



I WAS GETTING A LITTLE BIT OF A REPUTATION IN COLLEGE WHEN I WAS INVITED BY CANADIAN BROADCASTING TO PERFORM ON CHRISTMAS SHOWS FOR THE TROOPS. AT ONE POINT ON THE TOUR, THEY ASKED IF I WOULD LIKE TO DO A SHOW FOR A GROUP OF INUITS [ESKIMOS]. WE WERE ON THE EDGE OF THIS LITTLE TOWN IN THE WILDERNESS, 400 MILES FROM THE NORTH POLE, AND ABOUT 60 BELOW ZERO. I SET UP MY SHOW IN A LITTLE BUILDING, AND THE INUITS CAME IN TO WATCH. THEY SAT ON THE FLOOR IN THEIR PARKAS, AND I DID WHAT I THOUGHT WAS SOME PRETTY GOOD STUFF. THEY JUST SAT THERE, DIDN'T SMILE, DIDN'T SAY A WORD AND, AT THE END, NOBODY APPLAUDED. BUT THEY WERE COMPLETELY FOCUSED ON ME, LIKE I WAS SOME SORT OF PHENOMENON. ONLY ONE OF THEM SPOKE ENGLISH, SO I ASKED HIM, "DID YOU LIKE THE SHOW?"

"YES, WE LIKE THE SHOW," HE SAID.

THEN I ASKED, "DID EVERYBODY LIKE THE MAGIC?"

HE SAID, "THE MAGIC?"

I EXPLAINED THAT I WAS TRYING TO ENTERTAIN PEOPLE.

HE SAID, "ENTERTAINMENT IS GOOD, BUT WHY ARE YOU DOING MAGIC? THE WHOLE WORLD IS MAGICAL..." WE SAT DOWN ON THE FLOOR AND HE TOLD ME "IT'S MAGIC THAT SNOW FALLS, ALL THOSE LITTLE CRYSTALS ARE COMPLETELY DIFFERENT... THAT'S MAGIC."

I SAID, "BUT WHAT ABOUT WHEN I MADE THE RABBIT AND DOVES APPEAR?"

"WHY DO YOU DO THOSE THINGS?" HE SAID. "IT'S MAGIC WHEN THE WALRUS APPEARS EACH SPRING, HE COMES FROM NOWHERE... THAT'S MAGIC."

NOW, I WAS GRASPING, TRYING TO EXPLAIN MAGIC TO HIM. I THOUGHT OF MY "ZOMBIE," WHICH I THOUGHT WAS MY BEST THING. I SAID, "I MADE THAT BEAUTIFUL SILVER BALL FLOAT IN THE AIR... THAT'S MAGIC."

"BUT THERE'S A BALL OF FIRE FLOATING THROUGH THE SKY EVERY DAY. IT KEEPS US WARM, GIVES US LIGHT... THAT'S MAGIC."

THEN THE INUITS STARTED TALKING AMONG THEMSELVES. THE MAN CAME TO ME WITH A BIG SMILE ON HIS FACE, AND SAID, "NOW, WE KNOW WHY YOU'RE DOING THAT. IT'S BECAUSE YOUR PEOPLE HAVE FORGOTTEN THE MAGIC. YOU'RE DOING IT TO REMIND THEM OF THE MAGIC. WELL DONE!"

I CRIED RIGHT THEN. I'VE NEVER TOLD ANYONE THIS STORY. I SAID, "THANK YOU FOR TEACHING ME ABOUT THE MAGIC. I DIDN'T KNOW." THAT WAS REALLY THE FIRST TIME I KNEW WHAT WONDER WAS. IT WAS THE MOST MEMORABLE THING THAT HAS EVER HAPPENED TO ME. I NEVER FORGOT THAT, INSIDE. THAT'S WHY I BECAME A MAGICIAN.

