

# VANIISH

INTERNATIONAL MAGIC MAGAZINE

JUNE/JULY 2015

## EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

STEVE SPILL  
on LYING  
FOR MONEY

ONE HOUR OF MAGIC  
TO WATCH ONLINE

# FREE

BY STEVE SPILL

**FEATURING**  
CLOSE-UP  
STAGE  
MENTALISM

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JEFF HOBSON  
NICK LEWIN  
KEN DYNE  
& MORE

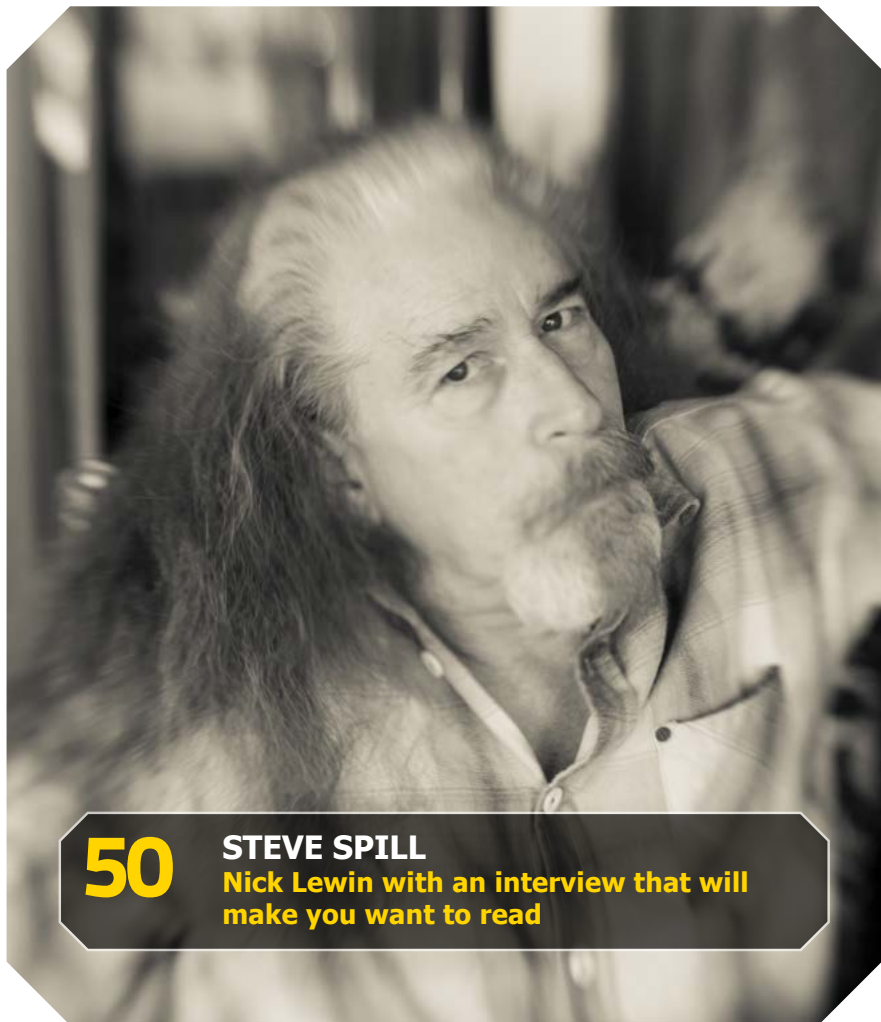
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# **STEVE SPILL**

## **LYING FOR MONEY**

**BY NICK LEWIN**

**PHOTOS: SAL TAYLOR KYDD**



# Lying For **MONEY**

By Nick Lewin

Photos: Sal Taylor Kydd

*I first met Steve Spill back in 1974 when I arrived in Los Angeles. It only took a few minutes watching him perform to realize that he was a very special performer who was creating original and unique magic. I suspect everyone who saw his show realized that he had a long and successful career in front of him.*



Thank you to Sal Taylor Kydd for the stunning series of photographs of Steve and Bozena.

**THE BLACK-AND-WHITE PICTURE WAS FUZZY AND JUMPY, AND SO WAS I ...**

”

Now, 40 years, later Spill has written a most enjoyable book about his magical journey and shared some of the twists and turns that lead him to where he is today. For all the books written about magic there are very few that take you behind the scenes and share some of the secrets behind the secrets. This is one of them.

I was delighted to have the opportunity to ask Spill a few questions for this article and very interested in his responses. Furthermore Steve has been kind enough to offer our readers the opportunity to take a look at some of the routines and effects that have helped establish him in the forefront of today's comedy magicians. At the end of this article you will find a link that will allow you to download his video "Ten Years of Spill,"

absolutely free of charge. Viewing this footage will add another dimension for better understanding this unique performer who rather modestly sums up his synergistic skills as a comedian and magician, by telling us that all he does is to lie for money.

