

## What Is Magic?

Photos and Story by Philip Laubner



What is Magic? For most, this is a question rarely pondered. Others have quick and definitive answers. But for magician David London, wondering just what magic is, has remained at the forefront of his mind, his life, and his art for over 20 years.

I recently had the opportunity to watch David's act as part of The Midnight Magic Show, which he produced and performed with fellow magician Josh Norris last month at the EMP Collective in downtown Baltimore. The show was hosted by a giant bunny, otherwise known as Paco Fish. The evening promised to chock-full magic, mystery, and madness and we weren't disappointed. David was especially critical in bringing the madness.



You see, David's magic is not at all typical. He doesn't pull rabbits out of hats, saw women in half, or float objects through space. Instead, he demonstrates the magic of thinking outside the box, proves the psychic potential of a collection of celebrity toenail clippings, explores his astrological connection to Wonder Bread, and facilitates a visit from Satan himself! And that's really just the beginning.

David is far from what we think of when we think of a magician. A recent transplant to Baltimore from Washington, DC, David has an extensive resume and a long list of accomplishments. Aside from performing his five shows all over the U.S., he has authored nearly ten manuscripts on magic and illusion, and has produced art, films, circuses, festivals and large scale events for over half of his life.

David is a consummate creator who revels in the imagination, dreams of impossible things, and then transforms those dreams into reality. But David's magic is not limited to mere tricks. In fact, in the description of his upcoming Magic Workshop, to be held this Saturday at Charm City Movement Arts, it states that "David believes that magic and magic tricks are two

completely different things.” When we met for an interview, I decided this would be a good place to start.

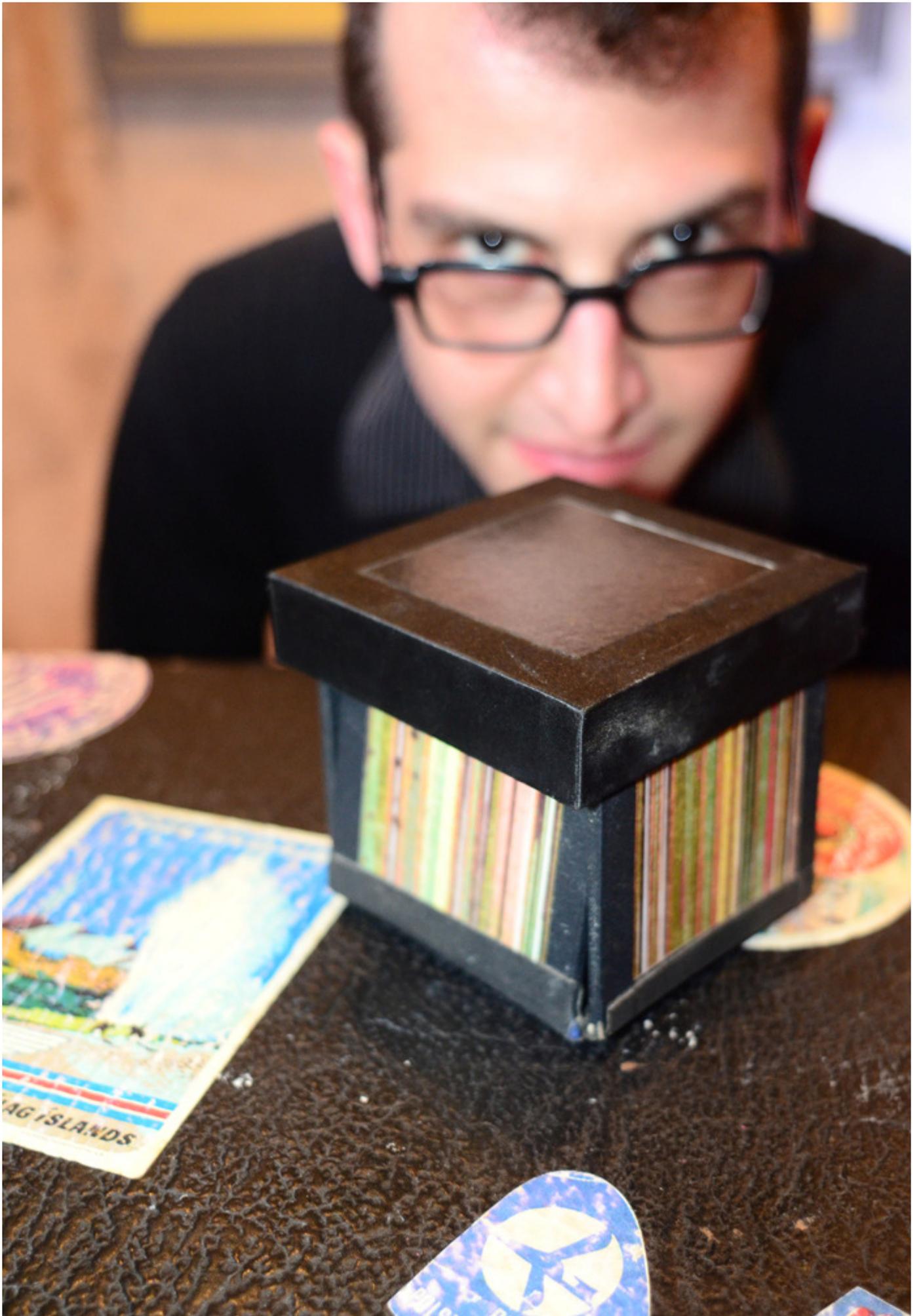
**Phil :** What is the difference between magic and a magic trick?

