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Fröhlich-Zauberkongress 2026

Bill Cheung's *Secrets Session IV*

INHALTSVERZEICHNIS

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Fröhlich-Zauberkongress 2026, Bad Aussee, Photo: Peter Kainrath



MRA Championship 2026 (Richard René and Rudi Heuer)



Secrets Session IV in Bill Cheung's Theather, Wiener Neustadt

Cover photo: Fröhlich-Zauberkongress 2026, Photo: © Peter Kainrath



Dear Magic Friends,

What an exciting couple of months we have had! Two extraordinary events take centre stage in this special edition of *Aladin*.

The ***Fröhlich Zauberkongress*** in Bad Aussee is now behind us, and we bring you extensive coverage of this remarkable event. In October, **Bill Cheung's** sensational ***Secrets Session*** Symposium took place in Wiener Neustadt, and it certainly deserves a special place in this publication as well.

Both events were unique in their own way and attracted considerable attention far beyond Austria's borders. They brought together outstanding performers, creative minds and magic enthusiasts from many different countries.

In this special edition, we take a closer look at these events, share personal impressions and offer an interesting behind-the-scenes look at what goes into organising an international magic convention.

We are particularly pleased to make these reports available in English. Magic is an international art, and the exchange of ideas, experiences and friendships across borders has always been an important part of our community.

Behind the scenes, we are already working on *Aladin* 2027. There will be some changes, new projects are in preparation, and our editorial team will be welcoming additional members.

As I will be stepping down as President of the **Magischer Ring Austria** (MRA) at the end of this year, I will once again have more time to devote to Aladin and finally put into practice some ideas that have been waiting for far too long.

One thing, however, will not change: *Aladin* will continue to cover unusual, critical and sometimes controversial subjects. Our editorial policy will remain completely independent, even after my departure as MRA President.

Sadly, the magic community has also experienced a tragic loss. **Andreas Pfalzer**, who attended the *Fröhlich-Zauberkongress*, lost his life in a mountain accident on the Loser, Bad Aussee's local mountain, just four weeks after the convention. Our heartfelt condolences go out to his family and loved ones.

We also wish everyone currently facing health problems a speedy recovery and hope that our shared passion for magic will continue to bring joy, inspiration and friendship.

We wish you all a successful autumn and winter season, filled with wonderful magical encounters.

Thank you for your interest in *Aladin* and for being part of our international magic community. We hope you enjoy reading these reports!

Warmest regards,



Hanno Rhomberg
Aladin Editorial Staff

Four Days of Magic in Bad Aussee

Our convention diary from the Fröhlich-Zauberkongress 2026

TEXT: ALADIN REDAKTION, PHOTOS: PETER KAINRATH

The Fröhlich-Zauberkongress 2026 is now history. For four days, Bad Aussee once again became a meeting place for around 350 magicians and magic enthusiasts from Austria and abroad. More than 30 performers provided a varied programme.

This time, we wanted to do a few things differently. Instead of numerous short acts in gala shows, we invited performers to present complete shows. Of course, that involves a certain risk: not every show will appeal to everyone. But we wanted visitors to experience artists and their programmes as they present them in their own theatres. There were also lectures, championships and, of course, countless encounters away from the stage.

Over the following pages, we look back on the four convention days with brief descriptions of individual programme items and plenty of photographs. Those wishing to learn more about particular performers, the championship or the background to the convention will find detailed articles following this diary.

THURSDAY, 10 SEPTEMBER

Welcome to Bad Aussee
The official opening marked the start of the convention programme. We wanted to avoid lengthy speeches and get to the magic as quickly as possible. We began with a short, humorous sketch offering a look behind the scenes of convention planning and the creation of the opening show. With his team's support, Hanno got to step into the Ehrlich Brothers' shoes – complete with a levitating Lamborghini and live online coaching from Chris Ehrlich. The message was clear: we don't take ourselves too seriously!

Rhapsody in Magic – Jaana Felicitas and Nikolai Striebel
Jaana Felicitas and Nikolai Striebel opened the artistic programme. These two performers follow very different paths yet delight audiences in a joint show. Jaana combines magic with dance and movement, while Nikolai works extensively with visual effects and unusual ideas. Their production was already one of the convention's highlights, bringing together the major signature pieces that made both artists internationally known.

Peter Marvey – A Life Devoted to Illusion
Peter Marvey hardly needs an introduction to the magic community. For decades, he has ranked among Europe's best-known illusionists. In Bad Aussee, he presented his famous Hands act. Michelle Spillner then spoke with him about his life, career and work. What made the conversation especially interesting was the opportunity to discover Peter Marvey the person, rather than merely the creator of spectacular illusions. A video also introduced his Magic House on Lake Zurich, where he regularly performs his full show for an audience of 100.

Thomas Otto and His Chop Cup
Thomas Otto has devoted many years to the Chop Cup, developing a routine entirely his own. It opens his professional act, so it was unusual and generous of him to share this gem with fellow magicians. During his lecture, he not only demonstrated how the various effects work but explained why he does certain things in precisely the way he does. It showed how much work can lie behind apparently simple details.

The Next Generation of Magic
Five young performers from different countries worked with Finn Talin to create a complete show. Fabienne Walz, Pia Reip, Maurice Grange, Romain Dewasme and Carlitos brought very different ideas to the project, which was precisely what made it interesting. The aim was to develop something new together, with a continuous storyline. They therefore came to Bad Aussee a week early for a workshop in which this production was tailored specifically to the convention. Giving young artists such an opportunity mattered to us.

David Eriksson – Apple Saucy
Anyone familiar with David Eriksson knows to expect the unexpected. Since relatively few people had probably seen him live, this was a genuine highlight. His late-night show had little to do with traditional magic. Instead, it offered wonderfully offbeat humour, physical skill and some fairly outrageous ideas. Certainly not to everyone's taste, but the response was overwhelmingly enthusiastic. Roberto Giobbi wrote about the show on his blog and described Eriksson, among other things, as a 'lovable monster'. He, too, found this extraordinary performance almost impossible to describe in words. Alexander Krist called it an unforgettable highlight.

FRIDAY, 11 SEPTEMBER

The Stage and Parlour Competition
Friday began with the FISM-certified championship. The contestants performed before an international jury and, of course, their fellow magicians. For many performers, such a championship is a huge challenge. They may have spent months developing an act and must demonstrate their abilities in





Jaana Felicitas



Nikolai Striebel



Peter Marvey



Thomas Otto



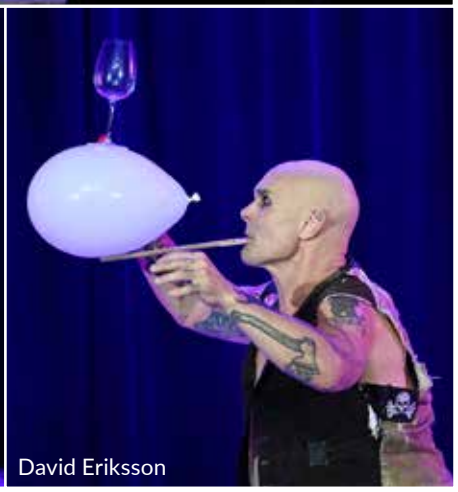
Hanno Rhomberg



The Next Generation of Magic



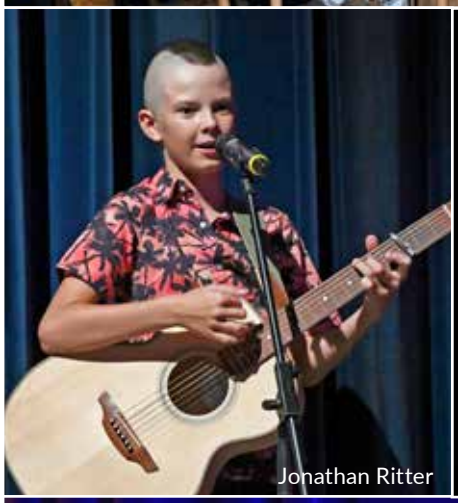
David Eriksson



David Eriksson


View members of the championship jury


Roberto Giobbi


Jonathan Ritter


Next Generation – from the Seminar


The Magic of Africa


Charlie Caper


Helmut Spindler


After Show Party

just a few minutes. The standard varied, as it always does in championships. But that makes it all the more interesting to see what ideas and approaches to presentation emerge.

Next Generation – The Seminar
Following Thursday's show, there was an opportunity to get to know the young artists better. They spoke about their work, how their acts had developed and their experiences of creating a joint production. They also demonstrated practical examples. Michelle Spillner led a discussion with Maurice Grange and Thomas Otto. Particularly fascinating was the way very different approaches and individual acts had been brought together into a single show.

Aladin's Magic Lamp
Under this heading, we brought together topics that often receive too little attention in a conventional convention programme. The format has evolved over the past three conventions and is not afraid to address critical questions.

- **Copying in magic:** Why is there so much theft of ideas in magic, undermining the livelihood of the creative people who enrich our art? Roberto Giobbi spoke candidly, offering fascinating facts from the life of a writer in magic.
- **Youth work outside magic clubs:** An initiative was presented that introduces young people to magic.
- **Magic of Africa:** Hanno described the background to the evening's Ubuntu Magic show from South Africa.
- **Artificial intelligence:** Helmut Spindler presented both the positive and critical aspects of AI through a database-development project. The session featured music from young performer Jonathan Ritter on xylophone and guitar, fitting the focus on youth.

Magic of Africa – Ubuntu Illusions
This was a show we had been particularly looking forward to. Four young magicians from Cape Town's College of Magic had travelled to Austria. Sinethemba Bawuti, Sinalo Mtwana, Lithemba Mti and Sibabalwe Khwezi presented a show full of music, humour and South African joie de vivre. Anyone who met them offstage knows how much this journey meant to them. It was their first visit to Europe and a chance to meet international performers.

After-Show-Party – Magic & Mountains
After the African show, the evening continued with an unusual after-show party. Together with Denies and numerous magician friends, Alex Ray developed a special close-up concept. This was not magic watched on a screen but performed directly before the guests' eyes. At long and round tables, standing tables and among the audience, well-known performers created magic in a relaxed setting. Olga Balabon provided live music. This ambitious undertaking was warmly received and became one of the convention's special experiences for many visitors.

SATURDAY, 12 SEPTEMBER

Charlie Caper – Creativity and Ideas
Charlie Caper is a performer who develops his own props and often the technology needed to operate them. In his lecture, he explained how he approaches new ideas and turns them into stage productions. Robots and modern technology were part of the discussion. It was fascinating to discover how much experimentation and hard work go into his seemingly playful inventions. See Andrea Bahn's article later in this issue.

The Close-up Competition
The close-up championship was also part of the FISM-certified event in Bad Aussee. Eight contestants presented their acts at close range. Close-up for an audience of 350 is possible only with excellent video coverage, expertly handled by Lars and Jenny Tepel. We present the results and all participants together with the stage and parlour categories in our championship report.

Pit Hartling – Card Fictions
Pit Hartling is one of Germany's best-known card magicians and has built an international reputation through his books and lectures. In Bad Aussee, he not only performed tricks but explained the thinking behind them. For anyone seriously interested in card magic, his lecture was a treasure trove. And naturally, his dry humour was very much in evidence.

Michelle Spillner – Failed? Fail Better!
Michelle Spillner chose a rather different subject for her lecture: mistakes, setbacks and failure. These are topics our community does not discuss nearly often enough. We usually see only finished acts and success stories, yet the many things that fail along the way are just as much a part of the process. This is certainly something worth reflecting on more often. An extensive review by Franz Kaslatter follows this diary.

Magic Monday Frankfurt
Bringing Magic Monday's complete show from Frankfurt to Bad Aussee was no easy task. But Markus Zink was determined to make it happen – and he was absolutely right! Over many years, the ensemble has developed its own mixture of magic, comedy and delightfully bizarre ideas. It is obvious when a production has matured over time rather than been assembled solely for a convention. We take a closer look at it elsewhere in this issue.

Charlie Caper – Robots
Charlie Caper returned to the stage on Saturday with his elaborate robot show. We had deliberately booked Robots so that even magicians who had seen him in Blackpool in 2026 would have something different to enjoy. The little machines, some developed by Charlie himself, became his stage part-


Pit Hartling


Michelle Spillner

ners. It was a combination of magic, comedy and technology unlike anything one sees every day.

SUNDAY, 13 SEPTEMBER

The Awards Ceremony
The competition results were announced and the prizes presented on Sunday. An exciting period had come to an end for the participants. Some received the recognition they had hoped for; others could at least take away valuable experience. The jury had also experienced an intense few days. Judging very different acts is not always easy.

The Fröhlich Award for Wittus Witt and Hans Peter
Wittus Witt and Hans Peter, two people who have made important contributions to magic over many decades, received awards. Wittus Witt is a performer, author and publisher who regularly brings fresh ideas and often challenging questions to our community. Through the meetings he organised at Hotel Peter in Saalbach, Hans Peter created a home for numerous magician friends over the decades. More than 60 such gatherings speak for themselves. They are two very different personalities with something important in common: their commitment extends far beyond their own performing careers. Separate articles in this issue are devoted to both recipients.

A Farewell Surprise
Hanno Rhomberg also received an entirely unexpected surprise. The convention team thanked him for his many years of service to magic. Lars Tepel presented an award from the German Magic Circle (MZvD), while Thomas Vollmann presented a bust of Joseph Fröhlich with Hanno's facial features, created by Wolfgang Moser. Hanno thanked his team, the many volunteers and, especially, his wife Gabi. None of this work would have been possible without her and the many friends and supporters involved. Special thanks also went to Alexander Krist, who provided his two gala performances in Bad Aussee without charging a fee.

Alexander Krist – Magic & Illusions
Alexander Krist from Munich provided the artistic finale of our convention for magicians. With excerpts from his programme, he presented part of the production he also performs in his own theatre. In the afternoon, he gave an expanded version for the general public, which received very positive press coverage.

Farewell to Bad Aussee
Four days pass faster than you might think. On Sunday, most visitors had to say goodbye. A few more conversations, last-minute purchases from the dealers, souvenir photos – and then the journey home. For our team, however, the work


Magic Monday


Fröhlich Award Ceremony


Charlie Caper


Alexander Krist

was not quite over. The public gala was still scheduled for the afternoon. Hanno then went on tour with the African performers for five events, followed by settling the convention accounts. Despite the enormous effort involved, the result was not a financial disaster but a break-even balance.

And What Else?

Naturally, the convention was about much more than its official programme. The dealers' area was always busy; there were countless conversations in the foyer, spontaneous performances and encounters with artists otherwise known only from videos or specialist magazines. And, of course, there were the many helpers. Around 25 friends worked to ensure everything ran as smoothly as possible, from registration and artist hospitality to technical production and countless little tasks most visitors never even notice. We wanted to capture some of those impressions here as well.

Thank you to all the volunteers, performers, guests, sponsors and families who made this convention possible! Seven gala shows, six lectures and talks, an international competition and some 350 visitors: those are the numbers. But numbers reveal very little about a convention.

It mattered to us that visitors could attend as much of the programme as possible without having to choose between simultaneous events. We wanted to present complete shows and offer young artists opportunities they might not otherwise receive. Did every item appeal to every visitor? We hope everyone took something away: new ideas, interesting encounters or simply a few wonderful days with friends in magic.

Next Generation of Magic

– Happily Exhausted

TEXT: MAURICE GRANGE, PHOTOS: PETER KAINRATH



Carlitos | Pia Reip | Romain Dewasme | Fabienne Walz | Maurice Grange

Five young magicians, one young director, one young-at-heart **Thomas Otto** and, seven days later, a bold gala show.

