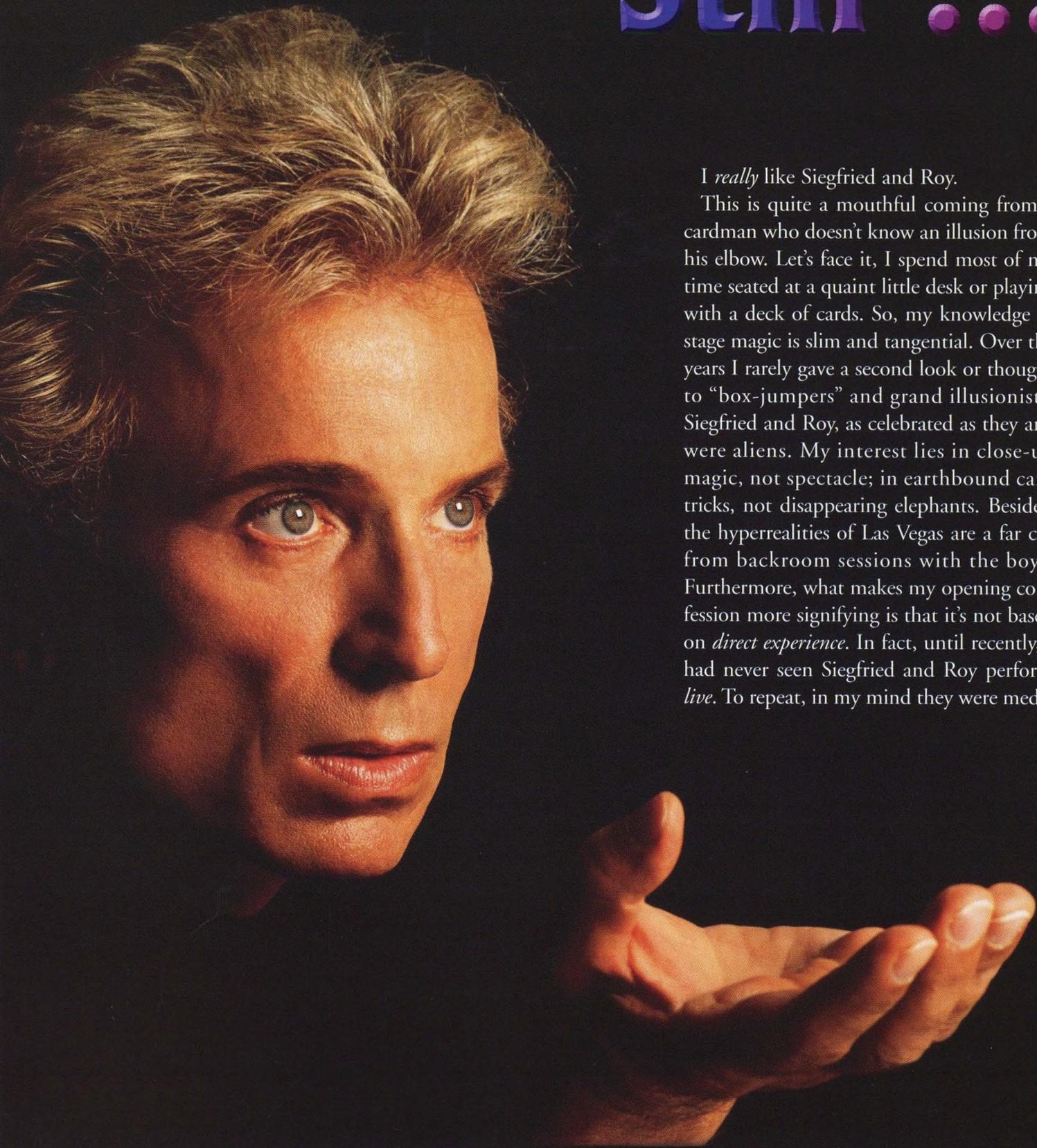


Still ...



