



## Ring in the New Year with The Jersey Tenors at Surfflight Theater

Story by Gina Marie Rodriguez

[MUSIC: "BIG GIRLS DON'T CRY"]

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ ([00:12](#)):

Big girls don't cry. I cry all the time. Does that mean I'm not a big girl? Oh, well, adult or not. I will admit to a childlike excitement about today's guest Broadway veteran and Jersey Tenor, Brian Noonan, stopped by to chat about the New Year's Eve Bubbly Bash with the Jersey Tenors, and this is but a sampling of their beautiful voices. And as a fan of The Four Seasons, I will always be giddy when I hear it. Brian Noonan has starred on Broadway and national touring companies as the Phantom in Phantom of the Opera, Enjolras in Miserable, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in Jekyll and Hyde, Cable in South Pacific with the legendary Robert Goulet. Gus Growltiger in Cats and in Jesus Christ Superstar. As an international concert soloist, Mr. Noonan has performed for a myriad of presidents and world dignitaries, and he is now the founder and managing director of the Jersey Tenors, the newest opera-rock mashup sensation. The tenor create an explosive blend of iconic opera classics alongside rock and roll greats like Queen, Elton John, and Bon Jovi to name a few, but they never forget their Jersey roots. Highlighting Jersey legends like Frankie Valli in the Four Seasons, of course. Frank Sinatra, Bruce Springsteen, and even Ms. Whitney Houston herself. And so without further ado, here's my interview with a talented Mr. Noonan.

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GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ ([01:41](#)):

Well, hello sir. How are you today?

BRIAN NOONAN ([01:43](#)):

Nice to spend some time with you. Thanks for having me.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ ([01:45](#)):

Of course. I'm really excited to talk to you about this. You are the founder of the group, the Jersey Tenors, and I'd really love a rundown on how that came to be. What inspired you to take a group of ragtag guys from Jersey and tour the world with your dulcet tones?

BRIAN NOONAN ([02:01](#)):

I love that description, I gotta to use that in our tagline. I've been a Broadway performer for the better part of the last 35 years, and I started my own corporate and social entertainment company thinking I was going to just provide entertainment for those type of outlets and industry. But I got pulled back into theatre again and having the opportunity to work and hire my own, my friends and the people that I really admire. We stumbled across obviously the great music of New Jersey. I mean, there's so many iconic artists that come out of this great stage. I mean, of course you think of the big icons like Frank Sinatra, Bruce Springsteen, Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons. But I mean, there are so many other artists that are out there. Bon Jovi, I mean Kool and the Gang, Connie Francis, the Shirelles, I mean so many. We just decided that we were going to start compiling all of this great work by these artists and we kind of put it all into one show called the Jersey Tenors, so.

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GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ ([03:03](#)):

That's fantastic. You mentioned Frank Sinatra before and all these Jersey greats, and I don't know if I'm just on this kick of embarrassing myself on this podcast lately, but I have such a crush on basically any man who can sing. So you totally count in that by all due respect to your wife. But I'm listening to your music and getting ready for this interview and just getting really excited because I say this all the time, I have no musical talents of my own, so I love to see it in other people. And you've done at least, what, 173 shows this year alone, and I want to know how are you still functioning?

BRIAN NOONAN ([03:44](#)):

It's crazy. We're glad to have the work. Of course, during the pandemic 20-22, it was the dry spell. We thought live performance was going to be over for many, many years. So when they started coming back again, we really prepared ourselves. We were ready to hit the ground running as it were, and when clients and theaters and corporate and social clients and entities found out that we were still viable, they just kind of rushed to us. And then as we performed and got out there, the word got out there even more, so from 256 two years ago to last year, to this year doing 173, we're trying to slow it down a little bit. I know we talked on the phone, it does get a little much, I've got three wonderful children that I miss dearly and going on the road a better part of the year really, really hurts, especially in their formative years. But from training purposes, we're all a bunch of Broadway performers who keep training and training our voices and making sure we're in tip top shape to deliver the product. But the ride is so much fun. I have to say that coming on stage and performing this music and the way we unveiled the show too, it's very interactive with our audiences. It makes it so much fun to perform.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ ([04:56](#)):

Interactive in what way? Do I get to sing also?

