

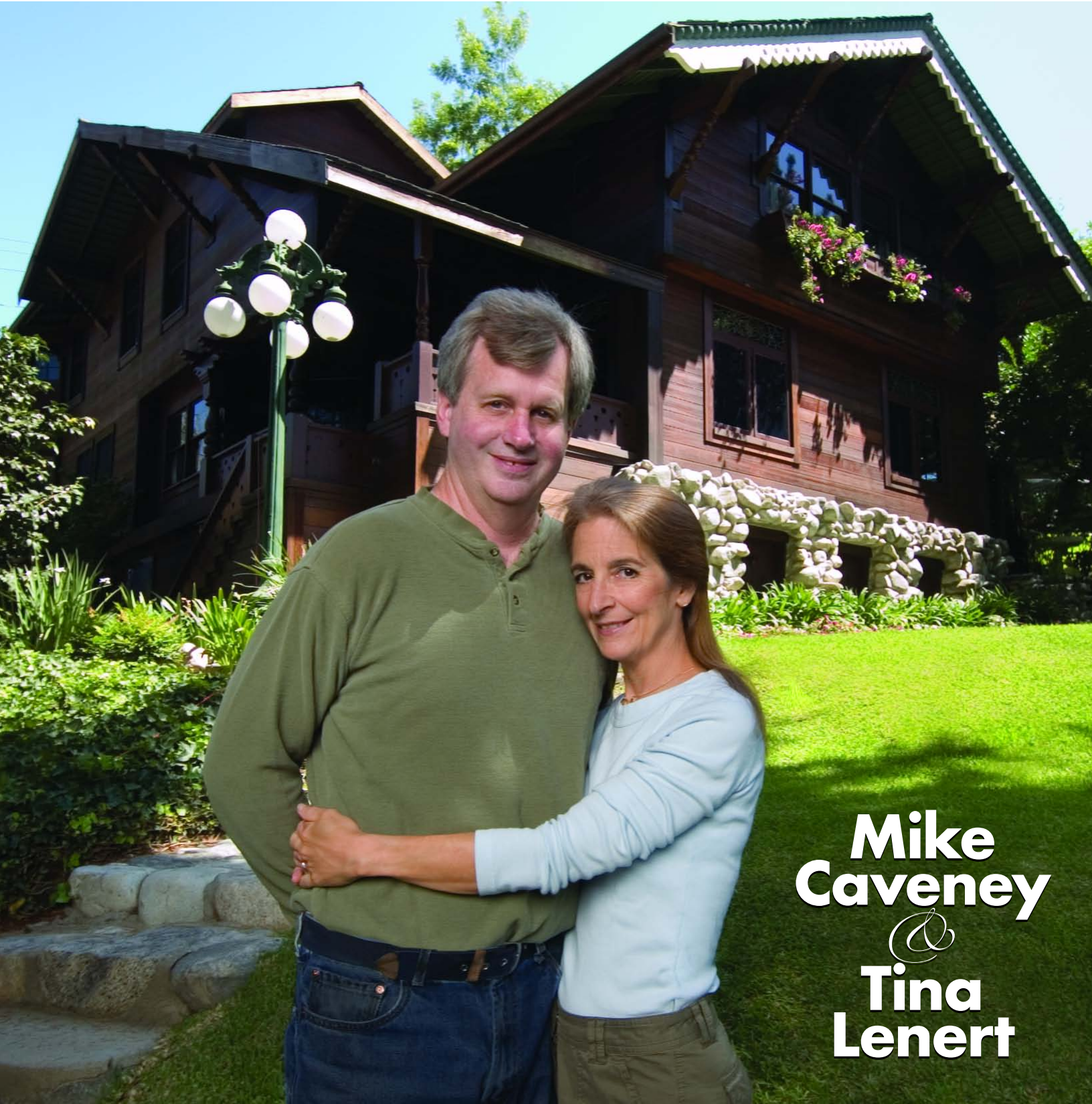
Genii

THE CONJURORS' MAGAZINE

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Mike and Tina: Power Couple • Stinett
Dai Vernon Back at The Castle
Mark Wilson in China—Barehanded
Mac King's Suitcase-O-Magic
"Triangulation" in Magicana
Marco Tempest's i-Magic
Mix-Up in Santaland • Osborne
Halloween Mindfreak



**Mike
Caveney**
&
**Tina
Lenert**



The Magic and Memories of
TINA LENERT &



The Egyptian Hall Museum. From left, Thurston's OH! Chair, T. Nelson Downs' Coin Ladder, Thurston's Through the Eye of a Needle Barrel, Alexander Herrmann poster on the floor, on wooden cabinet Thomas Worthington's magic wand collection, Charles Carter's Million Dollar Mystery cabinet. PHOTO BY BILL TAYLOR

BY DUSTIN STINETT
MIKE CAVENEY

*Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it.
Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it.*

JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE

I am a collector of memories.

TINA LENERT

Consistency is the spice of life.

MIKE CAVENEY

Passion and performing: Consistency and logic. These are words that Tina Lenert and Mike Caveney use often when speaking about their magic, themselves, and their life together. Couples in magic are hardly a unique occurrence. There are many examples of husband and wife teams in the art: unknown and well-known; past and present. But virtually all of these examples are a magician and his (or her) assistant: The few that are not, such as Servais LeRoy and Mercedes Talma, still performed together. And while Talma was a world-

class coin manipulator, she also acted as LeRoy's assistant in many of his illusions. What makes Tina and Mike so unique is that they are both magicians with vastly *different* acts. More often than not they are found performing at different times, usually in different countries, sometimes in the same show, but *never* on stage together. "Let's face it; there can only be one point of focus in an act," says Mike. "We were already solo performers when we met."

Mike Caveney decided early on he was going to be a magician. "It's a lot easier to become a magician when you make that decision at nine years of age," he says. "At every crossroad in my life, the road I chose was the one that kept me on track to become a magician." As a boy he would ride his bicycle eight miles each way to Owen Magic Supreme. "I thought that all magic shops looked like Owen. I thought all magic tricks were made out of hand-rubbed mahogany or finished with multiple coats of lacquer." His relentless loitering eventually led to his working odd jobs in the shop for which he was paid in apparatus. One of his first tasks was as a metal polisher. "I'll never forget the first time I tried to polish a zombie ball. I stood in front of the polishing wheel and Les Smith dumped a big pile of sawdust at my feet. I thought, 'This must be some kind of weird hazing ritual.' Then I got to work and pressed that ball into the polishing wheel. It shot out of my hands and buried itself in the sawdust. I sheepishly retrieved the undented ball from the sawdust to the sound of Les Smith and Carl Owen's laughter."

His well-chronicled affiliation with the Long Beach Mystics began what is an ongoing process of development through the scrutiny of his peers, a process that he (and now Tina) still depends on today. The closest thing he had to a "real" job was a stint as a clerk in a drug store during college. "They asked me if I wanted to go through their training to become an assistant manager. I practically went screaming out the door." After college, he thought about joining the fire department and even took their physical agility test. The next step, the oral examination, was on a day that he had a magic show scheduled. He tried to get them

Everybody needs a gimmick. This was Mike's hook.



to change the day but he was told that if he wanted to be a fireman, he would attend the examination on the scheduled day at the scheduled time. "I chose the magic show that paid me \$35 and never regretted it." Upon turning 21, bolstered by his Mystics reputation, he was quickly booked to work at The Magic Castle and just as quickly became a regular performer there. The nightly grind of working the main room of The Magic Castle, which at the time was in the basement, proved to be a graduate course in performance magic. "I would be sitting in my little dressing room backstage, just steps away from center stage, watching guys like Shimada or Marvyn Roy performing. You can learn a lot about magic watching pros like that doing four shows a night."

The daughter of a geologist employed by a U.S. oil company, Tina Lenert spent her first 12 years in Caracas, Venezuela. Even as a small child she felt the need to express herself in some artistic manner, as long as it didn't involve her speaking. "I was quiet and extremely shy, but I was always searching for an outlet; a performing art that would let me show what I was feeling," she says. "I thought I wanted to be a dancer; I wanted to play the harp. But I didn't get around to studying either one until much later in life."

She and her family returned to the United States and settled in Malibu, California. She learned to play the electric guitar and that led to her being part of an all-girl rock band. This lasted less than a year, but the band's performance at the high school talent show gave her a taste of being onstage. "I was petrified but I loved it!" Then she saw a performance of classical guitar, which changed her focus and she began studying in earnest. However, upon finishing high school she decided to pursue a reliable career, so she attended secretarial school. She had been working at a mortgage company for less than a year when it hit her: "I walked into the ladies room and looked in the mirror. I was 19 years old, my hair was up and I was wearing a business suit and I asked myself, 'Is this going to be me for the next 30 years? I don't think so.'" She went to the personnel office and gave her two-weeks notice. Fortunately her parents agreed to help, ensuring that she could study and practice the guitar fulltime. She was attending Los Angeles City College when her life suddenly changed. "I went to the Renaissance Faire and saw Robert Shields (of Shields and Yarnell fame) performing mime. I was transfixed. I had no idea why, but I knew that's what I had to do." She continued her guitar studies at California State University at Northridge, but less enthusiastically. After doing her senior recital, she put her guitar back in its case for the last time. Mime was now her outlet and her passion; a passion that has yet to fade. "I had actually seen Marcel Marceau when I was still living in Venezuela, but seeing Robert Shields flipped a switch in my head," she says. Tina later attended a performance of Marcel Marceau's at Caltech in Pasadena. Years later she discovered that in Marceau's audience that night was a young local magician named Mike Caveney.