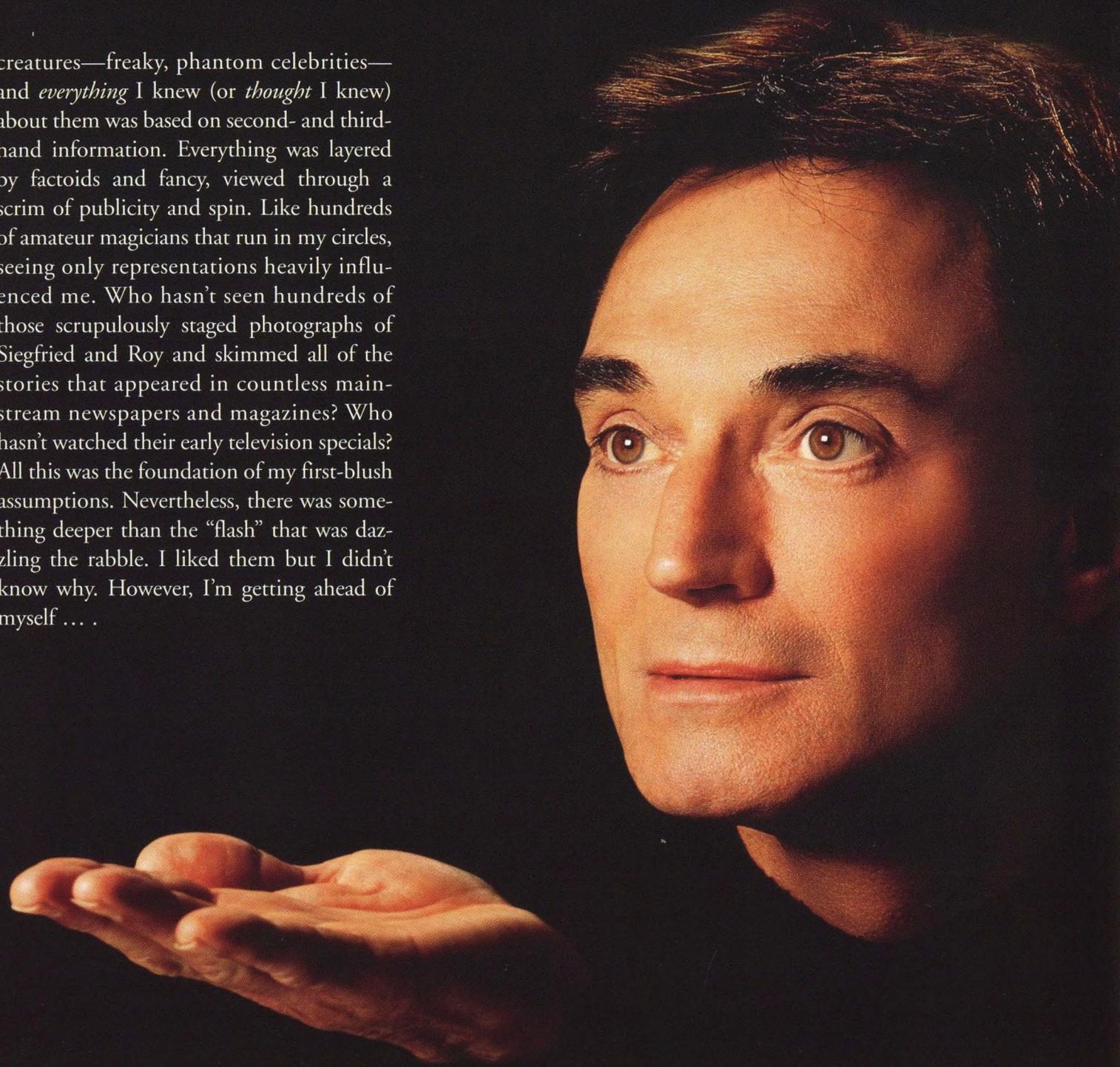
I *really* like Siegfried and Roy.

This is quite a mouthful coming from a cardman who doesn't know an illusion from his elbow. Let's face it, I spend most of my time seated at a quaint little desk or playing with a deck of cards. So, my knowledge of stage magic is slim and tangential. Over the years I rarely gave a second look or thought to "box-jumpers" and grand illusionists. Siegfried and Roy, as celebrated as they are, were aliens. My interest lies in close-up magic, not spectacle; in earthbound card tricks, not disappearing elephants. Besides, the hyperrealities of Las Vegas are a far cry from backroom sessions with the boys. Furthermore, what makes my opening confession more signifying is that it's not based on *direct experience*. In fact, until recently, I had never seen Siegfried and Roy perform *live*. To repeat, in my mind they were media

Beyond Belief

by Jon Racherbaumer

creatures—freaky, phantom celebrities—and *everything* I knew (or *thought* I knew) about them was based on second- and third-hand information. Everything was layered by factoids and fancy, viewed through a scrim of publicity and spin. Like hundreds of amateur magicians that run in my circles, seeing only representations heavily influenced me. Who hasn't seen hundreds of those scrupulously staged photographs of Siegfried and Roy and skimmed all of the stories that appeared in countless mainstream newspapers and magazines? Who hasn't watched their early television specials? All this was the foundation of my first-blush assumptions. Nevertheless, there was something deeper than the "flash" that was dazzling the rabble. I liked them but I didn't know why. However, I'm getting ahead of myself



