

Genii

THE CONJURORS' MAGAZINE

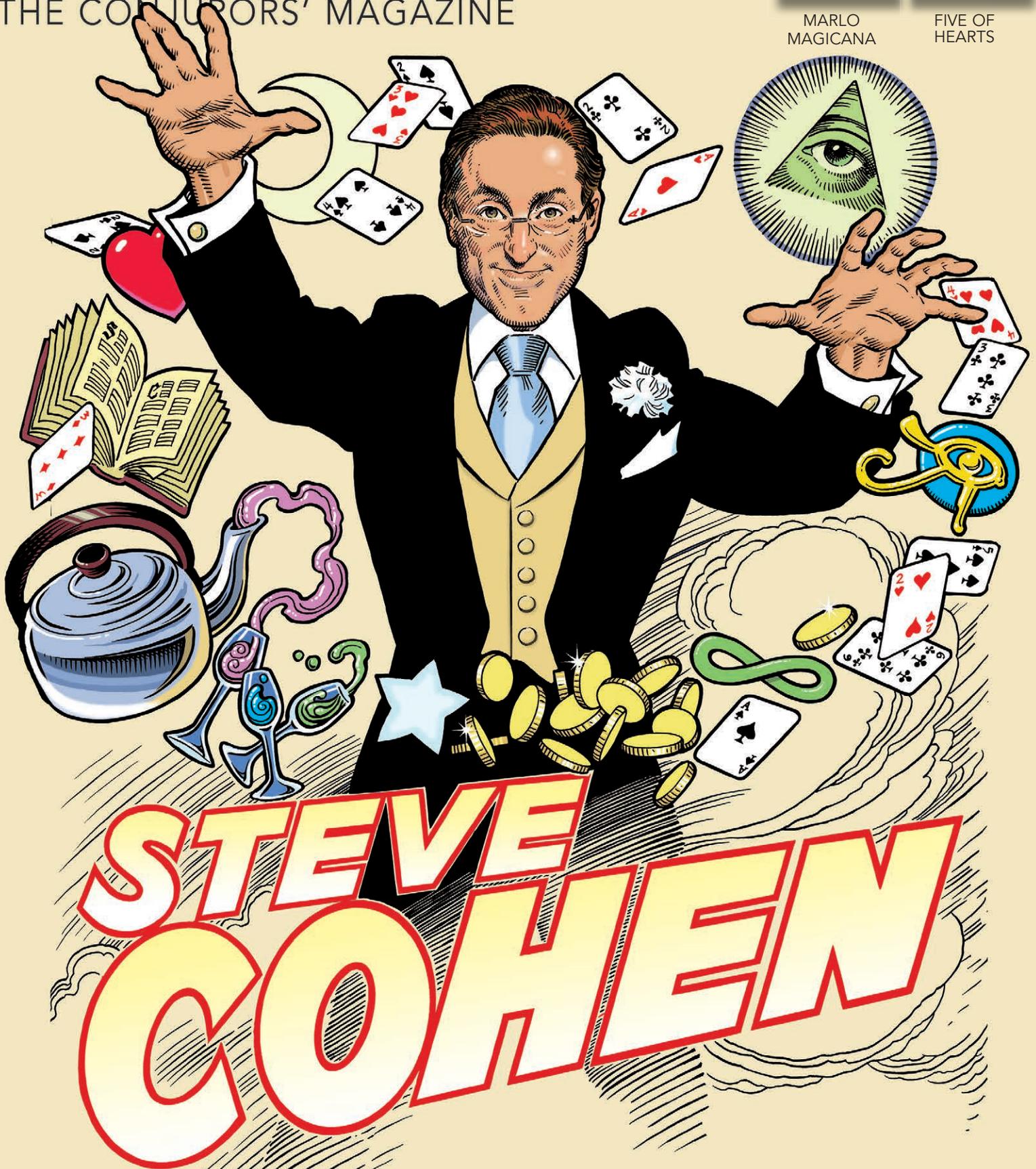
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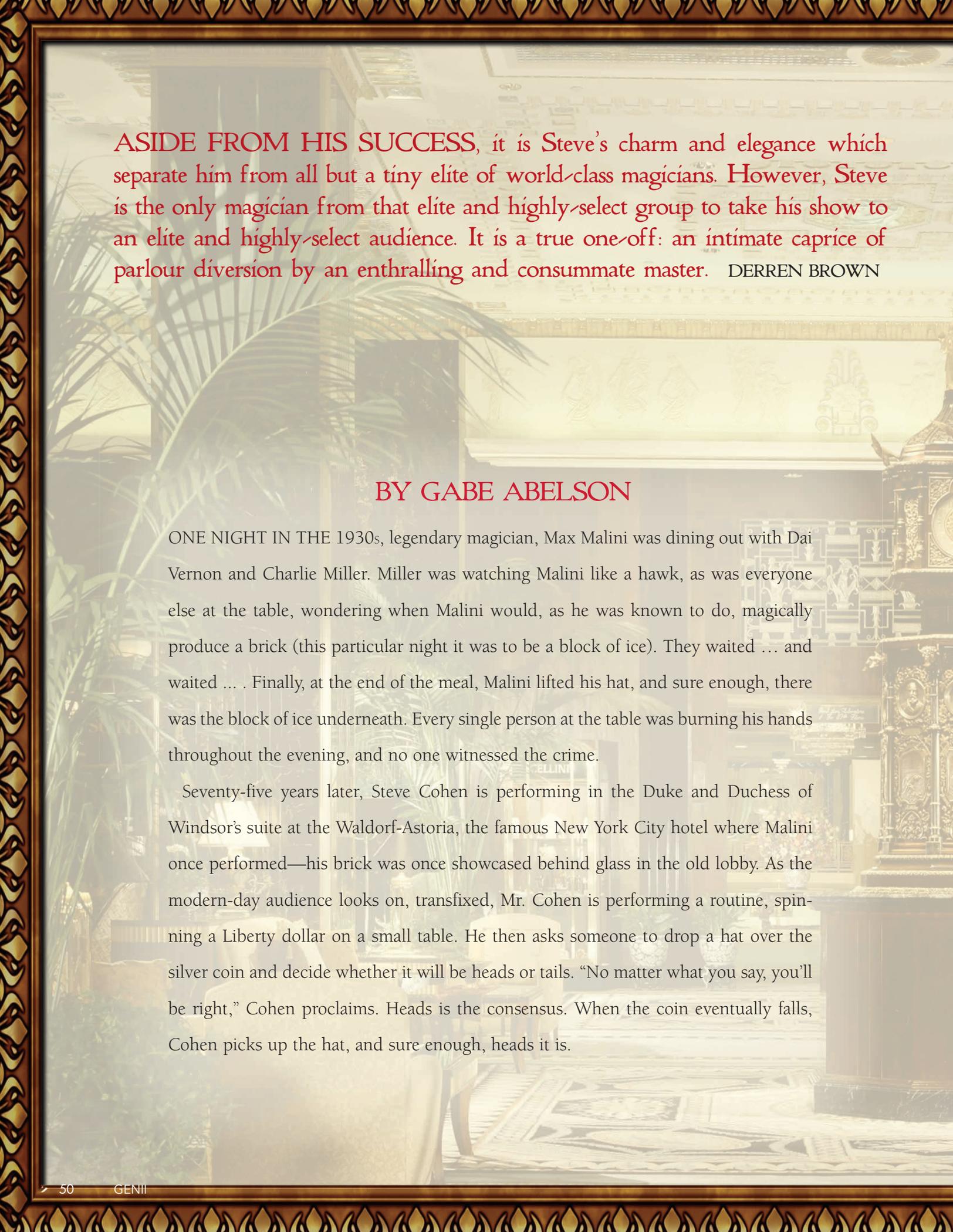
MARLO
MAGICANA



