

SPOTLIGHT ON ONE OF THE JERSEY BOYS

by Clint Hamblin

Calling him “that little man with that girlie voice,” Mom thought Frankie Valli was “a little strange,” but she sure did love his music. “Walk like a man, Talk like a man, Walk like a man my sa – ah – ah – on,” she’d sing along with Frankie. It was the 1960s, and Valli was the lead singer of the Four Seasons, shaking things up in the music world with “Big Girls Don’t Cry,” “Rag Doll,” “Can’t Take My Eyes Off You” and Mom’s personal anthem, “Walk Like a Man.”

In 1962, the unknown Four Seasons sang “Sherry” on “American Bandstand” and instantly became the hottest band in the country. Valli’s falsetto, or high range, was definitely unique, and at a time when men’s falsetto voices were relegated to backup, the Four Seasons switched things around and made the falsetto the lead.

Now, after all these years, Frankie Valli is everywhere. The one and only Frankie Valli is still performing concerts around the world. On Broadway and in numerous national and international touring companies, the award-winning Jersey Boys is introducing Valli and the Seasons to a whole new



Joseph Leo Bwarie

audience and reminding those of us who grew up with his music how truly exceptional he was.

Jersey Boys is the winner of the 2006 Best Musical Tony Award, the 2006 Grammy Award for Best Musical Show Album and most recently the 2009 Olivier Award for Best New Musical.

Casting is difficult, especially finding the right man to play Valli. After hundreds of people auditioned for the role, Joseph Leo Bwarie found himself in the finals. “I walked into the studio, and there he was,” Bwarie said. “Frankie Valli – right there. I guess he had to approve of the person playing him.”

“The audition process is a little more intense for Frankie, because you have to look it, sing it and dance it,” Bwarie said. He was chosen to play Valli in the Las Vegas version of Jersey Boys. It was a full Broadway production with a few minor edits. Now, he is about to open in Boston. “I’m excited to be back,” Bwarie said. “I spent four years as an acting major at Emerson College. Boston is the best.”

Jersey Boys is about a group of blue-collar boys who went from a humble upbringing to an American pop music phenomenon. Writing their own songs and creating their own sound, the boys sold 175 million records worldwide before they turned 30.

There are six current productions of Jersey Boys, in New York, London, Chicago, Las Vegas, Toronto and a U.S. National tour, and a seventh production will open in Melbourne, Australia this month. Boston has a long run of the production at the Citi Performing Arts Center Schubert Theatre, which opened on Thursday and is running through Sunday, September 26.

“This is my 21st month with the show,” Bwarie said. “I love the work, but I’m a little tired of the road life.” The work includes



PHOTOS: JOAN MARCUS

singing 27 songs out of a total of 34. “There’s a section in the show called the ‘Big Three,’ which consists of ‘Sherry,’ ‘Big Girls Don’t Cry’ and ‘Walk Like a Man’ back to back. It’s a challenge.”

The show is scheduled through to 2011, “And it’s still sold out on Broadway,” Bwarie said. “My contract is up in December, and I have no idea what I’m going to do. I get to see lots of places in the

country that I would not see otherwise, but the traveling is a killer. Luckily, we have computers, laptops and phones that keep us in touch with family and friends.”

Despite the nightly vocal challenge, in Bwarie’s 20 months with Jersey Boys, with the exception of a one-week vacation, he’s missed only three shows. “I love what I do,” Bwarie said. “And I love being back in Boston doing it.”

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