

The Wonders of "Magic" Still Intact

LOS ANGELES TIMES

by F. Kathleen Foley

For an early holiday treat, see "It's Magic," now running at the Alex Theatre through Sunday. The liveliest lineup of magic acts this side of Vegas, it's a must for magic buffs of all ages.

Co-produced once again by Terry Hill and veteran magic maven Milt Larsen, "It's Magic" has been an annual institution in Southern California for 40-plus years (not counting a decade hiatus back in the '80s). Those who attended last year can be assured: This year's offering is even better.

The stand-out act of the evening, amazing Jeff McBride, closes out Act 1. McBride mingles mime and uncanny physical dexterity in his signature mask act, a genuinely haunting show-stopper that has to be seen to be believed. Unmasked, McBride proves accessible and funny. With yet another serendipitously adorable child volunteer from the audience, McBride puts on an impromptu display of percussion as simple as it is charming.

Pinch-hitting for the absent Jeff Hobson, whose wife is about to have a baby, rubber-faced Tom Mullica projects the goofy affability of a latter-day Red Skelton as he lights up huge mouthfuls of cigarettes, which he then apparently chews and swallows. Mark Kalin and Jinger close with a bevy of crowd-pleasing illusions, one involving a black panther. It's a splendid finale to a magical show.