

THE MAGIC MAGAZINE FOR MAGICIANS & MENTALISTS

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MAGICSEEN MAGAZINE: FUELLING THE RECESSION SINCE 2005

RAN'D SHINE

THE MAN, THE MYTH, THE MAGICIAN!

Every now and again, we get to hear things on the grapevine that make us feel the need to investigate further. Some magicians are experts at marketing and PR, others tend to dip under the radar, and it can take time for them to be noticed by the magic world. They are steadily honing their skills and creating solid reputations. One such magician is the brilliant Ran'D Shine who is a favourite on the US college circuit. We caught up with the busy fellow just prior to his latest tour...

Tell us a bit about your background, parents, growing up...

I was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in a middle class family. My father has always been a Pastor of a church and my mother worked at a local elementary school as a coordinator. I am the third of four children.

When you were at school what were you like?

My friends say I was pretty quiet and shy around new people. I don't remember being shy I just did not want to be bothered with some people. I enjoyed reading and collecting comic books, playing chess, and watching wrestling. In high school I became competitive in sports (soccer and wrestling) and developed the "I can do it if I want to" attitude! I even dabbled with making small electronic devices. One time I made a device that would interrupt the signal going to the antenna of a television set. I would use the device any time my sister was watching something on television that I did not want to watch. I was the cool nerdy type. Not the social outcast type of nerd, but the kind that danced to his own rhythm and everyone thought that was cool because I wasn't afraid to be different. It's funny that as a child growing up I didn't see much magic, and the little that I did see did not capture my interest like most magicians. I thought it was cool, but I would rather play sports and do other things.

What were your aspirations?

After graduating from High School I enrolled in Penn State University with the intention of majoring in electrical engineering like my brother, but I ended up in a totally different major.



"Magic appealed to me as an intellectual curiosity and on an otherworldly level."

What did you do when you left school?

After I completed my undergraduate studies, I decide to continue and get a Master Degree in Health Education. During this time I was formally introduced to the world of magic. The brother of a friend of mine performed a short impromptu show for me when I was home on holiday. His name was Aaron Johnson. To this day I remember him performing a coin flurry routine and cup & balls with ordinary plastic cups he got from the kitchen. I still think that is the best way to perform the Cups and Balls because it was so organic, instead of using cups that can cost up to \$400.00 and which don't look like cups that anyone would use at all. When I returned from holiday, a student in a class I was teaching mentioned he owned a magic shop. His name was Brian Foshee. After each class Brian would show me a few tricks. Later Brian asked me if I was interested in joining the campus magic club. From there I was hooked. To this day Brian has been a good friend and

someone I can bounce ideas off about performing and the business side of magic.