The idea wasn't to create a conventional gala but rather a show, a play – whatever you want to call it. The group included **Finn Talin** (director), **Pia Reip**, **Romain Dewasme**, **Carlitos**, **Fabienne Walz** and **Maurice Grange** (me). Thomas Otto accompanied the project, giving us freedom while always offering an artistic helping hand. Stefan Siebert provided the narrator's voice in recordings.

So we had five acts and seven days to create a show that wouldn't feel like a gala. I hadn't felt as free as I did during those seven days in a very long time. We laughed, danced and fooled around, and in the end we described ourselves as 'happily exhausted'. Finn guided us through the week. On day one, we performed our acts, brainstormed about them, got to know each other and discussed the lecture. On day two, Finn explained his concept, and things really got going. We opened up: which parts of ourselves could we recognise in Finn's concept, what was on our minds and what stories had we always wanted to tell?

That became the basis for the show's transitions. At their core they were Finn's ideas, but each contained something of us. As the days passed, the magic itself gradually receded into the background. We wanted to create images, and what did we have to work with? A bed, some pillows and our emotions. We played out a little horror scene in which Pia sat on a bed that began to move on its own until a strange hand touched her. We staged a pillow fight with strobe lighting, a five-person choreography on the bed, shadow theatre and much more that never actually made it into the gala.

We cleaned stones, juggled pillows, said 'hi' and constantly stood up only to sit back down. Every morning we stretched to warm up – not for two hours in search of inner peace, but simply because it was fun. By the end of the week, I could touch my toes with my legs straight. Well, only using an extra-long thumb tip, but still!

Of course there were frustrating moments and disagreements, but that's part of it. We could always say 'no' (or 'yes' – only yes means yes). We didn't really leave our comfort zones; we created a comfort zone in which stepping outside it didn't feel uncomfortable. Above all, Finn made sure we felt free.

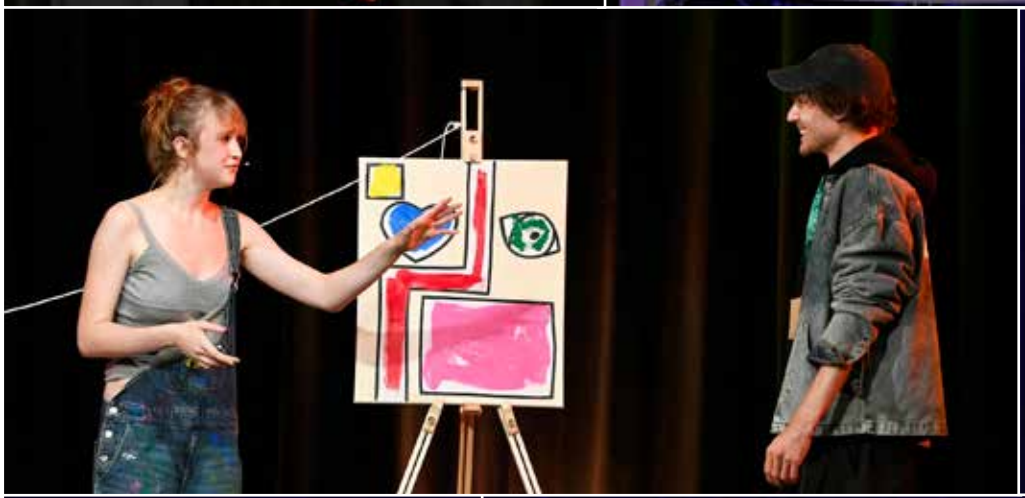
We had a few rules that helped enormously: we brainstormed everyone's acts together; we put our phones away (not always successfully); every idea was welcome; personal things stayed in the rehearsal room. And if you offered someone an idea, it became theirs.

Why don't we get opportunities like this more often? In France, entire magic productions receive public funding and creative workshop days are paid for. In Germany, things are different: most funding goes to state theatres and traditional art forms. That's why we have to make projects like this happen ourselves.

We would love to repeat the project. I am simply grateful for the time we shared and now need some quiet to process it all. And perhaps we managed to think a little less about the tricks and techniques, and a little more about what we want to say – about what stories we want to tell using magic as our language.










‘We Need to Be Braver Again!’

Thomas Otto on the Fröhlich-Zauberkongress 2026, young talent, artistic freedom and why magic conventions should be more than a succession of flawless acts.

INTERVIEW: HANNO RHOMBERG, PHOTOS: PETER KAINRATH

Thomas Otto was a member of the creative organising team for the Fröhlich-Zauberkongress 2026 in Bad Aussee. He developed the idea for the Next Generation of Magic youth project and shared insights into his Chop Cup routine, refined over many years, in a lecture. In conversation with Aladin, he looks back on an intense period and discusses what magic needs in the future.

‘Many good cooks can also prepare a good meal.’

Thomas, this was your first time helping organise a major magic convention. How did you find the experience?

Thomas Otto: It was completely new territory for me. Of course, I’ve organised workshops for ten or twenty participants at my farm, but a convention on this scale is something else entirely. We prepared for more than a year and a half, spent countless hours discussing things together and had a few sleepless nights. Above all, I’ve developed even greater respect for the people who organise events like this.

The best part, though, was working with the team. We were very different personalities, and that was precisely our strength. People say too many cooks spoil the broth. But plenty of good cooks can make a delicious meal, too! We inspired each other, supported one another’s ideas and resolved differences of opinion constructively. Looking back, it was an incredibly rewarding experience.

What impressed you most about the convention?

Next Generation, naturally. That project affected me deeply. But working with the many volunteers, the backstage team and everyone else was also fantastic. I was especially pleased by the audience’s open-mindedness. We dispensed with the usual galas consisting of individual acts and presented entire shows instead. That allowed people to get to know performers much more deeply.

We also invited artists who had rarely appeared at conventions, such as David Eriksson. I was amazed by the enthusiastic response. Sometimes we underestimate our audiences. People are far more open to new things than we think.

Is there anything you would do differently in hindsight?
I’d have liked more comfortable spaces where people could sit together and talk. Those personal encounters are an essential part of a convention for me. And, generally speaking, we should think about better competition conditions. The performing conditions are not always ideal, especially for close-up contestants but also for stage performers.



‘Next Generation was a gift to me.’

The idea for Next Generation of Magic was yours. How did it come about?

I wanted to give young magicians their own stage. At our conventions, we often rely on familiar names, although there are many talented young people who deserve a chance. My idea was to bring together five young performers from different European countries. They would work together for a week to develop a new show based on their existing acts. To be perfectly frank, I initially expected an entertaining youth evening. I didn’t anticipate such an intense artistic process.

The show developed into a serious, emotionally powerful work. What part did you play in that?

Initially, I simply wanted to establish the organisational framework and let the young performers get on with it. But I became increasingly involved in the process. Finn Talin, who directed the show, was absolutely crucial. In an amazingly short time he established a remarkable atmosphere of trust. The young artists were willing to open up, experiment, accept criticism and even fail.

I deliberately held back from artistic decisions. It was supposed to be their show, not our idea of what young magic should look like. What I experienced during those seven days was extraordinary. I’ve rarely seen such different people work so openly and trustingly together.

At some point, I realised that what eventually happened on stage was no longer the most important thing. The creative process itself was an enormous gift. Of course I was especially happy when the audience responded so enthusiastically to the show.

The performers presented their existing acts. Wasn't that also a kind of safety net?

Of course. That was the plan from the start. You can't create a completely new show from scratch in six days; that would take months. But it was impressive how intensively the young artists worked on their existing pieces too. They gave each other feedback, tried new things and improved their performances. Out of these very different acts, a shared artistic statement eventually emerged.

What can other conventions learn from this project?

That we need to place more trust in young people. The next generation often wants to express more on stage than just tricks and gags. They want to share feelings, ideas and personal experiences. That requires space and organisers willing to allow experimentation.

I very much hope our project inspires others. Incidentally, the group has stayed together, still meets regularly online and wants to keep working on the show. I'd be involved again in a heartbeat!

'Sharing knowledge makes me happy.'

You also gave a lecture on your Chop Cup routine. Was it difficult to share so much knowledge accumulated over many years?

Quite the opposite! I enjoyed it enormously. This routine contains countless ideas, technical details and experiences built up over many years. Preparing the lecture reminded me just how much thought had gone into it.

The feedback was particularly lovely. Some colleagues sent me photographs afterwards because they'd started sewing the special balls themselves. One is even working on his own vest. That makes me happy, because it shows that someone has really engaged with the ideas and might develop something of their own.

I also learn a great deal myself from questions and exchanges with colleagues during lectures. That's why lectures are always too short for me.

'The Africans won our hearts.'

After the convention, I spoke with the young performers from Cape Town's College of Magic. For one of the young women, your Chop Cup lecture was among the highlights. She was especially impressed by the amount of work behind a seemingly simple routine.



That genuinely moves me! Those young people impressed me tremendously. When you consider the social circumstances in which that magic school was established, its work takes on special significance. But what fascinated me most was their joy in life. The energy, enthusiasm and passion they showed on stage were incredible. They won our hearts in seconds.

What I found interesting was that the tricks themselves almost became secondary. What mattered was how these young people presented themselves and the presence they brought to the stage.

Exactly! Of course tricks matter. But the crucial thing is what you do with them, how much joy you bring to performing and what emotions you communicate. Sometimes we become so absorbed in technique and perfection that we forget why we do magic in the first place.

'Art is allowed to unsettle people.'

There are many different magic cultures and artistic developments around the world that are scarcely represented at our conventions. Shouldn't we look much further beyond our familiar horizons?

Absolutely! Magic is incredibly diverse worldwide, yet our conventions often show only a small part of it. We depend too much on familiar names and familiar programmes. We could learn so much from other cultures, other generations and new forms of artistic expression.

Conventions should be places for encounters, inspiration and exchange.

Many magic conventions today are essentially events where experts entertain other experts. Shouldn't we provide much more room for experimentation and debate?

Definitely. Naturally we want to see great acts and be entertained. But a convention should offer more. I want to discover something new, learn something and perhaps encounter



things that challenge me. Not everything has to appeal to everyone all the time.

To me, art is also about engaging with ideas. It can raise questions, spark debate and sometimes even unsettle people. If we always play safe and present only what is guaranteed to work, our art will eventually become boring.

'We need organisers with courage.'

But organisers also have to think commercially. A convention must pay for itself, and well-known names are easier to sell than experimental productions.

Of course I understand that. But Bad Aussee showed that courage can pay off. David Eriksson was an experiment. We didn't know how his programme would be received, and then he became one of the convention's highlights.

We need organisers who trust their concept and are willing to take risks. And we need audiences that remain curious too.

You mentioned the great artistic freedom enjoyed by our organising team. Was that a decisive factor for you?

Absolutely. We were able not only to develop ideas but actually to put them into practice. You gave us the opportunity to try things out without every artistic decision being questioned again. That was an essential foundation for our work.

I believe trust and mutual appreciation are crucial if something new is to emerge. And we didn't just create major programme items; we also paid attention to lots of little details. For me, that produced a very personal, human convention. I hope Bad Aussee inspires other organisers as well.

'Magic is, and always will be, my life.'

Thomas, what will you personally take away from this experience?

Above all, gratitude. Gratitude for the people I worked with, for the friendships and the many experiences. Next Generation moved me deeply. The College of Magic showed me how much joy magic can bring. And working with the team reminded me what is possible when people trust one another.

I think we should once again focus more strongly on emotion in magic. Of course technique, perfection and great tricks are important. But ultimately it's about touching people's hearts. For me, magic is the most wonderful thing in the world. I love this art more than anything. Magic is, and always will be, my life.

The interview took place after the Fröhlich-Zauberkongress 2026 and was edited and shortened for publication. The complete interview (german language) is available at: https://zauberfestival.life/thomas-otto-interview/



Thomas Otto – Standing Ovation

TEXT: TOBY RUDOLF, FOTO: PETER KAINRATH.

I always find lecture reviews interesting, because the essential question is: Should I have attended this lecture or not? I believe you can learn something from every lecture, some more than others. Thomas Otto's is right at the top of my 'must see' list.

It's always a pleasure to hear Thomas Otto talk about magic and explain his thinking. Even if you never intend to perform the Chop Cup, there is a great deal to learn from this lecture. The title suggests it's about the Chop Cup, but in fact it is about so much more.

Thomas provides carefully researched details about a classic that many of us rather casually keep in our 'Oh, I could perform that as well' repertoire. Watching him get so much out of an apparently modest effect is worth attending the lecture in itself.

It's impossible to reproduce every detail, idea and piece of information, but I'd like to record a few things I found especially valuable. This review might end up sounding more like a tribute than a lecture report, but it really is all incredibly clever.

For a start, I had never known why we call it a Chop Cup. I didn't know the name comes from Al Wheatley, who performed as 'Chop Chop'.

In the first part, Thomas concentrates on making the Chop Cup experience as pleasant as possible for the spectator – as visible and easy to follow as possible. He discusses the contrast between the ball and your clothing, the height at which the trick is performed and the background in general.

For instance, Thomas takes three tables of different heights to his engagements to ensure the ball is clearly visible. He also coordinates his outfit and his balls (which sounds rather hilarious, especially if you remember David Eriksson's late-night show). Thinking about visibility immediately inspires me. A drum kit in the background can cause enormous visual distraction. If you wear a white shirt, a white ball held in front of it is almost invisible. These considerations about contrasting props alone made the lecture worth attending for me.

Thomas usually brings a backdrop and a small stage too, simply to ensure good visibility – a level of effort most of us tend to avoid.

He demonstrates his complete routine. First we watch a video of a live performance and discuss it, then Thomas goes through every step live, explaining why he structured the routine as he did.



Seemingly minor details – using a fairly large cork ball containing steel screws on every side, covering it in leather and placing the magnet in the cup – take the effect to a completely different level.

The advantage is that the balls contain no magnets themselves, yet are still attracted to a magnet. That prevents confusion between balls. If there are two balls in the Chop Cup, only the upper one sticks to the cup's magnet, while the lower one drops out. The cup therefore appears empty. Thomas stresses how important he finds it that the audience actually sees the ball fall out of the cup.

Thomas's cup was turned from a solid piece of metal by Auke van Dokkum. It is large enough, tapers towards the top and has a magnet in its base. The inside is lined with Velcro to deaden noise. As well as the cup and balls, Thomas uses a glass and a silk handkerchief.

In his routine the ball repeatedly appears 'under' – or, as far as I remember while trying to reconstruct the routine – inside a little glass beneath the Chop Cup. At one point the glass itself returns beneath the cup. That's what the Velcro lining is for.

What I particularly appreciate is that Thomas shows us his entire setup. He explains exactly how he prepares and shares every single load.

He starts by polishing the fruit. This makes it look better, and because most fruit has a waxy coating, it also slides more easily through the sleeve and loading tube – more on that in a moment. He then performs the entire routine using a transparent cup, allowing us to see precisely where every ball is.

Rather than putting the ball into an outside trouser or jacket pocket, Thomas apparently places it in his inside jacket pocket. A ball in an outer pocket would create an obvious bulge. Instead, he secretly moves it into his sleeve, allowing him to drop it into and reload the cup later.

Thomas Otto's Chop Cup Secrets

TEXT: DIETER K. GOLF, IBM-RING VIENNA

Have you ever seen a Chop Cup performance using a transparent cup? Thomas Otto uses one in his lecture – although 'only' for demonstration. And that brings us to one of his favourite topics: visibility. The ever-cheerful lecturer has even considered the background of a magic show. He presents a photo in which the main thing you see is a drum kit, with him standing alongside it. In fact, the tripod in front of the drums isn't part of a cymbal stand at all – it's his magic table. You can barely make out the ball lying to the right of a cup. His recommendation is therefore a black backdrop, but 'Don't wear a black jacket as well,' he laughs, 'or nobody will be able to distinguish anything!' With a mischievous grin he asks why some magicians perform the black egg bag while wearing a black shirt.

