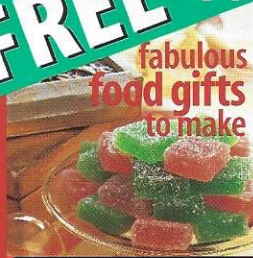


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the luckiest people in the world

Barbra Streisand and James Brolin on the way they are: head over heels in love. An exclusive—and very intimate—chat with Hollywood's happiest newlyweds.

BY SHERYL BERK

She simply can't stop singing her husband's praises: "He gives new meaning to the words *Hello, gorgeous!*" Barbra Streisand says, sounding as smitten as a schoolgirl, although she's 57—and it's been almost a year and a half since she and actor James Brolin, 59, were wed.

"When you're in love, you want to share that joy," she says. "You hope everyone in the world can feel the way you do at some point in their lives." And if that sounds a bit sentimental, it's fine by her. Streisand, you see, is all about *amore* these days, with a new album of romantic ballads (*A Love Like Ours*, Columbia Records) and her man as muse (the CD cover features the pair strolling arm in arm on a beach at sunset, and the inside liner photos could be the couple's wedding album).

"I think that for a long time, when Barbra used to sing love songs, the person she was singing them to had

no face," says Marvin Hamlisch, a close friend and the conductor of Streisand's upcoming New Year's Eve concert at the MGM Grand, as well as the composer of "The Way We Were." "Now the person she sees is clearly Jim, and it gives greater depth, greater meaning to her performance."

"She has this reputation for being a real powerhouse," says longtime friend and actress Brenda Vaccaro. "And she is—professionally. But around Jim, she's a little kitten."

It's hard to picture the woman with the tough-as-nails reputation as a pussycat, but you need only listen to an exchange between the couple, laden with terms of endearment (she calls him Honey; he calls her Beezer) to know this is *The Real Thing*.

Which isn't to say love bloomed overnight. Their fabled first meeting was actually a blind date in 1996 orchestrated by mutual friend Christine Forsythe Peters (the ex-wife of Streisand's former boyfriend Jon ▶

The diva and her darling.

