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Touch of TO in NJ Show

Jersey Boys creators have local connections.

By Sarah B. Hood

Perhaps the only surprising thing about the fact that the musical *Jersey Boys* is now touring to Toronto is that it hasn't made its way here sooner; the show has several strong Toronto connections. For anyone who doesn't yet know, the 2006 multiple Tony-winning musical tells the story of Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons, and it's replete with great songs like "Sherry" and "Walk Like a Man". It was originally created at San Diego's La Jolla Playhouse in 2004 under the direction of expat Scarberian Des McAnuff, who has recently become the artistic director at the Stratford Festival.

The show's choreographer also has local links: Sergio Trujillo lived in Toronto from the time he was a teenager until well into his early career. He worked on Toronto shows like *Outrageous*, *Swingstep*, *Syncopation* and *Romancing the One I Love* (starring Camilla Scott at the Winter Garden). He also choreographed *The Sound of Music* and *West Side Story* for Stratford before heading to the U.S., where he connected with McAnuff and *Jersey Boys* at the La Jolla Playhouse.

Trujillo's contribution to the popular hit was to re-imagine the moves of a 1950s-'60s boy band, which would actually have been pretty simplistic, with some of the extra flash and panache you might expect from a contemporary pop group. But, as a choreographer who likes to base his work in historical research of whatever period he's dealing with, Trujillo made sure to preserve the spirit and flavour of the time.

"Luckily I had done a production of a show called *Peggy Sue Got Married*, so I had done extensive research of the dances of the '50s and '60s. I had pictures; I had articles," he says. "Also, I wanted to give the boys a rougher edge, more hip and contemporary. More as if I had been a choreographer in the '50s, what would I do to choreograph a group like the Four Seasons."

He's very modest about his part in the show's success, noting that it was created in a very short period of time -- about four weeks. "It was one of those things that just happened magically with the collaboration," he says.

"I think the success of the show rests on the book, how a great, wonderful, meaningful story can touch a chord in every single audience member," he continues. "And Des has been at it for almost 35 years, and I happen to think that Des is a genius director and a brilliant storyteller. He's also a showman and a man of integrity, and he has the gift of bringing the right people together. Also, he has a very clear vision."

So for two key members of the creative team, the opening of *Jersey Boys* will be a homecoming. "I'm still very much Canadian and I'm still passionate about Canada," says Trujillo. "I'm thrilled to be coming back to Toronto with a hit Broadway show."

Dancap Productions presents *Jersey Boys* from August 21 to October 5 at the Toronto Centre for the Arts. For tickets, call Ticketmaster at 416-872-1111 or visit www.dancaptickets.com