

John Lloyd Young Offers an Insider's View at His Life, Work and Perspective on the Arts

Feb 14, 2017 by Steve Schonberg for show-score.com

Q: We were excited to hear that you're returning to the Cafe Carlyle with a brand new show, having been there last in February, 2016. Can you give us some insight into how you approach putting together a new show? And, what fans can expect from "Here For You"?

John Lloyd Young (JLY): I do a set at home in Hollywood once a month at the Federal Bar. We have a loyal following there of familiar faces who are a great test audience for new material. Since playing the Carlyle last year, my music director Tommy Faragher and I are bringing a good deal of the material – that has gone over well back home – here to New York. I've sung songs in four languages, I've added a new one this year...I'll be debuting a song in that language this time at the Carlyle.



Q: We recently interviewed Frankie Valli, who shared his positive view on "Jersey Boys" closing its Broadway production. How did you feel about the closing, and what are your thoughts on how it will live on?

JLY: Movie musicals last forever and so do cast albums. There are millions who saw the live show but even more millions who have seen, and will see, the Clint Eastwood movie. "Jersey Boys" was a major phenomenon on Broadway and it was thrilling to see the fan base grow. But I never got as many letters from as many far corners of the world than when the movie came out. The movie cast and I even had an invitation to the White House to sing for Prime Minister Abe of Japan. Don't forget, too, that Eastwood prioritized casting actors from "Jersey Boys" stage productions [around] the world. Our interpretations live on in the film. It doesn't seem "Jersey Boys" is going away anytime soon, and I feel so privileged to have been able to do the Broadway show, the film and the album. What a ride!

Q: With organizations forming like "The Ghostlight Project" and the "Concerts for America," we've seen an outpouring of political action from the arts, as well as concern over what the arts will mean in our current political environment. As a member of the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities (appointed by President Obama), what is your view on the immediate and continues future for the arts?

JLY: I just returned from a week on the Hill lobbying to protect the arts at the National level. I think you're going to be surprised how much the new administration supports the Arts. Stay tuned.

Q: Winter can be especially rough on a performer, and at least here in New York there's been quite a few illnesses going around. What's your secrets to keeping your voice healthy – which New York Times' Stephen Holden said is a "falsetto that [you, John] can direct through the stratosphere"?

JLY: It's tough. Fluids, rest, exercise and a good diet are key. But doing the show for two years straight on Broadway taught me all the tricks I need to know to sing even through a cold. And age has taught me the most important lesson: sometimes if you have the humility to let the audience know

you're singing through a cold, it can become a fun experience in itself. We're all people, imperfect, and it's great to be in a room together celebrating music even if I'm sounding less like clear-as-a-bell [Roy] Orbison and more like rough-and-tumble Joe Cocker.

Q: You're also an accomplished visual artist; we ate up your "Food For Thought" collection, which you debuted in 2010! Can we look forward to any new works soon?

JLY: I've been doing Warhol-inspired society portraits of late. There are about three dozen soup can "SOUPERstar" portraits out there of friends and idols from Clint Eastwood to President Obama. I have a letter from Mr. O with thanks for his portrait and have heard the rumor that it will be in the collection at the Obama Presidential Library in Chicago. Wanna take a trip with me to see it?

He's No Longer One of the Boys

Feb 2015 by Sheryl Flatow for [Revue Mag, Segerstrom Center for the Arts](#)

...to have a new singer reinterpret these indelible songs is unique

John Lloyd Young calls the program he's bringing to the Samueli Theater My Turn, and that title is laden with significance. In 2006, Young won a Tony® Award for his extraordinary portrayal of Frankie Valli in the mega-hit musical Jersey Boys, and he's remained closely associated with

the role ever since. He's played Frankie onstage some 1,300 times: two years during his initial run, limited engagements in 2012 and 2013, and six weeks in the West End production. He then had the privilege of recreating the role in Clint Eastwood's film adaptation, which was released last June.

