

Steve Marshall Big Man



Marshall's "perfect promo video" featured five minutes from Disney's *Diamond Horseshoe Revue* and five minutes from his Nagasaki theme-park show.

in Japan



Tokyo Disneyland opened April 15, 1983 and quickly became the most visited attraction in amusement park history. In 1997, when Disney began to prepare for their 15th anniversary celebration, they considered for the first time the possibility of using a non-Japanese performer in the comedy spot of the park's *Diamond Horseshoe Revue*. Although they had previously featured non-Japanese performers as singers and dancers in the show, concerns about the language barrier prevented the use of an English-speaking act as the comedy star.

Steve Marshall, then working for Walt Disney World in Florida, was asked to send a promotional tape. He put together what he calls, "the most perfect promo video I have ever sent in my life." The first five minutes showed him performing on Disney's exact same Diamond Horseshoe stage in Florida. The next five minutes featured Steve performing his comedy magic act entirely in Japanese at a theme park near Nagasaki. After viewing the video, the Tokyo Disneyland producer's delighted response to the agent was simply an incredulous, "Where did you find this guy?"

By Richard Hatch



“Dad, what’s a Houdini?” That’s what six-year-old Steve Marshall remembers asking his father from the backseat of the family car, at a stoplight in their hometown of Lakeland, Florida. Although he no longer recalls what prompted the question, his father’s response remains etched in his memory: “Houdini was a famous magician and somebody who could escape from anything. People thought he could dematerialize to get out of locked boxes.”



“A 1968 photo of me in my favorite pajamas. A sign of things to come?”

“What’s dematerialized?” Steve asked. “Well,” his father replied, “they thought he could turn himself into smoke and go out through the keyhole of the locked box and then make himself whole on the other side.”

Seeing the *Houdini* movie with Tony Curtis the following year on television reinforced young Steve’s interest, and he soon learned his first trick, the “rubber pencil” trick from a Mark Wilson special. When he was eight, he asked for and received a Marshall Brodien TV Magic set for Christmas, further setting the hook.

Although Kreskin’s syndicated show was past his bedtime, Steve’s parents let him stay up to watch it. When he was about nine, they took him to see a live Kreskin performance. A note sent backstage to the star was acknowledged, and when Kreskin signed autographs after the show Steve received not only the star’s signature, but his characteristically hearty handshake, which left a strong impression on the budding wizard. *Spooky Magic* from the school library became a favorite source of material, as did frequent visits to the magic shops at nearby Disney World.

At ten he gave his first paid engagement, a six-year-old’s birthday party for which he received \$10. One of the featured effects was the Magic Money Maker, during which the magician gave the birthday boy a dollar-sized piece of paper and the option of keeping it, or

running it through the Money Maker. The child chose the latter and was allowed to keep the \$2 bill into which it changed, thus giving Steve his first experience of paying a 20% commission. That same year he organized a “Backyard Carnival for Muscular Dystrophy,” donating the admission fees to the Muscular Dystrophy Association. Young Mr. Marshall raised the most money of any such event in Florida that year, winning him a spot on the local television affiliate in Tampa to present his check during the annual *Jerry Lewis MDA Labor Day Telethon*.

When Steve was 14, his father spotted a newspaper notice of an upcoming banquet of the Central Florida Magic Club and a mention of its monthly meetings. His parents began to drive him to the meetings an hour and a half away at Tom Craven’s magic shop in Auburndale. Steve credits Tom with guiding his interest in sleight of hand during his many visits to the shop. Another club regular, Grant “Corky the Clown” Dozier mentored Steve in the finer points of comedy magic and clowning. The many nearby theme parks gave him opportunities to see performances by Dan Stapleton, Doug Anderson, Tommy Jackson, and Chris Harris, all of whom encouraged the youngster’s interest.

The following year, Steve’s chance encounter in a restaurant during a church youth-group outing led to a year of steady weekend performances at a small amusement park next to the Tampa Zoo. The new tourist attraction’s owner was looking for a magician and had noticed the rabbit-in-hat design on a shirt Steve had made in art class. Steve got the job doing two to three shows a day on weekends. Again, his parents drove him to work until he was old enough to drive himself.

By this time, the Marshall family was living in Zephyrhills, Florida, a retirement community that tripled in size during the winter months. Word got around about the high school student who did magic shows, and the school’s student secretaries began to act as his booking agency, passing along messages in class about potential gigs. During this pre cell-phone era, he even left his graduation rehearsal early to place a payphone call to Busch Gardens to close the deal on a large show there.

After graduation, Steve’s clown mentor, “Corky” Dozier had encouraged him to apply to the famous Ringling Bros. and Barnum &

Bailey Clown College, but the College had a reputation as being more difficult to get into than Harvard Law School. In 1983, Steve was one of over 2,000 applicants for just 60 openings. While Steve was waiting for a response to his application, Richard Fick, a former Ringling clown, told him that the Holiday Inn closest to Disney World was looking for a clown magician. Steve got the job, and two weeks after graduation, at age 17, he was performing two shows a night, six nights a week, entertaining families visiting Disney World. What amazed him at the time was the frequent comment from parents that their kids made them leave Disney World early, so they could catch his show again!



