

PART ONE OF THE BOB CREWE STORY

by George A. Ingram

Frankie Vallie & The Four Seasons have had a long career dotted with hit after hit — a success story which can be attributed to several things. There's the unique voice and vocal style of Valli himself, the music of Bob Gaudio who wrote most of their songs, the vocal harmonies of Joey Long and Tom DeVito, and the group's own instrumental skills. But any story written about the Four Seasons is also the story of musical wizard Bob Crewe. He was, of course, their producer, co-writer and general guiding light through most of the sixties, but surprisingly nobody has ever delved much further than this most well-known of his many roles to put Crewe's whole career into perspective. Hopefully this article will go some way towards remedying that situation, and bring out at least the highlights of a very long and very successful stint in the music industry.

Crewe was born in Belleville, New Jersey in 1936, one of three brothers. His initial occupation on leaving high school was an interior decorator, along with which he also developed serious canvas painting as a profitable sideline. In fact, he reached the stage as an artist where some of his best works were displayed in four one-man art exhibitions in New York, bringing considerable financial (as well as critical) success. Bob was soon also famed as one of New York's best interior designers, and he used to act as an adviser on certain periods and areas of decoration styling! A visual pointer to this skill is the fact that his 3-floor Manhattan penthouse was decorated with mirrored ceilings, carved panels from the Indonesian pavilion at the 1968 New York Fair, and kangaroo(!) bedspreads.

Painting, however, was an isolated vocation, and the restless Crewe decided to widen his spheres and further augment his income by having a go at modelling. For some five years during the fifties he worked as a male photographic model in New York, becoming a familiar face on advertising hoardings and TV commercials. Even this, however, was not the most lucrative of professions, and Bob branched out yet again — into songwriting and singing.

This was the mid-fifties — the era of the rise to pre-eminence of rock'n'roll and doo-wop/R & B. Crewe established himself in a small way as a nightclub singer during 1956, and also recorded his first single in the same year — "Pride", on the BBSN label. It was most decidedly NOT a success, although a few useful appearances on Merv Griffin's Saturday Prom TV show were forthcoming as a result of his entry into the recording world. It was Bob's songwriting, however, which was the first aspect of his musical career to really hit paydirt. He teamed up early in 1957 with a musician named Frank Slay



The Man BEHIND The Four Seasons

PRODUCER OF HITS

Jr., whose orchestra was a fairly regular backing unit on pop discs. The Crew/Slay collaboration on lyrics and music quickly produced a series of hit records in rapid-fire succession. First there was the Rays' "Silhouettes" in the Autumn of 1957, rapidly followed by "La Dee Dah" from Billie and Lillie, and "At The Hop", the first hit for that rocking group Danny And The Juniors. These evergreen classics of almost two decades ago are sung even today! The hit trend continued throughout 1958, and then in the following year, Crewe and Slay wrote, orchestrated and produced Freddy Cannon's first international hit and million seller — "Tallahassie Lassie". It was followed by "Okefenokee", then a second million seller in "Way Down Yonder in New Orleans". The almost symbiotic partnership of Crewe and Slay formed the backbone of the original "Philadelphia Sound", with the Swan label (in which both men had an interest) pumping out their hits up and down the East Coast of the USA.

The next stage in the ball game was Bob's decision to re-launch his OWN singing career. During 1959, he recorded that "classic" oldie "The Whiffenpoof Song", a ditty which had been sung by various allied armed forces throughout World War Two! The disc was placed with the Warwick label, and whilst never a memorable chart-buster, it was received favourably enough by the public to inspire some confidence in Crewe as an up-and-coming singer, and eventually found a modicum of success by charting at the number 96 spot in Billboard's Hot 100 during February 1960. Another single, this time a Crew-Slay composition titled

"Torn And Tattered Heart", was also issued just previous to "The Whiffenpoof Song" on Brunswick, but this had made absolutely no impression on the masses!

It is of interest to note that while Bob was on the road promoting his Warwick release, he first met Frankie Valli. Frankie had recently recorded his one-off disc for Okeh — "I Go Ape", co-written by Crewe and Slay — and was making an attempt at a solo record career. Little did the chance meeting on the Pittsburgh road hint at what was in store for the two men just a couple of years later!

