

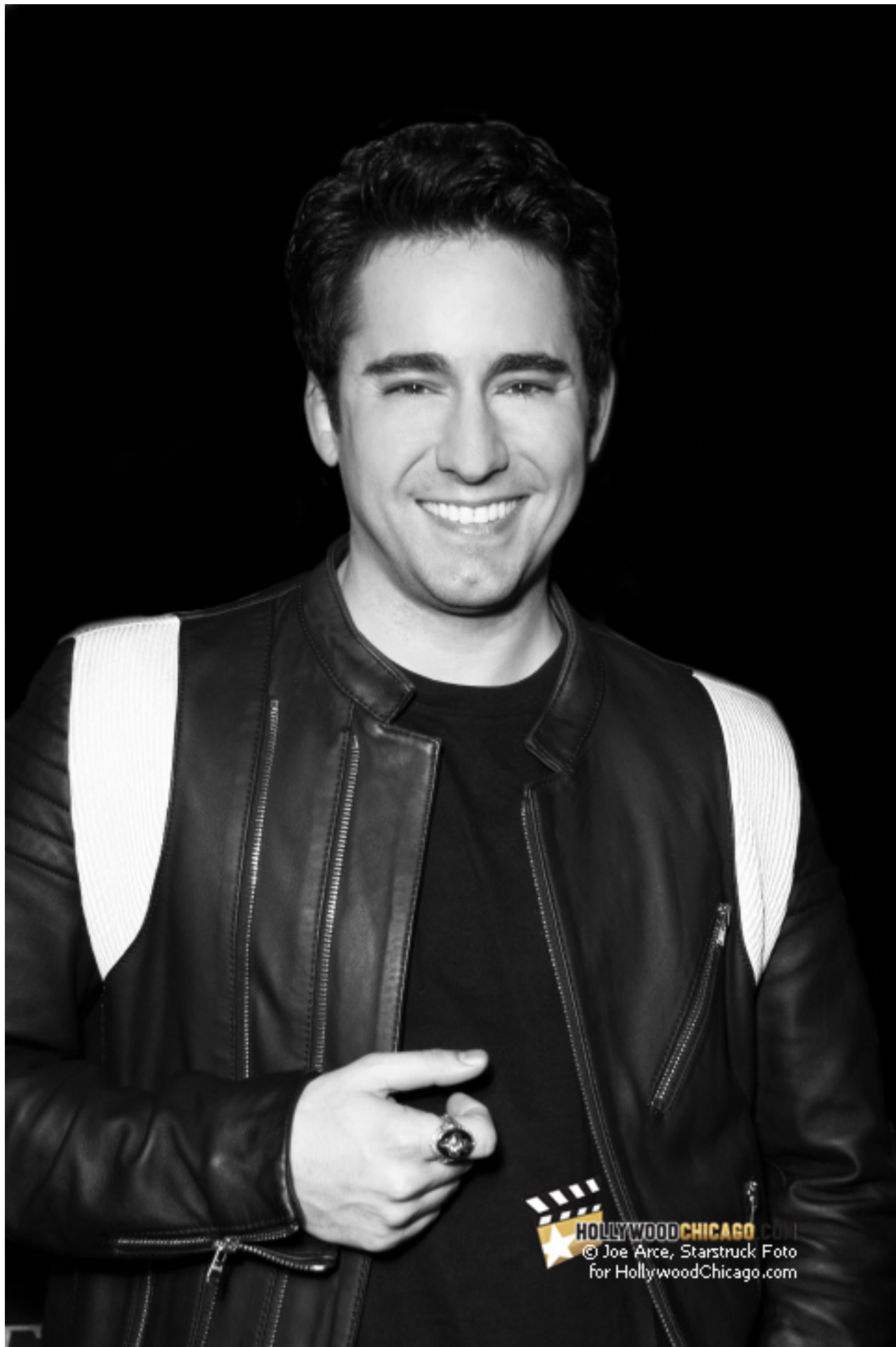
## Interview: From Stage to Screen for the Actors in ‘Jersey Boys’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on June 18, 2014 - 12:55pm

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CHICAGO – When taking a huge Broadway hit to the screen, there are a whole new set of challenges. For the actors of the new film adaptation of “Jersey Boys” – John Lloyd Young, Erich Bergen and Michael Lomenda – it involved driving lessons from director Clint Eastwood and interpreting their stage personas on film.

All three actors had been either on Broadway or in road show companies in the stage version of “Jersey Boys,” with John Lloyd Young originating the role of lead singer Frankie Valli of the The Four Seasons on the opening night of the Broadway play. Between all three, they have thousands of stage performances of “Jersey Boys,” and they had to take on the transition to the film set, directed by the icon Clint Eastwood.



