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Rod Chow

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Rod Chow and Company

by **Lon Mandrake**

I first met Rod Chow after he competed in a contest at the Vancouver Magic Circle using a mental card effect. What impressed me about him was that while most new members of the club would do an uncomplicated effect, Rod chose a card routine that was very unique and took a lot of practice in order to perform it correctly. He was obviously someone who put his finest effort into making magic work for his audience. After

talking with him, I invited him to join the Society of American Magicians. He eagerly joined and worked with us on our performances at Science World where he performed some excellent close up for the audiences. Later he did theatre performances too.

He began to look for themes for his magical performances and decided to focus on "money magic". He spent a great deal of time working on and perfecting his routines. He was always open to new ideas and suggestions from other club members. He would have his performances videotaped and then analyzed by members.

We witnessed continuous improvement in his style and presentation. His endless practice and dedication has culminated by winning the 2006 Society of American Magicians' Close Up Magic First Place Award in Louisville, Kentucky and The International Brotherhood of Magicians Gold Cup Finalist Award a record five times. Rod has won a remarkable over 30 awards over his magic career.

When Rod hosted an assembly meeting, it was

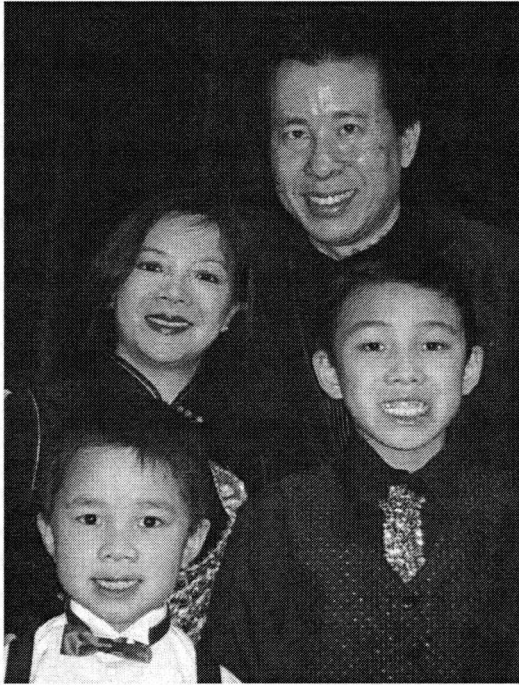
especially exciting because it was held beneath the thinnest building in the world. The building is only 6 feet wide and is written up in the Guinness Book of Records. There is an underground tunnel which has been converted into a meeting area, and while people walked above us, we practiced our magical arts below the streets of Chinatown in Vancouver. Rod's insurance business, Jack Chow Insurance, founded by his parents, Jack and Jean Chow, is housed in this family owned

building, and is a well known and respected business in Vancouver, British Columbia. Rod has become quite a celebrity in the insurance business as he has been involved in several insurance commercials and his family magic show has performed for several safe driving initiatives.

Rod developed a stage show with his wife and lovely assistant, Sylvia Chow. They performed and won several competitions at the Vancouver Magic Circle. They later each twice won the S.A.M. club awards: The Carl Hemeon Award, for excellence in performing; and The Lottie Hemeon Award for best assistant.

Rod has also won the Leon Mandrake award for outstanding showmanship and creativity in performance on two separate occasions.

The first magician Rod saw perform was Peter Rolston at the Pacific National Exhibition in Vancouver. Rod and his brother, Reg, both received balloon animals. Rod's parents saw the sparkle in young Rod's eyes as he watched the magic, so later bought him some kits



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and tricks. He was also given a Himber wallet and magic book that belonged to his father. His father is extremely inventive and innovative, but Rod had no idea that he had dabbled in magic himself. His parents always seemed very interested in magical performances and provided Rod many opportunities to see live shows and practice his tricks. His parents were a large influence on his interest in magic at an early age.

Rod's interest in magic increased in high school when he saw a senior student performing the ambitious card routine, disguised "as the fastest pass anyone ever saw".

Rod was a great student, but was also shy. He thought that he could increase his popularity with a deck of cards, and therefore did some research on card tricks. At the library he discovered the Dover edition of Card Manipulation, and learned among other things the Charlier Cut. He bought a copy of the Dover edition of Expert Card Techniques, and learned how to spring cards, do double lifts and the pass. As his family often traveled to Reno and Las Vegas, there was no shortage of decks of playing cards around the household. Rod began collecting a vast variety of decks of casino cards over the years. His father used to buy gambling books from the Gambler's Book Club and there was a special magic book section from which Rod ordered The Expert at the Card Table by Erdnase, and thus learned the Erdnase Cut.

