



# PAUL DRAPER

## MORPHING THEATRE, MAGIC, MENTALISM AND ANTHROPOLOGY

By Tim Shoesmith

**P**aul Draper grew up in Salt Lake City, Utah, home of the 2002 Winter Olympics. His uncle discovered Showplace Magic in the city centre, which appealed to the youth. Later he bought the Fulves self-working books at Disneyland. When Paul watched Michael Skinner in Vegas at the age of 16 he was stimulated to one day move to

Vegas. On the same Vegas trip, Gil Martinez convinced Paul to buy his first professional magic book, "13 Steps to Mentalism" after a performance of the Centre Tear.

As a child Paul had a strong inclination to all things theatrical, giving speeches, debating and involving himself in theatrical

performances. Indeed he won at local and international level at many of these arts.

He found himself working in all areas of theatre from stage management to lead roles.

In 2003 he gained a degree in anthropology and moved to Nevada to teach at the university. At the age

of 24, now holding a Master's, he decided to pursue entertainment as a full time career. First as a Musical Theatre actor and starting at age 30 as a full time mentalist.

He now performs in Las Vegas, Hollywood and much of the English speaking world.

"I don't make my living performing

magic for magicians, nor do I spend the majority of my time making effects more deceptive for magicians. I focus on the needs of real paying audiences."

In the last 7 years he has gone from part time pro to travelling the world and owning large homes in 3 major cities with a luxury car at each. He points out that this has happened during the worst economic climate of our lifetime. The 2008 collapse to today.

I first saw Paul Draper work when he lectured at The Magic Circle in 2013. He came across as a very likeable and intelligent performer. When I realised that we were going to work together at The Magic Castle the following year I was excited to see what he would do in front of a live audience. I was performing late night close up at the same time as Paul was working the Parlour. For me, his show was mentalism at its best. It was funny and baffling in equal measure.

Bad mentalism is one of the most boring art forms to watch! Think of something, now I will tell you what it is, repeated continually throughout the show. Good mentalism draws you in and to some extent makes an audience question the limits of human ability. Like all good mentalists, Paul got a lot out of a few bits of stationary and audience members. It was easy to see why this man has been so successful.

There is little doubt that Paul sees presentation as the key to any good mind reading act. When told that someone else at the Castle was performing a trick with paper and pencils he laughed out loud,

"Oh no, not another mentalist doing a trick with paper and pencils!"

His sarcasm was evident! I doubt the audiences would have seen the connection. Paul's presentation, to the paying public, was completely different to the other act that was performing the same effect.

Based in Las Vegas he has developed a strong brand and is now highly regarded. His performances have gained such remarks as

"If you've got an embarrassing secret, you might want to bring a tin-foil hat," from Rick Lax at Las Vegas Weekly and Wizard Wars.

He has had quite a TV career making appearances on shows such as Hell's Kitchen, Pawn Stars and Mindfreak. He has also lectured at Yale University, USC, UCLA and is a well respected artiste in Las Vegas having performed hundreds of times on the Las Vegas Strip. Venues include The Venetian, and Planet Hollywood.

Paul has taken his knowledge of anthropology and managed to combine mentalism with his studies to produce a coherent theatrical presentation.

When I asked him why he thinks it is more difficult to perform mentalism in an entertaining way than magic, I got this reply,

"Magic at its core is a visual art. Many magic effects can be performed in isolation from the magician and can still be visually stimulating, even if the audience knows how it is done.

Most mentalism is based in language and a journey of the mind. The success of a show like this is dependent upon the audience caring about the performer and the character. If they don't, a mentalism show quickly devolves into a bad open mic night at a comedy club.

As mentalists we have to accept that we are superheroes fulfilling the dreams and desires of our audience. We need to connect our magical skills to their real life desires so they can see the potential real life benefits of our powers and abilities."

Above all, Paul is considered to be entertaining and this is why he is popular amongst TV and conference executives. I asked him if he could identify what made him so accessible to an audience?

"First and foremost I am an entertainer. In the United States I have won national awards in oratory, mime, and performed in multimillion dollar musical theatre tours. I am a professor of cognitive anthropology and can speak broadly and deeply



**MAGIC AT ITS CORE IS A VISUAL ART. MANY MAGIC EFFECTS CAN BE PERFORMED IN ISOLATION FROM THE MAGICIAN AND CAN STILL BE VISUALLY STIMULATING, EVEN IF THE AUDIENCE KNOWS HOW IT IS DONE.**

about these subjects in the show. My character is clear. The effects that I choose are highly deceptive and performed smoothly with clear life application to the audience.

The show is woven together with comedy, call backs, and a strong theatrical arc that takes the audience on a journey. So many magicians and mentalists simply focus on the trick and if it fools people they say "good enough" and it goes into the show. However, choosing a good trick is like being a white belt in a martial arts class, it is only the beginning of the battle."