As Mike was making a name for himself as a performer, he was



Two years after seeing Robert Shields, Tina was a mime working at the Renaissance Faire.

also working for Johnson Products making gimmicked coins. He was the only magician on staff, so his expertise in the art became an asset to the burgeoning company. "I asked owner Sam LaPorte if I could attend one of the national magic conventions as a dealer. He wasn't sure what a magic convention was, but when I came home with a shoebox full of money he told me I could go to all the magic conventions I wanted. That was my ticket to the world and

soon I was traveling through Europe, Japan, and all over the U.S.”

Now living in Hollywood, Tina had created a Raggedy-Ann character and was performing her mime on the streets. Of the experience, Tina says, “Talk about beating the odds: Making a living as a mime! And it was far more interesting and fun—and profitable—than the classical guitar.” Her career began to grow, with television and movie projects coming her way. She and four others, including her teacher, Tom McLoughlin, formed the L.A. Mime Company, “Mike had the Mystics, I had the L.A. Mime Co.”



Photo by Chad Slettery

This photo of Tina was eventually sold as a greeting card and a poster.

From working in the streets and Renaissance Faires, she had met a few magicians including Harry Anderson and Larry Wilson. But it was a visit to The Magic Castle where she would have her first significant experience. A friend invited her to go to the club, a place she had driven by many times on her way to Los Angeles City College. “I don’t know why, but the moment I stepped in the building I said to myself, ‘I belong here.’” That evening she saw a per-

formance in the close-up room by Judy Carter and was fascinated. She tried to meet Judy backstage, but was unable to find her. She couldn’t stop thinking about the Castle, so the next day she called The Magic Castle in an attempt to get booked there. “Bill Larsen told me that I had to do magic. So that was that.” The very next weekend, while performing at the local Renaissance Faire, Tina spotted Judy Carter in her audience. “So we met and quickly became friends. One day she called me because she had been booked to work on the stage at The Magic Castle. She had only worked in the close-up room before so she asked me to come along.” She met with Judy and began tossing out ideas, including Tina being her “robot assistant” that would bend forward and become a table. “We worked up this strange and fun act together, and I was so excited about working at The Magic Castle. Years later she confessed that when she called me to come along she meant that it was for moral support. She had no intention of putting me on stage. In retrospect I’m glad I didn’t know that, because had I known, I never would have said or done a thing, and would have missed out on what was to become a new chapter in my life.” Meanwhile, a friend told Mike that he should check out Judy’s act at the Castle. “She did have a funny act,” he says, “but I told my friend that I was more interested in the table.”

Judy began working the Playboy Club circuit and no longer needed Tina. “Finding work as a table wasn’t easy,” says Tina. “I thought, ‘What am I going to do?’ So I went to Hollywood Magic in search of ways to incorporate magic into my mime performance. Once I discovered a few appropriate tricks I took the best eight-minutes of my mime repertoire and added the Multiplying Eyeballs and the Zombie Eyeball.”

As magic had become a part of Tina’s act, she began working The Magic Castle as well as the Mayfair Music Hall, another Larsen enterprise. And while Tina and Mike would work these same venues, they never worked at the same time and still had not met, though they knew of each other’s growing reputation.

Then Tina was booked with Bill Smith and Marvyn Roy to work a two-week engagement at The Magic Castle. Bill was unable to work the second week so he asked his fellow Long Beach Mystic, Mike, to fill in for him. It was backstage during that week in 1977 that Tina and Mike finally met and became friends.

“We had so much in common, and I felt so comfortable around him. I really enjoyed hanging out with him, but didn’t think of him as a ‘boyfriend.’ I was dating other guys, yet it was with Mike that I had the most fun. I didn’t have to impress him; I could just be me,” says Tina. Their relationship matured over the next year. “It’s so amazing how he just grew on me. When it finally hit me that I wanted to marry him, it was a shock because by that time I was 30 and

assumed marriage was probably not for me. I was afraid to bring up the subject, for fear of putting him under pressure, so I patiently waited . . .”

Mike planned to ask her to marry him on a freezing cold New Years Eve in 1978. They were in London performing at the Magic Circle show and staying at the Tavistock Hotel in Tavistock Square: “That’s where The Great Lafayette lived,” adds Mike. They

walked down to Trafalgar Square, where revelers gather to bring in the New Year. “It was spectacular,” he continues. “The place was lit up, there were happy people all around, and the fountains, while not completely frozen, were covered with ice. The people who have been drinking climb into the fountains and crack the ice.” The two Southern Californians were not prepared for how cold it would be. “I was freezing,” says Tina. “At the stroke of midnight, I pop the question,” says Mike. “Tina’s response was, ‘I’m freezing my butt off; I’m going back to the hotel!’” The memory brings them both to a full laugh. “Because of my chattering teeth I didn’t hear the question I had been so agonizingly waiting for,” says Tina, “and all I could think about was getting warm.” With one rehearsal under his belt, Mike asked again in the quiet warmth of the hotel. They were married on April 22, 1979.

The event took place in the library of the Variety Arts Center in Los Angeles; another Larsen venture. “We were both life-members of the Society for the Preservation of the Variety Arts,” says Mike. “It was a fantastic place.”

They took up residence in Mike’s Sierra Madre, California home. Moving Tina, a self-described minimalist (“I inherited my mother’s philosophy that when you own too many things, they begin to own you”) into the house took only two small car-loads. “When we first met she was renting a room in one of those big old Hollywoodland homes right below the Hollywood Sign,” says Mike. “One of the few things she had in that room was a filing cabinet where she kept her publicity photos. I asked her where her clothes were. She opened the bottom drawer of the cabinet and there they were.”

They decided to work out an act together. “We thought we should do something so we could both get booked,” says Mike. Tina portrayed a robot that assisted Mike. They performed the act first in New York and later at an auto show: They’ve never done it since. “We learned that lesson real quick,” says Tina. “It just didn’t work.” Working on stage together proved to be a greater challenge for these two seasoned performers, who each had their own ideas on how things should be on stage, than they first thought. “It sounds great when you first start talking about it,” says Tina. “Who wouldn’t want to work on stage with their spouse?” But even with everything they have in common in their life, on stage they did not connect. During one trick, Mike had to hand Tina a borrowed wristwatch behind a volunteer’s back. One time the watch fell to the stage and afterward Mike was saying, “bad catch,” and Tina was saying, “bad throw.” “It was a *ridiculous* argument,” adds Tina. “I thought, ‘We don’t need this!’” The concept of having two acts—and two

paychecks—began to make more sense to them. “Besides,” says Mike, “to have Tina Lenert working as a magician’s assistant is a complete waste of talent. It was counter-productive. Even our friends were telling us that there was nothing to gain by merging our acts. We’ve been two solo acts ever since.”

Traveling together, unless working the same show, is another aspect of their show business lives they tend to avoid. They experienced the downside firsthand when Tina accompanied Mike to a show he had in Canada shortly after their wedding. “There’s something about being a ‘backstage spouse’ that just kills your spirit, particularly if you are a performer,” comments Tina. “The stage is there; your friends are there; you want to be a part of it. But, you have to wait around for everyone to get off stage; I just couldn’t handle that.” Adds Mike, “It was a disaster: The person working has things to do; get to the theater early; setup; think about your act, discuss cues. The one along for the ride is thinking, ‘When I get home, I’m going to do this, or that.’ There’s nothing else to do.” Tina agrees; “There’s a lot of waiting around so you get bored and start finding things wrong with everything.”



Top, The short-lived double act: Mike and Tina working together at the Auto Show. Above, Still onstage together but now each doing their own specialty. Mike is about to introduce the next act—Tina Lenert.

The perfect scenario is for both of them to get booked on the same show. With two acts that are totally different, there is no chance for conflict. Tina’s act, being silent, allows her to work in any foreign country. And having grown up in Venezuela makes Tina a bi-lingual mime, which doesn’t serve her directly, but she taught Mike 10 minutes of his act in Spanish which has allowed him to work in Spain and South America. “I’m very big in Spain,” he jokes. “And I have a newspaper review from Bogotá, Colombia that says,

'... and he speaks perfect Spanish.' Tina hammers me on the correct pronunciation to the point that people actually think I can speak Spanish. After the show people will come up to me and start talking a mile a minute and I can't understand a word they're saying."

Besides allowing them to be together, there are technical and artistic benefits to their working the same show. Technically, it allows them to oversee each other's cues. "It's safe," Tina adds. "My light cues will be right and his sound cues will be right. It's really to our advantage to work in the same shows." Having a husband who many consider one of the best emcees in show business is also a comfort to Tina. "It always makes me feel good when he's the emcee: I know it's going to be a good show." Artistic logic comes into play when they work the same show as well: "After Mike's act, the stage is cluttered with silverware. It makes perfect sense for me to come on stage to sweep it off."

The seed for Tina's world famous "Maid in Heaven" act, also known as "Mopman," was planted in the early 1980s. "I was try-

ing to figure out how to get past the doll act," says Tina. "I was already in my mid-thirties and had really outgrown the Raggedy-Ann character."

Many people had a hand in the creation of the cleaning lady character, either directly or through inspiration. "The concept of the coat coming to life has various sources. Years before I had seen a stripper in Las Vegas who placed a man's coat and hat on her left shoulder. That side of her became a man who proceeded to strip her right side. Although I had no thoughts of being a stripper, the dual character concept really fascinated me. Then in the mid 1980s I saw Kenny Raskin. He does a beautiful piece where he's sitting at a park bench and his overcoat comes to life." Carol Burnett and Charlie Chaplin are also among the inspirational sources for the act. "The scene in the first *Rocky* movie where he gently removes Adrian's glasses to reveal her beauty really touched me." Those with direct input reads like a who's who of magic: Max Maven, Jeff McBride, Harry Anderson, Teller, Christopher Hart, Lance Burton, Jim Steinmeyer, Don Wayne, and David Copperfield.