John Lloyd Young is Frankie Valli in ‘Jersey Boys’

*Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Photo for HollywoodChicago.com*

HollywoodChicago.com got an opportunity to talk about that transition, and photographer Joe Arce took these photos at a Red Carpet premiere in Chicago on June 10th, 2014. The actors talked about how the music and soul of the “Jersey Boys” – with John as Frankie Valli, Erich as Bob Gaudio and Michael as Nick Massi – touched their lives.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** John and Erich, you had the opportunity to talk to the real-life characters you’re playing in the film about their experiences, while Michael you didn’t have that opportunity, since Nick Massi passed away in 2000. Do you think there is a difference when you get to know somebody you’re playing rather than not?

**Erich Bergen:** Yes, you really feel like you have to respect them, since they are living, especially when they are still actively working. And not only are they living, they have created the reason why you are there. I know I had a little more freedom than John did, because Bob Gaudio isn’t known to the public like Frankie was. I got to invent the character a bit, while still respecting Bob, and I was always aware that he was looking at that performance.

**John Lloyd Young:** It is kind of tricky – stars want you to think of them the way they want you to think of them. But there is something different about how you want people to think you are, versus how you actually are. There is one thing that can be said for how someone approaches their life, there is another thing for the affect they have on others and how they seem. The actor’s job is to play the psychological reality of a person, but also how they seem to others.

My most useful research for the character of Frankie? A long lunch with his bandmate Bob Gaudio right when I began the role. Intuitively I thought you get a better sense for a person from their best friend than from them, because their best friend will tell you something closer to the

truth.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** In that sense, did either of you pick up something from the real guys that you used in your portrayal, that you kept secret from them?

**Young:** Every time I have seen Frankie Valli over the years I have stole something from him. [laughs] And there are times when he is uneasy being around me because I think he knows I'm pickpocketing his psychological reality.

**Bergen:** I was in tech rehearsals when I was doing the tour, and I saw Bob sitting in the audience alone, as we were running a song. I had hung out with him a number of times and we got along. I observed him responding to things he was hearing intuitively – like a dog turns his ears without moving their heads – when we were adjusting all the sound elements. I think in his mind he is still the producer of the sound of The Four Seasons. So I was able to take away that he is always aware of sound.



Erich Bergen is Bob Gaudio in 'Jersey Boys'

*Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Photo for HollywoodChicago.com*

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Since you all came from the stage version of 'Jersey Boys,' what was the most difficult transition in playing the character in a movie sense, with sets, settings and acting intimacy that is different from the stage?

**Young:** On stage, the audience can't see your eyes up close, they can't see your irises. And since it is said that the eyes are the window to your soul, we all had to learn very quickly that the camera can capture everything you're thinking, so it's a more delicate process.

**Michael Lomenda:** You can let things wash over in character, more so than on stage, because the camera catches it. And Clint Eastwood



does a great job just capturing human behavior. He encourages that on the set, and often we didn't even know that the camera was rolling, which was great. And it would get some personal moments, because sometimes we didn't know whether it had stopped or started.

**Young:** For example, we've never been in this room in our lives, and here we are trying to relate to the furniture, and holding our water bottles a certain way. When you get on these soundstages, you've never been there before, but it's suppose to be your childhood home. You have to become familiar very quickly.

**Bergen:** With the theater, you are rehearsing on the set you'll eventually use for a good month, and even after that you get two weeks of tech on the actual stage set. In a way, it's harder for film. You get on the set about 15 minutes before you begin to film.

**Young:** That's why Clint is great for running a loose set. I had to figure out very quickly how it's going to seem like you've lived in this place forever. You have to be not be afraid of touching things, because that comes off in a scene.

**Bergen:** Our co-star Vince Piazza is like a bull in a china shop, he was always looking for something he could use on the set. My first day on the set was a scene that Michael was also in, and the scene was similar to our stage script, which was second nature to us. Vince turns this familiarity into a whole scene in which he's looking for a lighter and couldn't find it. If we just sat there while he was doing that, we'd look like logs. We had to come alive with him. That's the most distinct difference from stage to film.

**Lomenda:** Another discovery is that we had to figure out who these four guys were immediately. We hadn't hung out or met before we started shooting. So it becomes about how all these guys are from the neighborhood, and how do we create the history and the depth of relationship. You have to hit the ground running.



Michael Lomenda is Nick Massi in 'Jersey Boys'

*Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Photo for HollywoodChicago.com*

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What was it like to step into different eras like the 1950s and '60s. What advantages did you observe about life back then?

