

The Beatles versus The Four Seasons—Re-visited 2007

What was the most important US group of the 60's? The Supremes, The Temptations, The Beach Boys, The Monkees? ...and how do you judge them? Record sales? Self-penned songs? Social or musical impact? It's a matter of opinion...perhaps.

Well the album sales for the 1960's at Wikipedia don't give us a clue as only one group dominates that chart and that is Liverpool's The Beatles.

But in 1964 Vee Jay Records enabled record buyers to 'judge for themselves with the issue of a unique double album complete with 'score sheet', stating *'You be the Judge and Jury!'*

It was that year when Vee Jay decided to cash in on the success of their 2 biggest acts after the Four Seasons had left the label to join Philips. After a summer that musically belonged to Capitol and United Artists, Vee Jay decided it was time for another Beatles package. Again utilizing their tracks from 'Introducing the Beatles'(Vee-Jay VJLP 1062), Vee Jay repackaged them in a double album with 'The Golden Hits of the Four Seasons' (VJLP 1065)and issued **THE BEATLES VERSUS THE 4 SEASONS** (Vee-Jay DX30/DXS30) on 1 October 1964. It reached No. 142 [9/64].

Some would say the events of February 1964 inspired it. 'Dawn (Go Away)' had peaked at #3, and unfortunately not the top spot, because of the arrival of the Beatles in the US for the first time early in the month and the US TV promotion that followed.' Dawn' held it's own though with the Beatles occupying 1,2,4 and 5. They were the only sound that could compete utilising their new ground-breaking Philips arrangements created by Charles Calello. In fact with Vee-Jay facing complex lawsuits and having lost the Four Seasons and the Beatles from their roster it was a case of being without any hope of obtaining new Beatles material, which at this point was firmly in the hands of Capitol Records. Vee Jay wanted to take advantage of the limited number of Beatles tracks they had and a good collection of Four Seasons tracks. Vee Jay then began what would become a small string of tactfully conceived records intended to entice the ever hungry public into

believing they were purchasing brand new Beatles albums.

The actual battle between the groups was an overwhelming success for the Beatles who set records no-one could match in a mere 9 year spell and fundamentally changed pop music history. But in terms of US groups the Four Seasons sold pretty well. They had arguably their biggest hits after the British Invasion and produced some of America's best 60's pop songs. Does this make them contenders for the accolade of the USA's best 60's group?

This double album set the Four Seasons big US No 1's against the bulk of the early Beatles songs from what was largely their first UK album 'Please Please Me'. Musically this is a fairly even match with covers of classic US songs by the 'fab four' and their UK No1's. Of course the following years would see the



The Beatles versus The Four Seasons—Re-visited 2007 (Continued)



prolific Beatles produce the most stunning catalogue of self-penned and performed songs ever seen. No contest some would say!

Fast forward to 2007 and once again the Beatles and the Four Seasons are locked in battle. Now however it is not the original groups that are competing but stage companies portraying their music and in the case of 'Jersey Boys' the Four Seasons story. 'Jersey Boys' today holds pole position with 3 Tony Awards including 'Best Musical'

The Beatles show is in Las Vegas performed by Cirque de Soliel as 'Love', to a remixed version of their songs from the 60's. The Four Seasons are on Broadway (and touring) with the Tony Award winning musical 'Jersey Boys', the story of their members with performances by actors/singers

Both are stunning....but in different ways.

"Love is an emotional tour de force that takes your breath away, all you need and then some. It's a real coup, though, in the way it makes a once cutting-edge band cutting-edge all over again."

The Independent

"Unlike a simple best of, this "soundscape" does make you listen again, sliding previously unrelated bits into each other in such a way that music recorded before a lot of us were born seems freshly conceived.....As much as many desire it, recapturing the spirit of that time is a task that is at best quixotic, at worst soul-destroying." Stylus

But is it all part of a clever plot to milk the record buying public with the same old same old repackaged hits.?

