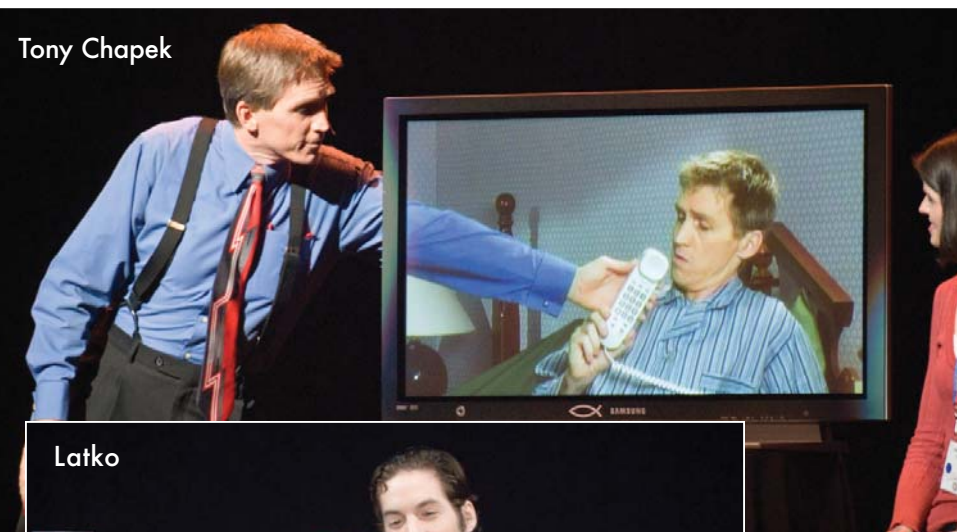


I.B.M. 2008 S.A.M. COMBINED CONVENTION

LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE MAIONE

Tony Chapek

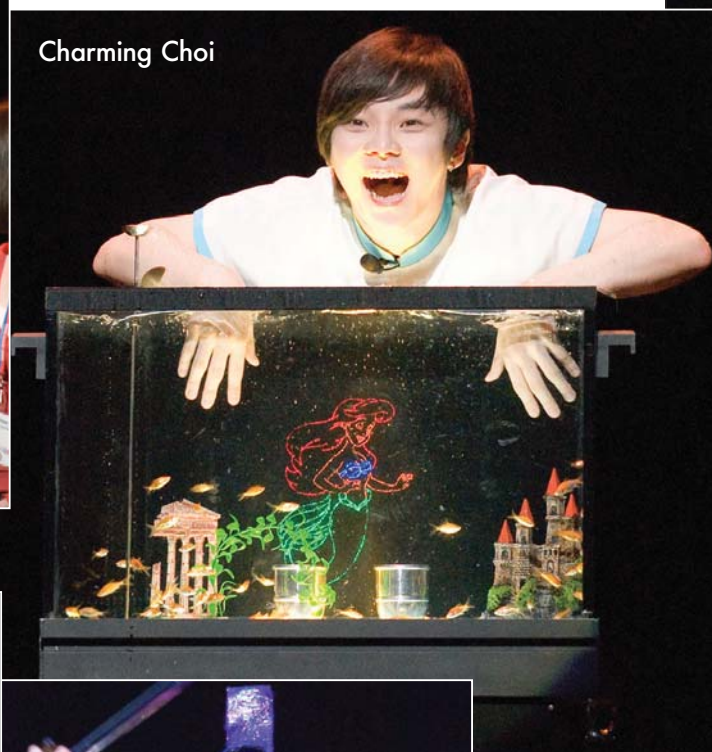


Latko



Bob Swadling

Charming Choi



David Kaplin



Mulan



An Ha Lim

Marc Oberon



KUDOS to the Combined Convention Committee:

Bradley Jacobs: Co-Chair, Operations, Budget
Roger Miller: Co-Chair, Treasurer
Hank Moorehouse: Artistic Director
Virginia and John Apperson: Registrars
Joan Caesar: Contests
Andy Dallas: Protocol, Gifts, Awards
David Garrard: Louisville Magic Club Liaison
Christy Henson: Food and Beverage
Mark Weidhaas: Logistics, Audio Visual
Jack White: Publicity
Tim Drake: Webmaster
Mike Miller: Contest Stage Manager
Mark Holstein: Gala Shows Stage Manager
Bruce Chadwick: Hotel Ballroom Stage Manager
Obie O'Brien: Dealers

By John Moehring

A realization of the projected attendance is the first measure of a convention's success. Then delivering the convention experience promised to the registrants is the next factor that's essential. And whether or not the convention committee's endeavors fulfill the attendees' expectations is what ultimately determines how a convention will be rated — great or good, so-so or disappointing (or "it sucked," as it now seems politically correct to say).

The committee who put together the 2008 I.B.M./S.A.M. Combined Convention in Louisville, which was co-chaired by Brad Jacobs and Roger Miller, managed to attract 1,866 magicians, family members, and aficionados of the magical arts. Having budgeted for 1,800, the committee was off to an exceptional start.

The six-day convention marked the ninth time the I.B.M. and the S.A.M. have joint ventured a convention, the last time being 34 years ago in Miami Beach. Of greater importance, it was the first time in the history of the two organizations that they joined forces to stage an international magic competition. Much akin to the format of a F.I.S.M.,

there were gala shows, lectures, a banquet, and dealers from around the world, with the main event being "The Contest of the Century," a competition that would determine an International Champion of Stage Magic and an International Champion of Close-up Magic. At stake was \$50,000 in cash prizes and performance contract guarantees.

The 24 pages that follow are filled with day-by-day reports, reviews, and recountings of the major events and shows of the convention. The wonderful photographs by Mike Maione serve as proof positive that the convention committee did deliver all things as promoted and advertised.

Were the 1,866 attendees happy with a combined convention that revolved around a Contest of the Century? A quick survey taken at the Saturday night Farewell Party [see "The Survey Said," page 49] indicates that the "daily contests" and the "competition finals" were the Most Liked Events of the majority of the attendees. And when asked, "Should there be another combined convention with an international championship contest?" a whopping 88% answered, "Yes."

DAY ONE
MONDAY, JULY 21

Welcome & Opening Show

By John Moehring

A crowd of close to 1,500 convention attendees gathered in Whitney Hall at the Kentucky Center for the Performing Arts at 12:30 p.m. for the first official event of the 2008 I.B.M./ S.A.M. Combined Convention. A two-page spread of the fine-looking 104-page souvenir program was devoted to the *Welcome and Opening Show*, stating we were about to experience “a truly international extravaganza that will kickoff a week that really is All About the Magic!”

But before the magic could begin, there was a quarter of an hour of pomp and circumstance to get out of the way. The houselights dimmed for an overture of electronic music that was synced with the theater’s computerized light system and seemed to play to infinity and beyond. After four or five minutes of monotonous sound-‘n’-lights, an offstage announcer introduced convention co-chairmen Brad



Combined Convention Co-Chairmen Roger Miller and Brad Jacobs.

Jacobs and Roger Miller, who after a team welcome speech introduced the outgoing I.B.M. and S.A.M. presidents Phil Willmarth and Maria Ibañez respectively, who after their

speeches were honored with a “Magic Week in Louisville” proclamation from someone in the Mayor’s office who was a member of the Louisville Magic Club (the Lance Burton/Okito I.B.M. Ring 64 and Mac King S.A.M. Assembly 215 combined). And it wasn’t until hometown hero Mac King hit the stage that the proceedings finally got around to being “all about the magic.”

Everybody loves Mac King. Without doubt, most magicians in the audience had seen his act countless times, yet all were instantly charmed and totally disarmed when Mac rolled right into his tried-and-true Cut-and-Restored Rope routine. And everyone present would have been more than happy had he continued with his Card in Fly and Aerial Fishing and all those tricks that have made Mac King the Las Vegas sensation that he is. However, the convention show producers had decided to have Mac be host to the



Comedy prevailed when hometown favorites Mac King [left] and Marty Pollio [above] took to the stage.



Veronin [left] spoofed the sophisticated sorcerer, while David Garrard gave the Zig-Zag a different twist.

Linking Rings routine; and a Frosty the Snowman themed Aerial Suspension, creating a photo op for the family’s Christmas card, the exact same scenario Garrard and company featured on one of the shows of the S.A.M. National Convention in Louisville in July 2006.

Next up was stand-up comedian and juggler Marty Pollio

(who also hails from Louisville). While Pollio’s deadpan style was funny and his ball juggling was above average, it’s a bit of a mystery why he was included in a show that was purported to be “all about the magic.”

But thank heavens, the combined convention’s Artistic Director (that’s show producer Hank Moorehouse) had saved some of the best for last. *The Mac King Comedy Magic Show* went into overdrive.

“Let’s go camping!” Mac shouted, as he presented his sneaky, scary, silly, and downright startling presentation of the Shadow Tent illusion. And I don’t think there’s another person on the planet who can garner an ovation by merely whipping out a paper sack — Mac did when he did his signature Hiccup Cure stunt. For an

international extravaganza this afternoon.

Enter Voronin of the Ukraine. Sophisticated sorcery was lampooned to the hilt when this stately clown prince — a regular star of the Teatro ZinZanni extravaganzas in San Francisco and Seattle, as well as variety theaters in Europe — controlled the theatrics of the Whitney Hall stage with his magical hand-held remote.

Mac returned to perform his signed Card to Pocket (and fly, and a hermetically sealed cereal box, too) and do his amusing and confusing Thumb Tie with garbage-bag twist-ties, before introducing Louisville’s own illusionist David Garrard. Working with friends and family, Garrard presented a Zig-Zag illusion, transforming an inflatable doll to a real, live girl; a dueling



encore, it was Cards Across with the slightly surrealistic and highly hilarious “Mac King Cloak of Invisibility,” which had the audience cheering and on its feet. Living proof that magic is fun. Long live the King!

As a final stab at making the afternoon extravaganza a wee bit more international (Veronin was the only performer who wasn’t from Louisville), the house curtain was raised to reveal a band of wailing bagpipers. Attired in full tartan regalia, the Louisville Pipe Band (yep) played and paraded their way out of the theater and back toward The Galt House, the hotel that would serve as combined convention headquarters for the next six days, and late nights, too.

The Secret No One Tells You A lecture by Jim Steinmeyer

By Richard Hatch

The Grand Ballroom on the second floor of The Galt House’s Suite Tower would serve as the venue for all of the scheduled lectures. There was an elevated platform stage, flanked with two 9 by 12 foot projection screens, and chairs arranged for 1,500 attendees. Nearly all of the seats were filled for this 2:30 p.m. event, which started promptly with a welcome and introduction from Hank Moorehouse.

Jim Steinmeyer is well known in the magic community for his many original contributions and publications. He was the first person Hank asked to create a “Never-to-be-Repeated Lecture” for this convention. The “secret” referred to can be summarized in three words: “Don’t perform junk.”

