

MYSTERIOSO!

A Pops Concert of Music, Magic, Mayhem, and Mirth!

Words by Mark Nelson
Photos by Tom Russo

Since Mickey Mouse first conducted the universe to the strains of Paul Dukas' "Sorcerer's Apprentice" in Walt Disney's *Fantasia*, classical music and magic have seemed a natural pairing. Harry Blackstone Jr., Lyn Dillies, Franz Harary, Chuck Jones, The Pendragons, David Seebach, and others have worked with famous symphony orchestras.

For attendees at the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra performances this past Halloween, however, a much more elaborate mix of music, magic, mayhem, and mirth was in the offing. It was the world-premiere performance of *Mysterioso!* — a pops concert fully integrating the art of magic and the bravura melodious atmosphere of a symphonic orchestral performance.

Mysterioso! was conceived two years ago with a working title of *Pops Goes Magic!* by magician and producer David Sandy, the magical entrepreneur and past International President of the IBM who has a 25-year history of producing shows and magic-themed events around the world. "I wanted to do something out of the ordinary and bring magic to a different type of audience," explains Sandy. "The idea was to bring a variety of magic styles and performers together in a symphony concert along with some unique magic that specifically included the conductor and musicians." In other words, to avoid creating just another magic show with an eighty-piece back-up band.

In 2008, Sandy met with the producer of the National Symphonic Pops Consortium, Ty Johnson, and renowned Pops conductor Jack Everly. The basic pitch was that adding magic to a night of magically themed standards could attract an audience of non-traditional symphony-goers. Johnson and Everly were prompt to agree.

As far as casting the magicians for the event, David had just worked with David & Dania and Les Arnold & Dazzle in the International Festival

of Magic Sandy produced in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The great response they received from audiences, and the fact that their acts were designed to be performed to music, made both acts a natural. For the classic magician to open the show and act as host, Joseph Gabriel was engaged to perform his signature dove act, as

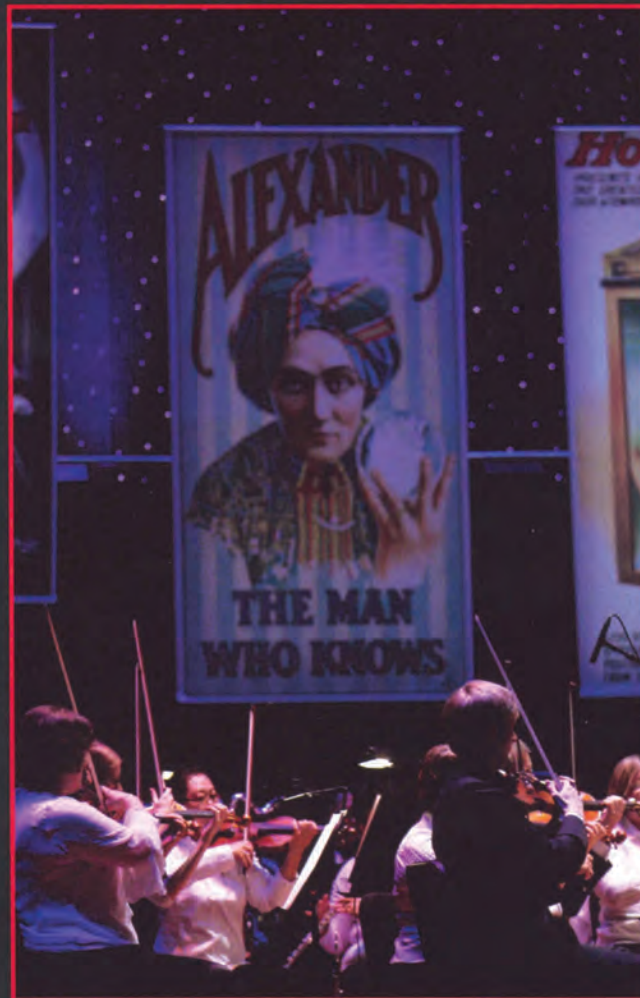
and a duplicate of Les Arnold's Strip Cabinet, which was reduced to fit through a normal height doorway on its entrance to the stage and then telescope up to its full ten-foot height for performance.

