

Michael Ingersoll Reflects...

On Sunday, January 31, 2010, Michael Ingersoll, who just two weeks earlier completed a three and a half year run as Nick Massi in the San Francisco and Chicago runs of "Jersey Boys," hosted a symposium at the Metropolis Performing Arts Center in Arlington Heights, Illinois. The event was an opportunity to hear more about Michael's career, more about "Jersey Boys," and more about his "Big Band" project that's reunited him with three of his "Jersey Boys" cast members for a cabaret performance that is selling out in the Chicago area.

More than 100 individuals, from children as young as eight to adults as old as... assembled for the promised hour and a half session that last almost two and a half hours. While the audience was encouraged to talk about all aspects of Michael's career, and many questions did, it was clear the audience had a preference for questions about "Jersey Boys."

Early in the discussion, Michael was asked about performing as Nick Massi more than 1250 times – how did he sustain the level of performance expected – and delivered – over that time. Michael explained that the story of "Jersey Boys" represented interactions between the various participants, that each of his lines was part of a conversation – not a presentation to the audience. His job was to "carefully listen to each part of the conversation as it was delivered, then respond accordingly." He commented about how characters may deliver a line differently based on who is performing the role or even how a particular performer is feeling. He emphasized how important listening was to a successful performance.

In the trivia plus insight category, Michael was asked which song he would hope to "never perform again" and which would he "always" love. For the "never perform again," he responded with the "backup" parts that the Four Seasons did before breaking out. "Sometimes," Michael said, "your mind just didn't want to back those people up anymore!" For always, it was the finale "Who Loves You." As Michael explained, the closing "Who Loves You" gives the performers a great view of the audience, with some of them singing, clapping, laughing, crying – even someone occasionally sleeping. But the overall connection to the audience at that point was as Michael described: "That's the privilege of having been on this ride."

In one of the most insightful parts of the presentation, Michael responded to a question about "forgetting lines." There is of course the story Michael has told several times, about forgetting the final two parts of the line "There are three things you don't do..." But his response to this question went further when Michael explained how the part involves not just the memorization of lines – but the "physical" part of the presentation. The words become intertwined with the muscle memory of their delivery so that, as Michael describes, "the physical memory can take over to deliver a line correctly" even if there's a mental lapse.

When asked, "Which of you was the practical joker?" Michael explained that all of them did their fair share of joking, and the whole cast had to have a thick skin. Ingersoll said that if someone messed up or cracked a note, they would definitely hear about it later. Sometimes, the boys would just do goofy things. One time, Michael loaded his coat pocket with Swedish Fish. Whenever he was on stage with a

fellow actor but the stage lights were off, he would pull out a candy and offer, “Would you like a Swedish Fish?”

One topic that was addressed from various aspects of Michael’s career and the interest of audience members in being in theater work was the dynamics of casting. Michael stated strongly that “talent is the most overestimated part of success for performers.” Bottom line, according to Michael, it is a combination of “attitude” and “being right.” On the talent issue, Michael pointed out -- because he auditioned for the role of Frankie Valli – that there were clearly better “Frankies” – “there will always be better singers – better dancers.” But the difference will be “attitude,” which Michael stated includes things like, “being on time, respect for fellows cast members, director, producer, etc., willingness to listen and take direction.” And then, perhaps even more important, a performer has to “be right,” the right person for the role, “solving a problem” for the director.

Michael Ingersoll created lasting memories for audiences fortunate to see his portrayal of Nick Massi in “Jersey Boys.” Now he’s giving back to the community, providing wonderful learning opportunities by his willingness to “teach” and share in his continuing artistic work.

“Jersey Boys” Blog Story

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