Steinmeyer’s contention is simply that better magic makes better magicians. The best magicians have always sought out the best magic effects and methods that they could find. Unfortunately, many performers are content to perform mediocre or even bad magic, feeling that their personalities and presentations will compensate. If they simply chose better magic, they would immediately become better magicians.

Steinmeyer offered guidelines for evaluating and integrating material. Finally, he performed and explained five original and entertaining rou-

tines, giving the audience a variety of accessible, non-junk performance material to raise the level of their performances.

The effects included a self-working card transposition with a borrowed deck (The Magician who Fools Himself), a demonstration of hypnotizing water (Solid Water), a transposition of a borrowed watch and a brick (Sonata for Brick and Glassware), a borrowed bill transposition (Fan Mail) and a three phase jumbo Three Card Monte routine (The Full Monte).

The one-hour lecture was well attended and well received. The nicely produced \$25 lecture notes sold out immediately, but will be available for a limited time from www.jimsteinmeyer.com. They include his thoughtful lecture essay and four of the five effects performed (Fan Mail is found in his *Conjuring Anthology* book and the September 2003 *MAGIC*), plus two mentalism effects Steinmeyer created for Mark Kalin and Jinger (Three Part Harmony and The Three Envelope Test).



“Don’t perform junk,” says Steinmeyer.

Close-up Competition Part 1

By Jon Racherbaumer

Because of advance hoopla and the top-dollar prizes, conventioners entered Whitney Hall at 7:30 p.m. with high hopes. Many arrived with airs of scepticism and mild cravings to be flat-out surprised. There are, after all, possibilities of out-of-the-blue moments occurring. Strong efforts were made by organizers to give this contest a F.I.S.M.-like sheen. Four of the six jurists were F.I.S.M.-seasoned — Eberhard Riese, Domenico Dante, Joan Caesar, and Gerrit Brengman — and they were joined by jurors Dale Salwak and R.G. Smith, executive show producers for the I.B.M. and the S.A.M. respectively.

Bob Swadling (Wantage, UK) opened. Having perhaps the most name recognition of anyone because of being a long-time magic dealer and inventor, his overall presentation-personality was as low-key, playing second-fiddle to his inventions: cards changed, a coin zinged into a bottle, and something convolut-

ed with signed cards. He threw in a lame joke about his pants and then flamed out with a flashy Malini Card Sword.

Dai Hewga (Chiba-City, Japan) reeked of gadgetry; however, the effect where cards magically appeared inside the cellophane deck-wrap played to the gallery and looked other-worldly. He was accompanied by his own boom-box, which he later used as the final destination of a signed card. He seemed undeterred by a few glitches, hoping that his original effects would win the day. Cory Bragar (New York, USA) radiated confidence and her forceful voice was a perfect fit for the lawyerly character she portrayed. Her routine was top-heavy with jokes, puns, and visual bits, but her costume change into a Ninja was a nice touch. The audience, however, began wincing as she repeatedly tried to crack a board in half.

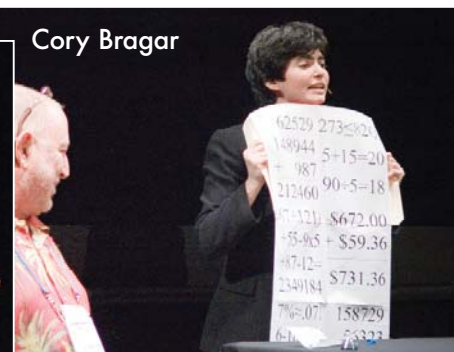
Rod Chow (British Columbia, Canada), a *M-U-M* cover boy and frequently seen competitor at conventions, literally has a “money act.” Playing Mr. Money, his act is thematic to the max and calculated to win contests and the hearts and minds of rank-and-file magicians.

Gino Mozzarella (Colorado, USA), a.k.a. *M-U-M* cover boy Danny Archer, had the most obvious character-driven act in the contest. Playing a lower-echelon “wise guy” he peppered his patter with well-placed jokes. His magic was coeval and well-done: Three-Fly, four cards to four pockets, dice under fedora.

Omar Ferret (Florida, USA), despite disjointed musical changes, performed a series of eye-candied feats with balls, silks, cups, appearing shot glasses, bottles, and lots of chink-a-chinking.



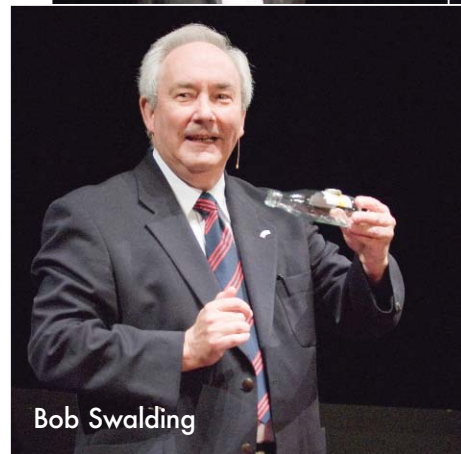
Dai Hewga



Cory Bragar



Danny Archer



Bob Swadling



Rod Chow



Omar Ferret



Michel & Yannick



Eric Leclerc



Pat Perry



Ali Shelley



Christian & Katalina



David Minkin

Michel & Yannick (Quebec City, Canada) were literally a human deck of cards. Taking a truly deviant approach, their “body of work” actually uses their bodies: meat-ware as metaphor. Their act of course was not close-up, but won over the audience. Card guys appreciated the line, “Did you know that Alex Elmsley had four children? But we’ve only seen three of them!”

Eric Leclerc (Ontario, Canada) sauntered onstage in a bathrobe, beamed in from a distant cuckoo’s nest, playing a benign nut job — a guy who tells us “when Rice Krispies talk,” he listens. He sustained this challenging premise throughout, whether it was putting a bottle cap in a bottle or performing Guy Hollingworth’s “Waving the Aces” with jumbo cards. His gallery-pleaser was causing the sleeves of his bathrobe to roll up via his “invisible friends” and got a huge laugh when he stopped short, glared at the judges, and shouted: “Hey!

Are you guys judging me?”

Ali Shelley (New York, USA) played the part of a diligent flight attendant. Her turn was loaded with puns and gags — all aimed at aspects of air travel everyone knows and detests (“Oxygen masks will drop and for a small surcharge you can breathe...”).

Christian & Katalina (Indiana, USA) Strictly speaking, this two-person mental code-act was not a close-up act. More suited for cruise ships and waltz-tempo venues, their practiced presentation was probably discounted from the get-go.

Pat Perry (Madetswil, Switzerland) is skilled and apparently knows how to execute good stuff, but the components of his act seemed to spill out of a blender — part mime, part Spanish dancer, part Ninja. Although he

made cards penetrate a glass pane, end up in a shoe, and on the end of a sword, the audience changed its mind too many times, deciding on exactly who he was and what he was trying to prove.

David Minkin (California, USA) was much better than he came across. This was partly due to his softly selling approach that featured nuances and precious moments obfuscated and weakened by the size of the theatre. His coin work was immaculate and puzzling, and some of his effects expressed a wonderful plasticity and dream-like quality. The segment, using audience participation to simulate the sound of rain was quite affecting. His act is on a cusp of future excellence.

Dealing for Fun and Profit

By R. David Michaels

The majority of the 62 dealers exhibiting during the week of July 21-26 reported that sales were beyond their expectations. Several had the pleasure of selling out of their latest releases before midweek of the convention, with one dealer, Creative Magic (of Shadow Tent fame), completely selling out of their featured illusions the first night the Dealers Room opened. Some attributed the good business to the fact that there were so many hours of the day with no events or shows scheduled that the Dealers Room became the ideal place for everybody to go to socialize, schmooze, and shop.

Merchants of magic exhibiting this year in the spacious Archibald Cochran Ballroom of The Galt House were Magic, Inc., Norm Nielsen, Elmwood Magic, Mark Mason (UK), Bob Little, Yigal Mesika, UGM Magic (Japan), Spider Magic (Germany), Sean Bogunia, B.J.W. Magical Jewelers, Paltergeist Unlimited, Joe Mogar, Card-Shark (Germany), Magic Backdrops, Spider Magic (Germany), Wellington Enterprises, Michael Ammar, Magic Fukai (Japan), Alakazam Magic (U.K.), Fantasio, J.P. Jackson, Iong (Macao), Joe Porper, Fantasma Magic, Daytona Magic, Mike

Powers, Bob Miller, Wladimir (Slovenia), Creative Magic, Jim Pace, Mahka Tendo (Japan), Domenico Dante (Italy), Dick Barry, Axtell Expressions, *Genii the Conjuror's Magazine*, MAGIC, Henry Evans (Argentina), Medieval Magic, Joker Magic (Hungary), Dazzling Magic, Magic Land (Japan), Seo's Magic (Japan), Koujou Sugaya (Japan), David Ginn, Paul Gertner, Chris Kenworthy, Charles Gauci (Australia), Kikuchi (Japan), Trevor Duffy (South Africa), Bob Swadling (UK), H&R Magic Books, Wayne Dobson (UK), Meir Yedid, Duane Laflin, Brad Ross, Losander, and the I.B.M. and S.A.M. booths.



The Dealers Room was always bustling with activity.

Stage Competition Day 1

By Steve Marshall

It's high noon in Louisville, and it's post time. Not out at Churchill Downs, but instead, onstage at Whitney Hall, where it's day one of the stage competitions. The contestants will be in the race for the People's Choice Stage Award, with its winner-take-all purse of \$10,000. The first performer is at the starting gate. It is announced that each entry will only be given a simple, name-only introduction. And with that, they're off!

An Ha Lim from Seoul, South Korea was first out, beginning with slow and deliberate productions of blank white playing cards. All of a sudden, the cards started changing colors as they appeared and the music accelerated. Then, multi-colored fans and clusters of cards appeared from both hands, above his head, and even behind his back. When he finished the crowd leapt to their feet with a standing ovation, sensing they just might have witnessed a winner.

Just Alan from New York, dressed in traditional fakir wardrobe, started out with a narrated slide show of his travels through India, which led into a presentation of the Sands of the Desert.

Magic Chaiki from Japan followed with an act where he produced large feathers and levitated them. The act included costume changes of his assistant ending with her wearing a Las Vegas showgirl costume and he dressed in a sequined tuxedo.

Yu-ko from Japan presented a Japanese "matsuri" (festival) theme act with several costume changes. Her act included a cut-and-restored ribbon, parasol productions, dancing butterflies, and the production of a traditional lion dance costume.

David Boyd from New York was up next and was welcomed with cheers from his fans when he was announced. He did a classic routine of dove productions, billiard balls, and card manipulations, producing jumbo card fans for his finale.

