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### **JEFF DUNHAM COMES TO THE RENAISSANCE**

MANSFIELD, OHIO. The Renaissance Performing Arts Association proudly presents comedian Jeff Dunham and his “working associates” on Thursday, March 27<sup>th</sup> at 7:00PM in the Renaissance Theatre. Tickets go on sale to Renaissance Members beginning Monday, November 26<sup>th</sup> at the Renaissance Box Office. Public sales begin Friday, November 30<sup>th</sup> online at [www.mansfieldtickets.com](http://www.mansfieldtickets.com) and at the Renaissance Box Office, 138 Park Ave. West, Mansfield, Monday – Friday, 10AM – 5PM.

Breathing life into an elderly curmudgeon, a purple creature known as a “Woozle” and a self-effacing jalapeno, among other lovable characters, Jeff Dunham is straight man to some of the funniest partners in show business. His comedic skill and impeccable technique serve as sleight of hand, however, drawing attention away from the fact that Dunham is a ventriloquist extraordinaire. “What makes this performer the best at what he does is the believability factor,” one reviewer wrote. “Dunham’s characters have more personality than a lot of people I know.”

The handsome, thirty-something veteran of performing has certainly honed his craft: performing 40 weeks and 250 dates a year in concert venues and the occasional comedy club, Dunham is one of the hardest working entertainers around. While never holding a job in the “real world,” he has compiled an impressive resume. The only person ever to win the prestigious “Ventriloquist of the Year” Award

twice, he was recently nominated "Comedian of the Year" by the INN Music City News Country Awards. Among numerous television appearances, he has appeared on "The Tonight Show" more than any other ventriloquist.

For Dunham the most significant stamp of approval will always be Johnny Carson inviting him to the couch on his very first "Tonight Show" appearance, an honor Jeff shares with only four other comedians during Carson's 30-year tenure. A special comedy moment erupted when Dunham's permanently disgruntled partner, Walter, had the audacity to tell Carson that "It'll be a cold day in Hell before I come back to this show!"

The Dallas native has come a long way since breaking into show business at age seven. As an only child, he invented "a menagerie of characters" that helped ease his natural shyness. Dunham began teaching himself ventriloquism with a plastic Mortimer Snerd puppet. His first show was in the third grade. It was for an oral book report on Hansel and Gretel, he recalls. "I spent about three minutes on the book and twenty minutes berating my classmates."

It was not until 1975 that Dunham would meet a live ventriloquist, and soon thereafter he would take weekly inspiration from actor/ventriloquist Jay Johnson on "Soap" (1977-81). Having never even seen Edgar Bergen as a child, he learned his craft from books and records. Performances for the local Boy Scouts led to corporate engagements by age twelve. "I'd be in front of the Kiwanis Club making cracks about high-level executives," says Dunham who, to his surprise, was audited by the IRS at age thirteen.

Dunham continued to pursue his career while picking up a degree in Communications from Baylor University in Waco, Texas. “While most people were going out on weekends and partying, I was flying off somewhere to do my show,” says Dunham, admitting that, in Waco, he quickly became “somewhat of a big fish in a small pond.”

In 1988 he moved to Los Angeles and discovered a much larger pond, one filled with performers whose proficiency in comedy overshadowed his technical skill as a voice thrower. After sharpening his act at the Improv, the Comedy & Magic Club and other comedy venues, Dunham earned his first “Tonight Show” spot in April of 1990, putting the audience on the floor and himself on the couch next to Johnny.

Dunham has since appeared regularly on “The Tonight Show,” in numerous stand-up comedy series and in such specials as “Hot Country Nights,” taking his act from the club circuit to sold-out concert venues as a headliner in his own right. No stranger to the theatrical stage, he also toured with the Broadway musical “Sugar Babies.” A master entertainer, Dunham has been featured as the opening act for dozens of major stars including Gloria Estefan, Julio Iglesias, Reba McEntire, Glen Campbell, Tanya Tucker, the Oakridge Boys and Bob Hope, with whom Dunham shared two unique moments: sitting on a couch with Hope and critiquing “Saturday Night Live” and flying aboard Hope's private Lear jet.

But enough about Dunham. The real stars of the show are his partners in comedy: chiefly, Jose Jalapeno on a Stick, Peanut and Walter. With a personality reflecting one of Dunham's favorite cartoon characters, Speedy Gonzales' cousin Slowpoke, the oversized and mustachioed Jose Jalapeno eschews ethnic humor in favor of stiffer material stick jokes. Peanut, a purple potbellied “woozle,” approaches

the world with a mix of childlike wonder and streetwise naughtiness. And the irascible Walter, whose bald head and permanent frown is usually accompanied by crossed arms, draws laughs with his non-stop negativism.

In addition to a white-trash, buck-toothed hayseed named Bubba, Dunham's lesser-known characters include a gorilla, a cockroach, and a worm at the bottom of a tequila bottle.

It is the believability of Dunham's characters that endear them to audiences everywhere.

“When Walter says he's been married for 47 years and the audience applauds, I know I've hit the right buttons,” says Dunham. And with material that hovers around PG-13, his audience ranges the gamut: from bikers to surgeons, singles to families. His characters are so vivid, Dunham usually opens with ten minutes of solo stand-up simply to establish himself as the hub of the wheel. “If they walk away thinking, Gee, those were some funny guys, rather than Boy, wasn't he a good ventriloquist, then I've done my job,” says Dunham.

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