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MAGICSEEN MAGAZINE



NATHAN KRANZO:

THE KRANZILLA IS HERE!

MATT STERLING:

MORE THAN A STUNT!

SCOTT PEPPER:

PERFORMING FOR DISNEY...



PLUS:
CLUB LAND
AVOIDING
THE REPEAT
PERFORMANCE
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AND MORE...

THE GENIUS OF DAVID WILLIAMSON

MAGICSEEN: HELPING TO RUIN XMAS SINCE 2003

DAVID GENIUS WILLIAMSON

Over the past thirty years or so, David Williamson has achieved pretty much everything a person can in the magic world. He's been awarded virtually every magic honour available, performed for royalty, appeared on magic TV shows and specials, plus, he's also worked as a consultant for stars such as David Copperfield and David Blaine. His own performances are hilarious and unique, and he is held in the very highest regard by his fellow magicians. Wayne Dobson calls him a true genius and a genuinely good guy. And who are we to argue? Graham Hey puts David Williamson under the Magicseen microscope...



David grew up in a rural area of Southern Ohio, and his father was a farmer who eventually ended up working in a factory, while mother worked for the local university. His two brothers, one older and one younger, both ended up working in L.A. doing editing and special effects for movies and television. So where did David's love of magic come from? "I got a magic set for Christmas at age 8. My youngest brother, Gary took to magic faster than I did. But he took to everything quicker than me. Juggling, sports, playing music... he was a natural," says David. "I made him stop doing magic because it was the one thing that I was good at!" he laughs. "That and art. I had a talent for drawing and painting, in fact at one point I thought I might be an artist. I wanted to make animated cartoons. I majored in Art in college. That quickly went out the window when my passion for magic and performing grew and grew over those early years. I was lucky that I had a supportive mother and she made it a point to feed our interests."

One of David's earliest memories of magic was when he was fooled badly by a magician who visited his school when he was in the fourth grade. "The magician was Sheppherd the Great!" continues David. "Walter Sheppherd was wonderful, he fooled me badly with the colour changing plumes. I didn't even know what plumes were, but they changed colour!" He pauses, then adds, "I still don't know what they are."

It wasn't long before David attended his first magic convention. "My mother found out about the annual Abbott's Magic Get-Together in Colon, Michigan from a magazine article and drove me there in the summer of 1974 and dropped me there with another kid from my area with a pup tent. We camped out in the dairy field and attended the convention. It was the most wonderful weekend of my life. I saw Karrell Fox, Monk Watson, Duke Stern, Tom Mullica, Gene Anderson and Jose De La Torre to name a few. I remember seeing Nile Foster perform the Zombie... it was real magic to me."

"My eyes were opened to the wider world of magic and the crazy, wonderful people who inhabit that world. We would sit around picnic tables in the evening with everyone performing magic by lantern light. I'd never been around such a diverse group of people. Here were judges and post-men and teachers and business men, people from all walks of life coming together in an Amish Dairy field to share their beloved hobby!"

"We pitched our tent in a low spot and it was flooded after an afternoon shower. All of our clothes, supplies and most importantly, magic purchases - mostly books - were ruined. A fellow camper, I don't know who this was but I remember that he was a mentalist, backed his car into the flooded field and helped us salvage our belongings. Then he did something that I'll never forget - he replaced all of our ruined books with new copies from the dealers. That act cemented my fondness for the art of magic which I realised early on wasn't about the tricks, or the secrets or the props... it was about the



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"When I got home my brain was on fire and I knew that I wanted to grow up to be a professional magician. I had no idea how to get there, but there was no question in my mind that it was my destiny. With the help and encouragement of some of the people I met that weekend and the many more I met subsequently I was able to cobble together a career!"

At about the same time, David found out there was a local IBM Ring in a nearby town, and tells me how a kind couple saw him in a candy store trying to hustle the counter girls with 3 card monte and were appalled! "That's not what magic is for!" they explained! Continues David, "Dave & Marcia Richley were a couple of amateur magicians with a little mail order magic business. They took me to the ring meetings and groomed me to be their demonstrator at local conventions. At Ring 5 meetings in Dayton my education continued. Lecturers came through often. I met John Carney when he was 18 years old, I was 15 then. He blew me away with his natural skill and casual manner. Here was a serious student of the art. I had never seen sleight of hand performed so convincingly. He became my magical idol, and to this day he is, for me, an example of how to be a magician, on stage and off. I consider him to be my magical big brother and we have been friends ever since."

