

*Magic, Monsters, & Mystical Mountains:*  
**The Magical Beginnings of  
JEFF McBRIDE**

*In the misty foothills of the Catskill Mountains where he was born, all things were magical to Jeff McBride. The infamous foggy habitat of Sleepy Hollow's Headless Horseman and the mysterious land of Rip van Winkle were Jeff's backyard.*

*The mystical -- and unearthly -- nature of the mountains were not lost on young Jeff. Fixing his eyes on the perplexing orb poised over the shadowed hills, Jeff, at age four, told his mother that he could "make the moon move." He found that if he stared at it and shifted his eyes ever so slightly, the moon would dance. He thus stumbled upon one of the primary principles of the sorcerer's art: reality is a matter of perception.*

Hiding in his closet at night or in a dark corner of his room, the mythical mountain bogeymen stirred unnervingly in Jeff's nightmares. Finally, in a scheme to outmaneuver the creatures, he resolved to scare them back by becoming one of them. He drew, painted and pasted on masks of ingenious surrealism. Sheets, towels, scarves and hats were transformed into capes and hoods. To Jeff's delight, he was scarier than the monsters. The foothill neighborhood became accustomed to the pint-sized, crayon-faced wild thing popping out from behind bushes and peering through living room windows at twilight.

The novelty of terrifying the neighbors faded as the pre-teenager became gripped with the transcendental beat of rock and roll drumming. He pounded out rhythms on an improvised drum, finding new and unusual ways to wake up the neighborhood. The self-taught rocker assumed he had exhausted the music collection at the public library when he reached for a book he thought was "The Golden Book of Music." It was actually "The Golden Book of Magic" by The Great Merlini.

The book was a revelation. Here was information Jeff had always innately understood — that the unknown possesses mystical, fascinating powers — but with the privileged inside scoop on how to develop your own magic. This, then, was apparently classified material. "Never reveal your secrets," the book warned as it disclosed conjuring mysteries. So Jeff made the library book disappear into his private collection.

Jeff McBride, boy magician, held his first public performances in the basement and backyard of his home. Neighbors once buzzed by the masked Catskill creeper now paid 25 cents to be enthralled by coin tricks, card manipulation and the charming stage savvy of the young prestidigitator. McBride was soon barraged with requests to perform at local Rotary Club and Masonic Lodge benefits, and at the famed Catskill resorts a few miles from his home. The first true professional job came, at age 13, at the popular Orange County Fair in nearby Middletown, New York.

At the age of fourteen, Jeff McBride became one of the youngest guests — and the youngest ever magician — to appear on the TV quiz show "What's My Line?" He couldn't stump the celebrity panel, but the youngster's national television debut included an impressive levitation.

McBride was performing near his hometown in the Catskills when he was spotted by record producer Jerry Masucci, who invited the 16-year-old wizard to tour Japan as the opening act for the salsa band Fania All-Stars. It was to be a portentous engagement.

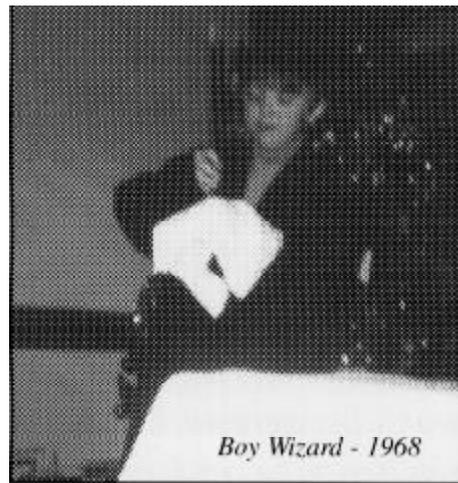
In Tokyo, McBride experienced the stunning spectacle of Japanese Kabuki theatre. His early fascination with masks and exotic makeup resurged as he watched the fantastic ritual theatrics and wildly painted faces of the traditional Kabuki characters. He soaked up the intense physicality of the art with its aspects of Judo, Karate and Aikido. He returned home fired with inspiration.

