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'Jersey' star opens Raue Center season

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Former "Jersey Boys" cast member John Michael Coppola is helping the Raue Center get its new season off to a swingin' start.

Coppola's "A Jersey Voice: From Sinatra to Springsteen ... and Everyone in Between," kicks off the 2012-2013 season at the Raue Center for the Arts in downtown Crystal Lake. Tickets, which range from \$30-\$36, are available at rauecenter.org, at the box office at 26 N. Williams St., or by phone at (815) 356-9212.

"It's such a wonderful venue to have in that neck of Illinois," Coppola said. "I'm really honored to be opening the season for them."

Coppola, who understudied and played the role of Frankie Valli in the Chicago company's long-running production of the Tony Award-winning musical, brings his solo show to the theater for one night.

Through the music, Coppola and a seven-piece band take the audience on a trip through time, starting with the music of the 1940s and traveling through today. Included are classics by Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Billy Joel, Bruce Springsteen — and of course, Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons.

Along the way, Coppola shares stories from his life and career with the audience.

"From meeting my wife in a production we did in Europe, to our life after coming home from being in a magical place called Europe, and dating here in sort of the 'real world,'" he said.

Coppola grew up in New Rochelle, New York, in an artistic household. After attending community college for a time, he decided to begin auditioning for shows. It was while in a production of "42nd Street" in Zurich, that he met his future wife, Rachel, who was also part of the cast.

Stories shared with the audience include his move from New Jersey to Chicago to be part of the Chicago company of "Jersey Boys."

"I lived in Bloomfield, New Jersey, which is a stone's throw from where the action of 'Jersey Boys' takes place," he said.

His family enjoyed the Chicago area so much, they decided to stay, he said. Coppola, Rachel, and their son, Michael, live in Skokie.

As part of the "Jersey Boys" Chicago company, Coppola had many duties. While he understudied and performed the role of Frankie Valli, he also served as dance captain, he said. Coppola considers the critically-

acclaimed show among his favorite productions in which he took part during his 17-year career performing in the U.S., Canada and Europe.

“It was a blessing to be able to go to the same place for almost three years,” he said.

Part of the joy working on “Jersey Boys” was seeing the impact it had on audience members, he said.

“They relived part of their lives because they knew the music growing up,” Coppola said. “To see people reliving their lives in two hours time is so moving and remarkable ... And to be part of that was remarkable as well. It’s a true testament to the show and its longevity, and it’s going to run for a long time.”

Audiences attending Coppola’s solo show will also find themselves reliving earlier days through music.

“People know the tunes going in,” he said.

While the audience goes in knowing the music, he said, they go home “knowing a little bit more about me, having enjoyed themselves and they also enjoy a couple of surprises.”

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