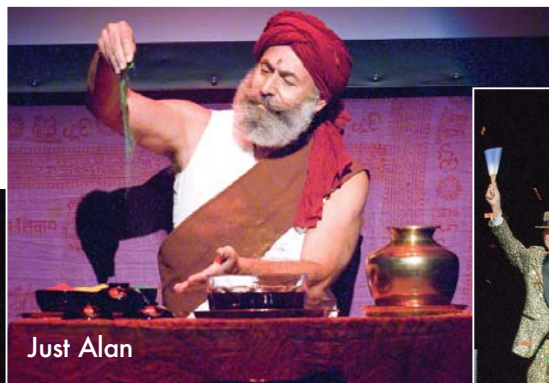
Bin Lin from China seemed to be having prop problems from the beginning, but she kept

going. She produced flowers and silks, but the objects were hard to see since her costume was so colorful. She ended with the production of two large twirling streamers.

Michael Tallon from Texas did a unique and creative card routine where he used clips of recorded lyrics from numerous popular songs as his "dialogue." He had a funny bit when his "snowstorm" with sheet music pages didn't go quite right, garnering big laughs and a standing ovation.



An Ha Lim



Just Alan



David Boyd



Magic Chaiki



Michael Tallon



Yu-ko



Bin Lin



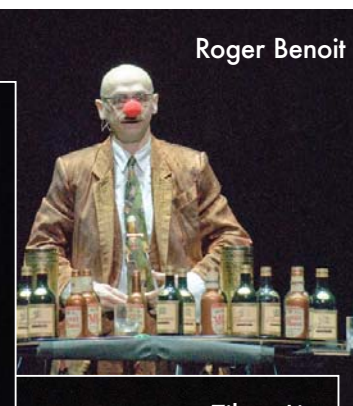
Kohtaro Fujiyama



David Kaplin



Sterling Dietz



Roger Benoit



Elliot Zimet



Zihao Liu

Sterling from the state of Washington came on strong with a black-light poi spinning routine, a LED-enhanced Dancing Cane, and D'Lites. A Linking Ring routine and some card manipulations followed, all set to hip-hop music.

Roger Benoit from Quebec City, Canada presented an entertaining Multiplying Bottles routine, with a nice bit where he tied silks around the bottle or placed them in the glass to prove that the bottle and glass did change places.

Kohtaro Fujiyama presented a smooth Linking Ring routine in traditional Japanese wardrobe and with traditional Japanese music.

He ended his act by producing a six-foot diameter ring, which he stood inside of and spun around the stage while simultaneously doing a costume change.

Zihao Liu from China performed card manipulations, ending with rapid-fire card productions that included confetti appearing with each card.

David Kaplin from Ohio did a comedy variety act that included magical moments and mishaps with a bowling ball. He ended by playing a rousing rendition of "The Impossible Dream" on a balloon, garnering huge laughs and

a standing ovation.

The last contestant of day one was Elliot Zimet from New York who had an urban street themed act. He produced doves from unlikely places, such as a mess of wires ripped out of his boom box. He finished with the production of a cockatoo and a macaw.

Part two of the Stage Competition took place on Wednesday.

Vernon and Marlo - The All-time Greats of Card Magic A lecture by Jon Racherbaumer and David Ben

By Richard Hatch

In a 2006 poll of the 200 attendants of the annual invitational Fechter's Finger Flicking Frolics in Batavia, New York, Dai Vernon and Ed Marlo were selected as "the two magicians most responsible for the advance of modern card magic."

Hank Moorehouse invited Vernon's biographer David Ben and Marlo's erstwhile amanuensis Jon Racherbaumer to the combined convention to discuss the achievements of both men.

At 3:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Racherbaumer was up first and painted a personal word portrait of his mentor, aided by large-screen archival footage of Marlo performing some of his originalities, and Marlo students Bill Malone, Allan Ackerman, David Solomon, Randy Wakeman, Steve Draun, and Simon Aronson commenting on his legacy.

David Ben followed with a resume of Vernon's life, accompanied by video recreations filmed by Daniel Zuckerbrot of some of Vernon's specialties, as performed by Ben, such as the Trick that Fooled Houdini, Dad Stevens' cull Riffle Shuffle work, the Double Undercut, Topping the Deck, Triumph, Slow Motion Aces, and Twisting the Aces.



Jon Racherbaumer and David Ben told what made the greats really great.

The influences on Vernon of the importance of naturalness, virtuoso technique, and improvisation were traced, as well as Vernon's influence on his own and subsequent generations.

Although neither Racherbaumer nor Ben offered lecture notes, copies of the recently released *Cardially Yours*, a compilation of Marlo's books, and Vernon's *Revelation* were available from the publishers, Magic, Inc. and Mike Caveney's Magic Words respectively, following the presentation.

North American Gala

Giggles and groans arose from the Tuesday night Whitney Hall audience as the houselights dimmed and they heard the first few bars of what a lady sitting in front of me called, “the gogo lightshow overture.” To the chagrin of many convention attendees the very same four-and-a-half-minute piece would be repeated at every one of the gala shows. (I later learned it is a Mannheim Steamroller recording called “Toccata” and Terry Schwarz, head electrician at the Kentucky Center, programmed the moving lights sequence at the request of combined convention Artistic Director Hank Moorehouse, who felt it would be good preshow piece to “settle down the crowd.”)

As the stage lights came up and revealed a table full of magician’s stuff with a hand-lettered DON’T TOUCH sign, a jump-suited janitor (mime Ardan James) wheeled out a dolly holding a large cardboard box. The temptation to snoop was too much and whenever he snatched a prop from the table there was a magical misfire of sorts, eventually resulting in the accidental appearance of a beautiful girl assistant.

Emcee for the evening Stan Allen was then introduced and he brought Arden James back out for a much-deserved curtain call. Dale

Salwak was introduced and performed his classic act of manipulations — Vanishing/ Appearing Cane, Fountain of Silks, Miser’s Dream, card productions, and Zombie.

Michael Finney delivered 12 minutes of fabulously funny stand-up material before buckling down and getting some even more serious laughs with his comedy magic: Six Card Repeat, a money trick with an absolutely perfect 14-year-old comic foil from the audience assisting; his comedy-club Cut-and-Restored Rope routine, which was actually a bit “uneasy” for some, because of the age of the young girl selected to respond to lines laced with sexual innuendos; and finally, Card on Forehead, performed with comedic timing that’s best described as “uncanny.” Michael Finney is the consummate pro and he was

given a sustained standing ovation.

Danny Cole is an innovative young magician whose act is full of visual surprises with a cinematic special effects feel. One is a “Chair Suspension” of a different sort — the chair floats away as he remains suspended in midair. And I’m still scratching my head over that artwork bird that slowly flew off the page of a magazine.

It was Killer time. A wave of applause rippled through the house as Stan Allen fetched the familiar PETCO box, the home away from home of the renowned rabbit puppet



Michael Finney playing with a kid’s head, Kohl & Co., and show closer James Brandon.



named Killer. Unfortunately, midway through the wheedling and cajoling of Killer to find a card selected by a lady in the audience, an unidentified flying playing card prematurely popped out of the box and plopped onto the floor. But in the end, aplomb prevailed over the goddess of glitch. Stan simply picked up the card and revealed that it was at least the right card.

Once upon a time, the spoof act of Kohl & Co. was outrageously funny; however, their appearance on this show was only mildly amusing. The act seemed tired and dreary. Perhaps this is because magic conventioners have seen Kohl drop his trousers a dozen times too many over the last three decades.

Illusionist James Brandon closed the

show. Clad in flowing cape and otherworldly costume, he opened with a six-minute blazing swords and bewildered-appearing birds routine, then exited the stage. An interminable stage wait in the dark was followed by some false starts and stops and soundtrack cues, until everything was set for a fast presentation of his Light Bulbs Through Girl illusion. James then told a story of a sixth-grade schoolteacher who dressed as a clown and influenced him to take up magic, as he sketched out his teacher’s likeness. When the

sketchpad was held in front of his face the black-and-white page turned to color, and when the pad was lowered James was seen to be wearing a red nose and clown make-up.

Donning a straitjacket and an evil-looking dungeon torture mask, Brandon was chained to a restraining rack on a platform to perform a bizarre body-double illusion. When the masked performer who emerged Interlude-like from the chest cavity of the masked performer that was supposed to be Brandon stepped to the stage and removed his mask it was James, and his out-of-body double faded into the cabinet’s dark shadows.

And thus ended the *North American Gala*, a two-hour show that left the audience amazed, amused, and slightly confused.

Something New Every Day

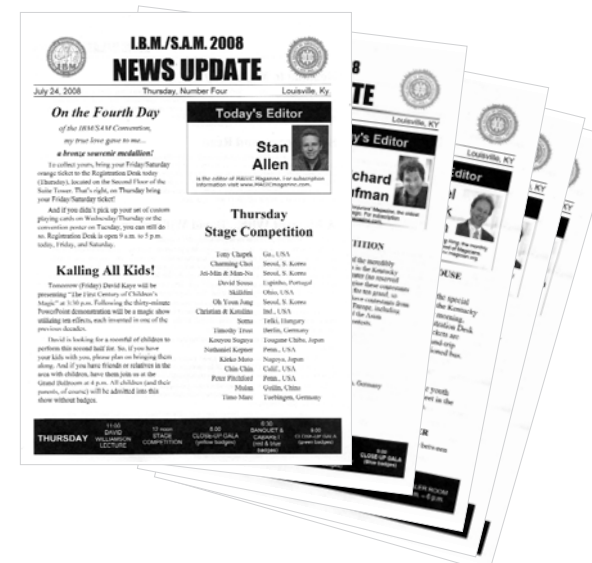
By R. David Michaels

In addition to the beautiful 104-page souvenir program and commemorative lapel pins that were found in each registration packet, there was a series of coupons that could be redeemed each morning of the convention for the “I.B.M./S.A.M. 2008 Gift of the Day.” Monday’s gift was The Case for Close-Up, a magic set of seven close-up tricks with a leather case to carry them. Other gifts for the week included a one-sheet poster featuring the stars of the combined convention, red and blue back poker decks with the convention logo that were created by Kardwell International, and a handsome bronze souvenir medallion.



Throughout the week of July 21-26, registrants were able to pick up a copy of the *I.B.M./S.A.M. 2008 News Update*. A team of six different editors — Stan Allen, Joan Caesar, Bruce Kalver, Richard Kaufman, John Moehring, and Samuel

Patrick Smith — took turns turning out the daily bulletin which kept everybody abreast of any schedule changes and late-breaking contest news.



The nightly “gogo lightshow” [above and clockwise], magical mime Ardan James, Dale Salwak, Danny Cole, Stan Allen and Killer.



The Business of Being Funny

By Michael A. Perovich

The convention planners could hardly have assembled three funnier and more notable comedy magicians than David Williamson, Michael Finney, and Mac King. It just doesn't get any better or any funnier than this. These three top professionals were perched on stools before a standing-room-only crowd of 1,500 attendees hanging on their every word. Lion tamer duties fell to Stan Allen, who knew the whole affair was out of control from the minute David Williamson pushed the podium through the curtain to dominate the proceedings.