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BRIAN NOONAN ([04:59](#)):

You can believe it or not, there are people that will get up there, I'm telling you. We let the audience know from the get go that this is going to be a conversation, and sometimes there's a little bit of a pushback, they're not sure of, it feels a little eggy, but once the third or fourth song comes along and then they start feeling, oh, it's okay to start responding back and forth. So it ends up being a collaboration with our audience, and at the end of the show, sometimes they're just shouting back at us. I mean, it's really aghast. I can't explain it, but once we hook them, once we get 'em in there, it just becomes a whole different type of show.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ ([05:37](#)):

I love that. I love interactive shows. Lucky for you, I will not be singing because like I said, it wouldn't sound good. It would be like a cat meowing or it just wouldn't be great.

BRIAN NOONAN ([05:47](#)):

Well, as long as you're jiving and having fun with us, and I encourage you to find an aisle seat if you're up for it.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ ([05:53](#)):

Yes. Oh, that sounds great. Well, you actually have what, two sold out performances this New Year's Eve?

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BRIAN NOONAN ([06:00](#)):

Yeah, the people at SurfFlight have been great to us. We did a show back in February of the year prior and the ownership and Steven Gale, who had been so amazing to us, decided that they wanted to use us for our gala, the two-show gala on New Year's, and she just let us know that all sold out, 450. 450 a show and not a seat to be had, so.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ ([06:23](#)):

That's so exciting. I'm very happy for you and for the guys. So congratulations. But talking about the guys, let's touch on that for a little bit. I believe you said that you have two rosters and that's kind of how you handle 173 shows. But for this roster, the guys who are going to be performing with you at SurfFlight, can you talk to me about them? Why do you like working with these guys and who are they?

BRIAN NOONAN ([06:44](#)):

Well, it does create a special, we have to create a special chemistry in doing this show. Like I said, it is not only does it require just an amazing versatile vocal talent, the two, there was a foursome of our Jersey Tenors and there are two rock tenors and two opera tenors. So we really have to go through a painstaking process to screen, audition, call back a number of gentlemen who come in and perform our show. And once we get that down and we fine tune it, then we teach the motif of the show. So it takes a

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lot of training, usually about four to five weeks of an onboarding process. The three guys that will join me on the 31st for New Year's at SurfFlight are just amazing. Isaac, Sean, and Joey. Just incredible vocalists, incredible people to be on stage with. And it also requires them to be malleable and flexible with the motif that we put forth and stuff like the conversation that we have with our audience.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ ([07:43](#)):

Now you mentioned the two rock tenors, the two opera tenors, and you are an opera tenor, correct?

BRIAN NOONAN (07:49):

Yes. Yeah.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (07:51):

Okay. So can you explain to me and also to our listeners the difference between a rock tenor and an opera tenor and what that means?

BRIAN NOONAN ([07:58](#)):

Well, I come from the world of Broadway where I was singing a lot of legit musical, but I also had an appreciation and studied, studied with private voice teachers. Everything from Pavarotti music to Turandot to Puccini to the lot. So I always had an affinity, however, I didn't get a chance to perform it at the level of the Met or the Lincoln Center Opera or New York City Opera. So when we had had our chance to infuse that rock and opera together, we didn't know what was going to come of it. And when

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we saw how well it matched up and how well it infused, it was such a gas. But as a musical person, we never want to be pigeonholed into one particular style. I love to sing Counting Crows as much as I love to sing Luciano Pavarotti and Nessun dorma or Les Mis. Les Miserables happens to be one of the shows that brought a lot of our original group members together because it required an incredible amount of vocal dexterity.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ ([09:04](#)):

As we're approaching the Christmas season, I remember that the first time I ever saw Le Mis, and don't judge me for this, but the first time I saw it was the movie. I did not get to see it on stage. I still to this day, haven't seen it on stage, but I saw it on Christmas Day years ago when it came out, which was maybe not the best choice because I cried a lot that Christmas.

