

The Jim Stafford Show

Just for Laughs

by Richard Freihofer,
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When you stop and think about it, are there any other comedians out there that who could set up in one spot and attract crowds to pack out a show over three hundred nights a year for twenty-two years *straight*? Honestly, who else is that funny? Beyond that, who else can stay that funny for that long? And here's the real clincher—in a town famous for making people want to come back again and again, what has *The Jim Stafford Show* got that makes fans want to come back endlessly? (We actually met a local Branson businessman and a friend of the Staffords who routinely ducked into the back of the theater almost every *night* to watch a good chunk of the show!)

What Jim Stafford has got is the real deal: the gift to make heavy hearts merry, make burdens light, and make troubles and

cares melt away with a form of music and laughter that brings peace to the soul and generally feels like we've emptied the attic, cleaned out the garage and can now relax.

It's not the kind of stuff presented as comedy that we're used to, that's for sure. Those hyper rants of insults, sleaze and druggy insanity that passes as comedy these days is not coming from Jim's comedy planet. Even if today's mainstream comedy does succeed in making us laugh, it certainly doesn't lift our spirits much beyond gutter level.

Nor does the comedy of *The Jim Stafford Show* reflect the other extreme. While playful and full of surprises, nothing in it could credibly be described as dumb, lowbrow, stupid, corny or cheap. Audiences at the Jim Stafford Show are in the hands of a master.

Jim's comedy pedigree literally rises

to historic proportions. Besides his mega comedy hit *Spiders & Snakes*, Jim has had his own show on ABC, co-hosted *Those Amazing Animals* with Burgess Meredith and Priscilla Presley and starred in Clint Eastwood's *Any Which Way You Can*, which featured his famous *Cow Patti* song. He appeared on *The Tonight Show* 26 times, worked with the legendary "9 old men" from Disney writing songs for Disney's *Fox in the Hound*, and was a regular performer and head writer/producer for the historic, Emmy-nominated *Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*. He has also worked with Joan Rivers, Tina Turner, Sammy Davis Jr., Bruce Springsteen—and the list goes on.

Inside the Jim Stafford Theater, the sense of anticipation is electric. Before the show, audiences of all ages sit in their cushy seats munching popcorn and

chuckling, serenaded by Jim's recorded guitar stylings playing in the background. Before them is a great red curtain festooned with ropes and looking like a cross between a birthday cake and a circus tent. The moment the lights dim, things begin to happen. Within seconds, the show has established the fact that from now on, *anything* could happen.

The center of what will soon become a potpourri of comedy mayhem, incredible musicianship and other moments that touch the heart and bring a tear to the eye is one smooth fellow. Our star. He's as folksy as Will Rogers, easy on song and guitar as Roger Miller, neighborly as Andy Griffith and wise as Jonathan Winters' Maudie Frickert. But then he's something else altogether. He's Jim Stafford, a true American original, although a guy that seems as familiar as someone we've known all our lives.

He chitchats with us about our funny lives, from raising kids, dealing with

dominating theme of this family show, both on and off stage. Though seldom seen onstage Mom Ann Stafford also plays a huge role in the family business. It was largely Ann who mounted and established the enterprise and today both oversees the theater's operations and remains involved in several civic and charitable organizations. Not a show passes by where Jim doesn't express how thankful he is that Branson has allowed him to do what he does without sacrificing family life for the normal show-biz model of life on the road.

What audiences get here, is all kinds of laughs. Some served up simple with guitar and harmonica, some with hi-tech special effects ranging from dancing snakes to powerful multi-media and mind boggling 3-D. Some laughs come from simple stand-up, some come from gags as simple as slinging drippy cow patties like Frisbees. The most impressive special effect is the show's time warp. *Whoosh*, and the show is over. Jim Stafford has entertained you for two hours and time went by like a Twitter tweet!

If you've already seen the Jim Stafford Show, do this; come back for more. It's like hearing your favorite song. It gets better each time. And like Disneyland, each year the show dazzles us with plenty that's new, while not forsaking some of the classics we've loved the most.

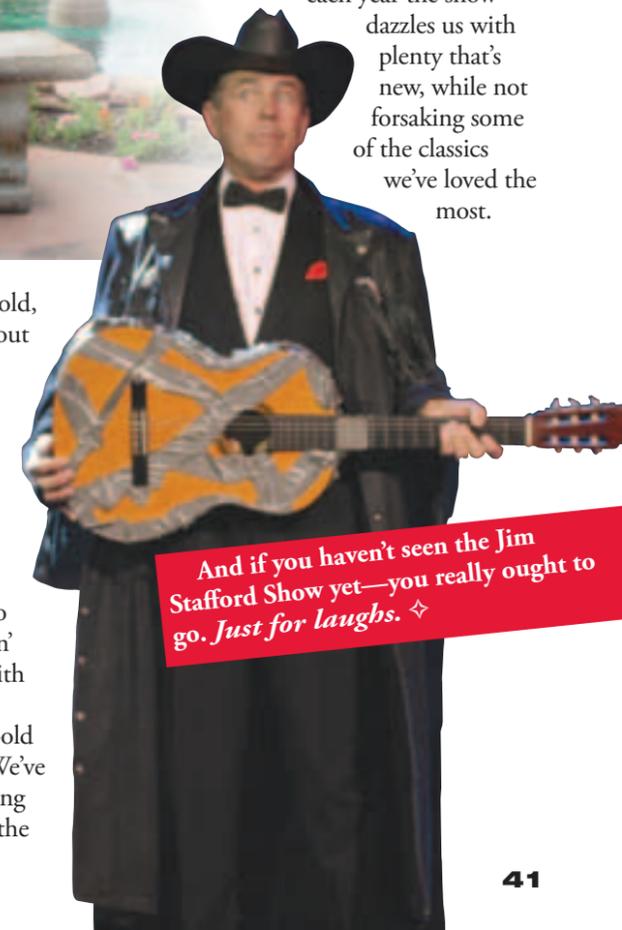


Behind the scenes:
Jim's wife Ann
operates the
family business.



Live on stage: a living epistle of family values. (top) Jim rocks to Shea's piano; (below) G.G. gets a hug from dad after performing on piano and harp.

computers, growing old, or keeping our wits about us as we navigate this thrill ride of modern times. The comedy is friendly, it comes from our lives, and it somehow manages to make us feel good. There are interludes of brilliant music, song and dance, performances from seventeen year-old son Shea, (who tickles the ivories with some smokin' hot rockabilly and later tears it up with some fancy bluegrass fiddling), and family jam sessions with twelve year-old daughter G.G. on piano and harp. We've seen the kids grow up on stage, a living epistle of family values that remains the



And if you haven't seen the Jim Stafford Show yet—you really ought to go. *Just for laughs.* ✧