

## ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE ... FOR ROB LAKE, "AMERICA'S GREATEST YOUNG MAGICIAN"

By Lauren Major

Sitting in the audience at a magic show in Branson, Missouri, ten-year-old Rob Lake was enthralled. He knew then that he wanted to become a magician.

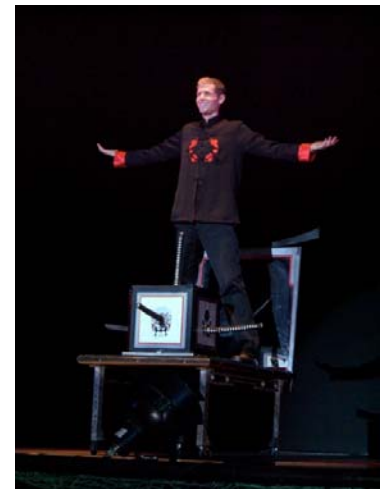


"When I saw that show, for a brief moment anything in the world was possible," Lake said. "Everyone, no matter what age, has dreamed of being able to fly or disappear. And the really wonderful thing about a magic show is that those things are possible, if only for a couple of hours."

Unlike many childhood aspirations, Lake's ambitions materialized. Not only is the Norman native now a magician, in May he was named the International Stage Magician of 2008 and received the prestigious Merlin Award.

"It's really the highest honor a magician can receive," Lake said. "It's the Oscar, Emmy or Tony of magic. All the really big names in magic are previous winners"

Still only 25 years old, Lake is the youngest magician ever to receive the Merlin Award, which is awarded not on the basis of a single illusion, but on the magician's entire body of work. About 100 names are considered for the award by the International Magic Society, which has 37,000 members and is the largest magic organization in the world. From these names, the winner is selected for their exceptional talent, showmanship, originality, skill, and ability to entertain under any conditions.



"No one deserves it more. He's the hardest working person in all of show business," said former Merlin winner Kirby VanBurch, in a release from Rob Lake Magic, Inc. "At this young age, if he has already won this award, I cannot wait to see what the future holds."

Fittingly, Lake chose to accept the award in Branson on the stage where he first saw magic performed. "I wanted things to come full circle," he explained.

It was VanBurch's Branson performance that first inspired the young Lake to pursue a career in magic. From the age of ten, Lake returned each year to see his show, and VanBurch grew to be a close friend and mentor.

Lake had wanted to be an entertainer from a very young age, but after seeing his first magic show he became completely obsessed with magic. He returned to Norman and got all the library books he could find on the subject, and began frequenting the Oklahoma City magic shops. Soon he began performing for his friends and family. "I started annoying everyone with card tricks," he recalled.



He also found a teacher and mentor in Norman magician Jim Smithson, when Smithson taught a magic class at Whittier Middle School.

Once in high school, Lake's impromptu tricks turned to paid performances for community groups, churches, and his Norman High School classmates. "I got my friends to be my assistants," Lake laughed. "They weren't big shows, but still, getting paid \$20 to do a magic show was exciting."

His talent was officially recognized when he was 16. Fox Family Channel held a national magic competition, and Oklahoma City was the last stop on their nation-wide search. They chose Lake as the winner, and named him "America's Greatest Young Magician."



Lake said he tried to give magic up after high school, and attended the University of Oklahoma for a few years. But he missed performing too much, so in 2003 he gave college up instead, and moved to Branson to be VanBurch's protégé.

"It was a great time because I was learning so much about the profession while getting my feet wet, and waiting for the phone to ring," Lake said.

There is no official training or school for magicians, so the best education is to learn from another. "It's a closely guarded fraternity," Lake explained. "I was very lucky to have two wonderful mentors."

Not long after going to Branson, Lake had enough illusions for his own show, so he began

performing in theaters around the country. Then in 2005, a Japanese agent approached him, and a few weeks later he took his show abroad. Lake toured Japan for four months and packed in a record number of performances and record-breaking attendance.

“Performing in Japan was truly awesome,” Lake said. “The culture has a great reverence and respect for magic because of their tradition of mythology.” He returned to Japan in 2007 for a second tour.

Since coming back to the United States last summer, Lake has been taking his show, “A Night of Magic,” all over the country, from New York to Florida to Las Vegas. Traveling with a team of dancers and crewmembers, his venues have included cruise lines, casinos and theaters.



Although he spends about 75 percent of his time on the road, Norman is still home for Lake, and he still loves performing in Oklahoma. “For one thing, it’s the only place you can say ‘Boomer’ on stage, and the entire audience yells back ‘Sooner,’” Lake joked. “But my favorite part about coming back is having so many friends and family members in the audience. A lot of them haven’t seen the show since high school, so it’s great to have them see how things have changed and what I’m doing now.”

Every part of his current show is unique, Lake said. “The majority of the illusions we created ourselves and – something the audience has never seen before. Even for the more standard illusions, we present them in such a way that they feel new to the audience.”

For example, Lake gives the traditional ring trick a twist by collecting rings from the audience members, then linking and unlinking them. He also uses volunteer assistants from the audience to help saw a woman in half, and levitates one of his dancers above a fountain of water.

Lake’s show is exceptional in its theatrical elements as well, and incorporates a variety of costumes and props. In one illusion, Lake rides a motorcycle onstage and is hoisted into the air in a cargo net, which falls open to reveal that he and his bike have vanished. Also in the show, a helicopter appears on a helipad, and Lake appears from inside a flat screen television.

In another of his unique illusions, using Japanese costumes and props, Lake places a dancer in a box, which he then folds like a piece of origami into a 12-inch box.

Lake explained that no one illusion is his favorite because he works on each one for three to four years to bring it from concept to performance. “They become like children to me,” he said.

But he confessed that he does prefer the parts of the show when the audience participates. In one illusion, for example, Lake throws beach balls to 12 audience members, who are brought onstage to sit on a ‘jury’ platform. The platform is momentarily covered, and then uncovered to show that all the audience members have disappeared. In another illusion, Lake levitates a woman from the audience while surrounded by other volunteers.

When asked if things ever went wrong with so many pieces of complicated equipment, Lake laughed, “Of course, all the time. Every theater is different, and on the road you never know what to expect until you get there. We’ve had the power go out and things fall from the ceiling, but the crew is prepared for everything. As soon as something goes wrong, they react, and the audience never knows.

In addition to his live shows, Lake’s illusions will be featured in the television special, “Great Magicians of the World,” which was filmed in May and will be broadcast internationally next year. All of the top international magicians were asked to perform an illusion for the special, with Lake invited to perform five. He and his team are now busy preparing for his own television segment, “The Rob Lake Special.”

As another separate project, Lake has designed specialized illusions for theatrical shows, including over 100 different productions of Disney’s “Beauty and the Beast.” The show, which is based on the Disney animated film, features a great deal of onstage magic. “Magic is easy for animators to create because all they do is draw it. It is my job to recreate this animated magic live,” Lake said.

As for the future, Lake said there are still many things he wants to achieve. He is currently considering offers for his own theater in a resort or tourist town, and there is discussion of a performance for U.S. troops stationed abroad. “We’re just beginning,” Lake said.