— DOUG HENNING

FROM THE INTERVIEW BY DAVID CHARVET
MAGIC, OCTOBER 1999

The Wondrous Years of Douglas James Henning



Does first paid show for a friend's birthday party. At 14, has "The Great Hendo" business cards printed. Places an ad in the local paper: "Magician, Have Rabbit, Will Travel." As a teenager, Doug attends meetings of Toronto's famed Hat and Rabbit Club, is seen at Abbott's Get-Togethers and Wisconsin's Houdini Club Conventions, and for a year, edits "The Zombie" youth-magicians section of the *Hade-E-Gram*.



Enrolls at McMaster University in Toronto with plans to get a degree in psychology and intentions to continue studies at medical school. Doug books his "Magic-A-Go-Go," a show taken to Barbados during spring break, into the Yorkville coffee houses of Toronto. "During college, I was making as much as \$5,000 a year," Doug would later tell a *New York Times* reporter. "In addition to night clubs, I did Rotary Club stag stuff in a tuxedo. You know, they'd have a belly dancer, a bad pianist, a terrible comedian — and me."

1947

1953

1961

1963

1967

Born May 3, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. His father, an airline pilot, receives a promotion and the family moves to Oakville, Ontario, a suburb of Toronto.



Finds the usual library books on magic. Makes props from cardboard, tin cans, and construction paper. Talks parents into buying a magic kit.



At six years old, he watches a magician on *The Ed Sullivan Show* float a young lady in mid-air. When he asks his mother how it's done, she tells him, "That's magic." Doug is hooked.

High school-assembly show was promoted with a publicity shot of Doug levitating his younger sister Nancy.

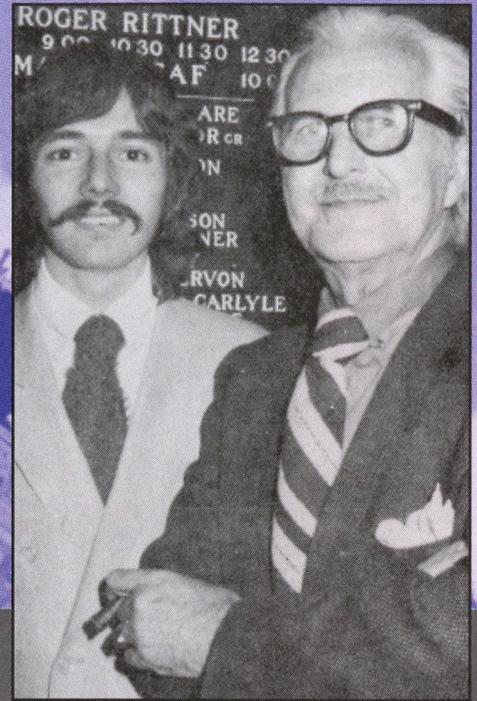
Doug Henning Hit At Magic Castle

GENII, FEBRUARY 1970



Doug Henning, assisted by Mars, found favor with the members and guests of the Magic Castle during their visit in January. Both 22 years of age, they have been performing magic together for two years. Doug plans to become a professional after his graduation from McMaster University in Toronto, Canada. Keep your eye on this lad for great things in years to come. (WWL)

During a semester break, Henning and Mars are booked for the 7th anniversary week of the Magic Castle.



The 24-year-old college "dropout" travels to New York to learn sleight of hand from Tony Slydini, then to the West Coast to study with Dai Vernon.

After Henning completes his apprenticeship with The Professor, in his March 1972 column in *Genii*, Vernon writes: "I predict that if he keeps up with his present schedule of study and dedication, Doug Henning will be a great success in magic, and he will help magic itself consequently."

1970

1971

1972

1973

After an invitation from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation to perform Christmas shows for troops stationed "400 miles from the North Pole," Doug returns home and abandons plans for medical school. He desires to create an artistic magic act.

**The Henning Formula:
magic + theater = art**

With this thesis, Doug applies for a Canadian Council Grant, governmental funding traditionally awarded to musicians, singers, dancers, painters, and playwrights. Upon receiving a rejection letter stating "Magic is not a fine art," he travels to Montreal, where he performs, thus convincing a skeptical panel of the Canadian Council to grant him \$4,000 to pursue the study of magic as an art.