Determined to master physical performance discipline, McBride enrolled in New York City's

American Mime Theatre. The assimilation of the classic subtlety of mime with intensity of Kabuki proved an irresistible concept. By fusing magic, masks, martial arts, make-up, and now a highly personalized style of what he called "commando mime," McBride began developing a stunning — and completely unconventional — magical act.

Masucci, with a gift for matching like art forms, connected McBride to rock-and-roll tour promoters. Barely out of high school, McBride eagerly accepted their offers, kicking off shows nationwide for Santana, Cheap Trick and other major rock groups with his newly assimilated masks-magic-martial arts bedazzlement. Rock fans were impressed.

The rewards of touring with a rock band were many, but after a year McBride trekked back to New York to develop new effects for his act.



Supplementing his income with nightclub work, McBride made his NYC debut at Club Ibis, one of the premiere night spots of the '80s. He was hired to do 13 of his high-energy, complicated shows a week — for \$150. McBride used the punishing schedule to polish the act, burnishing the rock-show grit of his stage presence into a more complex persona.

Subtle storylines began augmenting his effects. He developed what has become one of his signature pieces, the tormented young man of the "Hall of Mirrors." As the character stripped away oppressive, overpowering masks in a quest for self-liberation, McBride found himself transforming not only his appearance, but the essence of the act itself. As one prominent critic put it, "McBride wrestles with titanic unseen forces. He does not do rabbits."

The highly unusual act at Club Ibis caught the attention of some notable clubgo-ers. The artistic directors at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel invited McBride to create and star in own show. "Fusion Illusion" enjoyed an enthusiastic reception and an extended engagement.

Returning to New York, the career of 21-year-old Jeff McBride, magical artist, took a turn towards an almost non-stop continuum of major engagements.

Impresaria Sachiko Konami discovered McBride at Club Ibis and offered him his first ma-

gor headlining engagement — at the Tokyo show palace, Mikado, Asia's top night spot. Ms. Konami, impressed with McBride's assimilation of the Kabuki style, arranged for him to study with Morihiki-Haniagi. At the hands of this revered Kabuki master, McBride learned the secrets of authentic Kabuki make-up, movement and specific pieces, including the famous Lion Dance. Samurai specialist Oka was consulted for the precise art of the Samurai sword. McBride thus became one of a handful of Americans to master these commanding Japanese performance arts. His expert incorporation of these forms with his own magical style won ardent approval of the Japanese audiences, and he became a Mikado favorite.

Appearing in a limited engagement at the New York's new Cafe Versailles, McBride was introduced to Bill Barnes by Broadway director-choreographer Tommy Tune. Barnes, formerly of William Morris and now heading his own firm for such stars as Tennessee Williams and Raquel Welch, had no prior interest or background working with magicians. Seeing McBride, the superagent did an abrupt about-face and immediately signed the young wizard to appear at some of the world's most renowned showrooms.

McBride became the regular opening act at Caesar's Atlantic City, appearing with Arsenio Hall, Tina Turner, David Brenner and other top stars. He toured internationally with Peter Allen, and served as magic consultant on Allen's Broadway musical *Legs Diamond* as well as for Lil-liane Montevecchi's one-woman shows.

Television and film work followed. He guest starred on "Our Family Honor" with Eli Wallach, produced by Barry Levinson. On the PBS science series "The Ring of Truth," McBride demonstrated the dynamics of perception and illusion to host Philip Morrison. His talk show appearances included "Sally Jessy Raphael," "The Merv Griffin Show," "The David Brenner Show," Regis Philbin's "Morning Show," Maury Povich's "People Are Talking."

While touring, McBride chalked up countless TV variety show guest spots in Europe and Asia, including London's "The Best of Magic" and "Paul Daniels Show," France's "Champs Elysees" and Spain with Juan Tamariz, as well as shows in Germany, Italy, and television series in The Netherlands and Japan.

Superstar Diana Ross spotted McBride in a promotional video and selected him for her Las Vegas and national tour. Casino entrepreneur Steve Wynn caught the Ross show at New York's Radio City Music Hall and promptly signed McBride for

multiple engagements at Wynn's Golden Nugget in Las Vegas.