FIVE OF
HEARTS



STEVE COHEN

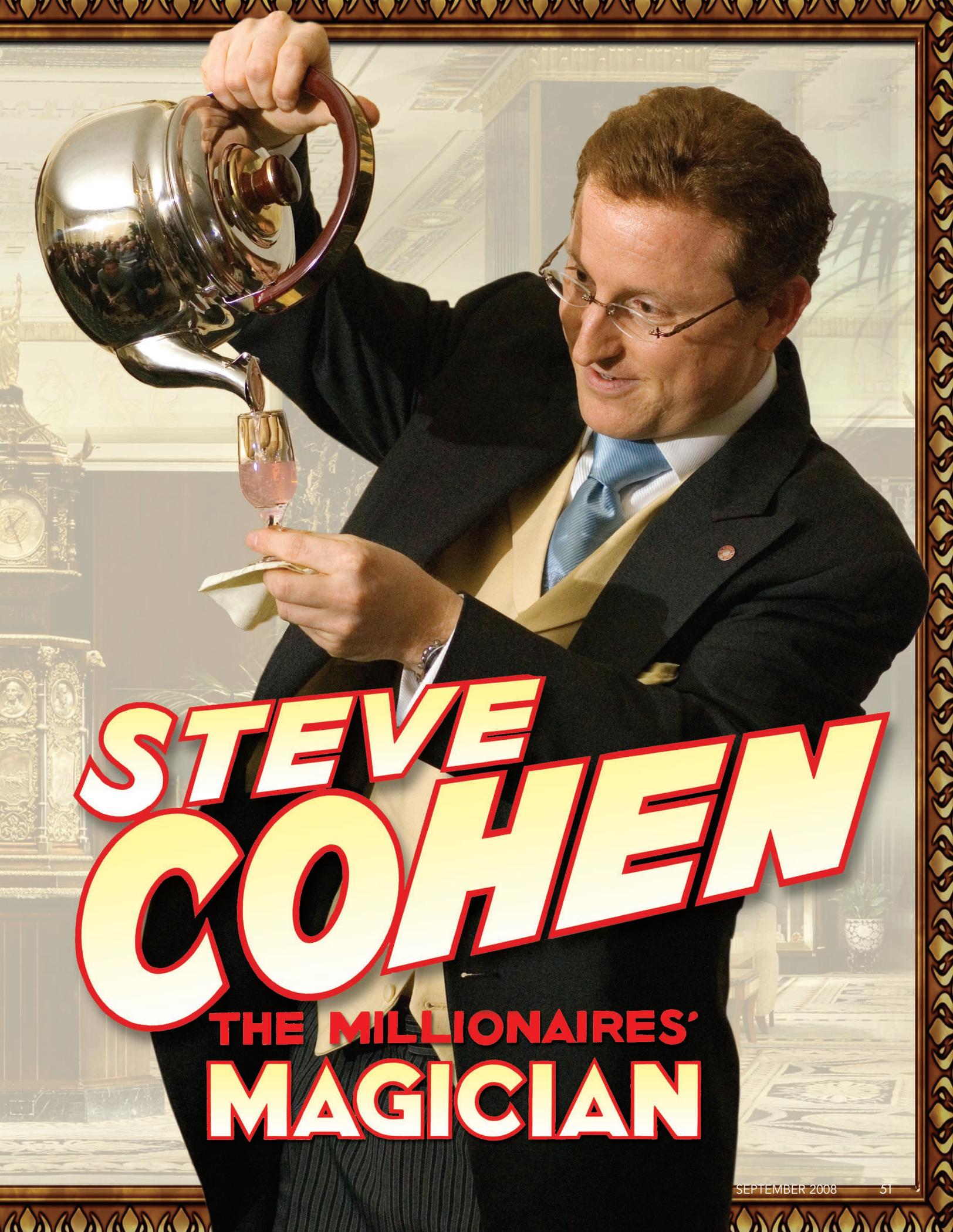


ASIDE FROM HIS SUCCESS, it is Steve's charm and elegance which separate him from all but a tiny elite of world-class magicians. However, Steve is the only magician from that elite and highly-select group to take his show to an elite and highly-select audience. It is a true one-off: an intimate caprice of parlour diversion by an enthralling and consummate master. DERREN BROWN

BY GABE ABELSON

ONE NIGHT IN THE 1930s, legendary magician, Max Malini was dining out with Dai Vernon and Charlie Miller. Miller was watching Malini like a hawk, as was everyone else at the table, wondering when Malini would, as he was known to do, magically produce a brick (this particular night it was to be a block of ice). They waited ... and waited Finally, at the end of the meal, Malini lifted his hat, and sure enough, there was the block of ice underneath. Every single person at the table was burning his hands throughout the evening, and no one witnessed the crime.

Seventy-five years later, Steve Cohen is performing in the Duke and Duchess of Windsor's suite at the Waldorf-Astoria, the famous New York City hotel where Malini once performed—his brick was once showcased behind glass in the old lobby. As the modern-day audience looks on, transfixed, Mr. Cohen is performing a routine, spinning a Liberty dollar on a small table. He then asks someone to drop a hat over the silver coin and decide whether it will be heads or tails. “No matter what you say, you'll be right,” Cohen proclaims. Heads is the consensus. When the coin eventually falls, Cohen picks up the hat, and sure enough, heads it is.



STEVE COHEN

THE MILLIONAIRES'
MAGICIAN



“Let’s try it again,” says Cohen, picking up the Liberty dollar and suddenly making it vanish in his deft hands. “Would you be impressed if I made the coin reappear under the hat again, heads up?” There’s a polite yet rather unenthusiastic “Yes.” Almost apologetically, Cohen responds, “I know, you’re thinking, ‘50/50 odds,’ right? I guess you’d be more impressed if there was a *brick* under the hat.” Scattered chuckles. Cohen then asks a spectator to lift up the hat. The audience member pulls the hat away and a loud collective gasp is heard as a large red brick now lays in the coin’s place—red, real, and heavy. You can hear a pin drop. Followed immediately by vigorous applause.



My life changed dramatically six years ago; and I mean on a dime, when I met Steve Cohen and watched him perform his *Chamber Magic* show at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York City. I have not been the same man since. For over half a decade, I have now been living and breathing magic and mentalism—reading, learning, practicing and performing. And it is all thanks to this man’s show.

In 2002, I was writing for *Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher*. The producer of the controversial television show was a man named Kevin Hamburger, with whom I shared a common hobby—magic. We both dabbled in the art since childhood, and entertained each other with simple card and coin tricks in Kevin’s office.

In the world of late-night television writing, there is, unfortunately, an elitism regarding magic. I believe it’s because many of the late night hosts (and writers) were former stand-ups, and spent too many years on the road working with bad magicians.

There’s even condescension within the stand-up community itself from straight monologists toward those who employ props in their acts. To straight stand-ups, or “purists,” *any* kind of props are seen as a crutch for a comedian who they feel don’t have strong enough written material to get the job done. Apparently, these comics never heard of Steve Martin and Andy Kaufman.

So the producer of *Politically Incorrect* and I would draw the inner blinds in his office, where we could stealthily perform tricks for each other without concern for the haughty writers who passed by with their “magic is lame” attitude. There we were, talking in hushed tones, once in awhile gasping in surprise, with the blinds drawn. Lord knows what the rest of the staff thought we were doing.

When *Politically Incorrect* went off the air and I relocated back to my home town of New York City, Kevin suggested I check out his cousin, magician Steve Cohen, who performs at the Waldorf-Astoria hotel. Having never seen Cohen’s show himself, Kevin told me Steve was a well-respected

magician and that I would surely enjoy the show.

Little did I know that this well-respected magician, who has performed for billionaires, movie stars, royalty, and heads of state, would give me new purpose in life, new passion, and new direction, at age 44.

The rest, as they say, is history ... and mystery.

I had always loved magic, but never put in the time to become good. Comedy writing was my skill, my livelihood, and magic was an on-and-off hobby. Mostly off. Like many pursuits in life, I wanted to be great without having to put in the required work. And, six years ago, had you asked me to define the word “mentalism,” I probably would have looked at you like George Bush looks at a quadratic equation.

Upon my return to New York, I called Steve Cohen to tell him I’d like to see his show at the Waldorf. He couldn’t have been more gracious, and invited me and my wife for the next night’s *Chamber Magic* show.

My wife and I dressed up in suit and evening gown (I wore the suit, by the way) and went out prepared for an evening of elegant entertainment. What I got, however, was far more than mere entertainment. I had a life-changing experience. A revelation. I’ve never been touched by God—although a guy named Jesus *did* once touch me on the subway, but that’s another story. Watching Steve Cohen, for the first time in my life, I felt a connection to a higher power.

More on that later.

My wife and I entered the Waldorf-Astoria, a legendary, beautifully maintained hotel at which we had dined several times in the past, but never stayed overnight. We were directed to a special, private elevator in The Waldorf Towers, and exited the antique lift on what appeared to be a standard (but high-end) hotel room floor, thinking it