**You have always seemed like a very private person, what made you decide to write, "I Lie for Money," and to publish such a personal and detailed autobiography?**

It started when the Santa Monica Museum of Art had an exhibit featuring various multi-media artists interpretations of what the craft of performing magic

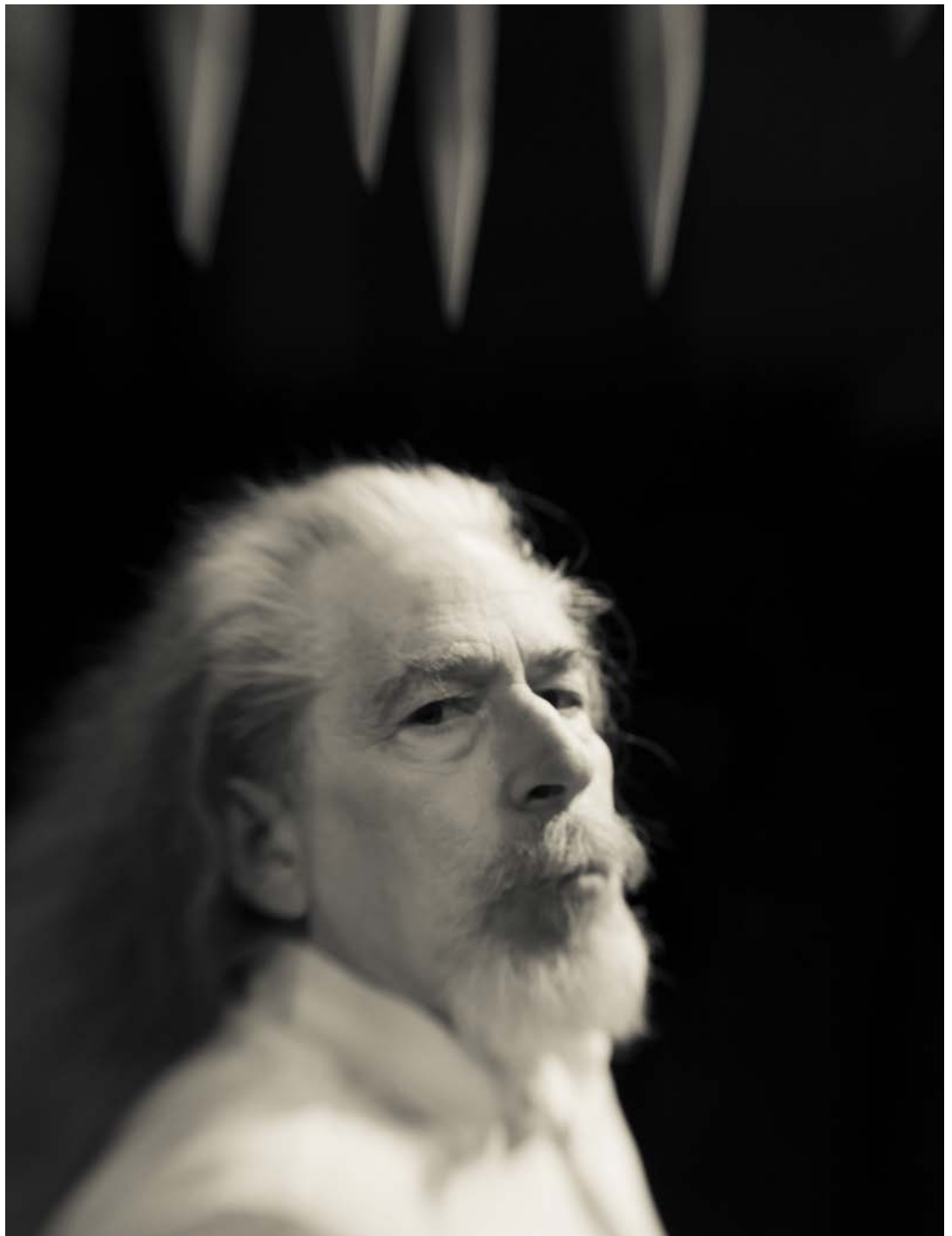
looked like to them. There were paintings, sculptures, etc.

The centerpiece was an immersive continuous 360 degrees projected film loop of Greg Wilson (Mark's son, not the other G. Wilson) in Victorian garb mysteriously pulling a rabbit out of a hat.

As part of the ongoing exhibit, I was asked to do a keynote on my journey as a magician. The speech was received okay, and without my specific intention, it seemed to others that the talk wasn't just about a magician's journey but was really aimed at all who wished to craft a self directed independent creative life... actors, painters, writers, etc.

My presentation wasn't written, but was done from notes. In the weeks and months after the event I expanded some of those notes into little articles, which for fun were submitted to the Magic Castle newsletter. The editor, Rich Cowley, published them, but the word came not to send any more because they weren't Castle-specific enough to warrant inclusion in the newsletter.

About that time VANISH started, Paul re-published those Castle newsletter articles and I continued to write. An author friend, Mark Miller, and I were talking about something, which reminded me of one of the articles – I forget which one at the moment - so I sent him a Vanish link.



“

**I ABSORBED  
MUCH OF  
WHAT I KNOW  
ABOUT COMEDY  
FROM THE  
BAR CROWD,  
THEY WERE  
THE ULTIMATE  
TEACHER.**

Mark asked me, "Have you ever thought about writing a book?" Without thinking I said, "yeah, sure..."

Miller sent some of my articles to his editor at Skyhorse Publishing in New York, they made an offer, I had nine months to write the book, and there you have it.

Oh yeah, one funny thing. My email has a high filter and when the offer came I never saw it, so naturally I never responded – a month later my friend called in a panic, "Why haven't you given them a yes or no? What's a matter with you? Are you playing hard to get?"