“This was the first picture taken of me in my new make up and wardrobe at Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Clown College in 1983.”

One night, just before his show at the Holiday Inn, Don Arthur, the magic instructor at the Clown College, stopped by to tell Steve that he had been accepted to attend that fall. Steve was so excited he could barely remember the sequence of routines he was about to perform, but managed to get ready for the show thanks to a friend, ventriloquist Joyce Carrol, who talked him through his show sequence.

Steve had just turned 18 a few months before and was one of the youngest in his class at Clown College. Upon arrival, he found fellow students in front of the dormitory juggling five balls and riding unicycles, an intimidating welcome since he could only juggle three and had never been on a unicycle. But he soon found other magicians in the class and they immediately retired to one of the rooms for a session of close-up magic.

Because Steve could already eat fire, he was chosen for training in the circus fire display, which would require him to juggle three flaming torches. Since he could not yet juggle any torches, flaming or otherwise, he spent much of his time in juggling class simply learning to pass clubs with a partner.

Founded in 1968 by Irvin Feld and Roy Hofheinz, new owners of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, to train new generations of circus clowns, the Clown College provided Steve with a foundation in all the traditional circus clown skills: make up, costuming, juggling, stilt walking, pie throwing, pratfalls, elephant riding, and even the fine art of water spitting. The latter skill requires the production of a fine spray of mist that will catch the light and show up "to the top row of Madison Square Garden," according to Steve's instructors.

One of his greatest memories of his time at Clown College involved a lesson from master clown and circus legend, Lou Jacobs. As Steve tells it: "Lou Jacobs was a great guy with a big heart. He called me up in front of the class to work on the camera gag. This is where there's a big antique looking camera, a photographer behind it, and a person in front of it getting their picture taken. The prop camera is rigged to squirt water, explode and all kinds of things. Lou got behind the camera and I was in front. In one part of the routine, Lou squeezed the bulb and I got a face and mouthful of water. Lou came out from behind the camera and I was supposed to spray water in his face. Well, it was Lou Jacobs, living legend and octogenarian, it was class, we weren't in costume. Was I



"This was my first walk around gag for Ringling. It was a dancing cane made to look like a broom. I was a witch. Need I say more? (Do I want to say more?)"

really supposed to spit on him?

"I kind of squirted it out, but not far enough to really hit him. 'Vut vass zat?' he screamed in his heavy German accent. 'You get behind zuh camera!' Lou stood in front and I shot the water at him. When I came out from behind the camera he really let me have it. I was soaked.

"Then Lou said, 'Now you get back in front of zuh camera.' He squirted the water, came out from behind the camera, and this time I let him have it. There stood Lou Jacobs in front of me, all wet. I can still picture the water dripping from his face. He had no expression on his face either. I was terrified! Maybe I wasn't supposed to spit *that* much. He just stood there looking at me. All of a sudden he got this big smile on his face and said, 'Now zat, vass a shpit!'"

During his time at Clown College, Marshall developed several original magical routines. In one, he portrayed a witch with a dancing broom, and in another he was a bumbling magician struggling to make a balloon animal. The ending of the balloon skit was learned from one of Bev Bergeron's lecture notes.

Steve would attempt to blow up a balloon in his right hand, only to have the one in his left hand inflate, and vice versa. Finally the balloons would inflate from his ears.

For the graduation ceremony, Don Arthur helped the five magicians in the class build a raised stage that filled an entire circus ring. It was a giant mirror table with two trap doors, allowing them to create some amazing effects during the graduation show.

Of the 1983 Clown College class of 60 graduates, only 11 were offered contracts with the Ringling show. Steve Marshall was one of those 11.

Marshall had the opportunity to go back to the Central Florida Magic Club for one of the meetings before he went on tour. He was amazed at how different he felt performing now. Many of the club members noticed the difference and commented favorably to him. "Clown College was really a turning point in my life," Steve says.

To prepare for his part in the show, Steve went to the circus winter quarters for three weeks of rehearsals. Coming from a small town in Florida, it was incredibly exciting to be meeting talented people from all over the world. He recalls calling home one night and saying, "Mom, I just met this Bulgarian teeterboard acrobat named Igor!"

One of the first things to take place at rehearsals is the clown audition. This is when each clown's make up and costumes are approved. It's also

where the clowns perform all of their gags for the producer and director, who then pick the ones that are in or out of the show. Since the clowns are free to create their own material it is something of a "moment of truth." The next morning, when the audition results were read, Steve was told that his balloon gag got the "Front track, ring two, intermission spot." All the older clowns went, "Oooooh!"

Marshall was quickly informed that this was *the* spot to have for a clown. It came at the opening of the second half of the show, and it was one of the few times that the clown gags were spotlighted. Also, front track, ring two was where the owners, Irvin Feld and his son, Kenneth, would sit if they came to the show. For Steve to be awarded this spot with a solo bit at the start of his first season with the circus was quite an honor.

In addition to the balloon gag and dancing broom routine mentioned earlier, Steve developed a magical comedy skit with Kikuchi's color-changing feather rings, themed as leis being sold by a Hawaiian guy.