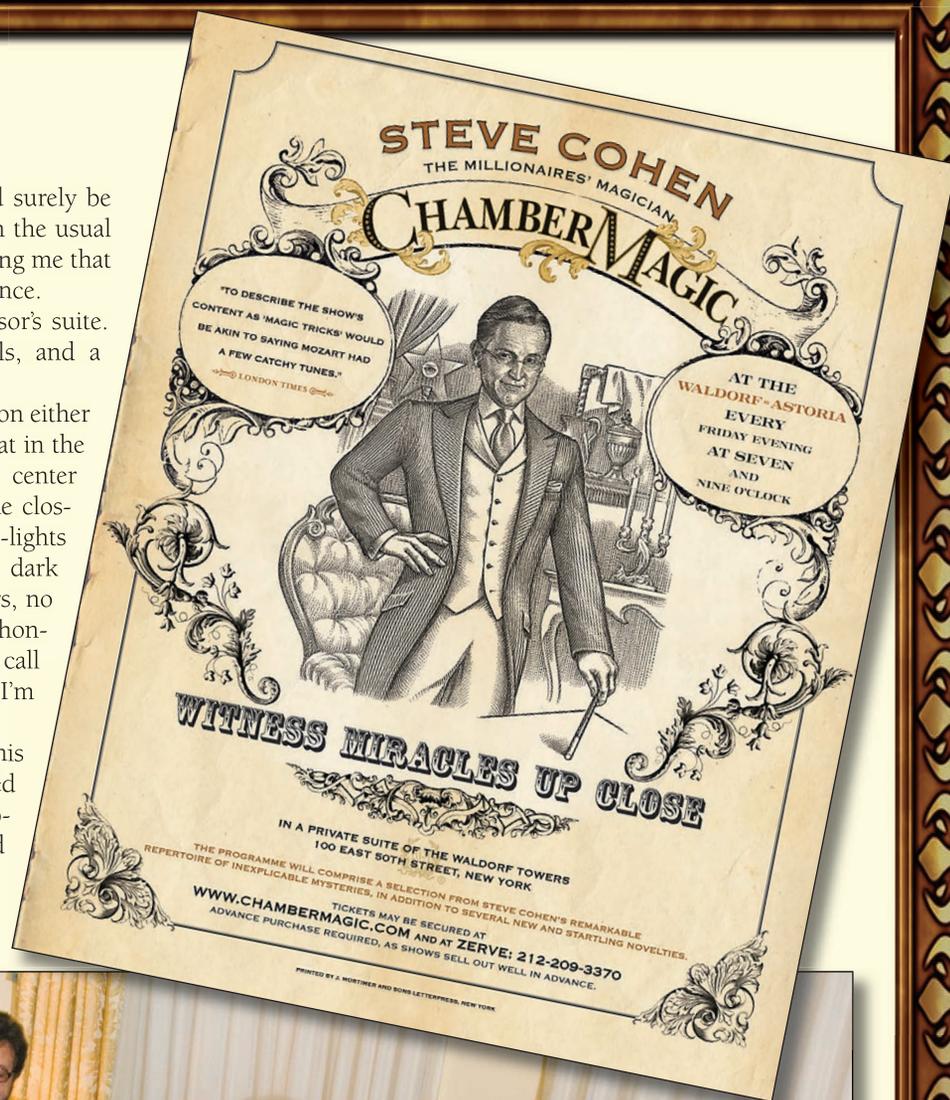


rather quaint to be headed toward what would surely be an intimate setting rather than seeing a show in the usual large theatrical venue. My Spidey sense was telling me that this was to be a unique and memorable experience.

We entered the Duke and Duchess of Windsor's suite. Damask silk curtains cascaded from the walls, and a Venetian chandelier twinkled overhead.

There were about 60 chairs set up, three rows on either side of the aisle, 10 chairs per row. Not a bad seat in the house. The magician's table was set front and center between rows, no more than three feet from the closest chair. The room was evenly lit, using house-lights only, with no spot on the performer, and no dark corners. No backstage. No hiding, no trap doors, no shadows, no escape for Mr. Cohen. Open and honest. No wiggle room. "Test conditions," as they call it. (Personally, I call it a "handicap," then again, I'm lucky if I can pull off a Top Change.)

Before the show (and before Mr. Cohen made his entrance), audience members were each handed index cards on which to write their favorite alcoholic beverage. As non-drinkers, my wife and I hesitated—then after a brief conference, she wrote "Diet Coke" and I wrote "iced tea."



The show began. Out walked Mr. Cohen in a \$3,000 tuxedo with tails, gold pocket-watch chain gleaming. The Millionaires' Magician who looked like a million. Despite his diminutive frame, he immediately (and silently) commanded attention. At the time, I had spent the previous eight years of my work in television as David Letterman's head monologue writer, experiencing nightly brushes with greatness—movie stars, television stars, famous politicians—you name it. Most celebrities have one thing in common: presence. It can't be taught, nor can it be specifically defined, and it certainly cannot be denied. I worked professionally as a stand-up comic for 17 years, sharing the stage with performers such as Jerry Seinfeld, Ray Romano, Adam Sandler, Dave Chappelle, Bill Hicks, Eddie Murphy,

effect. He had several audience members thoroughly shuffle a deck of cards, after which seven cards were chosen at random—and Cohen divined them all. Considering my lack of knowledge in the fields of magic and mentalism at that time, I would have been equally impressed had Mr. Cohen shuffled the deck *himself* and produced the exact same results. Now, however, after several years of intense study in the magical arts, I realize how this trick can be achieved with a false shuffle, a stack, a deck switch, etc.; but the fact that Mr. Cohen never touched the deck *after* it was shuffled by *different* audience members, and named every single card chosen at random, seems to be even more of a miracle to me now than it was when I knew virtually nothing about magic.



and Chris Rock. From the beginning, all the other, more pedestrian club comics (such as myself) knew the above-mentioned gentlemen were destined for greatness. You couldn't help but be drawn to these future stars. Still to this day, I have yet to meet anyone with more "X"-factor than Steve Cohen.

In a mellifluous voice, filling the silent suite at the Waldorf, Steve introduced himself to the crowd. His immediate energy and enthusiasm was infectious, his quirky delivery, manner and charming personality grabbing the audience from his first uttered syllable.

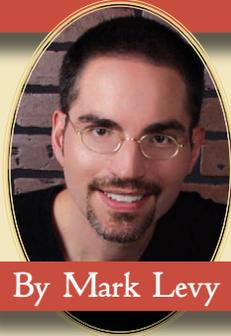
Steve then performed a seven-card opening mentalism

Next, Mr. Cohen directed our attention to a beautiful tea service on a large platter holding a gleaming silver kettle, surrounded by about 10 shot glasses in a perfect semi-circle. (The service had been in full view since the start of the show.)

This would be the moment where the index cards we filled out before the show would be called back into play.

Steve asked for a volunteer to step forward to handle the cards which had been, like the kettle, in full view on the table since they were originally passed down the rows, and collected by an audience member. I eagerly accepted the assignment as magician's assistant. Standing before the

RED CARS AND REAL MAGIC



By Mark Levy

Since 2001, I've been inventing tricks for, and often with, Steve Cohen. I also co-created and serve as Creative Director for the Off-Broadway show, *Chamber Magic*, in which he stars. Steve and I have come up with several tricks I think of as theatrical. I'd like to tell you about one.

Years ago, when *Chamber Magic* was getting off the ground, Steve gave me a call. He said a *New York Post* reporter had been in the audience, was impressed, and asked to meet Steve later in the week for an interview. If the interview went well, the newspaper would devote nearly a page to the story. Steve and I took this as a challenge. An article in a New York paper was worth thousands of dollars of publicity.

During a fast brainstorm, we hit upon an idea, drafted an email, and shot it off to the reporter. The body of the message read something like this: "Thank you for offering to interview me. Let's meet tomorrow in Manhattan at noon at the National Arts Club. And, if you're game, I'd like you to participate in an experiment.

"On your way here, keep a running tally of every red car you see. Don't, however, write down or mention the final figure to anyone.

"It should remain a secret until we meet. Just keep it fixed in your mind.

"A few additional points:

"You told me you live in Brooklyn, which is six miles from where we'll be meeting. You have a few routes you can travel. Perhaps you'll take the Brooklyn Bridge. Or, the Manhattan Bridge. Or, the Williamsburg Bridge. You also have the choice of dozens of avenues and streets.

"What's more, you have several transportation methods you can use. You can walk, cycle, rollerblade, drive, grab a cab, board a bus, ride a horse, take a helicopter, or mix and match. Each method will likely alter your route some. That's fine. It's your choice.

"Then, there are the cars. You decide what constitutes a 'red car.' It can be completely red or have just a red detail. It can be moving or parked. You can count red trucks and SUVs, too, or you can ignore them. Follow your impulse.

"Again, make sure not to make your counting obvious. No fingers or pads of paper, please. And take precautions that you're not being followed—check the foot traffic, the autos, and the air.

"See you tomorrow."

The next day, Steve was waiting as the grinning reporter walked in and said: "I couldn't sleep last night. I have a feeling you're going to tell me how many red cars I'm thinking of."

Steve, ever the showman, didn't rush. He held out his

hands, so the reporter could touch them. "Outside it's freezing," said Steve, "but my hands are toasty. I've been waiting inside. Did anyone follow you?" "No," said the reporter. "Did you see red cars?"

"I did."

"Did you write down how many you saw, or share that figure with anyone?"

"No."

"But you have the number safely in mind."

"I'm thinking of the number, yes."

"You're not going to change it, will you? I mean, you're a reporter and are sworn to the facts and the truth."

"I promise I won't change it."

Steve picked up a business card, scribbled a figure on it with a pencil, and held the facedown card out to the reporter.

"How many red cars did you see?" asked Steve.

"61."

When the reporter turned the card over and saw a penciled "61," he punched and kicked the air, shouting, "F**k! This almost makes me believe in real magic."

Steve got his article.

Now, I won't reveal the trick's method, but let me assure you, if you think you've figured it out, you have. It's not complicated. You may, in fact, have already figured out a better method than the one we used.

Why, then, did I tell this story? I told it because, well, it's a damn good story.

It's got an intriguing premise. It's got action unfolding on the streets of Brooklyn and New York. And, it's got a hardnosed, big city reporter who's so affected by the experience, that he lies awake in anticipation and nearly starts believing in miracles. What could be better?

Stories are what remain of the show once the decks, silks, and loops are packed away. They're evidence that miracles occurred.

When Steve and I come up with a routine, we simplify it until we believe it's easy for audiences to remember and talk about. If they do talk about it, great. If not, we pull it and start over. From a business standpoint, doing tricks that lead to stories is forceful marketing. The audience acts as missionaries, carrying word of the show with them. From an artistic standpoint, doing tricks that are strong enough to be talked about is just plain fun. It's why many of us palmed a coin or held a break in the first place.

