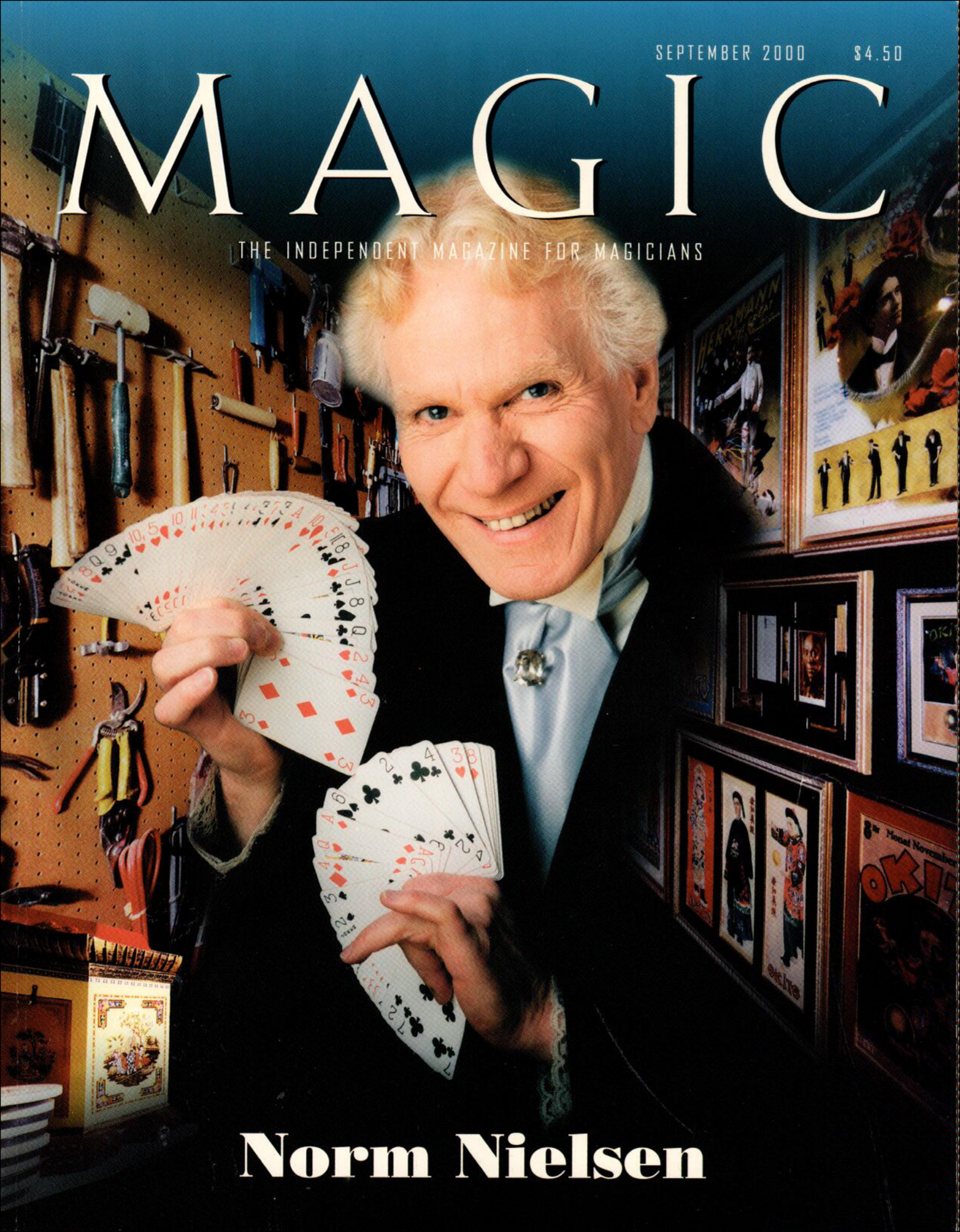


SEPTEMBER 2000

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# MAGIC

THE INDEPENDENT MAGAZINE FOR MAGICIANS



**Norm Nielsen**





"THE VIOLIN  
PLAYED BY A PHANTOM MAGICIAN  
WAS EERIE AND HYPNOTIC.  
RATHER LIKE A DALI CANVAS."  
VARIETY

# Conjuror, Craftsman,



By John Moehring

The wall behind the booth is decked out with alluring images of performance magic's rich past. Stacked atop the tables are intriguing playbills, colorful posters, and irreplaceable pieces of magical memorabilia — all restored to their near-pristine glory and linen-backed for posterity. Posters once commonplace as advertising art are now considered gallery art. "There's such a fascination about stone lithography," says Norm Nielsen. "The images just captivate you. And as with certain art, there's a scarcity of them." Yet, Nielsen has managed to capture an outstanding array of these fleeting images in a remarkable span of only ten years. His accumulation of magic posters is one of the largest and finest private collections anywhere.

For the last four or so years, Norm, along with his wife Lupe, has been showing up in dealer rooms at magic conventions with incredible caches of these poster treasures. And they are for sale or trade, as they are duplicates from the vast holdings back home in Las Vegas. When Norm starts to sift through a pile of the latest finds, it doesn't take long before a crowd is pressed two and three deep around the table. Suddenly you're immersed in poster jargon. There's talk of "one-sheets, three-sheets, half-sheets, panels, window cards, and barnsides." You hear the names of Strobridge, Otis or Friedlander tossed out, not like they were printing firms, but instead as the actual "lithos" on the table. Yet, no matter the size of the poster or its printer, it's called "paper" by collectors. Those less zealous about these antiquities, refer to them as "investments for the future."