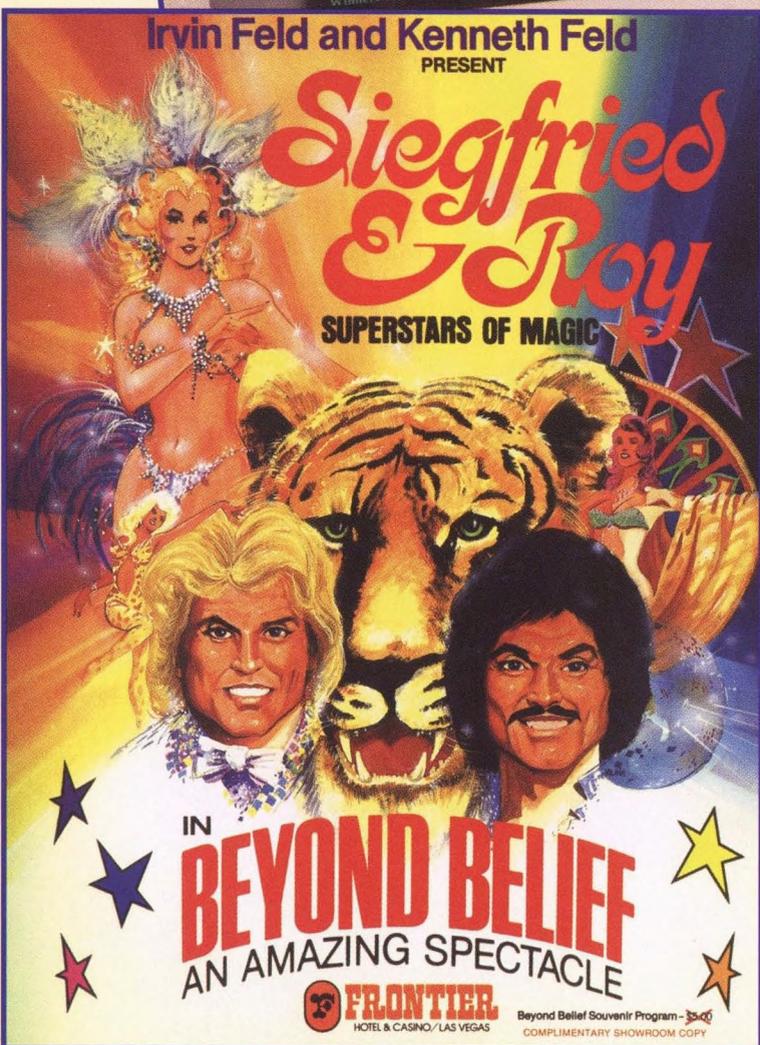


My initial encounter with Siegfried and Roy was inauspiciously pictorial. That is, I saw them on the cover of *Genii* in April, 1972. When I did, I instantly thought: They look like rock singers, holding awards for being *the* Las Vegas “Show Act of the Year.” Their hair was pure 1970s—swelling bouffants of contrasting manes. There was Roy with his dangling chain and medal, and there was Siegfried, looking like Gunther-Gebel Williams’ younger brother. There was a hint of Vegas flamboyance in their dress. Obviously they were hot items—*arrivistes* of a new class of stage magicians. Better yet, they looked like equal partners, doing a double act. Therefore, this cover shot warranted more than a second look. It deserved a lingering gaze; what I eventually saw was thunder and lightning—a yinny-yangy, centrally cast, glamour shot. The image was beautifully bipolar: earth and sky, light and dark, blonde and brunette, fire and ice, ego and super-ego, rigid and flexible, dedicated and dreamy, voluble and retiring. Plus they had glistening, you-ain’t-seen-nothing-yet grins—the kind Burt Lancaster flashed in the *Crimson Pirate* and *Elmer Gantry*. Never mind the part about Siegfried looking like Gunther-Gebel Williams’ brother; this was high-wattage stuff. And these grins would become luminous and famous brand “images”—remaining ever ready, optimistic, beatific, and fashion-model practiced. These guys *knew* how to pose. And their complementary natures, at this stage only tacitly evident, would seal their fate. More important, once they hit it big, neither dominated the other.

In early snapshots, Siegfried radiates blondness and promise. (He had the perfect look of a youthful protégé, stunning in tails, pulsating the gleam of youth while producing doves and fans of cards.) Roy offsets this glitter, expressing a stealthy reticence and composure. Some would call it shyness, but if it was, it was the kind of shyness animals express. His eyes always appeared serenely vigilant. Preferring to act rather speak, his connection to the world-at-large was different. (Much later I learned that it had to do with his relationship to nature and its lordly beasts.)

By the way, there are two other photographs inside this same issue of *Genii*. Each features a tiger, which to me is also revealing. Few magicians 30 years ago actively used jungle animals in their shows. Those who did, did *not* chummily interact with them. One of the photographs shows Siegfried and Roy playing with a tiger in a swimming pool. Roy is being licked (kissed?) on the cheek. All three, including the tiger, seem giddy. The article, written by Bill Larsen, Jr., is breezily upbeat, using superlatives that future writers would repeat to describe the S&R Experience. These words—unbelievable, amazing, mystifying, fantastic, fascinating, superb—still twinkle like distant stars. But their original power to halt or sway is gone.

Over the years, Siegfried and Roy graced many covers. They were, for example, on the January and December (1983) covers of *Genii*. The January cover depicts them in full glitzy garb, as bejeweled as Liberace, with Lynette Chapel in the middle (like a cherry on top of an ice-cream sundae). By the 1980s, Siegfried and Roy were fully Vegas-ized. Having witnessed many Mardi Gras celebrations in the Big Easy, I’m no stranger to excess and outrage. However, what struck me about this cover shot was how comfortable and natural Siegfried and Roy looked in the Vegas setting and in their own skins. *They were not pretending*. Their lives on and off stage had become, as they are now, genuinely and wholly theatrical.

