

Transcript of the Interview with Anslem Roy

Thor: So why did you create Magic Annex?

Roy: Basically I set up Magic Annex because when I got back from China in 2004, I found the “David Blaine” phenomenon was very feverish in Malaysia but a lot of people in Malaysia were doing tricks and were not performing. So what I did was that I looked around and I realized that they were looking for direction but not getting it from the other clubs or shops.

(Roy is also the President of Malaysia’s IMS)

Thor: So why couldn’t the International Magicians Society (Malaysia) help with that?

Roy: IMS is not into doing personal teaching. We (Magic Annex) are not into teaching you tricks, we are into teaching you to be better performers and entertainers. That is why we have a very strict vetting system whereby we only take in members who are passionate about magic. So to be a member of Magic Annex, number one you need to get into the forums and ask publically for an interview, so we do not want people who are shy to be members. Number two then you go through the interview process, where your name is given to all the members in the club and they will all agree or disagree on whether we want to accept you. If you are accepted, you will be in as a probationary member for two months, and there would be a shadow person to watch you and then we watch your behavior, what you do and what you do not do.

Roy: After that period, you are advised to as whether you are a member, or you are not a member, or we will extend your probationary period. The reason we do this is because we want to be certain that only the good people stay in magic. We don’t want people to abuse the system or join just for fun. We do not charge anything, it is free, I put my name, my thirty-three years of experience behind it and basically I am there to give. I think that it is a good legacy to leave behind. That is why even in the shops we do we are not interested in making money. We do not charge for shipping or handling unless you are buying via postage which you would then pay the postage yourself. So my passion is to have good magic in the country and I want magic to be something that people say “Hey it is an art form!” Right now, it is not there yet. There is not enough people who can bring magic to that level yet.

Vogue: So what you see that is lacking in the magic community?

Roy: The biggest problem is discipline.

Thor: What about the support that Magicians lack? Like people do not believe that magicians can make it.

Roy: Why? That’s my question. Why not?

Vogue: Asian culture also plays a big part...

Roy: I have done it. I have seen people do it. Magic doesn't start when you say "Hey let me show you a trick" Magic starts when you walk towards a crowd to perform. Are you dressed well? Do you speak well? Are you groomed well? Are you respectable enough? Do I as a member of the audience want to talk to you as a person? If you approach the person in a t-shirt, that is not magic. I have heard clients actually say when our boys (Magic Annex Members) go out and perform they go "Wow this guys dress like pros arh!" and it's just the dressing! They haven't even seen the magic yet! That is half the battle won.

Roy: Then you start to speak well. You don't start a trick by saying "Hey can I show you some magic arh?" because if you ask me that question I would say no. But if you say for example "Hey I found this really cool coin and it's really flexible" and you start it in a very surprising manner people will just warm up to you and then you open the doors and that is your first breaking point.

Roy: Then it should be planned. You should know how many laughs you are going to get, where your peak energy point is and where it is going to drop. You do three tricks and say "Hey I got these other people to attend to but I'll be back! Enjoy" As you leave, the feeling of the crowd should be "Aiyah finish already arh?" You know? If the crowd gets this feeling that they have been tricked by you, then you are not performing well. That is the problem that is prevalent in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, even in Hong Kong. I come to you, I'm smarter than you, I challenge you and they do not say it but that is the body language. When you approach with that mindset...

Thor: The audience becomes defensive...

Roy: Yea, I get aggressive. I go "Show me your hand" "I want to shuffle the cards" "Let me see your pocket". I do some close-up magic too and I never had the audience heckle me because the magic is always incidental. I'm there as a friend, I'm there as the host and when I leave, they all go "damn good trick that bugger did man!" and that is what you need to get. It's not about doing tricks, it's about entertaining people. We just happen to entertain them by doing tricks.

Thor: Ok, so which magician greatly influenced your magic?

Roy: For stage illusions it is David Copperfield, for design it is Franz Harary, Jim Steinmeyer, John Mendoza, Billy Smith , Ayala

Roy: So I take different things from different people. Like Copperfield, he doesn't build props himself.

Vogue: Yea he outsources them...

Roy: But he is a great performer! So each performer has his/her own strengths.

Vogue: Every magician that have done well have always someone to thank for their big break, so is there anyone you would like to thank?

Roy: No. I clawed my way up to the top. I started off doing birthday parties. Then I started doing manipulation for five years and then I switch to stage magic and then stand-up magic and I'm glad that when I was practicing magic then, I didn't have dvds. I think that dvds are good and they give you an idea but if you had a book, it forces you to develop your own style. That is why when I open up a magic trick, I never read the instructions. I pull it out, start playing with it and then go back to read the instructions.

Vogue: If there's any advice that you can give to any magician aspiring to go full-time as a professional, what would you give?

