



JOAN MARCUS

The finale of 'Jersey Boys,' from the left, Erik Bates, Joseph Leo Bwarie, Josh Franklin, Steve Gouveia and the Company.

Can't take your eyes off those 'Jersey Boys'

By MIKE CHAIKEN
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In terms of American pop acts of the 1960s, with the exception of, maybe, the Beach Boys, there were few acts as huge as Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons.

If you turned on the radio in those days, you were bound to hear songs like "Big Girls Don't Cry" or "Sherry." Even today, turn on an "oldies station," and those tracks live on.

"Jersey Boys" is a musical that explores the vocal group that took the nation by storm—and continued to have hits into the 1970s. And "Jersey Boys," which stars Joseph Leo Bwarie as Frankie Valli, Erik Bates as Tommy DeVito, Josh Franklin as Bo Gaudio and Steve Gouveia as Nick Massi, comes to the Bushnell in Hartford from Feb. 4 through Feb. 22.

Calling from Pittsburgh, Joseph Leo Bwarie, who plays the Four Seasons' lead singer Frankie Valli, said "Jersey Boys" is "magic in a bottle."

"The story is so remarkable," said Joseph, who played the same role in Las Vegas.

The book of "Jersey Boys" is written by Marshall Brickman (who worked with Woody Allen on many movies such as "Annie

Hall") and Rick Elice. Joseph praised "the level of really dry wit comedy" emanating from the two writers. "It's fantastic."

Besides the great book behind "Jersey Boys," Joseph said the show features music from the Four Seasons' catalogue. The music, he said, is "incredible." Each night, he said the crowd, cast, and crew get "so jazzed" by the music of the Four Seasons. "It's insane."

The story of "Jersey Boys" follows the individual members of the Four Seasons from their days as working class boys in Newark to pop stars. Joseph said this means most of the story of the Four Seasons has not been rehashed over and over again through the decades.

"Beyond features in 'Teen Beat' magazine," said Joseph, "their lives were their lives." And besides the great moments of their careers, Joseph said, the show also can offer the audience a chance to "see the under belly" of what the

Four Seasons went through.

For an actor, "Jersey Boys" is a unique situation. Rather than playing a fictional character, where an actor can offer their own spin on the role, in this case, the actors are playing someone who was real. Not only that, said Joseph, "(Frankie Valli) is alive. He

is still working. And he's still touring... delivering his music in real concerts."

"For myself and the other guys, and any of the cast members (playing an actual historical figure), it's a responsibility (to perform these roles)," said Joseph. "These are real human beings with real stories."



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Joseph Leo Bwarie

"You can't fall into the trap of imitation or mimicry," said Joseph.

As an actor, Joseph said he does add a little bit of himself into the role of Frankie Valli. "But we have to be true to the real person."

Joseph said he has been fortunate enough to meet all of the living members of the Four Seasons, including Frankie Valli, as well as some of the other real characters in the story. "It's always great to meet famous people and realize they are real people just like us," said Joseph.

Growing up, Joseph said he listened to the Four Seasons on the local oldies stations. "I always liked their music."

But Joseph said he mostly knew about their really huge hits. "I didn't know everything." So, by being "Jersey Boys," he has had the chance to learn about music from throughout the group's career.

Of the songs he discovered, Joseph said his favorite is "Beggin'." Joseph said, "It's just this really great song they did later in their career."

As for audience reaction to "Jersey Boys," Joseph said it has been "pretty consistent, which is to say amazing."

In every city, the show has been performed, Joseph said he has received the biggest standing ovations he has ever seen. The audiences are enthusiastic and jubilant about the show.

But Joseph added the audience reaction is as much a tribute to the Four Seasons themselves, as it is to the performers of "Jersey Boys." Joseph said, "Lots of the audience members lived in that time (when the Four Seasons were at their peak)," said Joseph. And they are overwhelmed by the memories brought back by the music.

"Jersey Boys" makes its Connecticut premiere in Hartford at the The Bushnell Feb. 4 to 22.

Preview performances are Feb. 4 and 5. The performance schedule is Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday at 7:30 p.m., Friday at 8 p.m., Saturday at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m., and Sunday at 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. There will also be a matinee preview performance on Thursday, Feb. 5 at 1 p.m. Tickets start at \$25. Tickets are available by visiting The Bushnell box office, calling (860) 987-5900, or online at www.bushnell.org. For more information, please visit www.JerseyBoysInfo.com or www.bushnell.org.