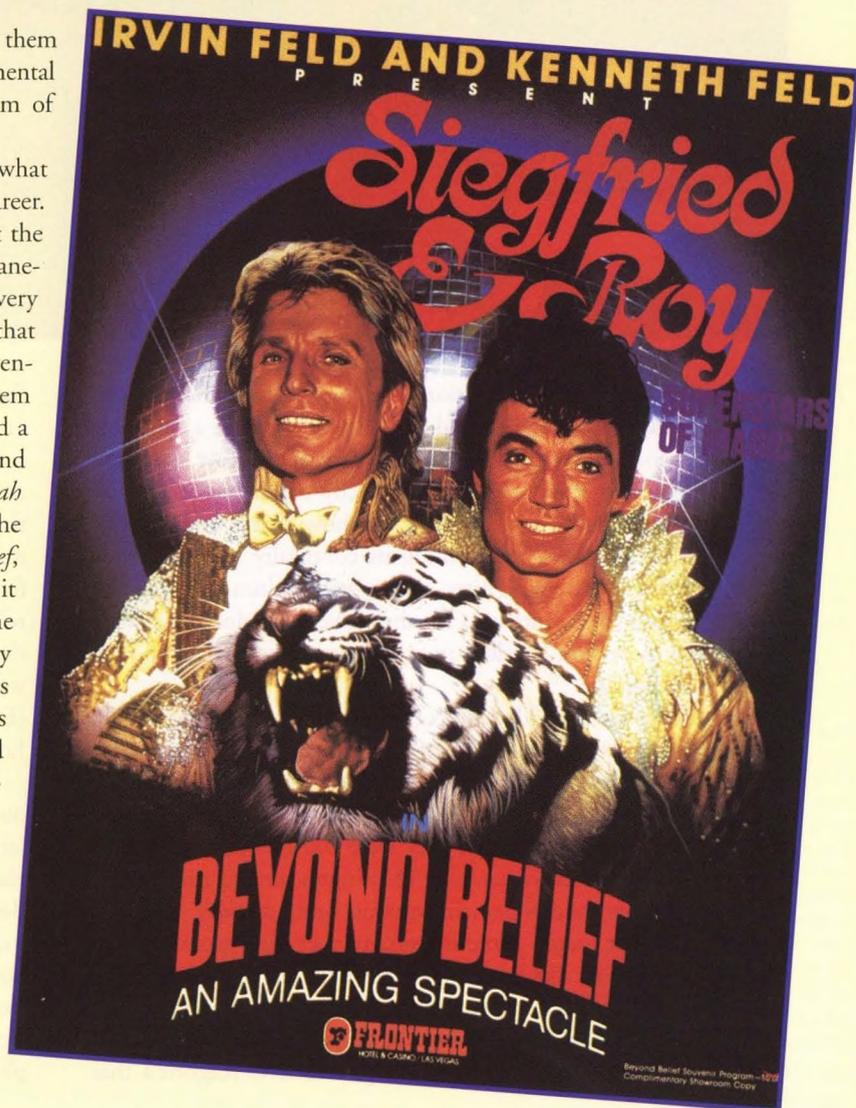


As Roy often says: "The stage is my life and my life is my stage." And compared to the routine existence of most people, Siegfried and Roy's life story, as it still plays out and down to its smallest detail, is rich, sumptuous, perhaps surreal, and frequently over the top.

Most photos of Siegfried and Roy blend into one image: Roy in his signature boots, bare-chested and tanned, heavy, golden crucifixes dangling from his neck, and sporting a Tony Orlando-moustache. Siegfried looking magisterial: a man with a plan. This issue was also earmarked by the generous inclusion of a souvenir program of *Beyond Belief*, then playing at the Frontier Hotel and Casino. This is the incandescent image of Siegfried and Roy that would endure for almost 20 years. After all, by the time they were in the fifth year of the *Beyond Belief* show, they had indeed become superstars ... and I had yet to see them perform live. In my mind, they were the *Übermenschen* of monumental illusions; beastmasters from the Outer Reaches; an odd amalgam of Houdini, Barnum, Tarzan, Elvis, and Liberace.

Most magicians have at least a *Cliff-Notes* comprehension of what Siegfried and Roy have accomplished during their amazing career. Their official resume is spectacular. From a modest beginning at the Tropicana hotel, they kept moving up a ladder they were simultaneously building for themselves. They were taking elements from every aspect of show business (Las Vegas style) and shaping a form that would accommodate their vision; that would permit their adventuresome approach to creativity to take hold without reining them in. Moreover, they wanted to be inimitable. That is, they wanted a show that could not be imitated by *anyone*. This took time and thousands of performances to shape. They starred in the *Hallelujah Hollywood* revue at the MGM Grand and the *Lido de Paris* at the Stardust. Next they moved to the Frontier, starring in *Beyond Belief*, which was the hottest ticket in town for *seven* years. At the time, it was the most successful show in the history of Las Vegas. In the process, Siegfried and Roy slowly, methodically, and brilliantly engineered their lives and careers. More important, they did this by being themselves. The public and celebrated parts of their lives are seamlessly connected to their private lives. What you see and read are what you get—an official, incredible "success story," endlessly retooled and retold.

During this same 30-year period as I was busily writing about the claustrophobic, internecine world of close-up magic, circus impresarios Irwin and Kenneth Feld were busy creating an entire "entertainment world" around Siegfried and Roy. As mentioned earlier, I had watched them on television and did *not* find it riveting. Although production values kept improving from special to special, something integral to the Siegfried and Roy mystique was missing. I was still seeing mediated representations.





Siegfried's instincts about television were good. I think he felt televised versions of the Siegfried and Roy Experience were a necessary evil, but I don't think he was ever enthused about how television diluted the live experience. And he correctly sensed that television could never capture the *essence* of their live show; that it would downsize it to a small screen, fragmenting its continuity into disjointed scenes and disruptive sound bites; that it would ultimately trivialize the very emotions that account for the power and glory of a show experienced in person. Needless to say, he was right. Television does diminish and debase.

I recently re-watched videotapes of the TV shows they did in 1980. Each show had its moments. What I liked was the pace with which they performed the illusions. They worked with the intensity of acrobats, tumbling and moving with urgency. They obviously understood that boredom is the enemy. Yet they were still hampered by being part of an old-style revue that after 15 minutes seemed irrelevant. I didn't want to see dancers prancing around Busby Berkley fashion; I wanted to see the magic. More important, they were working with all kinds of animals that were not caged or tethered. The animals made a difference. I had never seen anyone perform illusions with such a diverse menagerie—flamingoes, alligators, falcons, leopards, elephants, tigers, and a lion. Many magicians have forgotten that

Siegfried and Roy broke new ground. For example, they introduced an illusion using lasers—something that had never been done before. They revealed their whimsy by using the DeKolta Chair in an offbeat way. Siegfried transformed Roy into a smaller version, then changed this homunculus into a duck and then changed the duck back to a full-sized Roy. In one of the specials, Siegfried performed his old dove act, plus some charming close-up magic with a rolled-up dollar bill. This really resonated with me and I longed for them to expand this aspect of their personas. The rest of the shows were contrived and hokey and the patter which the guest stars (Eddie Albert, Lorne Green, Loni Anderson, Joan Rivers, and Jayne Kennedy) had to utter were banal and sometimes silly.

By the time they did *Siegfried and Roy: The Magic—The Mystery* on ABC in 1994, the dance revue razzmatazz was gone, along with lame guest stars and other distractions. In the 10 years that had elapsed, Siegfried and Roy had physically and artistically matured. Because they were more successful than anyone had expected, including the supposed brains in the business, they had enough power and autonomy to call their own shots. This meant that they would not only perform sharply-honed and original illusions, they would reveal their inner thoughts about their dreams and philosophy—which, despite being a bit grandiose, was probably surprising

and mystical to the viewing public. Ballyhoo is easy; talk is cheap. But everything Siegfried and Roy talk about, they eventually do ... one way or another. Who else could have flown their entire show to Japan, using four 747 jumbo jets, 800,000 pounds of equipment, a crew of over 100, plus all of the animals (including an elephant) in two cargo planes?

