

Williams Street Rep stages 'Company' this weekend

By **JAMI KUNZER** – jkunzer@shawmedia.com

No need to go to Chicago to see a musical, say those behind the upcoming production of "Company" at the Raue Center for the Arts in Crystal Lake.

Starring a professional crew, including a former "Jersey Boy," the six-time Tony award winning, romantic musical comedy opens Feb. 1.

The production represents Williams Street Repertory's longest running musical to date, with shows scheduled through Feb. 16.

Starring John Michael Coppola as lead character, "Bobby," the musical is a perennial favorite at theaters across the country, Director Richard Kuranda said.

"It's great for Valentine's Day," he said. "For us, it's a little bit of a departure from what we've done in the past."

Known for unique productions of "The Rocky Horror Picture Show," and most recently, "It's a Wonderful Life: The Radio Play," Williams Street has taken on a classic, "sort of like the grand master of American musicals," he said.

"I'm proud of the entire production. I really am," he said. "It's just a very large musical that people will enjoy."

"Company" tells the story of New York city bachelor Bobby, who is turning 35 years old, and his clutch of married friends. It features songs, such as "The Ladies Who Lunch" and "Being Alive."

Kuranda sought out Coppola for the lead after he performed "A Jersey Voice," a solo concert featuring songs from the 1940s through today backed by seven-piece band, to open the Raue's 2012 season.

"I think he's right on the verge of something really tremendous in his career," Kuranda said. "When you see the triple threat talent he brings to the table it's amazing. He sings, he dances, he acts. It's just wonderful."

Coppola, of Skokie, who recently performed "A Jersey Voice" at Huntley High School's Performing Arts Center, jumped at the chance to play Bobby.



"It's a role I've been wanting to play for a long time," he said. "I'm at the right age for it. . . I've known this show since I was a kid. I grew up around the arts. Even though the subject matter was much more mature than I was aware of at the time, the music of the show has always appealed to me."

Coppola already had included a couple of the songs from the musical in his solo concert.

The concert also includes stories about his journey moving his family from New Jersey to Chicago so he could become an original cast member of the city's "Jersey Boys." He was the understudy and performed the role of Frankie Valli in *The Four Seasons*.

Coppola has appeared on stages throughout the United States in his 17-year career, and said he enjoyed getting to know all involved in *Williams Street*. He hopes to do more shows at the Raue.

"It's been a really great company of people to work with," he said.

Of the show, he said, "It's kind of heady material for Valentine's Day, but it's a fun show because it may open up dialogue between people that maybe never crossed their minds before."

The show also features 22-year-old Dana Parker, of Buffalo Grove, as April, one of Bobby's three girlfriends. A recent graduate of the University of Illinois, where she studied acting, Parker also appeared in *Williams Street's* "The Fantasticks" in August.

"Company" has been challenging, she said.

"It's such an ensemble based show," she said. "It's been a challenge to show the character I want to show in the short snippets I have. You just kind of have to put it all out there."

“COMPANY”

Williams Street Repertory's production of "Company," the six-time Tony award winning romantic musical comedy

WHEN: Opens Feb. 1 and runs through Feb. 16. Showtimes include 8 p.m. Feb. 1 & 2, Feb. 8 & 9; 3 p.m. Feb. 10; 8 p.m. Feb. 15 & 16.

WHERE: Raue Center for the Arts, 26 N. Williams St., Crystal Lake

TICKETS: start at \$30. To order, go to rauecenter.org or call the box office at (815) 356-9212.

Planit Northwest is operated by Shaw Media and the Northwest Herald. Content copyright 2013, Planit Northwest.