BRIAN NOONAN ([09:23](#)):

Oh wow, okay.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ ([09:24](#)):

Yeah, but I mean, I love that show. So you do a rendition of "One Day More" that is lovely.

BRIAN NOONAN ([09:35](#)):

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Yeah, we use it as our encore. I'm not letting the cat out of the bag, but it's a show that, like I said, when it brought our original group together, the original foursome of the Jersey Tenors were all Les Mis veterans. So we decided to keep that number in the show as our encore and it ends up serving us well. But it is an exceptional, and if you have a chance to see stage production, it is epic.

[MUSIC: "ONE DAY MORE"]

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ ([13:35](#)):

Speaking about Broadway, you mentioned that you're all Broadway vets, and I would love to ask you a little bit about your history on Broadway, and if I could start with a favorite memory, funniest story, scariest story. You pick what order you want to tell me all those things in.

BRIAN NOONAN ([13:51](#)):

Oh man. Well, listen, I consider myself very, very fortunate to have a long Broadway career for about 17 years before I started the company, probably one of my favorite roles to perform was Jekyll in Jekyll and Hyde. Frank Wildhorn's Jekyll and Hyde, just because it required so much effort, not only physically, but vocally and the transitions back and forth between the evil guy and the good doctor. I'm trying to think of really, really funny stories that happened. When I was in Les Mis, I played Enjoras and we happened to be on the road performing, and our first show was in Washington DC for then President Bill Clinton back in 1996. And they told us when we got to the theater at the National Theater in downtown DC that you have to know that this theater is haunted. And we were all like, "okay, yeah, yeah, it's haunted."

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BRIAN NOONAN ([14:46](#)):

And the ghosts always come out the first night or opening night for every show that comes through. And we all laughed it off, but we were just so excited to have the First Family there. And in the middle of the first number are Jean Baljean loses his voice. A couple of pianos go down and stop playing. And "One Day More," which is the finale of Act One, when I raise up my gun, the guns literally split in half and it's a real gun. The gun's split in half and it was like swinging like a pendulum in front of me. So at intermission, by the time we got intermission, there was some girls who didn't even want to perform the show. They were like, what's going to happen next? So that's one of the things that kind of freaked a lot of people out, but I thought was rather funny and entertaining.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ ([15:38](#)):

I'm a huge fan of these ghost stories, so this could be a completely different podcast if we go in that direction. Yeah, I mean, hey, look, I love all things about the Great White Way. So anything that you want to talk about. You were also previously The Phantom at one point.

BRIAN NOONAN ([16:01](#)):

Yeah that was the last Broadway production I did, and that was back in 2000, 2001. And that was a really, really challenging role. I had the opportunity both playing the Phantom and Raoul at different times, and that was such a treat, and it was a very difficult role as well to perform very physical and to sing Andrew Lloyd Weber's music and "Music of the Night" and all that great music was such a treat.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ ([16:29](#)):

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If I'm remembering correctly, Phantom of the Opera was my very first Broadway show as a kid. So that one is still really special to me. I listen to the music all the time, it's just so dramatic I can't get over the drama of it. I love it.

BRIAN NOONAN ([16:45](#)):

And you think about it, it's a dime store novel that they just turned into this mega production and it really stood the test of time. It really did. And it's a credit to Cameron McIntosh too, who really went to the nth degree to keep up with the production design from the gowns to the dresses, to of course, the famous chandelier that comes crashing down to the stage.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ ([17:04](#)):

Oh, yeah. It's stunning to see it on stage. And that's one where I said before that I was embarrassed to have seen Les Mis as the movie first, and I'm very grateful that I saw Phantom on Stage first. I love the movie as well, but there's something about seeing that on stage. It's just breathtaking. Breathtaking.

