



Jola Chudy investigates the local magic scene and finds that it's not just smoke and mirrors. She presents the amazing... the stupendous... the magicians of Dubai!

ABRACADABRA! DIABRA!

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Daniela Maxova, the 'female David Copperfield' is a bit tied up at the moment.



Above: Phil Fenton urges you to look into his eyes. Below: Gaston Quieto performs a stunt with a Marilyn-alike.



TALKING TRICKS



Magician Matthew Duggan says that when it comes to his craft, "the impossibilities are endless". He recently performed at Sezzam at Mall of the Emirates.

What are the main differences between the crowds here and in Dubai?

Mainly, the reactions. Once the magic begins, the reactions vary greatly, but it would seem that in the UK, we are more used to, or perhaps more programmed, to applaud. In Dubai, the reactions are often far more muted. The crowd will enjoy it and talk about it afterwards, but when the magic is actually happening, the audience is very quiet. Dubai seems to enjoy more visual and often more comedic magic than anywhere else I've been.

What was a highlight of your visit to Dubai?

I guess the moment that sticks out was when I was performing at Sezzam and working a table of several gentlemen and one lady. The main guy at the table asked for my contact details saying that he wanted to invite me to perform in front of the Sheikhs. He shook my hand as I left and I felt a bank note being pressed into my hand. Following the rules of courtesy I thanked him, not looking at the bill but putting it into my pocket. When I remembered I had it and took it out, it looked like the Dhs50 note. It was only when I uncurled it that I saw it was Dhs500!

Have you performed for anyone famous?

Jamie Oliver. I was working at an awards ceremony for his charity in London. He shook my hand and said "Thanks for freaking me out!"

Are you coming back to Dubai?

I'm due back to work at Sezzam in January 2008 – it's a great way to go somewhere warm and work on new material without worrying about where the next bit of work is coming from.

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GLITTERING BOXES, RABBITS, WANDS AND CAPES HAVE BEEN ESCHEWED FOR A HIP, URBANE ATTITUDE

Pulling rabbits out of hats is old hat. David Blaine is probably single-handedly responsible for raising the profile of close-up magic, having taken a tired and dated format and turned it on its head. The audience became the beautiful assistant, and the pavement became his stage. Glittering boxes, rabbits, wands and star-festooned capes were to be seen no more, eschewed in favour of a deck of cards, some coins and a hip, urbane attitude. Then he went and sat in a plexiglass box over London and people thought he was, well, a bit odd. But his work was done and magic became trendy again.

Here in Dubai, the magic scene is still a relative infant, but a small band of determined magicians is ensuring that is going to change.

Sezzam at Mall of the Emirates is a restaurant, bar and hive of magical activity all-in-one and an excellent place to catch magicians performing close-up magic on a regular basis. The Kempinski Hotel brings internationally acclaimed magicians to Dubai on a rotating basis, so every month you have the chance to be dazzled and confounded by a different performer every time.

Grab a table at Sezzam and soon you are bound to have a magician performing tricks before your very eyes. Here, magicians don't stare down loftily from the stage. Instead, the audience is part of the act instead.

The interactive nature of close-up magic means that hiring a magician has become particularly popular at corporate functions or parties, where the magician provides both entertainment and acts as a social lubricant. This is where the freelance magicians (who knew such a job existed?) come into their own.

Czech illusionist and escape artist Daniela Maxova is one such trickster for hire. Based in Dubai, she has been performing for 12 years and is known as the 'female David Copperfield'. An attractive blonde, she looks more like the sort of woman David of the dodgy barnet inexplicably dates, but is a very accomplished performer in her own right and has even opened for Nancy Ajram. She's on the books with Dubai events and entertainment company Flying Elephant, as is Gaston Quieto, an Argentine sleight-of-hand magician.

Chilean illusionist Felipe Scherson is another master of close-up magic and has an enviable reputation for corporate events in Dubai (he did a great job performing at the

Felipe proves it's not all top hats for magicians. It's flat caps too...



