

a·e STAGE

Jim Bailey's Garland Flies Over the Rainbow and into Keene for AIDS Benefit

BY PAUL BROGAN

Judy Garland passed away in 1969 at the age of 47, right about the time that a young man she had befriended was beginning a career that has not only kept Garland alive but has encompassed a plethora of dazzling highpoints.

Jim Bailey is an illusionist, something he is very clear about. What he does, no one else in show business does. On Satur-

speaking by phone with Jim Bailey, who is in Florida selling out more than a dozen venues and capturing new audiences with his special gift.

He makes it very clear that what he does is to create an illusion. His shows are not "drag" acts and at no point does he pull off his wig. What he does is create an illusion and he never falters in the totality of his performance. From the moment he walks on stage until the final bow,

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day, April 29th, audiences in New Hampshire will learn first-hand why Bailey was voted Las Vegas Entertainer of the Year five times as well as winning a prestigious People's Choice Award.

Jim will bring Judy Garland to life on the stage of Keene's venerable Colonial Theatre for one unforgettable performance, which is a benefit for AIDS Services for the Monadnock Region (ASMR). Susan MacNeil, Executive Director of the agency is thrilled at the prospect of having Bailey appear in this benefit performance.

"We're very fortunate to host Jim for his only New England appearance this year and hope that many familiar and new friends will travel somewhere over the rainbow to join us for this spectacular show", MacNeil noted. "Jim's generosity is rivaled only by his professionalism and talent. This is the first show we've conducted at the Colonial, and I couldn't be more pleased to host Jim Bailey as Judy Garland".

For more than three decades, Jim Bailey has carved a niche for himself in show business. With multiple appearances on "The Tonight Show," performances before several sitting U.S. presidents, not to mention the Royal Family in England and sold-out engagements at Carnegie Hall; plus the London Palladium as well as film and television appearances, nobody does it like Bailey does.

I recently had the pleasure of

he walks, speaks and sings like Judy Garland. The banter that he does between songs is total Garland and audiences have been heard to ask one another during his show, "Judy Garland is dead isn't she?"

At an early age, Jim Bailey knew that his life would be anything but normal. Family members recognized that Bailey had real talent and an amazing voice, and he was enrolled at the famous Conservatory of Music in Philadelphia where he studied opera for several years. There he learned vocal technique which has served him well throughout the years.

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A waiter informed Bailey one evening that Judy was sitting up front and any nervousness Bailey might have felt was eradicated when Garland joined him on stage, put her arm around his waist and said "Oh My God, let's sing!" They did, and "I loved every minute of it," Bailey recalls.

The first encounter led to a friendship that lasted until Garland's passing.

Miss Garland's daughter Liza Minnelli also became not only a supporter but a friend. Together Bailey and Minnelli have performed "mother-daughter" duets to great success.

At one point in his career, Bai-



ley considered dropping his performances as "the ladies" (Garland, Barbara Streisand, Phyllis Diller and Peggy Lee). Upon hearing of this possibility, Minnelli exclaimed to Bailey, "Jim, if you drop the ladies show, how would I ever see my mother?" His ability to make an audience believe they are seeing Judy or Barbra is still a very important part of his career. His performance a couple of years ago as Streisand at her home for a roomful of guests, including such stars as Clint Eastwood and Warren Beatty, made headlines as the guests were totally fooled by the illusion created by Bailey.

I asked Jim why he continues to work so hard at his career. He explained it in the effusive style that is uniquely his. "It's my life. I don't know what else I'd do. I am constantly finding new ways to grow as a performer. I truly find such a joy in my work. I love to travel and to entertain."

"Unfortunately in the world of today, there are many people who are unhappy for any number of reasons. I like to believe that I have the ability to bring some joy into their lives and that for

a couple of hours they are able to forget and be transported to something very special. If so, then I have done something of which I can be very proud."

In October of 2004, Bailey performed as Garland to a sold-out theater of Hollywood celebrities in Los Angeles. The crowd of sometimes-jaded notables who had seen it all were left thunderstruck when Bailey concluded his three-hour show with a rendition of "Over The Rainbow," delivered without a microphone and accompanied only by a piano. Every word and note were crystal clear and the prolonged standing ovation that followed was a testament to the reality that Bailey brings to everything he does.

When not on stage, Bailey is busily at work penning his autobiography, which promises to be a best-seller. He promises to tell his story in the honest and forthright manner that is his style.

His performance in Keene is, like so many of his performances in recent years, a benefit. He is passionate about making a difference in the world and feels that if his performing can raise

money for a great cause, then all the better.

The benefit is very important for AIDS Services for the Monadnock Region, as Susan MacNeil explains.

"At this time, we've lost all our state and federal funding, so his show is critically important to our goal of raising \$70,000 in 2006. We may be the smallest AIDS service organization in New Hampshire, but we strive to make a big impression with the services we provide and that includes an ambitious community fundraising schedule."

Bailey has a firm commitment to doing what he can for people living with AIDS. "I've done many benefits since 1987/88," Bailey said, adding "This is a situation that needs more support. When it first began, AIDS was a gay disease. Now there are more heterosexual cases and babies are being born with it. I've made visits to hospitals with sick babies and believe me it is hard not to fall apart. It is just so unfair."

Jim believes that if Garland were still alive, she would share this passion for doing benefits for this cause. "Judy was very kind and very humane," he explains. "She would definitely give her time and talent to raise money."

On April 29th, lucky concertgoers in Keene will see for themselves what all the critical and popular acclaim have been about for more than three decades. By the final curtain, they too will be believers, having contributed money to a most worthy cause and in the process finding they have been transported to the Emerald City. ▼

➔ Jim Bailey IS Judy Garland: Saturday, April 29, 2006 at 8 pm at The Colonial Theatre, Keene, NH. For tickets contact the box office at 603-352-2033 or visit the web at www.TheColonial.org. For additional information contact AIDS Services for the Monadnock Region at 603-357-6855.

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