**David:** Let’s start with magic. I tend to ask people to define magic far more often than I choose to define it myself, simply for the fact that magic defies definition. And yet, every definition I have ever encountered seems to be correct, which is part of the beauty of thinking about magic. For my own definition, which I give hesitantly, I try to include all definitions, and define magic simply as the expansion of possibilities. It is the experience of what we know, becoming larger.



**Phil:** So it seems by your definition that magic is the larger thread of wonder that can occur in a person in more situations than just through tricks. How do magic tricks work with this larger idea of magic?

**David:** Magic tricks are illusions that literally trick the brain into experiencing magic, even though they are grounded in absolute logic, proper construction, and precise execution. Magic tricks emerge out of the infinite and can lead back to it, but are themselves, just tricks. The magic is the experience of the trick, and the momentary expansion of possibilities that it offers. The trick is one way to get there.



**Phil:** Can you elaborate on what you mean by proper construction?

**David:** When constructing a magic trick, every question needs to be answered, and you must be sure there are no suspicious moves or breaking of patterns. This allows for the magic to maintain the illusion of fluidity in order to make the magic trick appear as though it exists outside of our pre-existing notions of what is possible, when in reality, what is taking place is often quite simple. The construction is literally the construction of the reality the audience will experience, which must be a completely different reality from what is actually taking place.

**Phil:** I'm fascinated by the level of vigilance, discipline and logic that goes into making something that's not real, that's an illusion.

**David:** I am as well. A magic trick starts from a dream of something impossible and irrational. It's totally irrational for me to imagine a soda can floating up from a table and pouring itself into a glass. But that is normal thinking for a magician. So you start with this imaginative, abstract idea, and then immediately have to switch over to thinking with absolute logic, precision, and mechanics, which needs to be so precise that their workings are completely concealed. So magic tricks emerge from the extremes of both modes of thinking, and both sides of the brain. In many ways, creating a magic trick is just an extreme form of all creative acts. This has led me to believe that all creative acts, are in fact, acts of magic.

**Phil:** How is your magic different from the magic of other magicians?

**David:** I would say that my magic differs greatly from most of the modern magicians we see today, and actually has a lot more in common with the magic of the archaic past. If you look at magic today, most of it mirrors the world we currently live in. We want bigger, faster, and flashier, and we want it now. Whereas in the distant past, a magic trick was always part of something larger. It was utilized in the context of a story or initiatory teaching, to explore a concept or further an idea within a much larger exploration or magical experience.

**Phil:** How does this apply to your own act?

**David:** The magic tricks I perform are often utilized as the punctuation at the end of a sentence. I try to create much larger worlds to enter into than just the trick. By incorporating story-telling, philosophy, and larger concepts as the backbone of my work, the magic trick often appears as the final thought that seals the deal. Sometimes there isn't even a trick at all.

**Phil:** Do you consider yourself an entertainer or an artist?





**David:** Truthfully, I simply consider myself a magician. As a magician, I also see myself as both an artist and an entertainer. When it comes to explaining what I do to someone who is potentially interested in hiring me, I usually refer to what I do as entertainment if that is what they are looking for, and refer to it as art if that is what they had in mind. Being able to have a foot in both worlds has certainly been beneficial to my career, working at both private events as an entertainer as well as galleries, theaters and museums as an artist.



**Phil:** How does interactive art inform your magic?

**David:** It might be better to say that magic informs my interactive art. It started when I was began facilitating the construction of Wonder Bread sculptures. I'd bring loaves of bread to an event and have people make things out of it. That's when I started to realize that creativity and play are really a direct path to a magical experience. I suppose I always knew this from my own creative endeavors, but explorations of interactive art provided solid confirmation. I find these explorations to be just as critical to my own understanding of magic as any magic show or trick I have performed. Then again, I also believe that it is my responsibility as a magician to understand, explore, and facilitate as many avenues as possible to enter into a state of magic.

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There are several opportunities to experience David this weekend. On Saturday, David will present a three hour Magic Workshop at Charm City Movement Arts, where he will not only delve into his understanding of magic at large, but also teach you 5 tricks you can amuse and amaze your friends with. On Sunday, David will be performing two shows at Instant Gratification at Gallery 788. At 3:00 PM, David will present his family show, The Adventure to the Imagi Nation, and at 9:00 PM, David will perform a 45 minute Cabaret Show.

If you are interested in knowing more about David and his magic, I would encourage you to visit his website at [MagicOutsideTheBox.com](http://MagicOutsideTheBox.com)