PRESENTATION IS 70 PER CENT OF THE ILLUSION. WITH CLOSE-UP MAGIC THERE IS CHARISMA INVOLVED

What's On awards in April). "Presentation is 70 per cent of the illusion," he says. "With close-up magic, there is interaction and a charisma involved." Felipe performs in Dubai for eight months of the year and is a regular performer at Friday brunch at the Mina A'Salam, Madinat Jumeirah. He is keen to break the kids' party stereotypes of magic, along with the image of the man with the wand, the hat and the rabbit and urges the grown-ups to see his act.

Aboard the *Bateaux Dubai*, magic also happens – and not just of the romantic kind



Matthew Duggan distracts diners from the ski slope with his magic at Sezzam, Mall of the Emirates.

over its legendary dinner cruises and Table4Six events, either. Phil Fenton is probably Dubai's best-known magician and on Saturdays, he performs his illusions on *Bateaux Dubai* as the guests enjoy lunch that has more of a family vibe than a cosy couple feel about it.

There are also a couple of Indian magicians who are a strong part of the Dubai scene. Praveen specialises in close-up magic and also mentalism – which is not the art of going crazy. Rather, it is creating the illusion that he can read your mind. Spooky indeed. And for kids' parties, Tommy Marjuram is your man. He has been entertaining Dubai families for years.

While many of the magicians-about-town take a break over summer, these masters and mistresses of illusion won't completely disappear in a puff of smoke for long. **■**

- Bateaux Dubai. Tel: (04) 3994994
- Daniela Maxova: (050) 6533695
- Felipe Scherson: www.felipescherson.com
- Flying Elephant. Tel: (04) 3479170 www.flyingelephantuae.com
- Gaston Quieto: Tel: (050) 6828292 <http://gastonmagic.com>
- Praveen. Tel: (050) 7874725
- Sezzam, Mall of the Emirates, Dubai. Tel: (04) 4095999
- Tommy Marjuram. Tel: (050) 6574722

MASTERS OF MAGIC

The guys the rest aspire to be like...

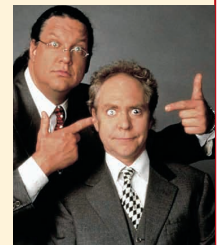


Harry Houdini

The escape artist (real name: Ehrich Weiss) immigrated from Hungary to America in 1878 at age four. He started with card tricks but he moved on to bigger things, including making an elephant vanish. But he made his name with escape artistry, his best trick being escaping from a glass-and-steel cabinet overflowing with water. Houdini died of internal injuries in 1926, aged 52, after claiming that he could withstand multiple hits to the abdomen. Sadly, he could not.

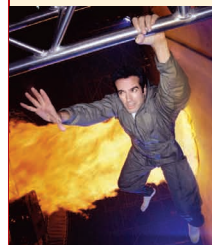
The Amazing Johnathan

The Amazing Johnathan has been dubbed the Freddy Krueger of comedy. Tricks include sticking scissors in the head of his assistant Psychic Tanya and inhaling a gallon of powder.



Penn & Teller

A twosome that defies description, Penn (the big ex-clown and juggler) and Teller (the quiet, spooky one) have been performing together since 1975. They combine stand-up and social commentary with shock tricks, such as dangling Teller over a bed of spikes, illusions, card tricks and juggling.



David Copperfield

His hairstyle is lost in the '80s and the world wondered what supermodel Claudia Schiffer was doing with him, but you have to hand it to him. He pulls the ladies, and his flying illusion has magicians everywhere aspiring to his greatness.

David Blaine

Possibly best known as 'that berk in a glass box', David Blaine is famous for public stunts. These include being buried



Paul Daniels

Paul Daniels has been entertaining us for years, on TV with *The Paul Daniels Magic Show* and world tours. His TV show lasted 20 years and screened in 47 countries.

alive, spending nearly 62 hours in ice, and going 44 days without food while suspended in a plexiglass box by London's River Thames. **GL**