Of the Beatles masters **Guardian Unlimited** says *"They should have been re-mastered, but they haven't; largely, you suspect, so Apple can flog one canny repackage after another, safe in the knowledge that sooner or later, the people who buy them will fork out again for the definite article."*

"The ambitions of Love go beyond renovation, however. Its 26 tracks are set in an ambient flow of sound collages distilled from hours of Beatles tapes and containing fragments and echoes of 130 songs in all. Frequently the effect is ghostly.....Love vindicates the Beatles' status as master musicians and conceptualists. Not only for the spirit of optimism they embodied but artistically, they remain the act to beat. On this evidence, no one else comes close." The Observer

"There is a good thing to keep in mind with the Beatles. They were just a pop band, even if they were possibly the greatest entity ever to fit that particular classification. The Beatles were so good that they're not very interesting to talk about-- it's like listening to someone drone on about the Grand Canyon. No other band has generated as much dull commentary, even as the music remains unimpeachable. They're certainly the best band I almost never listen to. I'm guessing I share this with a lot of music obsessives; the Beatles' music has been so thoroughly absorbed into our consciousness that we can play the songs in our heads any time we like. Which is why the idea of someone doing something new with the catalog-- mixing and matching different songs, blending the whole thing into an epic suite-- is potentially exciting. Any attempt to fiddle with this music is like

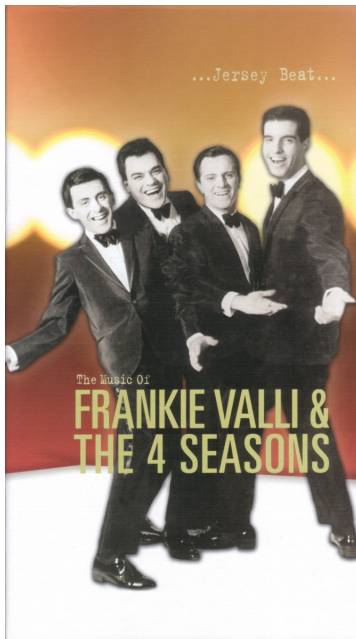
The Beatles versus The Four Seasons—Re-visited 2007 (Continued)

*long-distance brain surgery, toying with our collective memory with the hope of creating something new. What seems to consume people most about this record is the sound of the thing, just how beautifully the original material was recorded and how great it comes over on a purely sonic level. The art of recording a rock band, it seems, reached its zenith in the late 1960s. In terms of capturing guitar, bass, drums, and voice, nothing since-- no matter how many tracks-- sounds as pure and lovely as what the Beatles did at Abbey Road studios. Love is turning everyone into an audiophile, then....They were just a pop band, yes, but if anyone can bring all these music fans together under one tent, it's the Beatles. Which is what Love is ultimately all about. - **Mark Richardson, November 30, 2006***



Well The Four Seasons were amongst the first in the USA to be impressed by the Beatles. As Charles Calello told us.....

“Frankie, myself and Bob brought the Beatles records to Bob Crewe and wanted to record the songs as they were on the records. Bob declined. He said “we can write better than that” It was obvious they were the future and we recognized not only their talent but their song writing ability. It was thrilling for Frankie and I to meet them in Rome in 1965. I still have some 8 mm film that my kids think is cool but as far as I was concerned they were great. As far as their musicianship goes, this didn’t seem to be the thing that made them successful. In my opinion, it was their ability to make records and write songs - - that was their true talent. Paul’s general ability to play the bass, guitar and piano is certainly not up to the league of some other musicians but he plays his music better then anyone else I’ve heard. He was a “good” pop and rock player.”



And with the 'Jersey Beat' box set of 3 CD's and 76 tracks with a bonus DVD of TV performances the Four Seasons Partnership are getting their original masters out there first. It doesn't reach the dizzy heights of 'Love' and is a faithful portrayal of their catalogue up to 1992. There are no re-mixed elements to stretch the mind and ear.....but it is, as is the show 'Jersey Boys'....*“who they were!”*

With a forthcoming BBC2 Radio series by Bob McClure (made with our help) and the CD box set well reviewed by the Guardian things are just building up to the UK premiere of 'Jersey Boys' on the West End in February 2008.....