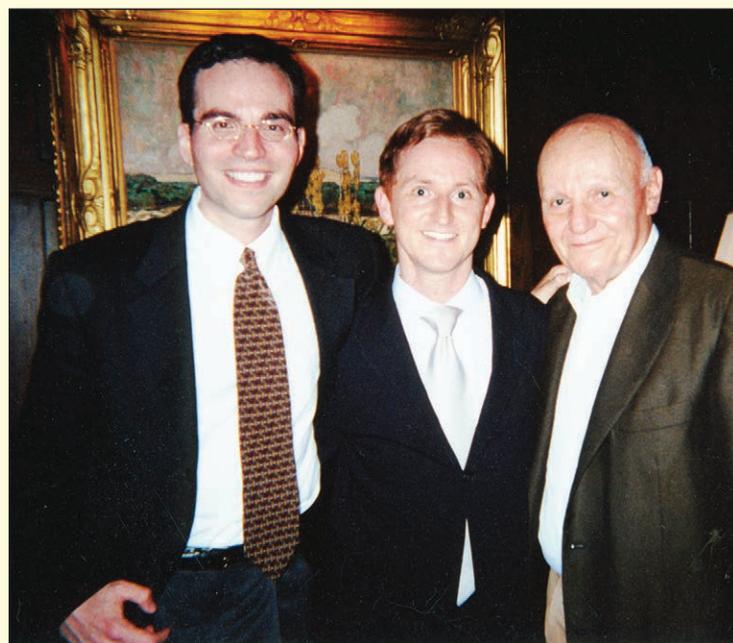


Mark Levy runs the marketing strategy firm, Levy Innovation (www.levyinnovation.com). He has written or co-created four books: *Tricks With Your Head* (with Mac King), *How to Persuade People Who Don't Want to Be Persuaded* (with Joel Bauer), *Magic for Dummies* (with David Pogue), and *Accidental Genius*. He co-created Steve Cohen's *Chamber Magic*, and serves as its Creative Director.

crowd, Steve asked me to cut the index cards then remove any five of them. My choice. I then distributed four cards to random members of the audience and kept one for myself. Cohen stated, "We're only going to work with people who have cards in their hands—that's how it was done 75 years ago, and that's how we're going to do it here tonight. We can't deviate from history." (A brilliant ploy he and Mark Levy call "Freezing the Audience," which allows him to stay in control of the historic premise which *now cannot be broken*. By setting up the conditions as such, no spectator can say, "Well, I'm going to do it *my way*.")

Mr. Cohen proceeded: "I'm not going to point to those of you holding drink cards. It's completely up to you. Who wants to go first? Please just shout out what they say!" The first card-holder spoke out and exclaimed, "Manhattan!" Steve considered this: "What's in a Manhattan? Bourbon, sweet vermouth, bitters? Sir, *anyone* could have gone first, but it was *you*. Please observe!" Cohen slowly poured a brown-burgundy liquid from the kettle, completely filling a shot glass before the kettle seemingly ran dry. Cohen handed it out to the reader, and said, "First, smell it." Disbelievingly, the audience members responded, "It smells like bourbon . . ." Momentarily feigning relief, Steve said, "That's a good sign." Laughter. The man was then asked to taste it. Sure enough, it's a Manhattan.

Magic is primarily a visual art; mentalism, an intellectual one. Steve Cohen combines the two flawlessly in "Think-a-Drink," a routine that not only fries the mind, but in addition, engages and stuns *three* senses—sight, smell, and taste. "Let's try someone else!" says Cohen enthusiastically, inviting another guest to shout out the name of a drink. "Orange juice," she reads. "Okay, which do you prefer: with or without pulp?" asks Steve. "With!" the woman responds, chuckling. "Freshly squeezed?" "Yes." Steve proceeds to pour thick, pulpy orange juice from the kettle. Again, just enough in it to fill the shot glass. Following the OJ, came a man who read "Grasshopper." Naturally, the green drink was poured. This was more than a trick—it was a magical cocktail party! I have never experienced a routine in magic or mentalism



Mark Levy, Steve Cohen, and Ace Greenberg

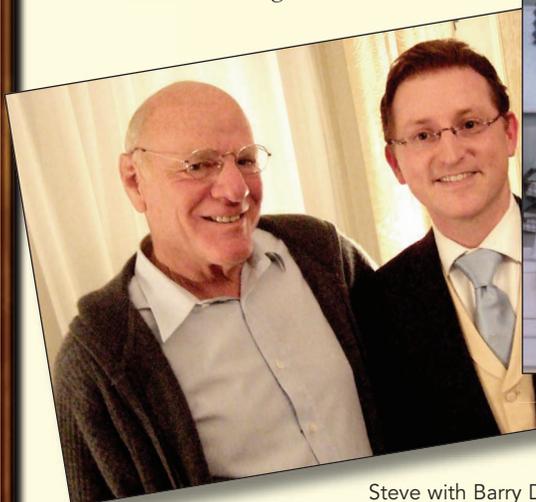
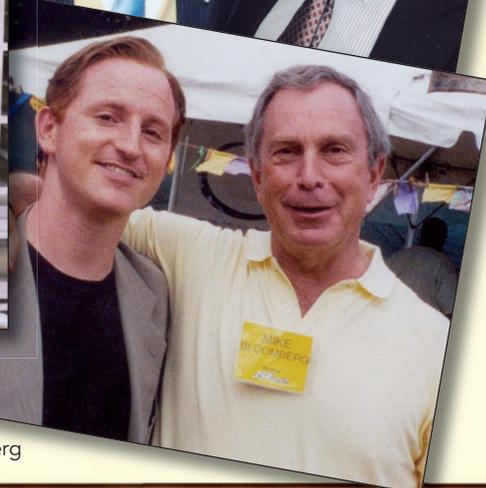
that was more fun. And Steve, always in the moment, was enjoying it every bit as much as we were. Giddy, as you might say.

After the third drink was poured, Steve said "You're probably wondering where you can buy one of these kettles . . . try Williams-Sonoma!"

What followed was yet another moment that is indelibly etched in my brain.

The fourth person holding a card yelled out, "1987 Cabernet." Steve asked, "That's kind of specific. Is red

Right: Steve with Stephen Sondheim



Steve with Barry Diller, Martha Stewart, and New York Mayor Bloomberg

WAKON YOSAI

JAPANESE SPIRIT, WESTERN KNOWLEDGE

For those readers who are aware only of Steve Cohen's performances in New York, it may come as a surprise to learn of his extensive career in Japan. Steve lived and worked in Tokyo for close to six years.

The late Shigeo Takagi escorted Steve around Japan for one month in 1989, which led to Steve's appreciation of our country, people, and magic. At that time, Japanese subculture was extremely interested in the ideas of young foreigners. It's easy to imagine how Steve, at age 17, was in turn fascinated by the emerging fusion of traditional and modern Japanese culture.

Upon returning home, Steve became obsessed with learning the Japanese language (eventually going on to pass the Japanese Proficiency Exam—Level One, which signifies native command of the language). At Cornell University, he breezed through Japanese 101 and 202, and then moved to Tokyo for a study-abroad program. He studied at Waseda University, considered to be the Harvard of Japan.

In 1991, Ton Onosaka invited Steve to work as a part-time employee in his world-renowned shop, Magic Land. This was the opportunity Steve was looking for. He was able to use his ever-sharpening Japanese skills in a magic-themed environment. Foreign magicians who visited Japan relied on him as their translator and guide, and this enabled him to meet many of the great names in our field.

The new generation of magicians in Tokyo—known as the “New Wave Kids”—were turning heads with their innovative ideas: Hiro Sakai, Tomohiro Maeda, Ken Kuroki, Kazuyuki Hase, Yuji Wada, and Akira Fujii. Today, these are some of the top names in Japanese magic. At the time Steve arrived in Japan, they were all young upstarts together.

Each of these magicians was notable for inventing unbelievably clever, original, and offbeat magic tricks. Their creativity made a strong impression on Steve. Little did he know that his New York delivery and showmanship skills had a strong impact on them, too.

Newly graduated from Cornell, Steve moved to Tokyo for an extended stay. He got off to a great start, performing close-up magic every weekend at Japan's most exclusive hotel, the Park Hyatt Tokyo (where Bill Murray's character stayed in the film *Lost in Translation*). Steve also appeared on various television specials and as a performer in the regular salon show “Let's Magic,” hosted by Yuka Shimoda and Tomohiro Maeda.

Steve was a surprise hit at FISM Yokohama in 1994, performing on the close-up shows in both Japanese and English.

Bona Ueki, one half of the famous comedy-magic team The Napoleons, often shared the stage with Steve, and they became fast friends. Says Ueki, “I knew that



By Yukishige Kadoya

Steve was very clever after watching him perform. He was enjoyable to be around, and I was pleased that he became part of the magic scene in Japan. He presented magic in a very gentlemanly way, which made quite an impact on the young Japanese magicians of the day.”

