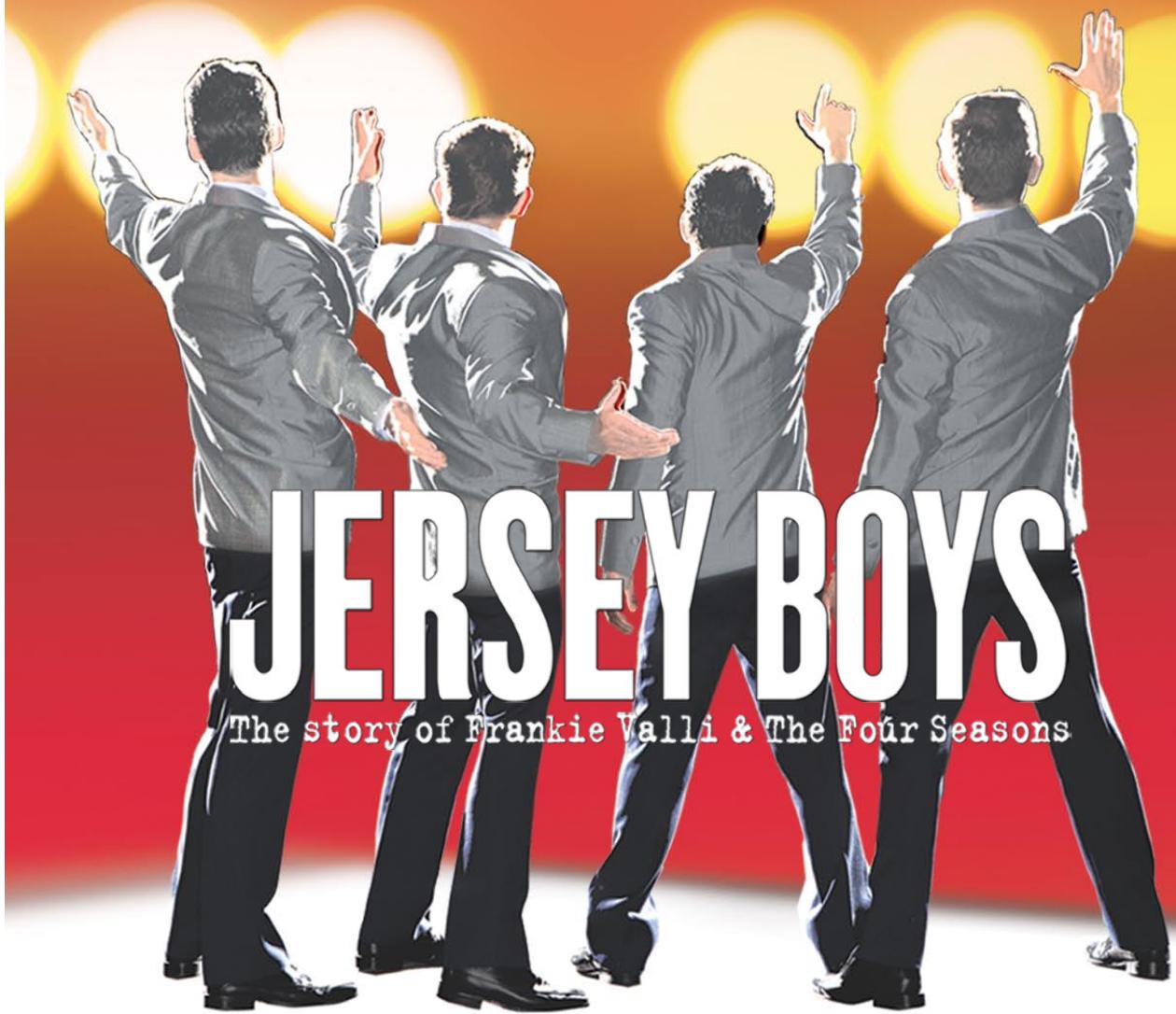


DISCOVERY GUIDE



Book by MARSHALL BRICKMAN and RICK ELICE

Music by BOB GAUDIO

Lyrics by BOB CREWE

Choreography by SERGIO TRUJILLO

Directed by DES MCANUFF

MAY 25-AUGUST 31, 2007 AHMANSON THEATRE



P.L.A.Y.

