Genii
THE CONJURORS' MAGAZINE

Genii
THE CONJURORS' MAGAZINE

Genii
THE CONJURORS' MAGAZINE

THE ROAD TO RIMINI

WALTER ROLFO AND FISM 2015

BY MAX MAVEN

IT BEGAN WITH A BOOK OF TRICKS for the public by the Italian star magician Silvan. The book was unexpectedly found in a drawer. Its discovery was, perhaps, a bit of magic in and of itself.

The discoverer was a 12-year-old boy in Turin, Italy. He was instantly smitten. "From the first page," he remembers, "I realized that my life would never be the same again, and neither would the lives of my parents and friends."

That young boy was Walter Rolfo. Today, he is the President and producer of the upcoming FISM convention that will take place this summer, from July 6 to 11, 2015. But a lot has happened in the three decades intervening, so let's catch up.

Genii
THE CONJURORS' MAGAZINE

Walter has been an engineer, journalist, lecturer, author, and television producer, with notable success. He explains that this is due to his ability to think like a magician.

"Magic taught me to understand people in a deeper way, and it showed me how to choose to be happy. But the greatest gift that this wonderful art has given me is the knowledge that nothing is impossible. I have reached the age where, when I ask myself questions I am always less sure of the answers. But also, I have deleted the word 'impossible' from my vocabulary. Anything I can think of or am asked to create, even the most insane things, I instinctively say, 'There must be, a solution. Nothing is impossible'!"

That attitude has extended into every part of his life. He notes, "I never went on a date without first asking the lady to pick a card."

After graduating with an engineering degree from the prestigious *Polytecnico di Torino*, Italy's oldest technical university, Walter turned his attention to journalism, "to satisfy my desire to learn." He was also performing magic, which led to appearances on television.

Producing came later, "because no one else wanted to produce magic shows." And so, he created a TV series, *ArcanA*, for the Italian RAI 2 network. This was written, directed, and hosted by Walter; it featured an array of guest magicians from assorted countries. The ratings were strong, which led to a deal with the international Sky network to create a 12-episode series, which gained the title *Masters of Magic*—an appellation that came to Walter while in the shower. He recalls exiting the shower, sopping wet, shouting the title out loud.

That series was well received and aired around the globe. That achievement linked the name to his future projects. In 2008, Walter and his team took over the production of an annual magic convention in St. Vincent, located in the Italian alps. In the ensuing years, the Masters of Magic Festival has grown into one of the most significant conventions in the world, featuring many of the top performers from around the world and attracting attendance surpassing a thousand.

He has also created events on a huge scale, including elaborately designed corporate shows, and music raves that combine the latest sounds (his brother is a well-known DJ) with cutting edge technology.

Producing massive events led to the successful bid for FISM. This will be the first time in its history of over half a century that FISM will be held in Italy, and Walter is determined to make it the BEST FISM EVER.

That's quite a challenge. But Walter Rolfo is used to thinking big. Virtually all of the magic

Genii
THE CONJURORS' MAGAZINE

shows on Italian TV during the last decade have been created and produced by Walter and his team, including *Sei Nel Mirino* ("You're In The Viewfinder"), *Cartoon Magic* and, most recently, *La Grande Magia*, an international magic contest that aired as five two-hour programs on Channel 5.

"For me," says Walter, "the goal is to go outside the box, and go beyond the old ways of thinking about magic conventions. I want to promote new kinds of magic, the magic of the future; the triumph of awe, wonder, and enchantment. The only way for the general public to appreciate magic is to create a magical form of *contemporary* entertainment, interactive and engaging."

However, that does not mean that Walter rejects the past. Indeed, to make a great convention, he feels that traditions must be respected. This means a world-class competition, great shows and lectures, plus excellent organizing with all of the events starting on time. (Actually, that last point is not really a tradition in Italy, where things are sometimes notoriously delayed. But, Walter has been drilling his team to make for a precision outcome.)

The story of Italian magic includes some of the greatest names in conjuring history. From the seminal authors of the 16th century, Cardano and Galasso, to the brilliant Pinetti, who dazzled all of Europe in the late 18th century, and Bosco, the 19th century Cups & Balls innovator, all the way to famed showmen of the early 20th century, among them Rastelli, Roody, and Chefalo. Moving into the modern era we find historians, such as Vanni Bossi and Roxy. And, there's no shortage of notable modern performers, including the celebrated artist Arturo Brachetti.

Italy has had its share of FISM award winners, including Moroso, who won the Grand Prix in 1952; Tony Binarelli, second place in Cards, and Zelpy, second place

Genii
THE CONJURORS' MAGAZINE

in General Magic, both in 1967; Alexander, third place in Manipulation in 1973; and Aurelio Paviato, first place in Close-Up, 1982.

One of the figures most connected to FISM was Professor Alberto Sitta, who performed at some congresses and was a jury member at others. He became President of the organization in 1988, but sadly his death the following year derailed what would have been a FISM in Rome slated for 1991.

Italian magic of recent decades has been dominated by three gentlemen: Binarelli, Alexander, and the indefatigable Silvan, all of them well known to the public. Walter credits that original encounter with a book by Silvan for his introduction to magic, and he also learned from books put out by Binarelli and Alexander. As such, he accords great respect to this triumvirate, and has asked Silvan to be the Honorary President of the 2015 FISM. He says that "they are among my most important advisors. Through their successful works they have created a precious heritage that has made them an important point of reference for both magicians and laypeople. Now it is our job to bring it forward."

This won't be his first time putting new perspectives to traditional tropes. A few years back, Walter set a Guinness world record by producing 300 rabbits from a hat!