Whenever the circus arrived in a new town,

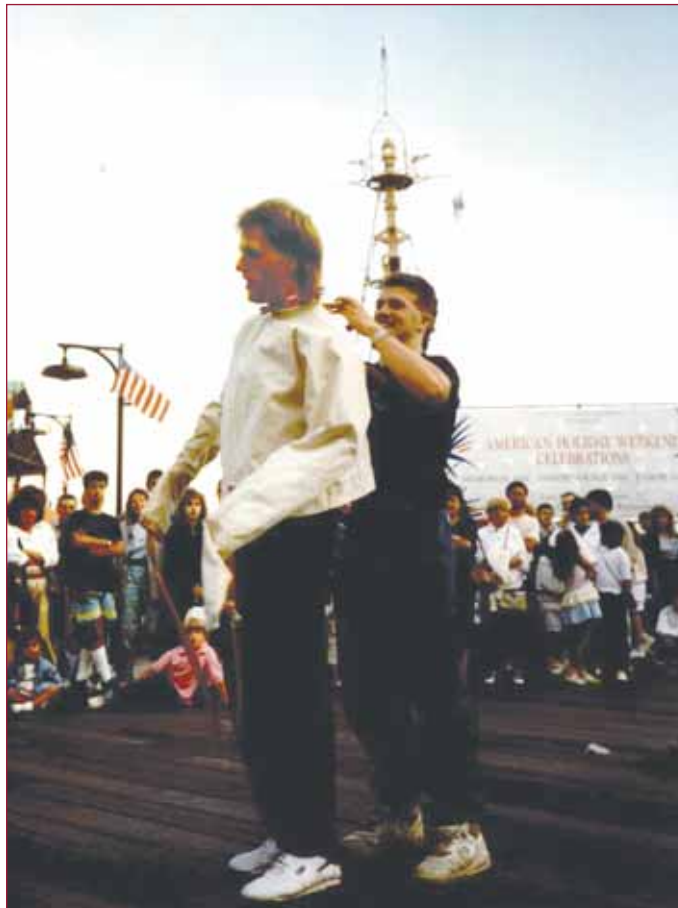
Steve would always look up the magic shops in the phone book and go visit them. When the show was playing an arena near Wichita, Kansas, Steve rode his bicycle 30 miles across town to Stevens Magic Emporium to meet Joe Stevens. When he got there, he was told Joe had just left. It would not be until years later, at a magic convention in Japan, that Steve would finally meet Joe.

When the show played Los Angeles, Steve wanted to go to the Magic Castle, but since he was only 19 he couldn't get in. Two years later when the circus returned, he went to the Castle and says he'll never forget his first night there. He was coming down the main staircase to the front bar area when he heard someone screaming, "No, that's not the way to do the pass!" When he got downstairs he saw it was Dai Vernon yelling at Larry Jennings.

When the circus played Chicago, three clowns were asked to appear on the *Bozo Show* on WGN-TV. Steve volunteered and went on the show, which was a childhood dream come true. Growing up, he loved the show and his favorite toy had been a Bozo doll he got when he was two. "It was wild to be on the show, and the icing on the cake was I got to meet Marshall Brodien who played Wizzo on the *Bozo Show*." Another fond memory of Chicago was going to Magic Inc. and visiting with Jay Marshall. "After I told Jay my name was Steve Marshall he introduced me to everyone as his illegitimate son!"

While on tour, Steve lived on the circus train's "clown car," along with the 17 other clowns on the show. His room was six-feet long, three-and-a-half feet wide, and nine-feet high. Always trying out new material, Steve decided one day to start practicing an upside-down straitjacket routine. He had been escaping from a straitjacket since he was 16, but he had never performed it upside down. "I had heard that if you hung upside down too long the blood would rush to your head and you would pass out. There was a chin-up bar in the middle of the clown car, and I would hang there training for ten minutes at a time and I never passed out. The hall was just wide enough for one person to walk down, so when people wanted to get by they'd just push me aside and walk by. The funny part was just how normal it was, just hanging there. Nobody said anything except, 'Hey Steve, how's it going?'"

After touring with Ringling across the United States for four years, Steve left the road and went to California to perform in a Disneyland event called *Circus Fantasy*.



"I always closed my street magic show at South Street Seaport in New York City with the strait-jacket escape."

During that time he was asked to go to Japan for a Ringling tour of Japan that lasted for six months. This was Steve's first trip outside the U.S.A. "It was a great tour and the Japanese people were really receptive to our *big American-style circus*. And it was especially great to meet Japanese magicians that I had only read about or seen on video and never thought I would meet, magicians like Ton Onosaka and Sanada."

After the Japan tour, Steve decided to leave Ringling and move to New York City. He figured "If I can make it there, I'll make it anywhere." A former Ringling Clown named Michael Bongar had opened his own booking agency in New York and provided Steve with a lot of work as a clown right from the start. One day he called and asked if Steve could do a magic show without clown makeup. That was obviously no problem, so then he started booking Steve as a magician, as well as a clown. "I've always been happy that I've studied many things and have a lot of different performing skills. That's what's really kept me working over the years. I never have to say, 'No, I can't do that.'"

During his time in New York Steve decided to try street performing. His first time out was

with a juggler friend, Brad Zupp. "We went down to Battery Park, where the ferry to the Statue of Liberty departs. There were lots of tourists there, so it was a good spot. We had brought way too much stuff, but we finally set up and did a show. We had not done street performing before and really didn't know how to attract a crowd. It happened though, and we were happy to make enough money to split."