Finney is the quintessential comedy magician, being both a fine comedian and magician. King has his own successful long-running Las Vegas daytime show featuring his seemingly homespun, but actually more sophisticated that it seems, humor and intricate magic. Williamson brings a relentless sense of anarchy combined with the immediate and correct impression that he might do anything at any time.

Laughs came fast and furious and at first it seemed no serious answers would be given to any of Stan's prepared questions. And when Michael and Mac did try to give serious answers, David immediately stepped in to derail the train of thought. But before the morning was over, all three had made candid responses, although levity was always lurking in the wings.

"Are you a comedian who does magic or a magician who does comedy?" Stan wanted to know. Michael professed that he was an entertainer; Mac stated that at the end of the day he was a magician; David launched into a hilarious "running for office" speech.

When asked if they had begun as serious magicians or always had a bent for comedy, Fenny described his start as a bartender who picked up some tricks to increase his tip potential, but also noted he had used comedy as a defense mechanism since his childhood. Mac King told the assembly he was the least funny member of a family whose dinner table repartee had always been a comedy free for all. Williamson made the statement that he had been born in a log cabin and raised by wolves. Williamson did eventually take a 180 and describe his initially serious approach to magic when he first visited the Tom Foolery in



Keeping the comedy spotlight in the right perspective, comedy magi David Williamson, Michael Finney, and Mac King relegate panel moderator Stan Allen to the ballroom floor.

Atlanta. [This was Tom Mullica's Magic Bar Theatre that was open from 1978 until 1987.]

Sensing a chance to get some fairly serious answers, Stan Allen asked about each's inspirations. Mac's came from his early days appearing on theme park shows with Lance Burton and observing his meticulous preparation. Michael noted television and comedy club performers who had influenced him, including Jay Leno, Larry Wilson, Ricky Jay, Jay Marshall, Karrell Fox, Jack Sutherland, Billy McComb, Henny Youngman, Louis Nye, and Professor Irwin Cory among others.

Jay Leno, by the way, had advised both Finney and King to get rid of the magic and stick to comedy. Although neither followed Leno's advice, Finney noted that it was important to him to demonstrate his straight comedy chops and he, in effect, opens for himself by starting off with a stand-up routine. This warms up the audience, allows him to judge how a particular group will respond and serves to scout out likely assistants for the comedy magic to follow. Mr. Finney also commented that he had slowed down his delivery, as it was important for the audience to adjust to the cadence of his

voice if they were to track on the lines to follow. David Williamson felt himself ill-suited to comedy clubs and focuses on corporate venues. He thought that Michael Finney and Mac King were more suited to comedy venues, although it is hard to imagine why.

Responding to a question about scripting Finney seemed to favor a general show outline with the proviso that the performer be prepared to modify on the fly as the situation presents itself. Mac King agreed and noted how many funny bits evolve from live performances. All three shared the same opinion and described how this or that bit had been added to their acts due to an adlib or some interface with a spectator.

They stressed the importance of listening to the audience and following their direction as to what is funny, as well as the need to note for future reference "keepers" that develop during performances. Thus the acts evolve, becoming better and better as each performance adds some new nuance, some audience interplay that can be used repeatedly, or some open-ended approach that is likely to bear fruit in future shows.

The discussion was temporarily thrown off track when the mother of a child with Down's Syndrome asked quite seriously if they were aware of how various comments made during a comedian's act might hurt those in the audience with disabilities. Initially stunned into silence, there then followed an awkward period in which each claimed they would never do anything like that and condemned those who would. Unfortunately, these statements were followed by one of the members affecting a tick, another referencing an "Are you deaf?" comment from the previous night's performance (the lecture was being signed), and the third becoming defensive about a routine he did that some considered directed at gays. Geez! This was all followed by comments on

political correctness going too far, and none of this sidestepping gave this very sincere woman, who had clearly dealt with many challenges, a direct and honest answer. One would have to conclude that while none of them would knowingly make fun of an individual physically present, all would in fact go for the types of laughs she referenced in a non-specific sort of way. Realistically, someone who is vulnerable has the potential to get hurt, and this position is a difficult one to justify. All three seem like nice guys and none appear insensitive. Even so, there was food for thought in this awkward exchange.

Other points made by Michael, Mac, and David were 1) you can challenge an audience or a heckler in a comedy club (or give a secret signal to have them bounced), but in a

corporate setting this is verboten; 2) audience reactions are hard to judge correctly; 3) they always look for volunteers with lots of energy who will react visually; and 4) they all had supportive wives who were very important to their stability in such a difficult work environment.

Michael Finney, Mac King and David Williamson are all excellent, successful comedy magicians and all seem to thrive on performing, keeping their acts fresh through the excitement of delivering always-unique live performances that take them down constantly new paths. Even though all had stories of when things went wrong, all three are eminently capable handling most anything that can come up when the stage is under their control.

Stage Competition Part 2

By Steve Marshall

Judges Gerrit Brengman, Joan Caesar, Domenico Dante, Eberhard Riese, Dale Salwak, and R.G. Smith were assembled at their table, announcer Jack White asked that cell phones be silenced and there be no photography or recording, and then, almost without missing a beat, the competitions picked up exactly where they left off Tuesday.

Up first this afternoon was Derek Selinger from Canada, with an act performed to big band music. After a hat production, hat manipulations, and a Flip Stick routine performed with a large straw from his drink, he then performed a levitation that was designed to look like he was getting blown up by the wind while waiting at a bus stop.

Jason Bishop from Pennsylvania presented



Derek Selinger



Jason Bishop



Trigg



Omar Ferret



Red Hat



Timothy Trust & Julie



Andost

holding, and as it came out of his hand the one he “dropped” went back into the table, even though he was standing a distance from the table. It was a nice bit for the magicians and it got a great reaction. He also performed multiplying balls with large balls that he juggled and an unusual effect where a Slinky walked across a tabletop by itself.

As a music box doll that came to life, Red Hat from Korea took to the stage next. His act included lots of mask changes that led into him producing lots of masks at his fingertips like card productions. Sometimes he produced four at a time in each hand.

Andost from Illinois presented a table lamp theme act that began with him producing several lighted table lamps. Light bulbs removed from a lamp changed colors and multiplied in his hands a la Multiplying Billiard Balls.

Timothy Trust and Julie from Germany did a Second Sight act that was made more difficult since they were performing in English, not their first language. Some of the words used to describe things in English were a little different.

Kyoko from Japan charmed the audience with a traditional act that included a fast kimono change, the production of a drum and a branch filled with cherry blossoms, and a beautiful presentation of the flying butterflies.

The Reed Sisters (three of them) from Ohio

took to the stage with a fast-paced set that showed off each of their individual magical talents. They performed a Metamorphosis illusion without a curtain, using only the large cape that one sister wore. The surprise appearance of the other sister in the audience earned them a standing ovation.

Shawn Farquhar from Canada performed an Ambitious Card routine that was precisely choreographed to the song “Shape of my Heart” by Sting. The close-up trick was made visible to the 2,400-seat house as Shawn’s wife focused a camera on his hands and the image was projected on a large screen.

The final contestant of the day was Darcy Oake from Canada. He had a nice moment in his act when he produced a parakeet and then a small cage. The parakeet then walked down his arm and into the cage, which he magically split into two cages and parakeets. The audience was particularly impressed when he transformed a dove into a white ball while wearing only jeans and a T-shirt.

The third and final part of the Stage Competition took place on Thursday.



Kyoko



Shawn Farquhar



Darcy Oake



The Reed Sisters

Southern Hospitality Banquet and Cabaret

By John Moehring

By Wednesday... hump day... midweek... the halfway mark, it was safe to say that most attendees were satisfied with the accommodations and services being provided by The Galt House. The rooms and suites were first class, the spacious Conservatory with its well-tended bar and 24-hour delicatessen was an ideal space for socializing and sessioning, the meeting rooms were comfortable, and the under-the-hotel passage to the Kentucky Center was a real convenience. The annoying wait for elevators before and after shows was the only thing getting a thumbs down. If the catering department could pull off tonight’s banquet and successfully serve the five-course meal that was planned to the crowd of nearly a thousand magic enthusiasts, The Galt House just might be in line for a three-and-a-half star rating.

Because there was to be a cabaret with dinner, when the doors of the Grand Ballroom opened at 7:30, there was a mad rush for tables near the stage. However, once the show commenced (the acts appeared between servings of the progressive courses) some of those eager beavers began to wonder if they’d made a wise move. In the interim, the Double Vision Orchestra provided festive music for dining.

For starters, the soup was cold, but that’s because it was gazpacho. Then at some moment between the first and second course (Galt House salad with choice of vinaigrette or creamy dill dressing), the legendary Terry Seabrooke appeared

onstage to serve as emcee for the evening of epicurean entertainment. After a few choice one-liners and gags Terry introduced Ardan James, who pantomimed his way toward winning the heart of a young lady helping him perform the Needle Through Balloon.

The third course (lemon sorbet) set the stage for more tricks from Seabrooke and an introduction of The King and Presto. “The King” was Duane Laflin as an Elvis impersonator and “Presto” was his wife Mary, costumed as a clown mistress of magic.

As The King crooned (and did a pretty good job of it), Presto wandered about the stage doing standard magic tricks. Elvis eventually took back seat to the main course — filet of beef and lobster tail, garlic mashed potatoes, and asparagus — thank you, very much.

The final cabaret act was banjo-playing juggling-comedian Todd Charles, who came on like gangbusters and attempted, but unfortunately didn’t succeed, to turn the banquet into a party. The audience did not care for his tired sight gags, abrasive banjo picking, and off-the-wall antics. The musical number played on a



Todd Charles and his bizarre music machine.

wacky instrument made up of a touch-tone phone, toy car horns, kewpie doll heads, and miscellaneous stuffed barnyard animals, as zany as it was, received less reaction than the Parade of the Raspberry Mocha Tortes, the choreographed service of the dessert course.

It’s doubtful that there’s anybody who’s been going to conventions on a regular basis over the last few decades who can recall a banquet that was better than this one. The setting was first rate. The food was good. The waiters were a tad slow, but that was dictated by the convention producer’s desire to serve the different courses of the meal between the acts. Had the right performers been booked, the Southern Hospitality Banquet and Cabaret could have perhaps been something remembered as a totally enjoyable experience.



Emcee Terry Seabrooke, the Laflins as Elvis & Presto, and Ardan James and friend.



Stage Competition Part 3

By Steve Marshall

Tony Chapek from Georgia was first up with his entertaining act where he, Tony, tries to get his video nemesis, Tony, to help him find a selected card.

Jei-Min and Man-Na of Korea presented an act with a storybook theme. They went through several costume changes, did lots of silk magic, and performed a surprising levitation of Man-Na where at the end she was in a standing position and walked away.

David Sousa from Portugal presented his romantic F.I.S.M.-award-winning act that included card, silk, and ball manipulations, and the continuing reappearance of a "love letter."

