

## JERRY LEWIS Biography

Jerry Lewis has personified the fight against neuromuscular diseases since 1951. As National Chairman of the Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA), he is a leader who battles with fierce determination on behalf of the more than a million Americans affected by these disorders.

And to his millions of fans, he is not only an admired actor, comedian, director, producer and teacher, but a humanitarian striving to provide "his kids" a better future.

Jerry's determined effort to raise funds for MDA's worldwide research program are turning that hope of a better future into reality. MDA-backed investigators identified the genetic cause of Duchenne muscular dystrophy (the most common and fatal childhood form) in 1986 and 1987.

Building on that breakthrough, MDA has discovered the specific causes of most genetic neuromuscular disorders, including other forms of muscular dystrophy, the familial form of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS, or Lou Gehrig's disease), the spinal muscular atrophies (a form of which is the leading genetic cause of infant death) and Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease (the most common type of neuromuscular disorder).

MDA researchers expect to begin the first human trials of gene therapy to deliver a properly functioning version of one of the genes that, when defective, causes a form of muscular dystrophy. Also, the Association played a vital role in development of Rilutek, the first drug ever to receive FDA approval as treatment for ALS.

### **MDA's Number One Volunteer**

Jerry has won the admiration and respect of millions for his unstinting dedication to MDA's goals. For more than four decades he's served as volunteer National Chairman of the health agency - which seeks treatments and cures for 40 neuromuscular diseases.

Jerry is the most effective fund-raiser in television history. In 1956, he and Dean Martin hosted a Telethon for MDA that raised \$600,000. In 1957 and 1959, Jerry led MDA Telethon efforts that together raised \$1,240,000 more for "his kids."

Jerry's Labor Day Telethon was initiated in 1966, and the star-studded event has raised \$1,606,790,210 (\$1.6 billion) to advance MDA's lifesaving mission. The 1999 Telethon raised a record \$53.1 million in pledges and contributions and reached a television audience of some 70 million viewers. The show also was seen worldwide as the first live, multilingual programming (English, Spanish, Japanese) on the Internet.

Preparations for each Telethon begin an hour or so after the last one has ended, Jerry says. "People think I show up only on Labor Day - that's hysterical."

Jerry spends a good part of the year helping to plan each Telethon - not to mention working intensively with MDA's national sponsors and expanding and improving the "Love Network" some 200 TV stations that carry the Telethon and constitute the largest independent network in broadcasting history. All this is in addition to appearances on behalf of MDA at business conventions and before civic, fraternal and youth groups, and meetings of MDA's Board of Directors.

There probably has not been a single day in the last 45 years on which Jerry has not met, worked for, phoned or just talked about youngsters and adults living with neuromuscular diseases and MDA's effort in their behalf. He writes many of those served by MDA and visits them when he is in their areas.

The charges for his long-distance telephone calls to people with neuromuscular diseases over the years would "probably match the national debt!" Jerry jokes. As he tours the nation on professional and MDA engagements, he often has long talks with families served by MDA at some of MDA's 230 hospital-affiliated clinics that his Telethons have helped establish.

### **Political Advocate for People With Disabilities**

Jerry has been effective in enlisting aid for hundreds of thousands of people with neuromuscular disorders through legislative action. In 1973, he appeared before the California legislature and petitioned for and received \$1 million for the Jerry Lewis Neuromuscular Disease Research Center at UCLA, one of several major research/clinical centers established by MDA.

During a visit to the White House on March 16, 1981, Jerry presented President Ronald Reagan with a framed photograph of the UCLA Center in gratitude for the President's invaluable support - as Governor of California - of the state's historic "Neuromuscular Disease Research Act of 1973." The Act made possible the partnership between the state and MDA that resulted in construction of this major research facility.

### **Humanitarian Awards**

"Jerry Lewis is a man for all seasons, all people and all times. His name has, in the hearts of millions, become synonymous with peace, love, and brotherhood." The late Secretary of Defense Les Aspin, then a congressman, penned those words in 1977 in the conclusion of his nomination of Jerry for the Nobel Peace Prize - the only time an entertainer has been so honored.

In 1984, the French, whose admiration of Jerry is legendary, made their sentiments official by giving him their two most distinguished awards. In recognition of his many years of leadership of MDA, Jerry was inducted into the Legion of Honor by presidential decree. Legion membership honors individuals whose accomplishments demonstrate extraordinary public service.