Steve learned that day that he couldn't do the same routines he had been doing in regular shows. "I did one effect where I had a card selected and said that I had three chances to find it. This routine worked great in a comedy club, but it didn't on the street. Because people could walk up anytime after the set-up for the routine, when I missed the card on the first attempt to find it — remember, I had three tries — a bunch of people simply walked away thinking I stunk!" He soon fixed the routine so that people were forced to stick around for the funny finish.

Marshall moved his street-magic operations to South Street Seaport, an upscale shopping-and-dining tourist destination in lower Manhattan. "It was here that I learned about building and keeping a crowd, even on a hot summer day, when my biggest competition was

the cool air blowing out on the street every time a nearby shop door was opened." He also realized just how fast people gather if they see a guy getting strapped into a straitjacket on the street. Steve always closed his street show with this escape.

While living in New York, Steve got a call from an agent informing him that Holland Village, a theme park in Nagasaki, Japan, needed a fire-eater for three months. But they wanted a 15-minute show and Steve didn't have 15 minutes of straight fire eating material, so he accepted the engagement with the understanding that he would also do an act of fire magic, in addition to the fire eating. Marshall's experience with integrating fire into an act was most useful here, as while he was with the Ringling show, Kenneth Feld had contracted him to make ten sets of fire torches and produce an instructional video to teach fire eating to a Zulu tribe that was working in the next edition of the circus.

Marshall spoke almost no Japanese. During his earlier six-month Ringling tour of Japan he traveled with an entourage of 300 English speakers, giving him little opportunity or need to learn the language. Therefore, he developed a silent fire act. When he arrived at Holland

Village that spring, he found that just about all the stages in the theme park were outdoors, and the “stage” he was expected to perform on was at the top of some steps in a courtyard, where it was exceptionally windy! Consequently, his act kept getting shorter because his props literally started burning up. “I opened with the production of a Fire Bowl and the fire changed to a bunch of spring flowers. One day after the flowers had appeared I sat the bowl on my table behind me and proceeded with my next routine. All of a sudden, out of the corner of my eye, I saw one of the stage hands come running across the stage. I looked back and he was running off stage with a bowl full of flaming flowers! A new effect? Even though I had brought several sets of props with me the same things started happening and soon my act was down to ten minutes. Luckily I’ve always been a better-to-have-too-much-than-not-enough kind of person, so I asked if I could start adding in some of my comedy magic. They said yes, and by the end

of the three months I was doing a comedy magic show with some fire eating and blowing a big fireball for the finale.”

Steve was invited back to Holland Village two more times during the next two years, each time for a period of six months. As his Japanese improved, he added more speaking and comedy magic routines to his show. The parent company of the theme park was building another new theme park called Huis Ten Bosch, which would also be in Nagasaki and also have a Dutch theme. Both parks had been inspired by the fact that in Japanese history, The Netherlands had been for many years the only Western country allowed to trade with Japan. Consequently a large Dutch presence had been established at one time in Nagasaki.

Steve was asked to perform for the grand opening of Huis Ten Bosch. “During the first two years they had lots of entertainment but realized they needed more. I created an illusion show for the park and also co-created a pirate stunt show that incorporated magic and circus skills. The illusion show was called the *Happy*

Harvest Show since it opened during the fall. For this production I performed a dove routine, jumbo Three Card Monte, Mis-Made Girl, and a Broom Suspension. In the pirate show I did a torn-and-restored treasure map, my upside-down straitjacket escape suspended between the masts of a tall ship, and a Substitution Trunk using a treasure chest.” Both shows were

he did all the magic while Hello Kitty just pointed and said magic words. Steve would act surprised when the magic happened. The role gave him greater empathy with the plight of traditional magician’s assistants, who do all the work while their partner gets all the credit.

For the clown routine Steve did the lean shoes. “I had it rigged so I was standing close to

the edge of the stage and could lean out over the edge. All went well for the two weeks in Thailand and up until opening night in Singapore. I was doing the clown routine and did the lean. Just as I was at full lean, I felt something like someone hitting the back of my right ankle. The next thing I knew I was leaning farther than I had ever leaned before. I was all the way over with my face touching the front of the stage! I was onstage with a giant frog and a duck character, so there was nothing they could do but look at me. I knew something was wrong. I pulled myself up on the stage and tried to stand up, but my feet were still in the rigging. I unhooked the boots and tried to

stand, but kept falling down, again and again.

“Remember this was a clown routine, and the audience was howling with laughter when I kept falling after the incredible lean. Something inside me said, ‘You’re hurt, you have to get off the stage, but you can’t let anyone know you are hurt.’ So I stood up and walked, very shakily, off stage. When I passed through the curtains and knew that the audience couldn’t see I collapsed. They finished the show and afterward took me to the hospital, still in my clown costume. The doctor told me I had completely severed both of my Achilles tendons.”

After Steve explained what had happened during the show, the doctor asked Steve how he got offstage. When he told him that he walked off, the doctor said, “It’s impossible to walk without Achilles tendons.” The doctor summoned the other physicians at the hospital to tell Steve just how impossible it is to walk without any Achilles tendons. “I’m glad you didn’t tell me it was impossible when I was walking!” Steve finally said, which the doctors found quite amusing.