Mike is generally the last person Tina goes to when working on a new piece. "I try to do everything I can on my own, working with others, before I ask Mike for his input. That's my process." By the time she brought the piece to Mike, it was a collection of effects and mime-inspired illusion with no plot. "There was no logic to it; she was sitting next to a one-armed man. I didn't get it," he says. "She was sitting on a stool with a broom attached to it. But why is a broom attached to the stool? I asked her what she was trying to say. She said, 'It's a transformation.' You mean like Cinderella? Well, that was it! The script just wrote itself. From that point on, I knew what the act should have and shouldn't have in it. I told her, 'You're a cleaning lady; go down to the cleaning supply store and buy your props.'" Mike thought she should have a cart instead of the stool. "It's logical for a cleaning lady to have a cart for all her cleaning stuff," he says. At first he believed they would need to build a custom cart to help create the planned illusions. But Tina's visit to the cleaning supply store for other props netted a perfect cart. "The saleslady thought I was crazy, what with my asking if I could sit on it and becoming excited when I saw that it could come apart easily for travel." A few alterations were all that were needed for the cart to work in the act. "It's really lightweight as well," says Tina. "That's important considering all the flights I have to take with it." She is still using the same cart today.

The act was still in mid-evolution when it made its debut in 1985 at a Halloween show put on by Harry Anderson's "Bubonic Players" at the Comedy & Magic Club in Hermosa Beach. The first time magicians saw the act was at the New York Magic Symposium held in Berkeley, California. "It was very well received, and that told me I was on the right track," says Tina. In 1987 she got her first big European break touring with Zauber Zauber, a four-month contract that took her to some of the most beautiful theaters in Germany. In 1988, she performed the act at FISM in the Netherlands. "I wasn't in competition, but I was asked to appear on the Winners Gala." That appearance led to years of work throughout Europe.

David Copperfield, who saw the act in Atlantic City, suggested what was to be one of the final major additions to the piece: The mop leaning over to kiss the transformed cleaning lady at the end. Don Wayne worked out the mechanics of the illusion. "I thought David's idea would be impossible to make," says Mike. "I was visualizing remote control servo motors and that type of thing



Photo by Marcel Loli

"Maid in Heaven, Tina's classic act with her partner, Mopman, here performed at the Princess Grace Theatre, Monte Carlo, 1988



Photo by Bill Taylor

Deep down in the bowels of their house is Mike's workshop.

but, Don came up with a very simple solution to the problem. With my own workshop in the basement and the expert machinery at Johnson Products still at my disposal, we soon had a road-worthy, kissing, mop head.”

The Mopman act had Tina working all over Europe, but mostly in Germany where live entertainment—particularly variety entertainment—has been booming for the past 15 years. “I’ve said to guys: ‘You want to become a magician that works in a theater every night? Go to Germany,’” says Mike. “For a good act, there is plenty of work,” adds Tina.

“You can make a living doing magic in the United States,” continues Mike, “but real show business is long gone in this country. Corporate shows are great but you’re not in a theater, you’re usually in a hotel ballroom on a platform with no orchestra. To me that’s not real show business. Real show business was vaudeville of the late 19th and early 20th Centuries.”

The idea of being a vaudevillian has its romantic appeal for Mike, but being a historian, he also has no illusions about the type



Photo by Anne White

Christopher Hart presents Tina with The Magic Castle’s 1994 Stage Magician of the Year Award.

of life they endured. “Today it’s thrilling to go into an old vaudeville house. From the lobby, to the house, to backstage, to the dressing rooms; it’s all very appealing to me,” he says. “But that’s so easy to say, from this vantage point, that it must have been great living in the theatrical digs and working in a different theater each week. But the reality of it is that it was *stupefyingly* difficult.”

Mike’s love of magic history, collecting, and publishing all stem from his lifelong affinity for the whole art of magic. While he certainly understands the differences between performance and these other aspects of magic, to him they are all part of a whole. “To me,” says Tina, “performance is the thing. Whether it is through magic, mime, or music, it’s all about the performance. For Mike, it’s all phases of magic; whether it’s performing, collecting, publishing, or researching its history.”

Mike began publishing books in 1979. His first title was a small paperback titled *French Pasteboards* by Bernard Bilis. From this mod-

est start to today, he follows one simple rule when choosing what he publishes: Release only those books he would want to read himself. “If the contents didn’t appeal to me and I wouldn’t enjoy seeing it on my bookshelf,” he says, “why would I want to invest the tremendous amount of work and expense required to publish it?”

Selling books finances what Mike has often referred to as his hobby; publishing books he wants to read. “I keep a couple copies for myself and sell the others to my friends. That way, I don’t have to get a job to support my hobby.” To date he has published 42 titles, many of which are out of print and highly sought after. Some, such as his monumental tome on Charles Carter, *Carter the Great*, fetch staggering prices at auction; be they Internet or live. “At first we couldn’t give away the Walter Jeans book. We printed only 500 copies and we had them for *years*. I heard from a guy the other day who paid \$300 for a copy; happily.” That he prints many books that otherwise may not see publication is a point of satisfaction for Mike. “I like to see books in my library that I know would not be there had I not published them,” he says. “It’s a great luxury.”

Tina acts as proofreader, order filler, and bookkeeper for the company. But even with her limited role, she takes great pride in what Mike does. She gets an equal amount of pride from Mike’s collecting as well. “He’s the guy to do it—to be a custodian to all these treasures—he understands his role as a collector and historian.”

That role is as a curator. For Mike, collecting, like everything else he does in magic, is part of the landscape of the life he has chosen. Like most collectors, he started small and then acquired his first major collection in 1990 when, together with Bill Smith, they purchased the entire Charles Carter show, including massive amounts of paper: Posters, scrapbooks, letters, photos, accounting records, and other ephemera. Harry Anderson was originally offered the collection, but turned it down. Anderson’s astute secretary realized that Mike might be very interested. “When that fax arrived listing pages and pages of old illusions—well, I could already smell the sweet scent of rotting wood,” recalls Mike.

While the apparatus is a treasure, it was the paper that excited Mike the most. “2-D is my thing,” says Mike. “I have some 3-D, but I love paper.” 2-D is what Mike calls paper collectables, while 3-D is his term for apparatus. “As an illusion builder, Bill was most interested in dissecting the illusions. I got the paper.” As big as this transaction was for Mike, it was just the precursor of things yet to come: An acquisition so monumental that, when asked what’s next, Tina politely interrupts Mike’s answer with, “Note from wife: The house is full!”

The house” is a story in itself. They purchased the house in 1984, but they had become aware of it before they were married. “We were preparing for a 10K run that takes place around the Rose Bowl area,” says Mike. I’m running along and see this house. Back at the car I tell Tina that I have to take her back to see this house. She says, ‘Okay, then I have to take you to see a house I saw.’ They took each other to the same house. It became their favorite. “Any time we’d go running around the Rose Bowl, one of us would say, ‘let’s go see our favorite house.’ For years we would run by that house,” says Mike.

The Pasadena neighborhood where the house is located is tree-lined and straight out of a Hollywood movie; almost literally. Many filmmakers have used the idyllic area for outdoor shoots. “There’s a house up the street I call ‘the back lot’ because there have been so many movies, television shows, and commercials shot there,” says Mike. Fans of the Steve Martin film *Parenthood*



Publishing magic books is not that easy with a mouse in one hand and a cat in the other. The best place to learn about history is from those who lived it. Mike with two dear friends, Moi-Yo Miller and Jane Thurston.

Mike went to the bank to start the loan procedures. When asked what he and his wife did for a living, Mike answered truthfully; "I'm a magician and she's a mime." Mike recalls the loan officer's incredulity: "He looked at me as if saying 'You just told me you are both unemployed.' This guy had no reason to loan us \$50 let alone money to buy that house." At one point during the ordeal, the real estate agent told them not to worry if the deal fell through, that she had other houses they might like. "She lived in a condo and just didn't get the idea of a dream house," says Mike. "I had to tell her that it was *this* house or nothing. It was tough, but we would not take no for an answer. We made it happen."

After six months of frantic scrambling for ways to obtain their dream house, they moved in; canary yellow paint and all. "All of the beams, the window seats, the French doors, the fireplace and the mantel were all painted canary yellow," says Mike. It was the beginning of an odyssey of remodeling, refinishing, restoring, and rebuilding that continues to this day. "It's forever a work in progress," says Tina.



The wood beneath the paint is now exposed and finished to show off its natural beauty. As guests tour the magnificent home, Mike and Tina will comment on additions and changes they have made. Their tastes in even the smallest details are identical. "When we need something new," says Tina, "like, say, a faucet, we'll look separately, then compare what we found. Usually it's exactly the same or very

close." It adds another level of trust to the relationship. If one finds something they like for the house, they are sure the other will like it as well. Such as two stunning etched glass windows, depicting peacocks, Mike found while out of town doing shows. Inside the

have seen the neighborhood on the big screen.

The house, built in 1906, is a California Stick Chalet designed by Walter J. Saunders, a locally renowned architect during the period. The original owner was Eleanor Bartlett. In 1906, to buy a lot in the area of Pasadena known as Prospect Park, the owner had to agree to spend \$5,000 just on the home (more than \$100,000 in 2005). "She wanted a home that looked like a Swiss Chalet," says Tina. In 1912, heiress Eleanor Bissell (of the Connecticut Insurance Bissells; not the floor cleaner Bissells) purchased the home. A picture of the house appeared on a souvenir tea tin that was sold at the 1915 Pan Pacific Exhibition in San Francisco.

