

By JAMI KUNZER – jkunzer@shawmedia.com

Former Jersey Boy honors the greats in Raue show (VIDEO)

When former “Jersey Boy” John Michael Coppola performs, it’s a sort of autobiography in song as he celebrates legends in music.

Backed by a seven-piece band, Coppola presents “John Michael Coppola: A Jersey Voice” at 8 p.m. Sept. 22 on opening night of the new season for the Raue Center for the Arts, 26 N. Williams St., Crystal Lake.

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“It’s not like a musical where the stories follow the plot,” Coppola said. “They’re all popular songs people will know, but they’re songs that relate to my life, that have influenced me.”

Songs include tunes by Billy Joel, Dean Martin, Davy Jones, Neil Diamond and of course, “Jersey Boys.”

One Billy Joel song he sings, “Just The Way You Are,” is a song he used to court his wife, Rachel. “I put a cassette tape in a radio player and serenaded her with it,” he said.

“There are a lot of different ways I sneak stories [on] the back end or the front end,” he said. “It’s better than just saying, ‘This next number is from this person and then go into a tune.’ It’s more to make it an evening of my life in song.”

During a 17-year career, Coppola has appeared in top theaters throughout the country, including as part of the Chicago and Las Vegas companies of the Tony Award winning musical “Jersey Boys.”

He understudied and performed the role of Frankie Valli of The Four Seasons and later became part of the vocal group, “Under the Streetlamp,” before venturing out on his own last year.

Coppola, who lives with his wife and their 6-year-old son, Michael, in Skokie, now performs his solo concert throughout the region, but also has been seen on tour with productions, such as “She Loves Me,” “Flight of the

Lawnchair Man,” “42nd Street,” “Singin’ in the Rain” and “Hot Shoe Shuffle.”

Coppola moved his family from New Jersey to Chicago to be part of “Jersey Boys,” the story of Frankie Valli and The Four Seasons, which has won Tony, Grammy and Oliver Awards.

“It was such a wonderful gift of a job because it’s such a wonderful show, very high profile, and it’s allowed me to veer off and do this thing on my own,” Coppola said.

He had performed off-Broadway throughout the country, having pursued musical arts after two years of college.

“I grew up in an artistic household. It was always in the back of my mind. I knew I enjoyed it, but I didn’t know if I wanted to do it as a living,” he said. I enjoyed cooking, thought maybe I’d be a chef. My mother’s father was a self-taught auto mechanic, so I thought about that. But I kept going back to performing...

It was sort of a mental challenge to decide that’s what I truly wanted to do, and my parents supported me the entire way.”

He said he’s honored to open the season for the Raue, a season that also will include Amy Grant, performances by Williams Street Repertory and the comedy of Steve Cochran, among other acts.

“It’s pretty far away from downtown Chicago to have that type of venue giving that caliber and quality of entertainment... I think it’s just a wonderful facility to have in that neck of the woods,” he said.

“JOHN MICHAEL COPPOLA: A JERSEY VOICE”

WHEN: 8 p.m. Sept. 22

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

INFO: Celebrate opening night of the Raue Center’s new season with former Chicago “Jersey Boys” cast member John Michael Coppola, featuring songs from the 1940s through today.

TICKETS: \$30 at the box office or by calling 815-356-9212.

INFORMATION: www.johnmichaelcoppola.com

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