Still at the age of 23, and having staked his claim as a would-be teen idol, Bob then decided to try his hand as a producer. Through 1960 he produced an assortment of singles, often drawing in Frankie Valli and the erstwhile Four Lovers for lead and/or backup vocals and as session instrumentalists. It was purely product-orientated record marketing, and the group went out under an assortment of names like Billy Dixon and the Topics and the Village Voices.

It's interesting to hear "Hal Miller — The Rays" sing "An Angel Cried", and compare it to the version of the same song on the Four Seasons' "Rag Doll" LP! Crewe issued many of these production on his own Topix label (from which the Topics name was probably derived), and as well as an assortment of vocal discs, he even had Bob Gaudio record an instrumental titled "10 Million Tears", going under the name of Turner Di Sentril A listen to the back-up vocals on Freddy Cannon's 1960/61 recordings should also ring a bell with Seasons fans, while you can hear the falsetto of Frankie Valli (imitating Johnny Mathis and Brenda

Leel) on Danny And The Juniors' Swan single "Twistin' All Night Long", upon which Freddy Cannon also guests. It might well be guessed that the song was co-written by Slay and Crewe!

Such was Bob's capacity for work that he combined this welter of producing with the recording of several more solo singles for Warwick, plus a couple of swingin' LPs. The latter demonstrate a polished style, a high degree of vocal perfection, and plenty of versatility. Standard numbers such as "Let Me Entertain You" from the Broadway Musical "Gypsy", and "On The Street Where You Live" from "My Fair Lady", coupled with the Bobby Darin touch on "Luck Be A Lady Tonight", produced a nostalgic and highly professional and enjoyable blend.

In 1962, Bob Crewe's production career moved into still higher gear. He gave the Four Seasons their first smash with "Sherry", and you know THAT story from there! Underestimated was Bob's artistic talent quite forgotten in connection with his work with the Seasons—he was also responsible for the sleeve designs of their first two Vee Jay albums.

The Seasons were not the only successful artists, however, to come under the Crewe production wing through the sixties. Bob catered for a wide range of tastes and his style was geared into several channels—the main hallmark being a solid beat coupled with a strong melody, and dispensing with shallow, annoying sounds. He worked in

conjunction with the famed arranger Charles Calello (whom I understand is now a member of some kind of religious tribe or commune in California), and the Calello "sound" and orchestration coupled with Crewe's direction and production touch regularly gave the public what it was eager to hear. Listen to the Calello arrangements on such assorted songs as "Let's Ride Again", "Carol Of The Bells" and "Can't Get Enough Of You Baby" by various Bob Crewe artists, for supreme examples of "the sound".



Bob Crewe

With the establishment of a pair of major independent labels in DynoVoice and New Voice, artists like the Toys (of "Lover's Concerto" fame — their LP sleeve was another designed by Bob himself — Diane Renay, Tracey Day, the High Keyes and Norma Tanega came under the Crewe/Calello duo and prospered in the charts. Bob also made his contribution to the mid-sixties Detroit

musical explosion in the form of Mitch Ryder & The Detroit Wheels (whom he managed), the short-lived Rationals.

By 1967, with his role as the Four Seasons' producer-manager-songwriter, and his position as the heart and nerve centre of no less than eight production, publishing and record management companies (which amassed a gross of 4 million dollars in 1967 alone!), Bob Crewe was one of the richest men in the music industry. Then in 1968 the companies were all completely reorganised on the advice of Bob's astrologer(!), and the Crewe label was born. It treated us to the voice of William "Oliver" Swafford, who had two million sellers with "Good Morning Starshine" and "Jean", and also held the Rationals, still Bob's answer to the Detroit aura! In late 1969, the Four Seasons also had "And That Reminds Me"/"The Singles Game" issued on Crewe, just prior to their eventual split from Bob. Group and producer actually parted from each other early in 1970, after the release of the controversial album "Genuine Imitation Life Gazette" and around the time that the Seasons were having trouble in renewing their contract with Philips. Differing musical ideas made it impossible for the team to work together as previously, and the split was the inevitable result.

