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Geordie Sinatra

A Play

Fiona Evans

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GEORDIE SINATRA

First performed at Live Theatre, Newcastle upon Tyne, on 18 April to 12 May and then at the Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough, from 16 May to 2 June 2012, with the following cast:

Geordie/Frank Sinatra*	Anthony Cable
Officer/Sonny/Jimmy Van Heusen*	Kraig Thornber
Joan/Dolly Sinatra*	Jill Myers
Nancy/Ava Gardner*/Vera	Heather Saunders
Pianist/Bill Miller*/Vicar	Richard Atkinson

Director	Chris Monks
Designer	Jan Bee Brown
Musical Director	Richard Atkinson
Lighting Director	Mark Johnson
Sound Designer	Martin Hodgson
Choreographer	Bev Edmunds
Wardrobe Supervisor	Lou Duffy

* *These characters form part of Geordie's hallucinations. They are not meant to be an accurate representation of any person living or dead.*

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CHARACTERS

Geordie/Frank Sinatra, 70ish male
Nancy/Ava Gardner/Vera, 40ish female
Joan/Dolly Sinatra, 60ish female
Officer/Sonny/Jimmy Van Heusen, 60ish male
Pianist/Bill Miller/Vicar, male

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The Lewy Body Society, established in June 2006 in the UK, is the only charity in Europe exclusively concerned with dementia with Lewy bodies. The charity's mission is to raise awareness of DLB for the general public and educate those in the medical profession and decision-making positions about all aspects of the disease and to support research into the disease. For more information, see www.lewbody.org.

Alzheimer's Society is a membership organisation which works to improve the quality of life of people affected by dementia in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. For more information about their work, go to www.alzheimers.org.uk.

FOREWORD

My wonderful dad David ‘Geordie’ Evans was diagnosed with vascular dementia in 2009.

To help deal with this, I started reading about the disease and came across a condition, dementia with Lewy bodies (DLB), where people hallucinate. Dad didn't have DLB, but he experienced hallucinations, usually small animals, but on occasions people, including his sister Kathleen — who died in 1946! Although this was a worry, as a dramatist, it sparked my interest and *Geordie Sinatra* was conceived.

The play had to have music — it is one of the few pleasures that someone with advanced dementia can enjoy. Song lyrics will often be remembered when a person can't even recognise their own children. Why Frank? Sinatra's personal life was every bit as interesting as his career. As Bono put it, “To sing like that you've gotta have lost a couple of fights ... you've gotta have had your heart broken.” Frank's voice is a manifestation of his life experiences, it commands dignity and respect, and a person with dementia should be viewed and appreciated in much the same way. Humour was also a vital ingredient, as families coping with dementia often laugh together, rather than cry.

Geordie Sinatra is not autobiographical, but at the heart of it is a strong father/daughter relationship. My dad's illness reversed the roles in our relationship. He had always cared for me. Now I had to grow up and take some responsibility. Dementia may have taken away with one hand, but it has given me something else with the other. It's brought our family together, given me a new appreciation of my parents, made me value the small things in life — talking to someone, listening, smiling and making them feel valued.

Dementia has forced me to reassess my own priorities and taught me to live life in the present. Hopefully, *Geordie Sinatra* contributes in some small way to raising awareness of dementia and gets us thinking about how we should care.

I would like to thank ... SJT artistic director Chris Monks, and Max Roberts, Artistic Director at Live Theatre, for commissioning the play. Gez Casey, Literary Manager at Live Theatre, and Chris for invaluable script development. Kate Rowland for being a well-timed outside eye. New Writing North for initiating the whole project. Our partners at Newcastle Science City, ERDF, Changing Age and the Alzheimer's Society, especially those at the Connie Lewcock Centre. Professor Ian McKeith and Peter Ashley (Lewy Body Society) for giving me a unique insight into DLB. The Maudsley Charity for their support. My fellow writers Romi Jones, Rebecca Jenkins and Valerie Laws. Special thanks is reserved for Steve Cooper, comedy writing partner and Frank to my Ava — plenty of arguing but no sex! Without Steve's friendship, support and major contribution, *Geordie Sinatra* would not exist. I owe you, kid. And, of course, my wonderful family.

