

Jersey Boys, London—The fans verdict!



With New York's cast of Jersey Boys having set a high...Toni Award winning....standard and with only 2 preview nights under their belt Saturday's London cast faced a tough ordeal. And with 50 long-term Four Seasons fans to be judge and jury.....would they pass the test.

Some of the fans were nervous.....

"Having seen and admired the top-line Broadway production, it was with some trepidation that this particular Briton took his seat for the (mainly) British take on the Seasons' story."....and " I wonder what Americans will make of the accents - I know I cringe when I hear American actors trying to do the English accent, and still roll on the floor laughing at Dick Van Dyke's 'mockney' in MARY POPPINS."

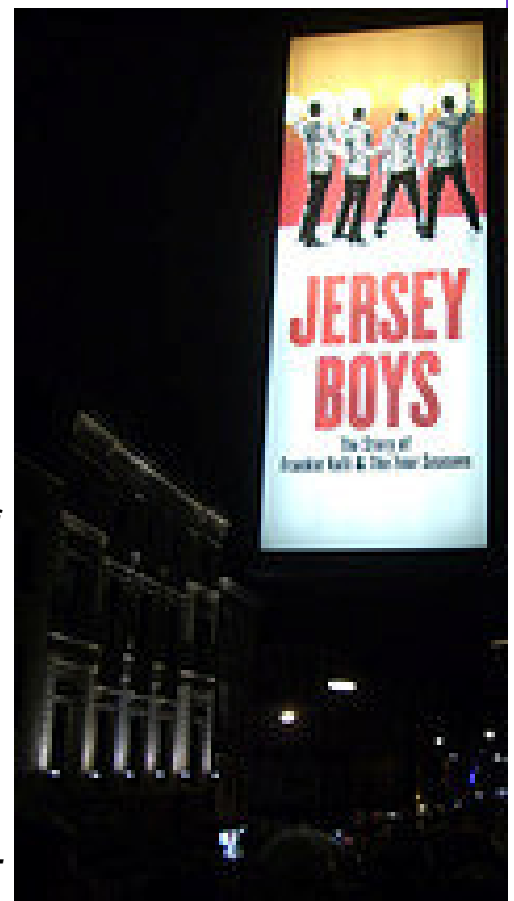
So too were the cast which perhaps explains a very nervous and tentative opening. This was understandable and although competent, the opening 30 minutes was somewhat flat. George Ingram who had seen several casts and many shows agreed with me. ***"Are they sometimes delivering their lines a fraction too fast?..... or is it just the mikes and the sound mix?"*** Asked Malcolm Wright.

But once they hit **'Sherry'** it seemed to release an **'electric'** energy and the audience caught the mood. From there the show went from strength to strength. The key to this city's version is the exceptional actors and singers who play the Four Seasons This show requires both, and with the UK casting by Director Des McAnuff being so good, Bob Gaudio must be delighted.....feeling like he has struck gold on the streets of London.....

"As a quartet the Seasons sounded great. After the exhilaration of the Sherry breakthrough, the audience were with them all the way. Walk Like a Man, Dawn, Who Loves You and December 1963 drew a particularly rousing response."

Malcolm Wright who had been at the first preview captured the evolution of the shows performances and the work of the cast in trying to get the performance right.....

"What a difference a couple of days make! Ryan Molloy was superb! If there had been the odd patch of vocal weakness on Thurs-



day, it had gone by this afternoon. I now eat my words and say he's probably as good as JLY, in fact I think I prefer his voice. I'll be very interested to see how he develops over the next few months. He could become the best of all the Frankie's."

...Phil Elms caught it perfectly.....

"The characterisation of the principals is warm, affectionate and (probably) bang on the nail. The singing is both disciplined and thunderous. It took a

while to acclimatise to Ryan Malloy's singing voice. It seemed to me his natural tenor and his falsetto were slightly higher than Frankie Valli's in his heyday but if this was a triumph for theatre over impersonation, then that's not a big issue...He was very close... Ryan is clearly a superb actor. His Valli demeanor was brilliant." We all felt this and his vocal work was exceptionally true to the legendary falsetto.



One of the key requirements of this show is the timing of delivery at special moments. Ryan achieved this to perfection with 'Can't Take My Eyes Of You' and 'Fallen Angel' squeezing every bit of emotion out of the delivery. Phil Elms again felt the same...

"His rendition of Can't Take My Eyes Off You - following the dramatic build-up to the song no-one wanted to release - almost stopped the show. And the heart-wrenching scene telling of Francine's demise possibly just capped the New York version. Timing and restrained angst made this a theatrical master moment, leaving - I imagine - hardly a dry eye in the house..... But what is the single line in the script that gets the biggest audience response? It's when the boys, seeking a new name, turn to see the illuminated wording OUR SONS corrected to FOUR SEASONS at the bowling lounge and a wide-eyed Frankie declares: "It's a sign." The audience just fell about, laughing and applauding wildly. The American creative team had really tapped into the British sense of humour."

But the whole cast deserve praise. Philip Bulcock was excellent and imposing as Nick Massi – a most difficult enigmatic role – but he was....*"the very essence of Nick Massi (his closing reference to being the Ringo of the group struck a chord as playgoers laughed and applauded in equal measure)"*....We could really relate to this comparison

"The immediately likeable Stephen Ashfield as an ever-so-slightly Scottish Bob Gaudio" achieved a confidence and power which held the audience at key times, and Glenn Carter who played the almost likeable rogue Tommy DeVito "played it with a dash more harshness than his Broadway counterpart."

One distinct improvement over the New York show was the casting of Simon Adkins as Bob Crewe ... for Philip Elms. *"a dream part of campness, pomposity and underlying sensitivity."* For me he was a more convincing character than portrayed by Peter Gregus, and he looks more like Bob Crewe of those days....but this role still gives me problems as Bob Crewe did not produce the Four Seasons from behind glass as the show portrays, but in a direct and participative way as studio shots show and artists confirm.

But it was once again the music that was the 'star' and it's delivery in a harmony blend which exceeded most people's expectations....combined with excellent timing and crisp delivery, overcame that early nervousness and sent us all home happy.

“Congratulations to impresario Cameron Mackintosh for his vision. Bob Gaudio and Frankie Valli must be delighted with the result. Stand by for awards. Anyone who can get to London to see the show will find the trip thoroughly worthwhile.”....was Phil Elm's conclusion.



This cast could potentially be the best yet and British audiences (including our 50 Four Seasons fans) responded this night with ecstatic standing ovations. The confidence this should bring to the cast will enable them to hit higher peaks and means that Four Seasons re-unions in London are compulsory and frequent. Jersey Boys British style is a triumph



Ken Charmer (with thanks to Eric Charge, Malcolm Wright and Philip Elms for their astute assessments)

Photos by Hugo Glendinning

Press Launch Photo By Craig Sugden

From left to right
Philip Bulcock (Playing Nick Massi)
Glenn Carter (Playing Tommy DeVito)
Frankie Valli
Bob Gaudio
Ryan Molloy (Playing Frankie Valli)
Stephen Ashfield (Playing Bob Gaudio)