Roy: Number 1, you have to be disciplined. It took me 3 months, 3 hours a day just to get a coin pass mastered. That's because it wasn't just this, it was angles, understanding where people stood, working out how it was not a straight pass, it was a curve, all of that stuff...so when you start dissecting things. For example, I just finished teaching in a play how to operate a fickle fire. It's 9 steps to do it. Number 1 you create the impression that your hand is empty. Number 2 you steal, while people think that it is part of the dance routine. Number 3, you flick. Its got to be a good clean flick, and you got to make sure people don't see the gimmick. Number five, the flame has to disappear. Everything has to be broken up and analysed and then presented.

Number 2 is to remember that you are only as good as your last show. No matter how good you've been before, it does not matter, you are only as good as your last show. And if your last show suck, you suck and trust me after 33 years of experience, you never get a perfect show. So the thing is, ok you're supposed to be perfect, you made four mistakes Forget about the rest of the show, just concentrate on making the next one good and rectify the four mistakes. You get on stage and you're doing a show because of whatever, what happens outside does not matter. Your job is to entertain the audience. Whether you get paid or you don't get bad, it does not matter. The minute the show opens, your responsibility is the audience.

I always remember this; that whenever you are performing for a group of people, you carry an immense responsibility and this goes to any entertainer. If you perform to say 500 people and they are giving you 20 minutes of their time, that is time that they will never get back. They are giving you 20 minutes of their life, time that they could have spent with their girlfriends, mothers and better things to do. But they decided to give you their 20 minutes, so you take 20 minutes and multiply by 500 people. That's how much responsibility you have on your shoulders. When you walk on stage with that burden in your heart and you are still able to do a good show, and at the end people go "Damn that was good!". That's your reward. And until you develop a mindset at that point. You're no where close where you should be.

So these are basic principles, I mean we all put up our plans one leg at a time. So until you get those things in your psyche. Magic does not mean anything.

Thor: So our last question of the day, so you said that books helped you a lot?

Roy: When I grew up, we didn't have dvds so books was it. Then came VHS tapes, then now its dvds. To me it's a learning experience. To me if I don't learn something new everyday, then to me it's a day lost. Its me, I just want to learn something everyday. So to me it's a learning process everyday. And if you want to be a stage magician, it doesn't stop just at magic. Costuming, stage, light, sound.....

Thor: Body language?

Roy: No no that's just you but what about your style of clothing, what about the colour. When you're performing close up, are you performing in good light, where should the best light be. All of that staging, is something that performers generally don't do. So getting back to your question of whether books helped me.....

Thor: So what books do you recommend?

Roy: I started with Patrick Page's "Big Book of Magic". That opened up a huge world for me. Henry Hay's "Amateur Magician's Handbook". Its brilliant, its out of print. If you get hold of that book, man it's a wealth of information. "The Buckley Trilogy", that's another one. " Magic and Showmanship for Magicians" by Henning Nelms. Dariel Fitzkee's "Showmanship for Magicians". They are old but when you look at it you might go eee...but the principles are just gold. If you can get those principles, great!

Then you should just watch every show that you can get your hands on video. Because there is no such thing as a show that you cannot learn from. There's good stuff, stuff that you should do or try to learn from. There's also stuff that you shouldn't do. When you see a show that sucks, you go "Ok I shouldn't this I shouldn't do this". People go..."Eeyur, bad show" but what did you learn?

So every show is a learning experience. I watch singers. And I watch them because I learn lighting, I learn the way they behave with lighting, I learn the way how they handle microphones, I learn how they interact with audiences. Like I just watched Elton John in Madison square garden, and he was performing in the middle of the stage. And do you know that that man got up after every song, he consciously looked up at a quarter of the audiences and went "EH!" and then he will get down to play and he will do this for every song. Which means he realizes that his audiences are all around him. As a performer, he realizes that it is his responsibility as a performer to acknowledge his audiences because without the audiences, the performer is nothing. So I was watching and I went "Damn". He is brilliant! Another one is Eric Clapton, apparently, he had a really bad show in Singapore. So while he was in Malaysia, he went through the entire concert, 1hr and 45 minutes, just going through the motions. But when he sang "Wonderful tonight". The whole stadium was in candle lights, and the audiences were singing and then he stopped singing and then he realizes that " Damn this is a damn good crowd!" That's when the concert started and then he went on for 9 minutes encore, but he went on for 20 minutes and Nathan East was like "Whats up with you dude?".

So as a performer, you realize that the psyche is very important. You know once you have set that the audiences are enjoying themselves. So if you see me do shows and when the audiences are not responding, you will see me struggle. I will increase the volume of my voice, I will change my pitch, I will definitely try. By the time I do my fourth trick, and if they are drunk I will just end my show as soon as possible and get off stage. By the time I hit my third trick, if I don't get audience respect for it, you will see me struggle. People do not know this but for those who know me, know that I struggle. I have various tricks, I will slow down my speech, if there's a noisy table, I will direct my voice in that direction. I try to make eye contact with one or two people without ignoring the rest. So people ask me "Am I performing magic?" The answer is no. I am just being an entertainer. Big difference. I mean 33 years of experience, that's what I want to pass on to these guys (referring to The Magic Annexe members). I want them to understand what this is all about.

Thor and Vogue: Thank you very much

Roy: Not at all. I hope it helps!