



Seven reasons to love 'Jersey Boys' in the West End

As the rockin' musical celebrates its seventh year on the London stage, 'Jersey Boys' fan **Andrzej Lukowski** explains why the boys are still on top

1 THE SONGS

A musical is nothing without its music, and you know you're in for a good night when you're seeing a show about Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons. You know them, right? The legendary New Jersey vocal group who gave us 'Can't Take My Eyes Off of You', 'Rag Doll', 'Sherry', et al, staying at the top for two decades as they dominated the vocal group era of the '60s then rode the wave of disco back to '70s glory. Their back catalogue is as strong as any in music.

2 NO, SERIOUSLY, THE SONGS

Unless you're a total Four Seasons nerd, the odds are you'll be unprepared for how many of the 20 top 10 songs in the show you're familiar with: did you know 'Big Girls Don't Cry', 'Bye Bye Baby' and 'December, 1963 (Oh What A Night)' were all the same group? Maybe you did (I didn't), but you'll possibly be moderately gobsmacked to discover chief Four Seasons songwriter Bob Gaudio was also responsible for teenybopper anthem 'Short Shorts', included here in all its guilty-pleasure glory.

3 THE STORY

'Mamma Mia!' turns the songs of Abba into a story about a paternity case. 'We Will Rock You' turns the songs of Queen into a story about a dystopian sci-fi future. 'Jersey Boys' turns the songs of the Four Seasons into a story about... the Four Seasons. These wise guys' ascent to the top was full of highs, lows, exploding egos and not a few brushes with crime – no need for a made-up story here.

4 THE SHOW

Maybe you loved Clint Eastwood's film version. Quite possibly you didn't. Whatever the case, the stage version of 'Jersey Boys' is totally different – a smart, slick, highly theatrical spectacle that flits (amusingly, sometimes unreliably) between different narrators, and barrels along at an almighty clip. The film was very serious. This is very fun.

5 THE SINGING

The Four Seasons were – and are – a vocal group. That means all their songs are based on elaborate, ornate arrangements,

not some bloke who sounds like he's auditioning for 'The X Factor' karaokeing his way through the songs. It's a great show for the singing alone.

6 THE SPECTACLE

With nine wardrobe staff, 500 costumes and 98 wigs per show, two vintage Gibson Firebird and Thunderbird guitars played each night (the only show in the world apart from 'Jersey Boys' on Broadway where you'll see them), and 826 lighting cues each night this is one serious show. It's no low-budget West End 'version' – it's the full Broadway experience.

7 THE STAYING POWER

Held together by a handshake agreement by songwriter Bob Gaudio and lead singer Frankie Valli, the Four Seasons have been going strong for 55 years. 'Jersey Boys' has some ways to go to catch up with that, but it might make it: a global hit, it's played in a total of 147 theatres so far. Who knows how many there are still to come?

'Jersey Boys' is at the Piccadilly Theatre.
 ► Oct 25. www.timeout.com/tickets