In addition to two sets of Japanese lecture notes, Steve's book *Win The Crowd* has been translated into Japanese and become a best seller business book in general bookstores nationwide. Steve was also instrumental to the success of two Japanese books I translated and published: the Japanese editions of Allan Kronzek's *Secrets of Alakazar*, and Jamy Ian Swiss's *Shattering Illusions*. Steve edited these books with an expert eye, since he understands both Japanese and magic so well.

Not only has he brought foreign magic to Japan, but he has also brought “Made in Japan” magic to the rest of the world. His most visible role has been with Tenyo. For many years, Canadian magician Gary Ouellette wrote the English instructions for Tenyo's export products. In 1997, Steve took over this post, and has explained the workings of nearly one hundred Tenyo tricks, in painstaking detail.

Tomoyuki Shimomura of Tenyo's development division says, “Steve Cohen's instructions are so clearly written and easy to follow that, not just magicians, but the general public worldwide is able to learn and enjoy our Tenyo products.”

Steve has recently written a book to be published by Kaufman and Company, which is a compilation volume that highlights tricks from Japan's finest close-up magicians. This book is an English translation of the Japanese book originally titled *Winners*, but it has been greatly expanded with many additional tricks not included in the original volume.

Among all of his accomplishments, I feel that Steve's strongest point is that he is comfortable both on and off-stage, both in front of and behind the scenes, working endlessly to promote intercultural communication.

Steve has not only learned about Japan and its magic on an intellectual level, but we Japanese recognize that he has completely internalized what could be called the Japanese spirit.

Since his first visit to Japan 19 years ago, he has played an indispensable role in helping Japanese magicians. The many friends and fans he has made in Japan are extremely proud of his success in New York.

Yukishige “Yuki” Kadoya has served as the beloved interpreter for every major foreign magician who has lectured in Japan. Based in Nagoya, he is both a performing magician and a magic scholar. Yuki has written several best-selling books, including Eigo de Pera-pera Magic. Later this year will see the publication of his Japanese translation of The Complete Works of Derek Dingle.



wine good enough?" More laughter. The card-holder then shocked everyone by revealing that he was, in fact, a sommelier! "Well," the man said teasingly, "1987 Cabernet would be nice" (laughter) "... in fact, '87 was a wonderful vintage—but if it's red wine, it's still a great trick!" Cohen said he would see what he could do. Tipping the kettle, what was clearly red wine spilled into the shot glass. The drink was then carried over to the sommelier. The crowd sat in silent anticipation as the man sniffed, then tasted the wine. "Jesus!" he exclaimed. "1987 Cabernet! How the hell ... ?" Thunderous applause and gasps of those who had just witnessed a miracle.

my cerebral cortex. And while Richiardi may have provided shock and awe, he most certainly did not provide those sweet, ultimate moments of astonishment I felt watching Steve Cohen's performance at the Waldorf. Moments I wished to experience every night. Moments I wanted to be able to provide for others. Moments of true magic.

 The second time I saw Steve Cohen perform, my knowledge of magic had grown by leaps and bounds. Truth be told, I had matured from having little knowledge to becoming rather well-educated, if I

Teller (of Penn & Teller) once said of Cohen:

"It's a pleasure to see an audience gasp in amazement over and over again."

Back to the show. Finally, Steve asked me to read my card, which I did. Iced mochachino. At this point, of course, I'm thinking, "How's he going to get out of this one, even with the 'trick' kettle he won't relinquish?" Taking me completely off-guard, Steve offered me the kettle and said, "Why don't you pour this one?" Gladly, I took it from him, and realized at this point that I was actually somewhat frightened. I gingerly poured myself a shot ... which just filled the glass, and as I poured it, I could see that I wouldn't even have to taste the drink to recognize it ... but I downed it anyway. Iced mochachino. Delicious ... and at this point, almost hallucinatory.

Steve Cohen and Mark Levy, the co-creators of *Chamber Magic* had constructed the strongest, most perfectly-paced, most enjoyable and memorable evening of magic I have ever experienced. Actually, the most memorable night of magic may be when I saw Richiardi at age 14 at Madison Square Garden, where he cut his daughter in half with a buzz saw, blood and entrails flying into the audience—and then invited the crowd onstage to see the carnage that was his offspring. It was the most memorable night of "magic," if only for the unfortunate fact that it took decades of therapy to dislodge the horrific image from

PARLOR MAGIC

FROM VIENNA
TO NEW YORK

By Jörg Alexander

Parlor magic is a unique performing situation, somewhere between small theater and larger close-up show and thus containing elements of both. Since Steve Cohen presents a formal show, his audiences come *specifically* to see magic and will, in general, be attentive and interested. This is a huge advantage over more improvised close-up situations, where part of the audience may be distracted or not even interested in magic at all. Although he doesn't have the technical facilities of a big stage, Steve has complete control over the performing environment in his Waldorf-Astoria suite, which gives him a lot of technical and artistic leeway.

On the other hand, the interaction between Steve and his audience is much more familiar and more intimate than in a typical theater situation. This is not "a star" to be watched from a distance; he acts as the host for a group of guests, and small conversations between him and the attendees may happen at any time—in fact, to a certain extent they're encouraged by him. He has to handle this delicately, of course, or the show may lose pace and focus, but it adds to that feeling of intimacy that is a trademark of *Chamber Magic*.

One of the drawbacks of a parlor show, as opposed to close-up magic, is that people are simply farther away from the magic, thus potentially diminishing the impact. To counter this you have to choose, script, and rehearse your material very carefully and use the proper amount of energy in your presentation: not too little, as you want to reach everyone in the room; not too much, as this may irritate or even scare your audience. Steve also employs another strategy: at two times in his show he asks the people in the last two rows to move to the front and stand next to, and behind him. He also has the second row stand up. Doing two strong effects in this modified setting adds believability to the rest of the show.

A parlor show is a great setting for working with volunteers—provided you treat them well. For many effects you may probably let the assisting spectators remain in or by their seats, since the room is small enough for everyone to watch you and the assistant without any problem. And if you do ask someone to the front, the group is not as large and the lights not as bright as in a typical theater situation, thus keeping his stress level down.

I think the parlor is also a very "honest" performing situation in the sense that you can usually see the reactions of your audience almost as easily as they can see yours. If you flash or if they hate you, you'll know immediately. And, of course, the opposite is also true: if they enjoy the show and if they are fascinated by what you are doing, you'll know that, too. An immediate feedback loop that can be a terrific learning tool for an observant and self-critical performer.

Part of what makes *Chamber Magic* so appealing to me is the definitive European flair that Steve's performance style exudes. He is very much aware of the roots and traditions of his chosen venue, which reach well back into the past. The start of the 19th century saw the steady rise to power, wealth, and influence of the middle classes in Europe. This created an environment that allowed magic to get rid of the dust of the streets and to elevate itself to an elegant and sophisticated art form. Artists like Robert-Houdin in Paris and J.N. Maskelyne in London firmly established "Modern Magic" in the theater. Vienna, however, where the parlors became the center of elegant social life, was to become the cradle of parlor magic. In the mid to late 1850s, great artists like Bosco and Döbler had started entertaining sophisticated audiences in their own parlors and had thus set the scene for Johann Nepomuk Hofzinsler—the undisputed father of parlor magic. In 1857, Hofzinsler's wife Wilhelmina opened the first of several parlors that would see regular performances by herself and her husband. Although Hofzinsler had also performed in theaters throughout Europe, it was primarily his regular intimate shows for the social and cultural elite that made him a star in his time.

Steve has followed this example and has targeted a very specific audience that is open and responsive to his particular style: these people enjoy his good manners, his soft-spoken and articulate presentations, his focus on the purity of the effect, far from any glamour and glitter. Steve has found the niche that allows him and his magic to shine.



Jörg Alexander is a professional magician and member of the Flicking Fingers. His work involves many performances in parlor-type situations, as well as smaller and medium sized theaters. Jörg lives in Munich where he has been presenting a regular formal close-up show for five years.



do say so myself. After having read hundreds of books on magic and mentalism, studied psychology, suggestion and NLP, and worked countless hours on card sleights, coin sleights, and every other kind of sleight and technique of misdirection imaginable (all of this inspired by my first encounter with Cohen, of course). I now went to see his show with a completely different perspective, and a firm grasp of the art. I knew what to look for this time. And damned if I *still* didn't see it coming when Cohen lifted his hat on the flat table three feet in front of my eyes, to reveal that brick!

In his landmark book, *Absolute Magic*, Derren Brown talks about the importance of the spectator seeing "the process." When Steve Cohen performs his Q & A mentalism act, as he did recently when I caught his show at the Beverly-Wilshire Hotel in Los Angeles, you witness the process of what appears to be true mindreading. With no discernable "pumping," he provides information that it seems impossible for him to have known in advance. I have witnessed numerous Q & A acts in the years since I first saw Steve, watching many of the greats in mentalism perform the art of cold reading, but I have never seen anyone provide as much inexplicably gathered information, and with such deep insight, as Steve Cohen. There are, for all appearance's sake, no seams, no fishing. Thank God he's using his powers for good!

At the L.A. show, I also watched Steve perform an incredible map effect, for which I still have no explanation. To the best of my knowledge, there was no pre-show involved, as I was friends with many guests who attended the show that

night, and we compared notes afterward . . .

