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The Magical Career of Jonathan Levit

By Amy Lyons

Jonathan Levit made his mark on the magic world when he appeared on one of the most highly rated episodes of the *X-Files*, *The Amazing Maleeni*. Levit was up against formidable competition with his *Files* audition, with every actor/magician in Los Angeles vying for the role. In the end, it came down to **Ricky Jay**, known for his appearance in *Heist*, *Magnolia*, *Tomorrow Never Dies* and *Boogie Nights* and Levit, both of whom were cast on the show as a magical duo, echoing the capers of **Paul Newman** and **Robert Redford** in their very own hocus-pocus version of *The Sting*.



So, how did Levit beat out the multitude of magicians and actors duking it out for the *X-Files* role? The same way he grabs all of his gigs, including an impressive number of stage performances at The Magic Castle: by simply working hard at what he loves. By tending to his talents in the magic world and giving equal focus to his goals as an actor, Levit has managed to create a career for himself that incorporates his many gifts and allows him to sustain a feeling of fulfillment.

Take, for instance, his experience as the host of *Miracle Hunters*, the Discovery Channel's show in which Levit investigated eerie phenomena on a world-wide scope. It was his knowledge of magic that gave Levit a leg-up on the competition and propelled him forward, landing him firmly in the show's hosting seat. The producers originally searched the acting/hosting world to fill the position, but this yielded less-than-perfect results. When they cast a wider net that included magicians, they snared Levit, whose experience with illusions, tricks and sleight of hand made him the ideal sleuth of other-worldly occurrences. There was no better man for the job than Levit, whose dalliances in smoke and mirrors entertainment date all the way back to his boyhood.

He began learning the trade of tricks and illusions at the age of eight and by the age of twelve, Levit was performing in front of crowds. "My mother saw an advertisement for street performers in the local paper and she encouraged me to try out. I got the job and performed on the streets of St. Louis from the age of 12 through my college years," said Levit, who attended Syracuse, but spent summers performing in St. Louis. "If you can learn how to do street performing, you can learn how to do almost any other type of performing. It's hard work because your audience is always changing and you have to earn money by passing a hat," said Levit.

And earn money he did. A few years after graduating from college, Levit moved to Los Angeles and quickly became a member of The Magic Castle, that Mecca of exclusive A-list magicians and performers. Two years later, he was performing at the Castle. "It was hard, at first, to hang out at the Magic Castle and feel like I was not part of the established crowd," said Levit, who now performs regularly at the esteemed Hollywood venue.

To his credit, Levit stuck it out and kept showing up at the club and it was there that he got the *X-Files* break. "Everyone in the magic world watched that show—mostly because Ricky Jay was appearing. But soon they started asking about 'the other guy,' and that other guy was me," said Levit. He was ecstatic in recollecting how perfectly the experience blended his magic talents with his acting pursuits. He has had the pleasure of getting to know some of his childhood magic heroes, including Dean Dill.

Though Levit's ultimate goal is to be an actor, he does not see himself heeding the advice of those who tell him to give up magic to solely pursue acting. "I do both magic and acting because I love both things. I would not have been cast as an actor on the *X-Files* if I had not been recommended by someone at the Magic Castle. My goal is to create a symbiotic relationship between my acting and my magic, but to also work on projects that focus only on the acting side of my career," said Levit. It will be nice to see what rabbit this versatile performer pulls out of his hat next. If you want to check out his work, find a way to get yourself into The Magic Castle this coming January; not just anyone can permeate the Castle walls—bust out your wand and your best bag of tricks when thinking of ways to witness Levit's stage show.