PERFORMING FOR LOS ANGELES YOUTH

DISCOVERY GUIDE

Jersey Boys

How to Use this Discovery Guide

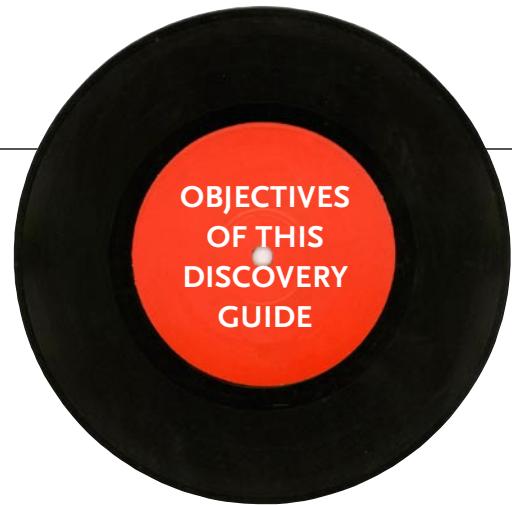
 WHEN YOU HEAR the opening bars of *Jersey Boys*, hold on to your heart. This play can make it jump and even threatens to break it. We have all heard The Four Seasons, but never like this. *Jersey Boys* is the Tony Award-winning play that tells the story behind the arc of their achievement, a tale of mythic proportion. Told here with candor and deft comic timing, it is lofted skyward by the over-the-moon music of this extraordinary group.

This Discovery Guide has been created to enhance your experience of *Jersey Boys*. It contains historical material and a summary of the play. At the end of each section there are opportunities for you to respond to the play's themes, events and characters.

Vocabulary words are in **bold type**. You will find definitions of these words at the end of each section.



Erich Bergen, Christopher Kale Jones, Deven May and Michael Ingersoll in *Jersey Boys*. Photo: ©Joan Marcus, 2006



Provide an overview of the play's historical, literary, cultural and musical contexts

Contrast the backgrounds of The Four Seasons with the backgrounds of the playwrights who wrote Jersey Boys

Examine the impact of The Four Seasons and their music on popular culture

Explore the power of multiple points of view in drama

Offer resources that may expand your experience of the play

DISCOVERY GUIDE CREDITS

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SYNOPSIS

Jersey Boys



Michael Ingersoll, Christopher Kale Jones, Erich Bergen and Deven May in *Jersey Boys*. Photo: ©Joan Marcus, 2006

 JERSEY BOYS is the story of four sons of Italian immigrants. They went from singing on street corners in the housing projects of northern New Jersey to singing on national television as their songs hit the top of the charts. Their meteoric rise was fueled by talent, street **savvy** and heart, plus a sound that was theirs and theirs alone. But even their dramatic ascent could not free them from the poverty and mob connections of their early years.

They called themselves The Four Seasons, and their story emerges as four stories, each representing a season of their career, and each told by a different member of the group. Spring is the time of their earliest beginnings, harmonizing under a streetlamp

on a balmy evening. Summer is the **zenith** of their success; while in autumn we see that success take its toll, as the lives and marriages of the group members begin to unravel. Winter brings solitude, sorrow and reflection, but within it the memories of that first spring are contained, and in that memory lies the promise of another spring.

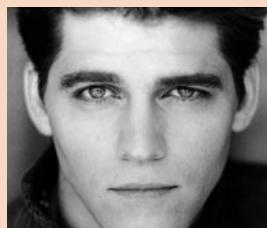
Within the broad outlines of their history, though, the recollections of the individual members vary widely. These conflicting memories provide a tension and **torque** which get beneath the bounce and zing of the music and rev it up still further, giving *Jersey Boys* an irresistible momentum.



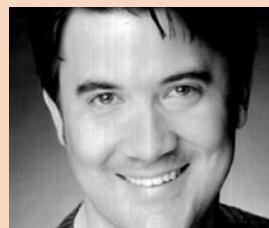
SYNOPSIS

Jersey Boys

CAST OF CHARACTERS *many actors play multiple roles*



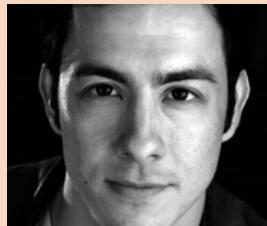
TOMMY DeVITO, founding member of The Four Seasons
Deven May