When did you first realise that you had a talent for comedy? "My brothers and I were always doing schtick to make my mother laugh. I'd have to say that that was my first training ground. My mother's family all had great booming, screaming laughs. They laughed hard and loud. So we did anything we could do to get that going from Mom and her sisters at family gatherings. We were pretty inventive with silly routines that we still call back to this day to get a reaction from them. I'm sure it's the same for most families. But we really pushed it, we were competing for attention and got good at it. Until we'd go too far and it would end up in a fight or with hurt feelings!"



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So who makes you laugh, I ask? "There are so many!" he considers. "Sitting with Mike Caveney or John Carney or Mac King at a dinner table always ends in fits of laughter. My favourite comedians were George Carlin, Richard Pryor and Steve Martin. But I grew up on a steady diet of the Three Stooges the Marx Brothers and then Monty Python came to our shores."

It's all very well having the talent, but often there is a pivotal moment when you seem to move to the next level in your career. I ask David if he recalls a particular moment for himself? "Not sure, there have been several events that helped me move on to the next phase of my career. Possibly winning the 1981 IBM Close Up contest. Michael Ammar talked me into entering. After that I did a performance in Ken Klosterman's Suite at the convention hotel. Bill and Irene Larson were there and invited me to work at the Castle and Joe Stevens invited me to work his Dessert Seminar in Las Vegas. I got a few

magic convention bookings from that. That helped me get out and meet more people." I ask David if there is one performance that sticks out in his memory? "Hmmm, not sure..." he contemplates, "but one might be the first OperaCadabra benefit I organised ten years ago to raise money for some local charities. I invited John Carney and Mac King to do a stage show with me in Cedarville, Ohio. It was in an old Vaudeville House that was being restored and little used. None of us made any money but they came anyway and we did a crazy, wild show with lots of gags and a big over-the-top finale. My brothers were backstage, my kids and nephews were on spotlights and most of the audience were Williamsons - my Dad had 13 brothers and sisters so imagine how many extended family are about! We raised some money and had a wonderful weekend. It's since become an almost-annual event and we've had Mike Caveny. Bill Herz. Tina Lennert, David Kaplan, John Ekin, Rob Torres, Glenn Singer, Tim Wright and



Charlie Frye & Company. The community here always looks forward to the show."

So where are most of your gigs these days?

"Well, for the last 25 years or so it's been mainly corporate shows, thanks to Bill Herz who kept me very busy all those years. During that last economic downturn the corporate work really dropped off. I tried a couple of cruise ships, (which I had been previously avoiding) and found that I was a pretty good fit, especially on the Disney Cruise Line. For that past 3 years or so it's been mainly Disney Cruises and I'm loving it. Jan 2014 I'm going to be joining the cast of The Illusionists Live touring Australia and Europe. I'm really looking forward to that."

The Illusionists tours seem to have captured the imagination of audiences around the world which can only be good for magic, but what are your personal views on the current state of the industry? "I got into it in the late 60s and early 70s. For a long while the art seemed to be dominated by old men...." he stops to take a drink. "...I often felt that I was the youngest one in the room. Now there seems to be an explosion of interest from all demographics. The internet has changed the way we share. There's arguably good and bad in that, but I think any time people come to magic with a positive attitude and enthusiasm, it's good for the art... I just saw Derek and Helder's show in New York. I'm optimistic about the future of magic."

I know you are about to launch a new project with Luis de Matos, what can you tell us about that? "I haven't wanted to put out another instructional video. But Luis convinced me that there was a deeper story to tell and he was the right man to help me tell it. We spent a week at his studio going deep into the magic I've been performing and enjoying all my life. With the help of David Britland we took the necessary time to document and explain and explore material that I hadn't considered sharing before."

"Luis and David are what I like to call 'organised thinkers' which is something that I'm not. It was an intense week for me because they methodically dug deep into my psyche and memories to tease out thoughts and notions that I would never have been able to articulate without their help."

"I was emotionally drained by the end of the process but I'm glad we did it. I hope that people who already have some of my material take a look at this new project because we go deeper into some of my "standard" tricks that people know of mine and we also have lots of never before seen material and ideas."

"Luis interviewed me at length and allowed me to go off into tangents of unexplored territory that only this long-form format would allow. I know that when I lecture live and go off into temporal tangents, often that

is where the best stuff comes from. Luis knows me well enough that he can expertly prime the pump!"

