

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Anybody who loves musical theater—as I do—can sing at least a dozen Jerry Herman songs. Even if you don't know musicals at all, you probably know some Jerry Herman songs...“Hello, Dolly!”, “Mame”, “The Best of Times”. They are so much a part of the culture that we take them for granted, the same way Jerry Herman has often been taken for granted. Many of the people who know and love his shows wouldn't recognize his name or face, aren't sure whether he writes the words or music (he writes them both), and certainly don't think about how much effort and craft goes into writing scores that you can hum leaving the theater.

That's Jerry's great gift, the ability to create optimistic, uplifting songs you feel you've known forever; and it's also his curse, because, as the great writer and director Arthur Laurents says, “it's so much safer to be cynical.” Cynicism and irony, of course, are the hallmarks of our time, and sincerity and joy are, well, old-fashioned. Jerry is very content to be old-fashioned, and thank God for it.

During the five years it took to make this film, Jerry proved himself a game and good-natured subject. He opened his files and scrapbooks, offered up the contents of his address book so I could contact a lifetime's worth of colleagues and friends, he even played all the piano underscoring. Most important, the so-called Gentle Giant of Broadway (with what one actor called “a whim of iron”) did not meddle in the creation of what I hope will stand as the definitive account of his career.

When I finally sat down with him to show him the rough cut (a fraught moment for any filmmaker), he had only three notes—after recovering his composure from what was clearly an emotional whammy: 1) the photo I had used was of the *wrong grandmother* (he kindly supplied a photo of the right one!) 2) he asked if the last shot we see of his mother could be a prettier one, and 3) he said the music for the closing credits (a soft and slow piano version of “Hello, Dolly!”, played by Jerry himself) made it seem like he was dead. “It's your film”, he said, “but I'd want to go out big, so the audience applauds and feels thrilled.” He was exactly right, and I gratefully changed it.

While researching archival footage for **Words and Music by Jerry Herman**, I found an old “What's My Line?” episode from 1964. The mystery guest, “Mr X”, is Jerry Herman, who signs in as the composer/lyricist of the current smash hit “Hello, Dolly!” The extremely handsome and shy young man who appears is questioned by Arlene Dahl and Tony Randall and the other panelists, who eventually discover his identity...and Arlene Dahl is mortified because she had just met—and interviewed!—him the week before. Jerry Herman has never been a household name, even though his songs are as ever-present as the air we breathe. I hope this documentary will give the mystery guest a new identity.

*Amber Edwards, Producer/Director  
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