His first visit to a Magic Shop was when his mom took him to a shop in Reno, Nevada, where the demonstrator showed him "The One Eyed Jack Sandwich". While not revealing the secret, he did tell Rod that it was in Harry Lorayne's book "My Favorite Card Tricks". Rod tracked down the book and learned almost every trick in it. He later collected every Harry Lorayne book.

Rod's father gave him his first performing opportunity. The annual office party for staff and important clients featured Rod performing magic, his brother, Reg juggling and his sisters, Barbara and Debra providing music and dancing. Rod's

magic at that time consisted of ungimmicked card routines, and he had so many decks of cards he was able to give away decks to each volunteer that helped him with each trick. He soon became well known at school and later at University as a good close-up card magician with an expanding repertoire of new card tricks every year.

In his early years, Rod, did not meet many magicians but learned from his Harry Lorayne books. He met Jack Mellor from Vancouver who owned Jacko's Magic Shop in Gastown. Jack encouraged Rod to join the Vancouver Magic Circle, but it wasn't until he attended a Magic Convention at Robson Square in downtown Vancouver that he decided to take this advice. His first convention was quite an eye opener and really broadened his view of the magic world. That's also when he discovered that a "dealer's room" wasn't a place where dealers met to deal cards! He met some interesting local magicians such as David Wilson and Ray Wong and was invited to attend the Vancouver Magic Circle again. Rod immediately applied for membership in the Vancouver Magic Circle and IBM, and was sponsored by Anthony Young and David Wilson. He immediately went through their initiation ceremony by performing three tricks and partaking of a secret ceremony. Rod never missed a meeting of the Vancouver Magic Circle with the exception of his honeymoon. Soon he put together a 15-minute act to earn his magic wand degree at the club. Rod became the official club photographer and continues taking important photos for events of the Vancouver Magic Circle and for the Society of American Magicians.

The Vancouver Magic Circle had a variety of trophies for the different fields of magic. The competitions were held almost monthly, but with the caliber of the magicians competing for these coveted awards, to win was not an easy task.

He eagerly took the challenge to win one of these trophies. As this was his first time competing, he

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had no idea of what he had to do to win. During his first year he entered each of the competitions with acts as unique as he could create. The experience and feedback was invaluable. It gave him the opportunity to meet Shawn Farquhar, who had won each of the VMC contests at least two times and Lon Mandrake, president of the S.A.M. # 95 group. During his early years at the Vancouver

Magic Circle, Rod specialized in cards and mental magic. Lon took an interest in his performances and after watching one of his competition performances, sat down to exchange ideas on mental effects. Lon was impressed by what Rod was doing, and invited him to come as a guest to the next S.A.M. meeting. He graciously accepted.

Rod remembers: "My first trophy was for Close Up Magic in 1992. I was pretty proud of this win and

so I put out my own media release. Apparently this was considered newsworthy as I was able to achieve some great articles in business and trade journals as well as in the local Chinese press." Having now achieved the edge necessary to win, he went on to win several other VMC trophies in other fields as well as winning the close up magic trophy a total of four times over the years, the most by any member, and the Stage Magic trophy

with his wife Sylvia.

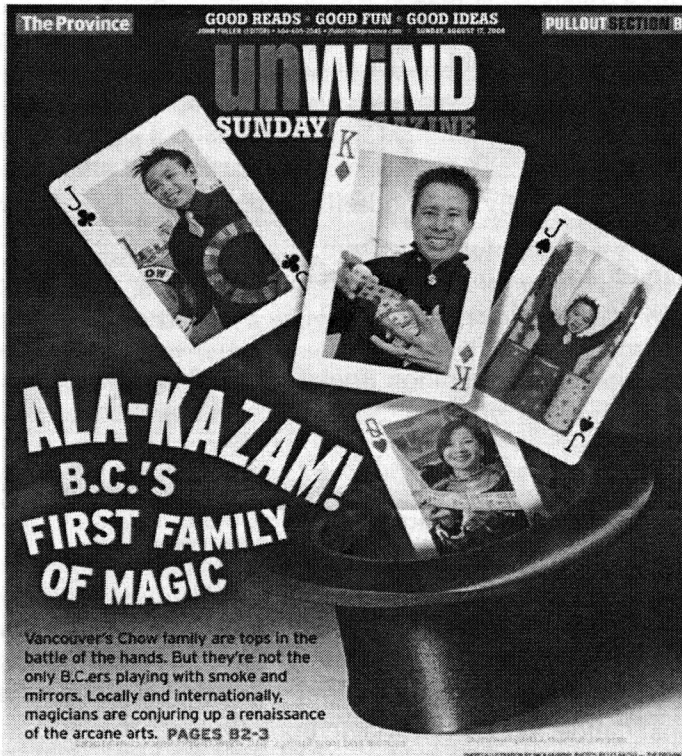
This opportunity to compete at this level was one of the tremendous benefits of being a member of the Vancouver Magic Circle. It gave him the accolades needed to establish himself as a credible magician, as well as the foundation for competing at the regional and international levels. Competition allowed Rod to develop new

presentations, make new friends and obtain the valuable experience needed to further his growth as a magician.