**Lomenda:** I love the nostalgia of a handshake meaning more than just a handshake, it's a bond. – and your word meaning your word. It just doesn't have the same meaning now as then.

**Young:** There was more loyalty then, in all areas of life, and this is why. You made an appointment to meet somebody, and then when they went to that appointment, you knew if you didn't show up, there was no way to get a hold of them. That society forced you to commit to people, in ways we don't have to anymore.

**Lomenda:** Accountability. It was just more important back then. It made you know who you were as a man. Nowadays, people are more out there, with less of a definition. That was very cool.

**Young:** And throw in that Italian American loyalty on top of that accountability, and those guys were liked glued together for life.

**Bergen:** On a musical level, these songs were melody driven, that is why they have become earworms. Today, it's easy for songs to become noise, just because they start with a beat or a track. Plus, they are achingly overproduced. Songs now can be 'cool,' but they don't necessarily make you feel anything. The early songs of Four Seasons songs were raw rock 'n roll records, that really had an effect on people, and they still do to this day.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What were the advantages of having a director like Clint Eastwood who actually lived in the eras you were representing, and would he give you any tips on how to act in certain situations that were era appropriate?

**Young:** He taught me how to drive a 'three on the tree' transmission in a vintage car. I had to do a scene with that car, put it in gear, and drive it. So I had a driving lesson on the backlot of Warner Bros., a stick shift driving lesson from Clint Eastwood. It was like driving with my Dad. [laughs]

**Lomenda:** It was the same with me. I'm from New York City, so I didn't learn to drive until I had to do the show in Las Vegas. As a modern day driver, the cars practically drive themselves. So I had this 1962 car that I had to drive John and I in this particular scene, and it kept stalling.

**Bergen:** To give you an idea of just how different it is, during the screening in New York City, the two times you see me driving in the film, my parents applauded. [laughs] It was so impressive to them.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Given that these 'Jersey Boy' songs are virtually embedded in your cells, which one gives you the most joy when you express it?



'The Jersey Boys' in Chicago, June 10th, 2014

Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Photo for HollywoodChicago.com

**Lomenda:** It evolves, and certain things resonate with you depending on your mood. But I've always loved 'Sherry Baby,' because it was their first big hit. It's like sitting on a tanning bed, in which you feel the heat of the audience burning you from that side, because they want the song so badly at that point.

**Young:** In one of the pivotal scenes in Bob and Frankie's handshake deal, Bob says that he hopes someday to get a saxophone in the group. When I do 'Jersey Boys' on stage, that's a very satisfying and spine tingling moment, when Bob gets Frankie his horn section. So when you have a Hollywood budget in a Clint Eastwood film, we can get a whole lotta horns. Holy crap.

**Bergen:** When Clint filmed 'Can't Take My Eyes Off of You' – and to answer your question that's my favorite song – he did it about 17 times. As with all of the songs, which we did with no playback [pre-recorded tracks], Clint produced a rock concert. He brought in the audience, and they enjoyed the show. So he filmed the performance, but he also filmed the energy in that room. He wanted it to be raw, we actually wanted to fix some of the takes, but he wanted it to be rock 'n roll.

**Young:** I’d go off on a note, like a scene we did in the recording studio in a montage in the film, and Clint left it in the movie. I heard it last night in New York, and I was horrified. But those things happened in the studio, and I’ll live with it.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Since the ‘Jersey Boys’ is a story about the impossible dream of being at the right place at the right time, and having hit records, what has been each of your right place/right time moment in your careers?

**Lomenda:** I think we’re in it. I can say I was in San Francisco when Clint came to see the show, and he saw me in that show. If he had come two weeks later, I wouldn’t have been there, because the show would have been closed.

**Young:** If I hadn’t been invited back to Broadway to play Frankie again, after being away from it for years. If I hadn’t said yes to that, I wouldn’t have been on stage when Clint saw it on Broadway, and he wouldn’t had seen my performance. There is no better convincing than doing the part in front of the man.

**Bergen:** For me, I was cast right from Broadway as well. You know how there is an Oprah effect for books? Well, there is an Eastwood effect for actors. Now when i go into a meeting or a casting session, the first question is always ‘what was it like working for Clint Eastwood?’ There is an immediate interest in anyone who has worked with Clint Eastwood.

*“Jersey Boys” opens everywhere on June 20th. Featuring John Lloyd Young, Erich Bergen, Michael Lomenda, Vincent Piazza and Christopher Walken, Screenplay by Marshall Brickman and Rick Elice, from their musical book. Directed by Clint Eastwood. Rated “R”*



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