Cohen told a volunteer to think of any city in the United States, reminding the person that the smaller the town, the better. As the man concentrated on his city, Steve kept tearing a paper map of the US into smaller and smaller pieces, finally being left with a tiny one-inch section, which he proceeded to stick with a long hat pin. When asked what town the man was thinking of, he replied, "Galveston, Texas." Cohen turned the map piece around. The pin was stuck directly through Galveston.

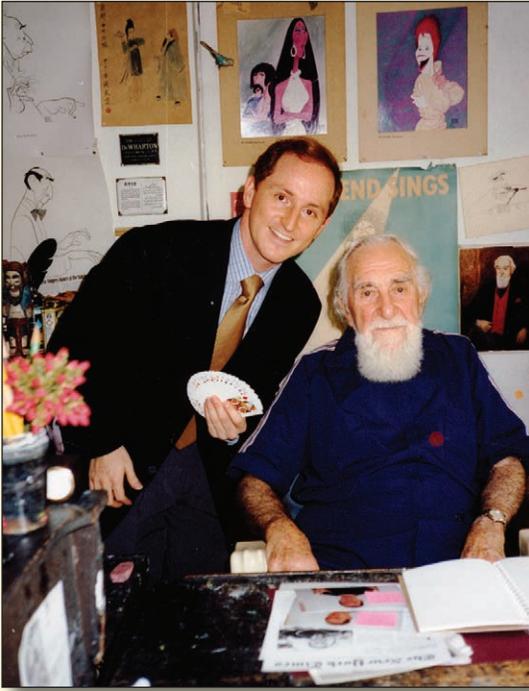


Steve Cohen was born in 1971, in Yonkers, New York, and spent his adolescence growing up in the tony suburbs of Yorktown Heights and Chappaqua, New York.

In 1977, at the tender age of six, Steve learned his very first magic trick from his great-uncle, an amateur magician. The trick Steve learned at six used a card force and the Si Stebbins stack. Six! At age six, the only force I knew was how to jam a round peg into a square hole. It was only four years later, at age 10, when Steve landed his first paying gig, performing for a group of 4-year-olds at a local birthday party. Steve performed, and the kids ate it up . . . along with assorted items that were stuck to the carpet. Here Steve was, at 10 years old, his career path already becoming clearly defined: going on after the cake and before the musical chairs. In truth, it was only the beginning . . .

As he moved on into his teens, Steve dedicated every free second to magic, performing table-hopping for two years





Steve with Al Hirschfeld and "The Hirschfeld" portrait at Elliott's Restaurant in Yorktown Heights, New York. By 17, Steve had garnered quite a reputation both within his residential community and in the fraternity of magicians as well. That same year, Steve took first prize in Junior Close-Up Magic at the IBM convention in Nashville, Tennessee.

Less than one year later, in 1989, Steve worked his first road gig. And when I say "the road," I'm talking about one heck of a road trip: Steve made his first visit to Japan, and performed at the invitation of the late Shigeo Takagi. A visit to perform in the Far East was exhilarating, to be sure, but eventually, it was time to go back to school. So Steve enrolled at Cornell University, where he studied psychology, gaining insights that would serve him well as tools in the conjurer's magic toolbox. In fact, Cohen's favorite book is *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, a seminal work by Robert Cialdini. "If you don't know how people think, you can't lead them down the garden path," says Cohen.

Steve was taken by the magic of the Far East and longed to return. So in 1991, Steve headed back to Japan, studying at Waseda University in Tokyo. While at school, Steve worked a part-time job at Ton Onosaka's famous Magic Land shop, and honed his ability to focus by studying meditation at Izumo Taisha, a famous Japanese temple in Shimane. Cohen currently meditates for one hour every morning at his Upper West Side apartment, where he lives with his wife, Yumi, and their children Alex and June.

Over a period of four years, Steve lived and worked in Tokyo, performing table-hopping magic weekly at Park Hyatt Tokyo and Ginza Lion. That provided him with a lot of experience. And sushi.

Then in 1995, Steve moved to New York City, where he began his steady rise. At first, Steve performed for small private gatherings while also working as a Japanese



translator/interpreter to help pay the bills. During his early days in New York, Steve would show up every Wednesday night (as a patron) at the main bar in the Peninsula Hotel on Fifth Avenue, and casually perform magic for other customers at the bar. Steve seized this as an opportunity to schmooze, make contacts, and network with the wealthy guests who could afford to stay at this luxurious residence. While I have found most performers (including myself) to be notoriously poor businessmen, particularly when it comes to selling themselves to a potential client, Steve Cohen is as self-assured a man as you will ever meet. His days spent at the Peninsula Hotel bar hobnobbing with the rich and famous would pay off in spades.

In 1999, Mr. Cohen landed his first major gig in magic—working as a television consultant to David Blaine. Steve would serve in this capacity for two years.

In his second year with Blaine, Steve Cohen performed his first *Chamber Magic* show (originally entitled "Mystery Salon") at friend Harvey Cohen's apartment in Greenwich Village, New York. "*Chamber Magic*," of course, was a name that harkened back to the Victorian Era. "Mystery Salon," of course, harkening back to Supercuts.



In the spring of 2001, Cohen performed 20 *Chamber Magic* shows at the prestigious National Arts Club, in Gramercy Park. By that summer, Steve was performing at The Waldorf Towers. To date, he has presented the public show over 800 times. This figure includes only public performances at luxury hotels in New York, London, Chicago, Beverly Hills, San Francisco, Miami, Houston, and Boston.

In addition, Steve has presented a modified version of the show hundreds of times at private events.

Celebrities, tycoons, and aristocrats, oh my. All three of these privileged groups hire Steve Cohen to entertain them in the privacy of their multi-million dollar homes. And when I say “privileged,” I’m not talking about their wealth. I’m referring to the fact that they are getting a private showing from arguably one of the best conjurers in the world.

Cohen is the very definition of a man whose life and career have come “full-circle.” The conjurer called “The Millionaires’ Magician,” who has performed for royalty, CEOs, and celebrity superstars, is in an elite group of his own. He is now a multi-millionaire himself and, holding

The Magic Circle’s rank of MIMC (Member of the Inner Magic Circle) with Gold Star, can be considered magic royalty.

Steve has traveled the world, with recent performances in Amsterdam, London, Tokyo, Paris, Lucerne, and Geneva. Switzerland holds a special appeal for Mr. Cohen, as collecting fine watches is a guilty pleasure. Cohen is a true Renaissance Man, with magic being just one of his many talents. He also speaks fluent, flawless Japanese, is a master of modular origami, kendama juggling, plays classical piano, and is an avid art collector (Al Hirschfeld being a favorite—having nothing to do with the fact that one of Hirschfeld’s subjects was Cohen himself).

Steve Cohen points to several legendary magicians (and his great-uncle, of course) as his biggest inspirations: Max Malini (he of the appearing brick), Johann Nepomuk Hofzinsler, Charles Bertram, and Jean-Eugene Robert-Houdin. These four gentlemen helped change the general perception of magic from a street performance or circus sideshow act, to that of elegant, upscale entertainment.

Cohen was also inspired by the modern works of Tommy Wonder, Derren Brown, and Juan Tamariz—all brilliant minds who understand how to command a stage, bend minds, and move an audience to laughter and tears, hitting them where it counts.

But it was primarily Hofzinsler, who performed during the 1840s and 50s for Viennese high society in the intimate setting of his private salons, that eventually was to help shape and define Steve Cohen’s magic. Aiding Steve in the discovery of his unique persona and brand of conjuring was the co-creator and creative director of *Chamber Magic*, Mark Levy.

Approximately nine years ago, Cohen was introduced to Levy by Joel Bauer. Bauer informed Steve that Levy had a strong background in positioning and marketing. Although already a master of sleight of hand, showmanship, and the art of deception, Steve knew that being talented wasn’t enough; he had to differentiate himself in order to stand apart from the pack, even among the most elite magicians of the day. He was tired of talking on the phone to clients who would ask, “Do you do that thing with the sponge balls?” or, “Do you make balloon animals?” Cohen wanted to communicate that he brought more to the table. A lot more. The client would be hiring an artist. A conjurer. As Mark Levy got to know Steve, watching his shows, becoming familiar with Cohen’s eloquence, style, and talent, and perhaps most importantly, learning about Cohen’s background, he had an epiphany ...

Steve Cohen had grown up in the one of the most wealthy



Photo by Clay McBride

communities in America—Chappaqua, New York—cutting his teeth performing magic for the über-rich. He attended an Ivy League university. All of this, Levy realized, was the key to branding what was to become “The Millionaires’ Magician.” The concept and character was organic; Cohen was cultured in this environment. It followed Levy’s blueprint of strategic positioning. Together, they overhauled Steve’s show and created a program the likes of which had not been seen since the days of Hofzinsler. An act that was to be performed in only upscale environs for select clients who paid top dollar. Cohen’s program provided elegant and intellectually-stimulating entertainment in an intimate, parlor setting.

The parlor provided a quieter, slower, and certainly more personal form of contact between performer and audience than we know today. Cohen and Levy realized the desperate need for a return to these bygone days of personal communication in the midst of today’s fast-paced technology boom: with the World Wide Web, e-mail, YouTube, PMS, text messages, and thousands of Direct TV stations.