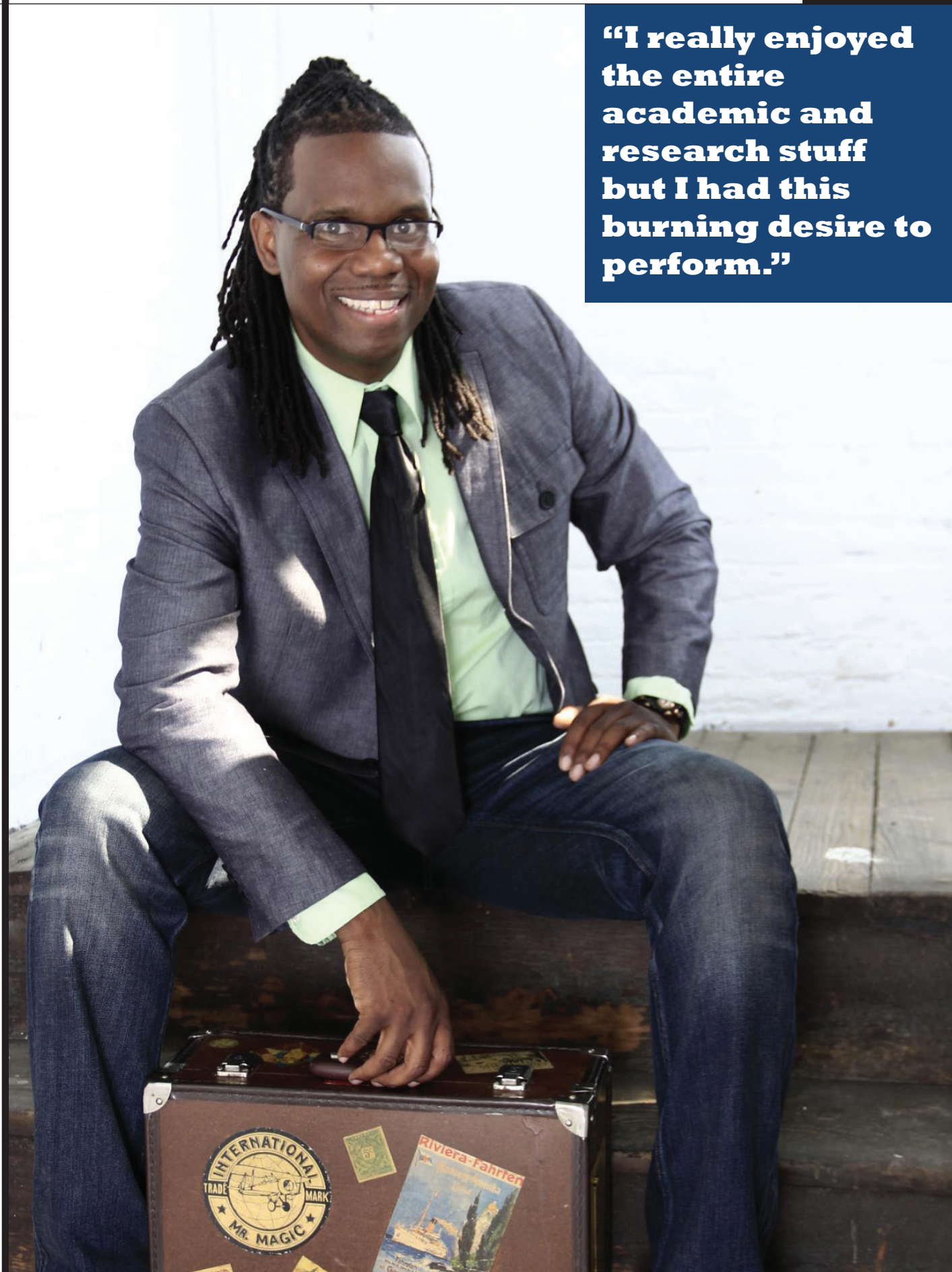
How did you get into magic?

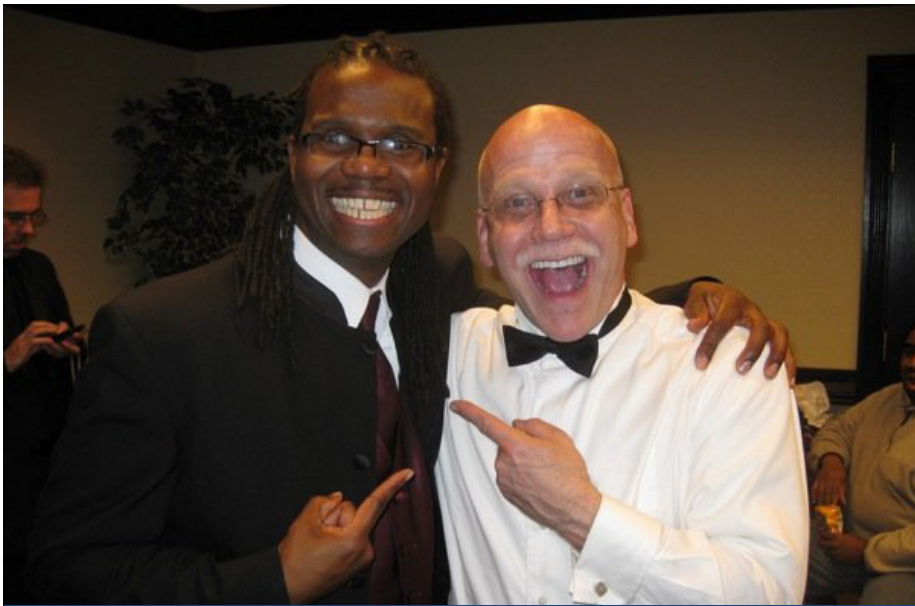
I decided to become a full time magician when I was enrolled in the DrPH program in Public Health at Drexel University and working in the Department of Epidemiology at the University of Pennsylvania. I was on the fast track of becoming a University Professor. I really enjoyed the entire academic and research stuff but I had this burning desire to perform. So I decided to take a chance and nine years later I am still enjoying being a magician.

What was it about magic that appealed to you?

