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ANCA & LUCCA
EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

ANCA



LUCCA

BY LUCA VOLPE



IT ALL STARTED WITH 'HELLO'

Are mind-reading and clairvoyance real? Or is all just an illusion that can be explained? In their theater show Anca & Lucca reveal the secrets of mental magic and leave you speechless and amazed nonetheless. The spectators become part of the newest and unsurpassed illusions of mental magic.

It all started with “Hello!”. This was not only the first word of the first conversation between Anca and Lucca when they first met at a cocktail party. It was also the only one. After Lucca approached Anca with a “Hello” and she responded back, he simply smiled and walked away. Nevertheless, he found her again the next day on Facebook and asked her out. Their first date was a rather unusual eight-hour-long walk through the city of Vienna. Six years later, the story of how they met would become the central theme of their mental magic theater show “Anca & Lucca -The Mind-Reading Revolution”.

In between those six years Anca would transform from a complete layman of magic into one of the world’s most successful female mentalists. Two times FISM Vice-World Champion in 2015 and 2018, FISM European Champion in 2017 and Nostradamus d’Or winner for Europe’s Best Mentalist in 2019 with their telepathy act “The Mind-Reading Revolution”. Finally, at the FISM World Championships in 2022, Anca & Lucca won the 1st prize for their new act “The Ritual”, in which Anca & Lucca are portraying an ethnic clairvoyant couple that wins the crowds with their moments of self-irony and humor and quickly create the willing suspension of disbelief.

The married couple have been continuously working on improving their methods and presentation to make the act feel like “the closest thing to real mind-reading the audience can experience”. This has been one of their goals from the beginning. I had the pleasure to work with them on some projects and what really impressed me about this couple is their incredible precision and perfection in building their acts. They are always trying to push their limits and this is what makes people successful.

Lucca’s career began long before he met Anca, but it was only at the age of nineteen that he discovered his love for magic. One year later he already joined the “Magic Cercle Vienna”, but for the next decade magic was only a hobby. Following a moment of awakening in 2008, he sold his oth-



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er businesses and started performing for the high luxury hotel industry, not only in Austria, but also in Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and the Maldives. For one of his clients Lucca created the first of many innovations: a dinner show in which the guests had to move one row of seats forward after each of the four show blocks in between the dinner courses.

A lot of Lucca's illusions are related to numbers. Lucca's Magic Square involves the audience by letting them count down as he writes the numbers from their countdown into the grid. His performance of the Chess Knight's Tour with a freely selected starting and end field is displayed on the background/ screen and can be followed by even larger audiences. It ends with a canny prediction twist. Honestly speaking, I have seen many Knight's Tour performers, but this is by far the most entertaining and fooling one, you certainly don't want to miss Lucca's performances.

When Lucca finally met Anca in 2011, she didn't know anything about magic but only one year later their lives would magically change forever. In 2012 Lucca won his first national title as Austria's Champion of Mental Magic. Only one month later, exactly on their one-year anniversary they spontaneously decided to marry secretly. Around the same time, Lucca showed Anca a video with a powerful performance of the German mind-reading couple Timothy Trust and Julie. Inspired by them, as well as by videos portraying the elegance of Frances Willard of Falkenstein & Willard, Anca wanted for the first time to learn



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magic, in particular mind-reading. Hence Lucca started to develop their own methods and presentation of the classical two-person telepathy act. Instead of merely walking into the audience, Lucca asks the audience to come on stage with objects of their own choice, thus making this act visible for everyone and allowing for a much wider range of objects. In 2019, at their performance on "Penn & Teller: Fool Us" Anca and Lucca even challenged Teller to come up with any object somebody merely could have brought with them to the studio and Anca correctly

guessed Teller's choice "kumquat". They also developed completely new effects, such as copying a freely chosen hand movement of a spectator or the revelation of someone's first love and their age back then.

Apart from their baffling technique, it is their artistic approach that makes them unique. The 10-minute-long act "The Mind-Reading Revolution" turned into a full-length theater show, created together with a dramatic adviser. The goal of their theater show is to intrigue even audiences who are not familiar with or passionate about magic shows.

