

'Sinister, magical and  
very funny'

## **Barry and Stuart**

'Swift, high quality and  
thoroughly entertaining'

## **TableNine**

## Jay Fortune's

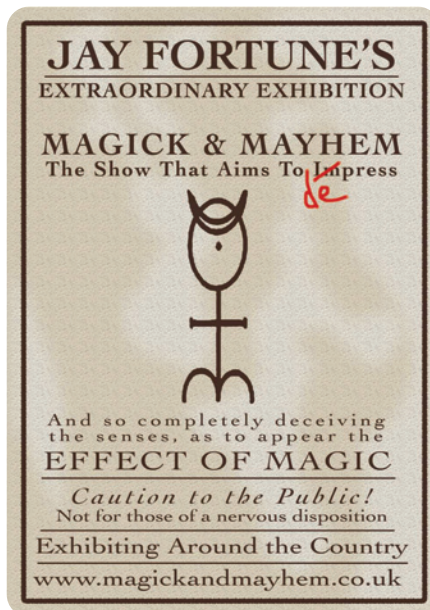
# Magick and Mayhem Show

**P**romising a show of pieces of strange that is not for those of a nervous disposition, we recently braved Jay Fortune's *Magick and Mayhem Show*. Staged in the rather appropriately claustrophobic *Barons Court underground theatre*, we caught up with Jay to ask him about the show, and more importantly why he's written such a performance which by its own headline is 'The show that aims to depress'

**Jay:** Well, it's the show that aims to impress, but as you rightly say, the posters have graffiti changing the 'im' on the word 'impress' to 'de' creating the word 'depress'. We aim to impress through the use of magic, lighting and staging, and also through the magic, we discuss topics and perform pieces on taboo subjects that the show may ultimately depress you too. In fact, it's quite normal for many people to leave the show during the performance as some of the pieces are too much for them to handle. Which is fine; I'd rather you had such a strong reaction that you left, rather than feign polite boredom and stay. Although there may be those who do that too! There's far too much magic that doesn't point to anything larger than itself, and whilst I agree with, and regularly perform magic for novelty's sake, there's also a place for magic as entertainment that disturbs the audience too. And I'm certainly not the first to realise this. Boredom bores me, and sadly many magic performances do this too. I'd rather any reaction, than no reaction at all. And sometimes that means people walk out.

**MS:** So, is the show offensive?

**Jay:** Well, that depends on the interpretation of the word. There's very little swearing, sex or gore. But I think it's the subjects we discuss and their performance that offends people. The show will affect people in different ways. For



example, in this latest show we have a few routines about death which make up about half an hour of the 75 minute show. Now, some people laugh out loud at these pieces, which are darkly comical. Others don't laugh at all. The magic is bigger than the sum of its parts. Actually, the performance is bigger than the sum of its parts. The actual magic is very limited. I do a twelve minute piece to find out how long someone has left to live, and like all

good horrors, this has a twist, as do many of the pieces in the show. If broken down into purely magic terms this trick is simply a reversed card, one of the first tricks we ever learn as magicians. But thanks to inspiration from many sources, initially Christian Chelman and Bob Neale, this piece is now quite powerful. Whatever your story is in your life up to the point you come see our show will depend on what you take from it and whether you decide to stay or not. We do a whole piece about the Samaritans and suicide and some people decide they don't wish to have such subjects performed to them. Others feel we're mocking suicide, but there's not a unanimous view. We know that from some of the reviews, comments and people we've had come along!