Fiona Evans

PRODUCTION NOTE

In the original production the cast members formed part of the band (during Geordie's hallucinations) to accompany the pianist. At the end of the play, during the final gig, they played instruments as their characters — the Vicar/Officer/Joan/Nancy.

At the beginning of Act II in the duel with the headlines, these were originally written on big cards which the actors danced around with. This may be left to the director or designer's interpretation.

Fiona Evans

This play is dedicated to David ‘Geordie’ Evans,
the best dad in the world

ACT I

Prologue

Sands Hotel cabaret bar, Vegas/Morrisons, Whitley Bay

Geordie is hallucinating

Compère (*recorded speech*) Welcome, ladies and gentlemen, to the Sands Hotel, Las Vegas; the coolest most happening joint in town. Kick back, snap a Dunhill and grab yourself a whiskey sour. Let "The Chairman of the Board" transport you to paradise. I give you "The Voice", Mr Francis Albert Sinatra…

Canned applause and cheers

Geordie appears as Frank Sinatra, dressed in a tuxedo, and sings a snatch of the Frank Sinatra song "Come Fly With Me"

Geordie How did all these folk get in my room?

Canned laughter and clapping, Geordie takes a bow. Cameras flash

What the hell…?

Harsh lights up to reveal a confused Geordie standing with skewiff toupée, trousers round ankles and a shopping basket in his hand

Recorded supermarket tannoy announcement: "Security to aisle five."

Black-out

Scene 1

Sands Hotel cabaret bar, Whitley Bay

The scruffy cabaret cellar bar of the Sands Hotel, a run-down joint that hasn't seen a reveller or lick of paint in years. A home-made poster is pinned up: Geordie Sinatra, Comeback Gig. Various photos of musicians hang on the wall, including ones of young Geordie, Vera and Sonny. Joan is sitting at the bar, which is stocked with various bottles and glasses, and

surrounded by business text books and paperwork. She's on the phone to the bank manager. Other books are stacked around the set: biographies — Frank Sinatra, Ava Gardner and other musicians— misery memoirs, etc. There is a drum kit covered with a dust sheet and a CD player

Joan Yes, I appreciate that it's a large amount, but... (*not happy with what she's hearing on the other end of the phone*) I need that money, if I'm going to… I don't have other options… Like what?... (*She looks around the place, considering*) No, that's out of the question… I can't…

Offstage sound of scuffling

I'm really sorry, I'm going to have to call you back. (*She ends the call and quickly tidies away the paperwork*)

A Police Community Support Officer and Geordie enter and come down the stairs. Geordie is struggling to free himself from the Officer, who is guiding him in. He is still wearing his tux — minus the trousers

Geordie Get your greasy mitts off my threads, you Keystone clown!
Officer Don't get abusive again, sir.
Joan Geordie! What the ——
Geordie Do you know who I am?
Officer Aye, your name and address is sewn into your jacket.
Geordie I've got friends in high places.
Officer I don't care if you know Ant and Dec, you can't dance around Morrisons with nee pants on.
Geordie Ma, tell this bum to take his fat paws offa me.
Joan Sorry, Officer.
Officer Ma? You can't be his ——
Joan No! What happened to his trousers?
Officer Very good question.
Geordie Filthy coppers! Always breaking up the party.
Joan Frank!
Officer Frank? On the label it says George Carson.
Joan We call him Frank. It's like a nickname.

The Officer eyes the posters and photos

That was him, back in the day.
Officer Geordie Sinatra, eh? Do you think you should be encouraging him?

Geordie Go to hell, Buster.
Joan Now Francis, be a good boy and keep it zipped. What happened?
Officer From what I can gather, he was belting out Sinatra tunes next to the loo rolls. Some kids started taking pictures and he—erm—exposed himself.
Joan No!
Geordie It's not what it looks like, Ma. I was only trying to teach those reporters a lesson.
Officer What in, human biology?

Geordie takes a handful of tickets from his jacket pocket and starts stuffing them in the Officer's pockets

Geordie Here, take some tickets. Gold dust. Big comeback show, next Saturday — bring a pal — bring them both.
Joan Why don't you have a little sit down while I sort this out.

