



Steve Cohen

**EDITORS' NOTE** Steve Cohen, *The Millionaires' Magician*, has delighted and mystified audiences all over the world. His long-running weekly show, *Chamber Magic*, presented in an elegant suite at the legendary Waldorf Astoria hotel, is consistently reviewed as one of New York's best kept secrets and must-see theatrical events. His audiences, now totaling more than 300,000 guests, include a who's who of celebrities, royalty, and other notables such as Woody Allen, William Goldman, Warren Buffett, David Rockefeller, and the Queen of Morocco.

The laws of physics are suspended when Steve Cohen is in the room. His performances include mind reading, telekinesis, conjuring, acrobatic card tricks, and an assortment of baffling physical tricks that include stopping his own pulse.

At age six, Cohen learned his first magic trick from his uncle, who had been inspired by Houdini. At age 10, during his first public show, he made a dove disappear at a friend's birthday party. Fast forward to 2012 and he is the star of both *Lost Magic Decoded*, a two-hour special on the History Channel, and *Theater of Wonder*, a sold-out solo show at Carnegie Hall.

Cohen's work has been featured on CBS Sunday Morning, CNN, and *Late Night with David Letterman* and has been profiled in numerous publications including *The New York Times*, *Forbes*, and *The Sunday Times in London*.

Cohen earned a psychology degree from Cornell University and studied at Waseda University in Tokyo. He holds the esteemed rank of Member of *The Inner Magic Circle with Gold Star*, awarded by *The Magic Circle in London*. His first book, *Win the Crowd* (HarperCollins), in which he explores the power of suggestion and how it can help people in their everyday lives, has been published in seven languages.

## The Face of Magic

### An Interview with Steve Cohen, Chamber Magic

#### How did your work with magic evolve?

I have been doing magic since I was a child and always had dreams of performing professionally. The style most appealing to me is a genre known as "parlor magic," an interactive, sophisticated subset of stage magic, usually performed in an intimate space.

After graduating from Cornell University, I lived in Japan for several years. I hit upon the idea to recreate a magic parlor or "salon," which prompted me to return to New York City to pursue my dream.

I chose New York City because this is where modern day royalty lives. In the Victorian era, a magician might have been called in to perform at a king's residence in London or in Paris. New York City called out to me because artisans, intellectuals, and modern-day nobility live here. In my mind, there is a built-in audience here for this type of sophisticated and cerebral entertainment.

Initially, I performed the show at a friend's apartment in Greenwich Village. I later moved it to The National Arts Club in Gramercy Park for a few months. The Waldorf Astoria hotel option became available in 2001, and I have since been presenting the show there every weekend for the past 13 years.

It was a struggle to get people in the door at first but fortune struck when an online blogger wrote an article about my show – that single write-up sold a solid year's worth of tickets.

The show really took off once I started receiving media coverage. Then *CBS Sunday Morning* did a television segment on me and that pushed everything over the edge. Over the course of two days after that show aired, we sold so many tickets that I had to start adding more shows.

At the moment, I present 250 shows a year at the Waldorf Astoria and it is sold out a month or two ahead of time. I feel like one of the luckiest men in the world since I'm now living my dream.

#### How important is it that the show maintains an intimate feel?

I performed on the smallest stage at Carnegie Hall last year and I made it work. However, there is nothing like the intimacy you can create in a much cozier space, like my suite in the Waldorf Towers.

The Waldorf Towers houses such magnificent history. I have performed there for royalty, billionaires, and A-list celebrities. If you sit down at *Chamber Magic*, you never know who you might sit next to. The dress code – defined as cocktail attire – also gives people a unique experience because they must plan for the magic show before they even leave the house. Many people in our



Steve Cohen entertaining late night television host David Letterman

country have lost the sensibility to dress up for events – the theater in particular is no longer respected as it once was. I think that dressing up for my show makes guests feel that they're part of something special in New York.

#### Is it important to continue to innovate in this space?

I have presented this show over 3,000 times, and it has certainly evolved over many years. What I try to do is pare it down to its absolute minimum. Every moment serves a purpose – I'm trying to craft the perfect show.

#### How does it remain so fresh for you after 3,000 shows?

I have an obligation to people who are coming to see me – they have paid money to see this show that they have heard so much about. They may have had to wait a year to see me. In many cases, they are coming for a celebration. People come from all over the world because they heard about the show in their home countries. At this point, the show is no longer about me and my own needs – it's about giving my audiences the gift of magic.

What drives me now is knowing that these people expect something great and I have the experience and skills to give it to them.

#### Is a career in magic drawing interest and is it important for you to cultivate that next generation of leaders in this field?

I spend a lot of time after my shows with young magicians who have come to visit. Sometimes, they will show me a routine that they have been practicing, and I will give them pointers and send them in the direction of resources they should learn from.

This is another part of what keeps me motivated at my shows: knowing there are people coming to see this magic show who might be inspired to learn magic themselves. So if I'm representing magic, I have to do a good job of being the face of magic as an art form.

Most of the top magicians in the world have come to see me – these leaders in the field are making a special effort to come to the Waldorf to see my show. It's satisfying to have such strong support from my peers within the business.

#### Do you appreciate and reflect on all you have accomplished?

At each show, I verbally thank the audience for coming. Specifically, I say, "I feel like I'm one of the luckiest men in the world because you have enabled me to live out my childhood dream." I say this not to draw sympathy but to express my gratitude with genuine honesty. I don't take anything for granted. ●