Anca's contribution lays in her emotional approach to all their illusions and her bold thinking. Many times, she challenges Lucca to come up with a trick solution for an effect she has in mind. Not having learned all the secrets of magic and refusing to question the methods of other performers, she tries to keep her imagination unlimited as to what is possible or not. It is Lucca's job to respond with the technical solutions, but

even then, the resulting brainstorming between them leads often to unexplored territories. Lucca, on the other hand, has always been a philosopher and tries to give his illusions meaning and purpose. Detached from clichés of magic, Lucca deals with very diverse topics in his illusions such as true love, lying, reincarnation, quantum entanglement and classical music.

Apart from his illusions on stage, Lucca had been wondering about the nature of amazement and its meaning in life ever since he started performing magic. Yet it was again Anca who encouraged him



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to write a motivational speech about curiosity, amazement and creativity and his personal approach to magic. The speech and their love story are the backbone of his book - "The Rediscovery of Amazement," which is currently being translated into English. Their two sons, aged 8 and 5, keep the couple amazed every day, as they travel with them whenever possible. The little ones have already been to 18 countries.

2020 was in many ways supposed to be a breakthrough for their career, with planned show tours in France, Germany and India and a series of international TV appearances. Like for so many artists in our magic world, the pandemic hit them hard and unexpected. Returning in Vienna from a show in Los Angeles, they had to go straight into lockdown. Their home country Austria had gone through four





lockdowns and was one of the hardest-hit markets.

Anca & Lucca used the time to keep working on their new act and to prepare for FISM 22 in Quebec.

The pandemic also put a halt to their parlour magic show "The Salon of Wonder", one of Austria's longest running magic shows at the prestigious Park Hyatt Vienna.

Anca & Lucca kept performing for corpo-

rate events in film studios and otherwise used the time to work together with Jeff McBride on their latest creation, "The Oracle of Transylvania", in which Anca was already acting as an ethnic clairvoyant. It may well be the first fusion of mental magic and dance ever created, and has only been performed publicly twice so far, the second time being at the FISM European Championships in Manresa (Spain) in 2021, where it was awarded with the second prize in mental magic. Many audience and jury members

mentioned the magical atmosphere that Anca & Lucca had created with their new characters and staging of a fire camp. This gave them the idea to use the same setting for their original min-reading act, hence "The Ritual" was born.

After winning at FISM in summer 2022 with it, they started touring on bigger stages in France, Belgium, Switzerland, Romania, Greece and Italy.

Wherever they perform, they prefer to do so in the local language. They are capa-



ble of performing fluently in English, German, Italian, French, Spanish and, of course, Anca's mother tongue Romanian.

I've been personally involved in their creational processes on some occasions already, as well as having had the pleasure to interview them for various online conventions over the last two years. I've picked the most interesting Q&As:

Luca Volpe: Why did you reveal your method to Teller before your perfor-

mance. How could you possibly have fooled them?

Lucca: I admit that was a very bold move, but the temptation to become the first fooler revealing the method in advance was too big. Unfortunately, something that never happened before went terribly wrong. Anca received the word "kumquat" absolutely correctly, but she didn't know what type of food it was. She was afraid that I had made a mistake by trying to send her something else, so she let me start our thought transmission process again.

For a lay audience it may still go under the radar, but for Penn & Teller it was too much to leave them with a feeling of impossibility behind. It would have been too good, because it was actually Teller himself who inspired me. When I saw his red ball levitation for the first time, it fooled me badly, even though I knew the method.

Luca Volpe: But I know this was not the only thing that didn't work out as planned. Do you want to share this?

Anca: For time reasons, the network cut





out the last effect. In his instructions to Teller, Lucca had used the same phrase again and again: "Take your pen and tell her in your mind". After revealing Teller's friend's name, we unfolded a long paper ribbon that showed: "Take your PENN & TELL'ER in your mind". Since it had been the same words over and over again, it was quite deceiving in terms of verbal coding and it was a tribute to Penn & Teller, of course. They liked it and so did the live audience. We were very sad to see that it never aired, because this had been the essence of our whole performance. Nevertheless, the experience was amazing, the production team was very professional and supportive. We can only encourage everybody to pitch their ideas for the next season!

Luca Volpe: Lucca, in your lecture at the Las Vegas MINDvention in 2019, you made your point why you don't differentiate between a mentalist and a magician. Can you explain why?

