

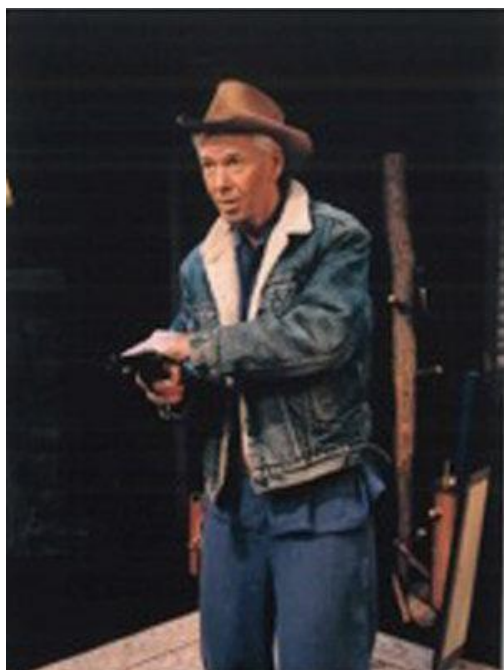
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## Iconic actor returns to life on the stage

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by [Cortney Maddock](#)

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A dynamic actor in a time when the film industry was evolving and a charismatic man in a time when the nation was changing, actor Jimmy Stewart not only was a household name but a goal for actor Steve Nevil.

On Saturday, Nevil will perform in the Celebrity Showroom at John Ascuaga's Nugget. But Nevil won't be recreating "It's a Wonderful Life," "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington" or "Harvey." Nevil will take to the stage to perform a one-man show about Stewart, as Stewart.

"It is a memory play," Nevil said. "It takes place in Beverly Hills about six months after Jimmy Stewart's wife passed away. The play takes place in

Beverly Hills at 2 in the morning and he can't sleep. He's starting to have memory lapses, a bit, but he proceeds to call his daughter, Kelly, who is living in London at the time."

Stewart married model Gloria McLean after the actor returned from serving in the military during World War II.

"Although it is one person, it really feels like three people because he talks to the painting of Gloria, and there are even parts that the audience can answer questions and interact," Nevil said of the performance.

For Nevil, "As Always, Jimmy Stewart" began as a personal project. It was something he pieced together at his theater company, Theatre West, in Southern California.

"I started writing this in 2002," Nevil said, "even though I had been thinking about it for about 30 years. I get worried that his achievements will fade into the distance as time goes on."

Stewart's iconic roles include Guy Johnson in "It's a Wonderful Life," Elwood P. Dowd in "Harvey" or even Alfred Hitchcock's leading man as L.B. Jefferies in "Rear Window" and John "Scottie" Ferguson in "Vertigo."

"He does have these two icon performances, 'It's a Wonderful Life' and 'Harvey,'" Nevil said. "I think those will keep him in the public light for a while longer.

“It’s a Wonderful Life’ hits you emotionally because everyone has been through that kind of despair at some point in their life,” Nevil added. “‘It’s a Wonderful Life’ was basically a failure when it first came out, but the same thing happened with ‘Vertigo.’ It did not do well at the box office at all. By the ’70s people started talking about it again, and in the ’80s it became a classic.”

The emotion and character Stewart breathed into the people he portrayed is what Nevil believes makes him so memorable.

“He was very, very close to who he portrayed on the screen, there wasn’t much difference between him and the characters he played,” Nevil said. “I think that’s why people respond to him, because he has a natural quality, a real natural quality that really took you back.

“Stewart just had this real natural sense in front of the camera,” Nevil added. “He didn’t have any training, he just sort of picked it up. Stewart was doing this real natural form of acting 15 years before (Marlon) Brando did.”

Picking up the voice, mannerisms and characteristic of such a natural actor could have been a challenge for Nevil, but “As Always, Jimmy Stewart” director and co-writer Ted Snyder said that was not the case.

“We’ve been friends for a very long time, but when (Nevil) is on stage as Jimmy Stewart, I see Jimmy Stewart,” Snyder said. “I don’t see Steve, I see Jimmy. He totally inhabits Jimmy Stewart. I’m convinced he could improvise when he is Jimmy Stewart, I’m convinced he could even do an interview as Jimmy Stewart.”

Nevil credits some of his ability to become Stewart to the recordings he taped of the actor on “The Tonight Show starring Johnny Carson.”

“He put on the role the way you would put on a coat,” Snyder said. “It does transport you to a different time, a different place, a different sensibility that Jimmy Stewart had. There are so many dimensions to Jimmy Stewart, his personality and his life, and Steve handles it very well.”

Some of those dimensions include Stewart’s bachelor days in Hollywood with friend Henry Fonda, Stewart’s military service, family and outspoken view on politics later in his life.

“The time he spent as a veteran takes up a very central part in the play as well, which is something a lot of people don’t know about Stewart,” Snyder said. “He was also a war hero.”

“The play talks a lot about his war experience, which he didn’t really want to talk about,” Nevil added. “He suffered night terrors, post-traumatic stress and he really suffered from the dark side.”

The play also touches on personal tragedy, Nevil said, when Stewart and his wife lost their son in combat during Vietnam.

Since debuting the show in 2004, Stewart's daughter, Kelly, has seen it and thanked Nevil for his work. Before Stewart died in 1997, Nevil met his mentor while doing some voice-over work.

"There is a lot of stories about Stewart that I hope are told in a very entertaining and funny way," Nevil said.

"You don't go very long without a laugh in this show," Snyder added. "Of course, this is for a good cause. I'm sure the audience members will come to support the (Sierra School of the Performing Arts), but anyone who goes who has seen a Jimmy Stewart movie and likes Jimmy Stewart themselves, they will have a greater appreciation and love."

"As Always, Jimmy Stewart" is a fundraiser for the Sierra School of the Performing Arts, which is a local nonprofit to enrich the arts. The performance will begin at 8 p.m. Saturday in the Celebrity Showroom at the Nugget in Sparks. Tickets are \$22 and \$32 and can be purchased by calling 356-3300 or visiting [www.janugget.com](http://www.janugget.com).

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