He attended every lecture and "Weekend of Magic" the Vancouver Magic Circle put on, and bought magic and lecture notes. In fact, he had a friendly competition with Ed Silva-White as to who would purchase the greatest number of new magic books at the many lectures and conventions they attended. Rod has accumulated at least a thousand magic publications, and hopes he's in

the lead! In spite of all the books, the performing opportunity afforded by the S.A.M. Assembly's annual Science World event was paramount in developing a professional stage presence. Lon, the producer of the event, gave each performer free reign for the content of the shows before appreciative family audiences, in a professional venue. The multiple stages and shows at Science

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World, enabled Rod to create visual, colorful and flashy parlor style acts and to get his then girlfriend, "The Enchanting Sylvia" involved in the show as his assistant.

Rod was elected president of the S.A.M. club of the Vancouver area. During Rod's term as president, the assembly put on their first and only full length televised theatre show called "Magic in May" at the James Cowan Theatre in Burnaby. This was fabulous exposure for our assembly and Rod's first real experience in theatre. Fortunately some of the members were experienced in performing in theatres, and under the supervision of Shawn Farquhar, it was a very professional live show. It ran for several years on local television.

Due to wedding plans in 1994 to his lovely assistant, Sylvia, Rod did not stand for re-election but has continued as secretary of the club to the present day. Rod's sister, Barbara, introduced him to Sylvia and on their first date, she loved his magic tricks. With her good looks, great personality and good humour, he knew he could work her into the act. Sylvia always enjoyed being amazed. She was a great supporter of what Rod did and was constantly being picked as a volunteer by the other S.A.M. magicians during their shows. The "Magic in May" show was one of the first stage shows they did together. Rod produced "big" money during the act and then surprised everyone by producing Sylvia magically out of thin air.

Rod and Sylvia's wedding was a magical event in more ways than one. The couple chose a magical theme, and a special professional magic show entitled "Love Sparkling Magic" starring Rod & Sylvia's friends: Juliana Chen, Shawn and Lori Farquhar, Ray Wong, Ed Silva-White and Juan Garcia. Each guest was given a custom deck of cards to celebrate and remember the wedding. They created a Magic Logo, custom Magic Hat and Wand pew markers, and a rose production during the ceremony. The reception followed at the Pan Pacific Hotel Crystal Ballroom where they had the hotel staff construct a full performing

stage complete with backdrop and wings. Guests were guided to their tables in accordance with a unique visual playing card seating system with the bride and groom being the Queen of Hearts and King of Hearts respectively. The magical entrance of the bridal party set the mood for the evening, and their first dance was an opportunity to do their magic show for family and friends.

His Science World stage shows have evolved with Rod and Sylvia and later sons, Jack and Nicholas performing as assistants. Now the children perform as magicians in their own right, with their cousins Melody and Juliana as assistants. Rod's sister, Barbara has become master of ceremonies for the Chow family magic presentations, and a real treat for Science World audiences.

Rod gives Shawn Farquhar credit for his successful competitions at regional and international levels. Shawn analyzed the structure, presentation and the techniques in the money act. He made many valuable suggestions while not changing the elements that worked well for Rod. Shawn actually built Rod his first table which became an integral part of the act. He also gave constant reminders not to laugh at his own jokes during the performance, never pose questions to the audience, and not to use music unless there is meaning and reason for it. With the money magic act progressing, Rod came closest to winning the I.B.M. when he placed second in the Gold Cup Close Up Finals in 2002 in San Diego, and also received an Award of Merit. Winning second place at such a prestigious international contest made him realize that first place was within his reach. From that point onward he set his goal on winning both I.B.M. and SAM competitions.