Skilldini from Ohio made a pompous entrance that reminded me of Jackie Gleason's character of Reginald Van Gleason. He presented the funniest, and most surprising, billiard ball routine I've ever seen (actually, the only funny billiard ball routine I've ever seen).

Oh Youn Jung from Korea presented a contemporary act with a traditional Asian flair. She

produced fans and roses, with her fan productions being unique in that she would produce the fans, three at a time, in a circle so they resembled a large flower.

Christian and Katalina from Indiana presented a fun mentalism act with a carnival game theme.

Soma from Hungary was up next, performing an interesting Torn-and-Restored Newspaper, where he actually went into "rewind" mode for the restoration, with pieces that had fallen on the ground floating up by themselves to rejoin the paper.

Timothy Trust from Germany, appearing a second time in the competitions, presented a corrugated box Sword box routine a la Hans Moretti. Funny bits involved smears of blood, a returned wedding ring, and the moment when the girl stuck her hand out of the box and gave him the finger.

Kouyou Sugaya from Japan presented an act with a Zombie-type effect, except that the ball was a mask and the

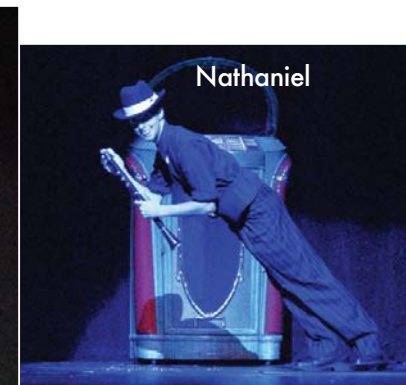
cloth was a kimono, making it appear as if he was dancing with a woman... and surprise — he was!

Nathaniel Kepner of Pennsylvania wore a zoot-suit and danced to swing music as his act included the appearance of a saxophone and a clarinet that then danced around him.

Charming Choi from Korea stood behind an aquarium, stuck his hands in the water, and pro-



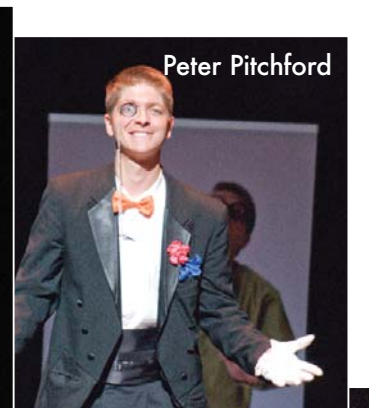
Kouyou Sugaya



Nathaniel



Keiko Muto



Peter Pitchford



Chin-Chin



Charming Choi



Timo Marc



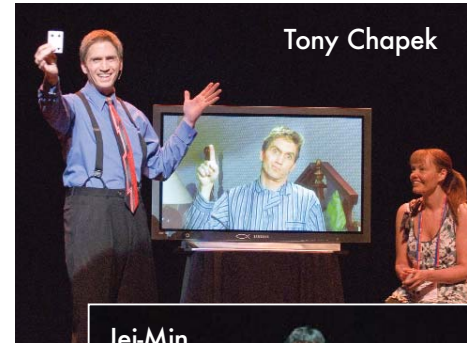
Mulan



Soma



Timothy Trust



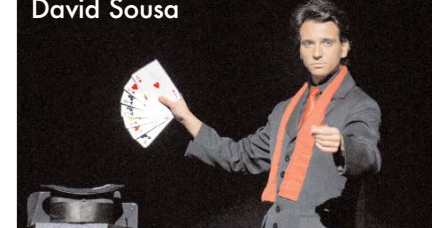
Tony Chapek



Skilldini



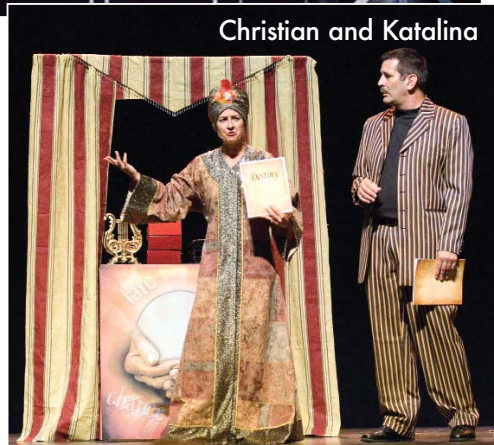
Jei-Min and Man-Na



David Sousa



Oh Youn Jung



Christian and Katalina

duction of a girl.

Peter Pitchford from Pennsylvania did an act where he started out as a janitor cleaning a Cardini display at a magic museum. As he played with Cardini's gloves he started doing manipulations and slowly transformed himself into Cardini, complete with top hat and tails, and the appearance of a female bellboy (as Cardini's wife Swan).

Mulan from China was onstage next with a traditional theme act that included the production of swords, rapid-fire color changing masks, card manipulations, and impressive card shooting.

The last performer was Timo Marc from Germany. He performed an innovative act where he "paints" images on a blue screen TV monitor, and then pulls actual objects off the screen or lets them fly off by themselves. Stepping behind a screen, his projected shadow went through several magical transformations, even though we could see his head and hands at the top of the screen.

Now it was time for the judges to decide on the top six to appear on the Saturday Stage Finals Show.

Organic Magic - A Lecture by David Williamson

By Michael A. Perovich

Whatever the premise of David Williamson's 10 a.m. lecture was, it was quickly lost in the zaniness of the offbeat approach that swept in like a tidal wave. Although plagued by computer glitches, Williamson eventually provided an overview of rejected notions of creativity by Edison, Napoleon, Louis Pasteur, and Obie O'Brien. Stressing that if one is fearful of failure, then following this organic, living organism approach to performance is not for you.

Suggesting that a here and now experience transcends more pedestrian performing, Mr. Williamson described situational awareness and its relevance to decision trees that lead the performer down a sublime path to a unique and satisfying performance. The decision tree PowerPointed on the screen, however, was so complex as to be incomprehensible and produced the requisite laughter.

David selected three volunteers with varying years of experience in magic. Borrowing a cork, a ChapStick, and an eyeball (well, not a real one I expect, but I was too far away to tell), a boy, a teen, and a grey-haired gentleman we came to know as Loudini were sequentially asked to ad lib some magic with the items. The boy gave up and David proceeded to do some

shctick with the items. The teenager repeated what Williamson had done move for move and left the stage to a deserved laugh. This left Loudini who French Dropped the eyeball and put the ChapStick up his nose.

Now came the time for David to demonstrate his genius by making up an exceedingly clever routine with the items at hand. The curtain burst apart as an assistant paraded forth with all kinds of stuff allowing him to launch into a hilarious routine with silks, small Change Bags in large Change Bags, Rocky, and the Bra Trick. Now why didn't we all think of that?

Moving down the home stretch David told stories of magicians who had providence come their way and had taken advantage of it. He then performed some excellent "improptu" magic, doing the paddle trick with a knife and papers, a sugar packet trick (from Mike Caveney) that was visually intriguing.

David finished up with a video made on the streets of Louisville using the components of the magic kit all attendees had received. This effort was quite charming and brought home the point David Williamson was trying to get across. A one-of-a-kind performance of the type he had done out on the street means much more to the person observing it, because they recognize it is unique, and that no one will ever see it again. It is magic in the moment and the moment is theirs.

East Meets West

Close-up gala for the Century

By Jon Racherbaumer

As we magicians inch our way into the 21st century, old and comfortable definitions of what magicians do are being redefined. This is especially true when we examine the *places* magicians perform. When it comes to close-up at magic conventions, particularly large ones, the word “close-up” now seems quaint and imprecise. When the term initially gained currency in the late 1920s (credited to Walter Gibson) it referred to intimate venues where interactive magic was performed for small groups of people. Being close to the action was essential.

Today, however, “close-up” magic more closely resembles stage magic and the “fourth wall,” a transparent scrim, is backed by a giant, mediating AV screen which competes with live action, dispersing and usually diluting it. It is an unaccommodating environment that alters what performers do, including the kind of tricks they assume can be seen and appreciated.

With this in mind, the Close-up Gala that was held at the Bombard Theater (neatly tucked within the Kentucky Center) felt different and in unexpected ways proved to be more interesting than shows of the past.

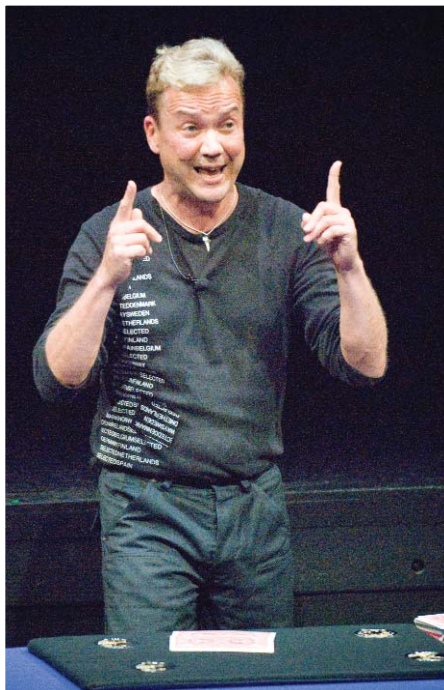
Six performers worked four times on two different days. The theater accommodates 619 people (a hefty number) and each day was filled to capacity. As advertised, the Bombard Theater is “an ideal facility for musical performances and smaller-scale dance and theater.” The steeply raked aisles provide a clear view of the stage from any seat, and feel roomy, comfy, and acoustically absorbent. The large, contending video screen periodically permits viewers to clearly see hands, small props, and certain circumscribed and choreographed actions. These important elements routinely occur within the confines of a tabletop and must be seen. Otherwise, to broaden the action performers must stand or freely move about as when working parlor or stand-up settings. The downside of the “distance factor” is that the audience is conspicuously apart

and performers cannot directly relate to them or establish eye contact. In short, they must work hard to “connect” and create rapport. Two performers, Brian Gillis and Dr. Sawa, invited volunteers to sit with them, creating a show-within-a-show, so that the distantly detached audience could see reactions of their “proxies” and feel less aloof.

On paper it was an impressive, promising line-up: Simo Aalto, Brian Gillis, Hiro Sakai,

Martin Eisle, Dr. Sawa, and Rick Merrill. Glibly emceed by David Williamson, the show moved along at a unified pace. The emcee role is not usually associated with Williamson’s free-wheeling, free-associating, anarchistic, gonzo performing style; therefore, experiencing him in this context seemed strange. His inner wild-child was subdued, obedient, and cordially subservient to a role of merely initiating and connecting. Nevertheless, he turned out to be a droll, snappy go-between, using amusing videos to introduce each performer.