Several months before, Lewis was made a Commander in the Order of Arts and Letters, and was extolled by French Minister of Culture Jack Lang for his "human qualities and generosity. You are a child's friend, and a model for adults."

And on June 8, 1985, the U.S. Defense Department presented him with its highest civilian award - the Medal for Distinguished Public Service. In addition to the engraved gold medal, Jerry received a citation that reads, in part: "His service has had a profound effect on the youth of our country, on men and women in uniform today and their children, and on those children who shall one day serve our country in its defense."

In December 1996, Jerry and MDA were recognized by the American Medical Association with Lifetime Achievement Awards "for significant and lasting contributions to the health and welfare of humanity." Jerry, only the fifth person in AMA history to receive this award, was honored for his nearly half a century of dedication to MDA.

As National Chairman of MDA, Jerry has devoted two-thirds of his lifetime to the effort to eradicate neuromuscular disease. His unflagging, year-round work for this cause has endeared him to millions. Under Jerry's leadership, the Association has raised well over a billion dollars for research and services.

### **Other Honors**

In addition to his induction into the Legion of Honor and the Nobel Peace Prize nomination, Jerry has received widespread recognition for his role in the fight against neuromuscular disease and his personal commitment to those affected by them. In 1971, the AFLCIO presented Jerry with the Murray-Green Award for Community Services, the labor organization's highest honor. In September 1976, the U.S. Senate unanimously adopted a resolution of appreciation to Jerry "for his outstanding contributions in the fight

against muscular dystrophy." And in June 1978, the communications industry honored him with the NATPE (National Association of Television Program Executives) Award of the Year for his humanitarian efforts in raising funds through his annual MDA Labor Day Telethons.

In June 1978, Jerry also received the Jefferson Award for the "Greatest Public Service Benefiting the Disadvantaged" in special ceremonies held at the Supreme Court in Washington, D.C. The Jefferson Award is presented annually by the American Institute for Public Service to nine outstanding Americans for highest achievement in the field of public service in the United States.

Following the ceremonies, Jerry was invited to the White House, where he had a private meeting in the Oval Office with President Jimmy Carter. Afterward, President Carter praised Jerry for his many years of devoted service in behalf of those with neuromuscular diseases.

In January 1980, the Touchdown Club of Washington, D.C., honored Jerry with its prestigious Hubert H. Humphrey Humanitarian Award, given annually to the individual who best exemplifies the ideals and courage of the late senator.

Jerry received the N. Neal Pike Prize for Service to the Handicapped from the Boston University School of Law in November 1984. The award, presented by Boston University President John R. Silber, "recognizes individuals who have made special contributions that have improved the lives of people with disabilities." In 1987, Jerry was further honored when he received a Doctor of Humane Letters degree from Mercy College in Westchester, N.Y. Jerry, who gave the commencement address at the graduation ceremony, was described by Mercy College President Wilbert J. LeMelle as "a shining example for people everywhere that one person can have an impact on society and change the world."

The following year, Jerry was honored in the American debut of the "Award of Professionalism and Achievement" from the Eterna Watch Corporation in recognition of his "outstanding humanitarian contributions and dedication to the Muscular Dystrophy Association." In 1993, he also received a Doctor of Humane Letters degree from Emerson College in Boston, for his work as volunteer chairman of the Muscular Dystrophy Association.

In 1999, Martin Scorsese presented Jerry Lewis with a career Golden Lion award at the Venice International Film Festival. Lewis was honored as "an extraordinary example of the total filmmaker: scriptwriter, director and protagonist of his films, therefore fully responsible for his work."

### **Legendary Entertainer**

One of the most successful performers in show business - box office gross receipts of his films total about \$800 million - Jerry has received worldwide acclaim for his unique ability and style with both comedy and drama.

Best known for his comedic genius, he is considered among the elite in the history of comedy. He has an exceptional feel for comic timing and possesses all the other unique qualities of a great clown. Critic Harriet Van Horne has called Jerry's screen image "a sort of witless genius," and Hollywood director Leo McCarey has described Lewis as "the Pied Piper of the business, the heir to the mantle of Charlie Chaplin and Harold Lloyd."

In 1991, Jerry received two impressive honors as the show business industry recognized his lifetime of achievement. On January 13, he received the Comic Life Achievement Award during cable television's annual ACE Awards. The National Association of Broadcasters paid tribute to Jerry by inducting him into the Broadcast Hall of Fame on April 17. Jerry was inducted into the International Humor Hall of Fame in 1992.