"Tina was out of town doing a show and I was jogging past the house," says Mike, "and there it was; a 'For Sale' sign in front of it. My first reaction was, 'Oh no! This is a disaster! I don't want to move!' First, I liked where we lived; and second, I knew this house would cost a *fortune*." He called Tina and said, "You will not believe what's for sale. She answered, 'Don't tell me.' I said, 'Yep: our house'." Mike picked her up at the airport and they drove by the house before going home. "We had never even peeked through the windows, but we knew that this was our house. We met with the sales agent, and she asked us if we'd like to see the inside," says Tina. "We said, 'That's not really necessary, but why not?'" The next day, their Sierra Madre house was on the market. "It was the scariest thing I ever did," says Tina. "Everyone including our parents thought we were nuts. We couldn't afford the place," adds Mike. "We had to borrow money from a friend as well as the bank and, well, it was really difficult."



Harry Anderson presents The Magic Castle's Literary Fellowship to Mike in 1999.

Photo by Anne White



Souvenir tin from the Ridgeway Tea company sold at San Francisco's Pan Pacific Exhibition in 1915. On one end is Alcatraz Island and on the other, the Caveney home.

house there was a plain window that was part of a room divider. When Mike saw this etched glass he thought it might fit in the space. "I called Tina and had her measure the opening; it was perfect," he says. The windows appear as if they have been there since 1906.

Virtually every room in the house reminds visitors that they are in the home of magicians. Pieces from Mike's collection can be found everywhere; any one of them could be the centerpiece of another collection. The formal dining room has been transformed into a magnificent library. Glass enclosed bookcases completely line one wall. A wooden display box contains the original typed manuscript for Howard Thurston's *My Life in Magic*. Charles Carter's "Aerial Fishing" rod is mounted above a collection of 8 x 10 photos of magical greats. Just off the library is what had been the butler's pantry, but is now dubbed "Periodical Hall." Nearly 100 complete bound files of periodicals dating from the 19th century to today, including the *Sphinx*, *Genii*, *The Midget Magician*, and many others; more than a century of magical journalism: a running history of the art. Mike does not consider these treasures trophies, as many collectors do. "This is a working library," says Mike. "I have spent years paging through these magazines doing research; page by page, looking for every entry on LeRoy or whomever. And I defy *anyone* to try that and not get distracted! 'Oh, look at this article,' and you're off reading that one. And the old ads are great, too."

Also residing in "Periodical Hall" is Mike's exquisite John Rogers statuette, "The Traveling Magician." When the butler's pantry was being remodeled for the periodicals, the space was purposely built with the statuette in mind. It is easily viewed from all sides.

A small guestroom off the kitchen was originally the maid's quarters. Many Kellar posters adorn its walls, including the first Kellar three-sheet Mike ever purchased. "I bought a very modest poster collection from the owners of The Magic Cellar in San Francisco. I was so excited that I sent a photo of me sitting next to my new treasure to my friend David Price. How I got that



Photo by Bill Taylor

Part of the library that looks out onto a small waterfall.



Photo by Bill Taylor

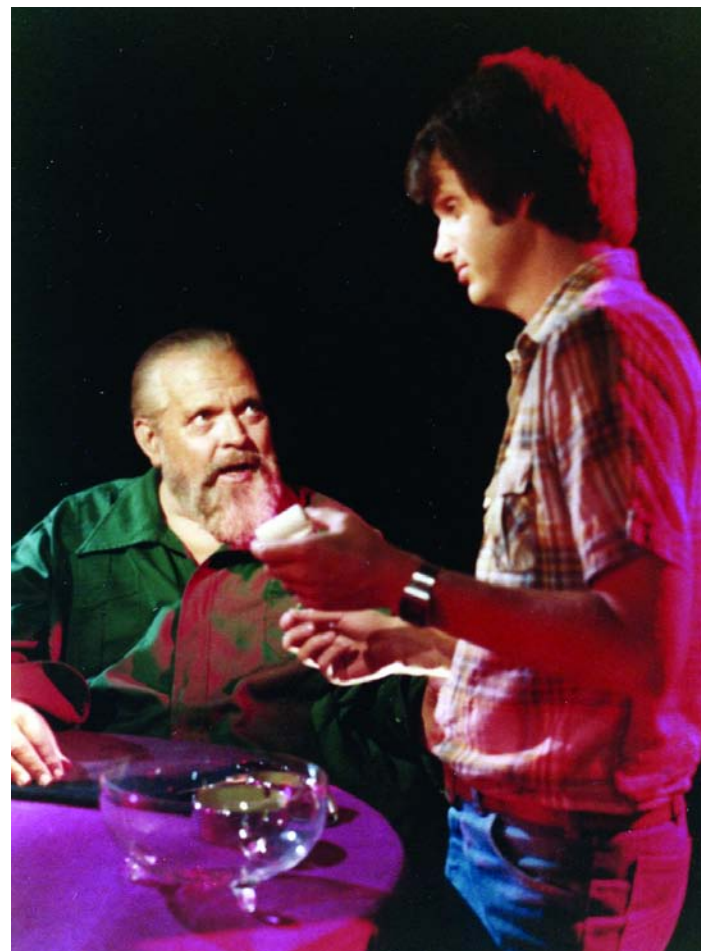
On their front porch: Tina and Mike each hold their onstage assistants, Jack the rabbit and Smeddy the chicken.



ed him on a TV show. “That’s a wonderful memory; working with Orson Welles,” she says. “Orson was the greatest guy,” adds Mike, speaking of the well-chronicled time he and Tina worked with the great man; assisting him with the magic he performed on his many television talk-show appearances. “It was a great experience. He would call and say, ‘Mike, I need you to come over here’ and we just dropped everything: It was Orson Welles asking us to come to his home.” Tina adds, “He didn’t like to stand up to rehearse so he would have me walk through his part. At one point I stopped and thought, ‘I can’t believe I’m being directed by Orson Welles!’”

Downstairs is the part of the house that is currently being renovated. “It used to be a space we rented out,” says Tina, “but our tenant left, so we’re turning it into my music room.” The basement area holds Mike’s workshop as well as Charles Carter’s huge Spirit Cabinet; the only place it can fit for the time being. “While I’d like to perform it at the History Conference, it’s too big for our present stage,” says Mike.

From the foyer up the grand staircase, the walls of which are lined with several large posters, the first room one arrives at is the office, or as Mike calls it, World Headquarters of Magic Words. “It used to be the ugliest bedroom in the house. It had a low ceiling and ugly wallpaper on thin, cardboard-like walls.” They completely remodeled the room. “We stripped it down to the studs,” says Mike. They put in new walls and a tongue-in-groove wood



In August, 1981 Mike worked on a film shoot with Orson Welles from 7 p.m. to 2 a.m. They shot the Gypsy Thread 22 times.

photo back is an even more amazing story.” The adjoining powder room is called the “Soo Loo” because of the Chung Ling Soo posters decorating its walls.

Next to the kitchen is a breakfast nook which doubles as a dining room and rabbit hutch. Jack, Tina’s handsome white rabbit—the co-star of her new act—lives comfortably in his four-level hutch on one side of the room. Jack is allowed out of his spacious hutch to play with the cat, but he must remain supervised. “He’ll chew on anything, and has a particular fondness for natural-wood door frames,” Tina says, watching Jack skid across the bare-hardwood floors. “His last name is Skidmore,” Mike adds.

On the other side of the room is a large curio case that houses mementos; most of which do not pertain to magic. While Tina does not consider herself a collector—except of memories—she does have a few personal items from her childhood, their wedding photos, as well as a pair of Marcel Marceau’s slippers used in a performance she attended. There is also a half-smoked cigar that Orson Welles left behind in a dressing room when she assist-

ceiling. A stained glass window is the finishing touch. The office is also decorated with more posters, as well as a bookcase with all of the books published by Magical Publications and Magic Words. Barely visible hanging from the wood-covered ceiling is Dante's Asrah form.

Though wonderfully decorated with magical collectables, it is a working office. While not a mess, it has a "busy clutter" quality about it. "It's the nerve-center," says Tina, "this is where we spend a good part of our day." Two computers are running, including the Apple system Mike uses for publishing his books. "We used to have an 800 pound Compugraphic photo-typesetting machine about the size of a Volkswagen," says Mike. "It was state-of-the-art back in the eighties but today it would be considered stone-age publishing, more like a Compusaurus. When we sold it we had to take the door off the hinges in order to get the two four-hundred-pound pieces out of here. It was replaced by a Macintosh computer that we carried upstairs under one arm."

Down the hall, past an antique hall tree, is the huge master bedroom. While the entire room is beautifully appointed with Arts and Crafts style furniture, the eye is immediately drawn to two rare three-sheet posters, a gold and black (versus the more common red and black) "Germain" and a "Vonetta" that border the entrance to the sun room where 15-year-old Dewey the cat spends most of his day.

Across the hall is the Egyptian Hall Museum; the bulk of Mike Caveney's extensive collection. Two bedrooms were turned into a single room to house it. Countless numbers of lithographic posters rest in racks, expertly mounted and restored and safely stored in special clear sleeves, for easy viewing. On the back wall, hanging from hinged arms, is a dazzling array of three-sheet posters. The walls of the museum are covered with rare and one-of-a-kind examples of late 19th and early 20th century poster art that takes the breath away. The only known half-sheet Chung Ling Soo Bullet Catch poster hangs on the wall. Another one-of-a-kind is



September 24, 2000 Tina and Mike conduct the monumental Egyptian Hall auction. Just out of frame is partner George Daily.