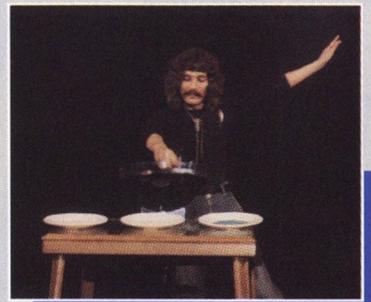


Impressed with the success of the rock musical *Hair*, Doug convinces college friend Ivan Reitman [pictured below] to co-produce a "rock concert of illusion" ...to be called *Spellbound*. Doug borrows \$5,000 from his mother to buy the mostly-used illusions. Ivan gets a starving musician friend to write the songs. They stage a backer's audition and raise \$40,000.

After eight months of rehearsal, a last-minute show cancellation allows them to open at the Royal Alexandra Theatre in Toronto. *Spellbound* wins critical acclaim, audiences love Doug, and the two-week run breaks all box-office records for the theater, including *Hair* and *Godspell*. New York producers Edgar Lansbury and Joe Berun see the show, and negotiations begin for Broadway.

On May 28, *The Magic Show* opens at the Cort Theatre in New York City.

The show not only becomes a four-and-a-half-year Broadway fixture for theater-goers, it establishes the first international celebrity of magic since Houdini. And, perhaps of greater historical significance, *The Magic Show* with Doug Henning ushers in a glorious new age for magic and its renaissance as a wondrous performing art.



Doug takes off from *The Magic Show* for two months and, with the latest from his TV special and the best of the Broadway show, tours colleges with *Illusion & Reality*.



A longtime practitioner of transcendental meditation, Doug spends seven months in Switzerland, studying at Maharishi European University.



Magic's new superstar finally leaves *The Magic Show* and, in October, moves to Los Angeles to begin work on a second special. In December, *Doug Henning's World of Magic II* airs, again live, on NBC.

1974

1975

1976

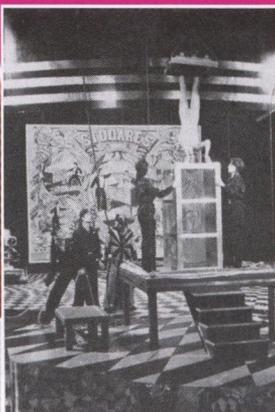
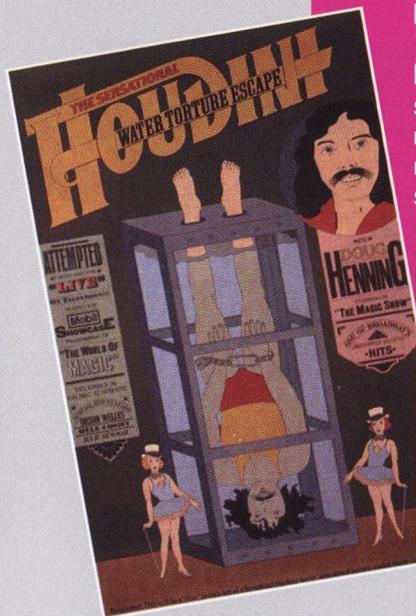
1977

1978

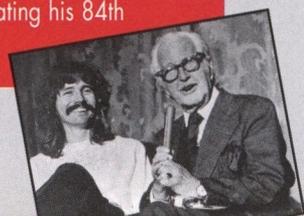
December 26, *Doug Henning's World of Magic* airs live on NBC. The special is the top-rated show for the evening, with reportedly 50 million viewers, making it the highest-rated magic special of all time.