### When did you first realize that you were going to be a professional magician?

I distinctly recall my first definite memory. Perhaps this dawn of a knowable past was so thunderously certain because it concerned my passion for magic. It's 1959, San Francisco, I'm nearly five years old. Seated on the couch in our family living room, a baby sitter on one side and my infant sister, Susan, on the other. We're watching TV. The television was a huge piece of furniture... on top were the antennas that enabled reception, called rabbit ears, below was a tiny rounded screen. The black-and-white picture was fuzzy and jumpy, and so was I.

We were watching a program called *The Money Tree*. It was a game show, just like *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*, except this was a local Bay Area show sponsored by a neighborhood grocery store. Correct answers to odd and offbeat trivia questions won contestants a can of baked beans or a package of frozen peas, grand prize an electric can opener. That's what local TV was like in the 1950's.

My parents were hosts of *The Money Tree*, and they opened each show by warming up the studio audience. On that particular day, mom and dad treated everyone to a little magic routine. We watched father tear up some tissue paper, he wiggled his fingers over the torn paper and said, "I want everyone to scream the magic words, Money Tree, three times, and wiggle your fingers three times..." He unfolded the torn pieces of paper and they'd magically formed themselves into a hat. Dad put the funny hat, which looked more like a bonnet, on a man's head and continued, "Call me sentimental, but I'd like you to have this."

As we watched the on-screen laughs and









applause, my mom tore her own tissue paper as she spoke, "I'd like to make a magic hat for this handsome man's beautiful and distinguished wife. I want to hear the words Money Tree, Money Tree, Money Tree... At the count of three... One, two, two and a half, two and three quarters, three!"

As she unfolded the papers the audience giggled, then laughed, and then applauded loudly. What mom held in her hand was made of tissue paper, but it wasn't any kind of a magic hat, it looked like women's bikini style panties. To me they looked like my sister's diapers. Mom put the panties on her head, "Stop laughing, it's a hat!" Father chimed in, "Underwear is fun to wear. After this commercial break we'll be back to magically make this lovely lady a matching bra!" It was at that moment that I knew I wanted to be a magician. And if it wasn't, it should have been. The seeds of who I am now had been planted.

### Who was the biggest influence on you as a magician in your early years?

Early on, like mid 1960s to early 70s, there were four. Other kids my age had heroes like Batman and Superman... I had The Man Who Fooled Houdini and The Man With The X-Ray Eyes, both real men known to all magicians, Dai Vernon and Kuda Bux, that I got to know very well personally along with Charlie Miller and Francis Carlyle, each of the four, of course, were magical icons. It's curious how some young popular magicians I've spoken to recently don't like to mention those who helped them along the way. I suppose they don't want it noised about that they needed any help, they want everyone to believe that they did it all on their own. I had a lot of help, and I'm delighted to admit it and blab about it in my book.

I learned a lot about how magic should be constructed and physically look from Vernon, prop management and angles from Miller, clarity of effect and the proper way to accent moments with comedy without destroying the magic from Carlyle, conveying and embellishing impossibility and mystery from Kuda, misdirection from Slydini...

I was so blessed to have watched the entire cast of Castle characters... the mid 60s to early 70s were an incredible time. From Goshman to Senator Crandall to Carazini to Slydini... I craved their attention and by osmosis learned their lessons. Each one had his own trick, a nuance, a personal way of doing things, a lesson, a gesture, a story, a philosophy, an attitude... I was a sponge and absorbed something from each of them. All of it went into my mental file. Very gradually, right up until today, nothing too specific, but little bits

and pieces that seemed to inherently fit me surfaced and worked their way into my performances, and the combination added to my personality gave me something new. Part of Carlyle's delivery, but not his words, the way that Miller would look at an audience after something amazing happened, a little sly confident half smile like Vernon.

### Who was your favorite comedy act?

Comedy wise as a young man, like most kids my age, I was into Lenny Bruce, Richard Pryor, George Carlin, Robert Klein... and I was a big Steve Martin fan when he first exploded onto the stand-up scene.

### What is your favorite memory from those formative days at the Magic Castle, and do you have a favorite performing story from the Castle?



At fourteen, I appeared in the Close-up Gallery doing a single, twenty-minute show, on Sunday nights. At the time, Sunday was the only night those under twenty-one were officially allowed in the Castle. A few years later they started a Sunday brunch for the under twenty-one crowd and instituted a no one under age in the evening policy. Despite the new rules, in 1973, starting at the age of eighteen I worked the Close-up Gallery three shows a night, seven days a week, two to four times a year. What a great way to learn your craft.

Leading up to my very first Sunday night show I hardly slept at night. I lay awake thinking about the excellent act I would do. All I thought of was the night of my debut. All other days of my life, the one's that had been lived, and the one's that were to come, were just dates on the calendar waiting upon my very first show in the Close-up Gallery at the Magic Castle.

The man who introduced the Sunday night acts was a grumpy old guy known as Senator Crandall, although he was no more a senator than I was, but merely used the title to enhance his status. I'd read about him in the magic magazines, before he introduced me the first time, he asked if there was something I'd like him to say about me. The words that gushed out of my fourteen-year-old mouth, "It's such an honor to meet you Senator. I never thought the day would come when I'd be privileged enough to work with you." The Senator was a very sentimental guy. "Don't give me that crap, kid," he told me, "you'd just better be good."