“For years now, it's been easy to forget the Four Seasons ever existed, even though, as Nick Cohn once said, if aliens landed and you had three minutes to explain the idiot joy of pop music to them, you'd only have to play them Sherry, Rag Doll or Big Girls Don't Cry.”

The Jersey Boys experience has been captured in the [Jersey Boys](#) and [GILG](#) websites, and the reviews tagged into [our blog site](#) side bar speak for themselves. Four guys telling their part in pop music history. And how well this works is just amazing. People certainly are listening to the Four Seasons and their past albums are selling again. So what is the essence of Jersey Boys huge success?

“Sure, this is clone theater, note-by-note coverage of songs that combine soapy, commercial with the deep-leaning pulse of a pre-counter-cultural parallel universe in which pop groups wore suits and skinny ties and nobody discussed Vietnam. ...Unlike the dim-bulb shows that use made-up stories as excuses to plug in hits by Elvis or the Beach Boys, this one is a straightforward biography of the group that defined a slick,

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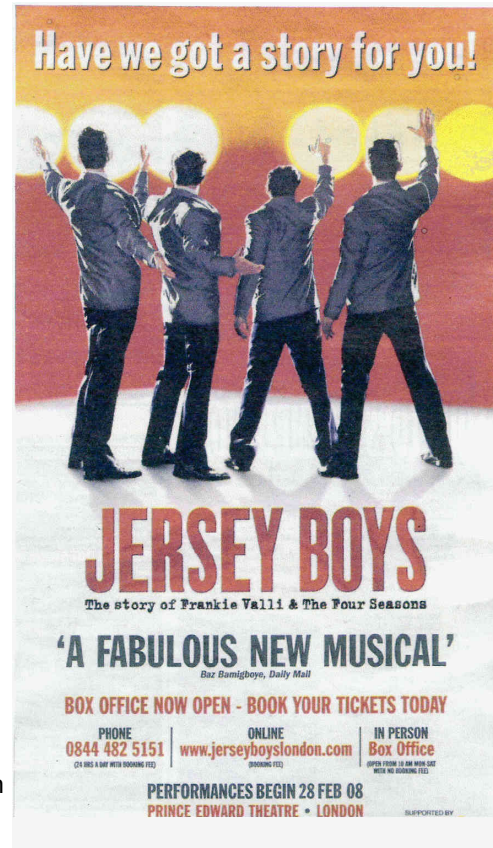
street sound. Unlike the recent John Lennon bio, "Jersey Boys" doesn't get artsy with the material or overly selective about history. Nor is this a sanitized, glitz-revue in the tainted tradition of the long-running "Smokey Joe's Café." Linda Winer—Newsday Staff Writer

"But it isn't just the performances or how the story is told—with each of the four getting a chance to tell his side. Nor is it the striking and flexible staging (a prison-like set with clanging steel doors that threaten these Jersey street boys) that makes this show work—or even the songs (charmingly nostalgic as they are). It is how all of these things come together in a lively, exhilarating and original way. It makes you want to jump up on-stage and join them. In this way, Jersey Boys exalts, and is pure show biz."

www.pacificsun.com

The 'Jersey Boys' phenomenon is continuing as the London February 2008 West End launch is announced and we will review again at that time whether in this new **'THE BEATLES VERSUS THE 4 SEASONS'** battle, the Jersey Boys are winning a new generation of fans with a time beating formula and maybe just balancing things up with the Fab Four's terrific achievements. So maybe the Four Seasons will come to be regarded as the most important US group of the 60s. If only for the way they challenged the 'British Invasion' with superb songs and arrangements. But isn't it great that we had both groups to enjoy back then, and again now with their recording catalogues and their musicals. Both legends in their own time.

Chameleon, August 2007



More of Ray Nichol's Picture Sleeves