**MS:** What are your inspiration and reasons for doing such a show?

**Jay:** I'm a huge horror fan. And the best horror films have you hanging on to the edge of your seat. Some have you hiding behind it. Horror is an emotional response to fear, yet some of the best horrors have strong comedy in them too. And that's another emotional response to tap into. 99% of my professional work is tailored to cater for this latter emotion only. Magic is violent though; sawing in half, head-choppers, in fact most illusions are quite violent if you break them down into what the actual performance depicts. Maybe somewhere along the line magicians got scared of performing them quite as brutally as they could be performed, so swapped the horror for comedy. This is fine and does cater for a specific audience. Therein lies the problem; so many

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magicians rely on comedy as the only emotion they wish to engage through their magic that magic has become 'shelved' in every booker and agents mind as a show that can only cater for novelty value. I am a booker for clients, and with magic shows that are not of the norm, bookers are not initially open to it, as they didn't know that magic could have other reactions and be staged differently. They assume the magician has to entertain first and foremost through comedy and novelty. As I say, that's all well and good, but it's not the only way to entertain and engage an audience through magic. I'm a big fan of Simon Drake and Barry and Stuart; magicians who understand this and perform in a way which goes beyond the comfort barriers, not only for their audience but for themselves as well I'm sure.

**MS:** How far do you intend to push the boundaries and are you concerned that doing this may affect your other work?

**Jay:** That's a really good question and a real concern too. I have written many pieces which didn't make it into this latest show. Why? Several reasons; I didn't have the confidence to perform the particular pieces as they were way too removed from my comfort zone and two, I didn't know what reaction they would get. Didn't have an inkling of an idea. And that's dangerous too. If I create a piece... like in the latest show there's a simple poker trick

where two strangers play a game of poker against each other in the show, but whoever has the losing hand actually loses their hand. Now, that's based around the popular SAW horror films, and I have the mask, we do the voice-over and the 'victims' are set in the traps so they 'live or die' depending on their decisions. That'll make sense if you have actually seen the films! I play that routine 'straight' as it is totally voiced-over, with each move done to the v/o. But then come out of it and play the actual amputation of the losers hand for laughs. Some see that as sick, others as a welcome relief to the seriousness that's gone before. But when designing the piece I have a basic idea of how the spectators involved may react. Some pieces though, I really don't know. I have a piece about 9/11 and another about the Afghan war. These pieces are hard to put in, as they are magically strong (although that's not important in the bigger scheme of things) but as part of a show you have to alter the audiences' expectation to not only introduce the piece but perform it in the correct way, controlling the environment. Not easy to do if prior to these pieces you have done comedy. If the audience are still laughing, these sniggers can ruin a serious piece about a real-life event. Again, not knowing each audience member's personal story, they will project onto these pieces their own experiences. It's incredibly difficult to put in a piece about a real-life event which someone in

your audience may have been personally affected by. As a stand alone piece it could be pulled off, but put into the running order of a dark comedy alternative magic show, it could be received by many with completely the wrong reaction to what was innocently intended. Another concern with performing this kind and style of show is that it can alter agents' impression of you as a performer for the bread and butter work. I regularly perform cabaret gigs and these are both stand-up magic and comedy, without the taboo subjects that we address in Magick and Mayhem. But, as a creative artiste, I have a great time exploring and performing in all kinds of environments. So Magick and Mayhem is a creative outlet for this particular blend of comedy and horror.

**MS:** What is the future for the show?

**Jay:** The whole show is a piece of immersive theatre; you will join in even if you think you won't. We do a whole piece about phobias and as I discuss various phobias, the whole audience begins to experience them. And future shows will include a lot more of this style of immersive performance. For those expecting a typical magic show we start with a card trick, presented by a 10 year old sick and demented girl. Up until now though, she has only ever been heard by the audience. Next year in the show she actually makes her debut appearance! I have a piece using a deck of donor cards; again a real taboo topic and this will be in next year. We pass on curses, tell people their death date, play with their inhibitions and worries, so not being a believer of most things discussed in the show (except death!), and of no religious persuasion, am hopeful to be alive to perform the show for the foreseeable future. You may laugh, but in the last show we had a spiritualist turn up and pray for me during the entire show! Hey, at least it's a reaction! **ms**

To find out more about the Magick and Mayhem Show (18 years and over), stay up-to-date via their Facebook fan page; visit [www.magickandmayhem.co.uk](http://www.magickandmayhem.co.uk) (Will require a log-in due to the rating of the show) Magick and Mayhem; written and performed by Jay Fortune. Music by Darryl Kruger. Art by Jen. Directed by Richard Leigh. Produced by Matthew Herd.