I was at the very least watchable and perhaps rose above adequate, the problem was that I was so nervous that I began working faster and faster until my twenty minute show only lasted ten minutes. But for the first time, I really felt like a professional. My act had a number of classic tricks including variations with cards





like Cutting the Aces, Color Changing Deck, Cards to Pocket and coin tricks such as Copper Silver and Coins thru the Table. I closed with my version of the Cups & Balls trick. Inspired by Andy Warhol's Campbell's Soup Can paintings, I developed a routine with a single Campbell's Soup can and a single cherry tomato. The little tomato appeared and disappeared under cover of the can. The climax came when two large beefsteak tomatoes appeared.

One of my very first shows in the Close-up Gallery, when I was fourteen years old, there was a guy in the second row on the aisle... the whole audience seemed to be aware of his presence and where he was sitting. I recognized him and said out loud, "Were you at Eddie Shlepper's bar mitzvah?" He shook his head no and everyone laughed. After the show that dignified man came backstage to say hello. It was movie star icon Cary Grant!

**Who was the act you recall the most vividly performing there, and what is it about them that sticks in your memory?**

I have vivid memories of all the acts, good and bad. One who I really enjoyed that not everyone today is familiar with was Carazini, who I think was at his peak as a performer around 1973. You can probably find some old clips of him from the Tonight Show, but his impact in person was so much greater than video can convey.

They say Carazini's real name was Jim Williams. The same first name as Jim Carrey, and Carrey sounds a little like Carazini, and this guy had a command of the same sort of rubber faced characterizations that Jim Carrey is famous for.

Carazini had wrinkled fluttering eyelids, a pencil thin mustache on a long lip, his jaws worked constantly whether or not he was speaking. The man's hands had fingers that seemed to be boneless and able to bend right back on themselves. His thrashed old black fedora hat, a size too big, was perched upon slicked back black hair. Carazini was prepared to do his act at the drop of a hat, any time, anywhere, and that's what he did.

At the Castle, he might do it in the lobby, outside in the driveway, or at the bar, in a doorway... And he didn't need an introduction, didn't need a table, didn't say anything, didn't use any music, and the few props he used were in his pockets. Carazini portrayed a lovable lush who had a few too many drinks. Not falling-down drunk, but inebriated



enough that you believed it when he first lit a cigarette that bobbed on his moist lower lip... and then he accidentally swallowed both it and the lit match, and started to burp smoke. Between multiple burps of smoke, he'd belch up other things, like strings of silk scarves and dozens of eggs. His performance of the act was perfection... nothing ever went down the wrong pipe, he never made any gurgling sounds, sneezed, wheezed, got hiccups, choked, hurled, or coughed up a loogy.

Carazini should be recognized as one of the great comic performers of the time... make that all time. The Magic Castle was only a burp in the road on his way to a career as a star specialty act, performing between nude female dancers at the world famous Crazy Horse Saloon in Paris.

**What do you think are the most important things you learned about the very specialized field of Bar Magic while working at The Jolly Jester with Bob Sheets?**

I was twenty-one years old when I started a four-year tour of duty working for Bob Sheets as a magician/bartender at The Jolly Jester. Bob was a consummate professional who became a valued life-long friend, and I learned more from him, and the job he gave me, than I realized at the time.

One of the great educational benefits from the work was a practical understanding of the art and science of audience management. People who are oiling their throats with alcohol are generally not shy when they see how a trick is done and it's a great help to know where corrections are needed. Most of the bar-hopping crowd changed five times a night which enabled me to perfect tricks by doing them over and over and over, forty or fifty times a week. By trial and error my sleight-of-hand, timing, presentation, and other elements improved.

I absorbed much of what I know about comedy from the bar crowd, they were the ultimate teacher. I learned to not work too hard at being funny, not to imitate myself from the night before, to try to make each performance as if it were the first time I'd ever done it, how to improvise, how to take advantage of a situation with a quick adlib... like when a guy was at the bar several hours, drinking continuously, hurled another shot against his tonsils, and then, without a word, fell over backwards onto the floor, out cold. "I like a man who knows when to stop."

Bob also trained me as a bartender and taught me how to use magic to sell more cocktails. "The more you drink, the better the tricks look." One strategy, never perform a trick until all the drinks are half full. That way, when the trick is over, everyone is ready for a new

round. Patrons were unconsciously trained... now it's time to watch a trick, now it's time to buy a drink... Pavlov would have loved it. "Don't applaud, keep on drinking."

The Jester environment ran the gamut from innovative magic to spontaneous outrageous comedy, an irreplaceable training ground I was privileged to be a part of. The principle thing I learned at The Jester NOT to do with my life, was to be perpetually plastered, wasted, loaded, and stoned... those days are long over for me. A quick word to my younger readers, in the long run, there are three types of people who can't handle constant drugging and drinking and smoking... magicians, comedians, and everybody else.

**Tell us a little more about how you created your "Highdini" character and how it felt working 'inside' a character?**

My inebriated Highdini character, developed in the early 1970s as a way to open for rock acts, was a combination of what I'd seen Carazini do silently and Dean Martin do verbally, but was also inspired by Cheech & Chong who had just come out with their first comedy record. They hadn't done any films yet, but were becoming very popular.

I had several big bouquets of marijuana that appeared from nowhere then vanished in a puff of smoke. Throughout the act I snorted tablespoons of white powder, as a finish to the bit I grabbed my nose and a long stream of salt-like stuff poured out. One by one eight smoking pipes magically appeared between my fingertips, which made me dry as a bone and "gave me cotton mouth," causing me to spit out dozens of cotton balls, then it looked like I drank a huge thirst-quenching pitcher of beer in a fraction of an instant.