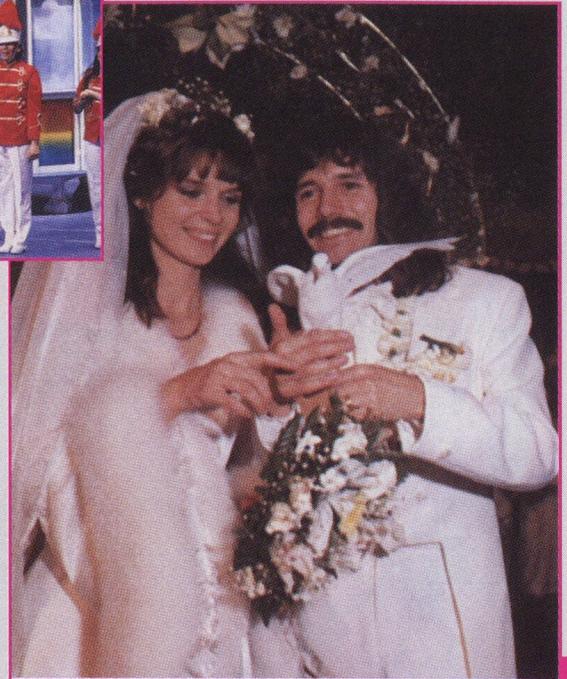
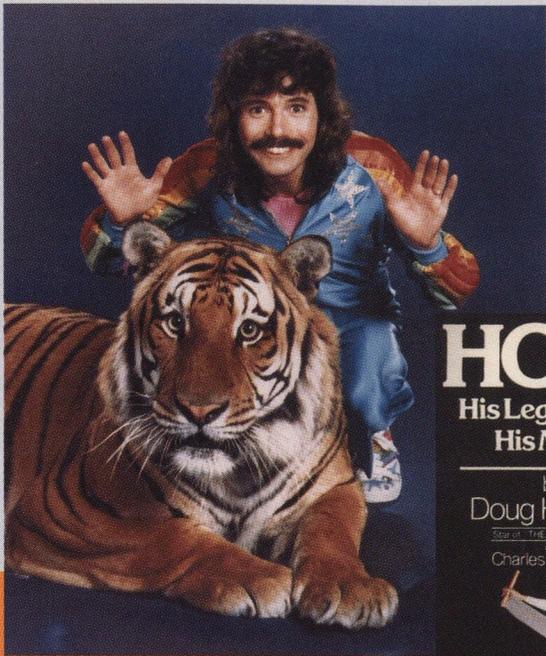
On December 13, *Doug Henning's World of Magic III* airs. The hyped illusion on this one is "Walking Through A Brick Wall," and immediately following the broadcast, a contract is negotiated with NBC for three more one-hour shows.

On December 14, *Doug Henning's World of Magic IV* airs. Because the theme, "A Magical Journey Through Time," presents so many technical problems, this is the last special broadcast live.



Doug shows up in New York City when the 50th anniversary SAM Convention honors Dai Vernon, then celebrating his 84th birthday.





HOUDINI

His Legend and His Magic

by Doug Henning

Star of THE MAGIC SHOW with Charles Reynolds



Henning hits the road again with his two-hour *World of Magic* show. Among the 54 major United States and Canadian cities played, the tour includes lengthy engagements at the Sahara in Reno and the Las Vegas Hilton. Doug becomes the first magical celebrity to headline in Las Vegas, going on to star at Caesars and the MGM Grand.

He co-authors, with his consultant and confidant Charles Reynolds, *Houdini: His Legend and His Magic*.

World of Magic VI, taped at Osmond Studios in Provo, Utah, is broadcast February 22 on NBC.

On December 6, Doug and Deborah Douillard are married at the Marishi International University in Fairfield, Iowa.

