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## *Need a Big Band Singer?*

# Go straight to the source (make that) Sorce!

*By "CP" Christopher Peppas*



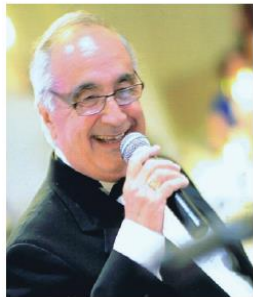
Let's transport you back to 1954 when a nine-year old Peter Sorce is about to perform live on Ted Mack's Amateur Hour in front of an audience of more than ten million. The medium was in its infancy and most eyes were glued to the show week after week.

The equivalent in terms of a similar show today would be "America's Got Talent" with a little sliver of "The Voice" and "American Idol" thrown in for good measure.

"The other kids were thinking about baseball," Sorce said in a recent interview. "And I'm backstage in New York with showgirls."

That's some pretty heady stuff no matter how old you are, but at nine it must've really been something.

Peter's Dad was well-connected in show biz at the time and took him backstage to meet Ella Fitzgerald, who happened to be performing in The Big Apple at the same time. When she found out that Peter was going to be performing on TV, she said: "You know, I'm going to watch you!"



"Even if she didn't mean it, it was nice of her to say," Sorce said, quoting her as if she had just said it. "She (Ella) was the most gracious woman I've ever met."

Walking down the street after his performance (the only one that elicited an encore that week, by the way), a man stopped Peter to say:

"Great show, kid!" The speaker was none other than Heavy-weight Champ/Restaurateur Jack Dempsey.

Peter Sorce has been in the spotlight ever since. At seventy-seven, he continues to pursue his passion of singing with big bands, most notably, Jeff LaBarge's Swing Explosion Band.

Jeff does all the arrangements and the two artists confab on adding new songs into the mix all the time.

Sorce will also be one of the featured vocalists for Jazz Unlimited's fall concert this October

The pandemic hit Peter pretty hard in its first iteration. "I was really sick," Peter said. "I was in the hospital for forty-three days. It was touch and go."

Jeff LaBarge called Peter in the hospital with some song ideas for him to work on when he got better. "I think that helped cure me."

Sorce continued to perform around town in his teens and twenties. He was scuffling around in a band when local guitar legend Jack Grassel met him and brought him on board to sing with his trio, Toll Free. They gigged together for five or six years.

Sorce recorded a hit record in the sixties, "I'm Too Young to

Love" and the list of people he performed alongside is a veritable Who's Who of Jazz and Swing artists. Frankie Laine, Louis Jourdan, Bobby Rydell ("the nicest guy"), Stan Kenton, Milwaukee native Woody Herman, Les Brown and his Band of Renown and Herbie Fields.

At the Playboy Club in Lake Geneva, there are names like Dyan Cannon, Jack Jones, Cab Calloway and some guy named Frank Sinatra. "I met him (Sinatra) at the Italian Open Golf Tournament there," Sorce went on. "I learned a lot just watching him, especially breath control."



Sorce is almost as well-known as a public servant as he is for his performing, having been in local government for decades.

Peter is currently a Supervisor in Germantown for the Washington County Board. And he was recently appointed to sit on the State Bar Examining Board for Medical Mediation. "It's quite an honor," Sorce said.

Sorce doesn't let a lot of dust gather under his feet. Last year, he posted pictures of himself in front of various monuments and landmarks in Washington, D.C., before boarding a plane to play a gig at Suburban Bourbon in Muskego later that evening.

One of the biggest compliments he received was by a fellow performer who noted that Sorce gave the same show whether there were two people in the audience or two hundred.

"Putting on the show is important," Sorce said. "When you're performing for people, they have no bills that are due, there are no troubles...there's just the music."

The jazz community is lucky that Peter Sorce continues to perform with the same zeal and fire in the belly that was ignited all those years ago.

