



JIM ROWLAND: ATLANTA AND BEYOND

An Exhibition at the Center for Puppetry Arts
July 21, 1997 - January 3, 1998

JAMES MASON ROWLAND



Jim performs "String Magic" aboard the cruise ship M.S. Sagafford. Jim also designed the scenery.

James (Jimmy) Mason Rowland was born in the northeast mountains of Georgia in Toccoa.

By the age of eight, Jimmy had already developed a fascination with dolls and puppets and began to make simple dolls and puppets on his own. His attendance at a puppet performance given by the **Vagabond Marionettes** in a local library heightened his interest. The Vagabond Marionettes was at that time owned and operated by **Vincent Anthony**, the Executive

Director of Atlanta's **Center for Puppetry Arts**. By the time Jimmy was 11 years old, he was assisting Vince on Saturday afternoons at library and community center performances. Although he was only 11 years of age, and not a paid employee, he gained invaluable experience on those Saturdays.

During these early years, Jimmy was already beginning to build his own puppets with the assistance of his mother and grandmother and learning to sew on his grandmother's sewing machine. At the age of 12, Jimmy formed his own puppet company, the Pastyme Puppets. With his own puppet version of "Cinderella", and with the assistance of his mother, father and siblings, performed at birthday parties.

During his years at Atlanta's Grady High School, Jim, at the age of 13, was the youngest performer ever to be invited to perform at **Piedmont Park** in the City of Atlanta's "Summer In The Parks" program. His puppet performances were such a success that he was commissioned to perform later that same summer at the Pensacola (Florida) Arts Festival.

While still in high school, Georgia State University asked Jim to design and execute a puppet version of "A Midsummer Nights Dream". The performances were aired on Atlanta Television. Other television credits during his high school years included a performance of "Calhoun's Christmas" directed by **Blanche Thebaum**.

During these years, Jim also acted for the City of Atlanta's "Summer in the Parks" program under the direction of **Walter Roberts**. Mr. Roberts, father to actors **Eric and Julia Roberts**, cast Jim along with Eric and Julia in such productions as "You're A Good Man Charlie Brown" and "Dick Whittington's Cat". Julia, long before her days as an Oscar nominee, at the age of 3, gave a performance as a mouse; Eric was Dick Whittington. In addition to acting in these performances, Jim was responsible for costumes, make-up and hair.

Jim executed hair and make-up during these same years for a production of "The Owl and The Pussycat" produced at the Atlanta Symphony Hall, Memorial Arts Center. "The Pussycat" was performed by another acquaintance of Jim's, **Yolanda King**, daughter of the late civil rights leader.

At the age of 16, Jim began spending summers with **Fred Cowan Puppets** in Crawfordsville, Indiana. During that apprenticeship, Jim perfected his sculpting and molding techniques while designing and executing various puppet



Jim performs aboard a cruise ship with his life-sized figure of Mae West. He also designed the scenery.

productions for Fred. During his last summer in Atlanta, Jim worked as a puppeteer for **Sid and Marty Krofft** at **Six Flags Over Georgia**.

After his high school graduation, Jim traveled to Chicago, where he performed as a dancer and puppeteer in **Bic Carrol's Wow Show**. Jim crafted his own trademark life-sized celebrity puppets, creating versions of **Mae West, Pearl Bailey** and **Phyllis Diller**, and other large, glitzy and bejeweled figures.

While attending a puppetry festival in Atlanta in 1974, Jim met **Bob Brown** and moved to Washington, D.C., where they began a two-year working relationship. Utilizing the medium of felt and styrofoam that Bob made popular, Jim assisted in the design and execution of many productions.

Jim soon decided to form his own puppet company and in 1976 founded **Apupetsho Productions**. During his years as director of Apupetsho Productions, Jim had the opportunity to work with **Kermit Love** and **George Balanchine**. The "Dance in America" special, "The Spellbound Child", which aired in 1981, was an achievement Jim was most proud of. In addition to puppet design and execution, Jim's talents were essential to the successful design and execution of many of the costumes. Later that same year, Jim designed and constructed hand puppets for a PBS production entitled "Well, Well, Well".

On several occasions between 1976 and 1990, Jim was invited to perform at the White House. He traveled extensively to the Orient, South America and Alaska performing aboard the **Costa, Cunard, and Pearl Cruise Lines**. Jim

performed his cabaret-style puppets at the famous **Red Dog Saloon** in Juneau, Alaska. In 1986, Jimmy was invited to perform at the Center for Puppetry Arts by his mentor, Vincent Anthony.

In 1980, Jim developed a working relationship with **Busch Entertainment Co.**, in Williamsburg, Virginia. For many seasons, Jim constructed life-sized puppets for them. The figures were included in productions at both the Williamsburg and Tampa theme parks.

In 1981, under Jim's direction, Apupetsho Productions developed a working relationship with the **Kings Entertainment Company**. Jim designed and created puppet versions of nearly all the **Hanna Barbera** and **Peyo** signature characters as licensed by Kings Entertainment. Jim traveled to Australia in 1985 to institute a puppet production at **Australia's Wonderland**. Jim's theme park productions for **Great America, California; Carowinds, North Carolina; Kings Dominion, Virginia; and Kings Island, Ohio** continued to be a highly popular form of children's entertainment from 1981-1992.

After his death in 1990, many performing artists and collectors of puppets and artwork have incorporated some of Jim's puppets into their performances and private collections. Several are on display at this exhibit. Apupetsho Productions, currently managed by **Paul Malerba**, still gives occasional performances. Jim's artistry and style of puppetry continue to be enjoyed by audiences.



Apupetsho Productions performs Jim's "Jingle Bell Bedrock" at an Ohio theme park.



Jim Rowland's "Flintstone Circus" characters designed for performances at a Virginia theme park. On the cover: jim and Apupetsho Production's first show, "String Puppet Magic", c. 1977.

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