

THE HAGER TWINS
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When "Hee Haw" entertainers, The Hager Twins, perform at Nashville North USA in Taylorville on New Years Eve, it's not just another show for the comedic brothers -- it's a homecoming.

"We just love coming home to Illinois," says Jon and Jim Hager, who were raised in the Chicago suburb of Park Ridge. "And returning to Nashville North USA is always a lot of fun and a treat for us."



It was also a lot of fun trying to tell the twins apart during a conference line phone interview from their Nashville area homes. Not only do the siblings look and sound identical, but their ad-lib humor is quick, spontaneous and razor-sharp.

For example, when asked about their Illinois childhood, one brother starts answering the question, but they both finish it.

"Jim and I were adopted," explains Jon, the older twin by twenty minutes. "Our late father, Jack, was a Florida Methodist minister and our mom, Frances, is a retired Mississippi schoolteacher."

"Dad had a church on the southside of Chicago when we were very little," Jim interjects. "It was near the stockyards."

"Ahhh!" they laughingly conclude in unison. "So THAT'S where we got the first whiff of our country upbringing..."

Besides a natural flair for comedy, The Hager Twins realized early on they had a talent for singing.

"It's just something we were born with," Jim says. "And our parents helped nurture it along by allowing us to sing in the church choir."

While still young boys, The Hager Twins also discovered an identical sense of fun and adventure.

"I remember when we wandered away from the house at 3-years-old," Jim says. "Our parents were just absolutely frantic. We were always exploring like that."

"We were brats," Jon says.

"Were?" Jim says. "Mother still calls us her brats!"

By the time they were freshmen in high school, The Hager Twins were appearing on a weekly Saturday morning television show for teens on WGN-TV in Chicago.

After college, the twins both served in the Army where they performed for Officer and NCO clubs in the United States and Europe.

Following their military discharge, The Hager Twins moved to California. As a result, they became regular players with Kenny Rogers, John Denver and Steve Martin at Randy Spark's (New Christy Minstrels singer) Los Angeles nightclub, Ledbetters, and various other venues.

Their big break occurred when country icon, Buck Owens, attended one of their shows at Disneyland and signed the twins to a management, recording and booking contract in less than a week.

"We traveled for years opening shows for Buck," Jon says. "We also got to open for some of the other greats like Tex Ritter, Billie Jo Spears, Wynn Stewart and Lefty Frizzell. We learned so much from them."

The Hager Twins were introduced to millions of viewers when they became regular cast members of the Buck Owens and Roy Clark co-hosted #1 syndicated television show, Hee Haw..

"We were on Hee Haw from the very first show in 1969 until we left 19 years later in 1988," Jim says.

"The success of Hee Haw," Jon adds, "is that the cast members loved and supported each other. Not only did we put our hearts and souls into the program, but we learned how to laugh at ourselves."

"No, Jon," Jim quips. "We were really laughing at you."

The Hager Twins have provided audiences with over three decades of smiles, laughter and music, but their New Year's Eve celebratory wish is a serious one.

"Even though its New Years Eve, don't drink and drive," they caution simultaneously. "Do the responsible thing. Designate a sober driver."