He has also chosen his cup carefully: a wooden cup in the Ken Brooke style, which doesn't reflect light like a chrome-plated Chop Cup. It contains a magnet and is lined with Velcro to reduce noise. Six screws are driven into each of the two nonmagnetic balls (made of cork?) – top and bottom, left and right, front and back – and the balls are covered in leather. Thus the magnet attracts them, but they do not attract one another.

I tried this at home and failed miserably. The ball didn't always behave as it should. Too heavy, and the magnet couldn't hold it; make the magnet stronger, and it wouldn't release the ball even when I put the cup down firmly. I am sure Thomas Otto would explain it in more detail if you wrote to him. In his lecture, he even offers to send a video on request showing exactly when and how the cup is loaded with the lemon and mandarin.

The inventor's 'best-kept secret', as advertised in the convention programme, is the so-called loading vest. Apart from a photograph, it should remain a secret to readers who did not attend. But I think I may reveal what it achieves: no suspiciously bulging pockets when the lemon and mandarin are in the vest. It also enables him to load the cup while performing on a platform in the middle of an audience surrounding him at the Palazzo. Incidentally, he slips the ball inside his jacket rather than into an outside pocket. Chapeau!

Like Larry Jennings, Ken Brooke and others, he begins with the cup wrapped in a handkerchief. He lets the cloth hang down from his right hand, giving him perfect cover for anything concealed there, even under difficult performing conditions. Paul Daniels had it easier on television and performed without a handkerchief, astonishing audiences with rapid repetitions of the ball's appearance and disappearance. Thomas Otto, entertainer and host, takes a different approach. The Chop Cup is his opener because it offers immediate opportunities for audience interaction. As he puts it, his presentation moves 'away from making fools of people and towards playing together'.

At the end, someone asks the passionate magician what he does if he isn't as cheerful as he is during the lecture. 'If I go on stage without feeling motivated, I perform less well, that's true. So I try to remember a particularly good show from the past beforehand.' I suspect he rarely needs to do that.

My Passion Project – *Magic of Africa*

How an encounter with a South African magic school became a project that has accompanied me for five years.

TEXT: HANNO RHOMBERG, PHOTOS: HANNO RHOMBERG. PETER KAINRATH

Some projects become especially close to your heart. We all know the feeling, though the projects differ from person to person. I think it's important to have them. You invest time and energy, sometimes more than would seem sensible, and accept risks you might otherwise avoid.

I've had several such projects in magic. The *Aladin* you're reading is one of them. Turning a club magazine into something more than a newsletter was already the vision of my predecessors, and I've always felt committed to it. The same was true of the *Fröhlich-Zauberkongress*. I wanted to create the sort of convention I would enjoy attending myself, with unusual ideas and content not dictated solely by famous names or superlatives.



But what has now become perhaps my most personal project is my collaboration with Cape Town's College of Magic.

What Really Remains?

I spent over 35 years working in the international pharmaceutical industry, mainly in marketing and management. Success was measured by increased sales, market share and profits. Anyone who has worked in that world knows how satisfying it can be when a strategy succeeds. But they also know the drawbacks: stress, deadlines and often far too little private life.

One incident has stayed with me. My son, then six, asked me one day, 'Dad, what do you actually do at work?' I genuinely had to think about how to answer. A child can easily understand what a firefighter, farmer or doctor does. But how do you explain to a six-year-old that you develop marketing strategies so a company can sell its products more successfully?

The question stayed with me. What makes an activity meaningful? What remains when it's over? As magicians, we have it easier. We can make people happy, fill them with wonder and help them forget everyday worries for a while. And sometimes, perhaps, our art can achieve a little more.

An Unusual Magic School

In 2021, the organisation Jugend Eine Welt contacted me. Two visitors from a Cape Town magic school were travelling in Austria, and I was asked whether I could establish contacts with the Austrian magic community. That was how I met Sinethemba Bawuti, a teacher at the College of Magic, and his young student Sikelewa. We arranged several performances and press events, including at the Zauberkasten Museum, the Magic Circle Vienna, the Circus and Clown Museum and Theater im Stöckl in Schönbrunn.

I learned more about the College of Magic. Founded in 1980, the school works mainly with children and teenagers, some of whom grow up in very difficult social circumstances. They learn magic, juggling, dance, puppetry, stage technology and much more. But its real purpose goes beyond that: confidence, discipline, creativity, teamwork and developing skills useful later in life. This is in keeping with Don Bosco's educational philosophy, which also underpins Jugend Eine Welt: overcoming poverty through education.

Curiosity led me to plan a holiday in South Africa. The sightseeing tour was a good opportunity, but my main aim was to get to know the College. We spent five days in Cape Town. I visited the school and accompanied the children to two performances in townships. I will never forget those experiences.

On stage I witnessed a professionalism I had not expected and an infectious enthusiasm from the audience. People laughed, danced and celebrated the young performers. The students' motivation especially impressed me. One boy caught my attention because he seemed to sit almost continuously at a table practising card sleights. He was a rather shy boy named Sinalo, who would later play an important part in this story.

I decided to sponsor the education of one student and deliberately left the choice to the College. That education costs around €600 a year and lasts six years – a manageable sum by our standards, yet one that can make a real difference there.

The First Attempt

In 2024, I invited two young performers and their teacher Sinethemba to our convention for the first time. It wasn't entirely smooth sailing. Some members of our organising team questioned whether the young Africans could match the high artistic standard of the international stars. So I initially scheduled them for *Aladin's Magic Hour*, where we presented special MRA projects.

But their performance quickly changed my colleagues' minds. The young artists impressed everyone so much with their joy and charisma that we eventually included them in

the main gala. I found that a revealing experience. Even in a team that considers itself open-minded and willing to experiment, there are evidently preconceptions about what belongs on the main convention stage. The most technically demanding or spectacular trick is not necessarily the one that has the greatest impact on an audience. Naturally, this involved considerable organisational work. Visas, insurance, flights, accommodation and financing were anything but simple. But it was worth it.

2026 – This Time, a Complete Show!

For my final Fröhlich-Zauberkongress in 2026, I wanted to develop the project further. This time, Africa would not be represented by a few individual acts but by a complete show of its own. Then I had the idea of taking the show on a tour of Austria after the convention. In retrospect, that was quite brave – or perhaps a little reckless. After all, the show didn't even exist yet.

I gave the College complete artistic freedom in choosing the performers and developing the production. My contacts were **Chad Findlay** and **Sinethemba Bawuti**. The only requirement was a coherent show of about an hour that represented the College and its philosophy. And so Magic of Africa – Ubuntu Illusions was born.

Ubuntu is an African concept that can roughly be translated as 'I am because we are'. It expresses community, mutual respect and our dependence on one another. The story takes place in the College of Magic's attic, where the young artists discover mysterious boxes containing various gifts from Africa. This provided a framework for their individual acts.

When I watched the first rehearsal video, however, I became quite worried. There were no costumes, no stage lighting and the running order was still unfinished. I wondered whether it would really work, and a few sleepless nights followed. But I had decided to trust the College and didn't want to interfere with its artistic work.

The subsequent preparations demonstrated a high level of professionalism: detailed lighting and stage-management plans, precise technical specifications and specially produced music – a standard I have sometimes missed even with established performers.

Ubuntu – Even When Things Get Difficult

The premiere took place at the Fröhlich-Zauberkongress in Bad Aussee on 11th September. A few hours before the performance, Sibabalwe, the youngest of the group, developed severe abdominal pain and had to be taken to hospital in Bad Ischl with suspected appendicitis. Just what we needed!

Suddenly only three of the four performers were available. But the group remained remarkably calm, rearranged the programme and performed that evening so successfully that some spectators never realised someone was missing. For me, that too was an example of Ubuntu: helping one another and making the best of a difficult situation.



The following day, I collected Sibabalwe from the hospital. When I entered his room, doctors and nurses were gathered around him as he performed magic and juggling for everyone. He had even appeared on the hospital's television service, and the hospital management was already interested in a possible appearance at a medical convention in 2027.

Imagine that: you go into hospital and emerge with the possibility of a booking!

A Tour and Many New Friends

After Bad Aussee, we travelled on to Fieberbrunn, Dornbirn and Vienna. Almost all the performances sold out, and the media gave the project welcome and extensive coverage. What was particularly pleasing was that the College's story, not just the magic, proved interesting to journalists.

The tour involved some financial risk. All the more pleasing, then, that we covered our costs and were also able to make a donation to the College. But that was only one part of the story.

My wife Gabi and I hosted the young performers privately in our home for several days. We cooked together, stayed up talking late into the night and got to know one another away from the stage. Perhaps that was the loveliest part of the en-





tire journey. The artists whose performances I had initially wanted to arrange had become friends.

I have rarely met people who approach what they do with such joy and enthusiasm. Of course they are not saints, any more than we are. There were difficulties, misunderstandings and exhausting days. But their positive attitude and the way they dealt with problems impressed me. And I think our sometimes rather self-absorbed magic community could learn a thing or two from them.

Who Actually Benefits from Whom?

Looking back over the past few years, my work with the College of Magic has long since become more than a charity initiative. Financial support is important, of course. I'm delighted if we can use our resources to create opportunities for young people. But I've also benefited enormously myself.

I've met fascinating people, made friends, learned about a different culture and experienced things that would probably have remained unknown to me without this project. The young artists' excitement at meeting their idols, the joy of performing, our conversations and shared experiences – all of it has enriched my own life.

Perhaps that's exactly what I value so much about the project. You start out intending to do something for others and eventually realise you've received at least as much in return.

I'm not telling this story because I think I've done something especially extraordinary. Countless people do far more for others. But perhaps it might encourage someone to try something similar.

You don't have to invite four performers from South Africa and organise a tour. There are many smaller ways to use magic to do something meaningful. And anyone who tries may have an experience like mine: a good deed for others can become something that gives you enormous personal joy.

In business, we would call that a win-win situation. In South Africa, they have a more beautiful word for it: Ubuntu.

Following this article, we introduce the young College of Magic performers in greater detail. We also publish a review of the Austrian tour from the Vorarlberg arts press, together with an interview with Sinalo Mtwana about his path in magic and his competition successes.





A Journey That Changed Us

Four guests from Cape Town describe their experiences in Austria.

TEXT: HANNO RHOMBERG, PHOTOS: PETER KAINRATH, HANNO RHOMBERG, ...

For our four visitors from Cape Town's *College of Magic*, travelling to Austria was anything but an everyday opportunity. Some had barely travelled beyond their home city. Passports had to be obtained in some cases, along with visas and all the preparations involved in visiting another continent. Then, in September 2026, they suddenly found themselves on stage at the Fröhlich-Zauberkongress in Bad Aussee, meeting international magic stars and subsequently touring Austria with *Magic of Africa – Ubuntu Illusions*.

What did the journey mean to them? Which encounters stayed with them? And might it even have changed how they imagined their own futures? We asked all four about their experiences.

Our interviewees: **Sinethemba Bawuti**, magic teacher at the College of Magic and leader of the group; **Lithemba Mti** (19), magician, **Sinalo Mtwana** (18), magician, **Sibabalwe Khwezi** (17), magician.

'I Just Couldn't Believe It!'

How did you react when you learned you would be travelling to Austria?

Lithemba: I was so happy I could hardly believe it. My heart was pounding; I was screaming and beaming. A dream was coming true: travelling overseas! I was really proud and incredibly excited.

Sinalo: I was very excited and grateful for the chance to represent Africa and the *College of Magic* in Austria. It was my first international performance. Of course I was nervous too, but above all proud of the opportunity.

Sibabalwe: I felt very nervous and incredibly excited at the same time. The very thought of being able to travel to another country was special. I was so grateful for the opportunity.

Sinethemba: I was overjoyed. It wasn't just an opportunity to share our magic; I could also represent my homeland and South Africa's talent. At the same time, I knew I would learn a lot and gain new experiences myself.

Austria? Cold, Quiet and Rather Serious!

What did you expect Austria and the convention to be like? And what was the reality?

Lithemba: I imagined a huge convention with lots of famous magicians. I thought Austria would be very cold and quiet, with beautiful buildings and rather serious people. But everyone was much warmer and friendlier than I had expected! The convention was even bigger and more impressive than I'd imagined. And the buildings were even more beautiful than in the pictures.

Sinalo: I hoped to meet magicians from different countries and discover their perspectives on magic. I was particularly curious about how an Austrian audience would react to us. Everyone was incredibly friendly and supportive. That helped me become more confident during my first performances abroad. I took home so many new ideas.

Sibabalwe: I expected to meet new people and lots of magicians. But I experienced much more than I ever imagined. The trip taught me things about life too. I saw the opportunities available and where magic might take you.

Sinethemba: I was curious about how people live in Austria and experience magic. My expectations were exceeded. What struck me most was how warmly we were welcomed. I saw that magic can bring people from very different cultures together.

Bees, Mountains and a Pretty Crazy Show

What were your happiest and most unforgettable experiences?

Sinalo: The best thing for me was touring with Hanno. We had so much fun together! Even the bees that kept attacking our food have become part of our memories. Meeting Peter Marvey and Vini was another highlight.





One of our craziest memories, though, is the day Sibabalwe became ill and had to go to hospital. We had fewer than three hours until showtime and suddenly had to figure out how to perform without him. In the middle of all that stress, we even invented a song about him! It wasn't funny at the time, but now we have to laugh about it.

Sibabalwe: Just getting there was an adventure. While we were travelling to Austria, I realised we were taking a second flight – that was a very special moment! But my favourite part was the car journeys with Hanno. We drove through Germany past all those beautiful houses. I kept staring out of the window in amazement. I'll never forget it.

Lithemba: For me, it was meeting magicians from around the world. I learned new tricks, watched shows and had the opportunity to perform myself. But the food, mountains and walks through the towns were wonderful too. Everything was so clean and beautiful!

Sinethemba: I particularly remember the people we met. We were able to share our magic while learning so much from others. The whole Ubuntu tour was much more than a journey. It created friendships and memories that will last.

Who impressed you most?

At a convention with so many excellent performers, everyone naturally has personal favourites.

Sinalo: Alex impressed me with his mentalism routine in which he bent a spoon. Not just the effect, but especially how he presented it. I also loved Carlitos from the Next Generation gala. His timing and misdirection were outstanding. It truly felt like magic. My absolute favourite, though, was Nikolai with his flying aeroplane act. That completely astonished me!

Sibabalwe: Alexander Krist really impressed me, as did many other artists and the way magic is performed in Austria. I was especially interested in how performers develop ideas and turn them into magic. And of course I loved the magician with the flying paper aeroplanes!

Lithemba: I was particularly impressed by the magicians working with cups and balls or playing cards. Their hands were unbelievably quick! And they were all very friendly and showed me so much.

Sinethemba: Above all, I was impressed by the different styles and the creativity. Everyone had something special. It reminded me again that magic is much more than doing tricks. It's about presentation, storytelling, practice and making a connection with the audience.

Can You Make a Living from Magic?

Has the journey changed the way you see your future?

Sinalo: Definitely. I picked up lots of ideas that I could immediately incorporate into my own act, including for my competition on 3 October. Most importantly, I saw that some people really can earn a living from magic. It showed me that magic can be more than a hobby if you work hard and take it seriously.

But in South Africa, it's very difficult to make a living as a magician, so I have to be realistic. Next year I'll start university. I definitely want to keep improving alongside my studies.