"The first show at Holland Village in Nagasaki featured fire magic; when invited back the second time, I created an illusion show called *Harvest Time*."

well received and ran through the entire second year of the park.

During that time Steve decided that if he were going to stay in Japan he wanted to work in Tokyo. He contacted an agent there and booked himself for six months in a theme park in central Tokyo. During this period he also performed close-up magic in the evenings at a baseball-theme restaurant near the Tokyo Dome.

It wasn't long before the choreographer of his illusion sequence at the Huis Ten Bosch show called and told him she was putting together a circus-style show for the Sanrio Company, the creator of the *Hello Kitty* television series. The live show was set to tour Thailand, Singapore, and Hong Kong. She wanted Steve to create a magic routine and a clown segment for the show. The real challenge was the magic since they wanted the Hello Kitty character to be the magician. The problem was the costume had big thick gloves that made it virtually impossible to do anything with the hands. Steve's solution was that he was introduced as Hello Kitty's "assistant," and

SIX THOUGHTS FROM STEVE

Over the years I've been lucky to be able to do what I love. I've also been fortunate to have so many great friends in the magic world and have met so many people who have been so generous with their time.

I always have something ready to perform or know something impromptu that can be done with an object that's lying around.

I feel that it's important to study all types of magic. I love close-up, parlor, and stage magic, and I've always had this dream of performing in all three rooms at the Magic Castle in one night. I guess that comes from my years doing five shows a day at Disney.

I remember one time I was sitting on the streetcar coming back from a magic shop in Nagasaki and looking down at the stuff I had just purchased and thinking "It's a bag full of magic!" It reminded me just how cool it is that magicians get to do this!

Recently I've found how much I enjoy being an emcee. It's nice to keep a show moving along and I enjoy the challenge of thinking on my feet if I need to fill time.

I never want to force magic on people, because it's really nice to surprise someone with it. Sometimes I make the change disappear and then quickly reappear at the cash register. It gets a good reaction and brightens a day. There's a big difference, though, between doing something that just takes a second and stopping to show the cashier your latest four-phase coins across routine with quarters.

Steve's tendons were surgically repaired the next day and he stayed in the Singapore hospital for ten days. "As soon as they let me out of bed, I put on my clown costume — I had it with me, after all — got in a wheel chair and went down to do a show in the children's ward. The patients were happy, and it was interesting to be doing a show when I was injured, too. The kids seemed to identify with that."

Steve returned home to Florida and spent three months in a wheel chair, followed by another three months in physical therapy. Even though he could walk, his balance was a bit off and he didn't feel ready to get back onstage, yet.



"Oops! Wrong hat!" a publicity photo inspired by the old Rocky & Bullwinkle cartoons.

PHOTO BY KATE TURNING, HOLLYWOOD

Marshall took a job for the next six months at Magic Max, an Orlando magic shop that catered to tourists. It was a sales-oriented business and the demonstrators were not encouraged to entertain the customers. He was told just to perform the effects and sell. "I've never done Scotch & Soda and the Devano Rising Cards so many times in my life. I hope the surveillance tapes from the store have been destroyed, so no one can see some of the goofy stuff I did when I was bored!" Steve calls this the only "real job" he's ever had, but is proud of the fact that it still involved magic, even though it was not satisfying his need to evolve

creatively.

While Steve was still at Magic Max, the Sanrio Company called and said they were taking the *Hello Kitty* show to Hong Kong and asked how his legs were. When Steve said they were fine, the director asked if he would do the lean shoes in the show. "No," Steve replied. "I'll come up with something else!" In place of the lean shoes, he performed an illusion where his feet disappeared as kind of an inside joke.

After the Hong Kong tour, Steve decided he wanted to move back to Florida, so he contacted Ron Severini, an entertainment director for Disney, and found out that Walt Disney World was opening a new resort called the Boardwalk. "It was themed around Coney Island and Atlantic City in the 1930s and '40s and right up my alley." He moved back to Florida and became the first full-time performer working on the Boardwalk, doing three 30-minute shows a night.

"It was a great time because I was in a spot where there were a lot of people who wanted to be entertained and I had full control of what I wanted to do. One night the general manager of the Boardwalk said to me, 'You're always where you're supposed to be at the time you're supposed to be there, and whenever I walk by there's a big crowd laughing and having a good time. You are one less thing I have to worry about here.' That was one of the biggest compliments I have ever received. And, once again, I was hearing those words, 'We left Disney World early tonight so we could come and see your show.'"

Steve enjoyed doing street-style shows again and facing the challenges of gathering the crowd, but remembers that getting back into the grind was difficult the first day. "As I started my routine I was confident because it was a routine that I had done many times over the last few years. But when I started to speak, I suddenly realized that I had come up with this routine in Japan and had *never* performed it in English! I couldn't speak Japanese at the Boardwalk, so I started translating it in my head. It was so strange. I was speaking English, but thinking in Japanese. Sometimes a Japanese word would start to come out and I would change it to English. It took me a few days before I was totally back in English speaking and thinking mode."