Luca: No matter how one defines magic, this definition will always include mentalism just like the definition of a fruit will always describe an apple. I understand the wish of mental magicians or mentalists to separate themselves from classical magic, but I think that in the long run it would do us all a favor if we would admit that we are mainly working with magic principles and that all our principles are explicable. We must not fall into the trap of confusing our magic secrets with our depiction. The audience wants to be deceived about how we deceive them but not about the fact that we are deceiving them. The moment we start to perform, our audience grants us the permission to deceive them the same way they allow an actor to pretend being somebody else on stage, but the foundation of this unwritten contract is that the audience knows

that we are pretending to be magicians.

Luca Volpe: For all your acts you are guaranteeing not to use pre-arrangements, secret assistants or any electronic devices for your shows by an affidavit worth one million dollars. Why do you do that?

Anca: We went to the notary and legally bound ourselves to this promise and made it public. We never use pre-arrangements, we do not have any secret assistants and we never use electronics. Giving up these 3 methods makes life easier for us (all we need is a sound check and we can step on stage and perform for 1 hour at corporate and private events or for 2 hours in our theatre show). Hence, we like to say that we perform "mental magic unplugged", which makes the whole experience even more authentic and artistic for us and our audience. Similarly, you could ask Adele why she never uses all these back-up vocals and playback options Britney Spears uses.

Luca: I don't mind using electronics at all if the audience doesn't suspect it. But for the two-person telepathy act it became a much too simple, apparent explanation. Since we started eliminating this explanation through our promise, we experience a higher level of attention and interest from all audiences all the way until the end of our performances.

Luca Volpe: Why do you join competitions? What is your ambition?

Anca: I love participating in magic competitions as it pushes us to improve our acts. I know this from the time before I met Lucca. I have been an artist all my life. I started with rhythmic gymnastics at the age of 4, ballet at the age of 6 and ballroom dancing at the age of 8. I performed as a ballroom dancer and attended national and international dance championships until I was 22, and the tournaments' fever caught me. When I performed with Lucca for the first time in a magic competition at the age of

28, it all came back.

Luca: In the beginning, potential awards and competitions were little more than a marketing tool for me. Over the years I've learned that the qualified feedback of fellow artists and jury members can be the most rewarding part of attending competitions. Apart from that, you never know who is in the audience and may request you for a show a few years later.

Luca Volpe: You see magic as an art form, yet you are also professional entertainers who depend on their commercial success. Do you have to compromise?

Anca: We have to, but we do not like to. And we are aware this has kept some options off the table for us, so we are working on refining the fine line between respecting our artistic credo and monetizing our art.

Luca: Absolutely yes. My first magic show was a mixture of reading of a self-written crime story and performing illusions. I was in love with it and the audience liked it too. But it was incredibly hard to sell. But we are still dreaming to establish ourselves well enough so that our fans would even dare to buy tickets for such a show.

Luca Volpe: As this is a magazine for magicians, I know that there are many who would like to start a duo act, but there is not much to learn from these days. Have you ever thought to do consulting for this kind of act and if not, is there any book or technique you can suggest that one can start with?

Anca: Actually, when developing our method and techniques, I always question whether they are consistent, and have not too many exceptions, so that they could be taught to someone else one day. We keep this in the back of our minds, but for the moment we are only performing it, not lecturing. However, I, as a previous layman, definitely recommend starting with watching videos of different duo acts and taking notes about what one likes, what one would want to improve and what one would definitely want







to change or leave out – this is how we started.

Lucca: You can find some basics in Corinda's Thirteen steps to mentalism, Ron & Nancy Spencer wrote a book called "Telepathy personified", but we started literally with a blank sheet of paper.

Luca Volpe: I guess one has to work with their partner because of the high amount of rehearsal time. Is that so?

Anca & Lucca: You are absolutely right on that.

Luca Volpe: On the other hand, you've personally admitted to me, that it can be also difficult to work with your partner at times. In one of your previous interviews you even strongly recommended not to work with your partner.

Anca & Lucca: You are right.

Luca Volpe: Wait a second, you just contradicted yourselves!

Anca & Lucca: Like we just said. You are right!