I'm still young and don't know where magic will take me, but now I know there are far more possibilities than I imagined.

Lithemba: This journey showed me that my dream is possible. I want to become a professional magician and travel the world performing. I'll practise every day to achieve that. I also want to teach magic to other children. At the same time, I intend to focus on my education and save money so I can travel again. The journey opened my eyes. Now I want to seize every opportunity that comes my way.

Sibabalwe: I came home incredibly inspired. I realised there's so much you can do with magic and that it can help you build your own future. I want to perform for more and more people, show them my magic and share it with others. It's important to me to use magic in the right way so people remember both me and the magic. And I want to make my parents proud.

Sinethemba: The journey motivated me enormously too. I want to continue working on my magic, developing new ideas and performing for as many people as possible. Above all, I want to inspire young people back home. I've seen what doors magic can open and I want to pass that experience on.

More Than a Magic Journey

At the end of our interviews, Sinethemba and Sibabalwe sent two personal messages.

Sinethemba 'Thank you once again to you and Gabi for believing in us and making this journey possible. I will always cherish this opportunity and our shared memories. The Ubuntu tour reminded me that magic is more than entertainment. It brings people together, creates friendships and shows us that, despite different backgrounds and cultures, we can be connected by something beautiful.'

And **Sibabalwe** schrieb: 'Thank you for this opportunity. Thank you for giving us so much love and care. You will always remain in our hearts. I really hope we see each other again soon.'

Perhaps that is the most important lesson of the journey. Of course the performances, convention and meetings with international stars were extraordinary. But equally important for our guests was discovering that their abilities are appreciated far from home.

For us, it was a magic convention followed by a tour. For the young people from Cape Town, it may also have been a small glimpse of a future they could not previously have imagined. And who knows? Perhaps one day we'll see one of these young talents on a great international stage again – this time not as an awestruck convention visitor but as a celebrated artist.




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MAGIC
JUGEND
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The Magic of Togetherness

Excerpt from the *Zeitschrift für Kultur und Gesellschaft* (Journal of Culture and Society)

TEXT AND PHOTO: DANIEL FURXER, HTTPS://WWW.KULTURZEITSCHRIFT.AT

With *Magic of Africa – Ubuntu Illusions*, the ensemble of Cape Town's **College of Magic** visited TiK Dornbirn on 15 and 16 September. Three male magicians and one female magician presented inventive magic, juggling and music, coupled with an infectious joy in life.



From left: magicians Sibabalwe Khwezi, Lithemba Mti and Sinalo Mtwana delighted audiences with their show.

In the Zulu and Xhosa languages, Ubuntu stands for compassion, community and mutual respect. The four award-winning magicians came on stage in suits and traditional South African clothing. They didn't explain what Ubuntu means; they lived it. Performing as an ensemble, they complemented one another and repeatedly created opportunities for shared play between individual routines.

Sinalo Mtwana impressed with spectacular card magic. Cards mysteriously travelled from hand to hand, multiplied or reassembled after a corner had been torn off. He combined these effects with carefully rehearsed dance steps, making everything look both effortless and elegant. As with any good magic show, the audience wondered how on earth the effects were accomplished. There was, of course, no explanation. Magic depends on spectators rubbing their eyes in astonishment after each trick.

'As a child I was very shy and withdrew into my room,' says Sinalo Mtwana. 'Magic gave me the confidence to perform on stage and share my art.' He also loves that magic is a universal language capable of delighting people around the world.

With Ease and Humour

Lithemba Mti is a master of large-scale stage magic. She worked with rings and ropes, flags and colourful silks appearing from empty boxes. With a magic gesture she also filled empty containers with rice or water, providing a calmer counterpoint to the otherwise fast-paced show. Emerging artist Sibabalwe Khwezi hardly needed words to win the laughs. His mischievous facial expressions and gestures repeatedly created comic moments and gave the show a welcome lightness. Magic teacher **Sinethemba Bawuti** hosted the programme and linked the routines through a story that nevertheless took a back seat to the magic. The show was greeted with thunderous applause and incredulous amazement. In the end, perhaps the greatest illusion was that four people on stage made an entire room believe that, for a moment, anything was possible.

In the Midst of Apartheid

Contact with the magic school came about with support from the organisation *Jugend Eine Welt*. The school was founded in 1980 during apartheid, when it was legally forbidden to teach black and white pupils together. That did not stop the school from accepting children of all skin colours. Jugend Eine Welt follows Don Bosco's philosophy of helping young people build independent lives through education, trust and practical opportunities.

A Magic School That Teaches Life Skills

'With our magic school, we want to give our young students prospects for their lives. In a city badly affected by violence, drugs and sexual abuse, the aim is to empower children and young people,' says **Sinethemba Bawuti**. 'The goal is not solely to train professional magicians. Many graduates go into technical or manual professions,' stresses **Hanno Rhomberg**, organiser of the events. 'Above all, we want to encourage young people and help them develop self-worth.' The young people, often from socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods, also attend regular schools in Cape Town; the magic school operates on Saturdays. From the beginning, it has played an important part in giving them the chance of self-determined lives.

Close-up as It Should Be

A Different Kind of After-Show Party at the Fröhlich-Zauberkongress 2026

TEXT. ALEX RAY, HANNO RHOMBERG, PHOTOS: PETER KAINRATH



Patrick Folkerts



René Strassner

One special idea at the Fröhlich-Zauberkongress 2026 was Friday evening's after-show party. The upper floor of *Bad Aussee's Kur- und Congresshaus* became a meeting place for magic, music and conversation. Instead of another stage show, visitors could experience the way professional magicians actually work at corporate celebrations, receptions and other events.

The party began after Magic of Africa. Following the lively show by the young performers from Cape Town, everyone was in excellent spirits. Guests could decide for themselves where to linger, whom to watch and with whom to chat. Close-up magic was to happen without cameras or giant screens. However useful video feeds may be for competitions and lectures, they cannot replace the immediate experience of magic at the table.

The idea wasn't new. Years earlier, Roberto Giobbi had demonstrated in Basel how appealing close-up under different conditions could be. Vladimir Mikek had also organised a similar evening in Maribor. But would it work with around 350 convention visitors – as a relaxed party with plenty of time to talk?

Alex Ray handled the planning and concept, assisted by his wife Denise and magician friends. Turning an entire floor of the Congress Centre into a party area was no small undertaking. There had to be enough space for visitors and freedom of movement for performers.

Different performing situations were created: a dedicated close-up corner, long and round tables, standing tables, beer-hall benches and areas in which the magic was performed without any surface at all. The invited artists did not bring special routines put together for fellow magicians; they performed their normal professional repertoires. After all, conditions at corporate events and receptions are rarely ideal. Sometimes it's cramped, sometimes noisy, and sometimes a performer has to work without a table entirely.

That was what made it interesting. Guests could ask how a performer prepares their material for an evening or reacts when something unexpected happens. How do you begin at a standing table where people are already talking? And how do you finish an act without rudely interrupting their conversation? So the party had a touch of a lecture about it without ever turning into one.

A wonderful array of performers took part: **Bill Cheung**, **Magic Christian**, **Kurt Freitag**, **Gerry Scharnböck**, **Martin Kosch**, **Patrick Folkerts**, **Tonio Vesarri**, **René Strassner** and **Richard Rene**. Different generations and styles came together. Competition achievements were represented alongside decades of experience entertaining real-world audiences.

René Strassner and Richard Rene performed as walkaround artists. Patrick Folkerts offered another attraction with his stationary Minibar act, while Olga Balabon played piano throughout the evening. There was something to discover everywhere. Those who preferred to remain seated were entertained too, as the artists came to their tables. Small conversation-starter cards offered questions about close-up magic and quickly led to animated discussions.

There was no prescribed route through the evening. Anyone who wanted to could stop and watch a performance; others met friends. Before long, convention guests themselves were reaching for cards and props to show one another tricks.

Small groups formed around performers and dissolved naturally again. The closeness between artists and spectators came about all by itself.



Alex Ray on the stage

It wasn't an everyday experience for the performers either. Some initially had reservations: would the tried-and-tested routines and jokes they used at events work in front of so many fellow magicians? And should they reveal their best ideas to a specialist audience when there was a risk of copying? Those who know the methods and perform themselves often watch with different eyes. A familiar act can suddenly feel very different in front of colleagues.

But the doubts didn't last long. Soon the atmosphere became so relaxed that the artists grew increasingly free and expressive – some quite literally. The pleasure of performing together outweighed their initial misgivings. What became particularly interesting was how colleagues interacted with their audiences and solved difficult performing situations.

At the end, Richard Rene, Martin Kosch and René Strassner gave a short stage performance. It provided a shared finale without altering the evening's character. This time, the small stage was an addition, not the centre of attention.

Feedback after the convention was excellent. Raphael expressly mentioned the party as one of Bad Aussee's lovely ideas. Michelle Spillner praised the opportunity to celebrate together and the friendly atmosphere. With so much happening, nobody could see everything, but everyone could create an evening of their own without following a rigid schedule.

A great deal of preparation lay behind the relaxed atmosphere. Tables had to be arranged, artists coordinated and passageways kept clear. At the same time, the evening was not supposed to feel overly organised. Alex Ray, Denise and the many helpers played a vital role in achieving this. The last guests didn't leave until late at night.

So the after-show party became more than a social evening. It offered rare insights into the work of experienced event magicians and showed that excellent magic works without a large stage. Guests took away many impressions, while the artists shared the satisfaction of having created something special together.



Alex Ray

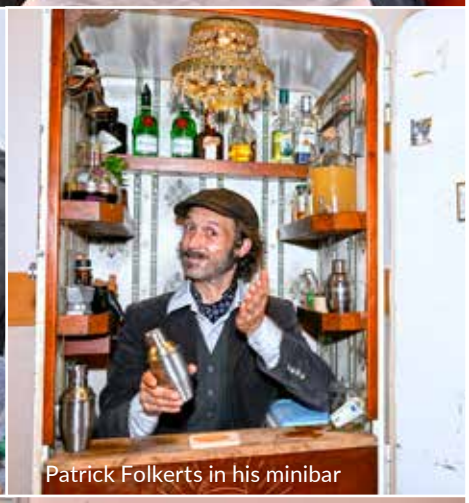

Kurt Freitag


Martin Kosch


Richard Rene


Magic Christian


Bill Cheung


Patrick Folkerts in his minibar



The Vanishing (eatable) Playing Cards'


Gerry Scharnböck

Giobbi Lets the Numbers Speak

TEXT: FRANZ KASLATTER, PHOTO: PETER KAINRATH

On Friday, 11 September, at 4:45 p.m., *Aladin's Magic Hour* began. **Hanno Rhomberg** brought a range of unusual projects out of his 'Aladin's bag of wonders' and examined them more closely with 'Aladin's magic lamp' for the interested audience. **Roberto Giobbi** received fifteen minutes to address piracy and the theft of authors' intellectual property. His main concern was to demonstrate through concrete figures that pirates steal products containing not only someone else's ideas but substantial financial investment.

He used his five-volume *Card College* series as an example: approximately 1,500 pages, each requiring an average of three hours of authorial work. Numerous illustrations were traced from specially taken Polaroid photographs, adding another 1,000 working hours at half an hour per drawing. Layout took around ten minutes per page; three proofreaders each needed another ten minutes per page. That already amounts to 6,500 hours of work, or € 65,000 even at the modest rate of € 10 per hour. Yet considerably more work is required before the books exist: corrections from the proofreaders must be incorporated into print files, and the books themselves must be printed at significant expense, among other costs.

With all that expense, just how much wealth does a famous book project like this generate?

Giobbi described the publication process in China as one example. Surprisingly, only 500 copies were to be printed for that enormous market, and the author would receive a € 2,000 fee plus royalties of 10–20 % of sales revenue. But the royalties were calculated only after the wholesaler's discount (perhaps a third gone already), then split with the translator (perhaps another half gone).

You get the picture: don't buy from pirates!

Despite his reputation for running over his allotted speaking time, Giobbi actually finished his provocative remarks before the bell rang.

https://www.robertogiobbi.com/site/product/grosse-kartenschule-1-2-3-4/



Hanno Rhomberg (left) and Roberto Giobbi (right)



Imperfection as a Strength

TEXT: ANDREA BAHN, PHOTOS: PETER KAINRATH





Charlie Capers' lecture at the Fröhlich Convention, with his thoughts on creativity, stage characters and individuality, gave me plenty to think about. Here are a few examples.

Caper originally came from street magic, so he is an expert in creating favourable show conditions, choosing the order of routines and especially managing transitions – the point at which street performers tend to lose the most spectators.

On finding your own stage persona, Caper says, 'Find your own character.' It's important to make decisions that define the world of that character: the place, time and universe they inhabit. All those decisions are reflected in your choice of plot, effects, props, music and costume. The best way to develop a character, he suggests, is to give them three traits, one of them relatively negative. 'Nothing perfect is charming.' In other words, you can turn your own imperfection into a strength.

Caper describes an act as a living creation that develops with repeated performances, born and dying anew each time. To keep it alive, the magician must still feel enjoyment and pleasure in performing it. Small adjustments based on feedback and audience reactions gradually improve an act. Ideally, the piece becomes so personal that only that particular performer could present it.

The audience saw him put all this into practice perfectly in his evening show. Thought-provoking reflections on AI and humanity's future, a magic-performing robot that seemed almost human, a robot dog turning somersaults, an AI-powered talking and interactive female head at the front of the stage and excellent technology made the evening special. The performer himself was energetically occupied keeping all his electronic props under control – a brilliant visual metaphor for humanity's relationship with AI.



Monday on a Saturday

TEXT: FRANZ KASLATTER, PHOTOS: PETER KAINRATH

We experienced the *Magic Monday* show in Bad Aussee on Saturday, 12 September, at 7:30 p.m. Don't ask why a Monday show was scheduled for Saturday: that's only the tiniest joke compared with this uproariously funny production. And I am not exaggerating – at one point I was literally doubled over laughing for minutes and could hardly stop. But let's begin at the beginning.

There are Magic Monday shows in several places – Munich, Linz, Oberursel and elsewhere. This *Magic Monday* comes from Frankfurt, where it has been staged regularly and successfully since around the turn of the millennium. The Frankfurt ensemble consists of four performers: **Michael Leopold** ('Monsieur Brezelberger'), **Pit Hartling** ('Heinz'), **Kay Schmid** ('Herr Schmid') and **Rainer Ewerrien** ('Herrmann'). The advance publicity stated that the four know their timing, characters and one another so well that they can improvise without losing control of the evening. I can only confirm it. Such familiarity opens up considerable artistic possibilities.

The evening began with **Wolfgang Moser**, from the rival Monday show in Linz, having to introduce the performers in unusually plain terms. He later told me they had insisted he abandon his prepared tribute and simply say: 'Enjoy the following four performers, who have been doing the same thing for 26 years.' Herrmann then appeared, responsible for the troupe as props man, stage manager, stagehand and truck driver. Without hesitation, he insulted the mayor of Bad Aussee, seated with his wife in the front row, by asking why anyone would buy such tasteless traditional clothing, let alone wear it. The level of cheekiness was immediately established, leaving plenty of latitude for what followed: Heinz performed a card routine, Herr Schmid destroyed a banknote and Monsieur Brezelberger performed cups and balls.

Then the lights went out because Herrmann wanted to install a decorative string of lights. This painfully recalled the previous magic convention, when Gaston had been forced to 'improvise' in darkness for almost half an hour during the evening gala and had no idea how to proceed. To everyone's delight, Herr Schmid repaired the lighting in a hilarious piece of physical slapstick.

