

Frank Sinatra in 1939



The story began on September 4, 1935. Edward Bowes had served in the Reserve Officer Corps during the First World War, from there acquiring the rank of major. In 1918, Bowes became a partner in the Capitol Theatre in New York City. The theater opened in October 1919, with Bowes as its managing director. In 1925, Bowes took over the radio program that had begun at the Capitol three years earlier. By that time, he had begun using the rank of major along with his name. In April 1934, Bowes started his famous “amateur hour,” which was picked up in March 1935 and sponsored by Chase & Sandborn Coffee.

On September 4, 1935, Bowes auditioned a group called the Three Flashes, who had just picked up a new member in Frank Sinatra. Bowes favored their audition, giving them a shot on the Amateur Hour on September 8th. During that appearance, the Three Flashes spoke about the jobs that they had held down in Hoboken. As for Sinatra, “This fella here never worked at all.” They were all looking for jobs, and they sang their rendition of “Shine” – a song that had been popularized by Bing Crosby and the Mills Brothers.

An advertisement for Chase & Sanborn Dated Coffee. It features a black and white photograph of the Hoboken Four performing on stage. The text at the top reads "MORE AMATEURS ARE WAITING FOR THEIR CHANCE". Below the photo, it says "You help an Amateur every time you buy Chase & Sanborn Dated Coffee". At the bottom, a caption reads: "'HOBOKEN FOUR' WIN HEARTS—AND JOBS—Three of the 'Hoboken Four' worked in a silk mill, in the curb market, in dad's ice-cream parlor. One didn't work. All 4 were out of work when they came to Major Bowes, but their amusing rendition of 'Shine' brought them 4 good jobs with an Amateur Unit!"

By the end of the year, they had appeared on the radio program several times, and the Hoboken Four – using one of the names given to them by Bowes – went out on tour. The others weren’t pleased with the fact that crowds ranked Frank Sinatra as the most popular member of the group, a dynamic that resulted in his quitting the group at the end of the year. Frank wound up at Hoboken’s Union Club, where he stayed until spring of 1938. His next gig took him to the Rustic Cabin, where he became a singing waiter.

Meanwhile, Harry James had left Benny Goodman’s band to become a bandleader himself. By the middle of 1939, James had released over a dozen singles for Brunswick Records. One night, he found himself in the Rustic Cabin, where he heard Frank Sinatra sing. He offered Sinatra a two-year contract to become one of James’ male lead singers.

And so it was that on **July 13, 1939**, Frank Sinatra created his first professional recordings as part of Harry James’ band.

“From the Bottom of My Heart”/ “Melancholy Mood”

Label 36a

Brunswick

8443

Black label with silver print. Patent numbers at the top.

Released August 1939.



The same month as the release of “From the Bottom of My Heart,” Columbia Records (which had purchased Brunswick’s parent company) decided to move several popular artists to a new 50¢ series with a red label.

On August 17, 1939, Sinatra and James recorded two more singles sides. Columbia split the sides up, preferring James’ rendition of “Vol Vistu Gaily Star” to be the A-side of Harry’s next single.

“Vol Vistu Gaily Star”/ “It’s Funny to Everyone but Me”

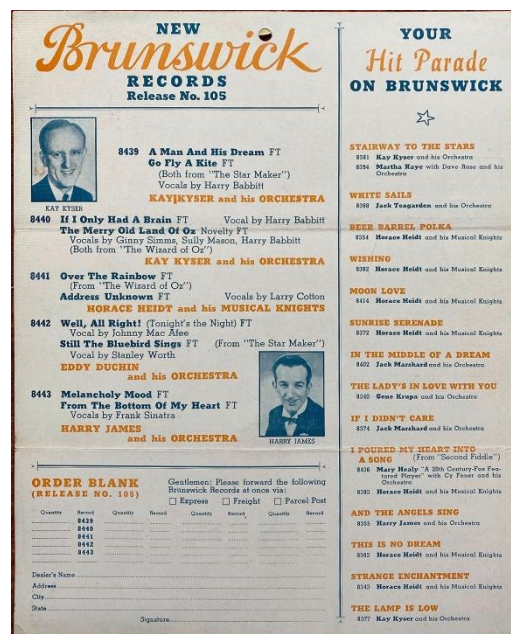
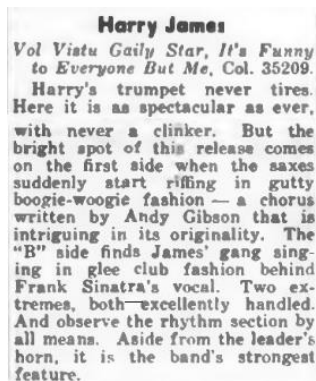
Label 39

Columbia

35209

Red label with gold band. Catalog number at the bottom of this label. The first line of text under COLUMBIA ends with “Only.”

Released September 1939.



