

## The singing accountant

It's not unusual to find Joe Callura belting out a show tune

By HUGH FRASER  
The Spectator

Joe Callura thinks it's not unusual for a chartered accountant to be a sex symbol.

That's because, when the lights go down and the stars come out, Joseph Earl Callura B. Com., C.A., sole practitioner of Joseph Earl Callura Chartered Accountants, unbuttons his shirt to his navel, shrugs into his silver lame bolero jacket and wiggles his hips three times.

Presto! He's Tom Jones.

Soon the ladies and gents, but particularly the ladies, at such high-class venues as the Aladdin Hotel, Las Vegas and Toronto's La Cage Dinner Theatre go wild as Callura rips through his high-energy Tom Jones segment of *The Living Legends* show.

Although show business and music are Callura's first love, leaving the green, green grass of accountancy at age 46 for the glitter and glamour of *The Stage* is more than he can do right now.

To understand Callura, you have to realize two things. One, he was the only child in a family he describes as "basically poor" during his early years. And two, he hated school and that hated should be spelled with a capital H.

"I stuck with it only because my family had some financial setbacks early in my life and I made a vow to myself I'd never be poor," he recalls. "I knew that if I didn't do the schooling thing and get a profession, I'd be dragging my bum for the rest of my life."

The only bit of school he enjoyed was performing lead parts in school musicals. That is, until he found bookkeeping in high school.

"Just as the Tom Jones act comes easy to me, bookkeeping came easy to me and naturally when that happens, you like it," he recalls. "So I went to McMaster with the intent to get an accounting degree."

Instead of accountancy at McMaster he got macro and microeconomics, statistical mathematics and all kinds of theoretical stuff rather than practical information he could apply to earning a living.

"The first two years, I passed," Callura said. "But not with high enough marks for an honours degree. In the third year, all of a sudden, boom, we got all these accounting courses and my marks went from the mid-sixties to high eighties."

Callura had to earn every cent in working his way through school. He worked at Rheem Canada, a manufacturer of hot water heaters, in the summer and played Fridays and Saturdays at Club Continental on Gertrude Street.

It was at Club Continental that he first did his Tom Jones act. It was so uncanny Callura got away with the joke he loved to tell: Tom Jones "stole my style."

Then just as Callura graduated with a pass BA and was doing handstands because he'd never have to take another exam or read another text book as long as he lived, two things happened that must have nearly pulled the 19-year-old apart.

"Gary Waterfield, the assistant dean of the business faculty at McMaster, phoned that the board of governors had reviewed my case," Callura recalls. They'd noticed the huge discrepancy in marks between his first, second and third years and were offering him the fourth year and his honours degree.

At that very moment his agent, Vita Linder,

called to say the head of RCA Victor records was interested in him and wanted to come to Club Continental to check him out.

"We packed the house every night and this particular night we were overbooked. We had to put a table on the dance floor for him and his wife and Vita," Callura recalls.

Callura was a hit.

"Vita got back to me and said they wanted to put me out on the road to season me up before taking me on," he remembers. "I knew that if I did that, I'd never finish school."

Callura's agony was evident. "I guess Mr. Waterfield was kind of surprised when I asked if I could get back to him but I really had to think about whether I wanted to go back to that torturous situation," he laughs.

Callura's anti-poverty vow worked again, though. "I did go back and I got my honours degree and that made it easy to find work. I had all kinds of interviews and got job offers."

He chose Clarkson Gordon (now Ernst And Young) and the accounting career never looked back. He became a partner in Gordon, Lomax, Hyde and Callura before going out on his own.

But does he look back with any regret?

"I don't know," he'll tell you, the uncertainty still there after all those years. "I know people who've been in showbusiness full time and they are really struggling. Entertainment took a major, major nose-dive in 1991. The cruise ships cut back, corporate work slackened off and clubs went from live music to DJs and karaoke."

But the dream of being an entertainer never left.

As young sprout of an accountant, Callura sang with the Wally Mack Orchestra and then branched out on his own as Joey Cal and the Royales, changing that a few years later to Breezin' with Joe Callura.

This lasted right up until 1989 when the headaches of running a band on top of an accounting career made him take a break.

The break lasted until 1992 when he found a source of karaoke tapes. At first he just used them to sing in his basement for his own amusement. But something happened. His range increased, his voice strengthened. Two years later in 1994, lightning struck for the second time.

Larry Viadetic, a former musician in Breezin', called. Did he still do his Tom Jones act? Viadetic wanted to know. Like riding a bicycle, wouldn't take me anytime at all to work it up, replied Callura.

Can you do Toronto's Delta Chelsea Inn this weekend?

Boom. Cue in snaps of people rushing in and out of the Aladdin Hotel, Las Vegas, The Rock And Roll Heaven show at La Cage Dinner Theatre, Toronto.

Just don't, when Callura has to take on a partner to help with the accountancy, tell him he's been an overnight success.



Joe Callura: by day an accountant; by night Tom Jones.

### NEED

### TO KNOW

**What:** Living Legends Dinner Show

**When:** Sept. 5, 12, 26.

**Who:** Joe Callura, Al Ross and Frank Rondell

**Where:** Carmen's Banquet Centre, 1520 Stonechurch Rd.

**Cost:** \$29, including three-course dinner