

weekender



AMERICAN BOY ... Brian Fortuna

By Caroline Kay
caroline.kay@burtonmail.co.uk

HAVING become a familiar face since appearing on the hit BBC TV series *Strictly Come Dancing*, Brian Fortuna is now wowing theatre audiences around the country.

Since taking up the role of Danny Cassidy in the Eva Cassidy biopic, *Over The Rainbow*, Brian has received rave reviews for his portrayal of the tragic singer's brother.

"It was a brand new learning experience for me — it's the first time I have acted, sung and danced on stage," said the 29-year-old American.

"I have now realised how difficult it is to sing!"

Brian joins a stellar cast, which includes Sarah Jane Buckley as Eva and Maureen Nolan who plays Eva's mother, and *Over The Rainbow* follows Eva's life from 14-years-old.

It highlights the tense relationship the singer had with her father and her ultimately succumbing to cancer. Eva Cassidy died aged 33.

Her memory, however, lives on in her music which is timeless — and this compelling and award-winning musical is a testament to her talent.

"Maureen Nolan is an absolute legend and Sarah Jane has been great," Brian continued. "We are half way through the tour now and it's going fantastic."

There may be many of you wondering where Brian has been for the past 12 months.

"I took a year off and decided to add a couple more strings to my bow — to give me a little more longevity in the business.

"What I didn't realise is I have had to lead a

Good fortuna smiles down on Brian — oh yes it does!



SIBLING RIVALRY? ... Brian pictured with Sarah Jane Buckley

more disciplined life as a singer than a dancer.

"I've always sung Sinatra in the shower but I have never been trained professionally to sing — which is all about how to breathe properly. Who knew I wasn't doing it properly?"

"If you make a mistake though, it's not so easy to cover it up when you are singing to a live audience. It's much easier to cover up a wrong dance step."

Brian came to the attention of British audiences when he was invited to join the professional dancers in Series Six of the hit TV show *Strictly Come Dancing*.

Partnering M People's Heather Small, the pair were eliminated in week eight, the week after they performed the Cha Cha Cha to Estelle's *American Boy*.

"It's weird because when I was in the states I listened to *American Boy* over and over again and six months later, there I was dancing to it on the other side of the Atlantic," he said.

Brian left *Strictly* after Series Seven to take on the role of lead choreographer and consulting producer for BBC3 show *Dancing on Wheels*.

He then danced to rave reviews with Ali Bastion (his partner on Series Seven of *Strictly*) in *Burn the Floor* which earned him

a 2011 What's on Stage Award nomination as best newcomer.

"There are two major buzzes in my life — performing live on stage and on TV.

"Although I miss many aspects about *Strictly*, long term I am heading down a bit of a path and am really excited about the way my career is going."

But it hasn't been all plain sailing for the multi-talented artist.

"I have been auditioning quite strongly for the past year and went back to basics by taking singing and dancing lessons.

"I got down to the top two for a couple of major shows and was absolutely delighted when I was offered the role of Danny Cassidy.

"There is so much talent about and show business is a tough old game."

One show Brian is particularly looking forward to is his pantomime debut in *Aladdin*, joining Bobby Davro and Basil Brush at the Royal & Derngate Theatre, Northampton.

"Panto is unique and totally new to me. Every decision I have made in the past years has been made on being an artist.

"It's not all about the money I can make. "There are many people who have 15 years in the industry on me, but I have the advantage of being on *Strictly*. My entrance is a little bit different and I wouldn't change it for the world.

"It's easy to be an overnight sensation but I want to be around for the next 50 year."

Over The Rainbow will perform at Stoke-on-Trent's Regent Theatre (0844 871 7649) on Sunday and Monday, October 23 and 24

Further information is available by visiting the website at www.theatre-productions.com