



BOBBY DARIN

In 1959 a cocky twenty-three-year-old Bobby Darin, flush with the success of "Mack the Knife," revealed his ambition to *Life* reporter Shana Alexander: He merely wanted "to be a pop legend at 25." Darin's exuberant, off-the-cuff performance of "Mack the Knife," produced by Ahmet Ertegun, did become the stuff of legend, but Darin could hardly have predicted the path his career would take. Born in the Bronx in 1936, Walden Robert Cassotto allegedly chose his stage name by thumbing through the telephone book. Although he had played several instruments as a child, Darin

never seriously considered a musical career until after he enrolled at Hunter College, in Manhattan. Forsaking the student life after a semester or two, he landed a gig as a songwriter for Don Kirshner's Aldon Music and soon made the leap from writer to performer, cutting a few unsuccessful sides for Decca before signing

with Atco/Atlantic. His first efforts for his new label also fared poorly, and there were even doubts about his breakthrough single, "Splish Splash," which he reportedly wrote in twelve minutes. Despite his admiration for Darin, Jerry Wexler of Atlantic originally thought the song "an unspeakable piece of doggerel," but Ertegun pronounced it a hit, and Ertegun was right.

"Splish Splash" combined a chugging New Orleans rhythm with a vocal performance fashioned after Jerry Lee Lewis's sound. A rock & roll song about rock & roll, featuring appearances by Peggy Sue and Miss Molly, it was followed by the similarly infectious "Queen of the Hop." Darin reached his creative peak as a teen idol the next year when "Dream Lover" married the yearning sound of Roy Orbison to the elegant simplicity of Buddy Holly's last arrangements.

In August 1959, Atco released the chart-topping "Mack the Knife," an artistic turnabout, it won the Grammy for Record of the Year. Darin followed it with a stunning version of "Beyond the Sea." By then he had his eye on Hollywood. He made his debut in 1960 in *Come September* and married his costar, Sandra Dee. His impressive work on film included *Captain Newman, M.D.*, for which he was nominated for a Best Supporting Actor Oscar, and *Pressure Point*, a psychological pas de deux between Darin and Sidney Poitier.

Leaving Atco for Capitol, Darin flourished as a rock & roll-inflected belter of pop standards and became a regular on Las Vegas stages. When he rejoined Atlantic in 1965, however, he began to select material by a new breed of songwriters, recording Randy Newman's "I Think It's Gonna Rain Today" and Tim Hardin's "If I Were a Carpenter," a Top Ten hit in 1966. The new direction of Darin's music also suggested the path his life was following. Seriously involved in Robert Kennedy's presidential campaign, he was so deeply moved by Kennedy's assassination that he sold his possessions and left Los Angeles for a trailer home in Big Sur. He returned to Los Angeles in 1969 to establish his own label, Direction, and to record an album of socially conscious material, *Born Walden Robert Cassotto*.

After Direction failed, Darin returned to the Las Vegas stage. At the time of his death on December 20th, 1973, following heart surgery, he had signed a \$2 million deal with the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas and begun discussions with producer-of-the-moment Richard Perry about a new album. Recalling Darin for *Rolling Stone*, Dick Clark said at the time: "If you knew him, he was the kindest, gentlest person. He had a great native intellect, and if he was only healthy physically, he probably could have gone on to be legend." — MICHAEL HILL

TOP 20 SINGLES

- "SPLISH SPLASH"
Atco; Number 3, 1958
- "QUEEN OF THE HOP"
Atco; Number 9, 1958
- "DREAM LOVER"
Atco; Number 2, 1959
- "MACK THE KNIFE"
Atco; Number 1, 1959
- "BEYOND THE SEA"
Atco; Number 6, 1960
- "WON'T YOU COME HOME
BILL BAILEY"
Atco; Number 19, 1960
- "ARTIFICIAL FLOWERS"
Atco; Number 20, 1960
- "LAZY RIVER"
Atco; Number 14, 1961
- "YOU MUST HAVE BEEN
A BEAUTIFUL BABY"
Atco; Number 5, 1961
- "IRRESISTIBLE YOU"
Atco; Number 15, 1962
- "THINGS"
Atco; Number 3, 1962
- "YOU'RE THE REASON I'M LIVING"
Capitol; Number 3, 1963
- "EIGHTEEN YELLOW ROSES"
Capitol; Number 10, 1963
- "IF I WERE A CARPENTER"
Atlantic; Number 8, 1966