50-Cent Columbia Disks Set For Early September Release

Brunswick band line-up shifting to new label—only one vocal change—Oberstein signs Van Alexander and Will Osborne—seeks Glenn Miller

NEW YORK, Aug. 26.—Confab between sales and recording executives of the Columbia Recording Corp. at the waxworks' home plant in Bridgeport, Conn., this week resulted in the formulation of definite plans for the company's new Columbia label disk and the continuance of the Brunswick label along different lines. New label will make its first appearance early in September and, as expected, will sell for 50 cents. It will offer the entire line-up of talent now available on the Brunswick 75-cent platters, with all dance bands at present recording under the Brunswick label, which list includes Kay Kyser, Horace Heidt, Eddy Duchin, Harry James and Jack Teagarden, dropping down to the new Columbia 50-centers. Benny Goodman is likewise set to sell on the half-dollar label. Vocalion platters remain as is, with only one change definite at the moment. Orrin Tucker comes up from the 35-cent discs to retail for 50 cents on Columbia.

Brunswick 75-cent platters will be turned over to concert and salon music exclusively, as well as better-class stuff from the Nelson Eddy type of artist. In line with this policy Moses Smith, former music critic of *The Boston Transcript*, becomes director of the classical division of the artists and repertoire department of CRC. Post gives him complete supervision of classical discs, including acquisition of artists, selection of repertory and actual recording. Another CRC appointment this week is that of James H. Hunter to the post of vice-president in charge of production, giving him supervision of all manufacturing operations involved in the production of the three labels.



Sinatra recorded two more songs with Harry James on August 31, 1939. Once again, one of these was to appear on Harry's next single.

"Here Comes the Night"/ "Feet Draggin' Blues"

Label 39A

Columbia

35227

Red label with gold band. Catalog number at the right. The first line of text under COLUMBIA ends with "Only."

Released September 1939.

This single was popular enough that reissues of it appear on

Label 39B (1941 to 1945)

Label 39C (1945 to 1947)

Label 39D (1945 to 1952)



"My Buddy"/ "Willow Weep for Me"

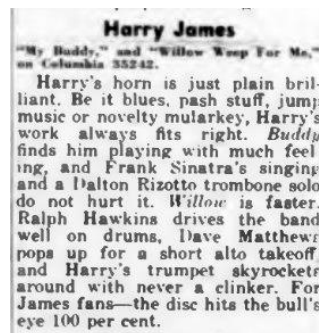
Label 39A

Columbia

35242

Red label with gold band. Catalog number at the right. The first line of text under COLUMBIA ends with "Only."

Released October 1939.



"On a Little Street in Singapore"/ "Who Told You I Cared?"

Label 39A

Columbia

35261

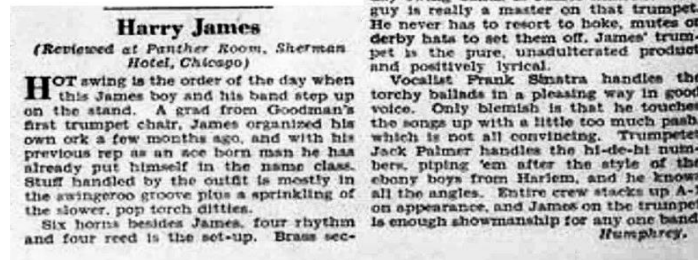
Red label with gold band. Catalog number at the right. The first line of text under COLUMBIA ends with "Only."

Released December 1939.

Both sides of the single were recorded during a session on October 13, 1939.

Released October 1939.





Frank Sinatra recorded his last two sides with Harry James at a Columbia session on November 8, 1939. As was usually the case, Columbia released one of these songs as the A-side of Harry's next single.

"Ciribiribin" / "Avalon"

Label 39A

Columbia

35316

Red label with gold band. Catalog number at the right. The first line of text under COLUMBIA ends with "Only."

Released December 1939.

This single was popular enough that reissues of it appear on Label 39B (1941 to 1945).



"Cross Country Jump" / "Every Day of My Life"

Label 39A

Columbia

35531

Red label with gold band. Catalog number at the right. The first line of text under COLUMBIA ends with "Only."

Released July 1940.

For this single, Columbia paired a new selection from James' orchestra with the second of the songs from the November 1939 session with Sinatra.



“All or Nothing at All” / “Flash”

Label 39A

Columbia

35587

Red label with gold band. Catalog number at the right. The first line of text under COLUMBIA ends with “Only.”

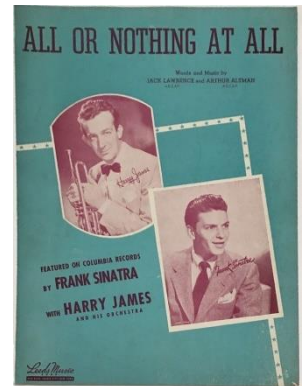
Released July 1940.

For this single, Columbia paired a new selection from James’ orchestra with the second of the songs from the August 31, 1939, session with Sinatra.

This single did not sell so well originally, but upon its reissue in 1943, it was popular enough that it charted highly. Reissues of it appear on

Label 39B (1941 to 1945)

Label 39C (1945 to 1947)



As 1939 came to a close, Harry James realized that Frank Sinatra would be well-served by joining up with Tommy Dorsey and his orchestra. James released Sinatra from his contract, leaving Frank free to spend a few years with Dorsey.