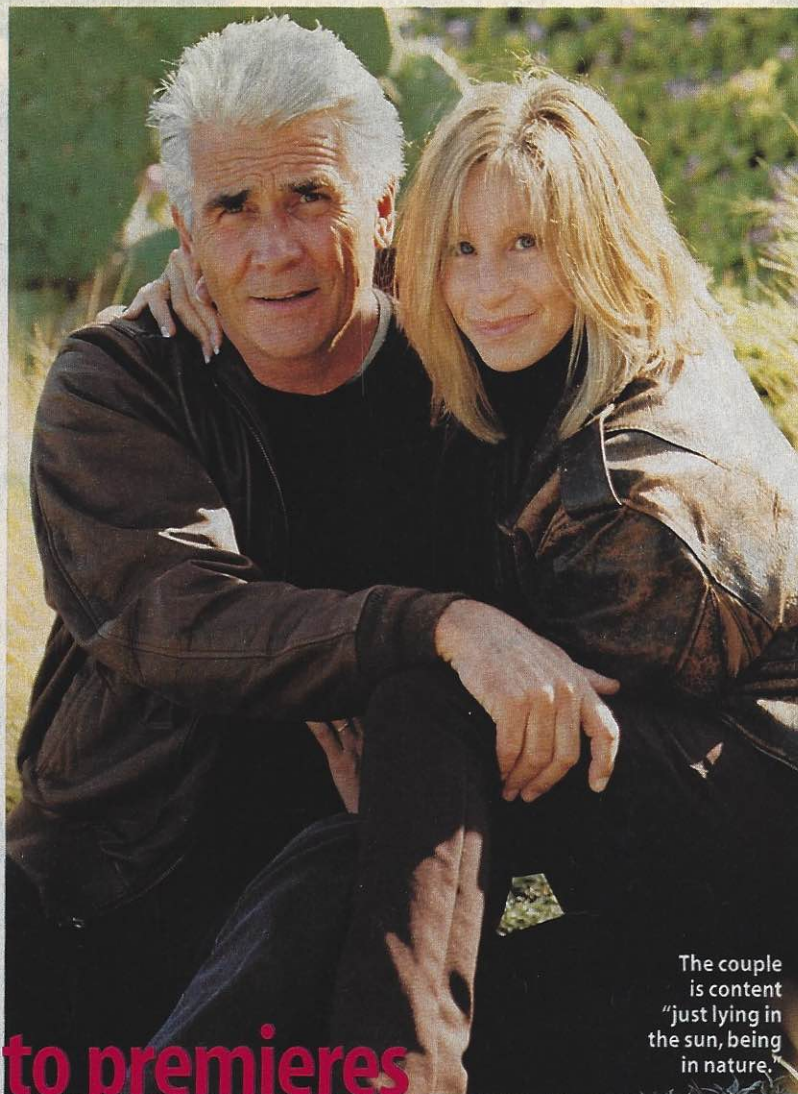
DEBORAH WALD/
OUTLINE

Peters). She threw a dinner party to introduce them. They were well aware that they were being fixed up—and only a few minutes before, both had contemplated backing out of it.

“I had my cell phone in my hand, and I was going to call and cancel,” Brolin recalls. “I thought, ‘I need this like a hole in the head.’ I had so many disappointments in my life, I saw no future in romance.” Streisand was busy editing her movie *The Mirror Has Two Faces*. “I hate being distracted,” she says. “This was a real imposition, to have to leave my work and go to a dinner party, which I never like to do anyway. So I told my editors to wait for me. I left around 7:30 P.M. and said I’d be back by 10.”

What neither of them anticipated was an almost instantaneous attraction. “Once we sat down and started to speak, that was it,” Streisand says. “George Foreman was sitting on my right, and I really wanted to talk to him about his grill—I love that thing—but I never did say more than four words to him. The whole evening was a blur. Once Jim and I got into a conversation, we just sort of locked spirits and forgot that everyone else was there.”

Brolin felt the same: “After ten minutes I knew we’d be together,” he says. “After 20 minutes I was a goner,



The couple is content “just lying in the sun, being in nature.”

“We never go to premieres or anyplace where there are cameras. We love to do a lot of nothing.”

and after two hours I knew we’d get married someday.” He offered to take her home and she, of course, refused.

“I told him thank you, but I had someone coming to pick me up,” Streisand says. “But he insisted. So we went back to my house and we talked till about 3 in the morning.”

Their next encounter, though, didn’t go as smoothly. They met at her goddaughter’s birthday party. “It just seemed incredibly awkward,” she recalls. “Lots of people came between us, and we barely had a chance to speak. At the end of the day, he said, ‘I’ll call you.’ So I expected him to call that night, but he didn’t.”

She decided that was probably the end of it. “You see, I was into a mode of just being by myself, of staying in bed and reading political journals and eating coffee ice cream cones,” she says. “I thought, ‘This relationship thing is not for me; it’s too difficult.’”

Her track record, after all, offered little reassurance. Following the end of her marriage to Elliott Gould in 1971 (they have one son, Jason, 32), Streisand was linked to numerous men—Jon Peters, Don Johnson, Ryan O’Neal, Steven Spielberg, Richard Gere, Andre Agassi and Jon Baskin among them. And Brolin had a history of his own: His first marriage, to

casting agent Jane Agee, ended after almost 20 years (they have two sons, Josh, 31, and Jess, 26); his second marriage, to actress Jan Smithers, dissolved after nearly a decade (they have a daughter, Molly, 11).

“I don’t think Barbra was looking for anything serious,” says Vaccaro, who costarred with Brolin on the 1978 movie *Capricorn One*. “She was pretty busy, and I think it was the furthest thing from her mind.”

But a few days later a fax arrived on her desk. “It said, ‘Respond or I’ll start faxing smut,’” Streisand recalls, laughing. “Jim put his phone number and ‘Tonight, yes?’ I thought that ▶

"When I was bored or lonely, I would work.

was so cute." (FYI: She keeps the note, framed, on her desk.) So they went out again—"We watched a movie and talked about how awkward dating is," she says—before Brolin had to fly off to the Philippines for two weeks to work on a movie.