Paul regularly holds workshops for a variety of clients including, hypnotists, mentalists, magicians, clinical hypnotherapists, corporate speakers and anyone who puts themselves in front of a crowd and has something to say.

"My workshop is about discovering what sets us apart from everyone else and how that will give us the star

quality we need to be remembered and booked again.

I also look at particular effects used by mentalists and how they can be performed on TV and stage as well as close up. I will also look at performing at trade shows and in theatres. Each environment needs special considerations and attention."

Paul prides himself on being accessible wherever he is asked to work. Adaptability is key. We discussed the differences between working a trade show and walk about close up magic.

"When you are booked to perform close up magic at a social event you do not have to sell a product. It is about connecting people at the party and being the most interesting person in the room. When you work a trade show it is about the product. Your job is to qualify leads, to explain the benefits of the service or product. Ultimately you are there to help in the selling process."



**I HAVE GONE FROM NOTHING TO BEING A RELATIVE SUCCESS IN A SHORT PERIOD OF TIME. THIS IS DOWN TO BRANDING, MARKETING, AND SALES. THESE ARE AREAS WHERE MAGICIANS AND MENTALISTS ARE WEAK.**

I asked him if he did impromptu magic when asked. He said, "Yes if I can make the environment my own. If I am going to do something for them, then they have to invest time and energy into it as well. If someone says: 'I've got thirty seconds show me something quick!' I would say 'no'. They are not a serious potential buyer."

If I think the situation is right I say "Yes, absolutely. But I need a table, pens, paper, at least five people and fifteen minutes of your time." If they are agreeable, I'll show them something.

You use hot and cold readings and Séance when you work! Is this correct?

"Yes. I include cold reading and hot reading techniques into sure fire effects as an added bonus and ah ha moments to the magic."

I perform theatrical re creations of séances in the month of October and at Steam Punk events. As well as at my own Theatrical Haunted House that was listed as one of the top ten in the world by the Travel Channel this year."

Do you think it is ethical and do you have any safeguards?

"My disclaimer at the head of the show is the theatrical proscenium and the jokes I open with explain that I am an actor and performer. At the end of the show I close with the Linking Rings and the song 'Pure Imagination'. If those don't tip someone off to my intent then we must reference back to the Dunninger quote,

"For those who believe, no explanation is necessary; for those who do not believe, no explanation will suffice."

The structure of Paul's show is very interesting.

"First I let them know who I am. Then let them know what my abilities are. Once that has been accomplished I offer them proof of my abilities followed by a discussion of my struggles. I talk about the abilities I wished I had, before attempting to go beyond my shown abilities. When all is done, I finish with a quiet moment. I reveal something personal about myself, sing a song, genuinely thank the audience and say goodnight."

Like all live performers rehearsal is difficult.

"The problem is rehearsal requires people. A silent magic act can be

isolated, it can be rehearsed in front of a mirror or a video camera. Mentalism requires engagement, interaction, it really can't be rehearsed without an audience.

I work new material in sandwiched between effects that I know will work. They fail sometimes but I know I can follow it up with something strong.

There are a number of local shows in Vegas were I can try something new without feeling too much pressure."

Why do you think that you have been able to create a successful business so quickly?

"I have gone from nothing to being a relative success in a short period of time. This is down to branding, marketing, and sales. These are areas where magicians and mentalists are weak.

When I first started I was doing everything I could, banging away at the ceiling as it were, trying everything until it came down.

After a while I realised that my approach was selfish. I had worked on an act and was now looking for an agent to get me booked. You do the leg work and I'll perform. Then I asked myself the question,

How does my magic fulfil the needs of others?

This changed everything, I realised I was in the need fulfilment business. I had to understand the market. Once you know what people need it all becomes easier."

I asked Paul about his plans for the future and in particular if he was

planning on coming back to the UK in the future.

He told me that one of the largest British conventions has been after him for a number of years, "I'm hoping it will come off soon and I will be back in the UK."

His primary goal seems to be to travel. "I turned down a six month contract on a cruise line which would have doubled my income. I looked at it and thought this boat is traveling between four islands over and over again. I want to put more pins in my map of the world than that."

We have other projects on the go, shows for major companies, TV projects, I'm very variety driven."

Finally I asked him what his week entailed.

"I was at the Magic Castle for their employee appreciation night to see Max Maven and Shimada. After all of the shows I drove 4 hours to Vegas and saw the Mac King Show and David Copperfield's new show."

I woke up the next morning and drove to Salt Lake for thanksgiving (one of only two days of the year that we make an English Sunday roast). Now it is 3 am and I am being interviewed for a magical publication. Tomorrow I'll drive back to Los Angeles for a weekend of Disney followed by shooting a television commercial in the days and working for the Magic Castle at night"

It's not a bad life for a working magician!



Photo: Richard Faverty/Beckett Studios