

Wayland Flowers & Madame Star In "One Of A Kind" At Desert Inn



"One Of A Kind," the sensational new Irvin Feld and Kenneth Feld musical production at the Desert Inn Country Club and Spa adds another dimension to its exciting line-up of "one of a kind" acts with Wayland Flowers and Madame, the most irreverently-popular comedy team of the 80's. Unquestionably, their rural-rooted, raucously urbane humor has established this off-beat duo's unique style that is recognizable wherever the talented Flowers and the lovable Madame go.

Wayland says, "I enjoy 'playing Las Vegas' where one finds such a cross-section of America and being at the Desert Inn makes it even better." Madame loves Las Vegas too and says, "No matter how we work it - the Sands, Sahara, and now the Desert Inn - I'm always dishin' the dirt." But Wayland and Madame both agree that the D.I.'s "One Of A Kind" is the perfect vehicle for them as they consider themselves "one of a kind."

Wayland Parrott Flowers of Dawson, Georgia, was raised by his mother, grandmother and a collection of aunts who reflected a Southern culture in which dirty jokes and riotous behavior were not acceptable. By the age of eight, he had learned to play the flute and drums, tap dance and carve objects from wood. His passion was designing and constructing puppets, a talent he continues to develop. After three years in college, Wayland joined the Coast Guard in order to live up to "the proper Southern Gentleman" image; but intuition told him that his creative talents would never be gratified in Dawson, Ga. He says, "I had to

leave before I could get into anything heavy with my puppets."

With five dollars in his pocket and his puppets in a box, Flowers hitchhiked to New York with a do-or-die attitude, allowing himself one week to secure a job. The struggle (he slept on a workshop cot and used a shower three block away) netted him a job at a children's theatre where he was finally able to use the puppet-making talent he'd developed as a youth.

A landmark event occurred in Wayland's life in 1964 when he had his first glimpse of a "hand and rod" puppet. That puppet became the prototype for Madame. "When I saw that puppet, I fell in love," recalls Wayland. "I picked it up and started working it. It was magical." That was the seed that developed into the Wayland and Madame we know today.

After performing in street theatre and bars for laughs, Wayland and Madame finally got their show business "wings" in the early 70's in major night clubs and theatres across America, including hotels in Las Vegas, Reno and Lake Tahoe and New York's famed Copacabana.

Their first major television break came when Andy Williams tabbed them as regulars on his weekly variety show. This was followed by guest appearances on "Laugh-In" specials and a regular stint on the popular "Hollywood Squares."

Wayland and Madame are now enjoying their fourth year as regulars on the popular television music/variety series, "Solid Gold." During this time, Madame also starred in her own television comedy series appropriately titled "Madame's Place." After 75 episodes, Wayland and Madame packed their bags for an extravagant 1983 national concert tour where they played to SRO audiences in over 40 cities. Also touring with Madame are Wayland's other puppet zanies - Crazy Mary, a young freak-out, and Jiffy, a soul-shouting cross between Tina Turner and Nina Simone.

Wayland's other credits include two Emmy

Awards from the National Academy of Arts and Sciences for his enchanting creation in Marlo Thomas' celebrated ABC special, "Free To Be You And Me" and for his dazzling work on the television special, "Old Is Somebody Else: Aging - Everybody's Doing It." He has also completed the definitive biography entitled "Madame - My Misbotten Memoirs."

"The tour marks the first time we've hit the road in over five years," quips Wayland, who quickly admits, "While I enjoy doing television and movies ("Norman, Is That You?"), I miss the magical fix of performing for a live audience." Wayland calls himself an illusionist. Through his puppets, he brings entirely different characters to life. Wayland recalls, "A woman once said she liked my show but hoped I wouldn't be offended because she forgot I was standing on stage. That was the greatest compliment I've ever had."

Although he has successfully scaled the show business mountain, when probed Wayland will admit that his biggest fulfillment is yet to come - writing, producing and starring in a Broadway musical about his life with Madame. "It's set in the 1930's. It's warm, humorous and appeals to kids of all ages," smiles Wayland. "This project is so special that Madame and I would spend the rest of our lives touring with it."

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