BRIAN NOONAN ([17:23](#)):

Yeah, I agree. There's nothing like live performance, live band or orchestra, 20 some pieces just backing you up. When you go to the theatre, I always have this feeling of "I want to be manipulated in some way." Take me on a journey and allow me to ride with it.

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GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ ([17:42](#)):

Yeah, what a good way to put that. I want to be removed from my own life. Take me away from reality for a little bit and entertain me, make me cry, make me laugh. Whatever it is that you're going to do, I'm here for it. I'm giving consent.

BRIAN NOONAN ([17:54](#)):

There you go. Take me away.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ ([17:59](#)):

Speaking of live band and live performance, the Jersey Tenors is a group of four men, but we'd be remiss if we didn't mention a very important woman, you are Maestra, Ms. Karen Dryer. Please regale us with how amazing she is and what it's like working with her.

BRIAN NOONAN ([18:14](#)):

Well, we stumbled across, we worked together on the road when I was touring with Ms. Saigon in Pittsburgh. And I recall looking for a music director who is going to be versatile enough to be on stage with us and also be theatrical with us as well, because we like our band to participate in what's going on as well, while they're not playing their instruments. But Karen and I started working together. She came on board in 2017, and she instantly not only brought a level, a high level of musical knowledge, but her ability to lead orchestras across this nation is incredible. Oftentimes, just to break it down for you, we'll come in with at least a drums and keyboard, which Karen is a keyboard conductor. Sometimes we'll bring our bass and guitar with us, but we'll hire out local horns and additional music to supplement our show.

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BRIAN NOONAN ([19:11](#)):

But she's just a quick study on how to be able to impart all of the knowledge in this show. She's a glue that actually keeps us together, and I take a moment in every show at some point or another to give her that credit, and oftentimes she'll be able to come out with us in our meet and greet after when we're selling our merchandise and the people just shower her with praise. They just love the fact how into it, and she's very theatrical in the way she unveils this show. So Karen Dryer, if you're watching this right now, we love you. We think you're amazing, and I can't imagine doing this show without you.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ ([19:44](#)):

All of the applause to Karen Dryer. She sounds wonderful, and I love hearing about women in positions of power. For all of the little girls who are currently learning to play violin or learning to play keyboard, there is more to it, and maybe one day they will be a Maestra.

BRIAN NOONAN ([20:02](#)):

I agree. I agree. We're very, very lucky. And I hope that continues down the years.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ ([20:08](#)):

Do any of your children play instruments or sing?

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BRIAN NOONAN ([20:11](#)):

I think they all, I just went to my daughter's Christmas concert last night, which was great. Bravo. But they do like to sing. I think they'd rather enjoy watching me perform and not having to get back up on stage. So they're more into their sports and their lacrosse and their soccer. But my wife and I, who, she's a Broadway performer as well, we don't push anything on them. We just want them to explore and find their own things. But I think that they like to see daddy up on stage and doing his thing.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ ([20:43](#)):

Oh, I love that. And they should be able to do their own thing. Let them get bitten by the bug later on. That's fine. If they ever do, they may not, and that's okay.

BRIAN NOONAN ([20:52](#)):

Well, they have my support.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ ([20:54](#)):

Good supportive parents are very important. But I've tied this back to your children now because you mentioned before how difficult it is to tour and to be away from them. So can you explain to me what touring is like? What is life on the road?

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BRIAN NOONAN ([21:09](#)):

Yeah, I think it certainly is not as glamorous as it appears to be. We will put posts on Facebook and social media pages saying, "look how fun we are." But I think that when you're younger and you're so resilient, you just bounce around and it's just, you're like a pinball and you love it. I've been fortunate to hit every continent on this planet and even including Antarctica. We've been to Antarctica a couple of times, but I would say it's very, very lonely. The road is lonely because you're away from your point of origin, you're away from your home, your family, the ones that you love. So you have to channel all of that energy and that focus and the distractions from being outside that and focus and keep it on the show, keep it on making sure that you're putting together a great product. And for me, going on the road is a little bit more complex because I don't get to necessarily go out and have all of the fun that some of the other guys are having because I'm knee deep in production elements and contacting and reaching out to technical directors and the team and the clients and stuff like that too. So the fun comes when you take your curtain call and your bows and you're performing. That's where the fun is.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ ([22:23](#)):

I understand that. I mean, who doesn't love a good standing ovation?

