



RUSS COLUMBO (1908-1934)

Birth Name: Ruggiero Eugenio di Rodolpho Colombo

Place of Birth: Camden, New Jersey



Career Highlights: Known during his brief career as “the Romeo of song,” Russ Columbo was one of 12 children born to immigrant parents. Columbo became a popular nightclub singer whose mastery of the smooth, romantic style of “crooning” favored in the 1920s and 30s earned him great popularity, particularly with female fans. Columbo composed several of his hit songs, including “Prisoner of Love” – later a No. 1 hit for Perry Como – and “You Call It Madness (But I Call it Love).” Columbo died of a gunshot wound at the age of 26, in an incident involving a friend that police ruled an accident. At the time of his death, he was romantically involved with Carole Lombard, one of the biggest Hollywood stars of the decade, who later married fellow Hollywood superstar Clark Gable.

Recording: “You Call It Madness (But I Call it Love),” 1932

Questions to consider:

- What kind of image does Columbo present in the pictures below? How is he dressed? Does he look like the son of working-class immigrants?
- How would you describe Columbo's singing style? To whom might this type of singing have appealed?
- What does Columbo's involvement with a star of Carole Lombard's stature suggest about how he was perceived by the American public?



With Carole Lombard



Sheet music cover, 1932