NEW ISSUE: Part 2 — from the early success of the Bob Crewe Generation, to Crewe in the mid-1970's ... plus disco-graphy.

To be concluded in the next Newsletter No. 62

Mini-Review of Music to Watch Girls By Single (Bob Crewe Generation) and Bob Crewe Information – Source and Date Unknown

BOB CREWE'S MUSIC TO WATCH GIRLS BY

"Music To Watch Girls By" (USA DynoVoice/UK Stateside 1966). Written by Tony Velona and Sid Ramin was the campaign theme of Diet Pepsi which got to No. 9 in the USA and stayed 12 weeks on the charts. It sold a million copies by 1967. The disc was a brass filled thumper played by The Generation of 17 instrumentalists, 7 brass, 3 saxophones, 3 guitars, piano, drums, tympani and xylophone headed by Bob Crewe, the famous song writer. It was also a hit for Andy Williams as a song. Bob Crewe was born 12.11.37 and became one of New York's top male models and also became a noted artist. Some of his canvasses sold for as much as \$1,200. For VIK records he wrote "Charm Bracelet" with Frank Slay Jr. and made a disc for the record company on which Bob was vocalist. Bob first met Frank Slay back in 1953 for songwriting and recording sessions while still in a full-time job. They were among the first independent record producers who wrote and arranged and then sold the masters to record companies. Crewe's hit "Silhouettes" opened the way for independent producers. With his brother, Dan, they started a publishing company and record business and in the 1st year had 62 hits and over 100m. records sold with his name on the label. Bob was head of his own operation "The Crewe Group of Companies" which include 3 publishing companies, 2 record labels (DynoVoice & New Voice), a record production company, Genius Inc., Crewe Group Films and a TV production unit – Crewe Videal Productions. Bob has produced such great artists as The 4 Seasons, The Highway Men, Lesley Gore, and Mitch Ryder. A fabulous success story for Bob Crewe.