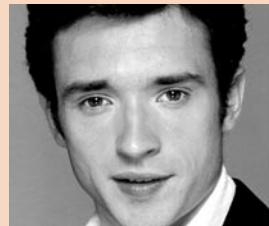
NICK DeVITO, Tommy's twin and also an original member of The Four Seasons, and OTHERS
Miles Aubrey



NICK MASSI, bass player for The Four Seasons
Michael Ingersoll



FRANKIE VALLI, born Francis Castelluccio, lead vocalist for The Four Seasons
Christopher Kale Jones



FRANKIE VALLI (alternate)
Rick Faugno



HANK MAJEWSKI, a singer/musician who joins The Four Seasons briefly
Eric Gutman



BOB GAUDIO, a singer/songwriter and keyboardist who takes Hank Majewski's place in the group
Erich Bergen



MARY DELGADO, Frankie's first wife, and OTHERS
Jackie Seiden



GYP DECARLO, a New Jersey mob boss, and OTHERS
Joseph Siravo



JOEY (actor Joe Pesci) and OTHERS
Courter Simmons



BOB CREWE, a record producer, and OTHERS
John Altieri



LORRAINE, a journalist, and OTHERS
Sandra DeNise



KNUCKLES and OTHERS
Nathan Klau



FRENCH RAP STAR and OTHERS
Brandon Matthieu



FRANKIE'S MOTHER and OTHERS
Melissa Strom



Toshiro Mifune and Machiko Kyo in *Rashomon*.

The *Rashomon* Effect

When filmmaker Akira Kurosawa's groundbreaking film *Rashomon* was released in his native Japan in 1950, it was considered a failure. "Too complicated," said one reviewer; "too monotonous," said another. Japanese critics were astonished when the film won the Golden Lion Award at the 1951 Venice Film Festival. In the West, in the aftermath of World War II, audiences were ready to contemplate relativity as more than a theory of physics – as a theory of perception, for example, and perhaps as a theory of truth.

In *Rashomon*, four people who have witnessed a murder tell four **plausible** but mutually exclusive stories of what took place, and viewers are exposed to a radical demonstration of the fact that people see things in different ways. "Rashomon" has come to suggest any situation in which the truth cannot be **discerned** because of varying testimonies. In psychology, 'the Rashomon effect' is the way each person's point of view affects his or her remembrance of events.

Questions and Exercises

1. Many children of immigrants have become so well known that their names are household words. America's former Secretary of State, Colin Powell, is one; baseball great Yogi Berra is another. Author Amy Tan, comedian Margaret Cho, and actors Telly Savalas and Tony Shaloub are also first-generation Americans. Select one of these, or someone of your choosing, and write a brief essay about how the "American Dream" was realized in this person's life.
2. Would you agree that famous trials often exhibit the *Rashomon* effect? Choose one of two topics: the O.J. Simpson trial, or the so-called "monkey trial" of 1925, in which John Scopes, a biology teacher, was tried for teaching evolution in Tennessee. Research your topic and then create a chart showing what each witness said about who, what, when, where, how and why (your categories may vary). Observe how witness testimony made it difficult, rather than easy, to learn the truth.



Marshall Brickman and Rick Elice: The Write Men for the Job



AN INTERVIEWER marveling at the success of *Jersey Boys* laughingly asked Marshall Brickman, “Who would have thought that you’d end up knowing all the **lyrics** Frankie Valli ever wrote?” A self-described member of the “over-analyzed, over-educated, Upper East Side” generation of New Yorkers, Brickman thought of “The Four Seasons” as a piece of music by classical composer Antonio Vivaldi, and would have turned down the opportunity to meet with Frankie Valli and Bob Gaudio had he not been **cajoled** into it by his friend Rick Elice. The meeting of these four men at the Joe Allen Restaurant on Times Square was an unlikely conjunction of two perfectly paired, but seemingly very different, sets of artists.