Joan settles Geordie into a chair. During the rest of the scene Geordie zones out, appearing absent

Don't you worry, Dolly's got it all under control. (*To Officer*) OK flatfoot, lay it on the line. I mean — sorry Officer, what happened?
Officer Well, Dolly ——
Joan Erm, no, I'm Joan. Joan Wilson.
Officer Then who's Dolly?
Joan Dolly Sinatra. Frank's mum.
Officer Right.
Joan It makes life easier.
Officer Not for me it doesn't. Who exactly are you?
Joan His wife, well, girlfriend—partner—chief cook and bottle washer.
Officer According to the witnesses… (*Reading deadpan from his notebook*) "He flipped, told us to leave him and Ava alone. He tried to grab my mobile phone, but I held on tight, so the loony dropped his trousers and said, 'Get a picture of this you fucking assholes!' "
Joan So strictly speaking it wasn't Geordie was it? It was Frank.
Officer Yes—well—no. I can hardly go back to the station saying I've arrested Frank Sinatra. They'd lock me up. Shouldn't he be in a home or summat?
Joan This is his home.
Officer (*looking at the surroundings*; *doubtfully*) Mmm. You're going to have to keep him inside.
Joan This isn't a prison.

Officer That's where he'll end up if he runs around in his undercrackers. (*Pause*) I'll overlook the incident this time.
Joan What about the supermarket? The kids?
Officer Supermarket don't want the adverse publicity. The kids won't complain, they got what they wanted. He's probably an internet sensation by now. (*Looking around*) Like a time capsule in here isn't it?
Joan It was the place to be, back in the day.
Officer Oh aye— "The Sands Hotel and Cabaret Bar", me Mam used to come here. Is it still a hotel?
Joan No, not for years.
Officer Shame. Waste of a good building.
Joan Yeah well—thanks for bringing him home.

Joan tries to usher the Officer out

Officer Is, er—your daughter not about?
Joan My daughter?
Officer Nancy.
Joan She's not my daughter.
Officer Oh, right, I just assumed ——
Joan You know her?
Officer She's famous, isn't she. It said in the paper she was coming back to look after her sick dad. (*Remembering the headline*) "Disgraced Gossip Queen in Mercy Dash." Geordie's label. Same last name. Two plus two. Police training.
Joan We can all sleep easy.
Officer Miscarriage of justice if you ask me. Nancy getting the big E from the *Daily Mail*. Is her husband really as crooked as they make out?
Joan No comment.
Officer "Playboy bookie in nag-nobbling *ménage à trois*". That's what it said, in her own paper!
Joan I preferred the *Star*'s 'Wag-Shag-Nag-Bag'. Still, if you dish it out…
Officer Poor Nancy. Did they really freeze all her assets?
Joan She's Audi-less. Why do you think she's here?
Officer To care for the old man.
Joan Oh yeah, regular Mother Teresa is our Nancy.

Nancy enters, carrying a bag, mobile phone to her ear

It's your lucky day, it's the scribbling nun herself.
Nancy (*on the phone, totally self-absorbed*) A romance novel? You must be fucking joking! Have you any idea what I'm going through?...

You try reinventing yourself when you've got to wipe your father's backside…

Joan looks annoyed at the lie

No Julian, I don't want to write about dementia, it's depressing… Zeitgeisty? Is it?... Listen darling, I'm exhausted, leave it with me. I might be able to find an angle. (*She ends the call, then notices the Officer*)

Officer It's an honour to meet you, Miss Carson.
Nancy Am I under arrest?
Officer Oh, no. No, no, no! (*He stares at Nancy*)
Joan He's that fan you mentioned.
Nancy How wonderful for him. Can you stop him staring?
Joan Stop staring at her.

The Officer is in a trance

Hey, Inspector Clueless!

Officer Sorry. Could I have your autograph, please?
Nancy Of course you can.
Officer Well, for me mam, like.
Nancy Always happy to oblige fans.

The Officer whips out a copy of the "Daily Mail" with the "Nag-Nobbling" headline emblazoned and gives it to Nancy; she isn't impressed

Who should I make it out to…?