Picture: KEITH BERNSTEIN/Warner Bros Entertainment

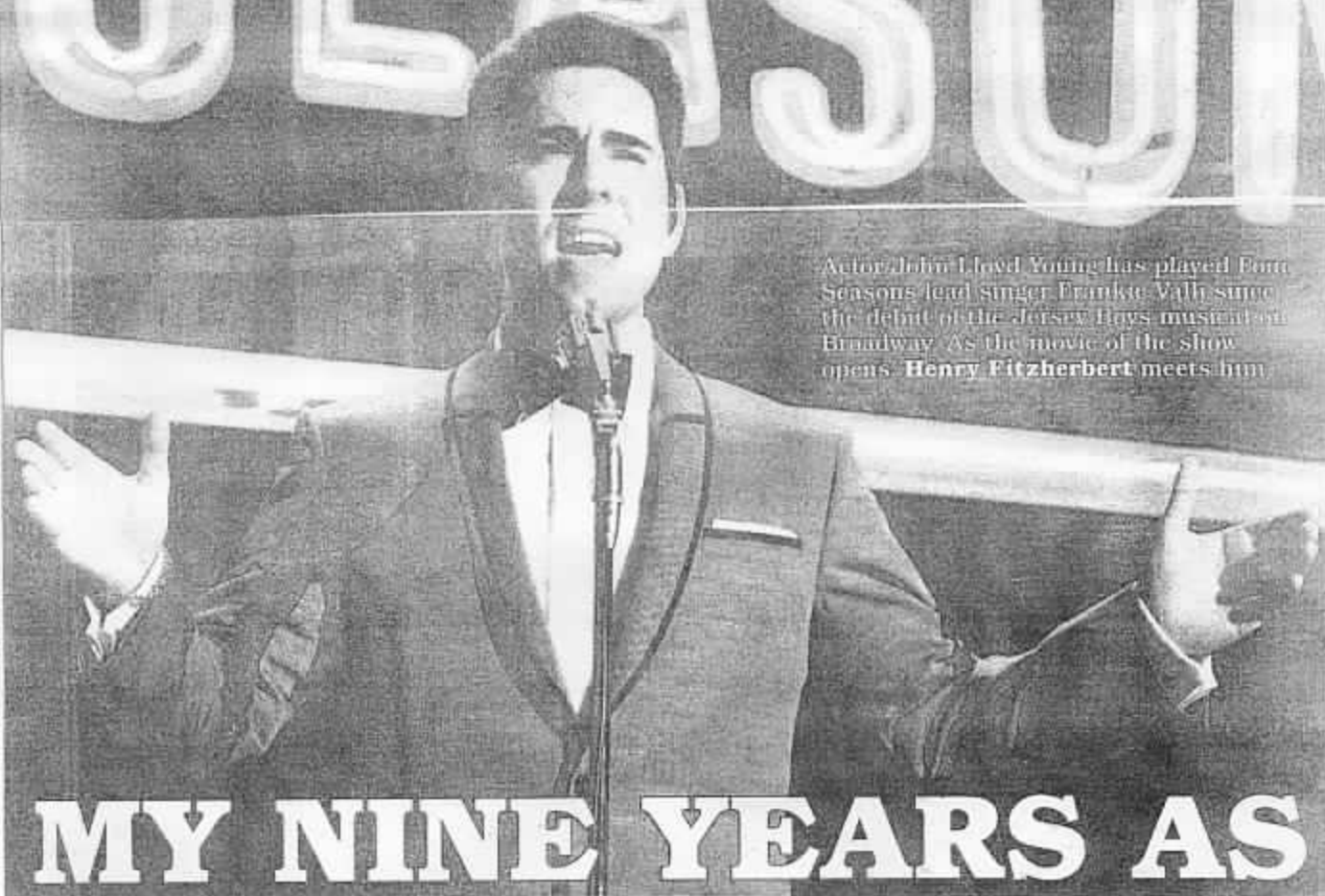
SUNDAY EXPRESS

Edited by CLAIR WOODWARD

Review

SEASON

Actor John Lloyd Young has played Fort Seasons lead singer Frankie Valli since the debut of the Jersey Boys musical on Broadway. As the movie of the show opens, Henry Fitzherbert meets him.



MY NINE YEARS AS

FRANKIE VALLI

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Article Taken from the U.K. Newspaper The Sunday Express June 22nd, 2014

Review

**BOYS' OWN
ADVENTURE:** Clint
Eastwood directs
John Lloyd Young,
Vincent Piazza and
Erich Bergen who
play Vail, DeVito
and Bob Gaudio



FRANKIE VALLI has been good to John Lloyd Young. A decade ago California-born actor Young was just another struggling actor vying for bit parts off-Broadway. Then he landed the role of singer Valli in a new Broadway musical, *Jersey Boys*, the rags to riches story of Valli's success with iconic 1960s vocal group The Four Seasons.

It turned out to be one of the biggest musical successes of recent times scooping six Tony Awards and playing all over the world; currently it is the 13th longest-running show in Broadway history.

Young won numerous awards for his performance as the famously falsetto-voiced singer of such hits as Sherry and Can't Take My Eyes Off You, performed at The White House and earlier this year made his debut in London's West End. "That was a high honour," he says. "American actors look to British theatre like the Holy Grail."

Now the Valli/Young partnership reaches its apotheosis with a movie version of *Jersey Boys* directed by Clint Eastwood. Starting many of the stage show's original cast members, plus Christopher Walken as a Mob boss who encourages the young Valli to pursue his dreams, it's a rousing, handsomely made production that should bring Young big screen stardom.

Certainly it's a step up from his sole other movie credit, a comedy called *Oy Vey! My Son Is Gay!* ("Clearly that was a very different style of movie," he laughs).

When he made his debut in the role in 2005 could the actor, who claims British heritage on his father's side via an early colonist who founded Rhode Island, ever have anticipated he and Valli would have come so far together?

"The polite answer would be 'no'," he replies. "But the actual answer is more interesting which is that when we opened we became such a huge hit overnight that immediately we knew we had something special. Hollywood studios were vying for the film rights."

Jersey Boys is a family feud...I'm On Frankie's steam

SO HEATED did the bidding get that Young, then only 20, was button-holed by a studio chief asking for his help. "I was at a film premiere in New York and one of the heads of a studio came up to me, a mere neophyte making his Broadway debut, saying, 'You absolutely have to tell them to give the movie to us.' There was a lot of excitement."