But now, he says, Frankie Valli and Jersey Boys are behind him. My Turn, which is also the name of his debut recording, gives audiences an opportunity to discover Young's gorgeous, expressive voice, "not a voice I'm putting on to play someone



else." The show, which will be performed from February 12–14, features some of the most beautiful ballads of the '50s and '60s, including "My Prayer," "Hurt So Bad," "Ebb Tide," "Unchained Melody," "Only You," "Hey There Lonely Girl" and one Frankie Valli song, "Can't Take My Eyes Off You." When he performed My Turn at the Café Carlyle, a writer for the Huffington Post said, "I, for one, did not want the night to end."

"I'm trying to do something similar to what Harry Connick Jr. and Michael Bublé did with war-era song standards," says Young, "reinterpret them and make them fresh for a new audience. These songs came 20 years later in the timeline than the war music, they have lyrical and melodic integrity, and yet they haven't been treated as standards. People don't cover them. So to have a new singer reinterpret these indelible songs is unique, and I think the audience experiences a freshness. On a certain level, this could be just a walk down memory lane. But it's not, because it's being sung live, right in front of you, in the present. So there's an immediacy to these already familiar songs that is really exciting for me and the audience. And thematically, these are the perfect songs to be singing around Valentine's Day."

Most of the songs have an R&B sound and were big hits for artists such as The Platters, Little Anthony and the Imperials, Eddie Holman, Fred Parrish and The Satins, and Lenny Welch. "I'm drawn more to that music than anything else in the '60s because there's a raw and honest energy that connects to me as a human being," says Young. "I think they're the greatest songs and the greatest songs to sing."

Those who are intimately acquainted with this music will likely find that Young captures the essence of the beloved original versions while imbuing them with his own artistry. He sings with an emotional honesty and vulnerability, and takes great care with the lyrics. "I listened to Frank Sinatra a lot when I was young, which is why I'm a stickler for lyrical interpretation," he says. "I approach these songs with the influence of those crooners and song stylists of the '40s. And Broadway is great training for knowing how to interpret a lyric. An actor who transitions into being a singer brings a lot more depth to the singing."

Young, a native of Sacramento who now lives in Los Angeles, was a theater arts major at Brown University: He spent his junior year in Spain studying visual art, his other passion and vocation. Simultaneously with his career as a vocalist and actor, he also works as a visual artist. He installed his first commission in 2011 at Spago, and the previous year had his premiere art show, Food for Thought. "There's a little bit of a wink in what I'm doing," says Young, who works in mixed media. "A lot of the things that I'm playing with are consumer items, packaging that people discard, and elevating them to a revered object. It's kind of like Marcel Duchamp's Readymades."

Young is also active in numerous charities, and in 2013 was appointed to the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities. "Each president's committee has a personality that fits the administration," he says. "Early education is deeply important to the Obamas, so the character of this committee is

arts integration into early education. The flagship program of the committee is called 'Turn Around Arts.' It takes the poorest performing schools across the nation and injects arts into the curriculum, which creates a magical up-tick in academic performance across all subjects and dramatically decreases discipline problems and increases attendance. It's basically a paradigm for arts not only enhancing school culture but being integral to school culture. Since it works in the poorest schools, it demonstrates that it can work in all schools. The data is irrefutable. The committee has reached out to artists as important as Elton John and architect Frank Gehry, who are going to schools and talking to kids and inspiring them."

So is Young, who traveled a long road to get to this place in his life. He says he prefers to look forward rather than look back, and rarely pauses to think about what's happened to him. But, he acknowledges, on rare occasions he'll sit back and reflect. "Ten or 15 years ago I was cashing an unemployment check hoping I could make it through the week with four roommates in a house in Purchase, New York, and taking Metro North into the city for a random audition for a children's theater. Now I'm visiting the White House. So, yes, when I look back it's pretty staggering."