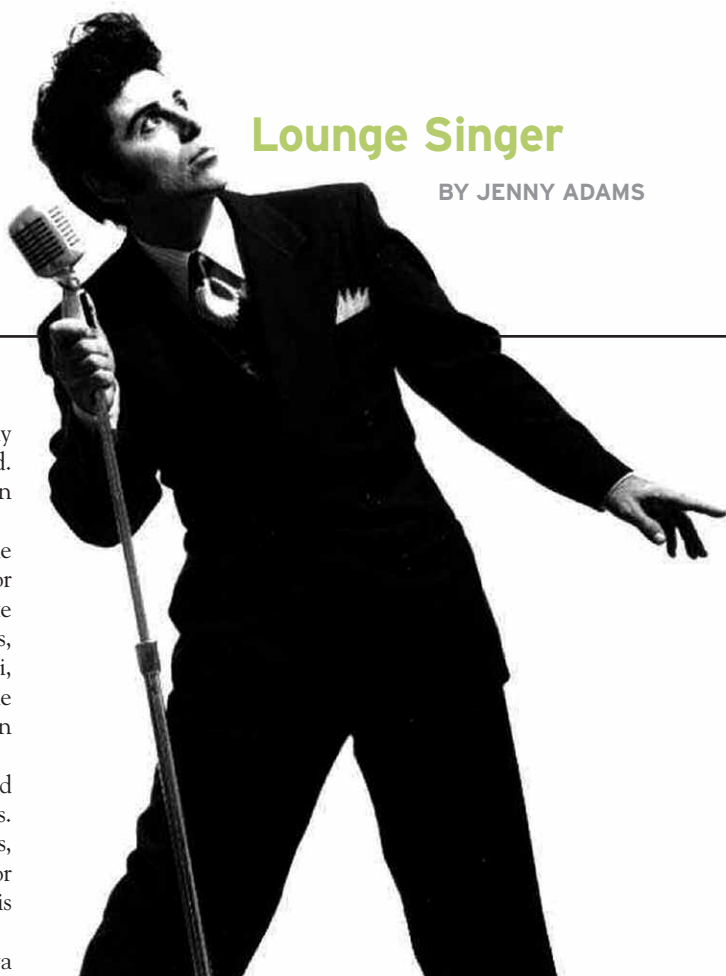


# Johnny Angel

Lounge Singer

BY JENNY ADAMS



The three-piece vintage suit might have been what caught my eye, but the hair was what drew my eyes inextricably upward. I laughed to myself and took a sip of the hot pink martini in front of me. Ahhh, New Orleans.

I began to wonder how one becomes a singer in The Bombay Club, the swanky bar/restaurant in the ground floor of the Prince Conti Hotel. So, on assignment to investigate the state of the music/bar scene in post-Katrina New Orleans, I took the singer's phone number and a final sip of my martini, and let his cheesy pick-up line bounce off with a smile. The following is what I discovered about Johnny Angel, and, I can assure you, pork rinds never enter the picture.

Save New Orleans, there is only one other place that could wrap itself around a character like Johnny Angel—Las Vegas. From the full foot of pompadoured hair to the wing tipped shoes, Angel is one of those “cats” (as he refers to everyone, feline or otherwise) who was born a few generations too late. But he is making better than the best of it.

“I’ve always liked the attention,” the modern-day Casanova in his mid-30s says of performing on stage. “It’s a good way to meet girls.” And the girls (and women) are there all right. Sidled up to the stage, martinis in hand, drinking him in as cigar smoke curls lazily around his head. But from the first note, you know Angel’s not in it for the ladies.

Born on Staten Island, New York, Johnny Angel was a member of a large Italian family with a penchant for the dramatic. “They were all actors, all theatrical,” he says of his family, “just not on stage. Growing up in my grandfather’s house, we had lots of music. It was an education, learning about music from when he was a kid. I love Big Band Swing from the ’30s and ’40s. I mean, Louis Prima . . . for a long time I thought he was from Brooklyn.”

From his teenage years in Little Italy to his education at Staten Island Community College studying music theory and physics, Johnny Angel, it seems, was always preparing to be Johnny Angel. In fact, I cannot drag his real name out of him. It would be the equivalent of asking me who I am when I am not being Jenny Adams.

Prior to Katrina, he was the frontman for a seven-piece band, Johnny Angel and the Swingin’ Demons. While wind and water have reduced the septet to a trio—including Angel, a pianist, and an upright bassist—the tunes are no less vibrant. However, the real treat is to witness one of his 17-piece orchestra shows. These gigs, usually booked for private weddings or inside the big casinos, are one of the reasons why Johnny Angel took home Entertainer of the Year from the city’s *Offbeat Magazine* just a few years ago.

A resident of New Orleans for over a decade, Johnny Angel is not a persona. He is honest-to-God lounge singer, embracing New Orleans as a place that would not only allow him to be

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himself, but reward and recognize him for it. “If you come to my house,” he says, “my whole environment is from the and 1930s and ’40s. I have a ’40s Plymouth, a ’60s Caddie, and I have all the clothes to match. I am like this 24 hours a day, seven days a week.”

“And your family?,” I ask.

“They love it! Are you kidding? Fuhgeddaboutit.”

Angel’s career is up and swinging again post-Katrina, partially due to his passion for the business and partially due to his rental location in the higher section of Carrollton Avenue, which was relatively unscathed by the storm. “Since Katrina blew in, anything and everything can happen,” he says. “No musician I know has Blue Cross. We go from gig to gig, from paycheck to paycheck. With every catastrophe, there are opportunities, and you just have to seize them.

“Here in New Orleans, it’s almost . . . well, you know, a natural feeling. When these guys are picking up their horns, it seems to come out easier. It is something you really have to experience.

“I came down to New Orleans on vacation and immediately fell in love. It’s so magical and magnetic that I couldn’t get it out of my mind.” After all, Angel says, “you can’t swing a dead cat in this town without hitting a musician.” ET