This spring, when Nielsen set up shop at the Magic Collectors' Weekend in Baltimore, a few of the offerings at the booth raised some eyebrows. As Lupe proudly went through a select stack of the vibrant images, one potential customer noted, "I've never seen that Houdini portrait that small." The three-sheet poster appeared reduced to a size that would fit comfortably on the wall of anyone's den. With an impish grin, Norm leaned across the table and said, "These are the reproductions."

"Hey, they're better looking than the originals," said one collector, putting aside a "rare-looking" Kellar that had a penciled-in price of only \$300. "And you don't have to take out a second mortgage to take home a couple."

In 1999, Nielsen took a handful of his poster reproductions — which by the way, are not mounted on linen, but instead, are digitally printed directly onto the fabric — to the Los Angeles Conference on Magic History. He was testing the waters. Would the historians and the old-line collectors accept these gorgeously drippy laser graphics? Before the gathering's end, they'd sold out.

As the dealer room in Baltimore emptied for an afternoon lunch break, someone walking by Nielsen's booth kidded him, saying, "With those new reproductions selling like they are, I'll bet you never have to go back to doing the act."

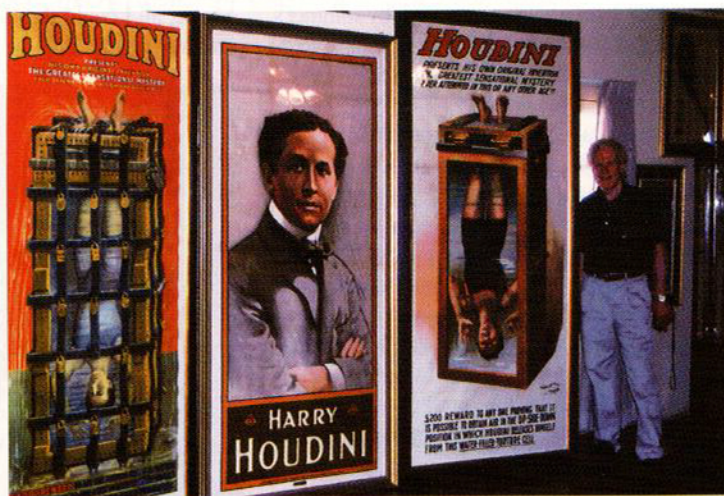
Norm laughed and told how pleased he was that people like the posters... then with that infectious smile, he casually dropped the news that in six weeks he's taking the act down to Mexico City to open a brand-new night club. "It's a two-month run, with options."



*The Conjuror — performing on European television.*



*The Craftsman — finishing up an Okito "Checker Cabinet."*



*The Collector — finding yet another Houdini poster.*

# and Collector as Well





At the Los Angeles Conference on Magic History, Nielsen shows off his stock of duplicate lithographs for sale, as well as his reproductions of many originals. Which posters on the wall are copies?