"Describing Jeff McBride is like pinning down a whirlwind," claimed Variety about his Las Vegas debut. "McBride reveals magic arts of all ages, from ancient lore to contempo recondit diversity, all wrapped in a highly stylized package. *Sui generis*."

McBride had just turned 24 when selected to receive one of the most coveted awards in magic, bestowed by the International Brotherhood of Magicians – The Star of Magic. The Star is awarded as recognition to an artist who has made a significant contribution to advance the art of magic, and had never been given to one as young as McBride.

McBride was touring Italy with his own show when he was invited to participate in the distinguished International Grand Prix Magique de Monte Carlo. He wound up sweeping the awards, being presented with the grand prize by Prince Rainier and Princess Stephanie. The Grand Prix and famous Monte Carlo Sporting Club became frequent venues for McBride's later shows.

With the performance group Triple Vision, McBride created a dazzling showpiece combining multiple performance skills: stilt-dancing, black-art illusions, and the diverse dimensions of McBride's act. The group was featured in a six-week engagement in San Francisco entitled "Simply Magic," and then was invited to the Las Vegas Hilton. There, for the first time, McBride headlined a major Las Vegas revue, the "Bal de Moulin Rouge," backed up by Triple Vision. The show later served as McBride's headline debut in Atlantic City as "Jeff McBride & Triple Vision Halloween Spectacular" in the Copa Room at the Sands.

Now, at age 25, Jeff McBride had reached what many would consider the pinnacle of the magic performance business. A headliner at a major Las Vegas casino, he was the youngest recipient of some of the top honors in the industry, capable of calling his own career shots, and celebrated and respected by his fellow performers.

A sense of overload began to set in, not uncommon for anyone after years of intense, non-stop world touring. After a surfeit of international travel, hotel rooms, rehearsals, debuts, and galas, McBride decided to find ways of taking a brief respite. One evening, after a late show at the Hilton, he decided to forego his hotel suite for a journey into the desert with long-time friend Michael Marlin.

What McBride encountered that evening in the Nevada desert was, he con-fides, a magical awakening.

"Exploring the outer landscape led naturally to exploring the inner landscape," McBride says. "The silent voice of the desert opened me up to the possibility of magic beyond the realm of the five senses — real magic.

McBride realized that up to this point he had always been playing the part of a magician, not *being* a magician. "For a magician to give an audience a magical experience, he must first *have* a magical experience himself," he explains.

He began to read extensively from the world of magical literature. In his study of real magic, he unearthed the link between the magic of nature

and the mythologies of diverse cultures. He gathered information from such experts on international myths and magical traditions as William Blake, Aldous Huxley, Joseph Campbell, and Eugene Burger.

One of the most revealing facts McBride discovered was that the ancient shamans and medicine men actually had his job – stage magician. These early magical practitioners were apparently adept at presenting highly developed illusions in ritual ceremony. These illusions were not merely "tricks," but had apparent healing effects. McBride decided to set his own work into a harmony with its origins.

Word got out about McBride's search for true magical experiences, and he began receiving feedback from similarly-minded artists and healers. He was invited to such events as a full-moon drumming ritual with mystical musician Kitaro at the foot of Mt. Fuji and stone lodge ceremonies with



Native Elder Wallace Black Elk. He studied traditional healing magic with some of the world's foremost masters.

McBride reshaped his performances based on the concepts he was now learning. *Mask of the Mystic*, featuring magical juggler Michael Marlin, was McBride's first theatrical full-evening show and his first presentation since he began his studies. *Mask of the Mystic* premiered at New York's premiere Off-Broadway cabaret, the Ballroom. There, it garnered praise from both audiences and critics for its unusual qualities and well-represented symbolism. Glenn Collins of the New York Times wrote, "Enacting the myth of a sort of wizardlike Everyman, he materializes from the primordial void, discovers and manipulates the four elements, and after mastering the universe, wrestles with his own soul."

McBride was invited to participate in an event called The Rites of Spring, sponsored by the New England-based EarthSpirit Community. Here, McBride explored the power of ceremony within a community to transform, inspire and motivate. He now began to develop the highly unique ritual theatre performance that was to become *Mask, Myth & Magic*.

