

The Norwalk Hour

Thomas' 'Cookie Dust' Turns Music Into Magic

By Mike Horyczun

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Vocalist Richard "Cookie" Thomas closes out the Norwalk Public Library's "Hello Summer" concert series this Thursday.

Photo: Contributed Photo

Popular vocalist Richard "Cookie" Thomas sprinkles some of his patented "Cookie Dust" locally this week, when he headlines at the Norwalk Public Library's "Hello Summer" concert series at 7 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 3. The singer is a favorite to Norwalk audiences and has appeared several times at the library.

In a recent interview, the singer explained the criteria he uses for choosing the songs he brings to the stage, and how he goes about interpreting them and making them his own. "First, the song has to tell a story that makes sense," he said. "I prefer those romantic ballads. I will then move on to understand the melody as it's written. Once that's in my head, I sprinkle a little 'Cookie Dust' on it to make it my own, and with my own twists and turns to the melody."

Thomas has been singing most of his life, and he noted that his influences included many musical greats. "My influences were anywhere from the Temptations to Lou Rawls, Nat King Cole, Frank Sinatra, Johnny Hartman, Nancy Wilson, Rosemary Clooney and more," he said. "As a teenager, my earlier singing style was developed by singing on the street corners of North Philadelphia, doing Doo Wop. As I matured, I found an affection for those singers whose classic songs landed in the Great American Songbook."

Thomas sings jazz material but doesn't consider himself strictly a jazz singer. "Being listed as a jazz singer is very limited," he said. "It puts me in a box. I'd rather consider myself a crooner who can sing many types of music, some of which may be jazz."

Joining the singer at his library appearance will be John Mobilio on bass, Arti Dixson on drums, and Joe McWilliams on keyboards. "They are some of the best musicians on the planet and have been my foundation for many years," said Thomas. "They engineer and manufacture the songs. All I do is sell them."

Besides performing as a singer, Thomas works as a song-coach, helping others develop their talents. He explained the process: "I can't teach you how to sing," he said, "but I can take a voice that understands scales that I play on the piano and sharpen them. I work on things like stage performance, how to overcome stage freight, breath control, microphone control 101, song dynamics and interpretation. I also do a lot with motivating my students."

Thomas is also a voice-over artist whose clients range from Fuji Film to St. Vincent's Hospital. And besides leading his own ensemble, he continues singing in the style he started with as a teenager as a member in the long-running Doo Wop ensemble, The Royal Kings. "I've been in the band about 35 years," he said. "It's originally a Norwalk-based band, but we're now located in Stratford, Stamford, and Bethel. I produced the Royal Kings Remix, that's now on CD, 'The Royal Kings 11 — Thanks To You.' And we have a new CD out."

For Thursday's show, Thomas will be performing "mostly standards and some surprises." He noted that when he approaches each show, he's primarily looking to connect with his audience. "I have to figure out the temperament of the audience so that I can figure out how to engage them," he said. "The Norwalk Library is always fun. There's a very engaging audience."

The concert takes place on the Main Library's front lawn, or indoors in case of rain, and it closes out this year's "Hello Summer" music series, which is being presented by the Norwalk Public Library along with MusicToChina. Community partner, Tuff Lawn Service-Fairfield County Tick Control, is a co-sponsor.

The Norwalk Public Library also presents Jim Clark, Norwalk's popular saxophonist, composer and music educator, in a presentation/performance at 2:30 p.m. Sunday, July 30, in the Main Auditorium. In a program entitled "Evolution of the Saxophone," Clark will explain why the sax was invented and how it involved into a centerpiece in modern music. He returns on Sunday, August 20, with the Jim Clark Quartet, featuring Tracey Marble, sharing expertise in "Songs from Classic American Films." The Norwalk Public Library is located at 1 Belden Ave. in Norwalk. All programs are free and open to the public.

Norwalk drummer John Cutrone brings saxophone notable George Garzone along with Robert Marullo on piano, and Phil Bowler on bass to the Sono Seaport Seafood Restaurant, 100 Water St., in South Norwalk, this Sunday from 3-6 p.m. For information, call 203-854-9483.

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