Simo Aalto, a first-place winner at FISM 2000, opened and warily set an upbeat tone despite the fact that his award-winning, signature props had been lost by an airline. Forced to adapt, modify, and present an alternative presentation he nevertheless demonstrated how far the now hackneyed Matrix can be taken. Using regular and jumbo coins, he admirably dispatched his act. But since Martin Eisle’s act is also based on the Matrix motif, in retrospect Aalto’s effort was destined to suffer. Those familiar with his F.I.S.M. act missed the bells and ice cubes.



Finland’s Simo Aalto [above] sans his trademark hand bells; Brian Gillis making close-up Hollywood hip.



Japan’s Hiro Sakai [left and clockwise], Martin Eisle from Germany, the legendary Dr. Sawa, and 2006 F.I.S.M. champ Rick Merrill.

Brian Gillis was next. Although seldom appearing at magic conventions because the setting is not conducive to what he does, Gillis managed maximum impact. More touch-and-go than touchy-feely, he prefers to get inside your head rather than in your face. He is, to use an unusual adjective, an *interocular* marksman. That is, his brand of magic directly hits you between your eyes on its way to your brain, coming at you point-blank with vicious abandon. This kill-shot style is a template of the original Fork’s Hotel style epitomized by Eddie Fechter and his posse. It is a knock-em-dead, razzamatazz, rough-house approach. Guys like Karl Norman, the late Lou Gallo, and Bill Malone have the FFFF gene... Gillis added a West Hollywood, *GQ* sheen to the mix. Anyone within a 20-foot radius of his smack-down performances will physically feel it. Except for the lucky spectators sitting with Brian on stage, this effect was mitigated by the roominess of the Bombard Theater. Although he has not significantly changed his act in 20 years, his act is bullet-proof. And despite gazillions of repetitions, he keeps on rocking like a sun-tanned warrior and close-up “lifer.” His Think-of-a-Card routine is incomparable. Better still, he leaves any arena the same way he enters, grinning, putting the pedal-to-the-metal, roaring in his sports car toward a Hollywood sunset.

Hiro Sakai is night to Gillis’s day, radiating the calm of a dandified Ninja. But he does not camouflage his considerable powers or lord it over others. His tiptoe movements are serene and elegant and he courteously astonishes as he peacefully occupies the stage like someone who could make himself invisible if he wanted. Empowered by carefully enunciated English patter, everything he does is direct, pure and colorful. The mark of a supe-

rior magic act is that the effects seen are not easily summarized, but the emotions felt can be described weeks later. His Bank Night routine with colored balloons is a fooler.

Martin Eisle, another F.I.S.M. winner (Micro Magic in 2006), would be miscast as a magician if you went by his appearance. He looks like a scholar who does not take himself seriously but knows his subject better than anyone. Furthermore, the artifacts of his act look conventionally familiar. One does not expect miracles! His smile, like all the others in the show, is dimpled... but his eyes are studiously conspiratorial. Of course it did not take him long to methodically ratchet up the wow factor. His gasp-producing Matrix is better than advance billing and brought the audience to their knees — just before they bolted upright for a standing O.

Dr. Sawa, internationally known and celebrated because of his literary creations, was relaxed and laid back, even though the audience probably expected more than any legend can deliver. Those familiar with the contents of his best-selling 1988 book, *Sawa’s Library of Magic - Volume One*, were eager to see his novel and poetic approaches come to life... which they did... slowly, surely, and beautifully. His crowning routine (still unpublished) is the Seashell Interlude that must be seen to be appreciated. It was, as they say, worth the price of admission.

What more can be said about the affable and astonishing Rick Merrill? Ever since he

brought home F.I.S.M. Grand Prix honors in 2006, his home-spun, home-schooled, all-American act has been seen in more places than there have been UFO sightings in rural America. If he was a painting, he would be a cross between Norman Rockwell and R. Crumb. Or if this analogy seems obscure, imagine a mixture of John Goodman, Steve Martin, and Huck Finn. Rick was the show’s neon exclamation mark, rounding off ragged edges, mellowing out the disappointed, goosing the blasé, and rousing the faithful. His was the frosting everybody wanted to lick... and did!

Over all, these six pros transcended the physical obstacles of long-distance close-up, showing why they are the acclaimed winners they are. They are *sui generis* representatives of the last century and the current ones the rest of us are trippingly and timidly entering now. It may be safe to say that there are challenging, undiscovered worlds ahead, including *virtual* ones. Therein the “magic” will be as close as it gets and the remaining boundaries between performers and audiences will likely disappear? If and when that happens, everything will be necessarily redefined by the intrepid few that can survive and flourish therein. By then, reviews like this will be redundant and unnecessary.

Close-up Competition Part 2

By Jon Racherbaumer

Charming Choi (Seoul, Korea) invited the audience to sing along and repeat the phrase “Charming, charming, charming Choi” to a mixed result. His gallery-pleaser was a coin Matrix without any covers. This looks quite magical and, as far as magicians were concerned, mechanical. Coins sliding to the corners violated natural laws and the Too-Perfect Theory, too. He also did a robust card-printing routine that did not register on the giant screen because the faces of the cards were not distinct.

John Born (New York, USA), known for his book on Any Card at Any Number, is known for his sleight-of-hand chops. Putting his working surface in his lap was a nice touch, but he — like too many others — performed another excellent Matrix to music. This was followed by a plodding prediction effect that jarringly slowed the quickened pace he initially generated. A named card was discovered by counting the amount of money in a wallet given to the volunteer equalling the value written on the back of the selected card. He ended with a smoothly executed Linking Ring routine, unintentionally marred by the now bathetic approach of paying tribute to a dead grand-

father. He probably sensed the flatness of the audience’s response when he walked off, oblivious to the assisting spectator he left standing there, holding a prop...

Galambos (Tapolca, Hungary) hitched his star to the other all-time prop, the Cups and Balls. He not only came out musically smoking, he used “smoke” to produce things rather than to make things disappear. Assuming that hands should be faster than eyes, he moved too quickly and exceeded the speed limit of the audience ability to understand and fully appreciate his skills. His frazzle-dazzle was accompanied by the retro-sounds of “77 Sunset Strip.” He zinged through some neat card manipulation, performed a version of the Rezvani Marbles From Mouth, and in the end, his balls and coins were big enough to satisfy magicians who believe that “size matters” and “speed” is killer.

Marc Oberon (Nottingham, UK) demonstrated a delicately balanced mix of myth, fantasy,

and mood. The Celtic sounds of Enya’s music helped establish the spirit of his Midas-like conjurations. He performed a named card to wallet, made golden balls multiply, transformed an apple to one of gold, turned a red rose gold, and likewise with an origami swan. This balletic blend kept the audience in his “enchanted loop” and they responded loudly and long, knowing that he would make the cut and probably walk off with the prize.

Tallon and Gorman (Texas, USA) have proven in the past to be a crowd-pleasing act tailor-made for populist conventions. Again, the Cups and Balls were the props, used in a way that would have stunned the Egyptians and bowled over Issac Hawkes. This synergistic and synchronous demonstration is impressive and amusing. To use a now shop-worn phrase, “It is what it is...” It ain’t Italian opera, but it is footstomping Grand Olde Opera, designed to win hearts and not necessarily prizes.

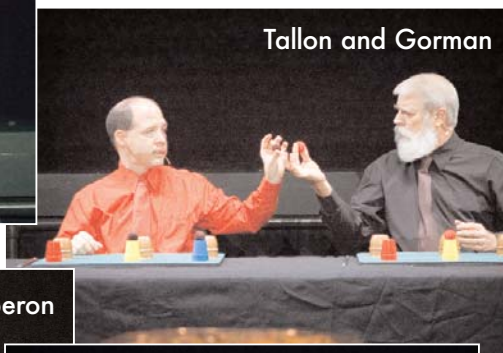
Toto (Tokyo, Japan) was wonderful, strange, almost hallucinogenic act. The garden path he led spectators down was lined with poppies. He punctuated feats by putting his thumbs to his ears and chanting, “It’s ma-a-a-gic!”



Charming Choi



Galambos



Tallon and Gorman



John Born



Marc Oberon



Toto



Patrick Przyseicki



Kiko Pastur



Shawn Farquhar



Satoru



Latko

Cigarettes named “Tom Hanks” and “Meg Ryan” linked and unlinked, rubber bands became topologically antic, a selection appeared under a glass, and — get this! — he explained how some of his tricks were done as he went along. Could this be the new wave of post-modern bar magic? Overall he drew the audience into the fun he was having.

Patrick Przyseicki (Ohio, USA) presented a stilted theme-act jerry-rigged around a travel agency. He gave it a proverbial college try, but as efficiently as he presented it, the approach already had a shop-worn look to it.

Kiko Pastur (La Coruña, Spain) has mastered what he has studied, having studied every card flourish, fancy disclosure, and eye-arresting

technique. Although this type of presentation cause card fanatics to swoon, it plays like a “juggling turn,” lacking the emotional hooks and dramaticurgy judges look for in acts aspiring to win the big prize.

Shawn Farquhar (British Columbia, Canada), already a F.I.S.M. winner and veteran of magic contests, was an odds-on favorite to make the cut and perhaps win the gold. He expectedly performed his award-winning act with urgency and flair — a signed-sealed-and-delivered card in card case, plus his momentous, solidly solid Cups and Balls routine. Farquhar takes no prisoners, riding in the front seat of his own rollercoaster. More gleeful than Barney in his purple suit, he still needs to pause more often than he does. Nevertheless, there were rollicking

moments in his momentum and the audience stood to wildly applaud.

Satoru (Tokyo, Japan) is a peculiar act that featured a toothpick prediction and a card revelation on the soles of his shoes, then socks, and later feet. I always like a good close-up performer who takes off his socks on stage.

Latko (Buenos Aires, Argentina) performed an act that probably took to heart the lessons taught in Eberhard Reise’s book *Foundations*. Using the Cups-and-Balls motif and music, Latko added chess pieces, focus, and plot that all blended together in a fitting climax: the transformation of his close-up pad to a chess board complete with timer clocks elicited a standing ovation.

The World’s Greatest Magic Inventors A Lecture by Derek Lever

By Michael A. Perovich

Britain’s Derek Lever stepped onto the stage in the Grand Ballroom at 1:30 p.m. amid a candy store of small apparatus. Magicians collect old apparatus and magicians buy new apparatus, but magicians seldom get to see apparatus performed. Mr. Lever made up for this by demonstrating piece after piece while his long suffering wife scurried about removing each one after it had its day in the sun.

Tricks with large dice, with tea sets, with cards that diminished all filed by as Mr. Lever praised the inventiveness of their creators, told the history of the magic shops from whence they came, and generally provided a context for their development. Many of the effects were unique versions of standard effects such as Harry Leat’s Drawer Box that locked up and could be handed out for examination. Others were much more intriguing when the secret mechanism was observed than was the trick itself. An example of this was a free choice of a colored ball that that ended up in an upright glass beneath an inverted one in a quite amusing Rube Goldberg sort of a way.