Marshall Brickman had written extensively for television before hooking up with Woody Allen to collaborate on the films *Sleeper*, *Annie Hall* (which won him an Oscar) and *Manhattan*, but his show-business debut was as a musician and vocalist in the folk group The Tarriers. Brickman recorded (with Eric Weissberg) the soundtrack of the movie *Deliverance* before turning to writing, so he was no stranger to the world of singing and recording. Elice, the playwright behind the popular stage thriller *Double Double*, had worked as an actor, teacher and creative consultant, and in the field of advertising had produced ad campaigns for 300 Broadway shows, including *A Chorus Line* and *The Lion King*. Both men recognized dramatic promise in the material they heard as Valli and Gaudio described their boyhoods in New Jersey. The two writers heard the themes of a play they knew they wanted to write: the contrast of the bright, youthful music with the **tenebrous** underside of poverty and mob connections; what Brickman calls the “Shakespearean” nature of the obstacles that had confronted the young Seasons; and, most of all, the way the four original members of the group still contradicted each other as they recalled

the past, “It was a happy day when we embraced the idea of the contradictions,” says Elice, adding that this became the organizing principle of the show. It also added many of the story’s dramatic ironies, each of which, wound like a spring,

produces energy and bounce onstage. The odd-couple alliance between the two high school drop-outs from Jersey and the two Harvard/Yale types from Manhattan sparked the very genesis of the show. Elice remembers Bob Gaudio saying to him **wryly**, early in their acquaintance, “I know where you were in the Sixties. You were marching on Washington while our fans went to Vietnam.” Brickman confirmed this impression, saying that the only song he had known back then was “We Shall Overcome.”

This basic **counterpoint** between the two pairs sounded the opening notes of what would be a whole new composition. The conflict experienced by four young Italian-Americans reaching for the American dream while still in the clutches of the Italian Mafia becomes a dramatic propellant onstage, moving the story forward. The internal tensions among The Four Seasons, who found their lives beginning to unravel just as their careers were at their peak; the differences in the way they recalled the past; and even the contrast between the audience’s heart-deep familiarity with the music of The Four Seasons and near-complete ignorance of the group itself – all of these closely-held opposites also provide high-octane fuel, making *Jersey Boys* move “like a joyride in a stolen Cadillac,” as one critic said, and giving it what Ben Fong-Torres of the *San Francisco Chronicle* identified as a “neat balance between heart and sass” that rocketed it to sold-out status on Broadway in less than a week.



Erich Bergen, Christopher Kyle Jones, Deven May and Michael Ingersoll in *Jersey Boys*.
Photo: ©Joan Marcus, 2006



Erich Bergen in *Jersey Boys*. Photo: ©Joan Marcus, 2006

Who Are The Four Seasons?

How is it possible that The Four Seasons have been part of American culture for four-and-a-half decades, and who they are has remained a mystery? Why is it that we have known their songs by heart while knowing or learning little about the singers?

Four Seasons lead singer Frankie Valli suggests that the main reason was a lack of promotion. "We were not embraced by the record industry," he says. Schooled by their mob connections about the way record companies routinely short-changed their artists, The Four Seasons wrote and produced their own music and retained the rights to it, giving the label owners far less profit and thus far less incentive to publicize them. Valli adds that the group's blue-collar orientation did not draw the excited attention of the media. "We were just a bunch of working stiffs," he says, "not fashion magazine pretty boys."

Born Francis Castelluccio and raised in a housing project in Newark, Valli had planned to become a hairdresser, but his Italian-born mother nourished his childhood interest in music with weekly trips to concerts, and at 16 he cut a solo record. A year later he joined twins Tommy and Nick DeVito and Nick Massi (formerly Tommy and the Nicks, a trio whose alternate career plans, to the extent that they had any, tended to involve unregistered handguns). The four formed the Varietones, and with some changes along the way they became the Four Lovers and then (naming themselves after a bowling alley) The Four Seasons. Songwriter/keyboardist Bob Gaudio stepped in – introduced to the group by now-famous actor Joe Pesci – after Nick DeVito left to serve a jail term. This was a group with a far-from-glamorous resume, to put it mildly, which is most likely why there was a notable lack of publicity about their personal lives.

All four of the original members were prodigiously talented. Frankie Valli had a signature ability to sing falsetto. When he joined the group, Bob Gaudio had been writing hit songs; his "Short Shorts" made it to the top of the charts when he was 15. Still, the odds were long that boys with their beginnings could blast themselves onto the Hit Parade. Even when they did, says Gaudio, "We weren't the Beatles. We weren't the Beach Boys. We weren't anybody but people who made hit records, and we were really only as good as our last hit."

As audiences are now discovering, that was very good indeed.

Questions and Exercises

1. Frankie Valli and Bob Gaudio write and perform songs; Marshall Brickman and Rick Elice write plays. Try your hand at one of these activities, writing either a dramatic scene or the words (lyrics) and music for one verse of a song. For help getting started, you may want to refer to www.guitarnoise.com/article.php?id=459 if you decide to try songwriting, or www.writing-life.com/exercises/scene.html if you will be writing a scene.