**Do you ever feel that "Steve Spill" is something of a constructed stage persona? What three words would you use to describe your current performing style?**

The 2015 Steve Spill isn't much of a constructed persona. Inside I suppose I feel like – three words: an old hippie - and over the years I've developed a certain amount of presentational gimmicks and techniques and craft and ways of handling things, as we all do... but essentially what you see on stage in terms of character or persona is the result of all my experiences



to date, what you see is a distilled essence of who I really am.

I'm not pretending to be a dumb guy who thinks he's smart, or flamboyant, or a human cartoon, or darkly mysterious... I'm pretty much myself, while trying to keep some of my less attractive traits hidden. I improvise a lot, but getting laughs all the time isn't all I'm after like when I was younger.

More and more I seem to speak to my audience one-on-one instead of performing impersonally in front of them – at times confiding in them who the internal me really is, occasionally even sharing spur of the moment unintended insights with them in the course of doing a trick. I oddly feel more comfortable doing that sort of stuff on stage or even writing about it in a book than I seem to in real life.

**What really ran through your mind the night you had the honor of Sting 'opening' for you at a live event?**

On November 4, 2013 an independent record label, Cherry Tree Records, engaged me, Sting, and Magicopolis, for an event designed to promote their newly signed unknown recording artists. Having Sting as the opener guaranteed an exclusive audience of everybody who was anybody when it comes to rock journalists and music insiders, who otherwise might not come out to hear the unknowns.

Sting was the draw, but the promoters also needed me. After Sting's set, the curtains closed and while his band equipment was switched for the other artist's gear, my job was to fill the time performing in front of the curtains. I, mostly unknown to the assembled guests, was there to keep the crowd engaged and amused so they wouldn't leave before the other widely unknowns took the stage.

What I couldn't get out of mind that night was a horrible rock concert appearance I'd done way in the past. The unruly angry crowd booed so loud, it was unbearably embarrassing, and although you can't really die from embarrassment, it definitely can feel fatal... I'm still trying to forget that show when I opened for a band called Flash Cadillac and the Continental Kids at Colorado Springs Municipal Auditorium.

Back to the Sting gig... I must do this. Tonight. Now. I had an attack

of diarrhea. By the time I walked onto the stage, I did not have the confidence to do a stellar job. But I was in a thoroughly professional mood and did do a stellar job... the audience was in the palm of my hand. Nobody left or booed. I'm pleased to report my comedy and magic was greeted with a roar of laughter and an outburst of cheering.

After the show my wife Bozena and I were invited to share some time and be photographed with Sting. He charmed us when he said what





a great theater we have, how he appreciated being able to actually see everyone's face in the audience from the stage, how he read I had designed and built the venue myself... Bozena told him that in our full evening show she levitates to his song Desert Rose. I chimed in with, "We heard you wrote and recorded it specifically for that purpose." Sting cracked a gracious smile and with great courtesy and kindness professed his fondness for magic, magicians, and all that is Magicopolis.

**Which celebrities have you opened for over the years, and which was the one you remember the most vividly--- and why?**

Yeah, over the decades I've opened for celebrities from time to time, just gigs, I'm not going to name names because it's sort of embarrassing - they were always names either on their way up or down - never anyone really super red hot famous at the moment, like Jay Marshall opening for Frank Sinatra's Las Vegas debut at the Desert Inn. Now that's opening for a celebrity! I've seen a printed program for that appearance that's owned by magic aficionado Bill Bowers who was actually at that show.

I have had a lot of famous folk see my show here at Magicopolis though, we always have a bunch of them pictured on our website.

**What was the biggest disaster you have had occur during your performing years, and what did you learn from it?**

Making magic at the bar in Aspen was seasonal work. Sure, we had local patrons, but its survival was tourist dependent. Winter and summer we had tourists... but when spring sprung and fall fell The Jester would close for six to eight weeks during the off seasons. I spent spring 1976 on a coast-to-coast busking tour with my friend Johnny Fox. And now the big

disaster and what I learned from it...

It took a while for Fox to locate a good spot in San Antonio. He started working his magic at the edge of a park, at the bottom of a hill, near a busy intersection. Today, when Johnny does his sword-swallowing act he can entertain hundreds at a time. In 1976, Fox was a coin man who was a master at entertaining an up close group of ten people. While Johnny was in the park making silver dollars appear and disappear at his fingertips...



I was scouting out The Riverwalk, looking for bars to return to that evening. Bars where people might appreciate sophisticated properly performed card tricks. I picked my spots, and went to meet up with Fox. As I walked down the hill toward the park, I saw a huge crowd, maybe a hundred people. As I got closer, I saw Fox making four silver dollars appear, then, one at a time, the coins became invisible, a routine I'd seen him do a million times. I couldn't believe the size of the crowd he'd drawn. Johnny had finally done it; the hat was going to be huge on this one.

As I got even closer, I saw that about ten people were engaged in Fox's routine, enjoying the fun and merriment and little surprises he was presenting. The other ninety people were looking behind Fox, across the street, at a man standing on the roof of a ten-story building. It looked like he was gonna jump. Was he really gonna do it?