Still, it took years for the film to come together by which time Young owned the part, even if he was on the cusp of becoming too old (Valli is 16 in the story's early stages).

Eastwood saw him perform on Broadway last year. "I met Clint very briefly afterwards on stage," says Young who by then had performed the show more than 1,200 times. "He keeps things very close to his chest and I have the same kind of personality so we had very short words with each other of admiration and the next time I met him was on the set of the movie."

If John Lloyd Young is Frankie Valli, what has he learned about the singer who still performs and was closely involved in the stage show and film production?

Of Italian descent and raised in a tough, Mob-influenced part of New Jersey, Valli struggled for years to break through (working as a barber to pay his way) and paid a heavy price for his success.

His friendship with spendthrift fellow band member Tommy DeVito which forms the heart of the film cost him dear. His personal life was scarred by tragedy, with his daughter Francis committing suicide.

"Frankie is someone who understands that life always has a double edge," he says. "Success is always followed up by failure and vice versa. It's an interesting way to look at life and it makes for a very interesting character. I have never shied away from showing that fatalism." Does Valli have regrets, I wonder? "Frankie's philosophy is like a yo-yo of regret and optimism. It depends on when you catch him. He's a very emotional guy and he's been through a lot in his life."

"Sometimes he's down in the dumps, other times he's an eternal optimist. It's like having an angel over your right shoulder and the devil over your left."

Although the pair are close Young has never broached the subject of his daughter's death. She was an aspiring singer and was more or less estranged from her father when she died in 1980.

"I instinctively know that's not a topic for conversation. But I'll tell you something I've learned as an actor who has exposure to the actual person they're playing. You get a lot more insight into that person in a quiet moment when they're not saying anything, just by observing them." A case in point, he says, is the awkwardness he witnessed between Valli and DeVito, his former

childhood pal who founded the band but whose erratic behaviour led to its break up and brought Valli to the brink of ruin (DeVito is played by Vincent Piazza from TV's *Boardwalk Empire*, one of the few cast members not from the stage production).

"There's a tension and discomfort between them," he says. "It exists and it's real and there are things that happened between them that we don't know about."

He may not know all the specifics but Young certainly knows whose side he's on. "It's so funny, it's like family feuds where the feud gets passed down the generations," he says of his own position. "No insult to Tommy but I'm on Frankie's team. I know where my bread is buttered."

The son of an officer in the US Air Force, Young's own childhood was certainly more comfortable than Valli's but it was not without its own tragedies - his mother died



SEASON'S GREETINGS: Bob Gaudio, Tommy DeVito, Nick Massi and Valli

Weekend Films

Edited by Caroline Jowett
www.express.co.uk/films

Changing Seasons of highs and lows



JERSEY BOYS ★★★★★
(Cert 15; 134mins)

CLINT EASTWOOD is probably not the first person you would think of to direct the screen version of Broadway's smash-hit musical Jersey Boys.

Think again though because he has serious form when it comes to music. We'll forgive his chitchat with the trees in Paint Your Wagon because he can actually tinkle the ivories with the very best of them.

He has composed and crooned some decent tunes over the years. He also gave us Bird, the Oscar-winning biography of jazz giant Charlie Parker.

We know by now that Clint is not a razzle-dazzle kind of guy. He's not going to grab us by the lapels and throw stardust in our eyes. He is measured and thoughtful, unfussy and unlikely to get in the way of the story or the musical performances.

Those are the qualities he brings to a film version of a stage show that won four Tony awards in 2006 and has been running, somewhere on the planet ever since.

In contrast to the stage crowd-pleaser the film is more of a mellow, bittersweet reflection on the rise and fall of the indefatigable Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons.

The first half is almost like a re-run of Goodfellas or Mean Streets as cocky small-time crook and part-time musician Tommy DeVito (Vincent Piazza) takes teenage Frankie (John Lloyd Young) under his wing, schooling him in the ways of the world and encouraging his musical ambitions.

