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HEEBONICS

Magic is not just kid stuff, says magician

By **CARA STERN**
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After 15 years of performing magic shows, Ben Train says he rarely sees a trick that fools him. But when he does, he wants to keep it that way.

It's really special to see something you just don't understand, he says. That's why he loves performing his illusions for adults.

"Everybody thinks of magic as something for children, but I really think it's more intelligent and intellectual," he says. "It's certainly family friendly, but this isn't kids' magic."

The 25-year-old philosophy major first discovered a love of magic when he was eight years old, an interest that he says is not unusual for kids.

"I think all young boys have an interest in magic," he says. "The only difference with me is I didn't outgrow it."

When he was 16, he tutored a child at a house across the street from a magic store, he says. He purchased a trick deck and learned to perform it that night.

The next day, he went back to the store and watched someone demonstrate the same trick – but this time, it was with a normal deck, performed using sleight of hand.

From that moment, he was hooked.

Becoming a magician wasn't easy, he says. It involved fine-tuning his motor skills, learning to speak in front of a crowd and becoming comfortable chatting with a group of strangers.

His mother, Shayne Train, says his personality really contributes to his ability to put on a great performance.

"Part of being a magician is being able to distract people while you're doing the tricks," she says. "He could be a standup comedian as well."

Ben Train says, when he performs, he doesn't lie to his audience. He knows he doesn't have magical powers, and he doesn't let them think otherwise. Instead, he assures them he performs illusions.

He also accommodates his show to fit his audience, even going so far as to perform a magic show for blind people by using tactile tricks as opposed to visual ones.

For example, one trick involves having a blind audience member taste a sweet treat and a sour drink. Without going near the taster, he says he would reverse the tastes of the foods, transforming it into a sour treat and a sweet drink.

He says he loves the feeling of making people happy with his show, and loves performing for sick children.

"It's pretty special to be able to show it to someone who's unhappy or ill, and it brightens their day," he says.

He joined in on illusionist

David Copperfield's Project Magic, which brings magicians into hospitals to teach physically challenged people how to perform sleight of hand.

He loves sharing his abilities, insisting that magic should be inclusive. He teaches a free monthly class at the Browser's Den, at Bathurst Street and Eglinton Avenue in Toronto.

One of the biggest challenges in learning to perform magic was finding people and resources to help him improve his skills, he says. Magicians tend to insist on secrecy, which makes it an exclusive community, and one that's very difficult to break into.

But Train says whether it's an art, craft or philosophy, experts should be willing to take new performers under their wing and teach them a foundation of skills.

"Everybody knows the first rule of being a magician is that you don't tell people how your tricks are done," he says. "But if you're really serious, I'd teach you anything you'd want to know."

His favourite magician is Dai Vernon, a Canadian magician who lived until he was 98. Train describes him as a pioneer of one-on-one magic, such as David Blaine's street magic.

As a young Jew, he sees similarities between the magic and Jewish communities. Both, he says, are very welcoming. No matter where he goes, he says there's always a family willing to share their home or a Shabbat dinner.

"With magic, it's the same thing," he explains. "When I go to a [foreign] city, I don't go to a hotel. There's always someone who will let me stay at their home."

He points out there are several magic stores in predominantly Jewish areas of Toronto, such as the Browser's Den.

Train will perform a show with Asi Wind, an accomplished Israeli magician, at a club in Toronto in mid-June.

The goal, Train says, is to bring more Israeli magicians to Canada. Many of them have moved to North America to chase greater success, so it isn't too expensive to bring them in, he says.

He says his favourite tricks are the ones involving gambling. For example, an audience member might shuffle a deck and, without looking, Train would pick out poker hands such as four-of-a-kind aces or a royal flush.

He learned many of his card tricks from *The Expert at the Card Table*, by S. W. Erdnase.

"It's a hard book to study, and it's a really important book," he says. "There are a lot of people who really like that book, but there are not a lot of people who can actually do the material."

The fact that he does understand the book has opened doors, he says, giving him the opportunity to meet many celebrities.

"There's a lot of people who have had an interest in magic," he says, citing examples such as comedian Colin Mochrie, members of punk rock band Billy Talent and television host Ben Mulroney.

He says the magic world is different from other forms of entertainment. Someone who's interested in movies can't just call up Steven Spielberg for advice. But in the magic community, once a magician knows the person is serious, he or she is usually happy to talk.

But the best thing about magic is it surprises people.

"[With technology,] we're never surprised anymore," he says, explaining that we can use search engines to know exactly what will happen in a movie before we see it. "We know everything that's happening in front of us."

But not with magic. That's what makes it so special, he says. "Magic sort of throws that for a loop."

For tickets to Train and Wind's June 14th magic show at Trane Studio, 964 Bathurst St., visit <http://abracadabaret.com/>.



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