Everything seemed to happen in slow motion. It was dead quiet as we watched the figure high above, dive head first, straight down. Spectators blocked my view of the landing... but I can tell you the accelerated speed of his departure from the roof to his meeting with the surface of the sidewalk produced a loud, sickening, thud. I half heard it, half felt the impact come through the earth... and I was across the street... a haunting memory.

I learned something valuable that day. The juxtaposition between whatever devastating agony might drive a man to suicide and the simple little surprises and merriment Fox dispensed - made me realize what an important service we magicians offer. People need fun like they need food and water and sleep. Even it's only for a brief period of time, guys like Johnny and I and you who are reading this, can relieve the pain or boredom of everyday life. When

audiences experience our magic, it's a sign that maybe the future will hold even more fun. Fun isn't just fun – it's hope.

**In your opinion what are the qualities that are most likely to allow a performer to enjoy a successful and lengthy career in the magical profession? What hidden defects should he be on the look out for that unbeknown to him may be impeding his progress?**

The name of the game is give it your best shot and hope your career will fly. Above all, trust your heart and go with what you believe in. Yeah, I've had a lengthy career, but in my heart of hearts I've always known I could have achieved more by now. Not necessarily fame and fortune, but by becoming a better magician, writer, creator. Proud as I am of some of my work, I could have done much better, earlier.

My hidden defect is probably that I wasn't terribly focused until I was forty, didn't set disciplined and achievable goals and go for them, let too many inanities and a restless mind bog me down in fruitless pursuits. Your question was aimed at giving readers some advice. I'm not big on giving advice, and hate to give anyone false hope because luck has played a part in whatever success I've had, but I'll say this: By utilizing your skills and by being true to yourself it is possible to create an act or show that will, if not rake in millions, at least not find you on welfare at the end of the day.

**What prompted you to open your own magic showroom "Magicopolis," and what were your considerations in trying to create the perfect 'jewel box' for your show? What has surprised you the most about "Magicopolis" since you opened in 1998?**

Flashback to January 1995, it was a Tuesday afternoon, amid a blur of gigs, on a plane, staring out at

the clouds, when a life-changing notion came to mind. I was forty years old, living my dream, but the thing was... even though my work didn't require getting up before the crack of dawn every morning it was starting to feel like a nine-to-five job. Not a problem working hard, but I wanted more independence, to be not answerable to anyone else but myself, to not depend on others for work. It was those things, and a couple of little problems that gave me the most important idea of my life.

One problem, I was technically living in Santa Monica, but only spending a handful of nights per month in my own bed. I felt like Santa Monica would always be my home, unfortunately I wasn't at home often, by necessity, of course. You might say part of the vision for Magicopolis came to me from sleeping around, and you'd be partly right. I needed to be wherever anyone would pay me to do magic tricks. It might be at an Indian casino, or it might be at a convention of internists in Indianapolis, but staying home felt like the right thing to do. Instead of constantly changing cities, to find new audiences, I needed a way to stay home more and have new audiences constantly find me.

The other bothersome problem, as sure as my name isn't Harry Houdini, most of my audiences were not coming to see me in particular... or even a magician in general. I was corporate event entertainment, or doing a comedy spot in a variety or revue show, even when I was a headliner, it was often at a comedy club where one went to see comedians and might be surprised the show was topped by a magician.

These ideas rolled around in my head constantly, while on planes, in cars, hotel rooms, eating, sleeping, and breathing. I thought so hard my brain hurt. The idea to produce, and perform my own show, in a theater I designed, built, run,

and named Magicopolis, was not born suddenly. It grew gradually in my mind, but it was that Tuesday in April 1995 that I knew that was what I wanted to do. I yearned for the intoxicating freedom of being a servant of nobody.

Day after day the voices rose and the drumbeats tap-danced in my skull. I wanted Magicopolis to be professional, to be imaginative, to do something people would get a kick out of... Then I'd back down, wracked with doubt. What did I know about supervising construction and decoration, plumbing and electrical, organizing suppliers, equipment, staff, arranging publicity and advertising and printing, lights and sound, and all the other thousand-and-one tasks for which I had no previous experience?

There were a million reasons not to do it and I ignored all of them, those million reasons crashed to the floor of my brain with the clatter of tin cans, and there was no turning back. I had the power. I wasn't so interested in power as in doing something the way I wanted to do it. I wanted control. My power was the courage and audacity to believe in the Magicopolis idea, and the stamina to follow it through and make it a reality.

The Rolling Stones are famous for their phrase about how you can't always get what you want but if you try sometimes you get what you need. Well, I'm here to tell you that sometimes you can get what you want and what you need at the same time, but it has its trade-offs. Driven and unable to relax I guzzled triple espressos and gave up a few things I really enjoyed doing to devote all my time to working on the project. You know, things like eating, sleeping, and breathing.

The opening night media support was overwhelming, but a groundbreaking ceremony attendee that was a journalist from the trendy monthly, Buzz Magazine, was quoted as saying, "It is needless for me to write about Magicopolis, in all probability the place will be out of business before the end of the year." That was back in March 1998. Since then we've had the good fortune to parlay our minimal talent into a long run and have been continuously presenting shows at Magicopolis right up until today in 2015. It was Buzz Magazine that filed for bankruptcy and went out of business before the end of the year. The magazine's June 1998 issue was Buzz's last.

