

# Behind the Music: Larry Raben Talks *Jersey Boys* and the Magic of The Four Seasons

By Jen Barraza



L-R: Noah Cornwell\* as Frankie Valli, Noah Archibald\* as Nick Massi, Justin Wolfe Smith\* as Tommy DeVito, and Daxton Bloomquist\* as Bob Gaudio in *Jersey Boys* (Photo by Brennen Russell)

Get ready to walk like a man, talk like a man, and experience the exhilarating journey of Frankie Valli and The Four Seasons! As *Jersey Boys* returns to The Phoenix Theatre Company, we sat down with director Larry Raben to talk about the magic behind this Tony Award-winning musical. From its high-energy performances to its raw and authentic storytelling, Raben shares his insights on what makes *Jersey Boys* a must-see event and how this production captures the heart, grit, and legendary music of the iconic group.

## Can you just jump on in and tell us about *Jersey Boys*?

*Jersey Boys* is the best jukebox musical there has ever been. It was conceived by one of the four Seasons, Bob Gaudio. He came up with the idea, he and Frankie talked about it, and they decided unlike, *Mama Mia!*, where they take their songs and put them into a show with a fabricated storyline, they actually thought that their real life story of how they became a group and where all the guys came from was compelling enough to make a musical.

And truly it is.

It follows the four guys from the 1950s. The three of them met in the same neighborhood. They were thugs in and out of jail, but they formed a trio called The Variety Tones, and they played a lot of clubs and then eventually, they met Bob. He came on, and that's where the Four Seasons sound really came from, and that's when they skyrocketed.

So, it follows the formation of the group, their interpersonal dynamics, and eventually how they become superstars, how it all falls apart, and then how they get reunited at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.

**What kind of collaboration happens between you and the set designers and the costume designers and the lighting to get the feel of the show?**

Well, obviously we all come to it in meetings after we've done our research and we've worked on it. I directed the show in 2019 at The Phoenix Theater Company. It was the first time I had a chance to direct it. And, it was one of the very first regional productions because the national tour was still out. It had only recently closed on Broadway, but we wanted to do our own work, put our own stamp on the show. The way the show is constructed means that you have to take some of the ideas that they naturally came to on Broadway, that Des McAnuff, did so genius-ly, as inspiration. It allows us to have a conversation about how do you do scenic-ly have a place that is the interior of a lot of places, but also has this character of gritty industrial New Jersey always kind of as an albatross around the neck. And, I thought Robert (Kovach) really beautifully captured that. And then in conversations with the lighting designer and the costumer, we were able to move from exterior on a street corner to inside somebody's car, and then into all these recording studios and clubs and people's homes and things. And, it's just really great, when you throw the idea out, we all go back and forth and layer on each other then we come up with the beautiful product that you're going to see. True collaboration.

**How are you approaching this one as differently than the 2019 version? Are you coming to it in a different place? Personally? Professionally?**

Yes and yes.

I've had a chance to go back and look at, at what I did in 2019, and I'm very happy with it. But I've directed it a second time. I directed it back east and that was interesting to do it first for a Phoenix crowd, which is a really great, smart, sophisticated crowd. But then to do it for a Long Island crowd, which was a whole mix of really sophisticated people and, and really blue-collar people. And, so having that knowledge, now I get to come back at it. I think this one is going to feel even more authentically Jersey. And, it's nice to be able to interlay that into it. I've learned from all of the different actors that I've worked with and choreographers on the show. So I'm excited to freshen it up, but also I feel really good about the product that Phoenix Theater had in 2019, and I think people are

gonna like this one even better.

**What excites you about the show specifically?**

The music, it is the most joyous technical process I've ever been to. When we get into our long 12-hour tech rehearsals where we're, you know, painstakingly going through all of the lighting, all of the cues, all of the everything, you just look around the room and everybody's happy because every last song in the show is great. And, also the level of talent that you have to hire to be able to pull the show off is really, really high. So, it just makes it a great experience.

**What do you hope the audience takes away from the show?**

I hope the audience, first of all, realize that they had more hits than anybody can ever remember. Even some of their lesser known songs that are in the show, they're all just at the highest quality. I hope the audience feels like they get to take a journey through the fifties, sixties, seventies, and they get to remember where they were when these songs were happening. That they take away how different American society has changed from decade to decade to decade. But mostly I really hope that everybody walks away just huge fans of the Four Seasons and what they did for American music.

Whether you've been a lifelong fan of The Four Seasons or are discovering their story for the first time, *Jersey Boys* promises an unforgettable ride through the highs, lows, and timeless hits of one of music's most beloved groups. With Larry Raben at the helm, this production is set to bring even more depth, authenticity, and sheer excitement to the stage. Don't miss your chance to experience the harmonies, the heart, and the history—secure your seats now and let the music take you back!

Watch the full Director's Download [here](#).