



JOEL GREY

BIOGRAPHY

Creating the role as the Wonderful Wizard of Oz in the hit Broadway musical *Wicked*, Joel Grey celebrated fifty years on the New York stage – from performances at the legendary Copacabana on East 60th Street to The Palace on Broadway; from the Public Theatre downtown to Lincoln Center uptown. In a career that was launched in the early 1950's (his theatrical debut, however, was at age 9 as Pud in the 1941 Cleveland Playhouse production of *On Borrowed Time*), Joel Grey has created indelible stage roles each decade since: as the iconic M.C. in *Cabaret* (1966, Tony Award), as song and dance man George M. Cohan in *George M!* (1967, Tony nomination), as Charley VII in *Goodtime Charlie* (1975, Tony nomination), as Jacobowsky in *The Grand Tour* (1979, Tony nomination), as Olim in New York City Opera's *Silverlake* (1981), as Amos Hart in the landmark revival of *Chicago* (1996), and in *Wicked* (2004) – his fourth smash Broadway show. Most recently, he recently participated in the star-studded 10th Anniversary celebration of *Chicago*.

Born Joel David Katz, April 11, 1932, Joel Grey has won acclaim in virtually every medium of entertainment: stage, screen, recording, concerts and television. About his diverse career and interests, Grey says, "At age nine, I fell head-over-heels in love with the theatre. Though the career has taken me on many different paths, the stage has always been my main love and I always return to it."

It was at age 16 that Grey appeared in his father's (the comedian Mickey Katz) revue where he was discovered by Eddie Cantor who introduced young Joel on his television show "The Colgate Comedy Hour." Remembers Grey, "I suppose the Cantor show appearance would be what you call, a 'big break;' it launched a very successful variety career which was, unfortunately, at odds with my passion

for the theatre." Indeed, Joel had become an entertainer of international stature, performing in nightclubs and concert halls from Las Vegas to London.

A sensational debut at the famed Copacabana brought him closer to his dream of Broadway, and Grey pounded the Manhattan pavement until he won a string of roles in television stage productions, among them "Forty Weeks of Uncle Tom" (Kraft Television Theatre, 1954) and Jack and the Beanstalk (Producers Showcase). He appeared Off-Broadway in the Phoenix Theatre's *Littlest Revue* (1956) and made his Broadway debut as a replacement in Neil Simon's first comedy hit, *Come Blow Your Horn* (1961). "I call these years my 'replacement period,'" he remembers. Joel followed with starring roles in the Broadway musicals *Stop the World I Want to Get Off* (succeeding Anthony Newley in 1963) and *Half A Sixpence* (following Tommy Steele in 1965).

Joel also appeared with Dustin Hoffman in the original production of *Harry, Noon and Night* (1965) at the American Place Theatre.

Thinking back to 1966, Joel recalls, "Things were not going as I'd hoped and I was seriously thinking about quitting the business. I remember this time as 'the summer of my discontent.' But as luck would have it, I received a call from Hal Prince. He had seen me in *Stop the World...* and offered me the role of the M.C. in his upcoming production of *Cabaret*. This would, among other things, mark the first time I got a part without having to audition." The rest, as they say, is history. For his performance in the 1972 film version (directed by Bob Fosse), Joel received the Academy Award, the Golden Globe and the British Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor. Grey also reprised his role once again under Hal Prince's direction, for the 20th Anniversary Broadway production (1987), followed by a cross-country national tour. "I've really been lucky guy to have been part of the musical theatre through so many periods, trends and changes. To this day, when the curtain goes up, my heart beats a little faster, whether in front of or behind the curtain," he muses.

Joel's dramatic stage roles include John Guare's *Marco Polo Sings a Solo* (1975) at the Public Theatre; the Williamstown Theatre Festival production of Chekhov's *Platonov* (1978); Larry Kramer's seminal *The Normal Heart* (1986) at the Public Theatre; the American Repertory Theatre's production of Ibsen's *When We Dead Awaken* (1991) at the Sao Paulo Biennale, directed by Robert Wilson;

Herringbone at the Hartford Stage (1992); John Patrick Shanley's *A Fool and Her Fortune* (NY Stage and Film, 1992); and in the Roundabout Theatre production of Brian Friel's *Give Me Your Answer, Do!* (1999), for which he received a Drama Desk Award nomination.

In addition to *Cabaret*, Grey's film credits include Frank Perry's *Man on a Swing* (1974), Robert Altman's *Buffalo Bill and the Indians* (1976); Herbert Ross' *The Seven Percent Solution* (1976); *Remo Williams: The Adventure Begins* (1985, Golden Globe Nomination); Steven Soderbergh's *Kafka* (1991); Altman's *The Player* (1992); Phillip Haas' *The Music of Chance* (1993); Michael Ritchie's adaptation of *The Fantasticks* (2000); and Lars von Trier's *Dancer in the Dark* (2000) with Bjork and Catherine Deneuve.

Last season, he returned to television, in a provocative appearance as an evil doppelganger in the ABC series, "Alias;" followed by a guest starring turn on "Crossing Jordan." He earned an Emmy Award-nomination for his appearance on CBS-TV's "Brooklyn Bridge," and was acclaimed for his role in the final six episodes of the HBO series "Oz" and NBC's "Law and Order: Criminal Intent." Most recently, Joel received critical acclaim for his guest appearance on the hit FOX series "House" and guest-starred on the hit ABC series "Brothers and Sisters."

In 2003, his first book of photographs, *Pictures I Had to Take* (powerHouse Books) was published. The monograph, coinciding with his debut photographic exhibition at the Staley Wise Gallery in New York, is a highly personal visual memoir of Grey's experiences while living and traveling in Europe, Asia, South and Central America, and the United States over the past 25 years. Says Joel, "This more inward, private experience of photographing has proved a great addition to my life offstage." His debut European solo exhibition took place in fall 2004 at the Galerie Einstein, Unter den Linden, Berlin.

His second book of photographs, *Looking Hard at Unexamined Things*, was published in November 2006, and was the subject of a solo show at the John Stevenson Gallery in New York City. His work is now part of the permanent collection at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Joel Grey is one of only eight actors to have won both the Tony and Academy award for the same role. In 1984, he was inducted into the Theatre Hall of Fame and has received his star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. He is also the

recipient of the Distinguished Artist Award from the Los Angeles Music Center. In 1993, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis presented Joel with the Municipal Arts Society medal naming him a Living New York Landmark.

Joel is the father of Jennifer and James and the grandfather of Stella. Visit Joel's website at www.joelgreyp photographer.com.