Monsieur Brezelberger entered and cheerfully explained that he originally came from 'Bredouille' – a French-sounding place name that also means a predicament. You can take Brezelberger out of trouble and transport him to Bad Aussee, but you cannot take trouble out of Brezelberger. He evidently brings it with him wherever he goes. As he entered the audience to select a volunteer, his unnecessarily reassuring remarks made everyone even more nervous.

When he asked a woman to write the name of someone close to her on a slip of paper, she was so confused that she entered incomplete information in the wrong places. The mind-reading routine therefore dragged on as he tried to glean details from her thoughts with enormous difficulty. Eventually she openly resisted his questions. 'Does the house number begin with a nine?' – Spectator, suspiciously: 'Why should I tell you that?'

The further Brezelberger twisted and turned within his rigid mentalist routine, becoming entangled in increasingly ridiculous but recognisable mentalist strategies, the funnier it became for everyone present.

He could probably have continued stubbornly guessing for another fifteen minutes, but Herr Schmid intervened with the best of intentions and made everything still more chaotic. Brezelberger protested defiantly: 'But it's my act!' Schmid, exasperated: 'Yes, but everything is getting completely out of hand!' Brezelberger, shouting meekly: 'It's not my fault. She's so uncooperative!'

By then I was practically on the floor laughing. To make matters worse, Heinz came out from backstage to help, cau-



sing complete distraction with an 'absolutely astonishing' revelation. A large map was then converted into a kind of Ouija compass, and eventually, after considerable fuss and the combined efforts of everyone, the desired name emerged with the aid of old-fashioned mentalist spirit slates. By then the spectator stubbornly refused to admit anything at all. Schmid, solemnly: 'What's the person's name?' Spectator, defiantly: 'I've forgotten it now.' Heinz, slyly: 'Perhaps it'll come back to you!'

Please forgive me if I've muddled the sequence a little, as I'm writing this from memory several weeks after the event. All in all, the evening was a firework display of magic that genuinely astonished lay audiences, stage characters polished over decades and an ensemble of superb acting ability. Out of curiosity, Herrmann squeezed himself into a Zig-Zag illusion box, only to be ruthlessly crushed when the others became so excited about the original Puchinger construction ('with built-in coffee machine') that they stopped listening to him.

Herr Schmid brought his banknote-destruction trick to a happy conclusion when the apparently lost note turned up inside the very lemon a spectator had chosen as a souvenir of Monsieur Brezelberger's cups-and-balls routine. All four then performed Pavel's Super Walking Knot amid much tomfoolery, demonstrating how surprisingly conflict-ridden it can be when four people all pull on the same rope. Finally, each dressed as a representative of a different world culture and, using appropriate instruments, gave an accomplished and unusually cosmopolitan musical performance. At times it became another magnificent slapstick act because Heinz couldn't resist mischief in his sumo-wrestler costume.

Frankfurt's Magic Monday was a masterclass in how wonderful magic can be when performers are not only technically proficient magicians but also skilled, experienced actors. My admittedly superficial verdict, in the most positive sense: I haven't laughed so much in ages!

Failing Better

TEXT: FRANZ KASLATTER, PHOTOS: PETER KAINRATH, FRANZ KASLATTER

Michelle Spillner, editor-in-chief of the German magic magazine *Magie*, presented her established lecture *Failed? Fail Better!* at 4:45 p.m. on Saturday, 12 September, in Bad Aussee. She wants to encourage a more positive attitude towards failure. Failure is, after all, a kind of success if you use it as an opportunity to learn. Of course, that rhetorical argument creates a paradox in which one can only fail, and I suspect she knows that perfectly well. So I'll return the ball with a compliment: 'I honestly don't know what to say. I don't think you failed at all with your lecture. Does that mean it was a success? Or did you fail at failing?'

One might stubbornly argue that failure is not a positive quality indicator – not in magic, nor for entertainers such as tightrope walkers, jugglers, proper singers or stage actors. 'He needs more practice' is the justified response when vital lines are delivered incorrectly, a glaringly wrong note is sung, a ball is dropped, the tightrope walker falls or a magic effect fails. Audiences haven't paid to see failure but success, and a failure deprives them of what they were promised. How much worse, then, if the artist profits from the audience's disappointment by gaining a valuable learning opportunity at every show!

One of Spillner's best-known fellow 'failure specialists' was in the audience: **Tobias Rudolph**, stage name Toby, the 2024 German close-up champion. He has failed his way to becoming a genuine star of failure and also lectures on the subject. His expertise as a person who learns from mistakes even took him to the cover of Spillner's *Magie* (issue 1/25). Interestingly, he admitted in that interview that being told failure would make him better was initially 'completely unhelpful'. It took enormous tolerance for frustration and perseverance before he ultimately became so successful.

An amusing detail is that Spillner had herself been in the audience at Rudolph's lecture on failure in 2024 and photographed his PowerPoint presentation. Which of them started this failure movement – or whether both deserve equal blame – remains unclear.

Yet their approaches differ. Rudolph focuses mainly on assessment by others: messing up an academic defence, coming second in a magic championship or winning no prize at all. His message is to persevere; giving up means losing twice. Spillner views failure more broadly, including actual mishaps on stage. This creates parallels with improvisational theatre.

She therefore quoted two famous principles from Keith Johnstone's theatre-sports approach (1933–2023; Impro, 1979): first, accept everything; second, stay happy. Every unexpected event in improvisation is an offer to play. This applies not just to external disruptions but to your own mistakes. Spillner recommends greeting the unexpected with 'Yes, exactly!' The second principle in its original wording is 'Stay happy if you lose.' In magic, that means preserving your good humour when something goes wrong instead of collapsing in embarrassment or shouting angrily.



Michelle Spillner

That's reasonable enough, but I believe magicians must be clear about whether they're presenting an improvisation show or an actual magic performance. For almost every magician, apart from a few exceptions such as **Helge Thun**, there's a crucial difference. One further essential principle of improvisational theatre illustrates my reservation: 'Don't be prepared!' That rather obviously clashes with performing a magic trick.



Author Franz Kaslatter (on the right) and magic friend Reinhard Müller



MRA Championships at the Fröhlich-Zauberkongress 2026

TEXT AND PHOTOS: BARBARA PIROLT AND MARIO KRASSNITZER

Event: **FRÖHLICH-ZAUBERKONGRESS 2026**
(FISM-certified MRA Championships)
Venue: **Kur- und Congresshaus, Bad Aussee, Austria**
Dates: **Friday 11 and Saturday 12 September 2026**

Organisation and Proceedings

Hanno Rhomberg's organising team prepared the convention in advance. The jury, chaired by **Rudi Heuer**, applied the current FISM judging standards. The schedule was streamlined and the categories clearly organised. Host **Thomas Vollmann** guided the audience calmly and concisely through the championship. The jury handled judging, timekeeping and the selection of audience volunteers for the artists.


Die Jury

Friday, 11 September 2026
Stage and Parlour Championship

MORNING SESSION: STAGE CHAMPIONSHIP

10:00 – **Raphael Macho** (Austria, General Magic). Raphael Macho presented an English-language manipulation act exploring fears. His props included spiders, cards, sand, balls and flowers.


Raphael Macho

10:15 – **Hermann Rauschmayr and Franziska Kronsteiner** as **Die Queen & der Eduard** (Austria, Mental Magic). The duo presented a theatrical piece centred on testing a 'mind-manipulation helmet'. With an audience volunteer, they carried out and successfully completed the experiment in honour of Elise.


Hermann Rauschmayr & Franziska Kronsteiner

10:30 – **David Topsever** as **David Remsi** (Austria, Manipulation). David Topsever appeared in a contrasting black-and-white outfit. At first, his white cards were difficult to see against the bright background and lighting, but in the final third he visibly gained confidence and enjoyment.


David Topsever

10:45 – **Florian Brandstetter** (Austria, Mental Magic). Florian Brandstetter framed his mentalism routine as a bachelor's thesis. An audience participant and a telephone lifeline helped mathematically determine a playing card. Carefully detailed props, including a transparent library bag, reinforced the theme.


Florian Brandstetter

11:00 – **Toni Mitev** and **Alina Georgieva** as **Toni & Ali** (Austria, Mental Magic). The duo chose a casino theme for their mentalism act, incorporating card bets, bank cards and a final demonstration of proof on stage.

LATER MORNING SESSION: STAGE CHAMPIONSHIP

11:45 – **Mellow** (Germany, Grand Illusion). With two spectators, Mellow presented a time-travel act. Despite the tight space for illusion props on the Bad Aussee stage, the act worked, with deliberately staged transmission glitches.

12:00 – **Niklas Thuswald** (Austria, Manipulation). Niklas Thuswaldner performed transformations of playing cards into balls, using precise sleight of hand, confident stage expressions and closely coordinated musical timing.

12:15 – **Paula Irmer** (Germany, Manipulation). Paula Irmer combined manipulation with flamenco choreography using fans, flowers and cards. Among other effects, her black lipstick mysteriously vanished.

AFTERNOON SESSION: PARLOUR CHAMPIONSHIP

12:30 – Klaus Wiedermann (Austria, Parlour Magic). Klaus Wiedermann made tennis the theme of his routine. Manipulations and transformations of tennis balls created a story culminating in an awards ceremony on stage.

12:45 – **Alexander Lechner** as **Softy David** (Austria, Parlour Magic). Alexander Lechner combined smartphone apps and streaming references with card and number routines. Involving three spectators, he demonstrated thought patterns and a film prediction.

Saturday, 12 September 2026
Close-Up Championship

MORNING SESSION: CLOSE-UP, 11:00–11:45

11:00 – **Harald Brunner** als **Harry Fontaine** (Austria, Card Magic). Harald Brunner opened with 'Journey Through Time', performing classical card effects with several spectators, beginning with a still-sealed deck.

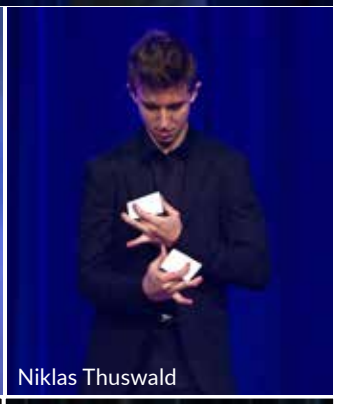
11:15 – **Pascal Glaser** (Austria, Micro-Magic). Pascal Glaser staged preparations for an imaginary stage championship. With a spectator, he combined card and coin routines that were clearly visible through the video projection.

11:30 – **Joanna Pałeczka** (Poland, Card Magic). Joanna Pałeczka presented her English-language act 'Intrusive Thoughts', combining psychological predictions with visual card effects and concluding with a royal flush.

11:45 – **Robert Woitsch** (Austria, Micro-Magic). Robert Woitsch staged an experiment on 'Being and Appearance' with five spectators. The mathematical calculations involved a vintage computer, a Rubik's Cube and chocolate.


Toni & Ali


Mellow


Niklas Thuswald


Paula Irmer


Klaus Wiedermann


Alexander Lechner


Harald Brunner


Pascal Glaser

AFTERNOON SESSION: CLOSE-UP, 13:30–14:15

13:30 – **Tomislav Nedeljkov** as '**Tomi**' (Austria, Card Magic). Playing the part of a 'high-class magician', Tomislav Nedeljkov presented a card routine in which a red and blue deck repeatedly and precisely exchanged places, matching the sophisticated character he portrayed.

13:45 – **Harald Hoffmann-Tombor** (Austria, Micro-Magic). Harald Hoffmann-Tombor explored waking up in the morning. Candles, pens, balls and cards appeared, changed and vanished on the table, until an alarm clock restored the original state.

14:00 – **David Berger** & **Emil Kowalewsky** as '**Individuo**' (Germany, Card Magic). The duo began and finished in a tightly intertwined position. They used playing cards of various sizes and confirmed the final prediction seven times.

14:15 – **Benjamin Birklbauer** as '**Ben Sleight**' (Austria, Micro-Magic). Benjamin Birklbauer concluded with rapid transformations of coins and balls, ending in a visual coin transposition on the close-up table.

Unfortunately, we could not remain until Sunday's formal prize-giving, owing to time constraints, and only learned the results through the live coverage. We wholeheartedly congratulate all winners and participants on their achievements. It was a thoroughly magical weekend in the Ausseerland region!


Joanna Pałeczka


Robert Woitsch


Tomislav Nedeljkov


Harald Hoffmann-Tombor


Individuo


Ben Sleight

Austrian Magic Championships 2026

The championships were certified in accordance with FISM guidelines.

PHOTO: PETER KAINRATH



★ STAGE MAGIC

General Magic	**Raphael Macho**	**3rd Place**
Manipulation	**Niklas Thuswald**	**3rd Place**
Mental Magic	**Hermann Rauschmayr, Franziska Kronsteiner 'Die Queen & der Eduard'**	**2nd Place**
Mental Magic	**Toni Mitev, Alina Georgieva 'Toni & Ali'**	**3rd Place**

★ CLOSE-UP MAGIC

Micro-Magic	**Robert Woitsch**	**3rd Place**
Card Magic	**Joanna Pałeczka**	**2nd Place**
Card Magic	**Harald Brunner 'Harry Fontaine'**	**3rd Place**

No first prizes were awarded this year. The highest-scoring performance of the entire championships came from **Hermann Rauschmayr** and **Franziska Kronsteiner**, also known as **Die Queen & der Eduard**, in Mental Magic.

Young magician **Paula Irmer**, who performed out of championship, also received special recognition and a special prize for her performance.

The formal awards ceremony was held on **Sunday, 13 September 2026**, during the **Fröhlich-Zauberkongres's** closing event.

Magischer Ring Austria congratulates all prize-winners and thanks every participant who accepted the challenge of competing.



The Fröhlich Award 2025 / 2026

Two Personalities Who Have Shaped the Art of Magic

TEXT: HANNO RHOMBERG, PHOTOS: PETER KAINRATH, ARCHIV WITTUS WITT

The Fröhlich Award 2026 Goes to Wittus Witt and Hans Peter

At the Fröhlich-Zauberkongress 2026 in Bad Aussee, Magischer Ring Austria honoured two individuals who have made exceptional contributions to magic over many decades: **Wittus Witt** from Germany and **Hans Peter** from Austria. Since no Fröhlich Award was presented the previous year, the MRA board decided to honour two people in 2026. Both have made a lasting impact on magic, albeit in very different ways.

One is a performer, publisher, historian and tireless campaigner for recognition of magic as an art form. The other is a passionate host, organiser and ambassador for magic who has brought together people from around the world for decades. What unites them is their love for magic and a commitment going far beyond their own performances.

Wittus Witt – A Life Devoted to Magic as Culture



Wittus Witt

Wittus Witt is undoubtedly one of the most versatile figures in the German-speaking magic community. He is a magician, author, publisher, editor, gallery owner, theatre operator and historian. In 1976, together with **Roy Gardner**, he won first prize in Comedy Magic at the FISM World Championships in Vienna. But Wittus Witt has never been satisfied simply with being a successful stage magician.

His commitment has focused above all on the status of magic as an independent art form in our society. Since 2000 he has published the specialist magazine Magische Welt. His numerous books, publications and documentaries have made important contributions to the history and development of magic.

Through projects such as his gallery, the Bellachini Museum and the extensive knowledge resource Zauber-Pedia, he works to preserve the history of our art and make it visible beyond the magic community. Wittus Witt has not always been an easy person to agree with. He questions traditions, takes positions and does not shy away from controversial debates. That attitude is precisely what makes him such an important voice in magic.

His aim is for magic to be recognised not simply as entertainment but as a cultural and artistic means of expression.