Among the other effects shown was the top-hat-penetrating glass of milk, several divination boxes, mechanical slates, and Davenport’s visual penetration of a card through a steel plate that looked so good I wish he hadn’t explained how it worked. Good fun.



Lever showcased treasures of yore.

International Gala

By John Moehring

With an offstage announcer assuring the audience that “the future of the art of magic was in good hands,” out strolled 11-year-old Sos Petrosyan Jr., son of Armenian and Russian quick-change artists Sos & Victoria, to validate that very claim. Wearing a utility belt stuffed to the gills with playing cards, he demonstrated manipulative skills that were, to say the least, impressive. Joined by nine-year-old brother Tigran, who first demonstrated his expertise with small ball manipulations, the two launched into a sequence of card scaling and spinning and shooting that was non-stop. I lost count of the times the brothers reloaded from their Batboy belts, but their flipping and skipping and slinging and bouncing of pasteboards went way too long.

The ever-charming Topas from Germany served as master of ceremonies for the

[Right and clockwise] Sos and Tigran, the supersizing Takamitsu Uchida, Wayne Dobson with his “human dummies,” and emcee Topas of Germany.

International Gala. His between-the-acts bits and vignettes were highly entertaining and never overshadowed the other performers. After an interactive finger exercise with the audience, showing how magicians stay nimble and quick, Topas introduced one of Japan’s premiere manipulators Takamitsu Uchida. While many conventioners had probably had their fill of card manipulators, Takamitsu’s productions of gigantic card fans that were as big around as automobile tires brought plenty of oohs and aahs.

Jerome Helfenstein from France presented a novel

act combining traditional hand shadows with video projected silhouettes. Watching the computer-generated images linked to a soundtrack wasn’t as magical as watching animations created by human digits (such as those seen in the act of Australia’s Raymond Crowe).

Topas is a musician as well as a magician and performed a fun bit with bongo drums and off beat productions of a lemon, orange, and pineapple before introducing Great Britain’s Wayne Dobson. Despite the toll the multiple sclerosis has taken (it’s been exactly 20 years since it was first diagnosed), Dobson’s comedic timing and acerbic wit are still sublime. As usual, his signature volun-



[Top left and clockwise] France's Jerome Helfenstein, Chinese magic of Huang Zheng, quick-changers Sos & Victoria, Roxanne, and funnyman John Archer.



teer-ventriloquism skit was a showstopper — even with a pair of dummies who just didn’t seem to get it.

Huang Zheng of China presented a beautiful manipulative act with exquisite card productions, silks and streamers, confetti butterflies and blossoms, and an unleaving tree that was most poetic. Sos & Victoria were up next with an ultra-energetic act of the flashy high-speed costume changes that made them two-time Guinness World Record holders.

UK comedy magician John Archer shared humorous stories and swallowed a yard-long balloon; strummed ukulele and sang funny ditties; did a mentalism bit with crayons, divining song titles thought of by spectators from the audience; and wowed the crowd playing a heavy classical piece on his tiny uke.

Most of the interval pieces that Topas performed were true treats — such as his Hawaiian Mystery, an all-eyes-on, total surprise production of a glass of freshly squeezed orange juice. However, why at this

point Topas chose to perform a lengthy sequence of card manipulations, on a show that had already presented four card manipulators, was a total mystery.

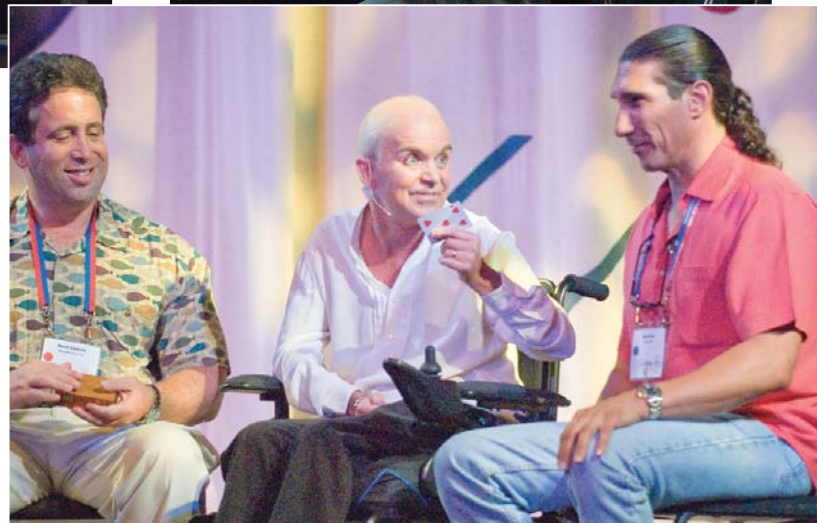
Roxanne, onstage partner and wife of Topas, graced the stage next and not with her magical abilities, instead with an act of what might be called hair chapeaugraphy. Twisting her tresses up and down and around her face in a variety of ways, she impersonated a multitude of famous folks from Cher to Castro to Chewbacca and Princes Leia of *Star Wars* fame. The act, like Roxanne’s beautiful hair, was long.

Topas closed the show with a production number from his successful full-evening show, *Magic Affairs*. After producing a large audio speaker from a shipping carton that was previously shown empty, Topas invited the audience to join in a lyrical “one more” sing-a-long. “One more” speaker was removed from the carton, then “one more,” and another, and another, eventually producing more

than enough treble, bass, and mid-range speakers for a rock concert. When Roxanne suddenly appeared from the carton, the entire cast joined her onstage, and it was time for the audience to reward them all with a standing ovation.

Clocking in at two hours and twenty-eight minutes, the *International Gala* did as promised and delivered a dazzling array of entertainers from around the world. The show was highly reflective of the current trends in Europe and Asia, where novelty and variety acts are showcased and spotlighted.

As the people exited Whitney Hall, most were praiseworthy of the selection of acts. I did, however, hear some grumblers. “There wasn’t enough magic on the bill,” said one attendee from Chicago. “I came to this convention to see the world’s best magicians,” said another. Perhaps the disappointments were not without reason. After all, the theme set forth at the *Welcome & Opening Day Gala* was, “It’s all about the magic.”



The First Century of Children’s Magic

A Lecture by David Kaye

By Steve Marshall

The second of Friday’s Never-to-be-Repeated Lectures was an informative talk by David Kaye, a.k.a. Silly Billy, on the evolution of children’s magic as a performing genre. The presentation began with a David



David Kaye presented a kid’s show within his lecture.

Blaine parody video, featuring Silly Billy performing some of Blaine’s stunts. Then a series of traditional engravings from old magic books were shown, with Silly Billy making observations as to what the kids in the crowd might have been saying. Funny stuff.

It was surprising to learn that the art of performing magic for exclusively for children is a relatively new concept, with the earliest literature on kid’s show magic appearing as recently as 1928. David went through the 20th century decade by decade, pointing out each’s influential children’s entertainers. The decades were also recognized as milestones for the creation of

effects that became kid’s show classics, such as Hippity Hop Rabbits in the 1940s, Forgetful Freddy in the ’50s. He also pointed out certain effects that were used in children’s shows of the past wouldn’t be acceptable now, with his prime example being a trick described in 1928 that involved an opium pipe!

After discussing how the challenges of performing for children have basically remained the same over the years, David invited about two-dozen children up onto the stage and performed an effect from each decade of the 20th century. Using the original presentations (even referring to the old instruction sheets occasionally for patter lines) illustrated how the kids were just as entertained by the tricks today as they would have been back then. (Just in case you were wondering, David did not do the opium pipe trick.)

This was a most entertaining lecture and everyone present enjoyed the kid’s show within the lecture. Some of the adults were even shouting out and feeling like a kid again!

Frances Willard in Conversation

By John Moehring

Celebrating the release of the book *Willard – A Life Under Canvas*, publisher Mike Caveney interviewed Frances Willard, daughter of master magician Harry Willard, about her life growing up on a traveling tent show. The late-night event was scheduled to begin at 10:30, but did not start until 11 because of the overlong *International Gala* at Whitney Hall. Yet, the crowd of 500 who gathered in the Grand Ballroom of The Galt House stayed beyond midnight, completely enthralled by Ms. Willard’s recollections of a bygone era of magic history.

Joined by *Willard* author David Charvet, numerous vintage photos of the Willard family and the show were projected onto the large screens, as the conversation focused on the show-business triumphs as well as the behind-the-scenes tragedies of the *Willard the Wizard* show. Charvet told of how Willard’s extravaganza under canvas would play small towns throughout the South for a full week, presenting three completely different shows with ever-changing featured illusions such as the Cannon and Nest of Trunks, the Welded Boiler Tank Escape, and the Spirit Cabinet.

There were stories of the catastrophic

blow downs, where storms literally flattened the theater and its stage full of props and equipment, and the house car fire that not only turned the family’s worldly possessions to a heap of ashes, but also destroyed the cashbox with the show ledger, receipts, and the money from an entire season. Frances told of how she and her sister Madeline were “raised and educated on the road,” enrolling in a new elementary school in whatever town they were appearing, saying they attended in excess of 300 different schools.

Frances told of how her father waited until she was a teenager before he felt it was time to teach her the secrets of the Willard Spirit Cabinet. There was much discussion of Willard’s Thumb Tie and the impact his method had on other magicians, and how Willard once told

Virgil, “I would give it to you if you could do it, but I know you can’t,” implying there was something unusual about Harry’s thumbs?

Caveney wrapped up the proceedings by saying that all the true tales of this remarkable wizard from Texas who had no peer in 20th century magic could be found in the beautiful new *Willard* book, and he, David, and Frances would be more than happy to sign any books that were purchased.



Caveney, Frances Willard, and Charvet brought the pages of the book to life.

DAY SIX

SATURDAY, JULY 26

A Little More than a Lecture of Tricks

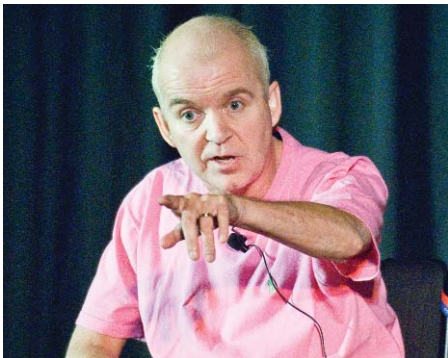
A Lecture by Wayne Dobson

By Michael A. Perovich

Beginning at 9 a.m. sharp, Mr. Dobson stated he would alternate teaching tricks with opening up the floor to questions of any nature. He performed his cabaret opener, David Hoy’s Tossed Deck, showing that his simplified method allows you to concentrate on total presentation. The first question fielded had to do with nerves. Dobson admitted having more stage fright the older he gets: “The younger you are the less fear you have.”

He presented a Book Test that used a specially printed book. A spectator had a free choice of any word in the book, where there were only 24 possible words to choose from. Once the first letter of the word was ascertained, you knew the choice.