Stony-faced mobster Gyp DeCarlo (Christopher Walken) has a soft spot for Frankie's falsetto, telling him: "A voice like yours is a gift from God."

DeVito recalls that the only routes out of New Jersey were to join the army, get "mobbed up" or get famous. "For us it was two out of three." Ironically it was a

By Allan Hunter

code of honour and loyalty forged during the band's New Jersey boyhood that would be the cause of their problems and their salvation when the boys made it big in the 1960s.

The arrival of squeaky-clean songwriter Bob Gaudio (Erich Bergen) is a key moment in the formation of the group and the discovery of a sound that was to become their trademark.

The film kicks into top gear when the band starts chalking up hits such as Sherry, Big Girls Don't Cry and Walk Like A Man.

Like the stage show the film gives each band member, including bassist Nick Massi (Michael Lomenda), a chance to address the audience directly to offer their version of where it all went wrong in a litany of marital woes, broken promises, artistic differences and the realisation that DeVito's mob connections and fast and loose attitude to finances could only end badly.

Jersey Boys covers the best part of four decades and you almost wish there was more time to fill in some of the period detail and give us a chance to know the secondary characters better.

It doesn't happen but the film is still a solid, entertaining tale of how a musical paradise was gained and lost.

Make sure you stay for the end credits in which a dapper Walken joins the rest of the cast for an all-singing, all-dancing finale. It is one of the best bits in what proves to be a melancholy but entirely enjoyable film.

THE FAULT IN OUR STARS ★★★★★
(Cert 12A; 140mins)

EVERY generation loses their heart to one great big weepie. Was it Love Story for you or Out Of Africa maybe? This could well be the weepie of choice for this generation.

The screen version of the Josh

of cystic fibrosis when he was two – and quite peripatetic.

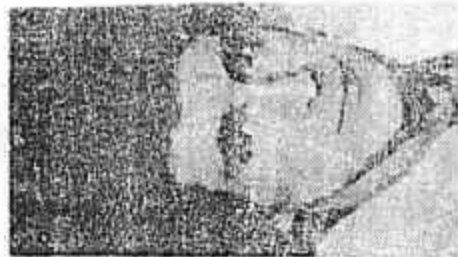
"I come from a military family so we moved around a lot. One of the ways to make friends was to be good at something and I think acting was a way into each community I moved into."

After graduating from Brown University in 1998 with a degree in theatre arts he earned his acting spurs in New York appearing in several off-Broadway plays.

Never giving up is an important lesson from Valli's life and one that inspires Young still. "Whenever I'm in a period of doubt I look at him and say, 'Look what can happen if you just keep going'. Now Jersey Boys is a major show all over the world and has just been made into a movie by Clint Eastwood. Who would have guessed?"

● Jersey Boys is in cinemas now. Read Henry's review on page 50

Advert for a UK Tour taken from The London Evening News Monday April 14th, 1980



FRANKIE VALLI: Three operations.

Frankie Valli on 15-city tour

By JAMES GREEN

singer and unable to hear the music.
"He missed all the little sounds we take for granted such as water gurgling and fire crackling. I had to scream at him just to be heard."

Conflicting

"When the fans came up to him, if his back was turned he wouldn't even know they were there. They thought he was snubbing them."

"But new surgical procedures were developed and we began getting conflicting reports from the

specialists. Some said 'This is your only chance' and others 'You'll lose what hearing you have.' It was terrifying."

"Finally Frankie told me 'All right, I've gambled before. I'll make sure of the odds and then give it everything I've got.'"

Some of his past hits have been Sherry, Big Girls Don't Cry, Rag Doll, and Opus 17. He will be appearing at Brighton Centre on May 11 and the Royal Albert Hall on May 13.

sales are estimated at \$7,000,000.
"But the New Jersey 'street kid' fell victim to a long and difficult bout of deafness—produced by an obscure disease called otosclerosis."

Following the operations he has regained almost his full range of hearing.

His wife said: "Those years have been a terrible strain for us. Imagine the sadness of his being a

FRANKIE Valli, the American singer who had three operations for deafness, is to tour 15 British cities from May 11 to June 1.