One of the phrases that Siegfried and Roy abide by is: "When you decide to change your show, never change more than 50%." Anybody comparing *The Magic—The Mystery* television special with previous ones can immediately see which 50% they jettisoned. In its place, for better or worse, viewers saw *pure* S&R, and, to accomplish this, they hired and collaborated with the best in the business. For example, they hired John Napir as set designer. He was a kindred spirit who was comfortable in the big ideas that freely floated around in Siegfried and Roy's dreamscape. In other words, the philosophy was: if you can imagine it, it can be built. What I liked about this special was the way it deeply and respectfully showed how integral the animals are to Siegfried and Roy's "magic" and to the men them-

selves. It was also unashamedly implicit that their long-term partnership as artists, entrepreneurs, and entertainers is truly unique—not only for withstanding the ups and downs, but for also daring to be who they are through thick and thin. There is a wondrous bond between these two showmen and this is exemplified by their best mediated show, the Imax film *The Magic Box*. This presentation handles all of their major themes in a convincing and coherent manner. Also, since the 3-D film is shown on a huge screen, the sculptural effects are truly arresting. After watching this film last winter, for the first time I was eager to see Siegfried and Roy *live*. I was primed and ready. And as Roy often says, "Timing is everything"

Las Vegas

*"No, this is not a good town for psychedelic drugs.
Reality itself is too twisted."*

Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*

Could Siegfried and Roy have flourished in places other than Las Vegas? Probably. But Vegas was perfect for Siegfried and Roy to test,



grow, and evolve. Their run in *Beyond Belief* took out any rough spots and kinks. After six years, their chops were as polished and precise as a drill team. Their flamboyance and celestial dreaming was perfectly suited. Hunter S. Thompson is right—reality in Vegas *is* skewed. Even the normal, everyday people (fast food nation on vacation) visiting and passing through Vegas seem a bit *unreal* these days. Most are in a heightened or agitated state, desperately seeking fun, betting and losing more money than usual, hurrying to the next event,

entranced by everything they see. At least 300,000 of these zombified tourists walk along the strip daily, dressed in shorts they would never wear anywhere else, wearing tee shirts that identify other unrealities, jiggling their fanny-packs, their sun-glasses gleaming and their cell-phones pasted to their ears. They mill about like ants on every street, pathway, aisle, escalator, and hallway ... endlessly flowing in lock step with the equal and endless flow of cash and credit.

Although Vegas-haters such as Cintra Wilson, who writes for Salon.com, characterize Las Vegas as a “limelight graveyard for Caucasian fame-junkies” (she also thinks that Siegfried and Roy are “completely freaked out on the vision of themselves as beautiful New Age twin-alien butterfly Emperors ...”), Steve Wynn, owner of The Mirage hotel, saw the marquee value in Siegfried and Roy’s magic and had faith in their talent to mount a show that would express their oldest dream and vision.

There are now 125,000 hotel rooms in Vegas—twice the number of rooms in New York or Los Angeles. Most of these are filled during peak periods. The phrase that spontaneously comes to mind is: And all of these interlopers are crammed in a metropolitan area of a mere 1.4 million people. Las Vegas has always been a breeding ground for exorbitancy. It praises enormity the way Texans do, showing them and the rest of the world what “over the top” really means.

What better place for Siegfried and Roy’s extravagant dream to ferment, mutate, and flourish?

Seeing Siegfried and Roy For The First Time

“We know that the world of appearance is a crust—under the crust is the boiling matter we see if we peer into the volcano. How can we tap this energy?”

Peter Brook

The hotel and complex aptly named The Mirage is Siegfried and Roy’s theatrical home. Since they rarely venture away from this domain, spectators must come to them to see, hear, taste, and feel *for themselves* what word-of-mouth testimonials approximate and never capture. They come in droves. They come to be astonished, overwhelmed, and blown away. They come to have their credulity taunted and tested. They come to luxuriate—in its most uninhibited, purest, unmediated





form—in the Dream Works of Siegfried and Roy—the “masters of the impossible.” Most of all, they come because others have come—millions and millions—each sated, converted, and carrying on the word.

I didn’t see the volcano erupt in front of The Mirage, but I heard it. That was enough. I wanted to see the show.

Entering the theater is like entering a church. Patrons are immediately pacified and their behavior noticeably changes. Their movements slow as do people walking in processions. They glide to their seats, getting their bearings, feeling the mute interiority. They have entered, as I was gingerly doing, the sanctum sanctorum of “Sarmoti.” I was creeping *within* Siegfried and Roy’s dream world and I was looking forward to being one with them, sitting in a cool, cavernous, internal space. It felt the same as closing your eyes and hunkering down inside your own head.

The stage from a distance is semi-dark, curtain-less, and deep set. And as I just mentioned, the room is cathedral-like. This induces respectfulness for the intrinsic serenity that the immense space engendered. Staring at the stage before the show was like gazing into stellar space. I saw blackness and twinkling starlight which seemed to extend infinitely. “Back there” became “beyond.” Before the show the stage has roomy width, but apparently no depth. The entire space, in fact, seemed sanctified by all of the satisfied customers who

have sat, as I was now sitting; who are now part of its “history.” There is a word for this kind of a space: *oneiric*, and it refers to *dreams and dreaming*.

Oneiric Partners

It is interesting to compare the programs from the *Beyond Belief* show to those from the show at The Mirage.

On the covers of the *Beyond Belief* programs, Siegfried and Roy are grinning the grins. The renditions are not photographs, but paintings, and they closely resemble the programs sold at the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. In terms of fashion and hairstyles, Siegfried is the more conservative and less experimental. Except for its varying length over the years, his hairstyle has stayed the same. Roy slightly alters his look by sporting different hairstyles and styles, and he will risk being a bit more flamboyant with boots, designs, and jewelry. Most of the time he takes a more taxing, physical, and athletic role. More things happen *to* him than Siegfried. He is the one who levitates through the ring of fire, gets impaled, and is penetrated by a woman and a cat.