With Shawn performing extensively on cruise ships, Rod received help from several other assembly members, especially Glen LaBarre. With Glen's keen coaching, Rod won first place at the Northwest Magic Jamboree in Oregon. He later received first place, and the People's Choice

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award at the Canadian Association of Magicians (CAM) convention in Kitchener, Ontario in 2003. There he met Joan Caesar, president of CAM and she became an important person for advice for his act later on. Rod comments: "Although, I have lived in Canada all my life, this is the first time I had ventured east. I was very impressed with the courtesy extended to me as Joan had arranged that I be picked up and brought back to the airport by CAM member volunteers. Joan and her team had put together a very friendly convention with top talent and a well-run contest, cutting no corners. The two trophies I won that year remain amongst my heaviest, most cherished and most prominently displayed to date."

Rod has always listened carefully to constructive criticism to help improve his performance. For example, after failing to place in either the I.B.M. or SAM in 2003, Rod says, "Both Glen and I did not falter. It was back to the drawing board. We listened to the feedback from the contest judges, consulted Shawn Farquhar, analyzed everything with a fine tooth comb, re-worked, tightened up, re-pattered and improved the magic and kicked up the finale. I even worked with Juliana Chen on the act, who being a great friend and outstanding magician, was more than willing to assist. Each time I met Gene Anderson at the conventions, he told me that he loves my money act and that it keeps getting better, and so I was very pleased to have him critique my act and provide me with his good advice. I felt good after the test run of the improved act which resulted in my winning the Vancouver Magic Circle close up contest. I knew I had a solid act but placed second place at the SAM convention in St. Louis and was a I.B.M. Gold Cups Finalist in Cleveland. More work was needed. Neither Glen nor I gave up. In 2005, he again was a finalist in both conventions. My family supported me and endured all the rehearsals and tapings of the act over the years. They encouraged me to keep trying." With the continued expert coaching of Glen LaBarre,

and an improved act, he won first place in the 2006 S.A.M. International Close-Up Contest in Louisville, Kentucky. After such a long road, becoming a S.A.M. champion was a proud and accomplished achievement."

The Chow Family of Magic:

Rod has given a great deal to the S.A.M. assembly and has honored them with his many wins at competitions both locally and internationally. His sons, aged 8 and 11 years old have begun making their mark in magic by winning competitions of their own. Jack (11) and Nicholas (8) were the youngest members to join SYM, CAM, and the VMC. Rod confided, "Our two sons, Jack and Nicholas, were destined to be magicians when they were first born. Instead of cigars, we passed out custom magic wands. Although they will not remember, each participated in their first card trick at their one month old party. At age two they were officially assisting on stage in Rod's act by passing props back and forth from their mother, Sylvia to Rod. During pre-school and kindergarten, their show- and-tell was a magic trick customized to the theme of the week. Assembly members, Ray and Jo-Ann Medway and Lon and Linda Mandrake watched our boys grow. They were at Nicholas' first birthday party where Jack at age three, did his first public magic show. When Jack was in first grade, he won the student talent contest against competitors up to the grade seven level. Encouraged by this, Jack competed at the Pacific Coast Association of Magicians (PCAM) conference in Seattle to take first place in the Juvenile Platform Magic category with his "Tiki Tiki" act. Jack won several more awards at both PCAM and VMC with a variety of acts. In 2005 Nicholas at age five, became the youngest ever to win the same award, on board the Norwegian Star cruise ship. Nicholas won the same award the following year and is the youngest person to win in a VMC competition. Jack is now a six-time Pacific Coast and four-time Vancouver Magic

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Circle junior champion. Nicholas is the youngest four-time Pacific Coast and youngest two-time Vancouver Magic Circle junior champion. The Chow family, including the children, have now won over 50 awards to date. Very impressive!

In 2007, Nicholas became the youngest ever international paid working performer at the S.A.M. convention as he was selected to perform in the Stars of Tomorrow show held in Dallas, Texas. This professional stage show was one of the big highlights of the convention featuring teenage magicians aged 16-17 with Nicholas at age 7 being by far the youngest in the stellar line-up.

Rod is enthusiastic about the opportunities his sons have in magic, and his role as their father to help them develop their talents. "For my sons' competitions, we had to come up with something new each time. The challenge for me was to find effects which their small hands could control,

yet which would produce big and colorful results. Some of the props I used in my stage performances, I re-decorated and adapted for their use. The routining was extremely important as I know that for a competition act to be successful the magic must be connected to a unique theme. Management of props was also critical as I had to make sure they had easy snag-free access to what they needed and an exact place and space to display everything once produced. The appropriate choice of music and careful editing/mixing/timing were also essential factors in creating their professional and commercial acts. After eliminating redundancies and weaknesses, and after months of rehearsal, the boys had acts which we were all very proud of. With Jack and Nicholas' successes at such a young age, we think they already have the best start ever to become

