

No. 58, KNOXVILLE, TN – Smoky Mountain Mystics

Meets 4th Thursday at 6:45 PM each month

Messiah Lutheran Church

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March was a difficult month for Ring 58 since Covid was preventing us from holding our 47th annual Winter Carnival of Magic. However, we did meet twice during the month, so that made it feel a little more acceptable. On what would have been the opening day of the convention, our Program Chairman, Tim Pressley, arranged an excellent mini-show and lecture by Keith Fields and Lady Sarah (his wife). The banter between these two was priceless and perfectly scripted for our Zoom meeting (they've done about 80 during the pandemic). Keith started with a barrage of magic and sight gags like an appearing fishbowl from his wallet and the cure to the common cold. He also wished a happy birthday to our treasurer, Jack Wilson, and led us all in that timeless classic chorus. His work on the Professor's Nightmare was fantastic, and many of the ten of us on the lecture are certainly putting it back in our acts because of his handling. We will look forward to having Keith and Sarah at our next actual WCM convention in 2022.

On March 25, our theme was "Memories of the Winter Carnival" and we had thirteen members and one first-time guest, Dan Stockdale, join in the fun. Our WCM Talent Chairman for the past ten years, Tom Vorjohan, contacted a tremendous list of past (and future!) WCM talent and friends of the Ring, and thirteen were able to join us. We were delighted to open with the "Magic Asian Man" who will be with us in 2022 with his awesome wit and superlative magic; Naathan Phan did a little comedy and showed us his beautiful Torn and Restored Newspaper. Larry Hass followed with one of Eugene's favorite Spot Card effects, then he told us the news that final book "Eugene Burger Final Secrets" should be out this summer. We were delighted to have the I.B.M. Intl. President, Stephen Bargatze, join us from Nashville to show his support of the convention that he's made more than ten appearances at. He was joined by our TVP from Tennessee, Tom Gibson, along with Jason Michaels, and Brian Waltham who were all with Stephen at Ring 37's first "in-person" meeting in a year. Stephen took a few minutes with us, and we got to hear about the success of his son, Nate's, latest Netflix special. Truly fantastic!

The "Man with Many Voices," Stephen Knowles, had nothing but praise for the Winter Carnival since it is what launched his 22-year career at the Comedy Barn in Pigeon Forge after Mike Stratman hired him for our convention which led to him "being discovered" by David Fee. It was great to have David Kaye, aka "Silly Billy" join us from Connecticut, and tell stories about everything from his massive book collection (we just saw four!) to some trivia about Captain Kangaroo! Ken Scott, our International President Elect who will also be a part of the 2022 convention, urged us all to come to the virtual I.B.M. convention in July and consider the Atlanta Harvest September 30 through October 2. Daniel Herron, a member of Ring 58 and our Dealer Chairman for almost two decades, had performed on last year's convention stage show, and he told several stories about some of the hijinks we have gotten into year after year at the WCM. Our stage director, Mike Woodward, also told several stories from the backstage point of view...hysterical!

Brandon Baggett has the dubious honor of being the *final act* to perform on the *final magic convention* of 2020, and we learned that he has been attending the WCM since he was four or five years old (he remembers being there for the snowstorm or '93). Jason Hudy, who has appeared twice at the WCM, was also on our Zoom meeting from St. Petersburg where he just arrived to work with the Zubricks, who are opening a theater and show in July. Matt Stanley of Dayton, Ohio, has been at a lot of the Winter Carnivals, and he told us how he has not one but *three* first-place trophies from our youth competition...with three different acts. Matt was fantastic on our 2020 convention. Our own Michael Messing had many stories to share from the years he worked backstage working with acts like Juliana, Paul Driscoll (when Paul was working a full illusion show with four assistants), and Landis & Company. Victor Agreda mentioned that his first convention was in 2014, and some of these stories made us all feel like we missed a lot if we hadn't been at the WCM for all these years.

There was a lot more sharing of stories, and we never got to do any magic for each other that night...but no one seemed to care. Our convention has helped to launch many careers; even Keith Fields told us earlier in the month that the Winter Carnival was his first convention to work when he moved to the States. We have a long and impressive list of performers in our history, and we expect to have many, many more in the years to come. Our sincere thanks to those special guests who joined us. Now we start preparing for March of 2022!

Tom Vorjohan