With him on the tour will be The Four Seasons group. Valli, who began recording in 1962 and most recently recorded the title song for the Travolta film, Grease, has a three-octave voice.

He has had 20 hit singles and his worldwide disc

STAR RATINGS

- ★ Don't bother
- ★★ Poor
- ★★★ Worth a look
- ★★★★ Good
- ★★★★★ Excellent



UK Record Mirror May 17th, 1980
Singles Review - James Hamilton

FRANKIE VALLI: 'Medley: Passion For Paris/An American In Paris' (MCA T 572). Zingy gay 132bpm 12in cymbal sizzler.



Evening Bulletin

Valli, Seasons

Change With Times

FRANKIE VALLI AND THE FOUR SEASONS. At the Latin Casino. Through Sunday.

By VICTOR LIVINGSTON
Of The Bulletin Staff

Back in the pre-Beatle days of 1962 rock 'n' roll, the Four Seasons assaulted the Top 40 airwaves with a chart-topping, trip-hammer tempoed, falsetto-sung plea for "Sheh-Ree-Bay-Bee" to come out tonight.

And the big question on the minds of Philly teens (who found the disc perfect accompaniment for the "mashed potato" and other early-sixties dance crazes) was whether the lead singer, a pint-sized Italian lad named Frankie Valli, could still be a guy and hit those stratospheric tones.

The string of hit singles which followed, distinguished by a heavy backbeat, innovative arrangements and

Valli's unique leadwork, established the Four Seasons as the high priests of early sixties group-pop, the standard by which other American groups were measured.

As the decade wore on, other early-sixties acts wore out (what ever happened to Don and Juan, the Capris, the Duprees, the Orlons?). But not the Four Seasons. Propelled by what was billed as the "sound" of Frankie Valli, the group (through its various incarnations) stayed abreast of pop music currents.

And now the younger brothers and sisters of First-generation Seasons fans are asking how Valli does it while they do the Hustle to recent smashes such as "Who Loves You," "Swearin' to God" and the current Number One record in America, "December 1963," better known as "Oh What a Night."

And that's just the phrase to describe Valli's rock-and-socking performance last night at the Latin Casino. Fourteen years after "Sherry," he still reaches those eunuch-like notes. And the present Four Seasons behind him (none is an original) supplement his enduring talents and magnetic stage presence with tight, electric musicianship and backup harmonizing which evokes Seasons past.

Accompanied by an orchestra with

string section and a trio of female singers, Valli and the Seasons treated a mostly teen-and-twenties audience to the best of the oldies and faithful reproductions of the disco cuts responsible for the group's popularity with second-generation fans.

This is one group that uses its prodigious past to complement the successes of its present, unlike other rock-revival acts who have nothing going for them but the nostalgia. Valli's ballad hits, "Can't Take My Eyes Off You" and "My Eyes Adored You," show that he is more than a squealing rocker of the doo-wop school.

But it was the rockers — the Golden Sixties medley and the Seventies hits — that provoked hand-clapping, dancing-in-the-aisles frenzy. "Dawn," "Rag Doll," "Big Girls Don't Cry" — they did 'em all every bit as polished and joyous as the recorded versions.

Likewise with their current material, especially "December 1963" with its nostalgic appeal linked to a heavy disco sound. Drummer Gerry Polci sings lead on the verse, with Valli and bassist Don Ciccone helping out on the chorus, proving the group's formidable talents even when Valli takes a secondary role.

FRANKIE VALLI UK Record Mirror 19/4/80 - Tour Dates

FRANKIE VALLI AND THE FOUR SEASONS: Brighton Centre May 11, London Royal Albert Hall 13, Stafford Bingley Hall 15, Manchester Apollo 16, Birmingham Odeon 17, Bristol Hippodrome 18, Leicester De Montford Hall 20, Hull City Hall 21, Glasgow Apollo 23, Edinburgh Usher Hall 24, Aberdeen Capitol 25, Southport Theatre 26, Sheffield Fiesta 27, Portsmouth Guildhall 29, Oxford New Theatre June 1.

Theatre and Party Events
September 7 and 8, 1978
8.30 P.M.

GARDEN STATE
Arts Center

FRANKIE VALLI

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