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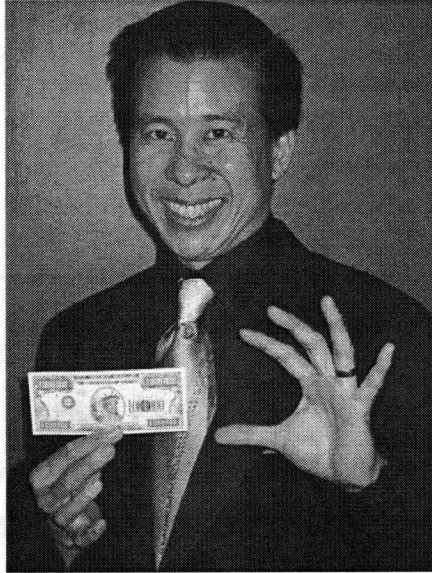
ROD CHOW CONT'D

the next stars of magic."

Just this year, Jack & Nicholas have added their first illusion to their act, the Cube Zag, which the Chows acquired from their magic friends, Trevor Watters and Lorena Paradon, who have performed this for many years as their first illusion. The brothers have added a modern edgy feel to the presentation, and they get to hypnotize and cut up their mom in the process.

Other family members are involved in entertainment as well. Rod's niece, Melody Choi, age eight. At age four, she performed as the assistant to Jack for five evenings on FISM World Manipulation Champion, Juliana Chen's live Chinese New Year's Show, and also at Science World. She won the Assembly # 95's Lottie Hemeon Award for best assistant and now assists her cousin, Nicholas. Cousin, Juliana Chow, age nine, is now Jack's assistant. The entire cast is billed as the "International Champion Magic of Rod Chow and Company". Rod's sister, Barbara is the very vibrant master of ceremonies. Rod's nephew, Michael Choi, who was the 5th grader star in the Canadian version of "Are You Smarter than a 5th Grader", has also very admirably fulfilled the role of MC.

Rod and Sylvia were recognized in 2007 by the Vancouver S.A.M. assembly at the annual awards dinner. Rod was awarded the coveted Mandrake Trophy for Outstanding Showmanship and Creativity, and Sylvia was awarded the Lottie Hemeon Trophy for Best Assistant. Rod has several of his bill switch routines & original techniques published in the book SWITCH by John Lovick, and was the cover story in the



April, 2007 issue of M.U.M.. In 2008, at PCAM in Monterey, California, the Chows brought back to Canada an unprecedented 5 Gold medals, and were featured on the cover of the Province paper special Sunday insert under the headline "Ala-Kazam! B.C.'s First Family of Magic – Vancouver's Chow family are tops in the battle of the hands." Over the years, the Chows have been featured in numerous mainstream media, including Live Breakfast TV, CTV, Shaw Cable, Channel M, Global TV, CBC TV and Fairchild TV as well as CBC, CFUN, CFRO and CKNW Radio. In addition to the Province, they have also been written up in the Vancouver Sun, Asian Pacific Post, Sing Tao, Ming Pao, World Journal, 24 Hours News, and various insurance publications.

Today, Rod and Sylvia look forward to continue performing with their family, and hope to see their boys succeed in more competitions as well as be booked for more professional gigs. Rod's ability to speak both Cantonese and Mandarin, in addition to English, has proven valuable at conventions where he is often called upon to assist in translating for the Asian delegates, as well as

in his performances, especially in Vancouver, where there is a large Asian population.

Rod had the honour to be personally invited by Obie O'Brien to attend the 2007 4F convention in Batavia, New York to earn his Bachelors degree. As a first timer, he was very privileged to perform for some of the top magicians in the world. In 2008, Rod returned to 4F to work for his Masters degree and will be returning again in 2009 to earn his PhD.

For further information, please visit Rod's website at www.rodchow.com or send him an email at rod@rodchow.com.

NPO

Nicholas - The Boy Who Knows

Nicholas Chow, who has just turned nine, has just turned the "S.A.M. 2007 Stars of Tomorrow" program mock-up by S.A.M. President Bruce Kalver into reality! Using an enlarged poster size version of Bruce Kalver's wonderful creation based on the famous "Alexander" poster, Nicholas has created an entire comedy mentalism act based on the theme of "Nicholas - the Boy who Knows". With this act, just on Saturday evening, Nicholas competed in the 2009

Vancouver Magic Circle junior comedy magic competition and won 1st place! Some comments from the judges: "Very well rehearsed and MOST entertaining!!!"; "Charming"; "His performance really was flawless." Nicholas executed his character perfectly with amazing stage presence. He delivered his lines with precision to have the audience in stitches laughing. That night he really was "The Boy Who Knows!"



NPO