Officer Chris.
Joan That's your name isn't it?
Officer How do you know?
Joan Says on your notebook.
Officer Oh, aye. Me mam's called Chris too, Christine.
Nancy So, to Christine?
Officer (*wanting it for himself*) No, just put Chris.

Nancy puts her bag down, takes a pen out of it, and signs the paper but holds onto it

Thank you so much—I—she'll really appreciate it.

Nancy All part of the service. That'll be a tenner.
Officer I thought ——
Nancy It's not personal, Officer, it's business. I wouldn't expect you to beat up a suspect without getting paid for it.

Joan Oh, just give him it, he brought your dad back.
Nancy (*concerned*) Where from?
Joan "Frank" made a personal appearance. In Morrisons.
Nancy He shouldn't be wandering the streets.

The Officer goes to hand Nancy a tenner

Just have it. Did anybody see him?
Joan Ashamed?
Nancy No! I'm concerned. What happened to his trousers?
Joan Lost them in toiletries.
Officer At least he's calmed down now.
Joan It comes in waves. One moment he's perfectly lucid...
Nancy The next he's away with the chorus girls. If I didn't know better, I'd swear he's putting it on.
Joan He's not putting it on.
Nancy I wish to God he was.
Officer Is it Alzheimer's?
Joan Something similar.
Officer Me nan had Alzheimer's.
Joan It's dementia with Lewy bodies.
Officer Never heard of it.
Joan Not a lot of people have.
Officer How come he thinks he's Frank Sinatra?
Joan One of the symptoms is hallucinations.
Officer He sees things?
Joan And hears stuff.
Officer Like what?
Nancy Ava Gardner.
Officer Who's she?
Nancy Who cares?
Joan Frank Sinatra's second wife and Hollywood star. (*She selects a book and hands it to the Officer*) They said she was the most beautiful woman in the world.
Officer I wouldn't mind hallucinating about her.
Joan It's not all Hollywood glamour, some of his visions can be really disturbing.
Officer Poor Geordie.
Nancy Poor Geordie? What about poor Nancy? It's me that's got to deal with this, he's as happy as a sandboy.
Joan Real saint, isn't she?
Nancy Actually officer, seeing as you're a fan. I was wondering if I could run something by you? Something I'm working on.

Officer I'd be honoured.
Nancy A book. My debut novel.
Sonny Brilliant idea.
Nancy My heroine. I'm thinking of making her a carer for an elderly relative.
Joan Fiction?
Nancy Romance!

Involuntary laugh from Joan

Officer I love Mills and Boon. Well, me mam does.
Nancy Obviously I'll draw on my own personal experience, but the character will be quite different from me—plain, frumpy. As a man, how would you respond to that? Is it sexy enough?
Officer Oh I like frumpy lasses—the big pant brigade does it for me.
Nancy Excellent. (*To Joan*) Dust down your Dutch cap, you might be in there.

There is a crackled message from the Officer's radio

Officer Geordie, I'm going to go now, but I need you to promise to behave yourself.
Joan It's impossible to rouse him when he's like this.
Officer You can't keep going round breaking the law. Are you listening?

The Officer waves his hand in front of Geordie's face. Geordie doesn't respond

Do you think he's OK? Might he be, you know, having one now?
Joan You never can tell.

The lights change, and we are transported into Geordie's hallucination. Geordie sings a snatch of Frank Sinatra's song "Don't Be A Do-Badder". Joan, Nancy and Sonny join in singing, and throw themselves into a dance routine

At the end of the song, the lights change back, and we move from hallucination back into reality. Everyone in their original positions

Officer Absolutely nothing going on.

Black-out

Scene 2

The same

Nancy is speaking into a Dictaphone

Joan enters unnoticed and listens to Nancy's efforts with amusement

Nancy (*into the Dictaphone*) A tear came to Fanny's eye as Doctor Eros broke the news: her father had dementia. It was a day she would never forget. Not least because it was the day she met her husband. She was irresistibly drawn to the hunky Canadian medic's impressive jaw-line, his five o'clock shadow and the musky smell of—the musky smell of ——

Joan His beaver hat?

Nancy Creeping Jesus. Can you stop doing that?

Joan Doing what?