Once I sat down, I picked up one of the programs on the table. It was hefty with promise and loaded with visual clues. More glossily graphic than textual, everything in it is precisely calculated to whet and seduce. The serious faces of the masters themselves fill the entire



front cover. Unlike the grin-meisters of yesterday, their facial expressions are now resolute, spectacularly smooth-skinned, forever young, and radiantly tanned. No surprise here. Siegfried is on the *left* and his commanding eyes focus on the vanishing point of all things. Roy is to the right, his eyes still as vigilant and relaxed as the cats he cares for and understands. Neither is smiling, although they have much to smile about ... perhaps because the front cover is a diptych? It opens outwardly like the doors of a pleasure dome. On the inside, completely filling the page, is a majestically staring white tiger (also, unsmiling). This is Sitarra, blue-eyed matriarch of the other royal white tigers.

(Program Trivia: For the record, Siegfried's photograph appears 32 times; Roy's appears 33 times. In a symbolic way they are pictured together 30 times, memorializing their unique partnership. Needless to say, various animals have top billing, appearing 36 times.)

Entering a Dream World

"The space in which we shall spend our nocturnal hours has no perspective, no distance.

It is the immediate synthesis of things and ourselves."

Gaston Bachelard, *The Right to Dream* (1971)

"When a man flies over the audience's head on a rope, every aspect of the immediate is put into jeopardy ..."

Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (1968)

I hesitate to call Siegfried and Roy's extravaganza a *show*. "Show" is too modestly generic—almost dismissive—and, worse, it fails to entail what really happens. Steve Wynn describes the show as being "a cosmic ballet." Bernie Yuman, their manager, says, "Staging the show is like reenacting 'Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom' live ... twice a night, forty weeks a year!" Siegfried has said (more times than he can count): "It should not be a show. It should be an experience." The program simply (or not-so-simply) states: *Siegfried and Roy at the Mirage*. (By the way, the word "magic" is mentioned only once in the entire program.)

Perhaps the stark declaration at the beginning of the program provides a significant clue:

"Welcome to our world of dreams and hope."

The experience is indeed surreal. I won't try to summarize what happens. Siegfried understates it: "It is not just a magic show; it is a show of magical moments." Magical moments, indeed! There is a cumulative, torrent of images. It is a journey, a magic newbie's acid-trip. And the fleeting snippets of sense derive their energy and momentum from other visual and aural layers that simultaneously work on different "tracks." Siegfried is also right when he advises people to relax and become part of the energy, part of the dream. "You think—Oh, boy!—I just want to know how they do it," he says. "After awhile, you won't think anymore about how we do it. You will just let it happen."



This is exactly what I did. I let it happen.

When the show was over and the spectators were slowly filing out, I thumbed through the program to its last page where I read:

Look for the magic that is all around you.

In nature, plants, flowers, and all the animals that share this planet with us.

Look for it—and let it enlighten your heart and life.

Until we meet again. Auf Wiedersehen.

The underlying sentiment, still filling the room, overpowered the sentimentality of this prose.

Postlude

“To create for himself freedom for new creation—for this the Lion’s strength is sufficient ...”

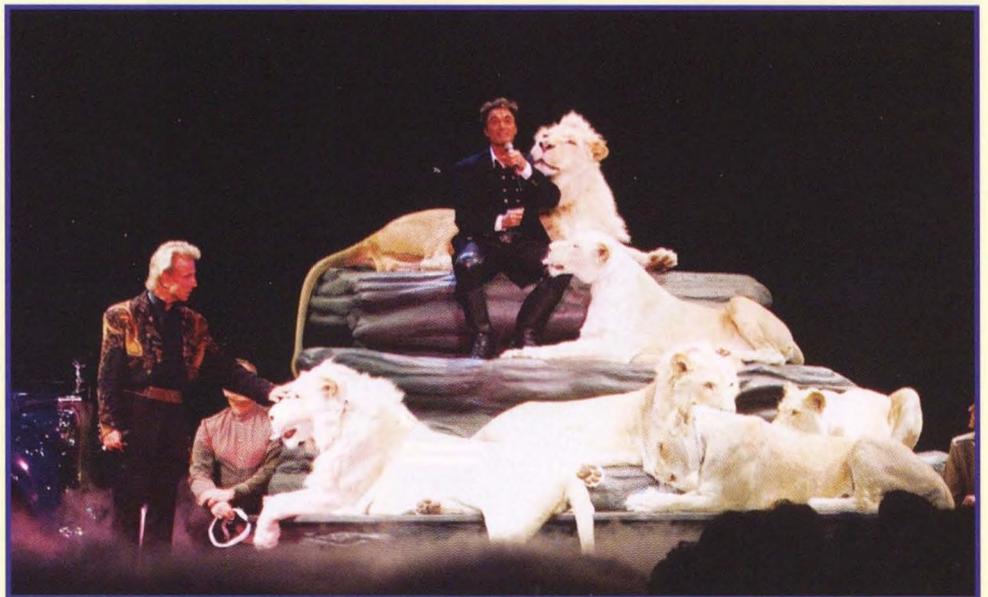
Frederich Nietzsche

Siegfried and Roy are *incomparable* in the deepest sense of the word. People who have experienced the show cannot glibly summarize or articulate what they saw and felt. Their utterances are doomed to gush, wash, and wane, although their eyes retain, even weeks later, a luster of eyes from having been relentlessly dazzled. When they return home they will shake their heads, their voices trailing off: “... You should have been there ... you gotta see for yourself” Besides, publicists have pumped up the volume for too many years. The usual superlatives can no longer supply real voltage. If something is truly matchless, figurative language is put to the test. Powerful tropes need at least two things to juxtapose and compare. “Siegfried and Roy are more incredible than ...” *what?* What or who in the entire history of show business is comparable to them?