Based on a ceremony of life's four elements and

incorporating every discipline he had mastered over the years, *Mask, Myth & Magic* became an almost autobiographical allegory of McBride's "vision quest" for real magic.

The early versions of *Mask, Myth & Magic* were produced in 1990 at East Coast performing arts centers. That summer, the show enjoyed an eight-week, held-over engagement Off-Broadway at The Ballroom. Response was overwhelming from all parts of the entertainment community.

"Calling Jeff McBride's show at The Ballroom a magic act grossly understates its content," wrote columnist Bob Harrington of The New York Post. "*Mask, Myth & Magic* is a fully developed, gracefully flowing hour of spectacular illusions, visual effects and dance movement tied together with a fascinating plot line... You are not only vastly entertained, but considerably enlightened on how the ancients saw the world, and how those precepts still color our own perceptions today. "

*Mask, Myth & Magic* became the primary subject of segments on CNBC's "Dick Cavett Show" and CNN's "Showbiz Today." McBride made numerous appearances on Superstation WOR-TV's "New York at Night."

McBride was soon being invited to present *Mask, Myth & Magic* all over the world. In October of 1991 he traveled to Bangkok, Thailand to stage a special performance of the show in the ruins of the historic temple Ayuthaya. Once a principal center of Buddhist ritual, it was a perfect setting for the show, and McBride's performance was the first in the ancient ruins in 400 years.

McBride's dramatic multi-cultural entertainment played to sold out audiences and rave reviews for five weeks at The Showboat Casino in Atlantic City in the fall of 1991. *Mask, Myth & Magic* then moved quickly to Caesar's Tahoe resort, where it returned for six weeks the following spring.

International arts festivals picked up on the *Mask, Myth & Magic* celebration. In 1992 McBride was invited open the prestigious London International Mime Festival. The show sold out every evening, and The Times of London called McBride "a conjuror of genius." McBride was proud to bring the show to Barcelona as part of the 1992 Olympic Arts Festival.

McBride's 1993 World Tour of *Mask, Myth & Magic* was launched with galas in Germany and India, and continued with arts festivals in Hong Kong Arts, Taiwan, Spain, and throughout the U.S.

In the spring of 1992, McBride organized an experiential retreat at the Ananda Ashram in upstate New York to which he invited magical practitioners from diverse cultures, including some of the world's top artists in the field. The week-long Mystery School included lectures, workshops, theatre, music, dance, and magical performance, all dedicated to the advanced study of the magical arts and sciences. The Mystery School was so successful and mutually fulfilling that McBride, in collaboration with producer/ manager Tobias Beckwith, has expanded the retreat to a twice annual event for specially invited participants.

In 1993 McBride and Beckwith initiated WorldMagics™, an organization dedicated to "reconnecting the world tree of magic to its mythological roots," examining new possibilities for magic in a global community. Along with the Mystery School, a specially recharged version of *Mask, Myth & Magic*, covering environmental themes, became a branch of WorldMagics™. A WorldMagics™ Festival, incorporating the talents of international magical artists and the traditions of their cultures, is in preparation.

"You will only experience as much magic in life as you allow yourself to believe in. Whether you live in a world of facts and answers or a world of mystery and wonder, reality is a matter of your perception." The boy who began by shifting his eyes to move the moon, progressed to sleight of hand to move the imagination, and is now moving to expand the consciousness of the world magic community. McBride has come full circle, and brings with him the gifts of a lifetime of magical experience. Believe it.



Photo by Eric Farber

*The magic circle has been cast.*

*It is here in the center of the sacred circle where the ancient magicians discovered the secrets of the universe, the magic and the mystery that is around us and within us. For when we live in balance with the miracles of nature we discover a powerful force, a magical spirit that connects each and every one of us to the center of the universe. This power is love, for love is the greatest magical power of all.*

*Love makes all things possible. And when we experience this magic we realize that the world is a reflection of our soul and nothing is impossible.*

*As above, so below. The power of the entire universe exists within us.*

*We are all magicians.*