Photo by Bill Taylor

Egyptian Hall Museum—Tina plays the harp as Mike reads in the OH! Chair ...



and searches for something in the inner sanctum past the poster door. Far right, Jarrett's Bangkok Bungalow.

a Great Lafayette lithographed portrait, also framed on the wall. Next to it is the actual 1911 playbill from the Empire Theater from the day of the fire that claimed the great performer's life. Water stains caused by the fire brigade fighting the fire are clearly visible on the historic piece. Against another wall sits T. Nelson Downs's Coin Ladder and a short distance away is Thurston's "OH!" chair, from which Tina disappeared at the 2003 Los Angeles Conference on Magic History. In the center of the room is Thurston's "Through the Eye of the Needle," another illusion he and Tina performed at an earlier History Conference.

On a narrow bookcase rests the wax head of Joy Willard (mother of Frances Willard-Falkenstein), used in Harry Willard's "Girl Without a Middle" illusion. In that bookcase is a first edition of Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft*. Next to it is the equally rare volume, penned by King James in 1603, in which the royal disputes Scot's conclusions. "King James really liked burning witches and he didn't like anyone saying there was no such thing," quips Mike.

Charles Carter's "Million Dollar Mystery" was another History Conference feature. Mike describes the routine that ended with Tina's appearance from the little box. Mike says, "I think you could make a case for this being the greatest principle in magic."

A tall Okito poster turns out to be a door leading to a room filled with file cabinets over-flowing with ephemera. Behind another poster-door, this one a Barnum and Bailey Circus two-sheet, is yet another small room, this one filled with leather binders containing letters, post cards, photos, and other paper collectables. Some binders are specific to famed performers, such as LeRoy, Thurston, Kellar, Blackstone (among others), while lesser known, or performers with only a few pieces in the collection, are arranged alphabetically in other binders. A flat-file cabinet contains another hundred or so posters. Against the back wall of this small room is an enormous photograph of Blackstone, Sr., who appears to be standing sentinel over rolled-up eight-sheet posters.

Just outside the small room, a beautiful Hermann the Great poster hinges away from the wall to reveal a recessed set of shelves which hold small apparatus and other small items. A tall curio cabinet holds more pieces, including items from Herrmann,



Dai Vernon relaxes in Thurston's OH! Chair in Mike and Tina's library

Thurston, Goldin, Selbit, Leon, Blackstone, one of Mr. Electric's 1,000 watt light bulbs, and a pair of Doug Henning's tennis shoes.

Another wonderful piece is one of only two specially made shadow wands. One end is turned so that, when held to a light, it casts the shadow of Kellar's profile; the other end is Thurston's. The wand is turned from wood from the stage of Ford's Theater in Baltimore; the theater where Kellar passed the mantle of magic to Thurston. Of course, a poster commemorating the event is also in the collection.

The bulk of the museum, particularly the paper and of course the name, comes from Mike's purchase, together with his friend George Daily, of David Price's Egyptian Hall Museum in 2000. It was a monumental acquisition that was a tremendous risk for Mike and Tina. "This was the largest collection of magic posters in the world," says Mike, "and we had to scrape together every cent we had to get it. What if the truck hauling the stuff crashed? It was a nervous time. George and I knew we would have to sell some of it to get at least part of our money back." The subsequent auction/sale, held over two days, returned enough of their money to "get us out of the woods," he says.

The collection was extremely rich in paper ephemera, periodicals, and books, "which is the kind of stuff I like the most," Mike says. Included in the enormous amount of ephemera was the photo Mike had taken of himself with his first Kellar poster and had sent to David Price years earlier. He has vowed to spend the rest of his life buying back everything he sold one piece at a time. "And I have already started" he says as he shows off a beautiful three-sheet poster of Arnold DeBiere.

Does he have a favorite piece? "People ask me all the time and I would have trouble narrowing it down to even 50 or 100 items."

Mike's collecting goes far beyond the mere accumulation of such items. He knows the history behind each piece, and happily shares that knowledge whenever given the opportunity. "I really admire what Mike has done here," says Tina. Her minimalism and Mike's collecting make for a perfect match; "Could you imagine what this place would be like if Tina collected anything?" asks Mike. "This place would be impossible."

Indeed, the only visible signs of Tina in the house, besides the few items in the curio cabinet in the dining room, the rabbit and the cat, are her four harps; one of which is kept in the museum. "I have my corner," she says. "And I sneak it further into the room every chance I get."

Tina loved the harp as a child, but never pursued learning to play it. Shortly before her 40th birthday, during a trip to Hawaii to visit her high school band-mate who was playing the harp in Kauai, Tina confessed to her friend that she wanted to learn. "We had hiked to the top of this mountain—it was just beautiful up there—and I told her that I wish I had learned to play the harp," she says. Her friend asked her why she hadn't; Tina had no answer, except to say that she didn't have a harp. "She loaned me one of her harps and offered me lessons. As soon as that harp entered the house, I knew that I was hooked."

The instrument became yet another outlet for her artistic soul. She practiced hours a day (and still does), acquired a pedal harp—an instrument that allows for greater note variations—and realized that although she didn't miss the guitar, she really missed making music. Eventually she began performing at weddings and other gatherings, as well as once a week in the dining room at The Magic Castle. In March 2000 she released a CD of her music, *Branching Out*.

Tina has incorporated the harp into hers and other performer's



Far left, Tina accompanies Andreas Wessels and Jojo Weiss at the GOP Variete in Hanover, Germany 1998; Left, Tina is pressed into service backstage at FISM when Jay Marshall has to do Lefty and there isn't a piano in sight; Left, Tina guests with the Savoy Dance Orchestra at the Apollo Variete in Dusseldorf, Germany 2001



Photo by Pete Biro

Above left, Tina presents John Gaughan's recreation of Robert-Houdin's Orange Tree at The Magic Castle in 1991. Above, Tina accompanies John Carney recently at The Magic Castle performing the Appearing Egg

magic. She performed Robert-Houdin's "Blooming Orange Tree" (from the John Gaughan collection) on The Magic Castle stage, accompanying the piece with her harp. She has also accompanied Eugene Burger, and worked out a mentalism piece using the harp with Max Maven for their performances in the "Nocturnal Trio." Other magicians she has accompanied are Luis de Matos, Jay Marshall, Tom Noddy, and most recently, she joined John Carney for a week at The Magic Castle, accompanying him during his closing piece: a lovely interpretation of the Appearing (Weller) Egg.

Today, Tina is concentrating on her new act, which she calls "Simply Magic." She had been thinking of doing a straight magic act for quite a while. "I was ready to move past Mopman. For years I wondered what it would be like to do a straight magic act; I won-

dered if I *could* do it." She still hesitates to use the term "magician" when describing herself. "A magician is someone who has been working on their magic since they were nine-years old. Doing everything they can, learning everything they can; learning the history of the art; having a complete passion for it. Mike is the magician. I have a passion for expressing myself and magic is a tool."

The seven-minute act stems from the Nocturnal Trio shows. "I

had performed with Eugene, playing the harp while he recited Edna St. Vincent Millay's *Legend of the Harp Weaver* and performed magic, and I really loved that," she says. "We wanted to do a show at the 2002 S.A.M. convention in New York and Eugene suggested that we do something with Max Maven. It started as a casual conversation. I didn't want to do Mopman, but I didn't know what else I could do. I determined right away—and I got no argument from the guys—that I was *not* going to talk on stage. Here are these two men with these eloquent, beautiful, powerful voices. To have this little squeaker come out, well, it would have been fingernails on a blackboard. Still I had no idea what to do. I said this to Max, but added that if I were to do something it would be to a Stevie Wonder song that I have always loved entitled *If It's Magic*. I had him listen to it and then he said, 'I can visualize you doing something with a scarf, forming it into a rabbit puppet, and then having it change to a real bunny.'" From that simple—but profound—comment, a new act was born. "At that moment I wasn't sure why the idea appealed to me so much until I mentioned it to my good friend Ardan James. His reaction was, 'there you go again, bringing things to life: first a Raggedy-Ann doll, then a mop, and now a rabbit!' We worked out a three-minute piece for the Trio show. We previewed it at The Magic Castle for a week. Then I decided to add another three-minute piece for the New York show."

With help from Christopher Hart, Earl Nelson, Ardan James, Don Wayne, and Mike, Tina added a Linking Ring routine. "I *hate* and I *love* the rings," she says. "I love the idea of two solid circular objects coming together, but I hate the noise, and I think the larger number of rings confuses the eye and disturbs the ear, especially if it's done to music." She decided she needed time alone with the rings. "For me it all has to be hands-on. I have trouble sitting down and reading about magic, which is too bad, considering the library I have at my disposal! I just went into a room and worked out ways to not only link and unlink two rings, but to move a ring from one side of the stage to the other. I put on various pieces of music and noticed that it was the music that began to guide my movements." After this personal exploration of the rings, she went to Mike to show him what she had come up with. "We were at odds

over a couple of things," Mike says. "She had an opening move that I didn't like but there were other moves that completely fooled me. One of them, only Tina can do. The first time I saw it I was convinced she had ruined the key-ring. Of course, she hadn't; but she had created a great new penetration effect.

"Then I started showing her the classic moves like the 'Crash Link' which she said was too noisy so I showed her how it could be done silently. She said, 'Okay; that's something I can explore' and off she'd go to rehearse more." Soon, a three-minute routine using two 12-inch rings was developed. In relation to her petite body, the two rings appear huge. This juxtaposition is not without design. "My body is the biggest prop I have," she says. "So I have to be very aware of where and how I place it." Tina is conscious of her femininity on stage, but she has never forced the issue. "We are sexual beings; that's obvious," she says. "But I believe when performers—and this goes for men as well as women—try to flaunt their sexuality, they've already blown it. The audience needs to make up their mind about whether the person on stage is 'sexy,' not the performer. Sexiness is something the audience wants to discover. The ultimate example of that is Jinger Leigh of Kalin & Jinger. You make up your own mind that she's sexy; she doesn't tell you that she is."