"We talked all the time while he was away," Streisand says. "We faxed each other and then he called."

"Sometimes we spoke for hours," Brolin adds. "I almost spent my entire salary on the phone bill."

Shortly afterward, Streisand recalls, Brolin broached the topic of marriage. "He brought it up several times, but I just always laughed it off," she says. "Then one day I realized he was serious. *This* was serious. I think true love comes when the infatuation period wears off and you commit yourselves to each other's personal growth."

She finally said yes (after making him sweat it out for a few months), then rejected his choice of ring.

"She said, 'This is way too much. I don't know how I could wear this during the day,'" he says of the original 9-carat stone he bought her. Streisand opted for a much more modest, 1.16-carat Tiffany ring, but—and it's a little-known fact—Brolin bought her a second one, a 3.5-carat oval surrounded by tiny diamonds, a year later.

The wedding took place at Streisand's Malibu estate on July 1, 1998, the second anniversary of their first date, before 105 of their closest friends and family. Her new album is filled with music from that day: their first dance as man and wife ("Isn't It a Pity?" by the Gershwins); parts of the processional Hamlisch composed for their walk down the aisle;

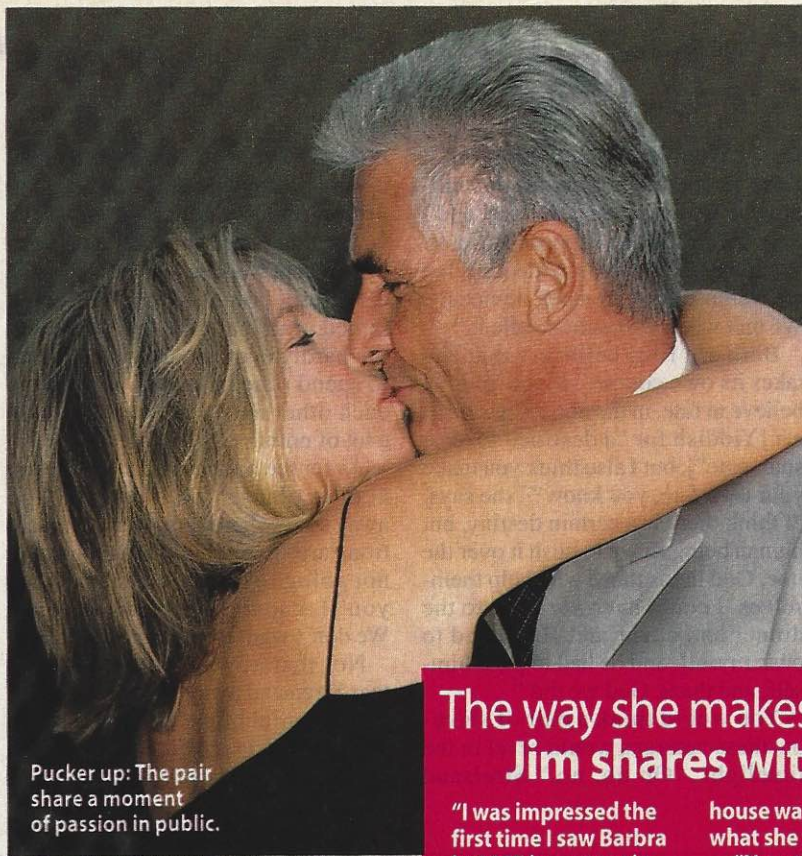
and the ballad "I've Dreamed of You," which has great significance to both of them. "We were having dinner in a restaurant in Ireland," she explains. "I heard this instrumental playing, and I loved it, so I asked [singer/composer] Ann Hampton Callaway to write lyrics to it."

The words didn't arrive—nor did the accompanying track—till moments before the wedding. "I sang the song for the first time to Jim, shaking a bit, at the reception," she says.