It's pretty common knowledge among magicians that Norm Nielsen has traveled the world with his classic manipulative act, enjoying decades of performing successes. However, it was truly a surprise for many to find out he would not be spending the summer of the year 2000 hitting the conventions, wheeling and dealing for posters, and occasionally dusting off the act for one of the evening shows.

After some anticipated delays in opening the Mexico City night club, which is called "Crazy Paris," the show *Crazy Paris* — yep, same name, same place — finally premiered in July. As usual, Norm was a smashing success and, by summer's end, he had added yet another outstanding credit to his already distinguished résumé.

Norman Dale Nielsen was born February 17, 1934 in Kenosha, Wisconsin, about 75 miles north of Chicago, right on Lake Michigan. His father was a third-generation Danish baker and, as Norm grew up working around the bakery, it was assumed he would be perpetuating the family tradition. Decorating cakes on weekends and early mornings before school, Norm seemed to have a career of flour, sugar, and pastry ovens all cut out for him. That was until the summer he turned 18 and traveled to nearby White Water for a magic convention.

Several years prior, Norm had become interested in magic through a barber in his hometown. Herman Raditz was a retired barnstormer who gave up doing small shows in small towns for cutting hair. By night, he would go from bar to bar just doing five or so tricks. "Herman would produce pocket watches," Norm remembers, "then he would vanish them, eat them, and pull them out from other places." Silks that changed colors, a cigarette routine, and "Squash," the trick where a shot glass full of whiskey disappears, comprised the

rest of Raditz's repertoire. "I learned about magic by just hanging around him, but he would never tell me how anything was done."

The need to know was soon satisfied when Herman took Norm to the Houdini Club conclave. "Joe Berg had a booth there, and it was my first experience to buy anything." Two magicians on the shows were Al Sharpe, doing the "Miser's Dream," and Neil Foster, with his act of card manipulations and "Zombie." That weekend shaped Norm Nielsen's destiny. He would become a magician. "When I heard that Neil Foster taught at the Chavez College of Magic, all I could think about was going there and having that man be my teacher."



As a teenager, Norm decorated cakes at his father's bakery in Kenosha, Wisconsin [left]. After high school, he left home for Hollywood, where he studied sleight of hand with none other than Benny Chavez, the founder of the Chavez College of Manual Dexterity.

Having to go home and tell his family he wanted to learn magic was painful for both Norm and his father. One of Norm's older brothers had left home for the Navy; the other brother was killed in a motorcycle accident. "I was the one my father planned to have take over the bakery. When I told him I was going to California, he said, 'If you leave, you don't have to come back.' I was a big disappointment to my father."

Norm felt a slight bit of disenchantment when he signed up at Chavez and discovered that Neil Foster no longer taught there. "Benny and Marian Chavez still had the studio on Sunset Boulevard, and they became my teachers." To make ends meet, Norm took a job with Lockheed aircraft, working the graveyard shift.

Chavez classes were conducted five nights a week, and students were taught basic moves with cards, cigarettes, thimbles, billiard balls, and coins. "Each hour you were given one new move with an item. At the end of the hour you'd go on stage to do a routine that included the new sleight." From a crow's-nest light-and-sound booth overlooking the practice stages, Benny, Marian, and other instructors could watch their fully wardrobe students develop their acts. "They had mirrors on the sides of the rooms, so if you flashed right or left, they would let you know." The rigorous practice and rehearsal schedule was not much fun for the first couple of months. "Then it really became a kick, as you became experienced with the routines, and you were actually performing."

Nielsen stayed around Chavez for nearly two years. A solid year of that time was spent taking both the regular course and the advanced courses. At six months, he started teaching, something he would continue to do as





he picked up experience doing school and club shows around town. A lucky break in television came early on when he auditioned, along with Tony Marks and Chuck Kirkham, for a local program called *This is Your Music*. "I got the show, I guess because they wanted somebody really young. Kirkham got so ticked off because, not only did I get the job over him, the TV station tried to rent his illusions to use on the show."

