



Shorewood native Ben Seidman thrills crowds with his magical shows throughout the country.

Magic Man

BY MARTIN HINTZ
PHOTOGRAPHY BY
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The crowd of kids and adults gathered around Ben Seidman as his fingers fluttered around the deck of cards. His lean digits were like a hummingbird about to land in the courtyard of Lynden Sculpture Garden. After a few waves and moves in a shuffle that would make a *chemin de fer* croupier envious, out pops the correct card previously selected by one of the youngsters. Applause all around.

Prestidigitator Seidman fell in love with magic when he was a youngster. As he recalls, it all began when a man wearing a multicolored costume pulled a small object out of his mom's ear. In retrospect, it was probably weird and invasive, he says, but he had never been more mystified. He then went on to do his first magic act at age 6. "I'd like to think that I've gotten much better since then," he laughs.

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Seidman, now 27, eventually graduated from Shorewood High in 2003 and from UW-Eau Claire in 2007. He spent his final year of college at UNLV, which he admits was a blatant excuse to study magic with the world’s best. His folks, Susan and Michael Seidman, have been supportive all along his career path—one that has included a stint as resident magician at Mandalay Bay Resort & Casino in Las Vegas.

“The job sort of came to me. I met and performed for some of the decision-makers, and they liked the idea of having something unique,” he says. “Las Vegas is known for elaborate production shows, but at that time there weren’t very many places to see magic up close.”

For Seidman, it was the experience of a lifetime. “I was out of college two years and suddenly performing at one of the nicest hotels in Las Vegas,” he says.

Seidman lives in Los Angeles where he’s been performing at the Magic Castle in Hollywood and the Comedy and Magic Club in Hermosa Beach. Yet, most of the time he’s on the road, doing much of his own booking.

“Show business is a constant roller coaster. Sometimes life is nonstop travel; other times I’m writing and creating material at home. But in general, home is whatever hotel I happen to be staying,” he says.

“When I call the front desk to ask for a wake-up call, the receptionist sometimes asks my room number. That’s not fair. I don’t remember what city I’m in, let alone the room number.”

For Seidman, casino audiences differ vastly—depending on the level of alcohol consumption, he laughs. “When you have a regular show, but you aren’t a celebrity, people will come to watch but don’t know entirely what to expect,” he says. “This can be great, or terrible. If someone’s idea of magic is putting girls in boxes and their idea of comedy is telling fart jokes, there’s a good chance they’re not going to like my show.”

Seidman doesn’t confide how his tricks work—not even to his parents—because he doesn’t want to rob anyone of those moments of wonder. “I don’t think it’s fair to tell. Good magic is one of the only ways we can feel like a kid again,” he says. He’s noticed people view magic differently, guessing that about 30 percent of his audiences think they want to know how tricks are done. “But they don’t. If I were to tell them they would just regret asking,” Seidman says.

For him, the most fun about being a magician is just being a magician. “The simple act of doing magic tricks for a living? It’s craziness! Anytime I find myself in

a conversation with a celebrity or staying in a five-star hotel that a client paid for, I feel like an impostor and I wonder how I ended up here,” he says.

Seidman also finds fun moments within the creative process, particularly when working on a television show. For instance, he recently found himself covered in liquid latex operating power tools and wondering what he’s doing with his life. That was the same day he ordered several live animals, a human torture chamber, three walnuts and a Pippi Longstocking costume. “How could that possibly not be fun?” he asks. “Besides, have you ever asked for a 50-gallon milk can, 2 quarts of spray adhesive and a chicken? It’s safe to say I have a weird job.”

As an entertainer, Seidman realizes every audience is different. Adjusting for age is elementary for him. “In any performance situation, if something feels off, it’s really fun to change the approach or the tone and steer the night back into laughter and amazement,” he says. “The key is to treat every gig like it’s just as important whether you’re performing in front of 2,500 people in a beautiful theater or 30 squatters in an anarchist collective in Salt Lake City.” And, yes, that happened.

Learn more about the not-too-simple Seidman at www.BenSeidman.com.