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STORY OF BROADWAY LEGEND TO AIR ON PBS *WORDS AND MUSIC BY JERRY HERMAN* PROFILES CREATOR OF "HELLO, DOLLY!", "MAME", AND "LA CAGE AUX FOLLES"

Premieres on WNET New York Monday, December 31 at 10:00 PM
Premieres Nationwide on PBS Tuesday, January 1 at 9:30 PM
(check local listings)

TRENTON, NEW JERSEY, December 6, 2007 — "When they passed out talent," Broadway star Carol Channing says of composer and lyricist Jerry Herman, "Jerry stood in line twice." Herman wrote the words and music for some of Broadway's greatest musicals, including "Hello, Dolly!", "Mame" and "La Cage aux Folles." This new documentary by award-winning filmmaker Amber Edwards takes you backstage through insightful interviews, behind-the-scenes rehearsal sessions, rare photographs, and never-before-seen archival footage of original Broadway performances to create a warm, humorous, and moving portrait of a living theater legend. ***Words and Music by Jerry Herman*** premieres in the New York metro area on **WNET New York, Monday, December 31 at 10:00 PM**; and nationwide on **PBS, Tuesday, January 1, 2008 at 9:30 PM**. (Check local listings.)

Five years in the making, this 90-minute special from NJN Public Television chronicles Herman's rapid rise from witty, topical off-Broadway revues during the 1950s, to his first Broadway hits in the 1960s (*Milk and Honey*, followed quickly by the record-breaking *Dolly* and then *Mame*) through the less successful shows from the 1970s (*Dear World*, *Mack & Mabel* and *The Grand Tour*) to his triumphant return in 1983 with *La Cage aux Folles*, which made social and political history.

The "supporting cast" is truly a *Who's Who of Broadway*: **Carol Channing, Angela Lansbury, Charles Nelson Reilly, Marge Champion, Arthur Laurents, Charles Strouse, Fred Ebb, George Hearn, Phyllis Newman, Michael Feinstein**, musical director **Donald Pippin**, singers **Leslie Uggams** and **Jason Graae**, author **Francine Pascal**, and historians **Miles Kreuger** and **Ken Bloom**. And theater

(over)

aficionados will marvel at the collection of archival motion picture footage. There is Carol Channing and the original Broadway *Hello, Dolly!* company performing the title song; Angela Lansbury in the only known footage of *Mame* and *Dear World*; film of the 1955 college musical Jerry wrote at the University of Miami; Robert Preston and a bevy of showgirls from *Mack & Mabel*; and other material which captures these original, ephemeral theater performances that, until now, existed only in the memories of those lucky enough to have seen them on stage. Naturally, the film is filled with music, with original cast recordings and live performances, while the piano underscoring is played by Jerry Herman himself.

True to the spirit of its subject, who describes himself as “a builder,” the documentary creates a dramatic arc that honestly examines a career of hits and flops and highs and lows, culminating in Jerry’s final act as a Broadway composer/lyricist: *La Cage aux Folles* (1983)—which was not only a critical and commercial smash, but a political and social turning point. Never before had two men held hands in a musical, or sung a love ballad to one another. George Hearn’s star turn as Za Za, belting out what is probably the most dramatic Act One closer ever written, “I Am What I Am,” still brings audiences to their feet with its forceful call for tolerance and dignity—a surpassingly powerful statement from a composer/lyricist who declared all along that he wanted only to entertain people. It was, Hearn recalls in the film, truly “The Best of Times,” until shortly after the show opened, and cast members began dying of a mysterious plague. AIDS had entered the world, and it swept through the theater community. Half of the original *La Cage* chorus didn’t live to finish the run. And Jerry Herman himself was diagnosed as HIV-positive in 1985; he is one of the fortunate ones who survived to see experimental drug therapies take hold and is still, as one of his lyrics proclaims, “alive and well and thriving.”

With his ebullient, hummable songs that personify the “show tune,” Jerry Herman extended the Golden Age of Broadway almost single-handedly, as new generations keep discovering his tuneful, optimistic, and deceptively simple songs. Yet, as Michael Feinstein says, “Jerry has succeeded so well in his mission, that people don’t give him credit...because to be simple without being cliché is nearly impossible.”

DVD Screener available upon request. High resolution images and additional information can be downloaded at www.njn.net/television/jerryherman/pressroom

Running time: 86 minutes

Producer/Director/Writer/Editor: Amber Edwards

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Executive Producer: Nila Aronow

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