Even though Norm Nielsen was young, good-looking, and possessed highly polished manipulative skills, he couldn't find decent work in his newly chosen profession of show business. "I'll never forget going to an agent in Beverly Hills, just after leaving Chavez. He said, 'You're magician number 440-something that's doing that exact magic act.' But I really did appreciate what he told me next. 'Now that you've taken the course, start to unlearn it.'" Norm says he got rid of those basic things that aligned him with the Chavez look (grabs an imaginary lapel to illustrate the infamous "Chavez Clutch"), but more importantly, he began to add a new element to the re-worked routines — his distinctive personality.

Just about the time Nielsen started getting his act together, he was drafted. Being an entertainer, he asked to be assigned to Army Special Services. Yet, before the proper commanding officers would even learn of this request, Norm had finished basic training in St. Louis, was stationed in Seattle for a while, and had been transferred to Japan. Norm liked living in the Far East, and when the choice for Special Services finally came up, he opted to stay there. He had learned enough Japanese to create some patter for his own show, which he was performing in Tokyo on weekends.

In the mid-'50s, when Nielsen returned home, he found himself back to square one when trying to find bookings. "The act was strictly a sideline at this point," he remembers. "That's when I opened a magic shop in Kenosha." But the shop was not your average run-of-the-mill trick store. There were lots of things on the shelves for serious magicians, and several were Nielsen creations, items that he was fabricating himself. Norm had invested in some tools and shop equipment, he was taking special courses in woodworking at the Extension University of Kenosha, and utilizing his knowledge from earlier art classes, he'd set up his own paint shop. In retrospect, the store was somewhat of a front for his backroom manufacturing operations. "That first magic shop was located in an office building. One day, a tenant, who just happened to be an attorney, came in, saw the paint sprayer and asked, 'What's going on here?' I had to move to another location."

In addition to building magic, running a magic shop by day, and doing club dates in Chicago and Milwaukee by night, Norm started playing the Playboy Clubs. "There were five or



*In the 1950s, young Norm Nielsen, still a student at the Chavez College, performed illusions while Jana Ecklend sang "You're Driving Me Crazy" on a local TV show called This is Your Music.*

so of them around, and I would do the act twice a night. On weekends at the club in Chicago, we did five shows a night. I was delighted for the opportunity to work on the act."

In late 1961, Norm was booked on a show for the Chicago IBM Ring. After the performance, an elderly gentleman came up and introduced himself. "When he said, 'I'm Theo Bamberg,' all I could say was, 'Of course, I know who you are.'" Norm had seen all the wonderful Okito "Checker Cabinets" and Okito effects in Joe Berg's shop for years, but upon meeting the master builder face-to-face he was awestruck.

Okito was impressed with this young performer who he heard was a craftsman, and he invited him to come see him at the Wacker Hotel, where he was living at the time. They talked shop the entire day. "He showed me his footlocker with all of his tools. He took out each tool, showed how it was used, and described the things he had built with it." As he was leaving, Norm asked Okito if he was interested in selling these tools. "When he said yes, and for \$50, I could not believe it." Norm hand-carried the trunk on the train back to Kenosha.

Along with the tools, Okito granted Norm permission to build any of the items he had ever created. The first thing constructed was the "Triangular Mystery" — an effect where three flat panels are shown, hooked together on a base, and when the magician reaches into the triangle, he makes an impressive production of silks, flowers, and a rabbit.

A year passed before Norm got around to building that first "Triangular Mystery." He wanted Okito to see it. "He was bedridden in a nursing home, but when I walked in and he saw the apparatus, he sat up. He examined it. He looked at the wood to see how straight it was. He asked about the kind of paint I used, and he saw that I had used the right decals. He inspected it again, then looked up at me and said, 'That's goot...' Well, that was like I had graduated with honors. I really felt proud." Unfortunately, Theo Bamberg died on June 28, 1963, without ever seeing any other of his mysteries lovingly re-created by Norm Nielsen.

Over the next couple of years, Norm began to turn out a line of Nielsen/Okito pieces that, even though some are still manufactured today, have become sought-after collectibles.





*Four characters in search of an act — a kabuki dancer produces a girl wearing a gorgeous butterfly costume; a Swiss yodeler performs “Silk to Egg” with patter in rhyme...*

Dr. Robert Albo has Norm's original “Checker Cabinet.” And that first Nielsen/Okito “Triangular Mystery,” which retailed for \$37.50, was resold at the Baltimore Magic Collectors' Weekend mentioned earlier for \$1,200.

