

Mac-Haydn Theatgre, Chatham, NY

Jersey Boys, Book by Marshall Brickman & Rick Elice, Lyrics by Bob Crewe,
Music by Bob Gaudio.

Choreographed by Ashley DeLane Burger; Directed by John Saunders.

Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

"My eyes adored you"

The story of Frankie Valli and The Four Seasons is a long one and it takes over two and a half hours to tell it, with music, in the show known as "Jersey Boys" currently playing at the Mac-Haydn Theatre in Chatham, New York. At 52 minutes into the first act the group is finally realized as an emerging attraction after fifteen songs and a great deal of sturm und drang. It is worth the wait, and the sad, almost sickening story of their lives up until they sing "Sherry" and tear your heart out with it. The four actors playing the four singers are wonderful from beginning to end: Andrew Maguire as Frankie Valli, Conor Fallon as Tommy DeVito, Andrew Burton Kelley as Bob Gaudio, and John Hannigan as Nick Massi. When the group's sound finally takes hold it makes you want to take hold of them and to keep them with you for a long, long time.



Arthur Beutel, Andrew Burton Kelley, Conor Fallon, Andrew Maguire, John Hannigan;
Photo: Ann Kielbasa

Back in the day I was not their biggest fan. I am now. Learning what the show has told me before (this is production 4), and told me again just now, about them has brought me closer to

them rather than to their songs. The show's book awkwardly cover the years 1953 to 1960 but then switches to a more honest look at the group, how it functioned and what it became: starting



Rachel Pantazis, Andrew Maguire;
Photo: Ann Kielbasa

in 1961, one of the most successful singing groups of the second half of the century selling more than 100 million records worldwide. It covers, in depth, Frankie Valli's life and his bitter relationships with his wives and his daughter, Francine.

Mary Delgado, wife #1, is nicely played by Rachel Pantazis while wife #2, as well as Valli's daughter, is played by Stephanie Prestage. Both women deliver nicely in their roles.

Maguire is an excellent Valli. His looks, his height, his voice all match the man he portrays. He is a joy to watch and to listen to. As his

eventual best friend and business partner, Bob Gaudio, Andrew Burton Kelley plays a young man of fifteen whose maturity and sense of purpose annoys Tommy DeVito tremendously. Kelley does splendidly in this role, even managing to touch my heart with his sincerity and his singing.

Watching the group grow in their varied and difficult directions is fascinating theatre. John Hannigan's Nick seems very close to the historic descriptions of the man while Conor Fallon's take on Tommy is a bit gentler than the previous interpretations I've seen which gives DeVito more of a human quality that plays well with Valli's decision to save the man who mentored him.

Others in the cast turn in equally realistic characters. Gabe Belyeu plays lyricist/producer



Andrew Burton Kelley, Andrew Maguire, John Hannigan, Conor Fallon;
Photo: Ann Kielbasa

Bob Crewe beautifully. Kevin Weldon make a sinister, sentimental Gyp DeCarlo totally believable. Taye Martin gives several roles their reality. Arthur Beutel makes original group member Hank Majewski an interesting, if ineffectual, singing star. Jacob Atkins plays the young Joe Pesche without any semblance of Pesche's unique voice and personality.

This production is fascinating to watch. Director John Saunders has given the show drive and energy and still made each character stand out as an individual. He and choreographer Ashley DeLane Burger have brought us the movement and coordination of pop music of the period with a true sense of recognition. Both the play and the musical numbers look great on the Mac-Haydn stage thanks to scenic designer Alivia Cross whose work transforms spaces thanks to the superb lighting by Andrew Gmoser. Emily Allen's hair and wig design highlights the period of the show as well as do the costumes designed by Claire Mezzetta. This is a fine, fine production on every level.

Have I mentioned the songs? There is "Dawn (Go Away)," "Let's Hang On (To What We've Got)," "Rag Doll," "Can't Take My Eyes Off of You," and "Walk Like a Man" to name just a few. There are thirty-four in all, almost all of them familiar and include a reference to Valli's first single (as Frankie Valley), "My Mother's Eyes" which he originally recorded in 1953, the year he first worked with Tommy DeVito.

I won't tell you how this show ends, but I will say that I was honestly moved and swept away tears for the last twenty minutes of the show. I think it will have much the same effect on you when you see it. At least I hope it will.

+ 08/18/2023 +

Jersey Boys plays at the Mac-Haydn Theatre, 1925 Route 203, Chatham, NY through September 3. For information and tickets go to machaydntheatre.org or call 518-392-9292.