BRIAN NOONAN ([22:29](#)):

But I will say that I'm not trying to paint this lonely, gloomy picture of being on the road. I am so blessed to visit places that I would never even consider buying a ticket for and traveling. And like I said, I've been to so many beautiful places and performed for so many world dignitaries, and those are experiences and memories that I'll never forget. But there's nothing like right here and right now.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ ([22:53](#)):

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I feel you. I do. Well, we're coming up on a new year already, which is crazy to me, but tell me a little bit about your New Year's Eve show and why that's special, why it's unique.

BRIAN NOONAN ([23:06](#)):

Yeah. This is our original show that we're going to perform at the Surflight. We actually have two installments of our show, one of which we'll bring, and I know that Gail and Steve will want me to mention this, which is our movie tribute, and we're going to be bringing that to the Surflight this summer. That show's been out for about two and a half years right now. But the show everyone's going to see on the 31st at Surflight will be our original Jersey Tenors, which is the tribute to Frankie Valli, Frank Sinatra, Bruce Springsteen, Kool and the Gang, Whitney Houston, I mean, a whole slew of Bon Jovi, and we really want the audience to experience the love that we have for these great artists. Yes, we throw Broadway in and rock and opera and Italian opera, and we talk about the journeys and the trips that we've taken across the world. But the main thing that we want to let our audience know is that we're here to have a great time with you. We want you to converse with us and interact with us, collaborate with us, because at the end of the the night, it just becomes just one big party. That's what it is. And that's part of the fun and the love that we have performing the show.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ ([24:12](#)):

I want to party and I get to relive my crush on the Rat Pack. I was raised by a much older man, so my music tastes are a little bit different than my peers. So am I in love with Dean Martin? Yes, but that's okay.

BRIAN NOONAN ([24:24](#)):

How can you top that guy's smooth voicem, his vibrato? Right? It's just-

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GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ ([24:29](#)):

I dunno.

BRIAN NOONAN ([24:30](#)):

Unbelievable what a talent he was. And he was really Frank Sinatra's best friend. I know there was a sad ending when he lost his son and everything like that, but Dean Martin was just, I thought the bee's knees as well, so I concur.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ ([24:47](#)):

He was just so charming. I could make an entire podcast about how much I love Dean Martin. I shouldn't. But yeah, he was just such a charming guy with a very smooth voice. And like I've already said, I will fall for a man with a smooth voice. I'm going to get a bunch of messages now after that, but it's okay.

BRIAN NOONAN ([25:03](#)):

The dulcet tones, right?

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ ([25:05](#)):

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Yes, those dulcet tones.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ ([25:09](#)):

The New Year's Eve Bubbly Bash with the Jersey Tenors will grace the SurfFlight Theatre stage in Beach Haven, New Jersey, on, you guessed it, New Year's Eve, December 31st. with two performances at 5 and 8:00 PM. For more information, be sure to visit [SurfFlight.org](#). If you like this episode, be sure to review, subscribe, and tell your friends. A transcript of this podcast, links relevant to the story, and more about the arts in New Jersey can be found at [JerseyArts.com](#). The Jersey Arts Podcast is presented by ArtPride New Jersey, advancing a state of creativity since 1986. The show was co-founded by and currently supported by funds from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts with additional support from the National Endowment for the Arts. This episode was hosted, edited, and produced by me, Gina Marie Rodriguez. Executive producers are Jim Atkinson and Isaac Serna-Diez. And my thanks to Brian Noonan for speaking with me today. I'm Gina Marie Rodriguez for the Jersey Arts Podcast. Thanks for listening.

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