Magic: making a comeback?

by Georgina Kirk

Why is magic as popular entertainment resurgent? In the past six weeks or so, I've seen four magic shows (Morgan & West at The Lowry, The Illusionists at The Apollo, Ali Cook at The Met in Bury and High Jinx at The Horseshoe in Blackpool); a play about Houdini, in which magic obviously featured, and a stage adaptation of Mikhail Bulgakov's novel
The Master and Margarita
at The Unity Theatre in Liverpool, in which a pleasing amount of magic was performed.

This level of magical activity in the North West of England is matched and exceeded in many other parts of the country, as magic shows and festivals, along with magicians' conventions, are proliferating and thriving in a way not seen in Britain since the early 20th century.

On television, magic's ratings have been steadily climbing since Derren Brown captured the public's imagination. Although his shows are all about mentalism (mind magic), huge swathes of the population tune in to watch Dynamo on a regular basis and Penn & Teller's *Fool Us* programme was a widely viewed and discussed (if somewhat uneven) showcase for talented British magicians.

As well as in the public realms of theatre and television, demand for magical entertainment is increasing in the private sphere, as magic becomes the entertainment of choice at corporate events, parties and weddings up and down the country.

On the surface, in an age of scepticism and CCTV, where transparency is prized and whistleblowers feted, a desire to experience magic appears counter-cultural. So let us look below the surface and see if we can identify the social trends that, 108 years after the establishment of The Magic Circle, are leading the nation once again to embrace magic as popular entertainment.

Need for escapism

Technological advance

The late 19th and early 20th century, the so-called golden age of magic, was a period of huge scientific and technological advance. The resurgence of interest in magic now, during a similar spurt of progress, suggests there may be some connection between discovery/invention and magic. As more and more becomes possible in the fields of science and technology, while seeming impossible to those of us who have no idea how it works, perhaps we become more open to witnessing the apparently impossible carried out.

Male domination

THE MAGIC CIRCLE
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