A team of three professional orchestrators were given the task of orchestrating more than fifty pieces of music, including rewriting the music normally used by the three performers, for an eighty-piece orchestra. Some custom music was orchestrated for a couple of the unique magic routines in the program, including one involving the destruction and restoration of the conductor's score in a comic interlude called the "William 'Tear' Overture."

"It was only natural to include a magical moment in the show that involved the physical music," Sandy says, immediately considering the classic routine created by magician/actor Christopher Hart. "Christopher's signature torn-and-restored sheet of music is a beautiful, intimate piece of great magic," comments Sandy, who visualized a more slapstick approach in *Mysterioso!* "Chris was kind enough to license us his effect for a limited time and for this very specific use."

David and Dania flew to Russia months in advance to have a musical-themed tuxedo and dress made just for a final, dramatic costume change during the curtain call. Norm Nielsen provided beautiful historic poster images used to create a magical set to be flown above the orchestra. An artist was engaged to create posters for David & Dania, Joseph Gabriel, Les Arnold & Dazzle, Jack Everly, vocalist Christina Bianco, and soloist Charles Richard Lester that were similar in style to the period poster art.

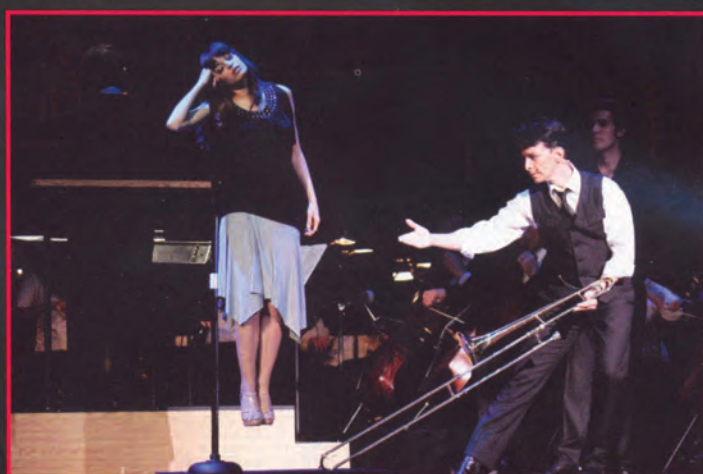
The week before the concert, the cast of performers arrived at the Hilbert Circle Theater in Indianapolis for tech rehearsals, blocking, and run-throughs with the entire orchestra. Staging a



well as new routines with his beautiful wife, Katalin, to magically interact with Maestro Jack Everly throughout the performance.

Illusions and equipment were ordered from Bill Smith's Magic Ventures, including a special conductor's podium, a Broom Suspension using a microphone stand and a trombone,

[Facing page] The stage manager was transformed into conductor Jack Everly. The Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra onstage at the Hilbert Circle Theater. Joseph Gabriel hypnotized singer Christina Bianco. Katalin remained suspended as Joseph removed the trombone that previously played a supporting role.



magic show in a standard concert hall requires a great deal of special preparation. Most modern symphonic halls do not have a proscenium or front traveling curtains, and lighting is generally a bright wash. Most of *Mysterioso!* magic would have to be performed on the apron, downstage of the orchestra.

On opening night, October 30, concertgoers were met by a stage set with more than a dozen gigantic reproductions of classic magic posters. Prior to the concert, a stage manager walked to center stage with a sober announcement. "Ladies and gentlemen, I regret to inform you that Maestro Everly's flight has been delayed, and he will not be able to be here tonight," he began. "However, since the orchestra is in place and I have a bit of musical experience myself, I will conduct the concert."

At that point, two stage assistants carried a six-foot high cloth banner onstage and proceeded to wrap it completely around the stage manager.

A dramatic tympani roll from the percussion section led to the unwrapping of Maestro Everly, and the audience burst into applause.