In addition to the five nights a week at the Boardwalk, Marshall started doing the pre-show warm-up for the *Hunchback of Notre Dame* musical, presented at Disney-MGM Studios. That show was in a theater that held 1,400 people and was always packed. "One day, the regular pre-show performer at the *Hunchback* show decided to take some time off. I agreed to work his shift for the weekend that he wanted off. The warm-up show was 15 minutes, five times a day, plus the three 30-minute Boardwalk shows, which meant that I

did 24 solo shows in three days. Some of my friends and fellow performers showed up for my last show on the Boardwalk because they knew it was a marathon and I was quite interesting that last show, since I lost my voice.”

Steve’s multiple performing skills — magic, comedy, juggling, fire eating — proved an ideal match for the Disney entertainment complex, as he could fill in for almost any act in any of the Disney parks that wanted time off.

The original concept of the Boardwalk was to have a three-man comedy show called the Boardwalk Buskers. After three months of Steve doing his solo show on the Boardwalk, Disney decided it was time to produce the *Boardwalk Buskers* show. Robb Zeisler, a Ringling clown colleague and friend who had moved to Florida, started to work on the Boardwalk doing his solo juggling and comedy show. Another magician, John Ekin, with whom Steve had become close friends, worked there as well. The three of them decided they wanted to be the Buskers. Because of Disney regulations for a new production of that size, auditions had to be held. And a lot of magicians, jugglers, clowns, and actors showed up. It seemed everyone wanted to be in the hot new show on Disney property. In the end John, Robb, and Steve were the three left standing and became the Boardwalk Buskers. “It was one of the best shows I’ve ever been in,” Steve recalls. “The three of us had the chemistry to make it work. We had definite characters: John was the heavy or leader, Robb was the eccentric who never spoke, and I was the goofball, the guy always causing problems and getting into trouble. We were Amazing John, Mister Robb, and Sparky The Wonder Chimp.” Before long they were the most popular show on Disney property.

While working the Boardwalk, Steve was asked to fill in “the magician spot” in the Diamond Horseshoe Revue. “I had grown up watching that show with Bev Bergeron, so I was very excited to perform on that stage. I’ll never forget, it was a Thursday morning when I walked backstage at the Diamond Horseshoe. As I looked in the dressing room mirror I thought this is the same mirror that Bev looked in for all those years. Then I was backstage with the emcee introducing me, and a shudder went down my spine. It was an amazing feeling. The curtains opened and I went into my routine. I wound up performing on that stage many times and consider myself lucky to be in the company of all the other great magicians and comedians who have performed on that same stage.”

While performing at Walt Disney World there were numerous Japanese guests who came to Steve’s shows, so he would always throw in a few Japanese jokes or tongue twisters for their benefit. “The look on their faces, that this very American-looking guy was

speaking Japanese, was priceless. After one of my shows a Japanese family came up to me and said that their son insisted they talk to me because he said he had seen me on a Japanese television children’s show. The family was obviously speaking to me to humor their child. When they told me what the show was, I told them that I had appeared on the program two years ago! It was really funny that the kid remembered me, and his family was more amazed.”

Back when Steve was 16, he competed in the junior stage contest at the annual Florida State Magicians Convention and won a second place. Now, a dozen years later, in 1994, Steve decided to compete again, this time in the Adult Stage division. Over the years he had created and performed many different acts, but for the competition he wanted to come up with something original and creative. “I have always loved newspaper magic and have been a fan of Gene Anderson since I saw his ‘Part Time Pro’ lecture at the Florida convention when I was a teenager. So I started thinking of newspaper magic. I’ve also loved costume changes. I thought it would be cool to use the Buster Keaton gag of the newspaper that keeps getting bigger for a costume change. Then I thought, ‘How about a newspaper tuxedo?’ After much searching, I found the fabric and had the tuxedo specially made by my costume maker. I constructed the routine, rehearsed it, and it all paid off when I won first place in the senior stage division at the Florida State Convention.”

The Boardwalk was a Walt Disney World Resort, and the back gate to EPCOT was about a 10-minute walk away. Very near to that employee entrance to EPCOT was the Japanese pavilion, and many of the Japanese employees used to come to the Boardwalk since it was so close. “One night one of the Japanese girls working there at the time came to my show, fell instantly in love with me and decided to marry me. Well, that’s *my* story.



“After leaving the circus, one of my first comedy acts paid homage to my early beginnings with a Marshall Brodien TV Magic set.”

Hers is a *little* different!”

Steve did, in fact, meet his future wife, Shigee, at Disney World. They decided to get married and were discussing who would move to whose country, when Steve received the call from Tokyo Disneyland mentioned at the beginning of this story. Naturally, he was hired and became the first ever non-Japanese magician to appear on the Diamond Horseshoe stage in Tokyo Disneyland, performing in the ten-minute comedy spot. For Steve, the best part about it was that he was doing the *original* Diamond Horseshoe Revue show that Walt Disney himself created when Disneyland in California first opened. So, he not only got to do his comedy magic act that he was allowed to create himself, but he also got to do the “Pecos Bill” number with the two singers that Bev Bergeron and Wally Boag had performed with at Disneyland and Walt Disney World. “I don’t need to tell you how great it felt to do that,” Steve says with a smile.