Keeping fit is an important aspect of Tina and Mike's lives; professionally and personally. Says Tina, "it's important to me that my body or as I call it, my biggest stage prop, be in the best condition possible. And, it has all these great side benefits." She exercises an hour and a half a day, five days a week. "It feels really good." Together, they enjoy running, hiking, and bicycling. "I ran everywhere when I was a kid," says Mike. He also ran track and cross-country in middle and high school. Tina, on the other hand, didn't start running until just before she and Mike met. "I hated any kind of physical activity when I was in high school. I couldn't make it around the track once," she says. "That's only a quarter of a mile!"

In the last few years Tina has taken up modern dance as another way of "nourishing my biggest prop. That form gets you to use every part of your body," she says. "My dance teacher defines it as 'Physics in Motion,' and for me that's also a definition of magic: objects and bodies that move through the air creating shapes." She doesn't dance during "Simply Magic," but, she says, "that act is about being centered, and dance helps you get in touch with that." Mike adds, "She has so few props—a white scarf and two rings—that *she* is the central part of that act."

Mike describes Tina as being "relentless" when it comes to practicing and rehearsing. "When I was first working on the new act, I worked at it most of the day every day," she says. "I carried the props around the house, getting used to them, trying to get to the point where I could do the trick parts without thinking about it so I could concentrate on the movement, and then working on getting the movement down so I could concentrate on communicating with the audience." Now she spends more time thinking about the act. "It's a work in progress; I know there's still more there." But she takes great satisfaction in the accomplishment of creating this new act. "I wondered if I could



Eugene Burger, Tina, and Max Maven—
The Nocturnal Trio perform at FISM in 2003.

Photo by Wittus Wirth

do something that wouldn't be character driven for a change; where I could come out and just be me. It's something I really needed to do. I'm a little more at peace with myself because I feel slightly more qualified to actually call myself a magician!"

What about Mopman? "Mopman lives in his case in the basement. He comes out when I need him. I don't mean to sound so cold about it. It's just that artistically I'm done with it. I still enjoy the audience reaction, but I'm not actually learning from it anymore. With 'Simply Magic,' I'm still exploring and discovering." So how does she keep her performance of Mopman fresh after all these years? "Someone once said, 'If you live each day as if it were your last, one day you'll be right.' Now, every time I perform Mopman, I like to think of it as my last time and I want my last performance to be my best one!"

In the case of both acts, it was Mike who turned Tina's ideas into cohesive acts. The process was not always a smooth one. Mike enjoys studying books while Tina prefers to pick up a prop and "have it speak to me, and when I can't make any sense of it I need to be shown step by step." Once she has learned the basics, she likes to experiment on her own. What Mike brings to the table is 45-years of creating and performing magic. Tina recognizes his ability to bring logic to an art that is inherently illogical. "In the beginning Mopman had no focus," she says. "Mike took the tricks, wrote them out and then made them fit in a logical order. He thinks in words; I think in images and sounds." The two compliment each other perfectly. Tina is able to apply her musical background to magic. She has helped Mike add music to his act, and Luis de Matos had her find music for every piece he planned to use in a series of television shows.

This ability to envision music with motion is what led to her working with John Carney. "Every time I saw him do that routine, I could hear the music in my head. He finally agreed to try it with me playing the harp. I think it worked out well."

Discussing and throwing ideas back and forth with their friends is something Mike and Tina have been doing for years, and something they both find invaluable. For Mike, it started during his years with the Long Beach Mystics. "They were brutal critics and that was a very good thing," he says. Over the years, a comparative "who's who" of magic has been a part of their inner circle of trusted friends. Today, that group includes Christopher Hart, Nicholas Night & Kinga, Jim Steinmeyer, John Gaughan,



Photo by Virginia Lee Hunter

Simply Magic: Tina cuts right to the heart of the effect with just two rings.

Don Wayne, Craig Dickens, David Williamson, John Carney, Mac King, Dana Daniels, and Max Maven to name just a few. "Everyone is just a phone call away, and we'll get together and bounce ideas off each other," says Tina. "Sometimes you get knocked down but if you keep the focus, you can pick yourself up and try it again. Occasionally someone will throw out a simple idea that never occurred to you and suddenly you'll be back on track." She counts having these friends so close among the reasons she loves living in Southern California.

These friendships came to the rescue recently regarding the finish to Tina's new act. "I hated how Tina was stealing the rabbit for the production at the end," says Mike. "It sort of worked but I

knew the steal was made from the wrong place at the wrong moment.” Mike solved the problem of where the rabbit should come from and then, “Nicholas Night says, ‘I don’t know how you’ll get him out, but this is when I’d do it.’ Brilliant: Now we had the ‘when’ and the ‘where.’ All we needed was the how. We called another friend, Craig Dickens, to build the new prop and it was in his shop that the ‘how’ was finally answered. Craig crafted a beautiful prop that was ready just in time for a series of three shows Mike and Tina did with Harry Anderson at the Cerritos Performing Arts Center. Friends in the audience convinced us that the new rabbit production was light years ahead of the old one.”

While Tina is a relentless “practicer and rehearser,” Mike has to think about the last time he rehearsed something that wasn’t new. “That’s all I did years ago: work on routines. It’s fun and challenging. The hoop and coffee cup juggle is the only thing I still practice regularly.” Adding something new to his act is a very slow process for him. “I add something new every five years or so.” Currently, he can present an hour show with audience and time-tested material. Every two years, however, he has to work out a new piece for the Los Angeles Conference on Magic History. As one of the producers (along with Jim Steinmeyer, Frankie Glass, and John Gaughan) of the biennial event, he needs to come up with a piece to perform during the final show. Whether it’s a recreation or restoration of a trick or illusion, it must be of historic significance and interest. “It’s definitely a challenge. At past Conferences I have performed illusions that were actually used by Charles Carter, Howard Thurston, and Dante. While it is by no means an impersonation, I do try to write a script that is in the spirit of the original performer. Jim and John have re-created illusions from scratch. Each approach comes with its own set of problems.” Examples of complete re-creations include Kellar’s “Blue Room” illusion, Jarrett’s “Sawing a Lady,” Devant’s “Mascot Moth,” DeKolta’s “Expanding Die,” and the incredible “Hooker Card Rise.”

One of Mike’s proudest moments on that stage was his re-creation of Dante’s sawing in half, using the original equipment and the original assistant.

“I had this amazing prop,” says Mike. “You can’t believe how clever this prop is. David Copperfield wanted it for his museum and I told him he didn’t have enough money.” It was a perfect illusion to present at the conference. Mike wondered out loud if the 70-plus year-old Moi-Yo Miller, Dante’s co-star throughout much of his career, would consider doing, or if she even could do the illusion. “I told him to call and ask her,” says Tina. “I thought she’d jump at the chance.” With this prompting, Mike called Moi-Yo. “Without hesitation she said she’d give it a try,” says Mike. “She came to the house and I reminded her that this wasn’t like carrying a prop on and off stage: I would just be standing around while she’d be doing all the work. She kicked off her shoes, jumped up on the table and curled up inside the box. ‘No problem,’ she announced, like she had been doing it all season. In reality, it had been over 40 years since she had performed that illusion, but all those years ago, she had done it thousands of times.”

Adds Tina, “She still had all the muscle memory; It was so beautiful to see that.” She was excited to do the illusion again. “The icing on the cake,” continues Mike “is that her husband, Arturo Montes, is the guy who built the illusion in the first place. So he was my on-stage assistant at the Conference. So there I am, sawing Moi-Yo Miller in half; in Dante’s original prop; assisted by the guy who built it.” Tina even had a small but very important part in the historic performance. “Two small parts,” she inter-

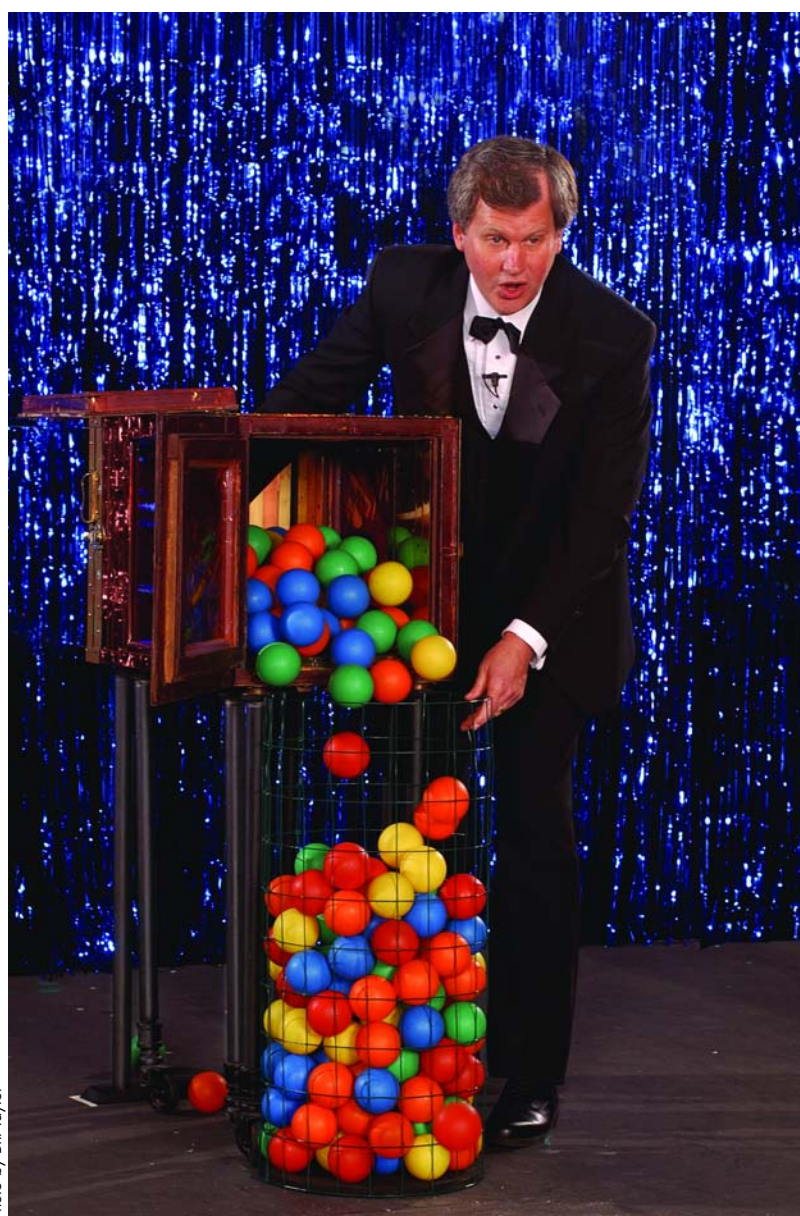


Photo by Bill Taylor

At the 2001 Los Angeles Conference on History, Mike presented Carter the Great’s Million Dollar Mystery; its first performance since 1933.