Almost everyone, I imagine, has a year which seems peculiarly his own in memory, a year enshrined where fireworks ever explode. My year was 1997-1998, during which time I experienced a feeling of self-importance, which I never again possessed.





## Tell us about Bozena.

November 9, 1997, some guys hit their forties and have a midlife crisis. I, on the other hand, fell in love. Enter stunning looking, smart, nice, talented, Polish actor/writer Bozena Wrobel... She would become my best friend, my wife, my lover, my partner in crime, in Magicopolis, both onstage and off, whatever the occasion demands. That night she was celebrating her birthday at Igby's, a West LA comedy club. My act had gone well, and when I came off stage I saw her at the bar, she was smiling at me. She looked as though she could give a man something that he needed to quiet his soul and soothe his body. I was saying inside myself, "I am incomplete. She would make me complete. I wonder..."

Then Bozena opened her mouth and began talking in her own peculiar brand of broken English, a great belly laugh came out of me. It's hard to make me laugh. I observe, I smile, but when I'm really amused you can hear me a block away. My vanity was tickled with a thousand feathers when she spoke my name. Before her accent became a little more Americanized, instead of Steve, when she said my name it sounded like "Stiff!" Everyone within earshot always thought I was a real stud muffin, which I was perfectly willing to accept.

She stared at me with wide eyes and has been looking at me with wide eyes ever since, except for the many times when she closed her eyes to my errors and my faults. Bozena intently listened to my grandiose Magicopolis scheme. I took her to the empty building on Fourth Street, with spray paint cans we drew on the floor where the stage would be, walls, lobby, dressing rooms, the project was a constant topic of conversation. Besides her physical beauty and inward loveliness, Bozena had

intelligence... and brains help in the long-range plan of happiness.

Just a few months after we met, on a romantic weekend, I pulled a rabbit out of a hat. They say one of life's most memorable moments is a man asking a woman to marry him. I don't remember proposing to her, I have no idea how it happened, but I do know it was a spur-of-the-moment, totally impulsive idea that Bozena agreed to. I remember the wedding... it's etched into my credit card bill forever. We flew to Vegas and were married at a drive thru wedding chapel, a drive thru

reception at Jack in the Box. No throwing of rice, no clergyman, no bantering by envious wedding guests... total time on the taxi meter thirty-nine dollars. Marrying Bozena was the best thing that ever happened to me. Today she feels the same way... that marrying her was the best thing that ever happened to me.

## Collaborating with Bozena on the creation of your Magicopolis show, what was it like?

Before Bozena, as a solo performer,



my content was largely comedy, the Bozena collaboration, added a female actor/ writer's skill set to the mix... her comments had authority and vitality. She had ideas, a deep knowledge of scene construction, and an expert capability of playing any character imagined. Bozena embodies the lives of beings I can interact with - vampires, séance mediums, even a horny man. The only character I can credibly play, was, and still is, an embellished version of myself. One of the funniest bits in the show became even funnier due to a little on-the-spot problem solving.

Audiences accept the fact that women are often sawn in two or otherwise theatrically victimized in magic shows. We wanted to do that sort of trick where instead of a woman it was a man, me, that endured some torture. At the time, a magician in Texas offered to build and sell a copy of his then newly invented illusion that looked like this - a woman stood in a box with an open front so you could see her standing there. When the magician cranked some handles the top of the box lowered, the bottom heightened, and the girl's head and feet drew closer together. This continued until she became compressed to less than 18 inches in length.

We gave my measurements over the phone and had him build the special box so that I, a man, presumably, could fit in it... and wrote a very funny sketch, The Runaway Groom, as a way of presenting this clever trick. When the prop arrived from Texas I could not fit inside, but, of course, Bozena could. Instead of having the thing re-built, we channeled our disappointment and anger into humor and a new funnier spin on our sketch sprang to life. Sometimes dealing with adverse situations brings something better than originally envisioned. That's what happened here when we decided to switch roles.

Besides the broad hilarity of it all, the unforeseen cool thing about me playing the bride and Bozena acting as the groom - is that the role reversal actually better presents the qualities of a cheating macho groom and a manipulative abandoned bride, in a more exaggerated poignant expressive way, than if we did the bit as originally intended. Plus it's much funnier. A full description of the routine is in the book.

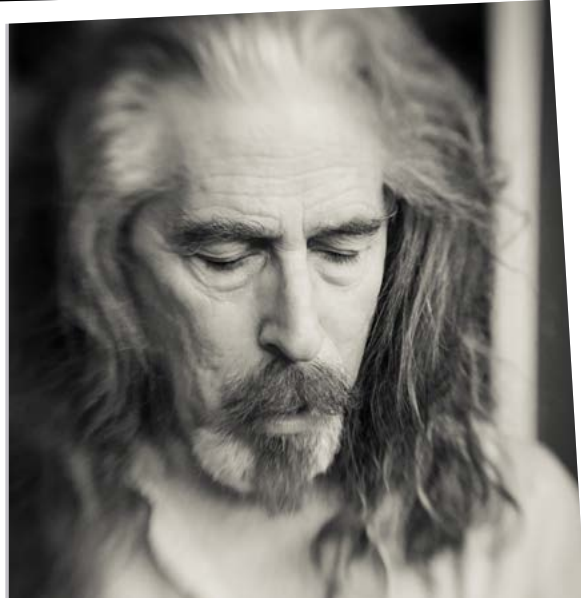
While developing our show, we argued about most every bit and piece along the way until we came to agreement. If a disagreement on any certain trick, routine, or dialogue wasn't settled, we got rid of it. This wasn't some rule of thumb or even discussed, that's just how we did and do it. Those opinions often changed to confront obstacles, logistic or otherwise, and we make/made incremental changes or dumped whole bits, as we saw fit. Debating with ourselves, and each other, the arguments over creative differences make us really commit.

