EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

"Why Else Do You Go to the Movies?"

Max Casella plays Frank Capra in JIMMY, the Jimmy Stewart biopic starring KJ Apa. He talks about recreating It's a Wonderful Life in Ireland, Capra's immigrant work ethic, why Apa "carries" the film, and why this "anti-Hollywood" movie is what audiences need right now.

Interview by Paul Salfen · AMFM Magazine

Max Casella has spent more than four decades on screens large and small, from *Doogie Howser, M.D.* to *The Sopranos* and beyond. In *Jimmy*, the new Jimmy Stewart biopic from Burns & Co. Entertainment, he steps into the shoes of one of Hollywood's defining directors: Frank Capra. The film, starring KJ Apa as Stewart, opens in theaters nationwide on November 6, 2026, and tracks Stewart from his Academy Award for *The Philadelphia Story* through his World War II combat service and the making of *It's a Wonderful Life*.

Paul Salfen caught up with Casella over Zoom ahead of the film's Fort Worth Film Festival premiere, with Casella fighting a head cold and still lighting up every time the conversation turned back to Capra, Ireland, and why people go to the movies in the first place.

A JOY TO RECREATE

Salfen opened by noting that sets are often hurry-up-and-wait, but *Jimmy* looked like it was made with real joy. Casella did not hesitate. "Absolutely, yeah," he said. "I mean, it was a joy for me, because it's a Wonderful Life, it's one of my all-time favorite movies, and recreating it was. Wow, it was such a, such a treat to do that."

Playing Capra himself was part of the treat. "Yeah, Frank Capra, like everyone else, he's one of my favorite directors, and I'd already seen almost all of his movies, certainly all of his most famous ones," Casella said. He dug into Capra's autobiography and documentaries about the director. "And that's very… it was a lot of fun, actually, as an actor, playing a director, actually directing on a set. I absolutely love that."

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A DIFFERENT BREED ALTOGETHER

When Salfen asked what parallels Casella found between himself and Capra, the answer landed with a laugh. "There were no similarities."

Then he explained what he meant. "He's, he was like a… That generation, they're like a different breed altogether. Like, he's my grandfather's generation." Casella's own grandfather had a self-made story that

rhymed with Capra's: coming from a village in Calabria, Italy, "with dirt floors," and becoming a successful dress designer in America.

Reading Capra's autobiography, Casella was struck by the sheer volume of work. Capra "worked 7 jobs to go to school" with no family support. Relatives who farmed with their hands made fun of him for wanting an education. Capra refused to stay a peasant or an immigrant in other people's eyes. He insisted on becoming an educated person.

"And, yeah, it's hard today to even identify with that kind of… you know, work ethic, and, you know, coming from where he came from," Casella said. "He's like a superhero, in a way."

> *"He's like a superhero, in a way." (Max Casella)*

CLIFFS OVERLOOKING THE OCEAN

Salfen asked for a set memory that made Casella look around and think, *I get paid to do this*. Casella said he has that thought almost every day. "I say that every single day I'm on any set. Some are better than others. This was one of the best ones."

Ireland helped. "I mean, for one thing, we were in Ireland, the most beautiful country ever," he said. "And one day, we were just shooting on the cliffs overlooking the ocean. And there are days like that where I've been lucky enough to have a lot of those where you pinch yourself going. This is the best job in the whole world, and you especially because you're working with really great people, you know."

The tone on set mattered as much as the scenery. "There's nobody's got an attitude problem or anything. There's nobody playing status or anything like that. Everybody's just pulling in the same direction, having fun. And that's what this was like."

KJ CARRIES IT

Salfen had heard strong things about Apa's work as Jimmy Stewart. Casella went further. "He carries the… he is the entire film, KJ. He carries it. Inc… beautifully. He had… he had a hard, hard job, and he pulled it off. Beautifully. You just… forget your… You're so, taken away by him."

That is a lot to ask of any actor playing an American icon, and Casella made clear Apa delivered. In a movie that moves from Hollywood awards to wartime skies to Bedford Falls, the film lives or dies on whether audiences believe the man at the center. Casella's verdict is that they will.

> *"He is the entire film, KJ. He carries it… Beautifully. You're so taken away by him." (Max Casella)*

YOU GOTTA LOVE TO ACT

Plenty of people look at a career like Casella's and want one of their own. Salfen asked what advice he would give them. Casella started with a personal note: his daughter wants to follow in his footsteps, and "frankly, I wish she wouldn't." Then he gave the only advice he trusts.

