

**JOHANNESBURG & CAPE TOWN**  
**MUSICAL THEATRE**  
**JERSEY BOYS**  
**WHERE & WHEN:**  
Montecasino's Teatro until April 28; Cape Town's Artscape, June 19 -July 14

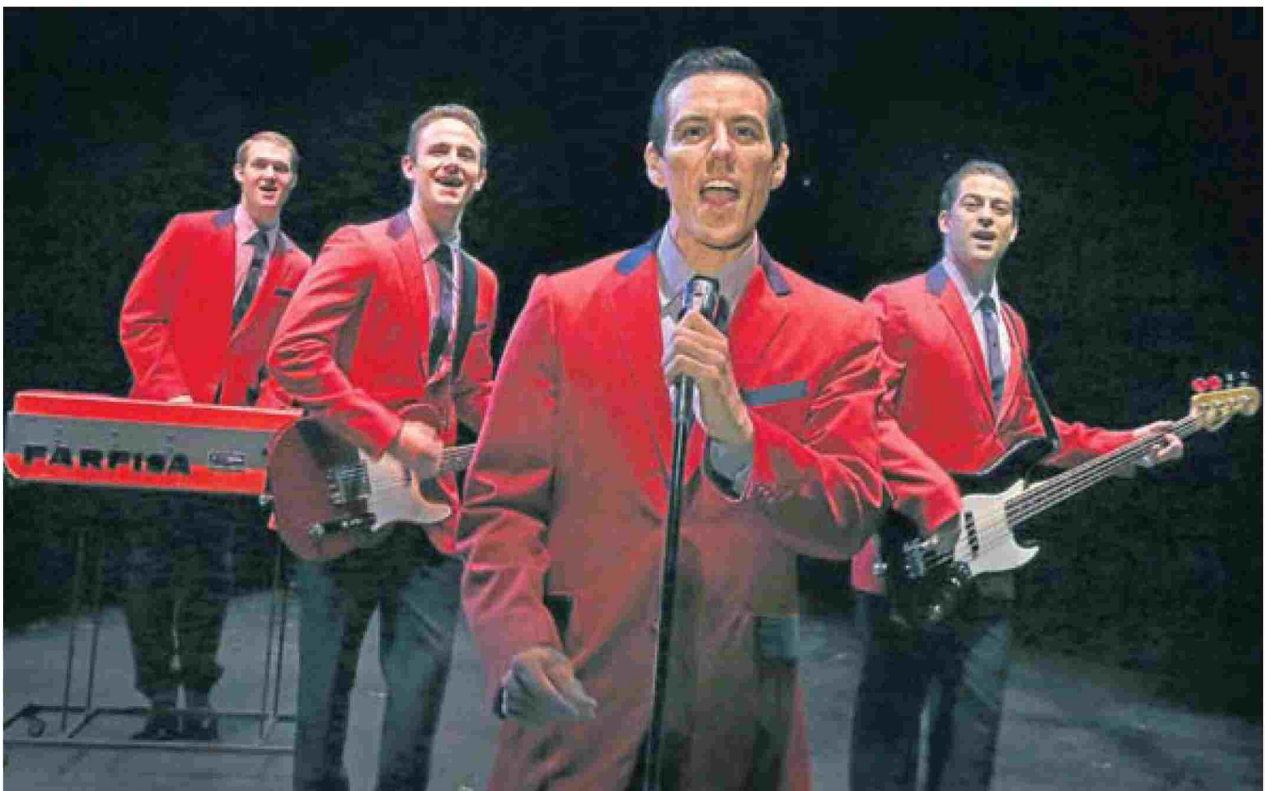
**T**HERE'S a big difference between a musical tribute show and a carefully crafted piece of musical theatre.

Thankfully, *Jersey Boys* is not a lightweight piece of unbearable sycophantic fluff in which endless songs are tied together by a flimsy story line. This is a full-scale musical with a plot and strong character development in a tale of triumph, tragedy and personality clashes.

It is the true story of The Four Seasons — Frankie Valli, Bob Gaudio, Tommy DeVito and Nick Massi. They were the US band from the 1960s who wrote their own songs, invented their own falsetto sound and sold 175 million records before any of them turned 30.

*Sherry, Walk like a Man, Oh What a Night and Can't Take My Eyes off You* all came from their pens, and if you are my age and remember swooning over the Bay City Rollers singing *Bye Bye Baby*, that was one of theirs too.

This production of the show, which was first staged on Broadway in New York in 2005, boasts a 19-member all-South African cast. It stars Grant Almirall as Frankie Valli, Daniel Buys as Tommy DeVito, Kenneth Meyer as Bob Gaudio and Emanuel Castis as Nick Massi. They are all excellent, particularly Almirall with his tremulous voice and Buys as the bolshy DeVito, the founder of the group who also almost caused its destruction. DeVito does not come out of it well, cheating his friends, gambling away their money and landing the band in heavy debt as the others honorably bear the burden of paying it back.



TRUE STORY: Kenneth Meyer, Daniel Buys, Grant Almirall and Emmanuel Castis sing 'Sherry' in 'Jersey Boys' Picture: MAYE-E WONG

# A finger-clicking good time

## Foursome's charming, flawless '60s pop wows *Lesley Stones*

The gritty script does not gloss over the tough background: rehearsals are put on hold while one or two of the band are doing jail time because their evening was spent robbing a store rather than playing a gig. It is all made funny and sassy, of course.

There are several lovely cameo roles too. Charlie Bouguenon is impressive as the quietly menacing fixer Gyp DeCarlo and Duane Alexander is delightful as a terribly camp record producer with a devilish way with words. Their small roles bring a freshness to their scenes and make the story more

entertaining by adding texture to the glamour.

Everything about *Jersey Boys*, which has won 54 major awards, including the 2009 Olivier award for best new musical, is slick and sharp. It has perfect lighting, muted costumes that reflect the mood of the day and some lovely tame choreography for an era when anything more than clicking fingers and a gentle sway would have been considered *louche*.

The stage set is simple but effective. The double-level space is used dramatically and large screens project cartoon images or old footage to enrich the tale.

Musically it is flawless, with musical direction by Bryan Schimmel and a 10-piece band led by Rowan Bakker recreating the tunes perfectly. The songs are woven into the script as an essential part of the story, and there is a wonderful goose-bump

moment when the band first comes together with *Cry for Me. Too Good To Be True* is another of several show stoppers.

The very beginning of the show feels like a bit of a mish-mash as characters are introduced by Buys narrating the story in the role of DeVito. But it quickly picks up pace and builds into a vibrant show with pithy humour, a few tense clashes and some sadness as private lives implode.

If you're a fan of the music, *Jersey Boys* is a brilliant show. It is a great evening out even if you are not, because by the end you will be.

This is a full-scale musical, a tale of triumph and personality clashes