After two years performing at Tokyo Disneyland, Steve felt it was time to pursue other career paths. About that time, the new



"The costume for my award-winning newspaper act at the Florida State Magicians Convention."

Tokyo Disney Resort was about to open. At the heart of it would be the shopping, dining, and entertainment development called Ikspiari. Steve was contacted to be one of the acts to work at the Ikspiari complex. He had three months off so he and Shigee decided to spend it in Florida, visiting his parents and giving them time to get to know their new granddaughter, Claire. However, when the other Disney performers found out that the ever-versatile Steve Marshall was back in town they decided they needed some time off. As a result, Steve wound up working in various shows at Walt Disney World for almost two of his three months vacation!

The Marshalls returned to Japan as scheduled and Steve started working at Ikspiari. During rehearsals he learned that Wizardz was opening a branch operation in Ikspiari in July of 2000. "Needless to say, I was very excited about that. Jonathan Neal Brown was entertainment director, and emcees for the grand opening were Cyril and Mr. Sako. Fred Wood, the president and director of development for Wizardz, frequently came by and watched my show, and I hung out there a lot. It paid off. When Cyril left Wizardz, I was asked to be the new emcee. Working at this venue was great. New magicians would come in every two months, so I got to meet and hang out with lots of great performers that I had never had the opportunity to meet before."

At the same time, Steve was also getting into the freelance market in Tokyo, and when he wasn't performing at Wizardz he was out doing private parties or event shows. "I was so busy I worked for four months straight without a day off. While at Wizardz I got to spend a lot of time with Mr. Sako, the other emcee there. He is truly amazing and one of those walking encyclopedias of magic. If you ask him about any effect or move he can probably show it to you. He's also a very kind and generous man. I learned a lot from him. By the time Wizardz closed, I had established myself in the freelance market doing my 30-minute stand-up show, all in Japanese."

Around this time Steve and Shigee decided to climb Mount Fuji. "I'm glad we did it, as it was a great experience. I always remember the famous quote though, 'Everyone should climb Mt. Fuji once, but only a fool would climb it twice.' I understand. When we were almost to the top we saw a young girl, probably 11 or 12 years old. She was sitting down and was crying. She said that she couldn't go on any more and wanted to go back down the mountain. But from that point it's much easier to get to the top and go down the other side than it would be to turn back. We were only about 20 minutes from the top. I stopped and told the little girl that when we got to the top I would show her a magic trick. She looked at me, stopped crying, stood up, and ran to the top. It took me

a while longer to catch up. When I reached the top she was waiting for me. I reached in my backpack and pulled out a deck of cards. My wife looked at me and said, 'You brought a deck of cards with you?' I said, 'And *why* does this surprise you?' The girl was happy watching the magic and the mom was happy that her daughter had made it to the top."

At the top of Mount Fuji there are some restaurants where people post stuff on the walls, be it notes, calling cards, snapshots, graffiti, et cetera. "I left a Three of Spades up there with 'Is this your card?' written on it. I wanted to force that card on someone and tell him or her to look on the wall of the ramen shop when they got to the top of the mountain. If anyone climbs Mt. Fuji please let me know if it's there. I'd go check myself but, hey, I'm no fool!"

When Universal Studios Japan opened in Osaka they contacted Steve to perform for the grand opening VIP party. Universal had created a *Backdraft* movie attraction at the theme park and wanted Marshall to dress like a fireman and eat, juggle, and blow fire. "It was a lot of fun. They took me to a real fire station and gave me an actual fireman's suit to wear. That made it great for juggling the fire, since I could do some comedy bits with the fire touching my clothes and not worry about catching on fire."

A few years later, Universal Studios Japan contacted Steve again and said they were putting on their first "Halloween Horror Nights" event, and wanted him to come up with a special spooky magic show for the event. "I've always been a fan of ghost stories, the old Spook shows of the 1940s and '50s, and séances. I bought Eugene Burger's book *Spirit Theater* and it really made an impression on me as to just how fun this kind of magic can be. It can be played for fun or it can be presented extremely seriously." Marshall has produced two old-time spook shows for the Tokyo Comedy Store, complete with a blackout finale, where ghosts were flying through the audience and actually making contact with the amazed and amused patrons.

Steve Marshall has guested twice on The Magic Napoleon's popular TV show, *Magic Okoku*, and when the first show aired The Napoleons introduced Mr. Marshall as "The Ambassador of Magic from the USA." The billing caught Steve by surprise, but he liked it. He now uses it as his billing throughout Japan. Marshall has been invited to perform for the last three years at the American Embassy's annual Fourth of July party in Tokyo.

In 2003, Steve and Shigee once again returned to Florida to visit Steve's parents, this time with *two* granddaughters, as Julia now accompanied Claire. While there, Mr. Marshall got to attend the Florida State Magicians Convention, this time as a paid performer. He did a close-up show, a late-night

comedy show, and emceed the closing-night gala show. "Since I was returning home and had the privilege to emcee the headliner show, I started thinking about all the times I had sat in the audience at that very same convention and all the things I had seen. One thing I remembered was Karrell Fox's 'Phone call from home,' where his wife calls him and tells him she's cleaning out his magic room."