People spend hours on end not leaving their PC, let alone their house. Entertainment is everywhere, but always at a distance. And magic on television, in this writer’s opinion, is like ventriloquism on the radio. You have to take the performer’s word for it. There is no concrete, empirical evidence that what the spectator has just witnessed involves any skill whatsoever. Most of the effects performed by the television magician can just as easily be achieved through the use of paid actors, stooges, special effects, or post production editing. And these days, in fact, they often are. Even the large, impressive Las Vegas magic shows keep the audience at arm’s length. To truly experience the wonder of magic, the audience should be able to practically reach out and touch the performer and his arsenal of effects. They must communicate as two friends would, in their living room.

Steve Cohen knew that, and subsequently brought intimacy and immediacy back to the art of prestidigitation.

After watching Cohen’s show, John Carney, who has received more awards from The Magic Castle than anyone in its history, said about Steve:

“This is the way magic was meant to be presented: for sophisticated adults, in an artistic atmosphere. Cohen presents his amazing and eclectic mysteries with great charm and aplomb. Chamber Magic is engaging, entertaining and great fun.”


The late media scholar Marshall McLuhan would have a difficult time defining Mr. Cohen’s act in terms of one that belongs either in the category of “cool media” or “hot media.” Hot media are usually visual, calling for analytical precision, and sequential ordering, as they are most often linear and logical. They emphasize one sense, like sight or sound over the others. For this reason, hot media include film and radio. Steve Cohen’s act is as visual as it gets—particularly for a show that involves a

great deal of mentalism (while all too often, mentalists move ploddingly along, uninspiring to the mind and eye). Cohen’s show builds in a logical, linear fashion—a precision story arc at its heart.

That being said, the specific effects are anything *but* linear, and certainly defy logic.

Cool media, according to McLuhan, require more active participation on the part of the user, including the perception and comprehension of abstract concepts and patterns. Cool media, therefore, include television (particularly call-in shows), as well as the lecture or seminar.

Cohen’s act not only invites, but indeed, *demand*s active participation by almost every “user,” or, in this case, audience member. You are challenged to comprehend the incomprehensible. Good luck.

A perfect example of Steve’s audience involvement was demonstrated a few years ago on the Martha Stewart television show. Steve asked the domestic doyenne to look through her books and decide upon an image or photograph. “Whatever you choose will magically materialize in that picnic basket hanging over your head,” he promised. The basket, in view the entire time, was eventually lowered and opened. In it was a loaf of sourdough bread.

Stewart, as if the victor of a challenge, said, “Ah ha! But I was thinking of spools of *thread*.” When the bread was cracked open, however, three spools of thread fell out, having been baked inside. Stewart was speechless.

The Queen of Morocco, Prince Saud of Saudi Arabia, Stephen Sondheim, Barry Diller, Michael Eisner, Mayor Mike Bloomberg, David Rockefeller, Martha Stewart, Sir André Previn, Michael J. Fox, Jack Welch, Stone Phillips, Reebok founder Paul Fireman, U.S. Senator Chuck Shumer, Andrew Grove (former Intel CEO), Herb Kellaher (Southwest Airlines CEO), Larry Summers (president of Harvard University) ... if this sounds like the membership roster of an exclusive country club, well, keep in mind it also happens to be a list of Steve Cohen’s clients.

At a private show for the Queen of Morocco in the Waldorf, Steve, as usual, delivered a command performance. Only eight people were present. At the door were six Royal Guardsmen. No pressure here. The highlight of the evening came when Steve performed an impromptu version of “Spectator Cuts the Aces,” which Steve had adjusted for just this occasion. One of the Queen’s subjects shuffled the deck thoroughly, after which Steve asked the Queen to cut the deck into four piles. Cohen announced, “Only a Queen could cut to these four cards—look!” She turned over the top cards of each packet; the Queens of Hearts, Clubs, Spades and Diamonds. The group went wild. Delighted, the Queen exclaimed, “Wonderful! When the King visits you must show this to him as well!”

To which Steve quickly replied, “Absolutely, only when *he* cuts the cards he will find all four Kings!”

There is indeed a lesson to be learned, here. By the simple tweak of using Queens instead of Aces, Cohen’s effect became more than just another magic trick. He

made it *relevant*, he connected, and thus the Queen and her subjects were more emotionally drawn to the piece. The “Spectator Cuts the Aces” was suddenly not just “the spectator.” It was “the Queen.” A bond had been formed. So much so, that after the program, Moroccan Ambassador Jiadi gave Mr. Cohen a beautiful hand-woven Moroccan carpet as a thank-you gift.

In my past life as a stand-up comic, I always believed strongly in connecting on a personal level with the audience. Before I would perform at a corporate event, I’d try to get information on the members of the audience, and I’d

saying this gentleman’s tricks were good enough, but he seemed to be on “automatic pilot.” You will never see Steve Cohen on “automatic pilot.” Ever. He is, as actors say, always “in the moment.” And this, in large part, is what separates him from the rest. No matter how long Steve performs the same effect, he is discovering something new about it every night—honing, improving. So in a sense, the effect is always “new” to him. Steve doesn’t merely string together a series of tricks and sleepwalk through them.

Cohen establishes a personal connection with each and every member of his audience, making them feel like every



ask for the info to be as specific as possible. For example, if I found out from his co-workers that office manager Joe Thompson was known for cracking his knuckles loudly during board meetings, I might open my show with the line: “Thank you, ladies and gentlemen! That applause was almost as loud as Joe Thompson’s knuckles at a board meeting.” About as lame a joke as one could write, it might well be the *biggest laugh* of the night, if simply for the fact that here was a stranger (me), *who showed a personal interest in them*.

Steve Cohen understands the power of magic. The power that *well-presented* magic can have on an audience. Recently, a friend of mine was going to Las Vegas, where I suggested he check out the show of one of my favorite mentalists. My buddy came home very disappointed,

word he speaks is directed toward *them*; every spectacular feat achieved, performed and tailored for them *personally*. This is no easy task when one is doing hundreds of shows per year.

One of the world’s leading violinists, Anne-Sophie Mutter, attended Steve’s New York show with her (then) husband, Sir André Previn. Afterward she invited Steve and his whole family to Vitznau, Switzerland—a beautiful resort town near Lucerne. After performing his Humber “Linking Finger Rings” routine, Cohen picked up a violin in one hand and a bow in the other. He showed them separately, then placed the violin under his chin. Steve then began to play a tune . . . Horribly. (Hey, even a Renaissance Man can’t do everything!) Cohen explained that he wasn’t much of a *musician*, but he was, in fact, a real *magician*.

Furiously, Cohen ran the bow back and forth across the strings, at break-neck speed—then suddenly let go of the violin. The bow hairs had miraculously penetrated through the violin strings, and the instrument was now hanging from the bow—undeniably linked together. Steve proclaimed: “Just as your finger rings had linked, so have the violin and bow!” The audience, comprised of all musicians, went bananas. Anne-Sophie kept the violin as a souvenir of the evening. These are the moments that those who are privy to Steve’s private shows will never forget. The personal touches, the specific miracles that touch their lives directly. Consideration and thoughtfulness, combined with unparalleled skill in creating miracles. Is it any wonder he’s at the top of his field?

Jeff McBride, one of the most innovative and talented magicians of this or any generation, said about **Cohen**:

“Steve Cohen’s ability to weave a world of wonders from such simple yet elegant properties is a lesson to not only magicians, but all entertainers. I don’t know where he can take the show from here; it’s about as close to heaven as you can possibly get.”

Indeed.

Call us “magicians,” “mentalists,” “sleight-of-hand artists,” “illusionists,” “close-up artists,” or “prestidigitators.” But please call Steve Cohen a “conjurer,” for that is what he is. And call him as soon as possible. If you can

afford him. There is no one more skilled, more polished, and more entertaining, in our wonderful art. And that is why he is “The Millionaires’ Magician.”

In my 30 years of performing in nightclubs, seeing thousands of stage shows, and writing and producing for television, I have crossed paths with many legendary entertainers. And of all the performers I have encountered, in any field, Steve Cohen is as strong as they come. His material, flawless. As McBride suggests, it could not be more elegant in its hard-hitting simplicity. Effective. Solid. And always surprising. Like a brick from under a hat.



Originally from New York City, Gabe Abelson spent 4½ years as the head monologue writer for The Late Show with David Letterman, garnering four Emmy nominations and three Writer’s Guild nominations. After his tenure at Letterman, Gabe relocated to the West Coast, where he worked as staff writer at various network shows, including Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher (ABC), The Tonight Show with Jay Leno (NBC), The Late, Late Show with Craig Kilborn (CBS), in addition to having served as the producer/head writer for The New Tom Green Show (MTV). Previous to his career in television and movie writing, Gabe was an accomplished stand-up comedian and actor, having appeared on such shows as Late Night With Conan O’Brien, The MTV Half-Hour Comedy Hour, and Caroline’s Comedy Hour. He now performs psychic entertainment at clubs, colleges, parties, and corporate events whenever he’s not writing for television.



STEVE COHEN

THE MILLIONAIRES’ MAGICIAN

Interview by Richard Kaufman

Genii: Why do you call yourself “The Millionaires’ Magician?” Doesn’t that turn some people off? It sounds kind of snooty.