1979

1980

1981

1982

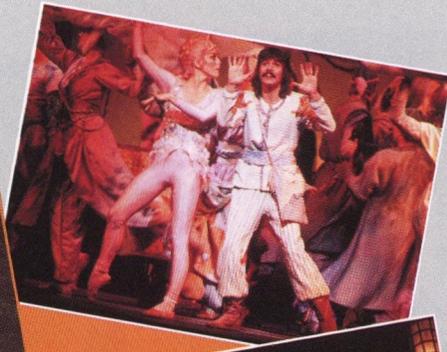
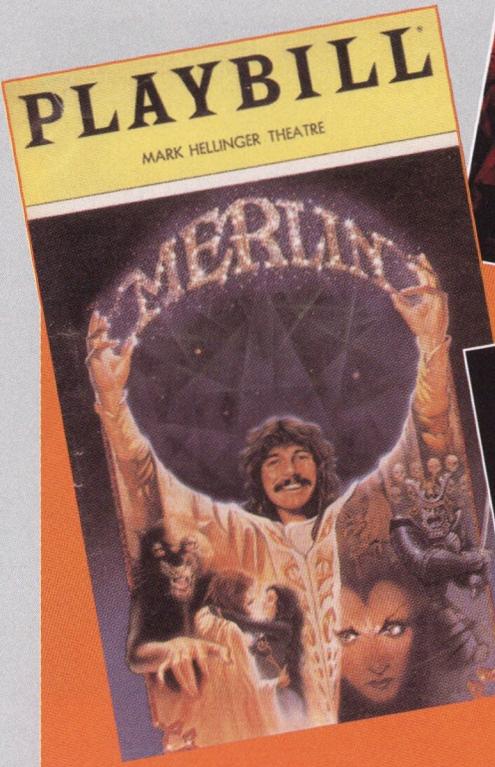
On February 15, there's a broadcast of the fifth special, which was taped at the Las Vegas Hilton.



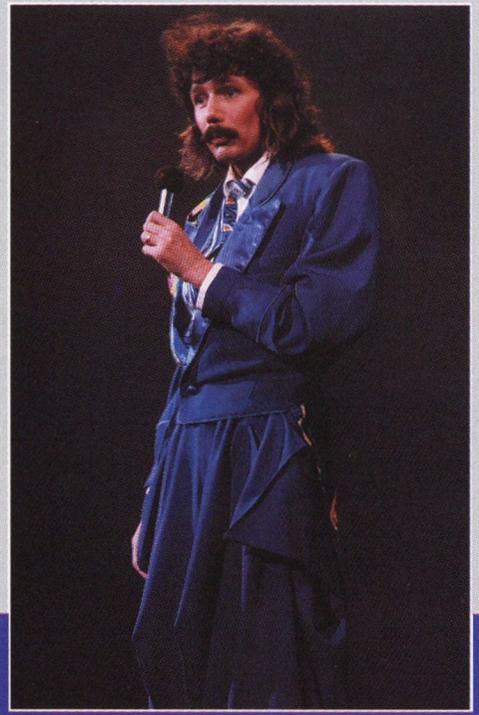
Doug Henning's World of Magic VII, videotaped at NBC studios in Burbank, airs on February 14.

In September, the eighth and last TV special, this one called *Doug Henning's Magic on Broadway*, is taped at the Ed Sullivan Theater in New York, as rehearsals are underway for a second Broadway show, *Merlin*.





On January 30, *Merlin* unofficially opens at the Mark Hellinger Theatre and, with constant re-writes and endless improvements, manages to run nine months. The lavish show receives five Tony nominations, including Best Musical.



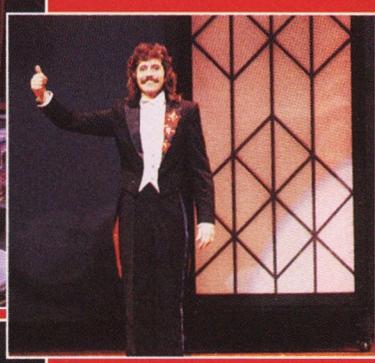
Winding down touring and with no future plans for television, Doug becomes a consultant for the Disney organization. He sets up "Wonder Workshops" for Disney's staff of Imagineers. When Michael Eisner takes a position with Disney and puts a hold on all creative projects, Doug journeys to India for a TM world conference that's being staged by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi.