rupts, “I was the feet.” “It doesn’t get any better than that,” says Mike. “I have never had a bigger thrill on stage before or since. I knew that there was nothing more I could ever do with that prop that would top that evening. And, there were things in David Copperfield’s collection that I knew I could only acquire through trading. So we agreed on a trade and the prop is now in David’s museum displayed with Dante’s tails and Moi-Yo’s dress. I love visiting it and have no regrets.”

The History Conference is more than just another magic event for Mike and Tina. “If no one came, I have a feeling we would still do it,” Mike says. “For anyone to spend as much time, effort, money, and resources on it as we all do, it has to be incredibly important to us; it wouldn’t make any sense otherwise. Tina adds, “It really defines us. It brings everything we both love, performance, history and research together in one place for a weekend.”

Continues Mike, “You also learn so much about these old tricks: Studying the physical props—analyzing the thought that went into them—trying to create a presentation that will show it off in its best light. Then to perform it just once might seem



Arturo Montes, Moi-Yo Miller, and Mike minutes after sawing Moi-Yo in half using Dante's original apparatus.

Above, Two-time winner of the Golden Quiver Award, or at least that's what he claims. Right, at the 2004 Scientific and Technical Academy Awards, Mike explains to Jennifer Garner how he will find her card by firing an arrow into the deck she is holding.



Photo by Bill Taylor



Above, Mike performing his stage-size version of the Gypsy Thread with "Magic" paper. Right, Too much coffee will do that. Mike, the cup, and the drink are all airborne.

ridiculous, but it's worth it." Adds Tina, "These things belong on stage; that's what magic is about. It's great to talk about them and read about them, but they can only come to life by being performed, even if it's only once."

Even to their friends, it appears that Mike and Tina are always on the go. When someone calls and finds them both at home, they are surprised. "They'll say, 'Oh, you're both home. You're never home.' But the truth is, we're usually home," says Mike. "I'll bet we see each other more than a 'normal' married couple with two jobs." They love being home so much, that when it does come time to "escape," Mike and Tina choose to stay home.

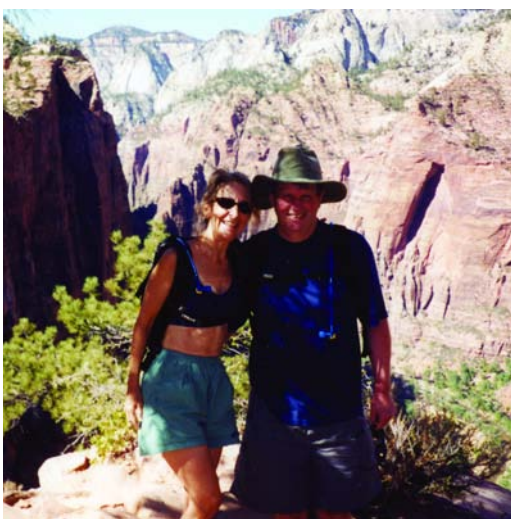
"With just a couple exceptions, we don't take vacations," says Tina. Their professional travels together take them to places they want to visit, or places they love to revisit. "Our acts are simple and compact enough that it doesn't take us long to set up," says Tina. "So we have time to explore": Time to take in the sights, meet new friends or reacquaint with old ones, building Tina's collection of memories.

But it's their home that offers them the solace and relaxation that many people feel they need to go away to find. "We have a stream and a pond with a quiet clearing that is steps away from our front door," says Mike. And there is also the famous tree house. "That's a great place to escape," says Tina.

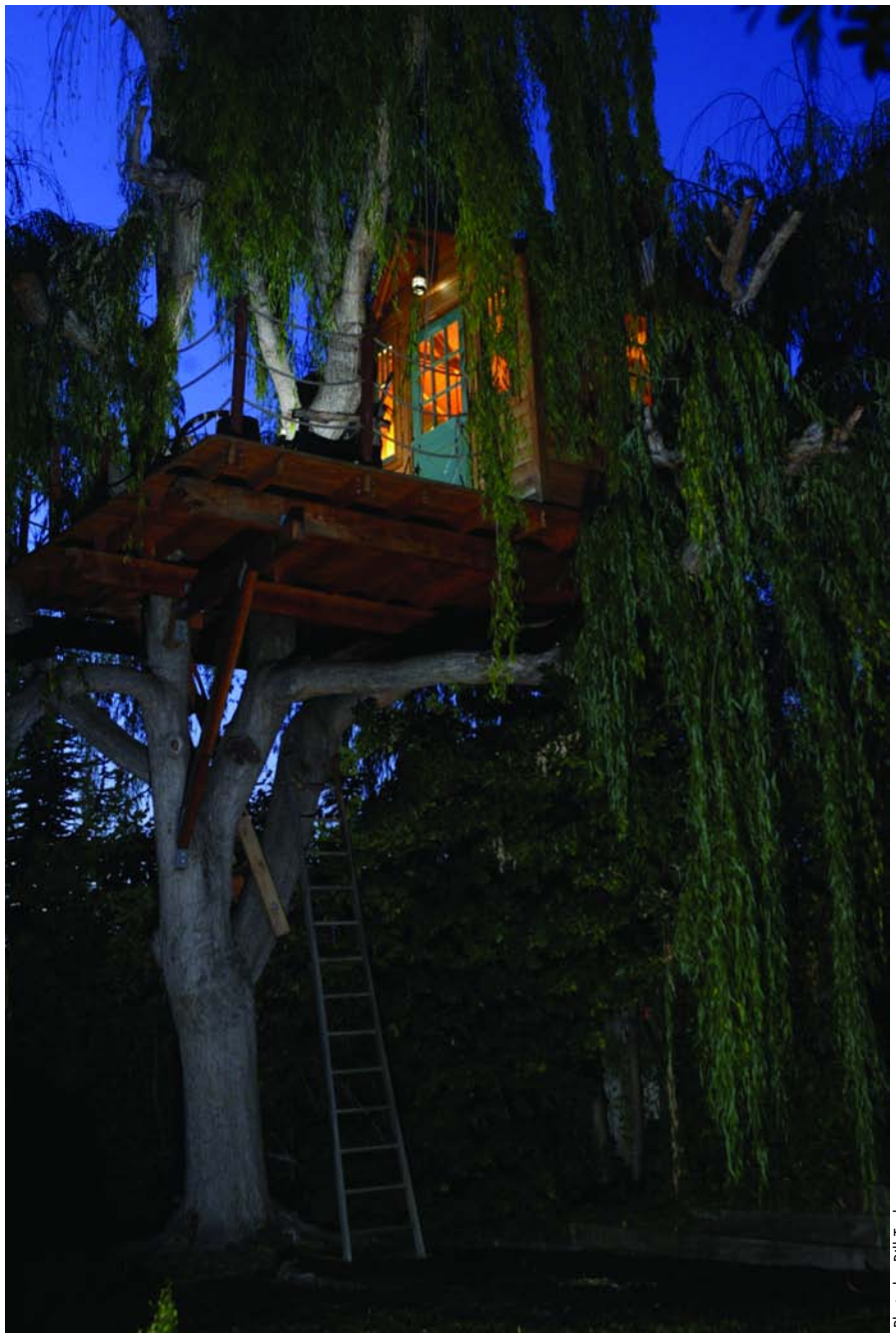
In their back yard is a large willow tree in which Mike decided to build a tree house. He started it in 1997 and it was completed the following year. The platform is about 180 square feet and the house covers half of it. The house features solar power that powers the lights, television and radio. "Important decisions have been made up there," says Tina. "And friends who need somewhere quiet to work have come over to use it." Standing on the porch of the house, Mike looks out at the impressive view of

the San Gabriel Mountains. "We can see what all our neighbors are up to from here," he jokes.

But generally, they simply do not feel the need to "get away." Tina elaborates, "If I do feel the need to 'get away,' I go hiking up a mountain. Mike's brother and I hiked to the top of Mount Whitney (the highest peak in the continental U.S.) and back down again in a day. And Mike likes whitewater rafting." Indeed, one vacation they did take, and a favorite memory of both, was a river-rafting excursion down the Colorado River. "It was nine days," says Tina. "We'd stop in these small canyons where you could get off the raft and hike into them. They were incredible. It was like being the first person who had ever been there." Another favorite for Tina was their hike to the bottom of the Grand Canyon. "We hiked down to the bottom and back up in one day,"



6 a.m. at the rim of the Grand Canyon. By 10 p.m. they will have hiked 16 miles to the bottom (where it was 131 degrees) and back. Not recommended.



Mike and Tina's vacation spot; less than a minute from the office.