Cohen: Nice way to start the interview!

Genii: It’s my prerogative: I remember teaching you and Mark Sicher how to shave when you were both kids.

Cohen: So you did. To answer your question, an upscale magazine in New York City wrote a feature story about me, and that was the headline: “The Millionaires’ Magician.” I’m at The Waldorf Towers every Friday and Saturday night for my show *Chamber Magic*. But the other five days of the week I travel around the world to perform at people’s mansions and private islands. They pick me up in luxury cars and put me up in fine hotels in Switzerland, London, Paris, the Caribbean, Boca Raton, Aspen, all over the place.

Genii: You’ve clearly figured out a great niche for yourself.

Cohen: To be honest, there are at least three million millionaires in America, and in my geographic region—New York City—it seems like everyone I know is a millionaire. So when I call myself “The Millionaires’ Magician,” it’s simply a description of my market. Now, I find myself contacted only by people—event planners, corporate groups, and individuals—who can afford my current rates. They kind of know what they’re jumping into when they call me, so there’s no sticker shock when they hear my prices.

Genii: How many shows per year do you perform?

Cohen: I do 16 *Chamber Magic* shows a month (four shows each weekend) at the Waldorf, and between six and 10 private or corporate shows per month on top of that. So I’m working a lot—roughly 300 shows a year. Which is good,

since I have two small kids and we live on the Upper West Side of Manhattan—not exactly a neighborhood known for bargain-hunting. But, it's not only about the money for me. I feel extremely lucky to live my childhood dream.

Genii: Speaking of money—and please be frank here—do you charge more for your show when you are performing for, say, a billionaire?

Cohen: Nobody likes to be taken advantage of, especially the ultra-rich. I do have a premiere rate that I present as an option to my high net-worth clients. To justify the higher fee, I customize parts of my show to meet the interests of the individual client.

In my proposal, I explain that I'll create two to three new tricks specific to their event. In many cases, this is easy—just a matter of changing patter to an existing trick in my repertoire to fit the person. But I also enjoy challenging myself to develop something truly new—like the violin string penetration (for Anne-Sophie Mutter) and the loaf of bread (for Martha Stewart). Mark Levy and I work together to come up with one-off presentations that the audience clearly knows was created just for them.

Some of my long-standing clients even suggest that I bring my family along when the events are held in resort areas. To me, this is like a bonus—a chance to vacation with my family while working.

You have to understand, one of my aims is to not simply be a “hired gun,” but to become part of the clients' family circle. I'm a real person to them—we stay in touch throughout the year, sharing personal notes and gifts. If they have guests visiting New York City, I comp them into my shows at the Waldorf. I take care of them.

In return, they take care of me. And that's because I'm sincere in my dealings with them.

Genii: What is your relationship with the Waldorf-Astoria?

Cohen: When I began working with the Waldorf, the staff had no idea that I would be there for an extended period of time. I've now presented over 800 performances of *Chamber Magic* at the Waldorf, and the staff considers me a permanent resident. The hotel has become overwhelmingly supportive of *Chamber Magic*: The concierges recommend the show to in-house guests; They feed me dinner after the show; They send wine, cheese, and fruit amenities so that I can entertain VIP guests who stay after the show to talk; They invite me to perform for VIP events for celebrities and royalty who are staying at the hotel.

Each of these items was attained by baby steps, over the course of many years.

I now live at The Waldorf Towers every weekend, and then uptown at my apartment the rest of the week. My suite at the Waldorf is much larger than my apartment at home—about 4,000 square feet.

I perform in the living room area, with three or four rows of chairs.

Genii: And the show is now sold-out several months in advance ...

Cohen: When I first started, the hotel was not at all supportive in promoting *Chamber Magic*. I had only one or two executives who championed my cause, and everyone else seemed to think that I was just another guest, holding just another event there.

The Waldorf Towers hosts important events every day, from the United Nations General Assembly to the NASCAR award show, to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame



induction ceremony. Richard Branson stays there, Brad Pitt stays there, and every U.S. President since 1931 has stayed there when they visit New York City. A magic show by an unknown magician was not on anybody's radar.

In the beginning, I invited my friends and family, and told them to bring their friends—just to fill the seats. After about six months, I'd used up all my friends, and attendance started to dwindle. I lied to my wife, and told her that our business was breaking even, but in reality I was losing money every week.

This continued for two and a half years. Then, with an immense amount of effort, and relying solely on word-of-mouth, I was finally breaking even. In order to keep the room looking full, I gave out complimentary seats to anybody who asked, and even “papered the room” several times with members of ticketing clubs who wanted to see free shows in Manhattan.

Fortunately, New York City is a media capitol, and media people started showing up at *Chamber Magic*. A reporter from CNN came one night with a film crew and did a long profile of the show on CNN. She told Anderson Cooper and Paula Zahn about it, and suddenly I was on the map. The media feeds off of other media, and shortly after, a reporter from the Associated Press showed up. After his article appeared in hundreds of American newspapers, there was suddenly some interest in my little show at the Waldorf.

Genii: You’ve talked a lot about marketing and your business. I’d hate for my readers to think that you are merely a businessman and not a real student of magic. I know that you are, of course, because you were doing tricks for me when you were 14 years old, but my readers don’t.

Cohen: Magic is all-consuming for me. I love to practice difficult card sleights: Earnest Earick’s One-Handed Bottom Palm, Ascanio’s handling of The Diagonal Palm Shift, “Raise Rise,” and so on. I also work constantly on the Classic Pass. Derek Dingle was kind to praise my Shift when I showed it to him repeatedly in New York. That memory will always remain one of my magical highlights.

I also love to read all of the biographies and treatments of great magicians of the past: Karl Germain, Chung Ling Soo, Roy Benson, Al Baker, Robert-Houdin, Hofzinger, David Devant, Charles Bertram, Max Malini, and Nate Leipzig. These are the magicians who have influenced me in a direct way, through the printed page. I read constantly—hunting for the good stuff.

Genii: This must have helped when you began to put together *Chamber Magic*.

Cohen: For me, the effect is always the thing. How will this appear to the layman? When I was choosing material for *Chamber Magic* I was tempted to put together a show full of knuckle-busting sleight of hand. But I ultimately decided that the show is not aimed at magicians. Nobody is going to applaud a flawless Multiple Shift, or something that magicians would call clever. Lay audiences care about the dramatic voyage—the introduction into a world where magic might really take place.

The Waldorf-Astoria building itself helps me put people into that mindset, even before the show begins. The audience enters through a marble lobby, and gets whisked upstairs in a special elevator. By the time they enter my suite, they’re already expecting to see things they’ve never seen before.

The material I chose is entirely effect-driven, and I include a lot of classics: Any-Drink-Called-For, the Rising Cards, and the Malini hat routine. In the mentalism section of my show, I do a Question & Answer routine. To

magicians, this may seem to be standard stuff. But when combined with compelling presentations, they take on a different character.

Mark Levy worked hard with me to pick strong material that can be easily described by audiences. Like Vernon said: “A good trick needs to be described in a single sentence.” For every trick that makes the show, there are probably 12 tricks that didn’t. Mark would always say, “Maybe they knocked the audience on their ass lightly ... but we’re hoping for black and blue marks.”

Genii: What are your guidelines when choosing tricks?

Cohen: I don’t mind going the extra mile to really fool the audience badly. Michael Close wrote about this in his book *Workers Five*. He calls it the “Too Much Trouble” assumption. Audiences would never imagine that a magician would go to such trouble (like memorizing an entire deck of cards) simply to fool them. That assumption is what slays them. I am willing to spend years preparing for a trick that takes only a few minutes to perform. The audience really has no chance—it’s a ridiculous disadvantage.

My performance of “Think-a-Drink,” for instance, requires an hour of set-up before the show, and another hour of clean-up afterward. I can’t just pack up and leave. It’s not like a club date where you have your props in a briefcase or trunk, and you need to be able to break down the show and hop in your car.

But it’s exactly that extra effort that provides an unforgettable experience for the audience.

In addition, at The Waldorf Towers, I have total control over the environment, including the entrance hall, waiting room, and performance space. I’ve built props that look like ordinary items and objects that are meant to be in those rooms.

The show appears to have very few props, when in fact there are many. They just blend into the environment—nobody even realizes they’re there. This approach is based on Dunninger’s statement that each time a mentalist takes out a prop, his price goes down. At the end of the show, I want people to remember me as a personality. The way I chose to accomplish this is to perform tricks that are personality-driven, not prop-driven.

Genii: That’s what makes the tricks yours ...

Cohen: That, I feel, is one of the real secrets of magic. To make the tricks yours. I tie in so much of my personal history, family stories, and other such elements that it rings true. It doesn’t feel artificial. I try to connect with *Chamber Magic* audiences on a personal level so that they feel like they know me.

Genii: What’s the most interesting thing one of your high-falutin clients ever said to you?

Cohen: One of my best clients in Boca Raton gave me the following quote: “A master in the art of living leaves others to determine whether he is working or playing. To himself, he always seems to be doing both.” That sums up how I’m living my life right now. I’m making an enjoyable living for my family, by playing. •