But Nielsen was not just building stuff destined for the shelves of collectors. At one point in the 1960s, his one-man shop was turning out about 30 different items. The one had all the dove-workers of that era gaga was the Nielsen “Vanishing Dove Cage.”

The wheels that were happily turning at Norm's place suddenly changed gears in 1965. The shop apron was temporarily exchanged for white tie and tails — it was time for the craftsman to again be conjuror. Jay Marshall had set up “a little show” in the backroom of Magic, Inc. The truth was, Mark Leddy, the legendary New York agent who booked the variety acts for *The Ed Sullivan Show*, was in town and he wanted to see Norm's act.

Even though the audition did not include the “Floating Violin,” something still in development, Leddy liked what he saw. Six months later, the call came to be on Sullivan's show. Upon arrival in New York for a Saturday music

rehearsal, Norm was told that the show was already too long. He would have to cut several minutes from his act. After the Sunday afternoon dress rehearsal, he got the bad news that “the powers-that-be” had cut him from the evening lineup. Disheartened, Norm returned to Kenosha and the somewhat regular work of the Playboy Club circuit. He soon got serious about replacing his closing effect of many years, a large “Zombie,” with the “Floating Violin.”

It was while performing at the Los Angeles Playboy Club that he decided to try out the violin for the first time. “It was the last show of the last evening of the engagement. I had no music for it. I told the band to just play something that sounded like a violin.” The magical musical instrument floated about, but there was no ending to the piece. “When I took off the bow and set the violin down, there was no applause. I didn't try it again in a show for six months.”

In 1967, Mark Leddy called to advise that they were putting together a 20th-anniversary celebration of *The Ed Sullivan Show*. They could only pay airfare and expenses to New York, but Leddy encouraged Norm to do it, saying, “It could lead to something.” By this time, the vanish of the “Floating Violin” had

been added to the act. It was something he thought Leddy would appreciate, so he flew to New York. It turned out to be a wise move. Shortly thereafter, Nielsen performed the act with the violin for the first time on network television on *The Dean Martin Show*. He went into the *Mitzi Gaynor Show* for a long run at the Riviera in Las Vegas. To top it off, Mark Leddy booked the act at the Casino de Paris, where he got Norm a run-of-the-show contract. “To get that kind of contract was terrific. I thought to myself, ‘At last, I've made it!’”

Because it was his first long-term engagement outside the country, he packed up his wife, Faith, and the two daughters, Jenna and Alexandria, and moved to France. Immediately following the nine months in Paris, Norm went on to play Italy and more of Europe. However, trying to work and live on the Continent did not work out with his family. “My wife just couldn't handle the traveling. She went back to Kenosha. One of the girls stayed with me for a while.” Norm knew that his marriage and personal life were “falling apart.” A divorce was eminent.

As with many acts of this particular period, Norm's triumphs were abroad. Except for engagements in Reno and Las Vegas, audiences





*...Toulouse-Lautrec explores the effects of explosives, and Ludwig Beethoven magically appears to make a grand piano float — all part of an unbelievable quick-change act that Norm Nielsen's been working on for almost 20 years.*



saw little of the act in the United States throughout the '70s and early '80s. He was working night clubs and theaters in Great Britain, South America, Finland, Turkey, Spain, Mexico, Germany, Greece, and Australia.

For seven years, Norm would become a perennial favorite at Paris' famed Crazy Horse Saloon. This is ironical, because during his first engagement there, Norm was extremely dismayed by the audiences. But the experience taught a lesson: You cannot be intimidated by an audience, anywhere. "I had a little problem with not having enough confidence, but working in France educated me on how to overcome that. When you walk onstage, you must be in charge. After all, they've come to see you." Originally, Nielsen was booked for only a month. "They hired me right back for another month."

