Mason Ashment

Prof. Luke Howard

MUSIC 202

12 April 2016

Option 3A: Analysis of *Almost Like Being in Love*

The cultural icon who is Frank Sinatra was born on the twelfth of December, 1915. At first untrained as a singer and unable to read music, he began gaining attention while singing on New York radio shows. Later he became a solo artist who sang as much as 100 times a day while touring, recording, and broadcasting over the radio. This oversaturation of music from Sinatra eventually took a toll on his voice and his popularity. By 1952 he had no film or recording contracts and no manager. However, his career was revived when he started acting as a non-singer in 1953 and picked up a new recording contract with Capitol Records. In the public eye, he started out being dismissed as one of the manufactured marionettes of the cultural industries, but as his career progressed he became more rebellious and scandalous which somehow gained him new respect rather than diminished it. His audience changed from teenage girls to a more balanced composition which included even adult men. He helped to push forward the rights of performers to gain more autonomy when he renegotiated his contract with Capitol to retain ownership of the master recordings in the wake of legislation that helped to redefine musicians, actors, etcetera as private entities.

The arranger of this particular version of *Almost Like Being in Love*, Billy Mays, was born on November 10th, 1916 in Pennsylvania. He was an American composer, arranger, and trumpeter who started out playing tuba in high school when he realized that he was interested in arranging. He played for several local bands and then approached Charlie Barnet to see if he could write for him. He arranged music for him but was later hired away by Glenn Miller because of his success. In the early 1940’s he worked in studios and as an arranger for NBC before settling in Hollywood where he arranged for bands
led by Phil Harris, Ozzie Nelson, and for Capitol studio orchestras. With Capitol Records he wrote
arrangements for top artists such as Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole, and Stan Freberg, and even after
Sinatra left Capitol to start his own label, Reprise Records, May continued to arrange for him off and on
for almost 30 years.

The musical form of *Almost Like Being in Love* is fairly simple. It starts out with a bombastic
introduction by the trumpets in the key of Ab, Sinatra sings the main theme followed by a bridge which
momentarily transitions to F and a chorus which repeats the idea expressed in the title “I could swear I
was falling, I could swear I was falling, It’s almost like being in love!” After an instrumental part with
commentary from Sinatra, the bridge is repeated, this time rising a half step before the chorus finishes
in A. One of the jazz progressions that is very prominent especially in the bass line is the ii-V-I
turnaround which is played at the end of many of the phrases. This turnaround serves as a very effective
way to build tension before resolving to the tonic at the end of the phrase.

The instrumentation is rather playful in this piece, especially where the trumpets are concerned.
They are divided into a left and a right section in the score, and they are engaged in constant banter,
trading the melody back and forth, finishing each other’s lines, and when they aren’t one of those two
they are making contrasting statements as the bass bounces along underneath. When Sinatra is singing
they quiet down but can’t help but make quick comments every now and again, and when they are
allowed to take the spotlight they announce themselves with a very wide, heavy shake. Meanwhile the
percussion is keeping pace with a lively swing beat and the occasional ornamentation from the
xylophone which accents the trumpets line and the tympani which is late to the party and only makes it
in time for the final chords of the song. Other horns also make their appearance. Mellow French horns
sing along with Sinatra throughout the song with long descending phrases. Trombones and tubas appear
at the refrain to comment or sometimes even play back and forth like the trumpets. Sinatra himself
serenades the listener with his silky smooth voice which he has adapted to fit perfectly into the upbeat
swing of this jazz tune. Interestingly enough, for a jazz singer he tends to stay fairly close to the rhythms and phrasing that are written in the score, and when he does make small changes they are tasteful deviations that appear to add some variety to the end of a line or inject a bit more personal expression into the music. Sometimes he takes liberties with the pitches, sliding into them or sitting on the bottom of them to add a little extra dissonance to the chord.

There are quite a few discrepancies between the scores and the final product. Some of the larger ones being the complete omission of the full piano score from both the conductor’s score and the final product. The piano score includes a walking bass line which was most likely assumed by the bass, but in the final recording somehow it cuts in once and a while with a bit of ad lib in the mid to high range like it could not stand to be replaced and left out. According to the production score, there is also supposed to be a harp as a part of the instrumentation, but it is neither seen nor heard anywhere else in the music. The individual scores for the French horn, tuba, and trombone parts were also omitted from the collection, and while the conductor’s and production scores do have them notated in, they do not include the entirety of what is heard in the final recording. I believe the nature of this style is the cause for these additions and omissions as it is all about expression and adaptation rather than strict rules and boundaries. It makes sense that they would add instruments or take them out on the fly.

After its release for the first time as a part of the new musical Brigadoon, Frederick Loewe’s song was swept up by one of the dominant genres of the day: jazz. The tender and wistful melody of Almost Like Being in Love – which was originally played straight and sounded more like a ballad – became a favorite of many jazz musicians. It ended up being covered by at least a dozen popular musicians who took this lyrical piece and transformed it into a swinging, up-tempo jazz tune. It ended up becoming an enduring staple of American musical culture. Frank Sinatra’s version of the song ended up being the most popular on the charts, and he was one of the main players in making it such a huge deal because of his extreme sensationalism. Not only this, but during the time that this song was being
covered throughout the 50’s and 60’s the American people were war-weary and in dire need of a
reminder of the lighter and sweeter things in life. That is just what *Almost Like Being in Love* provided. It
provided a release from the worry and anxiety and replaced it with happiness and fond recollections and
thereby helped to ease Americans through such a difficult time.