You might say, “Think P.T. Barnum!” Yes, Barnum knew how to ratchet up the power and glory of show business. (If he had penned a self-help book, it would have been titled, *God Is A Wimp.*) However, despite the fact that the Felds also produce a circus, Siegfried and Roy, particularly Siegfried, recoil from an image that suggests lowbrow carnies, midways,

three rings, tents, and mud. To Barnum, the sky was the limit. To Siegfried and Roy, there is *no* sky and *no* limit. Steve Wynn says, “It is very difficult to describe something of which there is only one. It’s totally unbelievable to me; I still have not got used to it yet.”

After experiencing their show three times, I greatly admire Siegfried and Roy’s guts and their unwavering vision. They have stuck to their guns regardless of what anyone has said or done. They ignore put-downs, ridicule, and sour-grapes criticism. By this time they are bulletproof and critic-proof. More important, they fully understand their place in the scheme of things. They know, as surely as they know their animals and their animals know them, the nature of their roles as primary agents in the matrix of Las Vegas entertainment. It is common knowledge that they single-handedly transformed magic-acts-as-a-vaudevillian-staple into something far more ambitious and fantastic. They knew where they had been, where they wanted to go, and were disciplined quick studies. They learned the game faster than everyone else, including officials, referees, and other high-stakes players on the sidelines. In fact, part of their gamesmanship was realizing that *illusion* was always part of the entertainment scene in Vegas. Having long languished between





being lowbrow kitschy-coo and cutting-edge-waiting-to-happen, Siegfried and Roy wanted to make a difference. Until they came along, “magic” was merely a cog and they wanted to be *the wheel* and make it turn. You can track Siegfried and Roy’s spectacular rise alongside the Strip’s transition from precarious respectability to a place that gives tourists the illusion of culture. Steve Wynn’s savvy understanding of American culture, particularly in anticipating the eventual direction it took, also made a huge difference. He not only created a perception of elegance, he added upscale images, threw in an erupting volcano for good measure, and, in the most savvy stroke of all, anchored Siegfried and Roy at the center. They, in turn, delivered the goods and became household names.

Who Are These Guys—Really?

Nobody knows ...

... even though Siegfried and Roy are known on a *first-name* basis. Their first names are inextricably linked, spoken in a single breath like a magical incantation. Their billing is equivalent, names side-by-side on the same line, “Siegfried” first because poetic diction demands it. This gives it a palsy-walsy, American sound: They are our German-buddies-next-door. (Has anyone, other than historians and attorneys, called them Siegfried Fischbacher and Roy Horn? Fischbacher and Horn is worse. Sounds like a law firm.)

As Siegfried told us at 3 a.m., “The show and the animals *are* our lives!” As showmen, celebrities, nature-lovers, and humanitarians, they are “on” almost 24–7. What happens beyond The Mirage, the Jungle Palace, Little Bavaria, and the Secret Garden, doesn’t matter to Siegfried and Roy’s fans. Any tabloid truths, if they exist, are irrelevant and not newsworthy enough to report.

Meeting Siegfried and Roy offstage in a homey atmosphere feels a little weird at first. The relative scale changes, even though a slightly exalted aura remains. Besides, you want them to be slightly aloof. When you read our interview, you will see that Siegfried tends to filibuster a bit. However, he is amusingly loquacious. In the history of his partnership with Roy, he is the talkative one. Roy defers. He is more monosyllabic, yet his talk is an eerie form of contrapuntal patter, spiced with insights, and ironic, good-natured humor. He effortlessly supplements and amplifies Siegfried’s discourse. To him, it is as natural as breathing.

Siegfried is also funny. This is contrary to his persona and presence onstage, except for a charming scenario with a spectator, a rope, scissors, and a lion. Otherwise, he is stereotypically Germanic, forever and despondently blonde; as disciplined and upright as heroes are meant to be. There are times he’s Wagnerian to a fault, empowered by sheer will, and ready to strut or preen at the slightest hint somebody might be gazing in his direction. But this impression is misleading. Granted: Siegfried enunciates words like a Teutonic disciplinarian, but he is also as playful as the “cats” he and Roy have raised. In private, he radiates a light-hearted, unsettling charm.



Roy is more centered, like a master of Aikido, and he understands the delicately balanced ecology of what might be called the Siegfried and Roy Landscape.

Yet very few people in and out of the business really know anything about them beyond what their publicity has consistently and unwaveringly revealed. Does anyone in magicdom really understand why they have had been so successful? Does anyone know the secret of such staying power? Bottom line: It doesn't matter. Everyone—and I mean *everyone*—concedes that Siegfried and Roy single-handedly changed the *perception* of what a magician can and should be. Most everyone also agrees that they are exemplars of how magic could be if you dream big. Their show is epic in scale, transformative in spirit, and dream-like in delivery. And in the wild, preposterous process of becoming what they are today, they transformed the way Las Vegas entertainment is now produced, packaged, promoted, and performed. They changed the content and course of showmanship itself; and in a series of canny, well timed, and historic strokes, they became synonymous with Las Vegas.

Can you imagine Las Vegas *without* Siegfried and Roy anchoring the Strip? I can't. Neither could Steve Wynn, who has since sold The Mirage and moved onto other things. He said, "People

sometimes ask me, 'What could you ever do to top this? And my answer is—I don't have a clue!'"

I agree.









Siegfried & Roy

Interviewed by
Richard Kaufman and Jon Racherbaumer

It's about one in the morning, after Siegfried and Roy have finished the second of two shows (at 7:30 and 11p.m.). Considering the exhausting paces their show puts them through, it was surprising to see how relaxed and energetic they were after *both* shows in the middle of the night. When *Genii's* request to do a special issue on Siegfried and Roy was accepted, I expected to come to Las Vegas and find, as I mentioned earlier in "Genii Speaks," two tired guys on the far side of middle age, incredibly wealthy, bored as hell, and ready to pack it in and ride off into the sunset. Nothing could have been *further* from the truth. Siegfried's on one side of 60 and Roy's just on the other, but these guys are reenergized and ready to rock and roll. If you've ever wondered what it's like to sit and talk for an hour and a half with two of magic's most successful magicians, listen ...

