



Magic in South Africa

By Chris van der Maas



South Africa has always been on the periphery. In times gone by it would act as a stopover between west and east, making use of the prevailing trade winds. Kellar spent 6 months in South Africa in the 19th century, performing mostly in Kimberley where diamonds had recently been discovered. He called the ride on the donkey cart between Cape Town and Kimberley “the most uncomfortable of his life”.

Forward to the 21st century and I am happy to report that magic is alive and well in South Africa. There are a number of Societies, the oldest being The South African Magical Society, and these societies are in turn affiliated to The South African Magical Council. There is an annual convention, whilst The South African Magical Championships are held every 3 years. Past winners of the coveted Grand Prix prize include Vaughn Leader, Graham Herbst, Graham Kirk, Kelvin

Willmoth, Lee Eun Geyol and Stuart Lightbody. Graham Kirk was a multiple South African sleight of hand champion, and was without a doubt South Africa’s top technician over the years. He sadly passed away in a motor vehicle accident a number of years ago, but has left a fine legacy in son Viv Kirk, who is a professional close up worker.

The most well known performer in South Africa is probably Martino, who has had over 70 television appearances over the years, including his own series, and he continues to delight audiences to this day, now concentrating on the corporate market.

Another well known performer and innovator, already known to your readers, is Wolfgang Riebe, who has hosted his own prime-time network specials, and has performed in over 117 countries!

There are of course a number of other top class professional performers, but space constraints sadly do not permit me going into detail here (and imagine if I forgot someone!)

In the sixties and early seventies the only bricks and mortar shop in South Africa was Kardani’s, that venerable shoebox situated at 33 Commissioner Street in downtown Johannesburg. Mr Kardani, a true Indian gentleman, stocked the SS Adams range, as well as Indian imports, and with his children

put on a full evening show. When Kardani retired the shop was moved and taken over by Ron Aldo and his partner Michael. The shop was subsequently taken over by Terry Baldwin and Neil Cohen, and finally by Jack Yates, before closing down.

For the last 25 years a bricks and mortar shop has been ably run by Byron Lappas in Johannesburg as The Genii Magic Studio, South Africa. The only other bricks and mortar shop in South Africa is The Magic Shop, situated on the premises of the College of Magic in Cape Town. Here Director David Gore and his dedicated team are doing a tremendous job teaching magic and life skills to youngsters, some of whom come from severely disadvantaged backgrounds. They are in the midst of a major fundraising drive to secure their premises, and I am sure readers will join giants such as David Berglas and Siegfried and Roy in making a contribution. Visit the college at www.collegeofmagic.com

It now gives me great pleasure to introduce readers to our Masterclass contributors, Trevor Duffy and Colin Underwood.



COLIN UNDERWOOD ▲

Colin Underwood is one of South Africa's most versatile entertainers having performed extensively both locally in all types of venues and in the UK in circuses and cabaret. He currently performs in The Middle East and in Spain in top resort hotels.

He started with a magic set nearly 30 years ago and worked his way up through the Supreme Magic era and is greatly influenced by Tommy Wonder and Juan Tamariz.

He has also performed many times at the Edinburgh festival with his unique street show which comprises of a card sword routine on a unicycle. He performed for Prince Edward at the opening of Chessington World of Adventures theme park in London in the early eighties and has appeared on many television shows and commercials in South Africa.

Besides the cabaret circuit in South Africa he also works a lot as a walkabout character magician at corporate functions,

casinos and this year has seen him performing in Malls and Hotels across Dubai.

He is also recognised as South Africa's premier juggler and has won many comedy awards at magic conventions in South Africa. You can learn more about Colin from www.colinunderwood.com



TREVOR DUFFY ▲

Trevor Duffy has been performing professionally for the past 22 years and over the last 8 years, has been touring lecture circuits around the world. He is also known for the Phil Trick and a variety of other magical innovations which he has produced. In 2002 he placed 2nd in the Australian IBM Close up and has received a number of South African championship awards.

Now that you've met our trick contributors I shall hand over to them for our special South African Masterclass.

3 Things You Probably Don't Know About Magic in South Africa...

1. The majority of the South African population still believes in witchcraft. It befalls many unfortunate souls to be falsely accused of witchcraft, getting chased out from their villages, having their houses burnt, and sometimes even being killed. If you are a childrens entertainer planning some performances in South Africa may I recommend you leave your FARMER AND WITCH EXCHANGE ILLUSION at home?
2. Jacques Le Sueur, professional corporate magician from Cape Town, holds the distinction of picpocketing the worlds favourite and most famous politician, Nelson Mandela. After the performance, during which he had stolen the President's watch, he received a letter from his secretary sincerely thanking Jacques for having returned his watch. Wow!
3. Masterclass contributor and top gun comedy magician Colin Underwood started his professional career in the Robert Brothers Famous Circus in the United Kingdom. Whilst performing the Coffin Cremation his hair caught alight and he was only narrowly able to escape!