He is well aware that, today, magic conventions compete for attention with DVDs and Internet downloads. To draw registrants, he feels it's important "to thank those who decided to leave home, travel and participate, we have to give them something special, something that does not exist on-line. And that is an *experience*: a magical, unique, unrepeatable event."

To help in this quest, there are the members of his crew who have gained experience by mounting the St. Vincent conventions and other big events. Walter hails them as "a fantastic and close-knit team that supports me and shares my passions," and notes, "We have young minds and strong hearts!" The planning is being done with the cooperation of the FISM Board, composed of president Domenico Dante (Italy), and vice presidents Gerrit Brengman (Belgium) and Peter Din (France).

To augment this, Walter has enlisted a group of advisors, dubbed the International Consulting Committee. The members are: Luis de Matos (Portugal), Ton Onosaka (Japan), Topas (Germany),

Genii
THE CONJURORS' MAGAZINE

Casa (South Korea), Alessandro Marrazzo (Italy), Richard Kaufman (United States), and Max Maven (currently at large). Meetings and brainstorming sessions have led to countless e-mail exchanges. Slowly but surely, the 2015 congress is coming into focus.

So, what can you expect at this upcoming congress?

Well, first of all you can expect some great surroundings. The city of Rimini is a popular seaside resort. It is located in the Emilia-Romagna region on the east coast of central Italy. There are almost 150,000 inhabitants, but the population swells as its nine miles of Adriadic beachfront attracts a wide range of visitors who are accommodated by over 1,000 hotels in the area, plus restaurants, dance clubs, and bars galore. Italy is deservedly famous for its delicious cuisine and convivial hospitality; now you can learn why.

Rimini is home to the largest convention center in Italy, with theaters and conference rooms that are unusually large for Europe. The city has been coordinating with FISM, and there will be good hotel rates and special menus at many of the restaurants in town. As part of this relationship, the municipality will provide outdoor spaces that can be used to bring magic to the streets of Rimini, giving the entire week a magic theme throughout.

It's worth mentioning that Rimini was the hometown of the famous film director Federico Fellini. So, the strange and appealing dreamlike nature of magic is surely familiar to that locale.

FISM will feature all of the expected attributes. The World Championships of Magic will feature 150 entrants, all of whom have earned their slots by winning in regional conventions across the globe. These are the closest magical equivalent to the Olympic Games. As Walter observes, "The Olympics are not only made for athletes to compete, or to be declared a winner, but to make people fall in love with a sport and help it evolve. In the same way, I see the World Championships as an opportunity for magic to evolve, not only as a competition but as an art form respected and loved by the lay public."

There will be gala shows, of course; an international roster of performers for both stage and close-up is in the process of being booked, and the lineups are starting to take shape. Finding just the right combinations of respected veterans and fresh new faces is no easy task, but the work of carefully assembling the shows is underway.

There will be a wealth of lectures, most of them repeated multiple times to enable varied translations. Walter says, "I want the FISM attendees to go home with a wealth of new secrets, and to discover new ways to bring magic to the people." And yes, the dealers are getting ready to show off their latest wares.

But Walter has more things in store. A few of his ideas are outlined in the "What's Coming FISM 2015" sidebar at right.

To sum it up, Walter says it's going to be "144 hours of feeling like you're at a home away from home."

It all began with the chance discovery of a book. Since then, he joyfully proclaims, "I have loved magic every day of my life, always looking for the perfect trick, the perfect performance. I don't think I have fully achieved this yet and I continue to look for it with the same love and passion that I had 30 years ago. The real enchantment was allowing magic into my life."

And his advice to *Genii* readers? "Simple: Sign up! Immediately! Stop whatever you are doing and register for the greatest magic event ever. Turn on your computer, go to www.fismitaly2015.com and register so that you will be able to say to everyone, 'I was there'."

We'll see you in Rimini. •

WHAT'S COMING FISM 2015

SOLO SHOWS: "I love to travel the world, to see artists working in real life. These shows reveal their real secrets—the ones that win over audiences and have made them famous. We will offer one-man shows that provide a unique insight into the true talents of performers whose shows are not available on-line."

MAGIC AND TECHNOLOGY: "Today's magicians use more than a magic wand. We'll explore the possibilities of new technologies. Smartphones and web links are capable of creating magical experiences; to entertain and amaze. We're preparing an app that will allow people to follow the contest and other events in real time. The Internet won't compete with FISM; it will enhance it."

ULTRA LECTURE: "This is a new type of conference, which has been tested at the Masters of Magic convention. Ten major artists will address a single topic, each given nine minutes to present their take on a compelling premise. The results will inspire you."

TEA TIME: "Each afternoon we will present a very special get-together, where a magical legend will be interviewed to talk about his career. There will be video clips and insightful conversations. Truly, this is what makes for unforgettable memories."

LATE NIGHT LEGERDEMAINE: "Something you can never download from the Internet is an actual gathering of friends and companions, live and in person. FISM will feature such gatherings every night. After the shows are over, we'll have Social-Event areas set up for sessions, informal shows, discussions, and much more. You'll be able to interact with famous magicians, meet up with your old friends, and make new ones."

SURPRISES: "We know that this week will feature unexpected visitors. Some of those will be announced in the coming weeks and months. Some of them will not be revealed until we are all together in Rimini. There will be some very special performers who have never before participated at a FISM congress. I promise you, these names will make your jaw drop!" Meanwhile, how does a convention organizer take advantage of a beautiful beach resort? Ah, that's yet another surprise to look forward to.