Following an overture of magic-themed melodies, Joseph Gabriel set the classical tone for the evening with his timeless dove act, accompanied by one of the most-respected symphony orchestras in the country. Assisted by Katalin, Joseph's flawless productions and manipulations of birds of all sizes rocked the sold-out, 1,700-seat house.

Charles Richard Lester appeared as a soloist with the orchestra, playing the Theremin — an eerie-sounding electronic instrument developed in the late 1920s, which produces music without actually being touched. Lester performed the "Spellbound Concerto for Theremin and Orchestra."

Joseph returned to the stage to select a "volunteer" from the audience, promising to unlock the music found deep inside the human

mind through hypnosis. After a brief induction, the female subject provided strikingly accurate impersonations of Barbra Streisand, LeAnn Rimes, Bernadette Peters, Celine Dion, Judy Garland, and Aretha Franklin. It didn't take long before the audience realized they were enjoying the talent of Broadway singer and impressionist Christina Bianco.

To a lush arrangement of "Forgotten Dreams," Katalin and Joseph performed a melodic microphone stand suspension with a trombone borrowed from the brass section, presented on the downstage edge of the stage within a few feet of the front row.

Conductor Everly then introduced the act that has become the ultimate send-up of well-worn magical clichés, Les Arnold & Dazzle. The pair provided a strong departure, magically and musically, from anything the audience had seen beforehand. They roared at the competitive antics of the uptight Les and his hyperactive



Flanked by Dazzle and Katalin, Jack Everly performed the No Feet illusion. Conductor Everly leaned surprisingly toward the violin section. Les Arnold & Dazzle with their classical take on the duck vanish. Joseph Gabriel made a flamboyant appearance when Dazzle vanished from Arnold's Strip Cabinet illusion.

*Joseph Gabriel and Les Arnold squabbled over the conductor's musical score, resulting in nearly bringing the orchestra to a complete halt before order was restored. David & Dania's finale showed off their new music-themed costumes. The cast of *Mysterioso!* posed after the show, with producer David Sandy at far right.*

and Dazzling assistant. The act concluded in its over-the-top fashion with Dazzle vanishing from the Strip Cabinet and reappearing across the stage in a Blammo Box, while Joseph instantly appeared in the cabinet wearing Dazzle's dress and feathered headdress.

"I don't think we've ever had an audience laugh so hard at one of our pops concerts," said symphony producer Ty Johnson. Naturally, nothing could follow except intermission.

The second half of *Mysterioso!* began with another medley of magic-themed songs and an encore performance from Christina Bianco, this time as herself. Conductor Everly then confessed to the cast and audience his own interest in magic, and as "The Great Everly," presented a comedy version of André Kole's No Feet illusion, assisted by Katalin and Dazzle.

Following more Pops selections played straight by the orchestra and Mademoiselle Bianco, the first few bars of the "William Tell Overture" began. Joseph and Les tiptoed onstage and performed the torn-and-restored music routine with the conductor's score. The orchestra dissolved into chaotic dissonance before Dazzle arrived with an oversized magic glue bottle to restore both the score and order to the orchestra.

For the grand finale, Everly introduced quick-change artists David & Dania. Their high-energy, rapid-fire costume changes electrified the crowd, and immediately following their final transformation, the audience erupted into spontaneous and sustained applause. Cheers of "Bravo!" rang throughout the hall. When all performers held hands to take their final bow on this opening night, the audience rose to their feet to give the cast and orchestra a well-deserved and extended standing ovation. *Mysterioso!* had come to an end — at least for the evening. Two additional performances over the weekend were equally well received.

David Sandy has announced that *Mysterioso!* will appear with a number of symphonies over the next few years, including the Baltimore Symphony, March 4–7, 2010; the National Arts Centre Orchestra in Ottawa, Canada, March 18–20; the Detroit Symphony, October 22–24; the Edmonton Symphony, October 29–30; and the Winnipeg Symphony, May 13–15, 2011; as well as others to be announced. 

Mark Nelson is a magic enthusiast who serves as Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Academy of Magic Arts (The Magic Castle). He is also a Contributing Editor to *MAGIC*.

