

Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100



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'Poetic illusion'

Bloomfield Hills magician takes his artistry to Paris

By Victor E. Swanson
special writer

MAGIC IS ART. Or that's the belief of magicians in America, such as Todd Karr, 23, formerly of Bloomfield Hills, now of Paris France.

What is magic in France?

"It's not considered art," said Karr at his parents' home in Bloomfield Hills, where he recently was vacationing and doing research. "It's like juggling. . . . When someone talks about juggling, you don't think of a great artist."

"When you think of magic here, you don't automatically think of a great artist, but you recognize the fact that, hey, there have been hour-long specials on magic on TV, magicians have given concerts around the country. In Europe, that hasn't existed yet. And there's no respect for it."

"It's not very sophisticated. . . . They're using props that are real clunky and unstreamlined. And their performances style isn't very with it."

KARR is well-qualified to make such a statement, for he's a magician in France who began entertaining the French and others by giving street magic shows in Paris about two years ago — the only work he could get as a magician without a permit to work. (He was there studying French for one year as a student of the University of Southern California.)

Working the street magic shows was fun. He remembers what a woman would say after a show: "Ladies and gentlemen, I hope I've added a bit of magic to your evening. I hope you'll add a bit of money to my hat."

Then, he would walk through the crowd holding a beer, and sometimes he came upon Americans who would say very, very slowly, hoping he would understand, "You were very good." His answer was usually, "Thanks a lot."

"They'd be really disappointed," Karr said. "They thought they were helping a starving Frenchman with his art."

After the stint in France, he went back to USC and received a bachelor

'I do a little of everything, so I can't classify myself. I'm like a general practitioner of magic.'

— Todd Karr

of arts degree in journalism and even worked as an intern for the Los Angeles Times. The experience of the internship made him give up a writing career and seriously take up the magic career.

In mid-1988, he went back to France, the best place to go, since his love, Claire, a French yoga instructor, was there. They were married and are expecting their first child in June.

"I've had to change my material, really improve it — really all of my illusions — so that the visual part is so strong that it doesn't matter if verbally it's a little weak. All of my tricks go into the miracle category because I have to compete with all these French magicians, who are very glib and very funny and stuff."

"I get along great with the French magicians. The problem there — one of the problems I'm running into, though — is that the (French) magic community is kind of . . . very paranoid. In the states, there's a really healthy atmosphere among magicians."

"They trade, they exchange secrets, they help each other and share ideas and things. In France . . . they don't share anything. . . . they're really closed-minded."

Karr believes magicians should talk and share because it allows the art of magic to flourish and grow.

Many magicians were willing to talk and share their art with Karr when he was growing up. However, it was a school friend at Detroit Country Day who got Karr, then 9, interested in magic.

The friend also was interested in magic, and one day he took Karr on a trip to visit a magic store in Ferndale. After that first visit, Karr's mother often drove him to the shop so he could spend a few hours talking

magic with professional magicians, some of whom shared their ideas and secrets.

One of the most influential men in Karr's magic career was Robert Lund, an automobile writer by trade, who loved magic and founded the American Museum of Magic in Marshall (Mich.). Karr paraphrased what Lund once told him about magic:

"Magic is not about tricks, magic is not about fooling people, not about secrets. When you're young, you have a sense of innocence and wonder, you don't know how everything works, you don't know why the sky is blue. . . ."

"You don't know where babies come from, you don't know why it rains, you don't know why flowers start out as seeds and become flowers. You've got this sense of wonder about you, when you see something new that you don't understand."

"And as you grow older, you lose your sense of wonder, you become jaded, you lose that sense of wonder and innocence in your life. So what magicians do is to momentarily give you back your sense of wonder and innocence. And that is the role of the magician."

THAT RULE Karr learned more than a decade ago. It took him through the days of giving magic shows at children's birthday parties and local restaurants and the days of displaying his art on the streets of Paris. It's the rule he follows today, giving performances at such places as wonderful European chateaus.

Today, he calls his magic "poetic illusion."

"It uses principles of magic, like technique . . . and the idea of the impossible, along with different techniques of the theater, whether it be choreography or music or what- ever, to evoke emotion. I do a little

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STEPHEN CANTRELL/staff photographer

Breakfast was never like this. Magician Todd Karr makes a croissant float in the air, while he

has a cup of coffee.

table talk

Lundi Gras

Nearly 20 appetizing hors d'oeuvres were sampled at a recent Tasting Dinner, to determine which ones will be chosen for the Lundi Gras XXIX, to be held Monday Feb. 6, at the Whitney in Detroit. The hors d'oeuvres, along with champagne, preceded a lavish dinner where various courses and wines were tasted in preparation for the event. This year's Lundi Gras will feature popu-

lar menu offerings from previous Lundi Gras dinners. First course will be a scrumptious selection of seafoods and shellfish, followed by a palate-refreshing ice of grapefruit and raspberry puree. Main course is a tasty medallion of veal with truffle, veal, forest mushroom forcement enroule, with five peppercorn sauce. The different vegetable is kohlrabi stuffed with puree of Siltion and celeriac. Potatoes also will be on the dinner plate. Fourth course is an eye appealing salad of miniature

greens tossed with orange walnut vinaigrette, along with selected cheese and fresh fruit. Dessert is a chocolate lover's dream: a plate of chocolate delicacies, centered by a Miniature Sac de Bonbons. The black-lace event at \$185 per person benefits the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. For more information, contact the Whitney at 832-5700.

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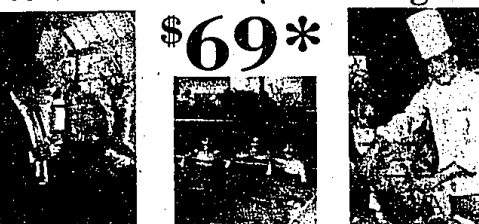
1988 Travel/Holiday magazine Fine Dining Awards.

Others include the Cactus Club, Joe Miner's Restaurant, London Chateau, Opus One, Pontchartrain Wine Cellars, Robert Lawrence Balzer, the mag-

azine's food and beverage editor, was originally scheduled to present the awards at Schuler's during a three-day trip to visit Detroit-area restaurants. His trip was canceled due to illness.

— Ethel Simmons

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