One night at the Crazy Horse, a small bearded man wearing a long black cape and a derby walked onstage. Sounding a little like a Peter Sellers-spoof of Toulouse-Lautrec, the diminutive character welcomed "zee audience." They answered back with enthusiastic "Bon Soirs!" There was an off-stage announcement: "A special delivery for Monsieur Toulouse-Lautrec." Then, a gloved hand

passed a big black round bomb with a burning fuse through the curtain. Frenetically, the little man searched his pockets for a tip for the outstretched hand. Finding nothing, he merely said, "I am so sorry, but I am a little short." The bomb was set down, as he asked, "What ees theeze Special Delivery?" Then it exploded. The little man changed into the elegantly attired Norm Nielsen.

"The Little Frenchman is part of a quick-change act I've been working on for a long time." However, this protean act is more than a bunch of costume changes, it's a character-change magic act. A masked kabuki dancer produces a girl in a butterfly costume. As she steps forward, the kabuki changes to a character Norm calls "the Swiss yodeler." Without yodeling, but with Swiss-accent patter in rhyme, he does the "Silk to Egg." To the sounds of Parisian music, he transforms into the Little Frenchman character. For the finale, instead of turning into himself, as he did at the Crazy Horse, he changes in a flash to Beethoven and performs the "Floating Piano."

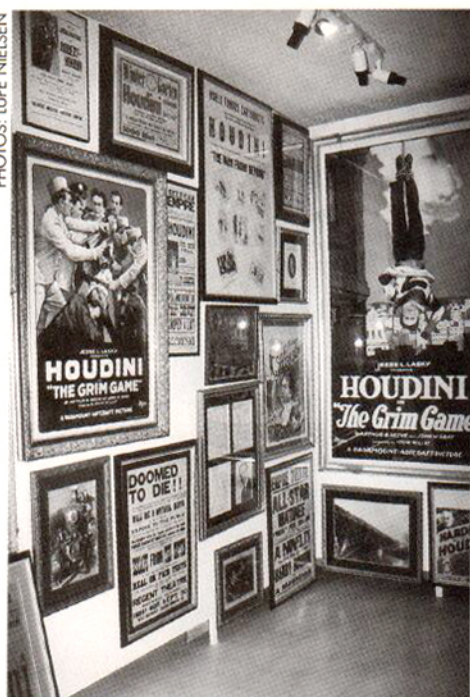
In 1987, the German producers of the *Zauber-Zauber* revue came to Norm's home in Los Angeles to see the quick-change act. He

was insistent they use this act in the *Zauber-Zauber* tour he'd signed for. "They watched me work in the living room with two girls who knew the act perfectly. Afterward, they agreed that I could do the quick-change act, but they wouldn't bring the girls over to Europe." When he arrived for rehearsals, they gave Norm only one girl, "and she was a klutz." Realizing it was a futile effort to do the quick-change act as envisioned, he threw in the towel. "I just did the act with the violin and the piano."

An encounter of a most significant kind occurred in 1990, while Norm Nielsen was playing the Scala in Madrid. He met and became friends with an Argentinean by the name of Victor King, who gave him his first magic poster. "It was a Fu Manchu that was torn and had pieces missing." Because of that, Señor King gave him two, "so he could make one good one."

The poster didn't receive much attention until a couple of months later, when Nielsen returned to the United States. "This time, I really wanted to settle down, and I didn't want to travel so much anymore." So, one afternoon, using an iron and some backing material he





Two corners of the museum building that's behind Norm Nielsen's Las Vegas home, where his ever-growing collection of original stone lithographs — not buried in file drawers or hanging in dark cabinets — are on display for the enjoyment of interested collectors and historians of the art.

pieced together the poster and put it up on the wall. "It kinda grew on me."

Gearing up to build and sell more magic that year, Norm took a dealer's booth at the IBM Convention. Mario Carrandi was in a nearby booth and had a Frakson poster for sale. "Frakson was a pal of mine, and I wanted to get that poster. But Mario had a horrific price on it because it was the only one he'd ever seen. Mike Caveney, also a poster collector, had never seen it either." This probably made the Frakson poster even more desirable in Norm's mind. He was determined to buy that Frakson, as well as a three-sheet Carter "Priestess of Delphi," from Mario. "But I didn't have the money to pay what he was asking. When Carrandi finally made me 'a deal for the two,' I was hooked. I never looked back..."