2. The Four Seasons overcame many obstacles in their early lives in order to achieve success. Does this make them heroes? Write a 200-word response based on the dictionary definition of the word "hero."

Vocabulary

Cajole: To persuade in the face of reluctance; to coax gently and persistently

Counterpoint: The combination of two or more independent melodies into a single harmonic texture in which each retains its linear character

Lyrics: The words of a song; poetic verses suitable for being set to music

Tenebrous: Shut off from the light; dark or murky; causing gloom

Wryly: With dry humor; ironically

And the Band Played On

 *JERSEY BOYS* takes place within a symbolic year of four seasons, but it covers several decades in the life of the doo-wop group by that name. The Four Seasons got their start in the mid-1950s, when the phenomenon of rock and roll **gyrated** into a **staid** era of lounge music and **propriety**, blew open all the doors and vented the life force and rebellion of a huge new generation, the children of World War II, now known as the Baby Boomers, just as they were coming of age.

Initially rubbing elbows with Elvis Presley (both he and Valli cut their first records in 1953), The Four Seasons displayed unusual staying power. After hitting the pop charts 40 times in the 1960s, most bands would have disintegrated, especially under the onslaught of the so-called British Invasion that brought the Beatles and the Rolling Stones to American shores, and the added pressures of the Vietnam War, which ended the Boomers' innocence. But The Four Seasons fell back and regrouped, downsizing to two, Valli and Gaudio, whose partnership was sealed with a "Jersey contract" (a handshake) and endures to this day.

By 1974, Valli was back in the Number One spot on the music charts as a solo performer, and a year later, the group reunited for two more years at the top of the charts, before breaking up in 1977. Rock music was changing, falsetto singing was enjoying a new popularity as the Bee Gees ushered in the disco era, and Frankie Valli reached new heights with a triple-platinum hit: the title song from the musical *Grease*.

Valli and Gaudio reformed The Four Seasons with two new members in 1980, the year Ronald Reagan was elected President, and began recording and touring. In 1990, The Four Seasons were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. And now, in a stunning **apotheosis** of the American dream, their legend and renown have new life in a play about them, which one critic said would probably run for several hundred years. Now that's staying power!

What, Exactly, Is This Show?

Much has been said about the form of *Jersey Boys*. Critic Pat Craig insists that "*Jersey Boys* is a jukebox musical; you can bet your sock-hop soul on that." Karen D'Souza adds a flourish, calling it a "doo-wop jukebox musical." Others have used the word 'popsical,' shorthand for what Broadway insiders call a 'catalogue musical,' a show in which a list of popular songs has served as the basis for a story written to connect them and flesh them out. *Mamma Mia!*, written around the songs of the pop group ABBA, is a prime and popular example.

Marshall Brickman and Rick Elice acknowledge that they were initially invited to consider creating a catalogue musical around the songs of The Four Seasons, but they immediately declined. Elice maintains that they did not write a musical at all. "It's a play," he says, "with songs." What's the difference? Strictly speaking, a musical removes the distinction between dialogue and song; characters turn to each other onstage and, instead of speaking, sing some of their lines, carrying the story forward through song. There is not a single instance of that in *Jersey Boys*, in which the songs are added to enhance but not to establish the drama.

In terms of its form, this show may be unique. It settled the issue, however, by winning a Tony Award for Best Musical and earning its own **niche** in a field of dramas that spans titles as far apart as the plays *Romeo and Juliet*, *Guys and Dolls* and *West Side Story*, the films *Goodfellas* and *The Godfather*, and the television series *The Sopranos*. These dramas have a menacing undertow of warring factions, class struggles, sinister alliances and seemingly insurmountable odds. Yet in that field, *Jersey Boys* is unique: not myth and not fiction, it is literally and sometimes painfully true.

Is it that honesty that brings audiences to their feet over and over? "The good news for us," says Bob Gaudio, "is that because no one knew anything about us, there is an element of surprise and shock." We could add, "delight and thrill," as both the four guys from Jersey and the play about them beat the odds.

Questions and Exercises

1. Choose a musical group whose songs you enjoy and create a portrait of their career as a group. Your portrait can be visual, a painting or collage, or a timeline showing their successes and milestones, or a written description of their achievements.