So what's it like working with Luis? Is he a monster? (laughs) "Luis is an amazing person in so many ways. He's driven but he wants to take you along for the ride. He's a perfectionist but it's not a handicap, for him it's how he operates. I'm in total awe watching him and his incredibly dedicated team tirelessly push ambitious project after ambitious project out the door."

"Whether it's a large scale touring show, an international television series, organising a FISM convention, producing annual street magic festivals, building his own studio, creating political events, producing a world-wide online conference... many of these being planned and executed simultaneously. "My head reels. So for him to dedicate a week to get this DVD project up to his high standards was no small thing. I knew that he would spend as much time and energy to get it right."

"After the FISM that Luis ran in Lisbon he invited me back to Portugal to film some funny insert bits that would appear in his TV series airing at the time. We jumped in a car with a camera crew and literally drove all over Portugal filming in every part of the country. We'd begin at 7am and drive for a few hours, film all day in a location, find a hotel where he made an impromptu editing suite on the dresser and we'd watch the footage and clock time code for hours. After a few hours sleep we'd get up at 6 and do it all over again every day for a week!"

"I was exhausted! But this is how this man lives. That's when I knew I was dealing with a maniac! And this is him off stage. On stage I find him just as amazing. He has gone through so much material in his career that he has an incredible eye for what works for him. He has the charm of a movie star and the comic timing of a stand up comedian. A true showman and I respect him for that as well. He and Vanessa have become very close family friends. There is much love there..."

QUICKIES:

Biggest influence?

Four names: John Carney, Tom Mullica, Albert Goshman and Del Ray... and everyone else I've met in magic.

Biggest mistake?

Agreeing to answer these questions.

Which magic creators do you most admire, and why?

Why are your questions so hard to answer? Too many to name! Juan Tamariz has exploded the notion of what card magic is all about. His methods are devious and opaque. Tommy Wonder always kept the story foremost, but would go to any length to tell it. Gaetan Bloom has a wonderfully evil, creative mind. In any other life these guys would be planning bank heists.

What are the things you REALLY need to know about doing stand up?

People want to like you. Give them a chance to know you. Also, you have to be a brutal editor, if something isn't working, fix it or take it out. Listen to the audience.

What do you feel, 30 seconds before going on stage?

I really do have a little visualisation ritual that I go through. I think "This is the reason I'm here... give these people something unexpected" and also "I'll avoid the shrimp tonight, it gave me the cramps last week."

Favourite effects you've performed in your career?

I always loved the cups and balls. To me it's the essential sleight of hand routine. There is plenty of room for each performer to pour in their own personality. I'm doing a twist on the McComical Deck on the ships these days and I'm having tons of fun with it.

What do you think are your great attributes? And your weaknesses?

My fingernails grow at a tremendous rate, but I can only smile with half of my mouth.

Best advice you've ever been given?

Darwin Ortiz took me aside at an early convention and told me that I owed it to my

parents and the people who cared about me to figure out how to make a living doing magic. He was right and those words motivated me to get more serious about the "business" side.

Also I remember Paul Gertner reminding me that when you start believing what they write about you, good or bad, you're in trouble.

Your hero is?

Passed- Del Ray. Living- John Carney

The last book you read?

Magic Book - Mike Caveney's Wonders. It's the culmination of his life in magic. It's probably the best magic book I've ever read. Even if you don't do any of the magic it's inspiring. He's been another life long friend and he and Tina have been a big part of my life. I could write another essay about my love for them.

Non Magic - lots of time to read on the ships so I just finished the Game Of Thrones series. Loved it.

Favourite memory from the last 12 months?

My son Ben is a wonderful musician, he plays traditional Irish music. Before the last

Blackpool convention, he and I travelled around Ireland visiting magicians and musicians that we know there. It was a fantastic week of great music and magic.

The last time you cried laughing?

Probably at one of many lunches with Carney or Caveney.

But I'll never forget screaming with laughter at a German magic convention in the 80's while watching Tom Mullica dealing with a Zither player who didn't speak English and wouldn't stop playing during Tom's act. I couldn't breathe! It was pandemonium and the audience was roaring.

Tell us 3 things about yourself that people won't know...

1. When I walk my 3 dogs, my cat joins us.
2. As a teen I was a competitive archer.
3. Rudy Coby and I almost killed Billy McComb on a cruise ship 25 years ago by slipping a Hustler magazine under his cabin door. He didn't come to breakfast the next day and at lunch he said "I think someone is trying to kill me!"

What's under your bed?

Meir Yedid's finger