"There's only, the only thing that's going to sustain you is if you love actually the work itself," he said. "Because the business around it is just, it'll beat it out of you. And you gotta love to act. You gotta love to be an artist, be, you know, dedicated to it. It's about showing up at, you know, 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning and being excited to do it."

That same love is what keeps him on the right path. "Well, like I said, I love my job," he told Salfen. He hates "all the stuff around it that you have to deal with" to get work, and the politics that sometimes show up once you have it. "But I love my job, I love that, I love to act."

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NO BACKUP PLAN

Salfen's co-host is Dallas Cowboys great and Pro Football Hall of Famer Drew Pearson, the man who caught the original Hail Mary, and Salfen likes to ask guests about theirs: the moment you just go for it and it works out. For Casella, it was the decision that started everything.

"Starting out, I didn't go to college," he said. People told him he could not make a living acting and needed a backup. "And I didn't… I was just… I wouldn't hear of it. I was just like, I'm gonna do this. I had no backup plan."

He had "no way of earning a living" if acting did not work, and still somehow sustained a career across more than 40 years. "I don't know what I would have done, but it worked out, and I just… Had such, you know… Blind faith in myself. It'll work out, this is what I'm meant to do. So, I guess that was, that was it."

> *"I had no backup plan… Blind faith in myself. It'll work out, this is what I'm meant to do." (Max Casella)*

WHAT PEOPLE ASK HIM MOST

After that many years and that many roles, Salfen wondered what fans ask about most. Casella smiled at the familiarity of it. "Just, what was this like? What was that like? What was it like on the Sopranos? What was it like, doing Doogie Howser when you're just a you know. youngster, and you know. What was this person like? What was that person like? You know, you get those kind of questions all the time."

Doogie Howser made him a household face as a teenager. *The Sopranos* gave him another iconic chapter. *Jimmy* adds Capra to a resume that already spans generations of television and film. The questions change; the curiosity does not.

THE ANTI-HOLLYWOOD FILM

Salfen noted that faith is part of *Jimmy*, something he was glad to see on a big screen. Casella agreed. "Absolutely, yeah, it's a big part of it. Faith is a big part of it. When you see the movie, you'll see that."

Then he drew a sharper line. "It's very sort of the anti-Hollywood film. It's not jaded or cynical or sarcastic. It's a beautiful movie that'll make you cry and laugh, and you'll be entertained."

Salfen said audiences could use that right about now. "I think so, desperately," Casella answered. "I'm a little over the eye-rolly, you know, kind of attitude toward everything."

Asked what he hopes people take away beyond "it's a fun movie," he kept it simple. "I know they're going to be entertained and moved. And, they're gonna enjoy themselves. And that's why you go to the movies. Why else do you go? Why else to go to the movies?"

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NEXT UP: ELOISE

Before letting him go, Salfen asked what else fans should look forward to. Casella pointed to a Netflix project with Ryan Reynolds. "A Netflix film I did with Ryan Reynolds called Eloise. Or Eloise at the Plaza, I'm not sure what the final title will be. Based on the famous, children's books. Of the 1950s."

Then it was time to wrap, with Salfen wishing him a quick recovery from the head cold and Casella signing off the way a Capra set might: gracious, short, and warm. "My pleasure. Thank you so much. I appreciate it." "Bye, cheers."

Jimmy opens nationwide on November 6. Casella's Capra is one piece of a larger story about Stewart, war, faith, and the movie that taught a generation what a wonderful life can look like. If Casella is right, audiences will leave the theater entertained, moved, and maybe a little less eye-rolly than when they walked in. Why else do you go?

FIND *JIMMY*

Film: *Jimmy* (2026)

Directed by: Aaron Burns

Written by: Justin Strawhand

Starring: KJ Apa as Jimmy Stewart; with Kara Killmer, Neal McDonough, Max Casella (Frank Capra), Jason Alexander, Christopher McDonald, Sarah Drew, Rob Riggle, Julian Works, Jen Lilley

Studio: Burns & Co. Entertainment

Theatrical release: Nationwide, November 6, 2026

Website: jimmythemovie.com

Social: @jimmystewartmovie (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok); X @jimmymovie2026

First look: youtube.com/watch?v=LmaWSb7WQ1E

Interview conducted by Paul Salfen for AMFM Magazine over Zoom, September 29, 2026.

Paul Salfen is Managing Editor of AMFM Magazine and a veteran interviewer of film, television, music, and sports figures. He is the author of Going For It!, a collection of Hail Mary moments from the artists and athletes he has spent two decades putting on the record.
