

May 2, 2011
IBM, Ring 60, Austin, Texas
Performing Magic for Children

As magicians, we can perform magic in many different venues!

Restaurants	Theme parks
Clubs - night clubs to Rotary	
Casinos	Schools
Daycares	Libraries
Home parties	Birthday parties
Office events	Trade Shows
Fairs	

And we can perform for folks 2-102...

I am not shamed to admit; I AM A CHILDREN'S ENTERTAINER. I absolutely love what I do. I really do not understand why there are magicians in our fraternity that look down on those of us who perform for and entertain children.

We shoulder a big responsibility. Quite often we will be a child's first exposure to magic and it's often a children's performer who inspires kids to learn magic and to follow in the footsteps of other magicians.

Children's entertaining is one area of magic available to us all - whether you are a parent performing to your child at a birthday party, or a corporate magician hoping to expand your repertoire and income, children's entertaining is a rewarding and enjoyable branch of magic.

Kid's magic is very different from close-up magic or sleight of hand - it is nearer to stage magic, with visual illusions to keep your audience attentive.

So why specialize in performing for children?

Why are there doctors and dentists that specialize in treating only children?

Why are there schools/camps and food for just kids?

Children are different from adults! Their brains work differently. They can be totally uninhibited; they are not trained to follow misdirection. They are more likely to be curious and believe magic is real and they can be brutally honest!

Since children do not have the natural social filters adults have in such situations, they have no compunction against pointing out every error or inconsistency a magician makes during his performance. This makes performing for children difficult.

If you suck, they don't hesitate to tell you. There are times I have compared certain children audiences to some drunken adults.

Children love magic, no doubt about it. They love to see magic performed and they love to try doing the magic tricks themselves. Not only do they enjoy the mysterious aspect of the art but they love the fun associated with a magic show.

Kids like the fun and participation that go with a magic show as much or more than the trick themselves.

Kids loved to be entertained!

For that reason the magician today must be an entertainer first and a magician second. *Entertain kids first and then fool them!*

Should YOU perform for children? ONLY and ONLY IF you like children. I believe that is the most important principle in for performing a children's audience. You must genuinely love children and truly enjoy them for an hour or two at a time.

Believe me, if you do not like children, they and their parents will sense it. If you don't like children, it's OK, just pick another market. As a mother, I can empathize with those that do not like kids. There were days I did not like mine either. Those days were called January, February, and March...just kidding...

I would not hesitate to assume some of today's most famous magicians launched their careers by first performing for children's birthday parties. I know of several prominent "corporate" magicians that support the off seasons by performing for birthday parties. Birthday parties are the 'bread & butter" of the magic business. Birthday parties are a big, big, business.

Again, it's a business worthy of pursuing as a magician, IF, and only IF, you LIKE entertaining children.

In the scheme of the history of magic, performing for children is something sort of new...It was the English that first developed it into an art form. So most of the mentors in this field are relatively young... It's really been in the last 80 years that performing for children has been elevated to an art form in magic.

William Larsen, Frances Marshall being among the first to specialize in performing magic for children. David Ginn came on the scene with his first book in 1968...

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It's important that you first -try to understand your audience!

Never talk down to a child. They know when you are doing that and they won't' appreciated it.

Treat children with the respect and care.

You also have to recognize what an honor it is to perform for children because quite often you will be the first magician and first live magic show they will ever see. You want to make this a positive experience and leave them with a good memory

Kids today are brought up in a fast past world with a remote control in their hand. If your shows are not

programmed like a kids fast paced television show there's a good chance they will mentally click that remote.

When planning your children's magic shows, it is essential to bear in mind that children have a relatively small attention span, so you need to keep them on their toes by using visual props (such as magic wands, colourful tricks etc.), funny jokes and a lot of audience participation. The magic illusions should be varied, exciting and most importantly, entertaining for the children.

So, you ask, "what captures a child's attention?"

To answer that you should look at contemporary entertainers and programming.

There's a wildly popular Australian band for youngsters called the Wiggles.

They have rewritten the book about how children can be entertained with song and dance.

This group went from a student project to global fame. The colorful quartet, dressed in their trademark blue, red, yellow and purple high-necked shirts, are so beloved by children they can fill Madison Square Garden and reap tens of millions of US dollars in annual sales.

Their success made them Australia's most profitable entertainers for four years in a row, outstripping Keith Urban, rockers AC/DC, and made household names of characters Dorothy the Dinosaur and Wags

the Dog.

Also take a look at the leader in children's programming, Nickelodeon. You'll find fast paced, bright programming. 3-5 minutes, with a commercial break so kids can run around, and blow off steam.

TAKE LESSONS FROM GIANTS IN THE CHILDREN'S ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY

Nickelodeon, the leader in the Child Entertainment Industry, magic recipe to becoming the most successful children's television channel, has been to see the children as an audience in their own right, rather than as appendage of their parent.

- In other words, they structure shows for kids!
- Magicians performing for children are wise to take note and emulate Nic's success.
- But also make sure your magic show, like Nics' shows, incorporates a parent-friendly dash of intelligence.
- Like a good children's television show, you must be able to connect with all children you entertain.
- You must understand their level and their sense of humor.
- You must also appeal to their parents' sense of humor.
- This can be accomplished with multi-level humor. Your use of humor must never be racial, blue or sexual in nature.
- Off color comments cheapen you and your credibility.

That's a formula that I have found that works for me as well. Routines no more than 5 minutes, filled with activity, color and music...then a break where kids are encouraged to release steam and talk...in a controlled manner.

It's important to remember even though you are hired to do magic tricks for children, you must also make an impression on the adults as well. They are the ones who can refer or recommend you to another party, which means more income.

Choose appropriate magic tricks for children. You may want to avoid those that involve knives or fire.

Although cards are popular props for magic, children especially the younger ones may not be able to appreciate it...unless you use kid friendly cards like the go fish, alphabet or character cards.

Tricks involving animals can always amaze kids and thus you can use rabbits, doves or butterflies in your tricks.

Also use bright colors and different shapes for your magic props so you can get the attention of kids even more. Optical illusions may also work for kids as well.

Keep your tricks short.

Kids have short attention span and once they won't like the trick, they may not pay attention to the next ones.

Magic that involve vanishing objects and making them reappear are among the impressive magic that you can share with them.

When performing for children's parties, make sure you rehearse your entire magic show considering the time to prepare your magic and the transition of one magic to another. Use music to create the correct mood and adjust the energy level of your group.

It can also be effective if you match your performance with an outfit of the character that you want to project.

Common Children's Magic Props include:
Run Rabbit Run, Hip Hop Rabbits,
Change Bag Routines, Breakaway Wand, Topsy Turvy
Bottles, and Spongeballs.

Older children (from 7 upwards) tend to have a far greater logic and less traditional and more innovative magic effects can be performed.

The tricks you choose for the magic show are very important - you should pick tricks for children that are suitable for their age and sex. A patter about football wouldn't go down too well at an all-girls birthday party!

Before you perform a show, watch a little children's television and see how the presenters act. They smile, laugh and appear to be enjoying themselves - a very important part of being successful! Try to also remember some of the characters names - you can (temporarily) rename your pet rabbit.

To be (almost) as successful as famous magicians, you need to enjoy performing magic, the kids will know you are enjoying it, and your positive feelings will help to make them enjoy your magic show - there's nothing worse than watching magic performed by a bored magician!

Customize the standard props, create stories around them.

To sum up, try to create a fast-paced, varied and exciting magic show to keep the children entertained.

Examples:

Monkey Bar
House