

# The Man Behind *the Music*

**JERSEY BOYS** – *The Story of Frankie Valli & the Four Seasons* has hit Auckland for a hotly tipped run, and has already met with the same rapturous response received in every other centre it has toured. **Sarah Illingworth** speaks to original Four Seasons' member and chief songwriter Bob Gaudio about how a once little-known pop act from Jersey became one of the brightest names on Broadway.

Since it first opened in 2004 in La Jolla, California, the Tony Award-winning *Jersey Boys – The Story of Frankie Valli & the Four Seasons* has played to more than 14 million people worldwide. Telling the story of Rock and Roll Hall of Famers the Four Seasons – Frankie Valli, Bob Gaudio, Tommy DeVito and Nick Massi – the show features 20 of the group's biggest hits, including *Sherry*, *Big Girls Don't Cry*, *Walk Like a Man* and *Oh, What A Night*.

Bob Gaudio, the original act's key songwriter – who has also written and produced for everyone from Neil Diamond to Diana Ross – has been integral to the development of the musical, as he was to Valli and his Four Seasons' slow-burner of a rise to success.

The Four Seasons first got together in 1956 as the Four Lovers, but it wasn't until a then 18-year-old Bob joined the group in 1960 that things really started to take off. Shortly after hooking up with the group, who adopted their new moniker at the same time, he wrote the matchless *Sherry*, still one of their best-known songs.

The combination of Bob's songwriting skill and Valli's inimitable vocals proved electric, and from that point on the duo largely drove the songwriting duties of the act, along with producer Bob Crewe.

The Four Seasons had worked with the producer since before Bob arrived on the scene, doubling as session musicians for other artists who came through his studio. They would continue to work under a variety of noms de plume throughout their careers, generating copious hits for both themselves and numerous others.

"We were very fortunate to have things cook," Bob, now 69, recalls. "It was just a wonderful combination, and when you're writing for a voice like Frankie Valli it's pretty inspiring. We were very focused. Nicky did a lot of vocal arrangements, and Tommy played guitar, so we were self-contained completely, and pretty much felt we could control our destiny."

While Bob admits he and Valli's dominance of the group caused friction within the band at times, he ultimately seems to consider it a necessary evil.

Director Des McAuff, Frankie Valli, Bob Gaudio and writer Rick Elice.



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"It seemed that we were right the majority of the time in our choices [but] it eventually took its toll on the group, and Nicky left, and then Tommy was bought out later on, for various reasons, which is told in the [show]." Conversely, when it came to *Jersey Boys*, Bob and Frankie surrendered much of their creative control.

"Frankie and I were both sort of back-seat drivers; we didn't do much driving," Bob elaborates. "We told our story, and we had a pretty decent idea of what was going to wind up on stage, at least we thought."

Until opening night, and I think both Frankie and I were totally stunned at how magical it was."

The show blew up from that very first run in La Jolla, California – something no one involved in the show really expected, least of all Bob and Frankie.

"We both looked at each other at intermission and said, 'imagine if the show ever gets to New York.' You know, La Jolla, California, was Beach Boy territory. It was just not our town – so to see that kind of response in California was pretty astounding."

*Jersey Boys* did get to New York, where it continues to draw large crowds daily on Broadway. It's also toured internationally, with stints in London, Sydney, Philadelphia and Vegas – and now, of course, Auckland.

Today Bob works with the show's creators on the casting of new instalments of the show, and general 'quality control' – which, in light of its runaway success, has turned into a pretty big job.

The irony of the Four Seasons finally having their name in lights every night, when they were relatively unknown at the time they were actually active, is not lost on him. After seeing the show, most viewers are shocked at the number of classic tunes they recognise from the band's repertoire.

"Most people don't recognise me, so I have the luxury of being able to stand in front of the theatre and listen to comments," he laughs. "And it's pretty interesting; it's essentially 'oh my, I had no idea,' 'I didn't know they did that song,' and so on and so forth. That's a fun time, to hear that."

**JERSEY BOYS**  
Until 17 June | The Civic

## JERSEY BOYS FEVER

Here are some of the tweets from the opening night crowd. There was a lot of love for local talent @vinceharder!

**@NZTopModelColin:** Captivated by hose dynamic @JerseyBoysNZ performances – all I wanted to do was get up & dance to those timeless classic hits

**@KerreWoodham:** The best show ever. I'm going again x

**@formerlydaniels:** "Valli with an I not a Y. Y doesn't know what the #%^ it is, is it a consonant or a vowel?!" #jerseyboysnz @THE\_EDGEevents white hot show!

**@SethHaapu:** Checked out Jersey Boys Musical last night and it was awesome. Cool to get a glimpse into the real highs & lows of some classic music.

**@Toni\_Street:** Oh what a night at Jersey Boys, loved every minute, can't wait to crank the tunes today! Fav song: 'Workin my way back to you' #loveit

**@AliLeonard:** Jersey Boys! Round 2! Still love it! Best way to learn the Frankie Valli story! Woke up husky voiced & still singing!

**@MarvellousMusic:** Had the best time watching #jerseyboysnz with one of my best girls! Go along and see it if you get the chance!

**@viewnewzealand:** @JerseyBoysNZ stunning show last night! Impressive cast with a story to match! And great to see kiwi @vinceharder take the stage! 10/10^S

**@DanielRutledge:** Aucklanders, Jersey Boys is really fantastic. I normally don't dig musicals much, but this one was truly thrilling. Go see it.

**@JTClassicHits:** All the hype about #JerseyBoys is 100% justified. A fantastic story, amazing music and brought to life by a sensational cast.

**@CGWmarkmywords:** Half time at Jersey Boys. Really good. Just getting better and better. Hard for them to top this in the second

**@madelinesami:** At jersey boys. Coast fm to the max and loving it!!! X

**@\_TheGuide:** so much fun at @jerseyboysnz opening night, can't wait to see the show in Brisbane, and I think the Civic is my new fav theatre #APNent

**@emmettsilton:** Blown. The F&ck. Away. @JerseyBoysNZ – Go watch it.

**@montybeetham:** @vinceharder I salute you. #Respect. #JerseyBoys.

You can follow the show's official twitter account @JerseyBoysNZ.



Photo: Jeff Busby