Nancy Loitering, I'm trying to work.

Joan I do live here.

Nancy Pity.

Joan I thought dementia was "depressing".

Nancy It's not about dementia, it's about struggle, about loss, it's about ——

Joan You?

Nancy No.

Joan Well, I bet it's not about your dad.

Nancy If I need your input, I'll…

Nancy's phone starts ringing. She looks at the screen to see who's ringing, and clicks it off

Joan Reporters?

Nancy (*not wanting to go there, so changing the subject to the Geordie Sinatra poster*) Did you do this?

Joan Me and Geordie.

Nancy "Comeback Gig"? He'll only get upset when he finds out it's all bullshit.

Joan It stimulates him.

Nancy It gets him over-excited.

Joan Everyone needs a bit of excitement in their lives.

Nancy Yes, well, I've had enough excitement to last a lifetime.

Joan Sorry, I... if you want to talk...

Nancy I want to work, but I keep being interrupted ——

Sonny enters and comes down the stairs. He looks around the room taking it all in. He looks at the old photos hanging on the wall and lingers on the photo of Vera

Who the hell's this?

Joan How should I know?

Nancy Don't you ever lock that front door? People are just wandering in off the bloody street.

Joan I'd better check on ——

Nancy Don't leave me with him. He could be an axe murderer… (*To Sonny*) Excuse me. This is private living quarters. (*Pause*) Oi, cloth ears!

Sonny (*broken from his reverie*; *with a transatlantic twang*) Sorry ladies. I'm just blown away by the old place. (*He becomes transfixed by Nancy*)

Nancy Oh, an American?

Sonny No. I was born and raised in Scarborough. I used to gig here. I'm a musician.

Nancy Oh. Not today thank you. We've got all the musicians we need.

Sonny You're Nancy.

Nancy You're creepy.

Sonny Just like your mum.

Nancy My mum?

Sonny You were so high, last time I saw you. (*He looks around*) Hasn't changed a bit. Spooky.

Joan (*stepping forward, hand outstretched*) Joan Wilson. Geordie's partner.

Sonny Sonny Gleason. Pleased to meet you, love. I don't suppose Geordie's around?

Joan } (*together*) { No. (*Beat*) Yes.
Nancy } { Yes. (*Beat*) No.

Sonny I'm confused.

Nancy Well you're in the right place.

Sonny Sorry?

Nancy Never mind. So, Sonny, you knew my mother?

Sonny Everyone knew Vera. One hell of a woman, a hard act to follow.

Joan becomes uncomfortable at the mention of Vera

Joan So I've been told. Nice to meet you, Mr Gleason.

Sonny Sonny, please.

Joan I need to get on.

Nancy Give Dad a shout while you're up there.

Joan He's probably having a nap.
Nancy Well, wake him up. You're always saying he spends too much time in bed.

Joan exits

Well, Sonny, this is quite serendipitous, you "rocking up" after all these years. You see I'm doing some research into the Sands, to help with my new novel.
Sonny Writer. Creative. It's in the blood.
Nancy Would you like a drink?
Sonny Don't mind if I do. Scotch on the rocks. Only because this is a very special occasion.

Nancy pours Sonny a drink and leaves out the bottle. As they talk, he tops himself up from time to time

Nancy, Nancy, Nancy.
Nancy Sonny, Sonny, Sonny.
Sonny My, how you have grown.
Nancy I should hope so.
Sonny I used to bounce you up and down on my knee.
Nancy Try it now and I'll stab you with my Parker. So Sonny, was Mum as beautiful as the photos?
Sonny Oh yeah. Of course, you won't remember her.
Nancy I was only three when she died.
Sonny What?
Nancy Mother died in a car crash.
Sonny A car crash?
Nancy Back in nineteen seventy-five.
Sonny (*gobsmacked*) That's terrible. I'm sorry about that.
Nancy Don't be. It's not your fault, unless you cut the brake cables? Ha!

Sonny downs his drink in one

Sonny How's Geordie?
Nancy Let's just say—things ain't what they used to be.
Sonny Eh?
Nancy He's in La-La Land.

Sonny appears unsure at what Nancy means

He's ill, dementia.

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