

JIM GAFFIGAN: A PALE FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH

COMEDIAN, HOT POCKETS HATER

By Alfredo Flores

You've probably seen **Jim Gaffigan**, but just haven't realized it. He's a ubiquitous pitchman (Sierra Mist, ESPN, Rolling Rock); TV star ("Pale Force" cartoon shorts with Conan O'Brien and leading role in TBS' "My Boys,") and stand up comedian star with six CDs to his credit. He's truly a Midwestern boy done good, and he's displaying his wholesome but incredibly funny act at the **Warner Theater** for four likely-to-be sold out shows starting **Nov. 30**.

But after looking at his appearance and his general nice-guy persona — think pasty pale skin, thinning fair blond hair, tall but paunchy stature, and attire that usually consists of khaki pants, dress shirt and sports coat — one doesn't necessarily think TV and movie star, nor a comic who could potentially sell out 7,200 seats at Warner at \$40 a pop. But that's not what he's after. He would often start his shows with "Don't worry, I've never heard of me either." While many comedians go to the lowest common denominator, Gaffigan manages to find his material in just everyday things — mostly food.

"I try to find universal topics that haven't been beaten to death," said Gaffigan in a recent interview with On Tap.

Who else would find Hot Pockets so funny? "It takes two minutes to cook, exactly how long it stays in your system," he said. "I have nothing against Hot Pockets. (I think)

they are a great laxative."

But it's the simple things the Dune Acres, Indiana native loves to talk about most — grocery shopping, himself ("I'm blind, bald and pale. I'm one gigantic recessive gene"), Cinnabon, cake, pie, robes, fruitcake, diets and manatees ("The manatee is endangered, and I think it's because they're out of shape"). He paces up and down stage, squints a lot, and most of his impressions are of what he believes the audience thinks of his jokes, which is always in the form of a high-pitched, housewife character — usually commenting negatively to the show.

"I have many voices in my head," he said. "The whisper is the 'inside voice' of the audience."

It's the sort of deadpan humor not found too often in today's comics, especially those with half hour and full hour Comedy Central specials under their belt. He even has local ties — having graduated from Georgetown University's prestigious McDonough School of Business, after transferring from only one year at Indiana's Purdue University (a sign of Gaffigan's desire to be in a bigger city).

"I love DC. I went to Georgetown and the DC Improv is one of my favorite clubs," he said about his time in Washington back in the late 1980s. "The Warner Theater is an amazing place to perform — but I don't really do any political jokes."

Political jokes are not what his fans come to see. It's not that sort of discussion folks of small town Indiana would speak of either. Gaffigan grew up in a town with a steel mill and went to high school parties where he sat on haystacks. Big city dreams became easier with the Georgetown degree. After a brief stint in Tampa, a big city job in at New York City advertising firm followed (including a gig writing Hardee's fast-food commercials, perhaps the catalyst of his writing comedy about food that's obviously bad for us). And like many comics, he studied improv and worked



diligently to move up the ranks in the New York comedy scene, working as many as a half-dozen clubs on a single evening. The rest is history.

Now Gaffigan's a frequent guest on the "Late Show with David Letterman"—a fellow Indiana native who gave Jim his big break in 1999 by allowing him to perform a stand-up set after five years of effort. Gaffigan even has Conan O'Brien as HIS sidekick in the hilarious "Pale Force" animated shorts shown on "Late Night with Conan O'Brien" (available on <http://www.jimgaffigan.com>).

Gaffigan's latest DVD, "Beyond the Pale" (65,000 DVDs and 100,000 CDs sold of the same show), also pokes fun of his lack of pigment, and has him in a white backdrop, wearing a white t-shirt, eating vanilla yogurt with a white spoon—Gaffigan's blue eyes, fair blond hair, and pale skin barely noticeable.

Gaffigan is currently in the mist of the "Comedy Central Live! Starring Jim Gaffigan: Beyond The Pale Tour." No doubt his style of humor will be introduced to many new audience members, and his shows often feature many returning customers who know many of his famous one-liners by heart — but love it when Gaffigan says it since it's all in the delivery.

"Comedy Central Live! Starring Jim Gaffigan: Beyond The Pale Tour" at the Warner Theater Friday, Nov. 30 at 8 and 10:30 p.m. and Saturday, Dec. 1 at 7 and 10 p.m. Balcony and Orchestra tickets are \$41.75 and available at www.ticketmaster.com.



Photo By Andrew Eccles