

Chubby Checker twisting his way back into Cape May

By CAROL R. EMMENS
Special to the Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — Chubby Checker will be singing and doing “The Twist” on July 18 at Convention Hall as part of the summer concert series.

The iconic performer has toured the world but said with a laugh, “I am the Jersey shore.” He performed “The Twist” at the Rainbow Club in Wildwood in 1960 when he was only 18 years old.

“The line was so long it went around the block,” he said.

He’s never stopped performing it.

In the 1950s and ’60s, Wildwood was a center for rock ‘n’ roll and Checker was a part of it. As a tribute to legendary musicians who performed there, the Greater Wildwoods Tourism Improvement and Development Authority commissioned three murals featuring Chubby Checker, Bill Haley and the Comets and Bobby Rydell. Checker admits to sneaking peeks at his huge mural as he drives by, saying “I don’t want anyone to see me looking at myself.”

Checker is understandably proud of “The Twist” and the fame it has brought him. “The Twist” is the only song that hit the number one position on the Billboard charts in two different years. When it was released, it changed dancing and we are still dancing to it — even though it was the B side of the record. On vinyl records there were an A side and a B side; the songs that were thought to be less important were on the B side and they were not played on air very much, if at all.

But Checker said, “Disc jockey ‘Porky’ Chedwick turned my record over, played ‘The Twist’ on the radio and the phones lit up; it’s been on the radio ever since. History was in the making.”

Chedwick was Pittsburgh’s legendary DJ; he was a trailblazer who promoted R&B artists in the 1940s and ’50s and was



Chubby Checker will perform at 8 p.m. Monday, July 18, at Cape May Convention Hall.

known for introducing black artists to white audiences.

Then Checker was asked to appear on “American Bandstand,” which was hosted by Dick Clark. At the time, television was in its infancy but the show became a powerhouse of rock ‘n’ roll and its popularity skyrocketed when Checker performed “The Twist.”

“Before ‘The Twist,’ dancing apart to the beat didn’t exist in the world of rock ‘n’ roll,” he said.

He rightfully claims he launched a new style of dancing that allowed the dancers “to exploit their sexuality — fully dressed.” He credits “American Bandstand” with paving the way for MTV.

The phenomenal success of “The Twist,” “Let’s Twist Again,” which was the first platinum record, and his other hits have allowed Checker to live out

his dreams.

“When I was a kid, 4 years old, my mom took me to see Ernest Tubb at the Georgetown County Fair in South Carolina where I was born,” he said. Tubb’s biggest hit was “Walking the Floor Over You,” a lively honky tonk song.

“I opened my mouth and I never closed it,” Checker remembers. “I’ve played on stage and it’s all I ever wanted to do. I knew the lifestyle I wanted and I am living it.”

Despite years of being on the road, Checker still enjoys touring.

“I really love what I do,” he said.

He feels “it is all about the music and the excitement” and the camaraderie of being with his band on the bus. “My favorite place to play is my next gig,” he said.

In the ’60s when Checker began touring, there were

restaurants and hotels for “whites only.” Fortunately, he said, “It didn’t have much effect on me. I slipped through it. I saw it and I was raised in it, but my thoughts were ‘Let’s go out there and make money. Let’s have fun.’”

Currently Checker’s song “Changes” is on the charts and he explained that it is not only about what he wants to change but it is “about you and what changes you want to make.” It is an inspiring ballad exploring the theme of transforming your life. His latest single is “Lookin’ For Me.”

The inaugural National Twist Day will be launched Sept. 21 to celebrate the 50-plus years that Checker and the rest of us have been doing The Twist. He wants everyone to twist that day and he hopes every radio station in the country will play his song.

It is also going to be the day that The Twist Challenge is launched. It will be similar to last year’s ice bucket challenge and will be in partnership with an organization that will raise awareness and funds to ‘twist away’ childhood cancer. The details will be available on his Facebook page at facebook.com/officialchubbychecker.

“Everyone has a piece of ‘The Twist,’” he said.

It has been used in commercials for all types of products ranging from Oreo cookies to vodka to coffee. “People eat ‘The Twist,’ drink ‘The Twist’ and wear ‘The Twist’ — it’s amazing. ‘The Twist’ is everywhere.”

Now he’d like to see his own brand of chocolate candy bars, beef jerky and twisted bottles in every store, too.

Besides ‘The Twist,’ he is credited with inventing and popularizing dances such as the Pony, the Shake and the Fly. His list of firsts is long: he is the only artist to have five albums in the Top 12 at one time and he is the only artist to ever have nine double-sided hits at the same time. As he says with a laugh, “Dancing belongs to

me.” No one disagrees.

Checker’s personality, dedication to music and pleasing his audience came shining through when he greeted this writer by singing lines from “Oh! Carol.” He was happy to entertain only me but he says he’s

going to “burn down Cape May” at 8 p.m. July 18 at Convention Hall.

Tickets are available online at discovercapemaynj.com or at the Convention Hall’s Box Office. For tickets or information, call (609) 884-9563.

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Men indicted

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to the death of Angstadt. On Dec. 14, two individuals were charged with separate armed robberies, one being committed Dec. 5 in Lower Township and one being committed Dec. 8 in Middle Township.

The investigation revealed two males were involved in the armed robbery of nine juveniles at Mulligan Park in Villas. On Dec. 8, both males were involved in another armed

robbery in Rio Grande that involved a victim being struck with a handgun.

LaQuan D. Harris, 20, and Powers were charged with two counts each of armed robbery and conspiracy to commit armed robbery. Both were lodged in the Cape May County Jail in lieu of \$200,000 bail.

On Dec. 14, it was learned that Mosley allegedly had a sexual relationship with Angstadt. As a result, he was charged with sexual assault of a person at least

13 but less than 16 years of age, endangering the welfare of a minor and tres-

passing. Mosley was lodged in the Cape May County Jail in lieu of \$250,000 bail.

Addiction

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are greater than in the past. He noted that young people today “chip in to buy hard liquor, not beer, and those drinks are often flavored and taste good. The marijuana of today is often far stronger, with a much higher concentration of THC, giving a higher high than marijuana used to.”

Selby noted that the community is working to stop addiction through Cape Assist, a nonprofit organization that is dedicated to preventing and treating substance abuse, and the Lower Township Youth’s Coalition, which implements strategies to prevent substance abuse.

“Lower Township has a better chance than most because we know we have a problem and we are trying to do something about it,” he said.

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