Want ads were placed in the Los Angeles-area newspapers. "I woke up every morning and asked myself, 'Who can I call today for leads?' 'What can I do today to get at least one poster?'" It wasn't long before Norm's phone was ringing. A retired theater lighting man had a poster he'd received from Hardeen. "It was the Houdini eight-sheet 'Buried Alive.' It was folded and still in the envelope with the 10¢ stamp that Hardeen used to mail it." That "first major find" cost Norm \$600. A lady had a poster that she knew was a magician's because it had "The Great Her Monn" printed on it. "When I saw that it was a Leon Herrmann portrait, my mouth fell open." Norm figured she wanted at least \$1,000, but didn't argue when she said \$500.

During the two years before he would move to Las Vegas, Norm recalls that the greater part

PHOTO: ANNE WHITE



Marshall Brodien [left] and Jay Marshall [right] celebrate the sale of Norm Nielsen's acquisition of the Jay's collection of posters in 1993.

of each day was spent on the poster collection. "If I had three or four orders a day for the manufacturing, I was happy." Once those packages — be they books, bottles, manipulative cards, canes that turned to tables, or cages that vanished — went out the door, it was back to the happiness of the pursuit of posters.

The paper chase had begun. The classifieds in the L.A. papers served their purpose admirably, but that source had dried up. Now it was the challenge of coming up with new

sources for posters. Norm was showing up at garage sales, swap meets, auctions, and library sales. "Sometimes institutions would have them, and lots of times I would be making deals with people who had never made deals before."

Norm had always been one of the few granted the privilege of perusing Jay Marshall's aggrandizement of posters at 5082 North Lincoln Avenue in Chicago. Trips to the inner sanctums of Magic, Inc. became more frequent in 1993, and they were usually made in the accompaniment of Marshall Brodien. Marshall (the one with that given name) often served as something of a sales catalyst, convincing the other Marshall (of that surname) to "unload" a few posters on Norm each time they visited. "I remember buying the Houdini 'Eclipsing Sensation.' I was so thrilled to get it, just because I knew that the week before, somebody else had made an offer for it, but Jay sold it to me instead." Norm continued with purchases of two or three posters on each of these frequent visits, hoping that someday would be the right time to ask, "How much for everything?"

Later that year, Jay made a reciprocal visit to Las Vegas to take a look at Norm's growing collection and, at the time, it seemed appropriate to ask if Jay wanted to sell the balance of his posters. To Norm's surprise, Jay entertained the notion. "We made a deal on his collection — a handshake on it. But when I took him to the airport, he changed his mind. It wasn't that he was playing with me, and it wasn't a question of how much money. He just couldn't let go."

Some months later, when Jay called and asked Norm to come to Chicago to inventory the collection, David Copperfield, who was also interested in Jay's posters, suggested to Norm that they buy Jay's collection together. "I simply said, 'David, there's no way.' I told him that I'd been working on it for a few years already, and I wanted to do it on my own."

With inventory sheets in hand, Nielsen and Brodien met in the backrooms of Magic, Inc. and proceeded to take out the crates of posters. In his inimitable outspoken manner, Mr. Marshall, then curator of this important chunk of magic history's colorful past, instructed Mr. Nielsen to keep a separate list of the items he was interested in having. "When Jay said to me, 'Take all the posters you want and put them into a pile,' I stopped dead. I looked at Marshall Brodien and he looked at me. We didn't know that was what he intended on doing."

The next day, after the inventory was completed, Jay called David Copperfield to talk with him. He then walked back to where Norm was, insisting that he talk with David. Jay said, "David's on the line!" Reluctantly, Norm spoke with him. Copperfield told him, "I don't have time to talk about this, I've got to go into this meeting... Let's cut to the chase and buy this collection together."

"I said, 'David, if that's the *only* way, okay.' It was probably the dumbest thing I ever did.



After the call, Jay told Norm, "I'm going to sell the collection to you outright. You can deal with David anyway you want."

Norm packed up everything and transported it on his flight back home to Las Vegas. The phone was ringing when he walked into the house. It was David. After what Norm calls "a rough phone call," and after Copperfield's lawyer entered into the picture, the posters were eventually split up. One person made two piles, and the person who didn't make the piles got to look at both piles, then choose one. "David chose the wrong pile," Norm said, "...from my standpoint. But it was my fault in ever agreeing to do it this way."