### **His Professional Career**

Jerry may have been destined for greatness. He was born Joseph Levitch on March 16, 1926, in Newark, N.J. His parents, Danny and Rae Lewis, were professional entertainers. While his father, as Jerry puts it, "was the total entertainer," his mother played piano at New York City radio station WOR, made musical arrangements and was her husband's musical director.

At age 5, Jerry made his debut at a hotel in New York's Borscht Circuit, singing, "Brother Can You Spare a Dime?" as his father, the master of ceremonies, watched from the wings. By the time he was 15, Lewis had perfected a comic routine, miming and silently mouthing lyrics of operatic and popular songs played on a phonograph offstage.

He attended high school in Irvington, N.J., quitting after two years, a move that he has often regretted. Then came a variety of jobs, including counterman behind a drugstore lunch counter, usher at Loew's State in New York City and shipping clerk in a hat factory.

Meanwhile, dressed in a drape jacket and pegged pants, Jerry continued to brave the offices of booking agents. When he finally got a booking, it was at a burlesque house in Buffalo. But this hardly proved to be his big break; he had barely started his act when he was hooted off the stage with shouts of "Bring on the broads."

Discouraged and ready to give up, Jerry was encouraged to keep trying by veteran burlesque comedian Max Coleman, who had worked with Jerry's father years before. The following summer, when he tried out his mime act at Brown's Hotel in Loch Sheldrake, N.Y., the audience was so enthusiastic that Irving Kaye, a Borscht Circuit comedian, helped the youth get further bookings.

In July 1946, Jerry began a show business partnership with Dean Martin that would skyrocket both to fame. It started when Jerry was performing at the 500 Club in Atlantic City and one of the other entertainers suddenly quit. Jerry, who had already worked with Martin at the Glass Hat in New York City, suggested Dean as a replacement. They began working separately but were soon ad-libbing together, improvising insults and jokes, squirting seltzer water, hurling bunches of celery and creating a general atmosphere of zaniness. In less than 18 weeks, their salaries soared from \$250 a week to \$5,000.

After movie producer Hal Wallis saw the two perform at the Copacabana in New York City, he had them sign a contract with Paramount Pictures.

Of their 1949 film debut, "My Friend Irma," Bosley Crowther of The New York Times wrote: "We could go along with the laughs which were fetched by a new mad comedian, Jerry Lewis by name. The swift eccentricity of his movements, the harrowing features of his face, and the squeak of his vocal protestations ... have flair. His idiocy constitutes the burlesque of an idiot, which is something else again. He's the funniest thing in the picture."

For 10 years, Martin and Lewis sandwiched 16 money-making films between nightclub engagements, personal appearances and television bookings. Their last film together was "Hollywood or Bust" in 1956. On July 25 of that year, the two made their last nightclub appearance together at the Copacabana, exactly 10 years to the day from when they began as a team.

From then on, Jerry was constantly on the move. He recorded several records and albums. One of them, "Rock-a-Bye Your Baby," released by Decca Records, has sold nearly 4 million copies. With increased confidence, Jerry plunged into screen writing, producing and directing as well as acting. In the spring of 1959, a contract between Paramount and Jerry Lewis Productions was signed - then the biggest single transaction in film history for the exclusive services of one star - specifying a payment of \$10 million plus 60 percent of the profits for 14 films over a seven-year period. The partnership was dissolved in 1965.

Jerry then moved to Columbia Pictures, where he produced, directed and starred in "Three on a Couch"; then to 20th Century-Fox to write, produce, and star in "The Big Mouth" and "Don't Raise the Bridge, Lower the River" for Columbia release. He then went to England to direct Sammy Davis Jr. and Peter

Lawford in "One More Time" for United Artists, before moving to Warner Brothers to produce, direct and star in "Which Way to the Front?"

After a hiatus of several years, Jerry returned to the screen with "Hardly Working." Since then, he has made nine more motion pictures, including Martin Scorsese's "The King of Comedy." He's also made a number of television dramatic appearances, among them the ABC made-for-TV movie "Fight for Life" and five episodes of the Emmy-nominated series "Wiseguy." His autobiography, "Jerry Lewis in Person," written with Herb Gluck, was published in 1982.

In 1990, Jerry completed the film "Arizona Dream" with Johnny Depp and Faye Dunaway. He starred in "Funny Bones," filmed in Great Britain in 1994.