2. Some people believe or assume that there is a cause-and-effect relationship between political eras and popular music. Write a one-page essay pointing to a kind of popular music (current or past) that might be a response to political events or developments. Use examples of the music and respective bands, and the political events that may have motivated them.



Top:
Cast of
Jersey Boys.



Bottom:
Erich Bergen,
Christopher
Kale Jones,
Deven May
and Michael
Ingersoll in
Jersey Boys.

Photos:
©Joan
Marcus,
2006

Vocabulary

Apotheosis: Perfect example; quintessence

Gyrate: To revolve, circle or spiral

Niche: A place for which something is best suited; literally, a recess in a wall, as for holding a statue

Propriety: The standard of what is socially acceptable; fear of offending against conventional rules of behavior

Staid: Reserved and colorless in style, manner or behavior; sedate

RESOURCES

Jersey Boys

Interested in learning more about the people and events of *Jersey Boys*? Here are some books, websites and films to check out.



WEBSITES:

www.artspass.com/default.asp

A video interview with Marshall Brickman and Rick Elice, authors of *Jersey Boys*, is featured on this website. Click "Video on Demand," choose "ArtsPass Live," then scroll down to #A-41: Marshall Brickman and Rick Elice.

www.history-of-rock.com/four_seasons.htm

There are a few misspellings in this history of The Four Seasons, but there is also a great deal of concrete information. For even more, proceed to the end of the history, click on "Frames" and choose "Timeline" in the left column.

www.rockhall.com/inductee/the-four-seasons

The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum devotes this page of its website to The Four Seasons, and documents some of their unique claims to fame.

www.classicbands.com/seasons.html

This site is a treasure-trove of Seasons trivia, full of intriguing specifics, especially regarding the making of The Four Seasons' first break-out hit, "Sherry."

www.angelfire.com/music/SeasonologyInstitute

Maintained by the Fans of Frankie Valli and The Four Seasons E-Mail Group, this uneven website includes a meticulously detailed

history of the group, filled with obscure facts, plus biographies of The Four Seasons and a downloadable Frankie Valli ringtone.

www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,964284,00.html

Charles P. Alexander's article, "A Handshake for All Seasons," dates from 1987, but it provides a portrait of the friendship and business partnership between Frankie Valli and Bob Gaudio that is timeless and inspiring.



BOOKS:

A History of Rock Music: 1951 - 2000

by Piero Scaruffi (iUniverse, 2003)

Written with an emphasis on innovation in rock and roll, this book gives readers a glance at the vast field of rock musicians, an increased appreciation for The Four Seasons' achievement and a clear understanding of the context in which they were working.

All Shook Up: How Rock 'n' Roll Changed America by Glenn C. Altschuler (Oxford University Press, 2003)

A look at rock music in the context of American history, this book takes the music seriously in terms of its origins and its effects on American culture.

The Complete Book of Doo-Wop by Anthony J. Gribin and Matthew M. Schiff (Krause Publications, 2000) Early Four Seasons songs are often described as doo-wop music. If you would like to know more about doo-wop, what it is and what groups performed it, you will appreciate this book's definitions and descriptions.



FILM & VIDEO:

Frankie Valli and The Four Seasons – In Concert '92 (Delta Entertainment Corporation, 1992)

Appearing live in Atlantic City, an updated Four Seasons performs a broad range of songs, encompassing some of the original greats ("Sherry," "Walk Like a Man," "My Eyes Adored You") and including some newer numbers ("Silver Star," "Remember When").

Rashomon directed by Akira Kurosawa (Daiei Studios, 1950) The Japanese film on which the structure of *Jersey Boys* is based.



About P.L.A.Y.

P L A Y • Jersey Boys

Now in its 36th year, Performing for Los Angeles Youth (P.L.A.Y.) is Center Theatre Group's award-winning youth theatre and theatre education program. P.L.A.Y. serves more than 35,000 young people, teachers and families annually through a variety of performances, residencies, discount ticket programs and innovative educational experiences. P.L.A.Y. offers programs that allow young people, teachers and families to attend productions at the Mark Taper Forum, Ahmanson and Kirk Douglas Theatres for low or no cost. P.L.A.Y. is dedicated to artistic excellence and innovation in its theatrical productions and to the development of young people's skills and creativity through the exploration of theatre, its literature, art and imagination.



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