

The DooWopProject with the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra



The DooWopProject has its origins at the August Wilson Theatre with cast members from “Jersey Boys.” Four of the group’s members, Dominic Scaglione, Jr. (still starring as Frankie Valli on Broadway), Dominic Nolfi (as Tommy DeVito), Russell Fischer (as Joe Pesci/Frankie Valli), and Charl Brown (Multiple Roles) are “Jersey Boys” connected.

The DooWopProject reached new heights last weekend in Indianapolis when they debuted a new show filled with their energy, harmonies – and the added power of the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra. It created a musical experience that was memorable on multiple different levels.

It started with an 11 AM morning show packed with senior citizens where despite my membership in that group I helped lower the average age. But age didn’t deter the audience from loving the songs from their teen years. With added songs for the evening performances (where I was happy to be raising the average age), the energy hit still higher levels.

There were so many highlights that it is difficult to select just a few to report on. I suspect many audience members would report their highlights based on their own personal musical tastes. Many would point to Charl Brown’s power and authenticity on Smokey Robinson’s “OOO Baby, Baby/Tracks of My Tears” and “Tears of a Clown.” Lovers of classic doo-wop would point to the groups’ work on songs like “I Only Have Eyes for You,” “Remember Then,” “Morse Code of Love,” or “That’s My Desire.”

Our “Jersey Boys” fans might highlight Russell Fischer’s lead on the “Big Three:” “Sherry,” “Big Girls Don’t Cry,” and “Walk Like a Man,” including Dominic Nolfi’s re-creation of “Tommy DeVito’s” dance moves from “Jersey Boys.”

A woman sitting next to me told me after the show that she couldn’t stop noticing how Dwayne Cooper was just “waiting” to break out and did so with his voice and dancing for “Gloria” and “Speedo.” But from the first song, the audience was acknowledging and loving his bass.

The DWP’s CD contains about half of the songs performed in the show. Fans of doo-wop and the guys need to catch the show because the new material is fantastic and leaves me eagerly awaiting the next CD, maybe even a live recording with one of their upcoming symphony performances. Two interesting notes: 1) sales of their CD were so good that additional copies had to be overnighted –and they still sold

out by the end of Saturday's final concert and 2) the DWP touring schedule is significantly expanded (www.thedoowopproject.com)

The surprises started quickly after intermission. The first was a fascinating interpretation of Frankie Valli and Frank Sinatra performing together on a song they'd each recorded. Russell Fischer, having already proven he had Frankie Valli's voice performed one of "The Ones That Got Away" from "Jersey Boys" with "I've Got You Under My Skin." When Dominic Nolfi joined, in true Sinatra style, the only thing I can say is it left me wanting more.

"Jersey Boys" still starring Dominic's Scaglione Jr excelled with his, and Charl Brown's leads on a surprise addition of "The Impossible Dream," a perfect song to be performed with symphony backing. In true "Jersey Boys" style "the crowd goes wild!" But an even bigger surprise was when Dominic soloed on a song he's done hundreds of times, the biggest song from "Jersey Boys," "Can't Take My Eyes Off You." I first thought it was "too good to be true." But it was so: "Dom" (Frankie), you got that saxophone you wanted, you got a "whole horn section," and more. ***You got a full symphony!***

The project in the DooWopProject indicates the groups' desire to perform songs that have been "doowopified," popular songs from today. Jason Mraz's "I'm Yours" is on their CD and is a great example of adding their harmonies to a hit song. In the second half of the show, Dominic Nolfi took the lead on "Sunday Morning" and Charl Brown took the lead on "This Love" for a medley from Maroon 5. Later, Dominic Scaglione Jr. took Adele's "Stay with Me" with Russell Fischer taking Sam Smith's "Rolling in the Deep" for a "doowopified" ride.

When Dwayne Cooper hits the bass with "Speedo", then leaps from stage to dance up and down the aisles of the theatre "some may call him Joe" but as the Saturday night audience gave him a standing ovation, they just called him "**Dwayne**" (Again, oh that bass!).

This review would be incomplete if I left out the obvious input from Sonny Paladino, the Project's Musical Director, who created this amazing show and did all the scoring for the Symphony. For me, it's another very personal connections because of Sonny's connection to Johnny Maestro and the Brooklyn Bridge. There are no two songs more defining for my life in the "60's than "The Worst That Could Happen" and "Can't Take My Eyes Off You." For the Project, it meant great performances of "The Angels Listened In" and "Pretty Little Angel Eyes."

Fittingly the show ended with the audience applauding, clapping and singing along to "December 1963" a performance that really does summarize the show: "Oh What a Night!"