### **Current Projects**

In 1995, Jerry went to Broadway and starred in "Damn Yankees" for six months. The show then toured the United States and played in London until August 1997.

Jerry's current projects include preparing as executive producer and writer "The Errand Boy" for Disney, "The Bellboy" for MGM and "The Nutty Professor" as a television series for Universal. He's also rewriting "The Independent," a film he'll star in which began production in April 1998. In addition, he's talking with the October Films Company (an extension of Universal) about writing and directing a film. Jerry's also heavily engaged in writing a book about Martin and Lewis.

On Feb. 22, 1998, Jerry received the Comedy Hall of Fame Lifetime Achievement Award. Jerry also conducts a seminar on laughter and healing with Dr. Clifford Kuhn, a prominent psychiatrist from the University of Louisville, and will do a seminar with Dr. Joe Gambone at UCLA this year. Far from least, Jerry is preparing for the 2000 Telethon after nearly 50 years as the chairman of MDA.

### **Leading Director**

A fact not widely known in the United States is that Jerry has won Best Director of the Year awards eight times in Europe since 1960. The French film critic Robert Benayoun wrote: "I consider Jerry Lewis, since the death of Buster Keaton, to be the foremost comic artist of the time. He corresponds to his era both reflecting and criticizing our civilization." French director Jean-Luc Godard said: "Jerry Lewis is the only American director who has made progressive films ... he is much better than Chaplin and Keaton."

In February 1993, Jerry journeyed to Paris to receive yet another recognition from his French fans. He was given the Cinematech's most prestigious honor, a 10-day homage acknowledging his body of work.

Although gratified by such esteem, Jerry values the words engraved on a plaque in his dressing room more. The plaque was given to Jerry by his friend, President John F Kennedy, and reads: "There are three things that are real...God, human folly and laughter. Since the first two are beyond comprehension, we must do the best we can with the third."

### **Inventor**

Jerry is also a successful inventor, whose patented video assist is currently used on virtually every movie set and on many television sets. Jerry created this closed circuit television system to facilitate motion picture and television production, and it was engineered and perfected by the Paramount Technical Department under supervision of Bruce Denny.

### **Teacher**

Besides his many entertainment, philanthropic and family responsibilities, Jerry is also a full professor at the University of Southern California, where he has taught a graduate course in film direction. "The Total Film Maker," based on recordings of 480 hours of his classroom lectures, was published by Random House in 1971.

### **The Man**

When he appears on stage, Jerry always carries snapshots of his family in his pockets for luck. The entertainer has a daughter, Danielle, born in 1992; five sons - Gary, Ron, Scott, Chris and Anthony - and several grandchildren. On February 13, 1983, Jerry married SanDee "Sam" Pitnick of Winston-Salem, N.C.

Jerry is immensely popular with children. "I get paid for doing what children are punished for," he reasons. "In doing this, I can help them get rid of their hostility quotient." One 14-year-old fan put it another way: "Jerry is just a nice big kid who makes us laugh. Kids love him because he's really one of us."

Jerry has a motto that reflects more than anything else his ongoing love affair with humanity: "I shall pass through this world but once. Any good, therefore, that I can do or any kindness that I can show to any human being, let me do it now. Let me not defer nor neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again."

*For more about Jerry Lewis, see [www.jerrylewiscomedy.com](http://www.jerrylewiscomedy.com) on the Internet. For more about the Muscular Dystrophy Association, go to [www.mdausa.org](http://www.mdausa.org) on the Internet.*

"Afterthought: In 1984 Jerry Lewis was nominated for the British Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor for 'King of Comedy.' (He didn't win, but enjoys seeing the nomination in print.)"