Streisand was also drawn to the lyrics of "If I Never Met You," partly because this topic is one the pair contemplate often. "It articulates the sense of gratitude you feel having met someone unexpectedly who changes the course of your life," she says. What if they had bumped into each other ages ago? What if they had spent more of their lives together?



I am a sister. A daughter. A lover.



Pucker up: The pair share a moment of passion in public.

"She'll be very intense, then Jim will walk in the room and she lights up. Frankly, it's wonderful to see."

"I used to be about work, work, work," Streisand says. "It's where my perfectionism kicks in. When I'm making an album, I play it in different cars. I play it on good stereo systems, bad systems. I say, 'Guess what? We have to raise the intro of this one, put down the volume on that line, raise the violin over here, blah, blah, blah...' It's because I care about something that lasts forever."

But work is no longer everything. "I turn down movies, television shows, awards, interviews," she says. "Finding love changes your priorities. I don't care about work as much—a lot of my work was a sublimation for love and relationships, I think. When I was bored or kind of lonely, I would work. Now, I don't feel very ambitious. I'm content."

Yet—one has to remind her—her plate is pretty full this year, what with her new CD, promises of a tour and the December 31 MGM Grand Garden Millennium Concert in Las Vegas (before an intimate, sold-out crowd of 13,000 fans and friends, each shelling out between \$500 and \$2,500 per ticket).

The way she makes him feel: Jim shares with McCall's readers

"I was impressed the first time I saw Barbra in 1967 in concert in Central Park. It was more of what she said than anything else."

"A few years later, I was intrigued by her sexy beauty and vulnerability in *The Way We Were*. I would drive by her canyon in L.A. and wonder which

house was hers and what she was doing.

"Now that I've got her as a full-time diet, I bathe in her beauty, her soft heart and skin, her tears, her joy of life's small gifts. I watch how children who are too young to know who she is flock to her because they understand who she really is.

"She is full of truth with grace. All of us close to her long for her intelligence and passion. This is one soft woman who knows how to give all.

"How would I characterize my relationship with Barbra? I'm her commanding officer and her slave all in one."

"Yeah, it's a lot of work and still scary," Streisand says. "I kind of resent the amount of time it takes away from my being with Jim." But there's where Brolin steps in: "Last night it was absolutely wonderful," she says. "He came home and whizzed me away from a meeting with six people so we could go to a 10:30 showing of *Outside Providence*." And if tours take her away, "I would only go places where we want to go as a couple—like maybe Australia."

Brolin is used to his wife's tremendous attention to detail. It's a side of her he understands yet doesn't share. "We're alike and we're different in so many ways," he adds. "There's a part of me that's a perfectionist that I've given up because I realized you never get it how you quite preconceive it. Expectations ruin everything in life,

that's my theory. On the other hand, it's part of the reason *she* won't take second best and *I have* in my career. But I've also had a lot more calm days, you know. She's teaching me some stronger work habits, and I'm teaching her to give it up and just have a nice day if it's not working."

Letting go of old habits is difficult, adds Streisand. "I do think that history repeats itself and that we automatically fall into the same patterns," she says. "But the great thing about growing older is consciousness. When you love each other, you have to accept each other's flaws as well as gifts."

Whenever they argue—"All couples do, and we're a normal couple, aren't we?" Streisand asks—she takes a kinder, gentler approach. "I have to remember to come at it from my vulnerability, not my anger, to express the deeper truth," she says.

"That way a person can hear you. That's a lesson that I'm still learning after all these years."

And Brolin is learning to speak his mind and his heart. "The first thing that hit me, that got my attention about Barbra, is her honesty and directness," he says. "You don't have to interpret the message; it's right there. When she says something, you understand exactly where she's going. And because I came from a family that kind of beat around the bush, I wasn't used to it. But I always know where I'm at with her, and that puts me on really firm ground. If she says she loves you, you know she means it."

And she does mean it—every word she says and sings. "You know those corny things they say in love songs?" she asks. "Well, they're true. Love is what life is all about." ■