Beyond his considerable professional achievements, I have also come to know Wittus on a very personal level. When health issues prevented me from continuing my editorial work on Aladin as usual, he spontaneously offered to help. Such generosity and collegiality cannot be taken for granted and reveal another side of this exceptional person.

The board of Magischer Ring Austria unanimously chose Wittus Witt for the Fröhlich Award, recognising decades of achievement and his tireless work on behalf of magic's reputation. Unfortunately, Wittus could not attend the ceremony in Bad Aussee in person, but he sent a video message of thanks.

Hans Peter – Saalbach's Magician Hotelier

Anyone involved in Austrian magic over the past few decades will certainly have come across Hans Peter, affectionately known to his friends as 'Hansi'. For many years his Hotel Peter in Saalbach became a place that was much more than an ordinary venue for magic gatherings.

Hotel Peter became a home for magicians, a place for friendship, exchange and encounters between generations. His commitment made more than 60 magic gatherings and conventions possible in Saalbach. International stars and famous names were just as welcome as enthusiastic hobbyists and young talents.

The legendary *Magische Sternfahrt* gatherings became an institution. Year after year, magicians travelled to Saalbach to perform, attend lectures, exchange experiences and cultivate friendships. What made the events truly special was their atmosphere.

With Hansi, you weren't simply a convention attendee or hotel guest; you were practically part of the family. His open, warm-hearted personality and enthusiasm for magic helped him bring people together. He wasn't only a host but a passionate magician himself. Anyone who has seen him perform knows how much joy he brought to his art and how naturally magic was part of his life.



Hans Peter (left) and Hanno Rhomberg (center), Richard René (right)

None of this would have been possible without his family's support. Through their shared commitment over decades, Hotel Peter became a special meeting place for our community.

I have many personal memories of Hansi too. We have spent countless hours talking about magic and performing together, as well as organising events and bringing projects to life. What I especially value is his straightforward helpfulness, hospitality and ability to treat people equally warmly, regardless of fame, ability or background.

In his own way, Hans Peter has made an important contribution to the development of magic in Austria. He facilitated international contacts, nurtured friendships and wrote a piece of Austrian magic history through his events. He was therefore presented with the Fröhlich Award at the 2026 convention.

The award is also a thank-you to his family and all those who helped make Saalbach such a special place for magic over the decades.

Two Different Paths – One Shared Passion

Wittus Witt and Hans Peter have earned recognition in very different ways. Wittus Witt has documented, questioned, preserved and developed magic as a cultural form. Hans Peter created a place where magic was lived, taught and shared across generations.

One helped establish the cultural self-understanding of our art; the other brought people together and made genuine community possible for decades. Both represent something that should not be forgotten in today's magic community, which is so often dominated by championships, titles and spectacular acts:

A magician's significance cannot be measured solely by achievements on stage, but also by what they do for magic and for the people who practise it.

That extraordinary dedication is precisely what Magischer Ring Austria wishes to honour through the Fröhlich Award.

Congratulations to Wittus Witt and Hans Peter, and above all, heartfelt thanks for everything they have done for our art.

Hanno Rhomberg
President, Magischer Ring Austria

‘Small, Excellent and a Little Different’

Voices from the Fröhlich-Zauberkongress 2026 in Bad Aussee

TEXT: VARIOUS CONTRIBUTORS

Four days of magic, unusual programme items, fresh artistic approaches and numerous personal encounters. The Fröhlich-Zauberkongress 2026 is over. What remains are memories and a remarkable number of responses from visitors, artists and contributors. Many went far beyond polite thanks. They described moving experiences, surprising discoveries and a convention that apparently did some things differently. We’ve gathered a selection of these voices, illustrating how varied the impressions were and what mattered most to participants.

A Convention with a Character of Its Own

‘I think you’ve really succeeded in positioning the Austrian convention as a small, excellent and slightly different convention in the German-speaking region’, wrote a long-time attendee. This assessment recurred throughout the feedback. People praised not only the quality of shows but especially the diversity of the programme and the courage to depart from familiar convention formats.

Werner Link, who has attended magic conventions for around thirty years, recalled Bad Aussee already being a special ‘feel-good convention’ for him in 2019. This time he was particularly impressed by the willingness to permit innovative ideas and accept the risk of not satisfying every taste. His verdict: ‘Young artists, experienced artists, a magic culture new to us, no sales lectures but lectures with so much valuable personal content! What diversity – I thought it was wonderful!’

Andy Häussler also described it as ‘an unusual, courageous and emotional convention’. The decision to replace conventional galas made up of short individual acts with complete programmes won widespread approval. Whether **Magic Monday Frankfurt**, **David Eriksson**, **Charlie Caper** or **Alexander Krist**, visitors could experience artists not simply through a single signature piece but through their own fully developed shows.

On behalf of his Frankfurt colleagues, **Pit Hartling** summed it up memorably: ‘You tried a few new paths, and it worked wonderfully!’

Young Magic Finding Its Own Language

Next Generation of Magic was among the most discussed projects. Five young performers from different European countries came together under **Finn Talin’s** direction to develop a joint show from their existing acts in just a few days. The result was no conventional youth gala; it was an artistic experiment seeking to unite distinct personalities and performances through a shared emotional theme.

The fact that this approach prompted discussion as well as enthusiasm was part of the point. **Hans-Peter Brockmann** jokingly suggested that Finn would be better off directing Jedermann than amusing appearances by emerging magicians. The serious artistic staging clearly didn’t quite fit his expectations of such an evening.

But that was part of what made the project special. The young artists were given not just a stage but the freedom to develop their own concepts of magic. A subsequent discussion with **Michelle Spillner**, **Maurice Grange** and **Thomas Otto** shed more light on the show’s creation and unusual teamwork. The project has already had an impact beyond the convention: the young performers remain in touch and hope to continue their collaboration.

Joy of Life from Cape Town

For many visitors, *Magic of Africa – Ubuntu Illusions* was an emotional highlight. Four young performers from Cape Town’s College of Magic delighted audiences with a show combining South African joie de vivre, music, humour and magic. Their personal charisma and enthusiasm made a particularly strong impression.

Viennese magician friends **Volcano** especially appreciated that the project had given *College of Magic* artists the chance to perform in Austria. **Michelle Spillner** also wrote that the initiative for their African colleagues had touched her deeply.

The enthusiasm extended beyond Bad Aussee. The ensemble went on a short Austrian tour, reaching audiences outside the magic community. From Cape Town came a particularly warm message: *College of Magic* director **David Gore** and his team thanked the organisers not only for performances and Austrian media attention but, above all, for the experiences, encounters and friendships offered to the young artists during their visit.

A fine example of how a magic convention can have an impact far beyond its four days.

The Little Things Make the Difference

Besides the major shows, correspondents repeatedly praised the atmosphere, personal encounters and many thoughtful details. Werner Amport from Switzerland highlighted the ‘wonderful atmosphere, varied programme’ and the organisers’ obvious dedication.

Michelle Spillner, herself involved as performer and host, wrote: 'It was a very, very beautiful, outstanding convention. For me, one of the loveliest I've experienced in all these years.'

Alex Ray's *After-Show Party* also received particular attention. It focused on direct encounters between performers and spectators. Rather than being broadcast on a large screen, close-up magic was experienced at the table. Several visitors specifically cited it as an example of the convention's many fresh and appealing ideas.

The championships and their presentation attracted praise too. The hosting between acts and the formal awards ceremony were among the highlights. **Roswitha Hülser** especially appreciated how the prize-winners were properly honoured and placed centre stage.

Voices from the International Magic Community

Feedback arrived not only from Austria but also Germany, Switzerland, Slovenia and other countries. In his message, Wladimir recalled the decades-long links between Austrian and Slovenian magicians. Since his first Austrian convention in 1981, that cooperation had been particularly important to him. Bad Aussee again underlined the significance of such international friendships.

Magic Christian sent concise thanks for a 'tremendous convention'. **Peter Marvey** remembered 'wonderful days in Bad Aussee with many lovely encounters, a great atmosphere and very special moments'.

Feedback from people who have attended conventions for decades was especially striking. **Hedi and Helmut Hörmann**, regular convention-goers for 55 years by their own account, described Bad Aussee as their 'best ever'. Such judgements are naturally personal impressions, but they show how important the four days were to some visitors.

Praise, Discussion and Suggestions

Not all feedback was unreservedly positive, and that's part of an honest assessment. Alongside organisational questions, there were suggestions about championship formats and critical remarks on individual items.

Some missed practical trick lectures and thought there was too much theory and background discussion. Others felt precisely those subjects were more fitting for a specialist convention than tricks available in books or online almost anywhere. Many appreciated the absence of sales lectures, while others missed them.

The artistic experiments also divided opinion. Many praised the unusual concepts, while others were less convinced by particular productions.

Many visitors appreciated that the convention was predominantly German-speaking, while others criticised the lack of translation of every item. But 'we are in Austria' was not, for us, a reason to make an international magic convention provincial when at least 80 percent of participants speak English. Anyone wishing to experience international magic benefits from understanding English.

A convention that explores new paths will not please everybody. Perhaps that's one of its strengths: it provokes conversations and encourages reflection on our art. We were especially grateful for constructive criticism, which helps us develop even when we cannot or do not wish to implement every suggestion.

What Remains?

A recurring wish in many letters was that Austria might continue hosting conventions with this special character. The 2026 *Fröhlich-Zauberkongress* was the last under **Hanno Rhomberg's** direction. Many visitors therefore combined their thanks with the hope that it would continue.

The experiences of Bad Aussee may offer inspiration for Austria's future convention scene. The many responses certainly suggest that it is not only famous names and spectacular acts that make a convention unforgettable. Equally important are the encounters, new thoughts, little surprises and sometimes the willingness to dare something different.

Or, as **Werner Link** put it in his letter: 'What diversity – I thought it was wonderful!'

The quotations are drawn from messages sent by visitors, artists and contributors after the *Fröhlich-Zauberkongress* 2026. The selection was compiled editorially for this article.

A few individual voices follow on the next pages! Please understand that we cannot publish every response in this issue. All reactions matter to us, however, and have been passed on to those involved. Many thanks for them.

Bad Aussee – My First Magic Convention

And What Can I Say? I'm Hooked!

TEXT: MARKUS HOFMANN, PHOTO: PETER KAINRATH

My first magic convention. Four days in Bad Aussee. And afterwards, one question: why had nobody told me how much fun this could be?

I admit I wasn't quite sure what to expect. A few magicians, a bit of shop talk, some lectures and shows, then home again. **Well, I got that wrong.**

The *Fröhlich-Zauberkongress* was a complete immersion in a world where seemingly everyone has a deck of cards, a coin or a cup in a pocket – and somebody else is thinking about how to do something utterly impossible with it.

And that was the best part: the people. So many lovely, open-minded and gloriously **magic-mad people** together. Conversations, discussions, spontaneous performances and encounters that always seemed too short. 'Hello, I'm Markus' quickly became 'See you later!' – and hopefully some of those encounters will grow into real friendships.

My conversations with people from Cape Town's *College of Magic* were especially eye-opening. For decades, the College has combined magic with personal development, communication and self-confidence. Their *Magic of Africa* show demonstrated impressively that magic can be much more than a trick that works at the end. These were people on stage who weren't pretending to enjoy what they were doing. I could feel that joy throughout my entire body.

That brings me to something I noticed in Bad Aussee: when performers radiate joy with their whole bodies, the audience has no chance of resisting. It is swept along. I experienced it with several artists and realised how much more a strong magic act needs than sound technique and a good script.

Speaking of how things work.

Watching the professionals was at times a slap in the face – a positive one, of course. Suddenly you see what's possible when someone combines mastery of the effect with timing, character, dramatic structure and audience control at the very highest level.

Sometimes boundaries were crossed, not just those of traditional magic but also my expectations of what a show could look like. David Eriksson's *Apple Saucy* made it clear that a magic convention needn't mean watching cards appear, disappear and reappear for four days. Circus, comedy, acrobatics, absurd theatre and black humour could all have their place.

And then there was that deck of cards. Good enough to eat! Yes, literally: a deck you could look at and then simply consume. Of course I took photographic evidence. You never know whether anyone will believe you otherwise.

The convention was a wonderfully colourful mixture: championships, close-up, stage magic, lectures, conversations, late-night shows, parties and an awful lot of magic. From young newcomers – there's plenty to say about them too – to international professionals, it was all there.



And then Thomas Otto came along. His Chop Cup lecture has stayed especially firmly in my mind, not because I desperately wanted to learn the Chop Cup but because he showed how to make life as easy as possible while delivering a perfect show. **Why make something complicated when it can be simple?** That attitude really struck me.

For Thomas, the Chop Cup is much more than a cup and a ball. Over decades he has turned it into a personal routine, and in the lecture he explained not only what he does but, above all, why. Focus, timing, spectator position, props and colours – suddenly a little cup becomes a huge lesson in magic.

And what can I say? I now own a Chop Cup too. Not just any cup, mind you. Of course I have to sew the balls myself. The leather has already been precision-cut by laser, the cork balls and screws are ready, and all I need now is thread before I can begin.

That's what fascinates me about conventions like this. You go home with ideas you'd never previously had – and sometimes even things you'd never thought of looking for.

The **lectures** were a world of their own. Charlie Caper, for example, wasn't just talking about robots and technology but about the far more interesting question of how an idea becomes a show.

A Brilliant Event – and a Brilliant Idea!

Joseph-Fröhlich-Zauberkongress, Bad Aussee 2026

TEXT: DON FERNANDO, PHOTO: PETER KAINRATH

Hallo Hanno,

The Fröhlich-Zauberkongress in Bad Aussee was simply brilliant! From Thursday to Sunday, it was superbly organised, with a fantastic atmosphere and truly outstanding performances. You could tell how much work and heart you and the entire organising team had put into it.

I must admit, though, that I had some concerns when I read the programme beforehand. More events every evening after 10 p.m.? I thought, 'Hopefully this won't turn into Liverpool 2.0!' But only after the convention did I really understand why you'd planned those extra sessions. Late-night programmes mean extra work and, of course, additional costs. Yet that was precisely the clever idea: in Bad Aussee, there was very little going on in restaurants and bars after ten o'clock.

And what do magicians want after a long convention day? To sit together comfortably over a drink or two, discuss the tricks they've seen, talk shop, laugh and wind down together. But where can they go when nowhere is open? That's exactly why your late-night sessions were perfect! An extra programme item became a meeting place for everyone who had no intention of going to bed after the last show.

Hanno, congratulations on this excellent idea! For me, the late-night sessions were a complete success. In hindsight, I can only say: thank goodness the evening didn't finish at ten! A huge THANK YOU to you and your entire team for all your work, commitment and countless hours.

It wasn't just a great convention – it was an ABSOLUTELY FANTASTIC MAGIC CONVENTION!

Thanks, Hanno. Bad Aussee will stay in my memory!

Magical greetings from Linz,
Don Fernando



David Eriksson

Some Personal Thoughts and Feelings About the Fröhlich-Zauberkongress 2026

TEXT: ALEXANDER RÖMER, PHOTO: PETER KAINRATH

Dear Hanno and dear Team,

Together you've created a wonderful convention at which I felt completely at home from beginning to end. To me, the atmosphere was exceptionally harmonious, peaceful and lovely. The acts represented an incredible range. For once, you could really feel the connecting spirit and tolerance inherent in magic throughout the entire event. In our age of intolerance and dismissing different views and opinions, that's something very special.