### **MOTION PICTURE/TELEVISION/STAGE CREDITS**

1949 "MY FRIEND IRMA" (1) *Paramount*  
1950 "MY FRIEND IRMA GOES WEST" (1) *Paramount* 1951 "AT WAR WITH THE ARMY" (1, 4) *Paramount* 1951 "THAT'S MY BOY" (1) *Paramount*  
1952 "SAILOR BEWARE" (1) *Paramount* 1952 "ROAD TO BALI" (1, 6) *Paramount* 1952 "THE CADDY" (1) *Paramount* 1953 "JUMPING JACKS" (1) *Paramount* 1953 "SCARED STIFF" (1) *Paramount* 1953 "THE STOOGES" (1) *Paramount*  
1954 "MONEY FROM HOME" (1) *Paramount* 1954 "THREE-RING CIRCUS" (1, 4) *Paramount* 1954 "LIVING IT UP" (1) *Paramount*  
1955 "YOU'RE NEVER TOO YOUNG" (1) *Paramount* 1956 "ARTISTS AND MODELS" (1) *Paramount* 1956 "PARTNERS" (1) *Paramount*  
1956 "HOLLYWOOD OR BUST" (1) *Paramount*  
1957 "THE DELICATE DELINQUENT" (1, 4) *Paramount* 1957 "BEN CASEY" (TV) (1, 2)  
1958 "THE SAD SACK" (1, 5) *Paramount* 1958 "THE GEISHA BOY" (1, 4, 5) *Paramount* 1958 "ROCK-A-BYE BABY" (1, 4, 5) *Paramount* 1958 "LIL ABNER" (1, 6)  
1959 "IT'S A MAD, MAD, MAD, MAD WORLD" (1, 6) *United Artists* 1959 "DON'T GIVE UP THE SHIP" (1, 3) *Paramount*  
1959 "THE JAZZ SINGER" (1) *NBC-TV 2-Hour Special* 1959 "VISIT TO A SMALL PLANET" (1) *Paramount* 1960 "THE BELLBOY" (1, 2, 4, 5) *Paramount*  
1960 "CINDERFELLA" (1, 4, 5) *Paramount*  
1961 "THE LADIES MAN" (1, 2, 4, 5) *Paramount* 1961 "IT'S ONLY MONEY" (1, 2, 4, 5) *Paramount* 1962 "THE ERRAND BOY" (1, 2, 4, 5) *Paramount* 1963 "WHO'S MINDING THE STORE?" (1) *Paramount* 1963 "THE NUTTY PROFESSOR" (1, 2, 4, 5) *Paramount* 1964 "THE DISORDERLY ORDERLY" (1, 4) *Paramount* 1964 "THE PATSY" (1, 2, 4) *Paramount* 1965 "THE FAMILY JEWELS" (1, 2, 4, 5) *Paramount* 1965 "BOEING, BOEING" (1) *Paramount*  
1965 "THREE ON A COUCH" (1, 2, 4, 5) *Paramount* 1966 "WAY, WAY OUT" (1) *20th Century Fox* 1967 "THE BIG MOUTH" (1, 2, 4, 5) *Columbia*

1968 "DON'T RAISE THE BRIDGE, LOWER THE WATER" (1, 5) *Columbia* 1969 "ONE MORE TIME" (2) *United Artists*  
 1969 "HOOK, LINE AND SINKER" (1, 5) *Columbia*  
 1970 "WHICH WAY TO THE FRONT?" (1, 2,4) *Warner Bros.*  
 1972 "THE DAY THE CLOWN CRIED" (1, 2,4) (*A work in progress*) 1979 "HARDLY WORKING" (1, 2, 3) *20th Century Fox*  
 1981 "KING OF COMEDY" (1) *20th Century Fox*  
 1982 "SLAPSTICK OF ANOTHER KIND" (1) *Independent*  
 1983 "SMORGASBORD" (AKA "CRACKING UP") (1, 2,3) *Warner Bros.* 1984 "TO CATCH A COP" (1) *France*  
 1985 "HOW DID YOU GET IN?" (1) *France*  
 1987 "FIGHT FOR LIFE" (1) *ABC Movie for Television* 1989 "COOKIE" (1, 6) *Lorimar*  
 1989 "WISEGUY" (1) *CBS Network Series /5-Parter* 1990 "BOY" (2, 3) *UNICEF*  
 1991 "ARIZONA DREAM" (1) *Independent*  
 1992 "MARTIN & LEWIS: THEIR GOLDEN AGE OF COMEDY" 5-Parter (1, 2,3) *Disney* 1992 "MR. SATURDAY NIGHT" (1, 6)  
 1993 "MAD ABOUT YOU" (1) *NBC Network Series, 1 episode* 1994 "FUNNY BONES" (1) *Hollywood Pictures*  
 1995 "DAMN YANKEES" (1) *Broadway* 1995-96 "DAMN YANKEES" (1) *National Tour* 1997 "DAMN YANKEES" (1) *London*  
 1998 AUSTRALIAN TOUR (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) 1999 AUSTRALIAN TOUR (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)  
 Key: 1 - Actor 3 - Writer 5 - Producer  
 2 - Director 4 - Co-Author 6 - Cameo