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Com **UNICO**

The Voice of UNICO National

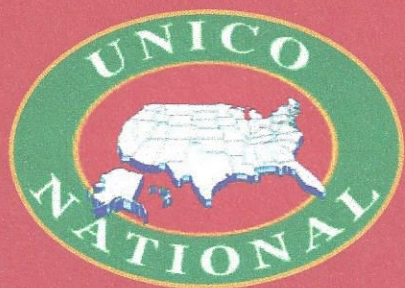
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Convention Coverage 36

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MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

October 19, 2015	Deadline for the November issue of ComUNICO
October 23 - 24, 2015	Eastern Regional Meeting
October 28, 2015	NY, NJ and PA Meet the President
December 4, 2015	National Office Christmas Party Open House
March 4 - 5, 2016	Mid-Year Board Meeting
April 23, 2016	Community Service Day
July 27 - 30, 2016	National Convention

For more events, visit www.unico.org

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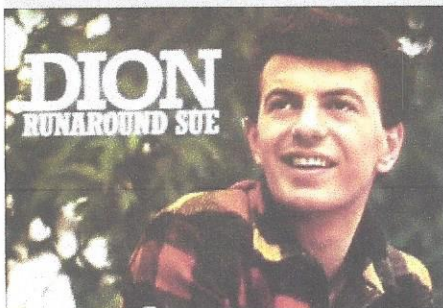
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SPECIAL FEATURE ARTICLE

Dion – Return of the Wanderer



Dion Francis DiMucci is best known to rock and roll fans worldwide simply as Dion. Honing his craft in the mid-1950s on the street corners of 187th Street and Crotona Avenue in Bronx, NY, the legendary singer-songwriter has remained one of the most versatile and popular performers of his generation.

At age fifteen, the street corner poet recruited the three best doo-wop singers in his neighborhood, naming themselves, Dion and the Belmonts. They lifted their name from nearby Belmont Avenue, located in the heart of the 'Little Italy' section of the Bronx. By 1957 Dion and the Belmonts were bona fide teen idols, scoring with the rock and roll classics, "I Wonder Why" and "A Teenager in Love," and appearing on American Bandstand. Dion has described their ethnic sound as "Black music filtered through an Italian neighborhood, coming out with an attitude."

Dion is forever linked to the most tragic event in rock and roll history which occurred on February 3, 1959. The then nineteen year old was a featured performer along with Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, and "The Big Bopper," headlining the 'Winter Dance Party' tour. The four headliners decided to charter a plane rather than continue riding on a broken down old bus. The plane seated only three passengers, plus the pilot, so they flipped a coin. Dion won the toss, but let Ritchie Valens take his plane seat. Dion's reasoning was that he couldn't justify paying a \$36.00 fare, the same amount as the monthly rent for his childhood Bronx apartment. As fate would have it, soon after take-off in the wintry early morning hours, the pilot lost control of the airplane, which subsequently crashed into a cornfield, leaving no survivors.

Despondent upon returning home after the tour, Dion attempted to make sense of his life and an increased dependency on alcohol and heroin addiction. There were also disagreements within the group ultimately resulting in Dion leaving the Belmonts in 1960 to pursue a solo career. Nonetheless, from 1960 through 1964, he recorded eight best-selling singles, including "Runaround Sue" and "The Wanderer."

Dion married his high school sweetheart, Susan Butterfield in 1963 and credits her with much wisdom and tolerance. They have been together for fifty-two years, and blessed with three grown daughters.

Despite his success, Dion was at an all-time low both mentally and spiritually. He moved to Florida seeking a fresh start. Then on April 1, 1968, he asked God to help him and "was delivered from the obsession to drink and drug." Within six months of becoming clean from heroin addiction, Dion, at the age of 28, embarked upon a new musical path. He released a gentle, folk rock recording in the summer of 1968. The song, "Abraham, Martin and John," was a tribute to the memory of four assassinated Americans and sold a million copies.

On morning of December 14, 1979, Dion underwent a life-altering religious experience. While on his daily morning jog he started thinking about the past and future. He prayed, "God, it would be nice to be closer to you." He was then flooded with a white light and saw a man with outstretched arms. "I love you," He said. "Don't you know that? I'm your friend. I laid down My life for you. I'm here for you now." Dion firmly believes that God changed his life that morning.

Confused by his mild Catholic upbringing, he drifted from the Church and became a born-again Christian. Over a period of eighteen years, Dion moved throughout Florida and participated in a number of Protestant denominations. During this period, his musical odyssey took yet another direction. From 1979 through 1986 he recorded contemporary Christian music and proclaimed his newfound religious experience.

But throughout this Protestant period, he felt incomplete. He realized that

the rich tradition of the Catholic Church was missing in his life. As a Protestant, he saw no living voice of authority to settle and resolve disputes or controversies. And with new churches opening, each with slightly different doctrines, it became confusing for Dion to know what the truth really was. He found that St. Paul called the Church the "pillar and foundation of truth," and it should hold to the traditions passed on by the early Fathers of the Church, who recognized the Bishop of Rome as the earthly head. Dion concluded after more years of intense religious studies, that the Catholic Church is guided by the Holy Spirit to make decisions without error, and this promise given by Jesus – this infallible divine guidance – gave us the Bible.

Dion's truth searching journey continued in the early 1990s when he took a plane from his Boca Raton home to the old Bronx neighborhood. He went to Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, at the corner of Belmont Avenue, where he was baptized and confirmed. He met with Father Frank, went to confession and let it all out to the priest. When he finished, Father Frank stood up, stretched his arms out and said, "Dion, welcome home." With those words, he tried to control his emotions, but broke down. Dion has said that he had met a Father who took the wanderer in his arms and led him home.

With his return to Catholicism, Dion's odyssey has taken him full circle. Elected into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1989, the invigorated superstar returned to secular music and performs regularly to sell-out audiences. His repertoire includes a perfect mix of his 1950s hits; classic songs from his early 1960s solo career; occasional gospel tunes; and the hard driving rock and blues music he records today. The 76 year old music icon (born: July 18, 1939) is more relevant and energized today than ever. Spirituality has brought Dion inner peace and public acceptance as true rock and roll royalty.

John Esposito is a freelance writer, who lives in New Providence, NJ with his wife and two children. The complete article, Dion – Return of the Wanderer, abridged for UNICO, is included in Mr. Esposito's website: www.PieceworkJournals.com on the "Arts, Music, Food & Entertainment" page.