Karrell had passed away and Steve really wanted to do the "Foxy One's" routine, not only as a tribute, but also help keep it alive since it's the perfect magic convention nostalgia bit. "I contacted Abb Dickson, since I knew he and Karrell always worked together doing great comedy bits at magic conventions. Abb not only gave me the okay to do it, but also sent me the entire script, stage direction, and the way to light it to make it play well. When it came time in the show to do it, I didn't want people to think that I had just taken the routine, so I felt it was important for me to acknowledge Karrell as well. So when my phone rang, I took it out, looked at it, and said, 'Karrell Fox gave me this phone, just before I answered it.'

"The comedy routine went really well," Steve says. "Bev Bergeron even complimented me on it afterwards. That meant the world to me. I think it's important to keep classic bits like this alive, and I feel it's equally important to go about the right way of doing it by getting permission and acknowledging the originator."

While Marshall was in Florida this time, he also got to spend some time with the Society of American Magicians past national president Jim Zachary. "I remember the first time I ever saw anyone stack dice and it was Jim. I was amazed and really wanted to learn this. I had worked on it over the years and had even ordered my dice cups from Jim. It was nice to actually sit down with him at his home and have him go over the fine points with me. He was extremely generous and helpful. Jim had started painting, and since I had an interest in art Jim took me to my first painting class."

Steve was asked to perform at a comedy theater event in Tokyo, the 2004 Fool Festival. He wrote and performed a one-man show called *Magic and Mayhem!* "In the show I played myself at five different periods in my life, doing magic from those times. I started the show on Christmas morning, when I was eight years old and opening my first magic set, and closing with the comedy magic and illusions that I do today. It was good to do that show and actually relive all those phases of my life and career."

At the 2005 S.A.M. National Convention in Boston, John Moehring, as the newly appointed editor of *M-U-M*, talked with Japan Regional Vice President Dr. Shigeru Tashiro,

SIX MORE THOUGHTS FROM STEVE

In my career I've performed in so many locations and different situations that it's really paid off. If I get somewhere and the venue is not what I expected or told it would be, I'm able to adjust and do whatever I can do.

We are so lucky to do what we do. Make someone happy. Help them to experience magic in this world. Make them think.

One time I was asked to do a ten-minute show for my wife's cousin's junior high school class. When I got there they expected me to do a 20-minute show for 300 kids in the main assembly hall. Talk about some information getting lost in translation. I asked for some paper cups, water, some paper, scissors, tape, and a few paper clips and I was able to do a levitation, the Zig-Zag Lady, and then completely vanish! No, seriously though, I was able to ask for some common objects and still do an entertaining show for that group because I had "done my homework" over the years. I think it's always important to rise to the occasion and do whatever it takes to get the job done.

I enjoy all types of entertainment and get inspiration from everywhere. I watch old movies, I'm a big Marx Brothers fan, and I also love Jerry Lewis.

I'm a big music fan, too. If I weren't a magician, I'd probably be a musician. I was thrilled this year when Dr. Demento played a song I wrote on one of his shows. I have listened to him since I was 15. He inspired my love for comedy music.

I love coming up with new ideas. Brainstorming sessions among magicians are a great way to come up with creative ideas. If you get a bunch of magical thinkers together the ideas that come out are amazing.

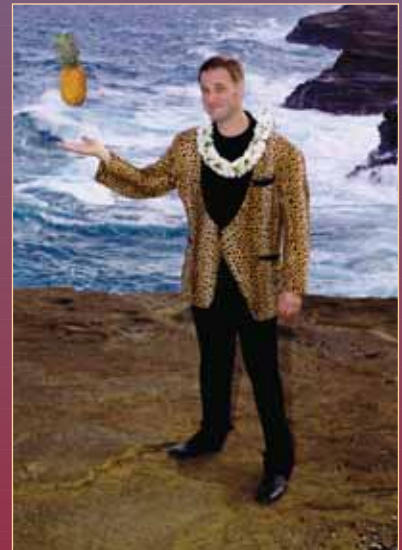


PHOTO BY DWIGHT OKUMOTO

"It was really windy in Hawaii and I was standing a lot closer to the edge than it looks."

who'd just emceed the successful *All-Star Japanese Revue*, about the possibility of having a column in the magazine that would feature the talents of Asian magicians. Dr. Tashiro liked the concept, but said he'd have to figure out how to accomplish the English translations of the material.

A solution was on the horizon when S.A.M. Contest Chairman Paul Critelli attended the World Magic Symposium in Saitama, Japan the following month. Critelli met up with Marshall and Dr. Tashiro and they arrived at a plan of attack. Steve agreed to write up the contributions if the good doctor would assist with the recruitment of the talent.

Steve has now completed almost a full

year of "Asian Astonishments" columns and really enjoys the fact that he is able to do something to give back to the magic community and, more importantly, promote the creative Asian magicians on his side of the world. Always insisting on giving credit where it's due, Steve insisted on ending this story saying, "I want to thank Paul Critelli for all of the time and help he gives me looking over the columns and correcting my grammar."

Earlier this year the Japan Magic Circle presented Steve with their Fellowship Award. He was especially honored to be the first foreign magician to receive this award, making Steve Marshall truly feel like the big man in Japan. ♦