Magic appealed to me as an intellectual curiosity and on an otherworldly level. The first time I witnessed a magic effect live, it was disturbing in a good way, because

“I really enjoyed the entire academic and research stuff but I had this burning desire to perform.”





“First I think my ethnicity makes me different. There are not many Black (I am African American) magicians around.”

it violated everything I knew about what was possible and logical about the world. For a brief moment I thought this guy must have super powers. It was an enjoyable moment that I wish I could experience again. I believe that is why some people don't like magic, because they feel intellectually violated and they can't handle that something is beyond their comprehension. Actually a physician once told me that he could not logically understand how I knew the name of his father. He said "it must be a trick but I cannot explain how. I didn't see you do anything. If someone has the ability to read my mind that means there is a GOD and as a man of science I don't believe there is a GOD, so it must be a trick." This type of person will always view magic as a puzzle and will never suspend his/her disbelief. On the other end of the spectrum you have those who really believe that a magician has some type of supernatural powers and you cannot convince them it's not real. Sadly these people often get exploited by unscrupulous magicians posing as psychics. Fortunately, the majority of people fall into the middle, where they suspend their disbelief or experience the moment when magic is presented to them. These various reactions to magic always fascinated me and speak to how we as humans view the world. But what really interests me about magic is the social interaction it fosters between people who are watching a performance. For example, early in my career, I was performing close up magic

at a party hosted by a friend. Six months after the event I received a wedding invitation from a couple who attended the party. They said they did not know each other the day of the event but they had had a conversation about my show and one thing led to another. And they lived happily ever after.

Has magic helped you in any way - other than earning a living?

Besides earning a living, magic has allowed me to travel and make friends from all around the world.

What is the 'college circuit'?

The college circuit is a market here in the US where entertainers perform for students on college and university campuses around the country. It can be a very lucrative market but it is also highly competitive and difficult to get into the market.

Is this an area you particularly focused on?

Yes. It is currently about 85% of my performances.

What sort of effects do you do in your act?

I have about 20 solid "go to" effects in my stand up repertoire. I perform about 5 to

8 effects in my show. This is functional because I can switch out and change effects based on the type of show, venue and/or duration of performance. It also keeps me from getting bored from performing the same effects over and over again. The same applies when performing close up / strolling magic. As far as a few of my "go to" stand up effects, I perform the Egg Bag, a stage version of Ashes on the Palm, a very funny and original card effect that is based on a play on words, book test, and Bill to Impossible Location.

What do you think makes you different to other performers?

First I think my ethnicity makes me different. There are not many Black (I am African American) magicians around. I remember an incident when I walked into a venue that I was hired to perform and one of the guests said to me "You don't look like a magician." I said what does a magician look like? The guest replied by saying, "I never had seen a Black magician before in my life." Trust me this isn't an isolated incident and I don't think most people who have said this are racist. In fact this has been told to me in various ways by people from all ethnicities. As a result I found and have been told that my ethnicity in this business is a plus. But my ethnicity is not enough to be different. So In addition to my ethnicity I would also say my style. I have an urban contemporary style, but in a way that people can enjoy. I incorporate urban aesthetics throughout my show such as music, language, and pop culture. It is important to me to be authentic when on stage, especially since I am not playing a character. I don't use stock lines or jokes. My jokes are based on my personal experiences, that part of being me on stage. Now if you were to ask someone else what makes me different then you may get another answer.

When working on your stand-up act, what's the most difficult thing for you personally?

Scripting (patter) is the most difficult thing for me when working on my act. I strive to have my script be engaging to the audience, and leading smoothly into the effect. It also has to be authentically me. To illustrate the last point, take the Snow Storm in China effect. So many magicians are claiming that they have never seen snow when they were a child, that you would think that every magician lived in a desert and never left. The audience can sense that this is a lie. I work hard on finding my voice in scripting to match the effect.

What's the last effect you bought?

Cue the Magic by Angelo Carbone. It's a good effect that can play on mid to large size venues without the use of a video camera and projector. Plus there is a lot of built in byplay with the effect. Although I like the effect as is, I am going to change a few things to make it fit my style.

Which magic creator do you admire most?

