

# Sean O'Connor, who grew up in Demarest, wrote a play about his turbulent youth

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BY KARA YORIO

STAFF WRITER

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## **THEATER**

Sean O'Connor, who grew up in Demarest, has written about his youth and the turbulent 1960s.

**WHAT:** "World of Sinatras"

**WHEN:** 7:30 p.m. tonight, Wednesday, July 23, July 25, July 30-31, Aug. 2;

2 and 7:30 p.m. Saturday and July 27; and 2 p.m. Aug. 3.

**WHERE:** The Arc-light Theatre, 152 W. 71st St., Manhattan.  
212-927-6403, [projectrushmorenyc.org](http://projectrushmorenyc.org).

**HOW MUCH:** \$18.

**FOR MORE INFO:** [writersean.com](http://writersean.com)

For many, hearing Frank Sinatra's music brings back a warm nostalgia of a parent's love for the famed singer, his songs providing the soundtrack for their childhood home. For Sean O'Connor, however, Ol' Blue Eyes brings back painful memories of the father who idolized the legend, and of

O'Connor's time growing up in Demarest

"I think we were seen as kind of the ideal family," said O'Connor, an actor and writer who, in his play "World of Sinatras," culled together and adapted a series of poems about his youth, the volatile relationship between him, his mother and his father, and the 1960s. "We had this house way up on the hill. We were next door to the Alpine Country Club. ... My dad was doing very well as a Park Avenue psychiatrist. We had these nice-looking kids who played sports and had lots of friends, but by the age of 7, I would come home and it was pretty scary. ... So, yes, there was a schism between what was happening in our personal life and the way people saw us."

O'Connor's father "suffered from alcoholism" and while he was gentle and kind when sober, according to his son, the family saw explosive rage much more often.

"I loved him very much, but for 25 years, it was very hard to feel that love," said O'Connor.

The son's view of his life in that house will play out in repertory at the Arclight Theater over the next few weeks. "World of Sinatras" took years to refine. The play's existence is a tribute not only to O'Connor's willingness to confront his past but the support and encouragement of his former Northern Valley Regional High School teacher, Rodney Sheratsky.

About nine years ago, Sheratsky called O'Connor to see what he was working on. When the former student said he was writing "a weird set of poems" but didn't really know what they were, his teacher asked to see them.

"During this time I'm acting and writing more plays and

trying to sell some film stuff and Rodney just said, 'You have to keep doing this,' " O'Connor said of Sheratsky, who has since died. "That was a real impetus, because he was an extraordinarily bright, good man."

The result is a play about more than just O'Connor's life.

"It's a lot of the cultural experiences too, the assassinations during the '60s, the drugs, this crazy thing sex that kind of leapt into our lives at a certain age and falling in love, all against the union, the triangle between me, my father and my mom," he said. "My dad wanted me to be this kind of tough American guy. He idolized [President] Kennedy and Sinatra. I was a very good athlete and stuff but I was never a tough, American guy. I was kind of this crazy, little creative kid that would go into the corner and draw."

The North Jersey neighborhood and the kids who played in it are a part of the play as well.

"There's a character in the play called Rooster, who's based on two very good friends of mine growing up," said O'Connor. "They passed away early. I would love for them to have seen it.

"There's a character Gloria, who's based on a number of girls I knew growing up. They have seen readings in the last two years and they will be coming."

Despite the turbulence of the '60s and his life, O'Connor has some fond memories of being a kid in North Jersey.

"It was totally classless when I grew up, one of the things I love about Jersey," he said. "Everybody was friends. Here I am now, I'm going to turn 60 this year and, I would say, probably 30 people I grew up with in New Jersey will come

to see this."

Sinatra's music can be heard throughout the play. For a long time, O'Connor couldn't listen to those songs. Now he has integrated them into his art.

Sinatra's voice was like this gorgeous, haunted curtain that always separated us from my dad," he said. "Every time we walked past the living room, there was the voice, and deep inside the room, was my dad. ... If you grew up in North Jersey in the '50s and '60s, every other guy you met was just another Irish or Italian version of Sinatra — a lotta charisma, but trouble always just around the corner. It was a world of Sinatras."

O'Connor is telling this story not only for himself but for his mother, who knew about the project but died before she could see it performed on stage.

"She was a wonderful woman," O'Connor said of his mother, Alix Euwer, who taught photography at Dwight Morrow High School in Englewood. "That's crucial to this story. ... Her whole thing was always basically, 'I had my wings taken away from me but I will not let anyone take them away from you.'"

- See more at: <http://www.northjersey.com/arts-and-entertainment/theater/unblinking-look-at-pain-behind-ol-blue-eyes-1.1051376?page=all#sthash.yZ87ufpc.dpuf>