Photo by Bill Taylor



Enjoying the view from the deck of the tree house



Inside the tree house solar energy powers lights, radio, and TV

she says. “There’s all kinds of warnings on the trail about not hiking it all in one day, but there’s something about completely exhausting my body that I find rejuvenating.”

With tree houses, ponds, pets, and a life and home filled with magic, one might wonder where the children are. “I knew we forgot *something*,” jokes Tina. Mike and Tina made the decision not to have children early in their relationship, knowing that they could change their minds later if they wished. Somehow the time never came. “There is no way we could have the lifestyle we have and have kids, too,” says Mike. Tina adds, “We were just having too much fun, and I would think, maybe in a couple of years, but before we knew it 26 years had passed!”

Besides their agreement on this major issue, Mike and Tina credit the success of their marriage on their mutual agreement on three other key areas: “Religion, politics, and finances; any one of

which can be a marriage-breaker,” says Mike. “We are both frugal; me more than Mike,” adds Tina. “But he has taught me to let go a little bit. That sometimes it’s okay to get something I simply want without having to ask myself if I really need it. And I trust Mike; I know he’s not a spendthrift; he won’t do anything irresponsible with money. Our only really expensive taste is this house. Everything else; cars, clothes, food, things like that, our needs are very simple.” Adds Mike, “I knew a long time ago that I wanted to be a magician: But I also knew that I didn’t want to be a *poor* magician. Magicians don’t have pension funds. I knew that I had to tend to this. My solution was to buy rental property; so I bought an apartment building while I was still living in an apartment myself. We’re depending on that investment to help keep us in our dream house.”

Tina’s working travel schedule, on occasion, has applied extra pressure on Mike. “There’s a lot to do around here,” he says. “There’s the house—which takes a lot of work—the book business, and the apartment building; it all demands time. And Tina does a lot of work around here. When I have a show, I’m out of town for two or three days and then I’m home. That’s the nature of my performing. With her, she’ll be in Berlin at the Wintergarten for two months. Once she was gone for four months.” This will leave Mike to do Tina’s share of the work along with his own. “There have been times when I pretty much had my fill of that.” But he also understood that this was something she had to do; not just for the money, but for her own spirit. “My heart is in performing,” she says. “So, once or twice a year I like to go somewhere in Europe, usually Germany, where I can do my acts for a month or so. The theaters are beautiful, the audiences are great, nice working conditions, I meet and work with interesting artists from all around the world, and the money’s not bad either. It’s also interesting to me to live a different lifestyle for a while, to experience other cultures. Of course I miss Mike, and it’s a great comfort to know that I’ll be returning to our little paradise. I guess I want the best of both worlds!”

The words “sacrifice” and “compromise” are not in their marital vocabulary. “If you are ‘sacrificing’ or ‘compromising’ all the time, you are probably married to the wrong person,” says Mike. “I knew there would be times when we’d have a lot of shows and times, down the line, when we’ll be home doing nothing.” Of course, Mike’s version of “nothing” is all of the things they do besides performing. “Mike never *looks* like he’s working hard, but he is; I see the results,” says Tina.

All this being said, the era of long-term contracts for Tina is slowly coming to an end. “As much as I love doing all of that, it’s been going on for almost 20 years. I find myself wanting to stay home more, which I think is a natural progression.” Mike adds, “There are only so many places in Europe to work and Tina has done most of them more than once.” Tina continues, “Now I’m a

little more picky about the work I accept. It's not so much about money as it is the opportunity to work with friends, to go to places I have never been, or to try new ideas on stage."

"Like the Greek engagement," Mike says. The show Mike refers to was in April of 2005, at the Gyalino Dinner Theater in Athens, Greece. The show was special not only because of its incredible location, but because of the other magic acts; all friends of Mike and Tina's. Working under serious time constraints, Bill Herz, working for theater owners Michail and Vanessa Adam, was able to secure Christopher Hart, Nicholas Night & Kinga, Jason Byrne & Brandy Lee, Mike Giles & Stacy Jones (otherwise known as The Majestix), Tina Lenert as well as two popular European variety acts, on very short notice. The producers wanted Mike as well, but he had commitments to complete two new books. "For the first time ever I was under a double deadline," he says. He had to get *Mr. Electric: Unplugged* by Marvyn Roy completed prior to the I.B.M. national convention and he was committed to have Dr. Edwin Dawes' new book, *The Great Lyle*, ready for the centenary celebration of The Magic Circle in London. So pressed for time was Mike that Tina agreed to index both books while on the trip.

Tina could only commit to four of the planned seven-week show due to a prior commitment back home. With his books now completed, it was agreed that Mike would cover the last two weeks in Greece. "It was a great show and a great time; I wanted to stay," says Tina. "I was getting ready to come home when I found out that the other show had been canceled but it was too late to change plans. I came home and Mike went over."

Somewhat distraught over the cancellation of the show, plus being away from her husband and friends, Tina decided that she would break her own rule. "I decided to go back and just be a backstage wife," she says. It was easily justified since it also was the occasion of Mike and Tina's 26th wedding anniversary. Tina planned a surprise for Mike. With the help of her friends already there, she arrived at the theater without Mike even knowing she was in the country. "At the end of the show, I went backstage and hid in Nick's DeKolts Chair and Table illusion," she says. As they often do, Nick asked Mike to come backstage to look at a new idea. The whole cast was in on this so they were standing by

watching. "Nick covered the empty chair with the big cloth, and I worked my way out of the table and into the chair," Tina continues, "then Nick pulls the cloth away to reveal my appearance. Mike just stood there and said, 'It's too slow.' I had to say, 'Uh, hello—it's me; your wife!' He was *completely* surprised."

While they inch toward a time when they know they will be slowing down, spending even more time at home, the concept of retiring never enters the conversation. There is more to do. Tina is looking for something to do off stage, "Being a full-time performer really makes you self-centered. I'm interested in exploring other sides. I would hope that maybe my experiences could

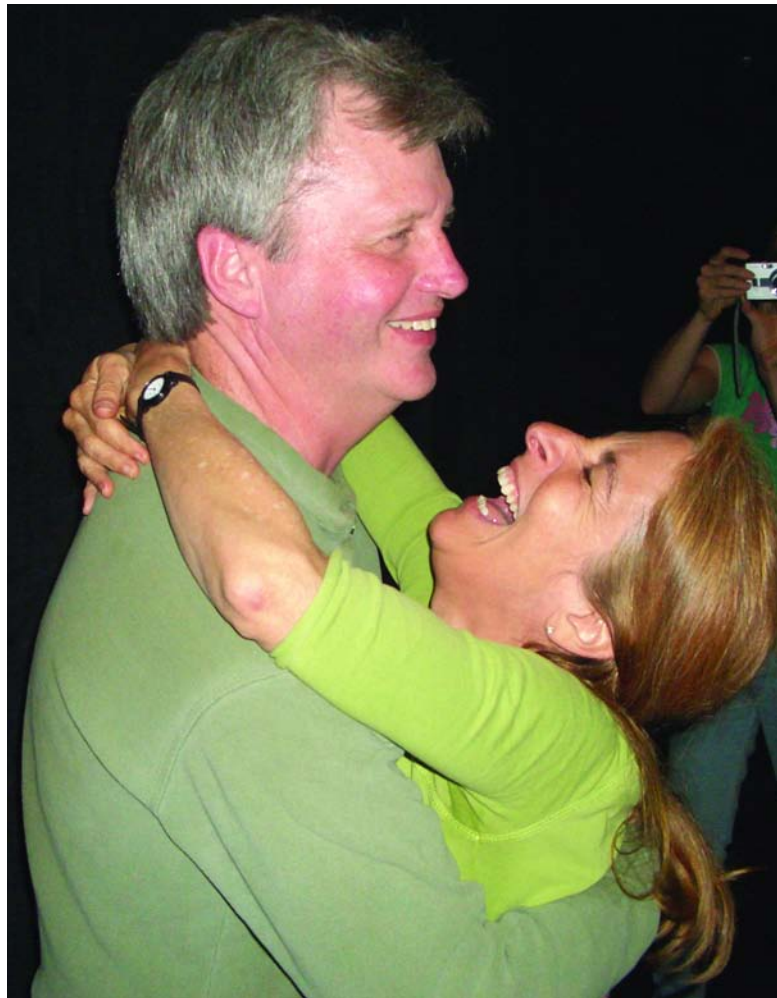
serve to help other performers who are struggling to move ahead artistically. I am always so flattered when someone says to me that I have been an inspiration to them."

Mike enjoys saying that "Consistency is the spice of life." It's a comment that makes Tina laugh. "He's so diverse within the art of magic: Performer, publisher, author, consultant, historian, and collector. It's all right there in one package. And he applies equal passion to all of it," she says. "See; Mr. Consistency—that's me," he says.

"I started in magic at nine-years old. Tina, on the other hand, learned the classical guitar and spent all of her time on it. Then she decides that mime is her passion: full attention on that. Me; I'm still doing my little magic skit. Next, Mopman and nothing but Mopman. It completely takes over her life. Me; the same old act. Then Tina discovers the harp: Bang, 100 percent of her energy goes into the harp. Me? Still doing magic tricks. And then

Tina decides it's time to change to the straight magic act. Every ounce of energy she has goes into that. And here I am, still doing the same thing I was doing when I was nine-years old." Tina counters: "My thing is performance and every aspect of it. All those outlets are parts of a whole. For Mike, his thing is magic, and every aspect of it. All those things are part of a whole."

Whether or not they can agree on their individual observations of their lives, friends, and even casual observers can see that Tina Lenert and Mike Caveney are part of a whole; their life together: A life that is consistently filled with passion in all that they do. •



Tina surprises Mike on their 26th anniversary by appearing magically in Athens.