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Interview with Daniel Melvin. Jamie Stoddard of the Naples Daily News



(Photo: JAMIE STODDARD/NAPLES DAILY NEWS)

Naples singer Daniel Melvin literally learned to sing standing in the shadow of Motown.

The Detroit native recalled, as a youngster, hanging out near the steps of the famous white-and-blue Hitsville U.S.A. Motown studios in the 1960s. He was singing with his friends there when legends Smokey Robinson and Melvin Franklin of the Temptations heard them.

"They were on the steps waiting to go into the studio," Melvin said. "They'd come over and give us little tidbits. My musical training was on the streets of Detroit and getting tips from them."

Now Melvin wants to help the next generation of singers. He and business partner Manuel A. Peña have opened Star America, a small music studio in a tan-colored building with other offices just off Goodlette-Frank Road in Naples. Peña, a native New Yorker, brings expertise in hip-hop, rap and more modern music while Melvin focuses on [his repertoire](#) by singing classic tunes by Barry White, Lou Rawls, Larry Graham and others.

"When we talked it was game over," Peña said of his first discussions with Daniel Melvin about their business. "We both had a dream, a passion. It was naturally perfect."

With his pepper-specked beard and hair that flows beyond his collar, the 64-year-old Daniel Melvin looks the part of a soulful singer. Some have dubbed him "the Barry White of Naples" and Melvin's website and brochures label him the "Most Romantic Voice In Southwest Florida."

When his wife, Barbara Melvin, landed a banking job here, Melvin had to pull out a Florida map to locate Naples and Fort Myers. She hails from Virginia and is vice president-community leader of the Naples-based First Florida Integrity Bank.

A background singer with a rich baritone-bass, he ventured out to Naples bars and began singing karaoke, which he had never heard of before moving to Naples. He performed songs by White, Rawls and others in restaurants but also found that Neapolitans "still like Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, so I had to learn their songs too."

For years, Melvin performed at Fred's Food and Spirits along Immokalee Road, just east of Airport-Pulling Road, in North Naples. But Fred's closed earlier this summer, and he now sings regularly at the Marco Polo Restaurant on Marco Island.

He also performs at private gatherings, such as corporate and nonprofit events and wedding receptions.

Melvin has sung at more than 100 venues in the U.S., including at the former Ditka's restaurant along U.S. 41 in Naples. His professional background also includes working with various groups, such as the Contours, the Floaters and the Dynamics.

Melvin's latest album - "One In A Million" - covers songs varying from Graham's "One In A Million You" to Etta James' most famous hit, "At Last."

He credited with John Tarangelo, known throughout Southwest Florida as Johnny T, with connecting him to the local music scene.

Tarangelo, an entertainer and promoter, said he was instrumental in helping Melvin land gigs in restaurants.

"The guy took off on his own," Tarangelo said. "His voice is very, very mellow. He's got a very good range and has a great stage appearance and great composure. That's why the people love him.

"I led him to the door and the rest he did on his own. I'm very happy for him."