The team was always attentive and ready to ask whether everything was all right, helping maintain the relaxed atmosphere. As I was there as a dealer, I can't say much about the lectures, although I heard only positive comments in conversations with customers. I could have attended the lectures (and did attend one), but it's always too much when you're having so many conversations at the dealer's stand. That's why I particularly look forward to the shows at conventions – and EVERY single one was exceptional and worth seeing, even if not everything suits everybody's taste. And that's fine.

For once, the schedule also left endless time for lovely conversations, which I enjoyed immensely. If you wanted to, you really could attend everything, with absolutely no stress.

Two things stood out for me in particular.

1. The show by the young woman and men from Africa. For me, that really was one of the biggest highlights in many, many years. The spirit, emotion and dynamism this troupe brought to the stage were extraordinary. Their positive energy, even when just talking to them, moved me deeply. They come from circumstances in which learning magic is far less straightforward than it is for us, yet they create an atmosphere that completely blew me away. We could all learn a huge amount from that spirit.
2. The lighting and sound for every show. In my opinion, the technical production made a tremendous contribution to the experience and mood of the shows. Whoever designed the individual lighting setups did an outstanding job. At last, someone also avoided shining cheap lighting effects into the audience! It's been driving me mad for years, as being repeatedly dazzled is unpleasant for spectators. Lighting and effects belong on stage to create atmosphere, and that was beautifully achieved here. Being blinded over and over ruins the mood, at least for me.

The music, too, was audible and carefully balanced, without hurting anyone's ears or distorting. Once again the technical team understood how to achieve more with less. My highest praise therefore goes to the backstage crew, the helpers and the technical team!

Another thing that fascinated me was that there were well over 300 people, yet it never felt crowded. This was the cosiest and most beautiful convention I've attended in recent years, and I already regret that Bad Aussee may not continue.

Before considering moving the convention to a large city, one should remember that its size and the surroundings in Bad Aussee are what make its atmosphere unique, welcoming, high-quality and comfortable. It would be a great shame to sacrifice that spirit in pursuit of 'BIGGER' and 'MORE'.

I fully understand that this was possible only because so many people behind the scenes contributed tremendous effort, often for little or no payment. For that, and for all your hard work, ideas and creativity, an enormous thank-you and a deep bow.

Alexander Römer
Hotel zum Zauberkabinett
Zauberkabinett-Shop



Magic of Africa

Random Thoughts on the Conference in Bad Aussee

TEXT: DIETER K. GOLF, IBM-RING VIENNA, PHOTO: PETER KAINRATH

1#

A convention badge serves several purposes. You can spot participants from afar by the coloured lanyards around their necks, creating a feeling of connection. Then you stand face-to-face with a magician you haven't seen in ages, greet each other warmly and suddenly freeze: damn it, what was their name? Which magic club and which part of Austria do they belong to?

Even reading the name on the badge can prove difficult. At precisely that moment, the blank reverse side is facing you. My suggestion: please print names, stage names and magic clubs on both sides. Thank you.

2#

Roberto Giobbi's *Card College* in four downloadable volumes for just $ 13? Unbelievable, but true.

Roberto explained in Bad Aussee that, out of fairness to authors and creators, we should not take advantage of such internet offers. Fair enough.

Meanwhile, the EU is trying to restrict cheap imports from China and elsewhere, including counterfeit, absurdly cheap magic tricks, by charging fees even on tiny parcels. Imports from Canada are affected too – for example, if persistent marketing persuades you to order Undeniable and Indelible directly from inventor and magician Jay Sankey.

My disappointment was considerable when the postman collected a 'low import tariff' handling fee and customs charges amounting to € 14 at the door. From 1 October 2026, another € 2 is added! The declared value of a few playing cards was correctly listed as $ 2.50. Perhaps I could have refused delivery and done without the supposedly magical gimmick. But my disappointment became greater still: the cards were blank-faced or double-backed, accompanied by a video tutorial explaining how to cut the secret flap into the cards yourself with an X-Acto knife and then draw on them with a Sharpie. I had expected a fully prepared gimmick!

Moral of the story: nothing gained but expenses – $ 60 plus €14. Jay Sankey has lost a European customer, and after this account, perhaps a few more.

3#

Alexander Krist's Sunday-morning gala for convention visitors wasn't entirely smooth, although among fellow magicians it passed as a dress rehearsal for the afternoon's public show. During the performance he mentioned that an assistant had arrived only that morning and there had been no time to rehearse. No wonder: the stage had previously been occupied by the awards ceremony and the undoubtedly deserved but seemingly endless tributes to **Hanno Rhomberg**.

After the public performance, I asked several lay spectators what they thought. The response was positive throughout. One striking feature was that Alexander, in his tuxedo, climbed into the illusion cabinets himself almost as often as his assistants. Yet the 'most astonishing effect' was apparently the one involving an assistant's head inside a cube-shaped box on a table. The clearly visible head seemed to detach from the body and slide sideways in both directions. The door then closed, and Alexander carried the box to the other side of the stage, placing it on a second, brightly illuminated table. The door opened and the smiling head greeted the amazed audience. If you'd like to see it, search YouTube for 'Head Mover Illusion' – although it's much better performed live by Alexander Krist!



Alexander Krist

When Magic Becomes a Media Story

The *Fröhlich-Zauberkongress* 2026 and *Magic of Africa* in the Austrian Press

TEXT: ALADIN-REDAKTION, FOTO: PETER KAINRATH

Mainstream media tend to cover magic when the story involves major illusions, famous stars or extraordinary records. Coverage of the *Fröhlich-Zauberkongress* 2026 in Bad Aussee and the subsequent Austrian tour of *Magic of Africa – Ubuntu Illusions* was, in part, different. Regional newspapers, cultural publications, radio and Austria's public broadcaster ORF covered the events. Notably, they reported not only on magic itself but also on the people behind it and on the significance our art can have for young people. We collected some of those reports and examined what most interested journalists.

Bad Aussee as an International Meeting Place

Regional media reported on the *Fröhlich-Zauberkongress* even before it opened. With around 2,000 overnight stays, the convention was also a significant economic factor for the region. That mattered to journalists from a business perspective and helped win coverage from business desks.

Alexander Krist's public family show offered another opportunity to introduce magic to people beyond the convention. But we should not fool ourselves: promoting a show with performers' names achieves little among the general public, who can probably name no more than three magicians.

Featuring successful artists mainly helps communicate that accomplished and exceptional performers have been booked. Several journalists also told me that magic has a reputation problem: virtually every performer presents themselves as a world wonder, even when their work is merely average. Consequently, many journalists are reluctant to provide free publicity for shows unless they have a direct relationship with the organisers.

What stood out was that the most extensive follow-up reports in the general media weren't about the championships or international superstars. Instead, it was the young performers from South Africa and the story of their magic school that captured journalists' attention.

A Magic School That Changes Lives

The four young performers from Cape Town's *College of Magic* first appeared at the *Fröhlich Convention* and then toured Austria with support from Magischer Ring Austria. The story behind the project – the potential for magic to change lives and open new prospects – interested the press and led to substantial editorial coverage. Such initiatives are ultimately important for magic's public reputation too.

ORF Tirol: 'When Magic Changes Lives'

On 15 September, ORF Tirol published an extensive report by **Éric Berdaguer** under the title *When Magic Changes Lives*. The story was also featured on the television news programme Tirol heute. The young performers' personal experiences were central.

Nineteen-year-old **Sinalo Mtwana** comes from the township of Khayelitsha. He explained how magic had helped him stay away from the drugs and crime prevalent in his surroundings. Magic gave him a different perspective on his future.

Sibabalwe Khwezi described himself as having been a very shy boy. His training at the *College of Magic* gave him confidence and taught him to perform in front of people. Incidentally, he hopes to become a lawyer.

Lithemba Mti also described how profoundly magic had helped her personal development. ORF included audience reactions from the Fieberbrunn performance. They demonstrated that the mixture of magic, music, humour and South African joy in life appealed even to people with little previous contact with the international magic community.

What was interesting was that the main question wasn't how a trick worked, but what magic could achieve in a person's life.

Kitzbüheler Anzeiger: 'A Magical Evening in Fieberbrunn'

The *Kitzbüheler Anzeiger* also covered the Fieberbrunn performance in detail. In 'A Magical Evening in Fieberbrunn', Elisabeth Standl described a varied combination of magic, music, rhythm and South African joy in life, with the effects' surprising twists repeatedly provoking amazement.

Alongside the artistic achievements, the article explored the College of Magic's social background. Fieberbrunn's cultural councillor Wolfgang Schwaiger made a particularly noteworthy comment. For him, the evening was about far more than the pleasure of successful tricks: he saw a combination of talent, joie de vivre and social commitment.

Thus the show was also perceived as a cultural and social project.

Dornbirn: 'The Magic of Togetherness'

Who are the people on stage? Where do they come from? What have they experienced? And what role does magic play in their lives?



Magic of Africa – Ubuntu Illusions: Lithemba Mti

Naturally, journalists also reviewed the performances. Audiences appreciated the combination of music, dance, humour and magic. But the young performers' personal stories gave the press additional subjects worth exploring.

A particularly interesting review appeared on 16 September in Vorarlberg's *Zeitschrift für Kultur und Gesellschaft*. Under the title 'The Magic of Togetherness', Daniel Furxer examined the shows at Dornbirn's *Theater im Kopfbau* in detail.

Unlike many other reports, he discussed the individual artistic achievements: Sinalo Mtwana's elegant card manipulation combined with dance, Lithemba Mti's illusions and Sibabalwe Khwezi's refreshing humour. Sinethemba Bawuti hosted the programme and connected the different acts.

His exploration of the African concept of Ubuntu – community, compassion and mutual respect – was particularly interesting. Furxer observed that the young performers didn't just explain this philosophy; they embodied it on stage, complementing and interacting with one another while allowing each individual room to shine.

The cultural journalist also critically examined the staging. In his view, the narrative framework took something of a back seat to the individual tricks. The production was therefore praised not merely for its social context but assessed as a work of art in its own right – an important contribution to the public perception of magic as art rather than a childish pastime.

It's Also a Topic on The Radio

Alongside television and newspapers, independent Radio Proton covered the project. Its cultural programme Facette Kult presented the College of Magic and its educational goals, reaching another audience not necessarily interested in magic conventions but attentive to culture, education and social issues.

Once again, combining magic with personal stories proved an attractive approach for the media.

What Interested the Media Most?

Comparing the various reports reveals a striking difference. Within the magic community, we spend a great deal of time discussing technique, originality, presentation, championships and the quality of individual acts. Mainstream media, however, were interested mainly in other questions.

The tour also reached general audiences, not just specialists. Families, culture lovers and people perhaps attending their first magic show were among the audiences in Fieberbrunn and Dornbirn. Performances for schoolchildren were part of the programme too.

Linking an international specialist convention with a public tour afterwards has proved an interesting way to bring our art to a wider audience.

More Than Just Good Entertainment

Media coverage of the *Fröhlich-Zauberkongress* and *Magic of Africa* shows that magic can offer interesting stories outside its own community. The Austrian Championships provided an opportunity to introduce successful performers and their achievements. International shows highlighted the diversity of our art. And the *College of Magic* revealed another side of magic that has so far received relatively little public attention.

We do not want our art to be recognised solely within our own community. Magic is an independent performing art form that deserves a place in mainstream cultural journalism. Naturally, that requires good performers and interesting programmes. Sometimes it also requires a story that goes beyond the performance itself.

Special thanks go to the outstanding PR agency **Pzwei**, where we found a brilliant partner in **Daniela Kaulfuß**. She spontaneously supported the event and helped transform a magic show into a story with heart and meaning.

This article draws on reports published in September 2026 by Kleine Zeitung, Kitzbüheler Anzeiger, ORF Tirol, Zeitschrift für Kultur und Gesellschaft in Vorarlberg and Radio Proton.

Three Days in a State of Magical Exception

Our Behind-the-Scenes View of *Secrets Session IV*

TEXT AND PHOTOS: MARIO KRASSNITZER & BARBARA PIROLT

When an email from **Bill Cheung** lands in your inbox in May, it's worth reading twice. Bill warmly recalled our shared visit to the Christmas dinner show the previous year and thanked us for the subsequent report in Aladin. But the real reason for his message was an invitation that would make any magician's heart beat faster: an exclusive allocation of places at *Secrets Session IV* for the Magischer Cirkel Kärnten (MCK).

Within just a few years, this event has become one of the most exclusive and sought-after gatherings in the international magic community. It's an invitation-only convention strictly limited to 100 selected participants from more than two dozen countries – including no fewer than fourteen FISM world champions. They don't come to perform for a lay audience but to share, test, challenge and refine the magic of the future among fellow performers, critics and friends.

Since our esteemed editor-in-chief **Hanno Rhomberg** did not put me under deadline pressure for this article, I decided to take a deep dive. To do justice to those three days in Wiener Neustadt requires more than a few superficial lines; it calls for a report from the heart of the action.

FRIDAY, 16 OCTOBER
A Warm Welcome and Magic at the Highest Level

The trip began with a relaxed Friday morning. In Austria, when you stop for lunch at a restaurant and notice people at the next tables casually handling coins and cards, you know you're approaching the centre of a magic convention. At exactly 2 p.m., the doors of the *Bill Cheung Magic Theater* opened.

Even in the foyer, it was clear how lovingly every detail had been prepared. Magischer Ring Niederösterreich provided energetic logistical support. Particularly notable was **Alexander Lechner** (Softie David), who seemed tirelessly to be learning names, welcoming guests and relieving Bill Cheung of the organisational burden. From the first moment, you felt not like a registration number but like an invited guest at a large family celebration.

The convention gift underlined the high standards: an exclusively designed deck of playing cards, an elegant collectible coin, a personalised card holder engraved with the guest's name and further surprises. The constant presence of playing cards already suggested the weekend's direction: if anyone in the room were to ask for a deck during the next 72 hours, a hundred hands would instantly shoot up.

After an atmospheric introduction in the darkened theatre, our host welcomed 100 guests from 29 nations. The programme immediately got down to business. In Session 1, **Bill Cheung**, **Sara Rodríguez** and **Tino Plaz** opened proceedings. Their technical precision was breathtaking. Although English was the main language spoken in the room, the performers' visual language was universally understood. Watching their sleight of hand, you quietly wondered whether decades of practice might make it biologically possible to twist finger joints into entirely new positions to create an impossibility on the table. The teaching format was ideally structured: first pure astonishment, then a joint exploration of the method, valuable practical tips from professionals and finally an opportunity to examine the material further at the dealers' stands.

Liam Ball took over immediately in Session 2. With a fragrant rose and refreshing British humour, he demonstrated routines from which even the enthusiastic amateur could take ideas directly into their own repertoire.

THE FQC COMPETITION
Excitement at FISM Level

With our accommodation conveniently located in the adjacent hotel, there was just time to change before the prestigious FQC close-up championship began. Eleven contestants took part: **Alex Cahill** (UK), **Harry Fontaine** (AT), **Thomas Genias** (CY), **Harald Hoffmann-Tombor** (AT), **Stepan Smid** (CZ), **Owan Nemo** (FR), **RuoYue Dai** (GER), **Andrei-Catalin Artenie / Arcan** (GER), **Augusto Amen** (DK), **Klaus Wiedermann** (AT) and **Joshua Kenneth** (SP).

Anyone who has organised such a championship knows the effort involved: setting lights, balancing audio, preparing props, briefing volunteers and timing the programme to the second. The distinguished jury reflected the event's international importance: FISM world president **Andrea Baioni**, FISM Europe president **Xavier Tapias**, **Magic Christian**, guest of honour **Michael Vincent**, Christian **Engblom**, **Rudolf Heuer**, **Hanno Rhomberg**, **Shimpei Katsuragawa** and host **Bill Cheung**. Two experienced colleagues, **Wolfgang Moser** and **Gleb Tsarou**, also gained their first experience as jurors in training.