Somehow able to ignore the hassles and mental aggravation caused by the hysteric sale, Norm continued his passionate quest for posters. It wasn't long before he had obtained most of the desirable ones that were in that "wrong pile." Surprisingly, via further trading, several of them actually came back from Copperfield. Norm was building poster frames for David, and they continued exchanging material with each other. "It was kind of fun," Norm says, "I'd put together a trade, he would call in his people to evaluate it, and usually we made a deal."

As the Nielsen collection rapidly gained recognition so did Norm's reputation as the man for whom, if a particular piece was desired for the collection, price was no object. Was he responsible for the last decade's unbelievable escalation in the market prices of lithographs? "I don't know if I was. I think there were a number of us who were a part of that, but prices have always started to inflate when deep-pocketed collectors come into the picture."

In June of 1997, Norm and a half-dozen or so prominent poster collectors were invited to bid on a selection of posters from the Charles Cabot Collection in New Zealand. There were scarce Chung Ling Soos, unusual Dante and Carter paper, and several rare Hugard, Malini, and Le Roy, Talma & Bosco pieces, among other things. The sale was conducted over the Internet, and after it closed as scheduled, Norm received a fax stating that his bid was the winner. Lupe, who would become Norm's bride in less than a year, purchased a plane ticket to New Zealand to pick up everything. Then, another fax arrived. To their chagrin, bidding had been reopened. "I was fit to be tied," says Norm, "because I had the deal!" As the result of a call to the New Zealand consulate, Norm was able to eventually overcome legal barriers and end up with the goods.

Lupe Ah Chu Dusek, the one who brought back the posters from Down Under, was and still is a talented sleight-of-hand artist who first met Norm at Hank Lee's Cape Cod Conclave in 1989 BC (before he collected). After the convention there was an occasional phone conversation between the two. Then sometime in the mid-'90s, while Lupe was talking to Nick



Norm Nielsen's "Floating Piano," from an inspiration by Christian Fechtner, and performed here on the stage of the Casino Escorial in Lisbon, Portugal.



In a roomful of Chung Ling Soo and Okito posters, Lupe and Norm were pronounced man and wife by John Booth in 1998.

Ruggiero about magic posters, Nick mentioned that, "Norm Nielsen, out in Vegas, has a great collection." This rang a bell. She knew Norm. So when she moved to Las Vegas in 1995, she called up for a tour of the place. They started dating and soon Lupe went to work part-time for Norm. Another bell rang when they were married on May 2, 1998. Marshall Brodien was Best Man, and Reverend John Booth officiated at the ceremony held at their sprawling, poster-filled estate in Las Vegas.

Two years later, sitting in their home's breakfast room, which just happens to be loaded with exquisitely framed magical ephemera, Norm was making last-minute arrangements to leave for Mexico City for the upcoming engagement at Crazy Paris. He expressed how anxious he was to get back to performing on a nightly basis. He told

of some of the refinements to the act that he'll be making. But these are primarily things to satisfy him. "When you've got an act that works well for a lay audience, it's difficult to change it. You've done it so many times that to add something new or modify the choreography is a major effort."

Lupe will be more than busy while Norm's away, just handling the day-to-day activities of the poster business. "Two days ago," Norm says, "just by returning a call, we got three Soo posters, and we're expecting 20 or 25 more posters to come in tomorrow or the next day." In addition to cataloging and getting restoration work going on those old posters, Lupe has twice as many of those new posters that will need to be painstakingly printed.

Norm has scheduled another run of the Nielsen/Okito "Checker Cabinets" as soon as he gets back from Mexico. He's also hoping there will be lots of backorders for the other items he continues to hand craft. "I love building. I'm so comfortable out there in the woodshop. It's the one place where nothing is wrong with the world."

In the 1952 book, *Okito on Magic*, Theo Bamberg maintains that no one achieves success as a conjuror without mastering magic as an art, a craft, and a business. "The art in your magic must spring from your personal gifts. But in order to exploit your gifts, you must become a sound craftsman. You can no more produce magic with a trick you have not mastered technically, than you can produce music with an instrument which you have not learned to play." It's easy to see why Okito was one of the early inspirations for Norm Nielsen — the craftsman, the conjuror, and now, the consummate collector. ♦