The word creator in magic means many things. It can mean someone who creates an original effect, presentation, approach etc. Also many magicians are credited for being a creator but they have a team of consultants that came up with the idea. There are magicians who claim they created something that someone else has created years ago. That being said, I currently have three favourite creators. One is a Baltimore, Maryland based magician named David London (<http://www.magicoutsidethebox.com/>) He is not afraid to take risks in the way magic is presented. He does things with toe nails from celebrities, a Devil puppet and other weird objects. His style maybe too "Fringe" for some and for me sometimes, but I find it refreshing to see magic pushed beyond the boundaries that we normally see. The other is Barry and Stuart. I like how they can take common magic effects like Knife through Arm (Suicide in C Sharp), and The Interlude Illusion (X ray machine) and reframe them into skits that are entertaining and which make sense to the audience. It takes very creative mind(s) to come up with a unique presentation. Lastly, Francis Menotti, not because we have been friends for over 15 years, but because he infuses art and literature into his act in ways no one has yet to do. Check out <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pn5oqA3e024> to see for yourself.

Who has been the most influential person on your magic career?

There isn't one person who has been the most influential on my magic career. Many people have influenced me in different and important ways, and some of them are not even magicians. They are friends who I have a personal relationship with, who have careers as poets, preachers, musicians, photographers, business leaders and entrepreneurs. They know some of my quirks, my personality and interests beyond magic because of these personal relationships. Many of my presentations for effects came from conversation with my friends. They also have a lay person perspective when watching magic, so they will tell me if they liked something or not. My friends are brutally



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honest and have a tendency to say "that trick was garbage" if they didn't like it, which I think, is a good thing. As for magicians who have influenced me, I belong to a group called 3rd Monday Night Magic. It consists of only ten members who are full time magicians, magic historians, hobbyists and magic enthusiasts. We meet the 3rd Monday of every month at the home of international award winning photographer and magician Don Camp. During our meetings we critique and offer feedback on effects, scripting, lecturing and the business. Don was very instrumental in me becoming a full time magician and this group has been very helpful in my growth as a magician.

Tell us 3 things about yourself that people will not know...

1. I wanted to be a professional wrestler. I know it's fake but so is "reality" TV. Actually there are a lot of similarities between magic and wrestling.
2. I read and collect comic books,

3. I enjoy discussing the political/social issues of underrepresented groups.
4. I also enjoy learning about new subjects. I know that's 4 things about myself but I am a nerd.

If you were booking a show and could have 5 living performers on the bill - who would you choose and why?

Derren Brown; smart, engaging mentalism. He made mentalism popular again. He is in a class by himself; Penn & Teller: original, thought provoking, and edgy; Phelston Jones: one of stage magic's best kept secrets. He has a highly original fire act. You can see a short part of his act here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1nEjsD0Pcgs>. In 2000, he was the opening act for the gala show at a major magic convention in Las Vegas and he was the only one who got a standing ovation. He hasn't been on the magic circuit since. I would love to see him perform again. Mac King; one of the best



“At the risk of sounding too philosophical, there are no mistakes only lessons. This is a piece of advice that was given to me early in my career by magician Hiawatha Johnson.”



working comedy magicians of this era. His act is well scripted, very entertaining and appeals to all audiences.

The last is not a magician, but a musical group, the band/rap group; The Roots. I would have them back the acts and do a set. They are from my home town and have made it BIG here in the US. They are the house band for the Jimmy Fallon show. They are very talented and can play various styles of music and have worked with several major musical artistes.

How is business for you this year so far – how has the ‘recession’ affected you – if at all?

Business has been good this year so far. I have

met all of my quarterly goals. That is a result of planning, marketing and projection. Performing is only 10% of what I do; the other 90% is working on getting that 10%. That’s the little secret of having a sustainable career in magic.

What’s the biggest mistake you’ve made?

At the risk of sounding too philosophical, there are no mistakes only lessons. This is a piece of advice that was given to me early in my career by magician Hiawatha Johnson. This reframing of “mistakes” has helped me grow as a person and performer.

Most people only see the mistake but if they dig deep they can find a lesson far more valuable. It’s similar to an old story that has been told

many ways. It goes something like this: An old man in a village known for his wisdom was approached by one of his students.

The eager student asked, “Old man I must ask you a very important question, the answer to which we all seek: How did you become so wise?”

The old man thought for a time, and then responded, “The secret of wisdom is good judgment.”

“Ah,” said the student, “But how do we attain good judgement?”

“From experience,” answered the old man.

“Yes,” said the student, “But how do we attain experience?”

“Bad judgment.” replied the old man.

Your best ever gig?

That’s a tough one, but I would say The South African National Arts Fest and President Barack Obama’s Inauguration ball.

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