The acts covered the entire spectrum, from classical, elegant manipulation and subtle storytelling to highly inventive approaches. As a spectator, you genuinely wondered how the jury could produce a fair ranking, since the styles were scarcely comparable.

Anyone who imagined the day was finished after the championship was mistaken. The invitation said the bar and lounge would open at 8 p.m., but the small print contained a late-night session with **Kiko Pastur** at 11 p.m. With his 'invisible friend', he performed highly intelligent, almost poetic card magic, rounding off the first convention day perfectly at one in the morning.



SATURDAY, 17. OCTOBER

In-Depth Learning, Fine Food and a Gala Firework Display

After a short night, the programme resumed at 10:30 a.m. The schedule was tight – academic discipline in the best sense. Joshua Kenneth opened with a specialist session on marketing, brand identity, brand books and typography for magicians. What might initially sound dry proved a visually brilliant and extremely practical presentation. The subsequent questions and comments from seasoned masters added enormous value for anyone wanting to present themselves professionally.

While the jury withdrew over lunch to make mathematically precise assessments of the competition entries, participants had an opportunity for some exercise. Dining options in the industrial estate were limited, but the walk did us good: Saturday still had a long programme ahead. (See Hanno Rhomberg's insider account from a jury member's perspective.)

AN AFTERNOON FULL OF MAGIC

History and Systems

At 2 p.m., special guest **Michael Vincent** took the stage. His session was far more than a demonstration of tricks; it was a deeply moving tribute to magic. Vincent intertwined memories of his own life and gratitude towards his mentors with masterful technique. When an artist of his calibre shares life stories while casually making miracles happen before the audience's eyes, you completely lose track of time. His passion for quality, aesthetics and respect for the audience was palpable throughout the room.

Christian Engblom followed. He gave a fascinating demonstration of how complex principles can be organised logically and made practical. Concepts such as the 'political shuffle' – in which an enormous amount happens but absolutely nothing changes in the end – provoked both laughter and moments of revelation. Even attendees with limited experience discovered first-hand how a carefully thought-out structure can allow someone to memorise an entire deck in a remarkably short time.

Gala Dinner and the Art of Enchantment

After the seminar, it was time for a quick change in the hotel room! Meanwhile, Bill Cheung's team and Softie David had transformed the theatre with impressive speed for Christian Engblom's seminar. Despite more than 130 people in the room, the atmosphere was intimate and family-like.

The buffet offered plenty of variety, service was excellent and conversation at the tables was lively. Between starters and main courses, cards flew, coins travelled and newly purchased props were tried out at almost every table.

At 8 p.m. came the evening highlight: the International Gala Show, hosted by Liam Ball. What followed was an artistic firework display. **Giancarlo Scalia**, **Sara Rodríguez**, **Shawn Farquhar**, **Wolfgang Moser**, **Hernán Maccagno**, **Kiko Pastur** and **Michael Vincent** demonstrated world-class stage and



The 2026 Winners: 1st Place: Augusto Amen, 2nd Place: Joshua Kenneth, 3rd Place: Owan Nemo.

close-up magic. The fascinating aspect of this format is the immediacy of the transition: the colleague with whom you'd been discussing a technical subtlety over dinner two hours earlier suddenly stands in the spotlight, enthralling the entire theatre. Camera work, lighting design and sound were flawlessly coordinated.

Anyone looking for a quiet moment after the gala found it in the late-night jam sessions. Perhaps the convention's most memorable image occurred at around three in the morning: magicians of different generations and nationalities sitting together on the lounge carpet, sharing knowledge freely, perfecting minute details of movement and simply celebrating the joy of their art.

SUNDAY, 18. OCTOBER 2026

Sunday offered no chance to feel tired either. At 10:30 a.m., **Hernán Maccagno** took over. With infectious energy, he challenged fundamental routines that had been performed for decades. His humorous yet carefully considered reworking of the classic 21-card trick, together with his concepts of visual camouflage and the perception of space and time, were intellectually explosive. Maccagno showed convincingly that even apparently exhausted standard effects leave endless room for innovation.

Giancarlo Scalia followed immediately. He enchanted the room with his incomparable elegance in handling coins, rings and playing cards. His presentation focused on body language, economy of movement and the sensitive guidance of the audience.

After the FISM jury forum, where judging criteria were discussed openly, came the formal finale: the awards ceremony, announcing the prize-winners, followed by the Award-Winning Gala Show. Mentalism duo **Anca & Lucca** provided the crowning conclusion, once again astonishing the room with their perfectly coordinated performance.

By late afternoon, it was time for us to take the train back to Carinthia. The three-hour journey flew by. Neither of us touched our phones: we spent the entire time discussing the countless impressions, techniques and encounters we'd experienced.

With *Secrets Session IV*, Bill Cheung once again demonstrated what makes a successful specialist gathering. It isn't the sheer number of participants that matters, but the quality of the content, the warmth of the hosts and the space for genuine exchanges among colleagues.

We wholeheartedly congratulate all the winners, thank **Bill Cheung** and his fantastic team for the invitation and are already looking forward to next time!


Alexander Lechner


Hernán Maccagno


Joachim Solberg


Kiko Pastur


Michael VIncent and Hanno Rhomberg


Giancarlo Scalia


Wolfgang Moser


Andrea Baloni and Xavier Tapias


Shawn Farquhar


Sara Rodríguez


Liam Ball



Owan Nemo


Bill Cheung


Tino Plaz


Michael Vincent and Bill Cheung


Wolfgang Moser


Joshua Kenneth

Secrets Session IV

A Look Behind the Scenes of the FISM Jury

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS BY HANNO RHOMBERG

Mario Krassnitzer and Barbara Pirolt have already reported extensively on *Secret Session IV's* outstanding programme and its many international stars. I would therefore like to offer a different perspective. As president of Magischer Ring Austria and a member of the international FISM jury, I had the opportunity to gather some interesting experiences that went beyond the convention itself.

★ A Valuable Addition to the Austrian Magic Community

What **Bill Cheung** has created in Wiener Neustadt deserves great recognition. His concept resembles the legendary American FFFF – *Fechter's Finger Flicking Frolic*, an exclusive invitation-only gathering of international close-up magicians. Secret Session is similarly not about size, but about the quality of the participants and personal interaction.

For Austria, this event is a stroke of good fortune. It is by no means a given that so many world-class international artists should come together in our country. With his *Magic Theater*, Bill Cheung has created a venue that attracts attention far beyond Austria's borders.

With the *Fröhlich-Zauberkongress* in Bad Aussee and Secret Session in Wiener Neustadt, we now have two completely different events that represent Austria superbly on the international stage. Bad Aussee appeals to a broad audience through its extensive programme and several hundred participants, while Secret Session concentrates on a small, exclusive circle of close-up specialists.

Magischer Ring Austria was therefore delighted to provide the € 1,000 first prize for the championship. We wanted not only to support the contest but also to express our appreciation for Bill Cheung's commitment.

★ Behind the Scenes of the FISM Jury

For me personally, participating in this exceptionally distinguished jury was one of the most interesting experiences of the weekend. Among the members were FISM president **Andrea Baioni**, european FISM president **Xavier Tapias**, **Michael Vincent**, **Magic Christian**, **Christian Engblom**, **Shimpei Katsuragawa** and other experienced colleagues. They possess extensive practical knowledge, and some have themselves enjoyed successful championship and FISM careers.

What particularly pleased me was the constructive collaboration. Despite different artistic backgrounds and viewpoints, the atmosphere in the jury was remarkably objective. Discussions were interesting and decisions clear and understandable. When judging very different artistic styles, that is by no means something to take for granted. Of course, magic is an art that can only with difficulty be squeezed into a scoring system. But the new requirements for juries in FISM-certified championships show the considerable effort FISM is making to ensure fair conditions and fair judging.

The overall field was good but also quite varied in standard. The three award-winning acts were welcome highlights and their merit was not disputed by any of the jury members.

★ The Winners

First Place: Augusto Amen (Denmark)
A blindfold card-finding routine.
Second Place: Joshua Kenneth (Spain)
An original combination of soap bubbles and coin catching.
Second Place: Owan Nemo (France)
A cups-and-balls routine presented in a particularly original way.

★ What Really Makes a FISM Act Successful?

I found the conversations with international FISM officials about the requirements for a successful championship act particularly interesting.

Technical perfection, originality, presentation and the other judging criteria are naturally important. But ultimately there is more to it. An artist must create a complete experience that goes beyond technically accomplished magic. **Being merely good is not enough for a top placing at FISM. An act must be extraordinary and inspiring.**

Xavier Tapias summed it up with a simple question: 'Whom would I book for a top gala?' I think there's a great deal of truth in that. A FISM championship is no light-hearted contest; it is, in a sense, the Olympics of our art. Those who want to succeed must offer more than clean technique and a well-functioning sequence of tricks.

It is sometimes claimed that championship acts impress juries but aren't necessarily successful with general audiences. I don't agree with that sweeping statement. My experience in Bad Aussee suggests otherwise: the overall winners there also won the audience prize. Extraordinary magic convinces not only specialist judges but lay audiences too.

We should also remember that championships are showcases. Among the audience are event organisers and producers looking for exceptional acts. A successful championship can therefore open doors to new engagements.



Front row, from left to right:Hanno Rhomberg, Magic Christian, Xavier Tapias, Andrea Baioni, Christina Nyman, Shimpei Katsuragawa, Michael Vincent; Back row, from left to right: Christian Engblom, Bill Cheung, Wolfgang Moser, Hleb Tsarou, Rudi Heuer.

★ A Missed Opportunity

One observation did leave me thinking.

During Secret Session, a special FISM judges' forum was offered to interested convention attendees and contestants. It was an opportunity to learn about the new championship rules, ask questions and discuss matters directly with the judges. Attendance was very poor, and only two of the eleven competitors took advantage of it. According to my colleagues, the offer of private, personal feedback from the judges after the championship was hardly used either.

I find that extremely regrettable. All certified FISM judges have completed demanding training and examinations. Many also have decades of practical experience as judges, performers, directors or successful competitors.

How often do you have the chance to hear first-hand from such a group what it takes to achieve a top placing, and to receive a knowledgeable and respectful assessment of your work free of charge? You certainly don't have to accept every criticism. But seeing your act from another angle can be immensely helpful.

I had similar experiences at the two most recent championships in Bad Aussee. A championship isn't only about scores, rankings and prizes. One of its most valuable aspects can be the feedback after a performance. Many successful FISM acts have been developed over years, performed repeatedly, critically examined and improved.

Anyone who misses such an opportunity is forgoing an important chance for personal and artistic growth. Evidently many people shy away from honest feedback – something we unfortunately encounter in our magic clubs too.

★ What Remains from This Weekend

Secret Session once again reminded me how valuable personal encounters and international exchange are for our art.

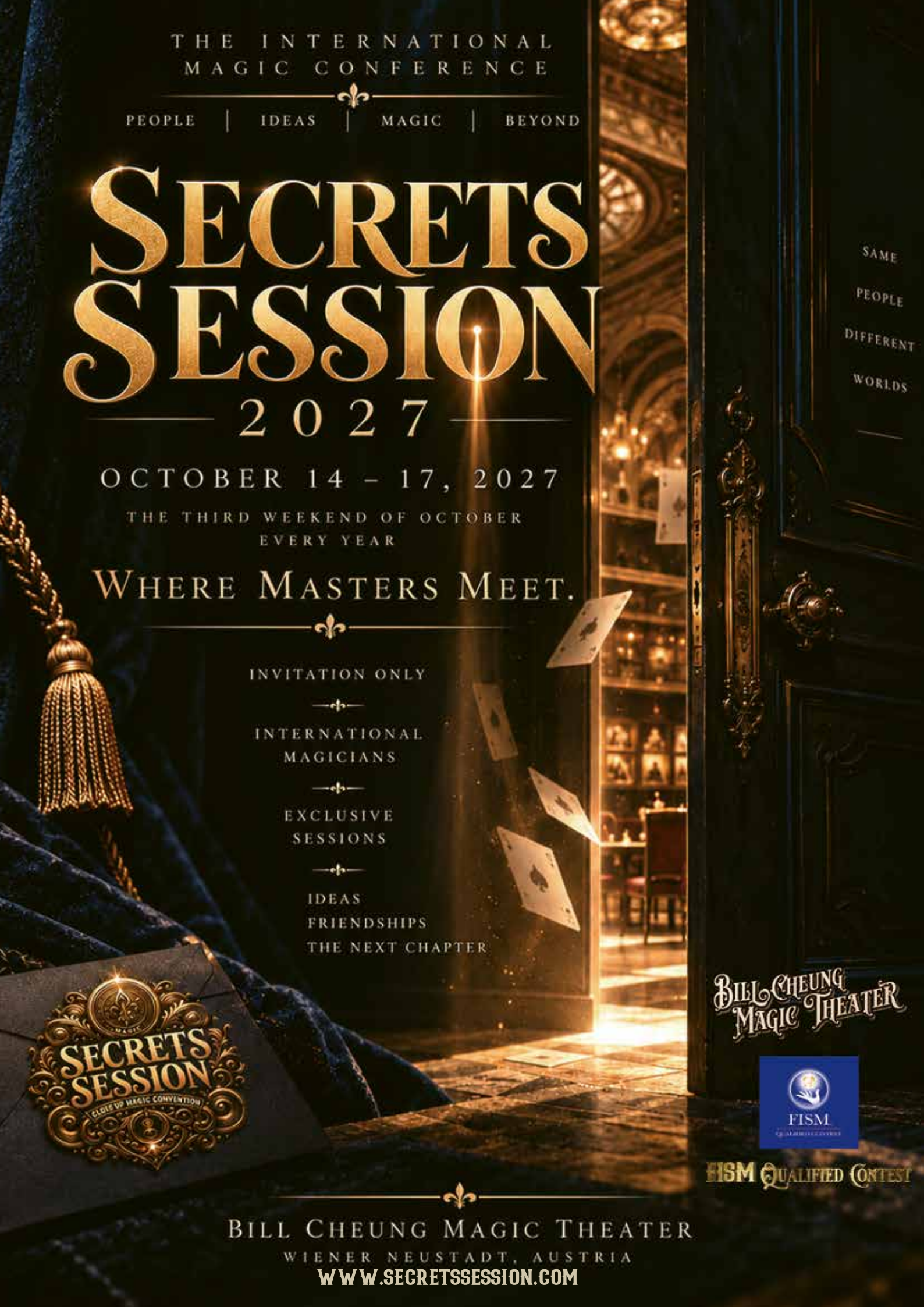
Bill Cheung was an excellent host. With his team and the dedicated members of the young Magischer Ring Niederösterreich, he organised an event that ran professionally and yet with a wonderfully relaxed atmosphere.

The *Magic Theater* is rather remote, in an industrial estate on the outskirts of Wiener Neustadt. That's not ideal for accompanying guests interested in sightseeing. For magicians, however, the focus on one venue offers a major advantage: everyone stays together, meets in the lounge and often continues conversations deep into the night. That's a real strength for a specialist magic gathering.

It was a wonderful weekend. In particular, meeting old friends and interesting colleagues from around the world reminded me what makes our international community special.

Thank you to the performers who gave their audiences the feeling of genuine magic. Even very experienced visitors were often left speechless and completely fooled. What more could we wish for?

My heartfelt thanks go to Bill Cheung and his entire team. Not only have they created an exceptional event, they have also made an important contribution to the international reputation of Austrian magic. I'm glad I was there. It will be a regular fixture in my convention calendar!


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