With the benefit of audience feedback, after each performance we'd replay the show in our heads, figuring how to make it better and better. We spent day after day in the theater cutting and fixing and changing and switching. We still do. Our best work is about more than floating ladies, mind reading and sleight of hand. It's as much about what we want to say as the tricks themselves. It is about us, our lives, our feelings... many of the show's best moments were initially improvised on stage.

Bozena and I are as synchronized as the parts in a watch, when either of us goes off script and does or says something different, we can follow each other without missing a beat... and whenever we hit a perfect moment the audience feels it. We also work with the reality of the moment. In a play, if a light



Photos: Thank you to Steve Spill and Sal Taylor Kydd Photography for allowing us to use these unique photos.



suddenly goes dead or someone throws up in the audience, the actors keep doing the script. When things out of the ordinary arise we use them, respond to them, weave them into our presentation – sometimes not knowing what’s going to happen next is a ton of fun.

**You have achieved many different successes and triumphs since you began performing magic**

**50 years ago. What, if any, goals do you have remaining that you would like to a notch off from your professional bucket list? What should we be on the lookout from Steve Spill next?**

There is one big project on the horizon, but I can’t risk jinxing it by revealing anything now. You can always find me doing shows here at Magicopolis in Santa Monica. I’m looking forward to the rest of my life – a year or

thirty years – with quiet, peaceful expectation. In fact, I hope to do so much constructive living that fifteen or twenty years from now I will write another book about the coming period.

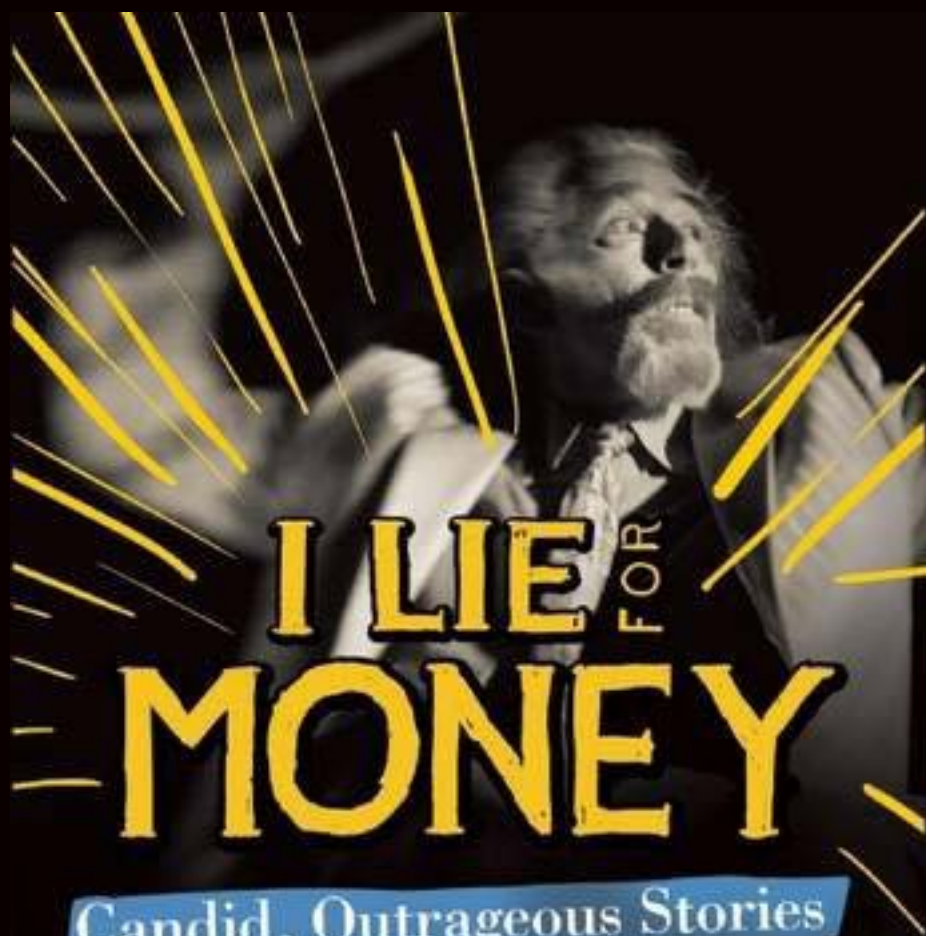
*Well I hope this brief article gives you a brief taste of this very unique magician and human being. I highly recommend reading his highly entertaining book, once I began page one I couldn’t put it down until I had*

*finished it. The book is entitled, **I Lie for Money – Candid, Outrageous Stories from a Magician’s Misadventures.***

**You can buy the book by clicking [HERE](#):**

You can check out Steve Spill’s live show at: [www.magicopolis.com](http://www.magicopolis.com).





**Candid, Outrageous Stories**  
**from a MAGICIAN'S**  
**Misadventures**  
**STEVE SPILL**

*"Nobody knows more about magic from the inside than Steve."  
—Teller of Penn & Teller*