

## **A CONVERSATION WITH JIMMY SMITS, NEW HOST OF A CAPITOL FOURTH**

*Featuring the most spectacular fireworks display anywhere in the nation, the 28<sup>th</sup> annual broadcast of **A Capitol Fourth** airs live in high definition and commercial free from the West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol. This year, Jimmy Smits will be hosting the festivities. We sat down with Jimmy and asked him about his new role and his feelings about July 4th. **A Capitol Fourth** will be broadcast live on PBS from the West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol on Friday, **July 4, 2008 from 8:00 to 9:30 p.m. ET** (check local listings).*

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**Q: What does the Fourth of July/Independence Day mean to you?**

**SMITS:** My parents came to this country with the hopes that their children would grow up and live the American Dream and those dreams have been realized to a large extent. For us, Independence Day has always been an acknowledgement and a thanks -- a feeling of gratefulness -- that we were a part of this country.

**Q: What excites you most about hosting this year's *A Capitol Fourth*?**

**SMITS:** I feel extremely honored to be asked to host *A Capitol Fourth* celebration. It is a day and a program that reaffirms what it is to be an American. I participated in the concert in 2005 when I presented an award to my good friends Gloria and Emilio Estefan. I was also involved with the *National Memorial Day Concert* last year so I'm very familiar with these shows. When the producers asked me to host I got a double vibe. I feel privileged to do it but when you're presenting, you do your one little piece and then you get to watch the rest of the show. The hosting duties are more labor intensive so there's a bit more pressure but there's an excitement too... I can't wait!

**Q: You've been to *A Capitol Fourth* before. What's it like to perform before a crowd that numbers in the hundreds of thousands?**

**SMITS:** I was floored by what my reaction was to the time that I spent in Washington, D.C. on the Fourth of July. I can't emphasize enough the rush you get when you see this fireworks display with all of the national monuments ... the huge crowds... the National Symphony Orchestra and Erich Kunzel playing the 1812 Overture with a battery of real cannons - - it just gives you goose bumps. It left me very reflective in looking at

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the monuments and the fireworks but at the same time, knowing what the fireworks reflect on a historical level. It fortified my feeling of what it is to be an American. It made me feel proud, and thankful and joyous to be an American.

**Q: What did you do on the Fourth of July as a kid in Brooklyn? What are some of your favorite Fourth of July memories?**

**SMITS:** The significance of Fourth of July when you're very young is that you get to see the fireworks. For me, that was always connected either with a baseball game in Brooklyn or going to Coney Island and watching the fireworks. That was the thing to do because it was a day off for the family to be together. The Bicentennial in 1976, with the huge fireworks displays around the country, was an important July 4<sup>th</sup> memory for me. But again, it pales to the wonderful fireworks display that you have with *A Capitol Fourth* celebration - - it's just incredible!

**Q: What is notable to you about celebrating our "nation's birthday" in our nation's capital, Washington, D.C.?**

**SMITS:** The backdrop of the national monuments energizes me and creates a sense of awe. The experience always makes me reflect on the framers of the Constitution and how these men put their names on that document that was kind of a death warrant to them. I mean, they fully believed in what they were doing and but it was a "declaration of independence" from another country. They asserted their independence and what were the ramifications that were going to come from that? The document became their dream and has flourished into something really beautiful.

**Q: Are you going to bring your family to A Capitol Fourth?**

**SMITS:** My daughter lives in the Washington area so we will all be together. When they heard that I was hosting this year they were jazzed!

**Q: What makes A Capitol Fourth special – the grandeur of the setting, the excitement of the huge crowd, the wide array of performers?**

**SMITS:** I think it's by design that the producers of *A Capitol Fourth* have an array of musical genres from classical to rock 'n roll and Broadway. There's something for everyone and, I believe, the performers that grace the stage at the Capitol are also representative of the tapestry of people that make up this country. You have performers from all different walks of life, different ethnicities and the audience watching the show is equally diverse. With the birthplace of our nation as a backdrop, I think that's an important thrust that no other July 4 celebration or television program can offer.

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**Q: Is there anything else you would like to say to our audience and to our troops around the globe who will be watching on the American Forces Network?**

**SMITS:** The fact that we're doing this show in 2008 when we are in the midst of a conflict around the world, we should pause to reflect on the fact that we have troops in other countries in harm's way. But it is also a time to reflect on the fact that we are in the midst of a presidential election cycle right now. When you see people running for the highest office in this land, they are a spectrum of what this country is: women, white, black, Hispanic. That adds a bit more significance to the show for me this particular year. The country has gone through this two hundred year change and we are all the fruits of that.

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