

An alternative career: into the Top 40 in the charts

The art of the singer-songwriter

In addition to his challenging and demanding work for the Swiss Re Industry Practice Groups in New York, Anthony J. Foti's great interest is singing and songwriting. The creative skills he uses to write memorable songs can also be applied to producing quality client presentations.

With an Italian mother and an Italian-American father, both of whom sang or played instruments, it comes as no surprise that musical expression should play such a major part in the life of Anthony Foti, who works in business support for Swiss Re New Markets Industry Solutions (Public Entity & Environmental Industry Practice Groups) in New York. However, although he says he greatly enjoys and appreciates Italian folk music and opera, there are only very subtle hints of Verdi or Puccini to be heard in his songwriting or attempts to emulate Caruso or Pavarotti in his singing – Foti's musical activities are soft-rock stylings in the tradition of Billy Joel and Elton John.

He begins young...

Born in Brooklyn, New York, Foti started singing as a child, and by the time he reached high school he was both performing regularly and writing songs, as well as receiving vocal training. He continued singing lessons during college, and when he went to Pace University, New York, to study for a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Studies, he also took courses in musical studies – the content of which ranged from the history of rock and roll and jazz to musical theory, songwriting and classical appreciation. All this time, Foti was working in bands and playing live, which, as he says, "is in itself always a great form of musical education."

Foti describes his work as music for thinking, professional adults. He says he writes from the heart and does not try to adopt a particular musical style merely because it is currently trendy. This, he notes, is a problem affecting the pop music business, which is nowadays dominated by groups churning out "formula"

music – music which appears to be more the creation of marketing people than of the musicians themselves.

...who wants to get to the top...

Musicians are inspired by a variety of sources, and Foti says his major influences are music from the late sixties and early seventies, and include singer-songwriters such as Billy Joel, Elton John, Neil Diamond, Cat Stevens, John Denver and Edgar Winter. His Italian background comes into play: after all, as Foti points out, great musical names like Bruce Springsteen and Frank Sinatra came from Italian families. And then there are the influential professional musicians with whom Foti has come into direct contact through his songwriting and performing and who have greatly encouraged him in his work. These include Dave Greenberg, a background vocalist for the legendary Irishman Van Morrison, Al Greenwood, keyboardist for the group Foreigner, John Abbott, producer for Dionne Warwick, Steve Jerome, producer for Neil Diamond and Simon and Garfunkel, Al Pitrelli, guitarist for Asia, and Ritchie Blackwell, Bruce Springsteen's percussionist.

"There is a distinct lack of singer-songwriters these days," says Foti, but it is exactly this dual role that he enjoys the most. When writing a song, it is always the lyrics that come to him first and then the melody, and it is the intelligent combination of melody and lyrics that is most important to his work. "After all, I'm a songwriter, not a composer." But how difficult is it to come up with new melodies? Foti emphasizes that he never actually sits down with the intention of writing a new song before he's had some inspiration. "The ideas just come to me –

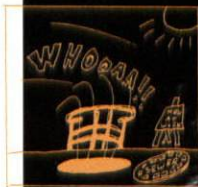
they pop into my head when I'm in the car, at night, at Thanksgiving dinner. My wife is used to me getting up during the night, or in the middle of a social occasion, to note down my latest tune." After he has his first idea, everything just seems to fall into place. However, he did once have to sit down and write a song for a specific occasion, which was when he decided to propose to his wife in music.

This was the one time when songwriting proved to be much more difficult than usual, because he had the feeling he had to complete a distinct task he had assigned himself; a very special task, which finally came to him with perfect timing and melody! Having said that, Foti notes that if he had to pursue a different career to his one at Swiss Re, he does see the appeal of working as a staff songwriter for a major record company, writing great melodies for international stars.

...as a singer-songwriter

Gaining a break in the music business is difficult for anyone, even for someone as enthusiastic about his music as Anthony J. Foti. So in order to provide a platform for his work and to get it heard, he formed his own independent record label, Wreckords Records. Several years ago, the label released one of his biggest hits so far, the beautiful ballad "In the Eyes of the Rose", which is based on the writings of the 17th-century French philosopher Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle. The recording made it to the top 40 playlist in numerous US states, holding its own against releases by such major artists as Gloria Estefan, Eric Clapton and Richard Marx. Supplied to a number of record stores, copies quickly sold out. The ballad is one of Foti's own personal favourites, along with "Janice"

Mr. Swissree by Anthony J. Foti



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and “You are My Heart”, songs he wrote with and for his wife. Other popular songs by Foti include “Music Man”, “At Night” and “Alive Forever”.

Work first – then music

But with such an active musical life – he has also been known to spin discs as a DJ – is there time left for his job at Swiss Re, where his duties involve administrative coordination, scheduling, presentation and special project preparation for the Industry Practice Groups? Foti stresses that he clearly separates music and career. He performs and writes in the evenings and at weekends, so there is no danger of it ever interfering with his job. “All my bosses openly know of my alternative career, and everything is above board.” And are there any similarities between music and insurance? “There is a creative aspect to client presentations. The more artistic you are, the more it shows in your output.”

The Web site

<http://www.bignoisenow.com/foti.html> includes short soundclips of Anthony J. Foti’s major songs, biographical information, reviews and details of how to order recordings. His e-mail address is Anthony_Foti@swissre.com.

Anthony J. Foti lives with his wife, Janice, and six cats in the New York City borough of Brooklyn. Besides music, comics are another of his interests. His song, “Music Man”, received an Honorable Mention at the 9th annual Billboard Song Contest in the middle of July.