1983

1984

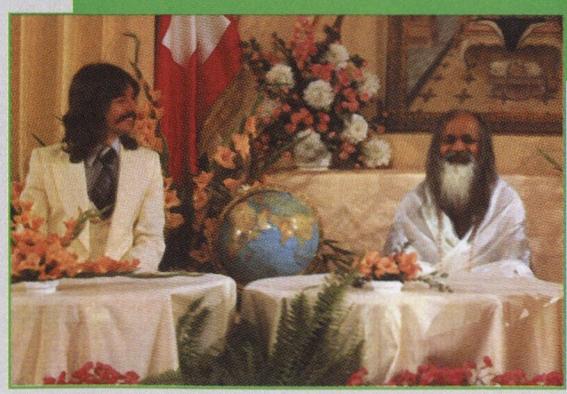
1986

1987



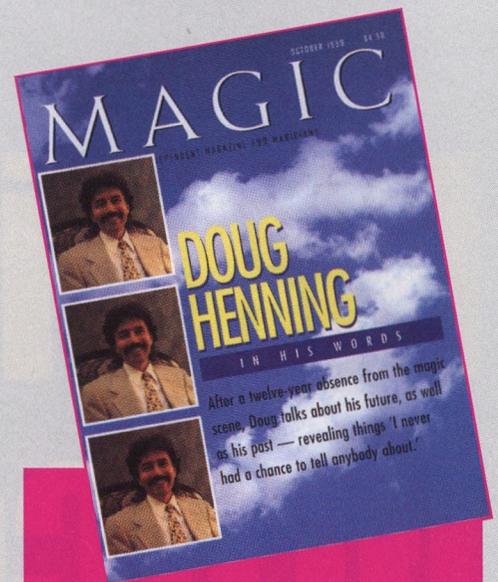
Henning embarks on another major tour of North America, ending up December 11 in New York City. Booked into the Lunt-Fontanne Theatre for a month, *Doug Henning's World of Magic* is held over an additional month, making this his third show on Broadway.

Word is out that he's leaving magic. After the conference in India, Doug is convinced that his life mission is to promote the TM movement. He closes all magic operations in Los Angeles, and accepts a full-time position with Maharishi Veda Land Inc., developing concepts for an amusement park with themes of enlightenment, knowledge, and entertainment.





Announcement is made for future locations of Maharishi Veda Land. Press releases tell of options on prime real estate near Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida; a site near Niagara Falls in Toronto, Canada; and a large tract of land outside Kyoto, Japan.



In August, David Charvet suggests an interview to let the magic world know what Doug's up to. Readers of the October issue of *MAGIC* learn that Henning is indeed back to performing, but only as part of his fund-raising efforts for the University of World Peace. He also gives information concerning his career that "I never had a chance to tell anybody about."

1988

1992

1993

1999

2000

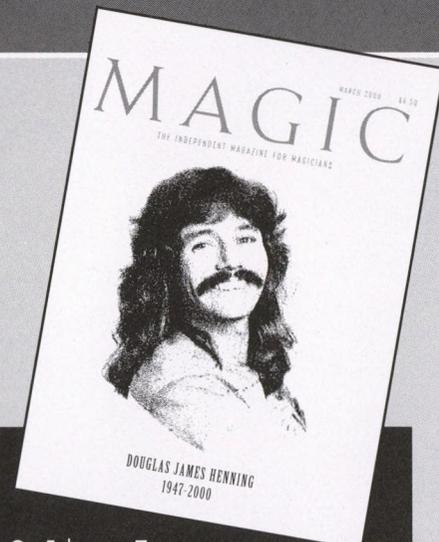
As senior vice-president of Maharishi's Natural Law Party (founded on a belief that world peace is possible through the power of Group TM), Doug becomes a NLP candidate in England's general election. He finishes last among four candidates.

In the '93 Canadian elections, Doug runs as NLP candidate from Rosedale, Ontario, Canada, where he works on the planning of Veda Land Canada. Out of 55,928 votes cast, he gets 839.



In June, there are reports of Henning sightings in magic shops in Toronto, New York, Chicago, and Hollywood. He lets some of his old friends know that he's shut down the Veda Land offices in Holland and is moving to Los Angeles.

Photos and memorabilia from the collections of Jim Steinmeyer and John Moehring.



On February 7, at 4:17 a.m., Douglas James Henning at the age of 52, dies of liver cancer.

Doug's greatest joy will always be the rekindling of people's sense of wonder for both magic and for life.