Changing back to Q&A, Dobson was asked if he thought he was getting a greater reaction to his performances due to his physical condition and, if so, did this bother him? He replied he wasn’t looking for pity but allowed as how he probably got some added applause due to his MS. He still felt, and I would agree, he was doing a legitimately entertaining performance.



Dobson didn’t hold back.

When questioned about hecklers, Dobson came back with the line, “See what happens when cousins marry.” He then asked for a heckle and responded, “F—k off.” He said that since his illness, he didn’t force humor, but also didn’t hold back and was willing to risk the use of swear words, although he seemed to have a sense he needed to be careful about this.

Dobson returned to magic with a clever version of the Invisible Deck. A card was mentally chosen from a pretend deck with various bits of business (“Spread the cards... No, face down... Now remove the Jokers... Did you remove the Jokers? Amazing since the cards were face down,” etc.). Dobson takes the pretend deck, makes a fan, and holds it beside his head, asking the spectator if he can see a card. The mentally selected card is removed from a wallet. The effect is accomplished by using a Thumb Tip with a card pip stuck on it. When he makes the pretend fan, the spectator sees the card on the Tip, and gets the idea. He carries an Ultra Mental Deck just in case.

Mr. Dobson then proceeded with his spectator-vent routine from the previous night’s show, explaining how it evolved to a signature piece. Another bit of business he used was to read the fine print from his bottled water saying the water had taken thousands of years to naturally filter through the soil from a glacier, assuring its pureness, etc. He then read he expiration date.

Evolution of an Act - A Lecture by Eberhard Riese

By Richard Hatch

Eberhard Riese of Stuttgart, Germany is the most successful magic coach today. His students include F.I.S.M. prizewinners such as Topas and Franklin. When invited by Hank Moorehouse to give a lecture, Riese in turn asked Moorehouse to invite a young magician with a “nice” act to perform, and it would be followed by a coaching session.

Riese began with a brief PowerPoint presentation on the aspects of an act that create an impression: first the audience hears the music, then they see the stage setting and the performer’s attire, followed by a reaction to the personality. Then the magic begins and after an initial phase of amazement, they ask themselves *why* the performer is doing these things, i.e., what motivates the performer.

Jeanette Andrews, a young magician from Illinois, was then introduced and performed a flower production act in the character of Eliza Doolittle, the Cockney flower seller from *My*

Fair Lady. A quick change transformed her into the elegant lady as promised in an introductory Rex Harrison (as Professor Henry Higgins) voiceover from the film. She concluded by producing a tea setting and some parasols. The performance was well received.

The coaching began when Riese asked Miss Andrews about her motivation for the act

and how she envisioned her character. He then began to make concrete suggestions on how to restructure the act for greater audience impact: eliminate the voiceover, letting the well-known music set the scene; reverse the order of the flower productions, which had proceeded from large, umbrella-sized blossoms, to very small bare-hand spring flower productions; re-choreograph the quick change, and finally, magically produce Professor Higgins to end. With Topas in the Higgins role,

Andrews walked through the new choreography and final production, demonstrating the practicality of the suggestions.

After the lecture, the half-dozen copies Riese had of his 2006 book on this subject, *Foundations*, were quickly snatched up.



Miss Andrews’ act was coached “live” by Riese.

The People’s Choice Shows

By John Moehring

After the two-day close-up contest, the six competition judges — Gerrit Brengman, Joan Caesar, Domenico Dante, Eberhard Riese, Dale Salwak, and R.G. Smith — had selected six finalists from the field of 24 entries — 75% of the hopefuls had been eliminated.

At 11 o’clock on Saturday morning, convention attendees were given another opportunity to see the finalists perform in the *Close-up Competition Finals Show* at Whitney Hall. They would then vote to select the People’s Choice winner. Obie O’Brien served as the no-frills emcee and announced the acts in the following order:

- Latko
- Tallon and Gorman
- Satoru
- David Minkin
- Shawn Farquhar
- Marc Oberon

There were perhaps minor slips or stumbles for some, and maybe things went a slight bit smoother for others, but for the most part the performers presented carbon copies of the acts that had gotten them this far in the contest. It was evident from the ovations that there were two favorites. But only the tally of the ballots would tell for sure who would be crowned the close-up champ.

Later that evening at eight o’clock, conventioners gathered at Whitney Hall for the last time for the *Stage Competition Finals Show*. The judges (the same as for the close-up contest) had narrowed the field of 40 to a hale and hearty half-dozen. Duane Laflin (Hey, that guy looked an awful lot like that Elvis impersonator on the banquet show) had been chosen to introduce the acts in the following order:

- Tony Chapek
- David Sousa
- Red Hat
- David Kaplan
- Timo Marc
- An Ha Lim

Exactly how the running order of the acts was determined wasn’t announced, whether it was by points scored or just luck of the draw, but it turned out to be a perfectly balanced bill that rivaled any of the galas produced all week. Many people acclaimed this show to be not only the best show of the convention [see “The Survey Said” on the facing page], but also the best show of *any* convention.

Champagne and orange juice were served in the lobby during a 30-minute intermission as the ballots were counted. When the audience returned to their seats, the house curtain was raised to reveal “the cast” of The Contest of the Century. Seated stage right were all the close-up and stage competition finalists; stage left were the outgoing and incoming presidents of the S.A.M. and I.B.M., the competition judges, and the convention producers and representatives of the organizations that would be awarding performance contracts. Center stage was a table with the two trophies and the stack of plaques and certificates to be awarded. At the podium behind the table were Combined Convention Co-Chairmen Brad Jacobs and Roger Miller and Artistic Director Hank Moorehouse, who welcomed all and said, “The time has come.” The I.B.M./S.A.M. International Championship of Close-up Magic and \$10,000 in cash went to Marc Oberon of the United Kingdom. An Ha Lim from South Korea was awarded the I.B.M./S.A.M. International Championship of Stage Magic and \$10,000.



Marc Oberon

An Ha Lim

I.B.M./S.A.M. International Champions of Magic

The I.B.M. presented performing contracts for its next convention to An Ha Lim, Marc Oberon, and Timo Marc; the S.A.M. also gave performing contracts to An Ha Lim and Marc Oberon, as well as Shawn Farquhar, Red Hat, Timo Marc, and David Kaplan. Columbus MagiFest contracts went to David Kaplan and Shawn Farquhar. Abbott’s Get-Together awarded contracts to David Kaplan and Shawn Farquhar, who also got a contract for the next F.F.F.F. Convention. Marc Oberon and David Sousa were offered gala show contracts for F.I.S.M. 2009 in Beijing. The Festival of Illusion in Germany awarded contracts to Ah Ha Lin and David Kaplan. David Minkin and David Kaplan were given contracts for this year’s MacMillan International Magic Convention, with offers to Timo Marc and Red Hat for 2009, and An Ha Lim for 2010. The Club Magico Italiano gave performing contracts to David Minkin, David Kaplan, and An Ha Lin, as did El Duco’s Magic Weekend in Sweden. David Kaplan received a contract for the Japanese S.A.M. Convention, and Marc Oberon, An Ha Lin, David Kaplan, Latko, and Tony Chapek won contracts to perform at the Blackpool Magic Convention. A six-week contract for the 2009 Murray Hatfield Tour of Canada went to Timo Marc, and a contract for the World Festival of Magic tour of New Zealand went to Tony Chapek. In addition, all 12 finalists are eligible to compete at F.I.S.M. 2009 in Beijing.

Overheard During the Confab

By Jon Racherbaumer

Every convention, regardless of size, generates lots of loose talk — casual remarks, wry observations, impulsive assessments, silly asides, and some actual constructive criticism. This heard from afar is any crowd’s chatty din. But when you move within and through such gatherings, you hear snippets and sound-bites in the air. Sometimes this talk is modified, distorted, and repeated; often it morphs into gossip, gospel, or rumor. Then, after everybody goes their separate ways, this twitter and talk takes the shape of an entertaining and utterly human coda — a cereal-box summary to an event that hundreds experienced in their own way.

“Look at this schedule. There’s an awful lot of down time with nothing going on.”

“Mac King was great this afternoon. Wonder why Lance didn’t show?”

“I met Mac’s mother... which clears up a lot of things.”

“The Steinmeyer lecture was terrific. How are they going to top day one?”

“There’s too much free time.”

“I loved listening to Finney, Williamson, and King talk about comedy without explaining it. They were what ‘funny’ is...”

“I had a blast in the Conservatory last night. That’s where all the uncensored stuff happens!”

The Survey Said

Following the International Champions of Magic awards presentation, a mini survey sheet was circulated among those attending the I.B.M./S.A.M. Farewell Party in The Galt House Grand Ballroom. In answer to the questions, “Was the 2008 combined convention too big?” 11% said “Yes,” 89% said “No”; “Was the convention too long?” 34% said “Yes,” 61% said “No,” and 5% were unsure; “Should there be another combined convention with an International Championship of Magic?” 12% said “No,” and 88% said “Yes.”

When asked, “What event or show you enjoyed most?” the responses received ranked these top three in this order:

1. The Close-up and Stage Competitions
2. The Stage Competition Finals Show
3. East Meets West Close-up Gala

When asked, “What event or show you disliked most?” the responses ranked these three items in this order:

1. International Gala
2. Southern Hospitality Banquet & Cabaret
3. The schedule (not enough activities).

“I loved that story about Marlo and the monkey that did second deals.”

“Are you sure this is only day two?”

“There should be more lectures and more teaching magic.”

“I’m confused... the third part of the stage competitions are on day four, but the second part of the close-up contest isn’t until the fifth day?”

“So you think there’s too much free time... You ought to go to Blackpool where you can bitch that you don’t have time to eat and drink or talk with your friends.”

“Talking with the old fossils last night was a hoot. These guys really know their stuff!”

“You’ll have to go a long way to top that lineup on the Close-up Gala — best magic convention show I ever saw.”

“Matrix is today’s Six-Card Repeat. Enough already!”

“Best banquet food ever at a convention, magic or otherwise.”

“Is your soup as cold as mine?”

“I’ll give the food an A and the show a F.”

“I hate Elvis impersonators, but I’d rather listen to Duane Laflin sing than hear his corny jokes.”

“I liked the *International Gala* and the ‘genie with the light brown hair.’”

“I like the unrushed schedule — more time to spend with the pros and learn the real work.”

“Topas doing a three-way with the Professor’s Nightmare deserves an Oscar!”

“Is this the fifth or sixth day?”

“I liked the two competition finalists shows.”

“It’s a given the *International Gala* was the worst thing, but what was the best... Michael Finney?”

“I liked seeing Dr. Sawa.”

“I was just up in the room and looked at the *Genii* Forum. Kaufman posted that the Contest Finals show was one of the best shows he’d ever seen at a magic convention!”

“You got any money left? I wanna buy that Willard book.”

“Convention of the Century, you say? Well, I’m pretty sure I won’t be at the next one.” ❖