Genii: How long have you been doing this show at The Mirage?

Siegfried: Thirteen years.

Genii: How much has the show changed since it opened?

Roy: Well the infrastructure of the show doesn't change because it's a 38 million-dollar framework. But the nuances of the show are constantly evolving. Constantly.

Siegfried: Some of the illusions have changed. The large balloon in which Roy floats was not in the original show

Roy: The transpositions ...

Siegfried: The sawing ...

Roy: We took other things out.

Siegfried: We can't really change what Siegfried and Roy are all about, but the show always changes. The Magical White Lions are in there now because we are doing with them what we did before with the white tigers.

Genii: Do you change the illusions for the benefit of the audience or so you guys don't get bored?

Siegfried: We are doing it more for us.

Roy: To tell you the truth, you may want to say that we are humanitarians because of what we do with the white lions and white tigers, but we are very selfish. We do *everything* for ourselves: the audience sees what we do and what we feel. Because we think like the audience *and* we also think like Siegfried and Roy.

Siegfried: That's right.

Roy: And we are only as good as our last show. So we never rest on our laurels. If we are not entertained then our audience is not enter-

tained. If we did it just to have a job, then we wouldn't be in this business. There is no easy path, there is no way to avoid the thorns on any rose.

Siegfried: It is something that comes ...

Roy: Sometimes Siegfried and I will have an idea for an illusion and it doesn't gel—it doesn't click. It's like a seed ... you plant it, it grows a little bit, but it's not worth anything until it blooms into something outrageous. Like the balloon illusion or the sawing illusion.

Genii: How long has the balloon illusion, where Roy floats inside, been in the show?

Siegfried: Since our TV special on ABC, *The Magic and the Mystery*.

Roy: That was the first time we introduced it, around 1994.

Siegfried: *The Magic and the Mystery* was ... (Siegfried pauses and laughs softly) You know, they forced me to do that. I never wanted to do another TV show [Siegfried and Roy had done two TV specials for NBC in 1980], but we signed a contract to do an animated series, what was that called?

Genii: *Siegfried & Roy, Masters of the Impossible*, I think.

Siegfried: And there was a clause in our contract, which I overlooked, that before they would release that we would have to do a television special.

Roy: Time goes by ...

Siegfried: And after a certain amount of time they came to us and said, "You have to think about that TV special now because in the contract it says" What? I didn't know what to do! It's the best thing that happens to me because you get the most creative when you're desperate.

Roy: (Laughs loudly) Pressure, pressure, he works well under pressure.

Siegfried: When everything goes too easy, well ...

Genii: A modern gargantuan spectacle like your show is, I'm sure, run by computer. How locked into the computer's timing of the props and lighting are you? Can you deviate in any way?

Siegfried: Once the show starts, it starts. In a show like this where everything is combined ... it's huge, with all the animals ... where everything has to be on the beat ... lighting, everything ... otherwise it doesn't work and you have a problem. Everything's run by computers. The dragon is run by a computer. That means when we go onstage you really have to be totally there. All of your concentration has to be focused. Not only 100%, it has to be 110%. You have to have that feeling and, by the time you do that everyday, your body gets adjusted to it.

Roy: Don't make a wrong move or you'll crash! Basically you still can move as you like as long as you can count on each other to be in the right place at the right time.

Siegfried: And it must be that way, so when I am in one spot, Roy must be in the other spot.



Genii: So, Roy, when you come out swinging on the rope ...

Roy: He meant when we're *not* on good terms we have to count on each other!

Siegfried laughs.

Genii: Roy, when you swing out on the rope you have to land on the stage at the same exact moment every time?

Roy: In the same position every night.

Siegfried: Everything has to be in the same position every night to coincide with the lights and music controlled by the computer.

Roy: We always say that it's the German position combined with the American business that gives you the element we create on stage.

Genii: We watched the show twice, and we actually enjoyed it much more the second time.

Siegfried: Yes, yes, let me tell you something. I heard you want to watch the show tomorrow, too. No, no, no: Tonight's two shows are enough. If you don't get it by now, you're not going to get it, you know what I mean?

Everyone laughs.

Roy: You're going to write a book about us!

Siegfried: So many things have been written about Siegfried and Roy ... today somebody wrote to me and told me that we have been on the cover of *Genii* maybe, what did he say, 30 times!

Roy: We? We've never been on the cover!

Everyone laughs. [As long time *Genii* readers know, Bill and Irene Larsen were one of Siegfried and Roy's earliest supporters and Irene remains a close friend.]

Genii: Are there any differences between the early and late shows?

Siegfried: Yes, there is an energy difference, but in Las Vegas ...

Roy: And I change the animals all the time. They have it better than me: they only work one show!

Genii: I seem to remember that you produced a big cat from the Snake Basket at the very end after Roy came out, but we didn't see that in tonight's shows.

Siegfried: It used to be.

Roy: I used to do it with a spotted leopard, I used to do it with a black panther, and I used to do it with a snow leopard.

Siegfried: We changed it because we realized that sometimes you can oversell or overdo something, you know?

Roy: Steve Wynn always said that, "If you start too high you can't finish." It's too much information sometimes ...

Siegfried: It gets to be too much.

Genii: You change the whole level quite nicely at about the mid-point in the show because you have this enormous spectacle in the first half where the audience is just goggle-eyed, and then you [Siegfried] come out and speak, and you do that nice version of the Pavel "Walking Knot." It's human ... intimate.

Siegfried: You *have* to do this. You *can't* go just big all the time, you *can't* just rely on the technology.

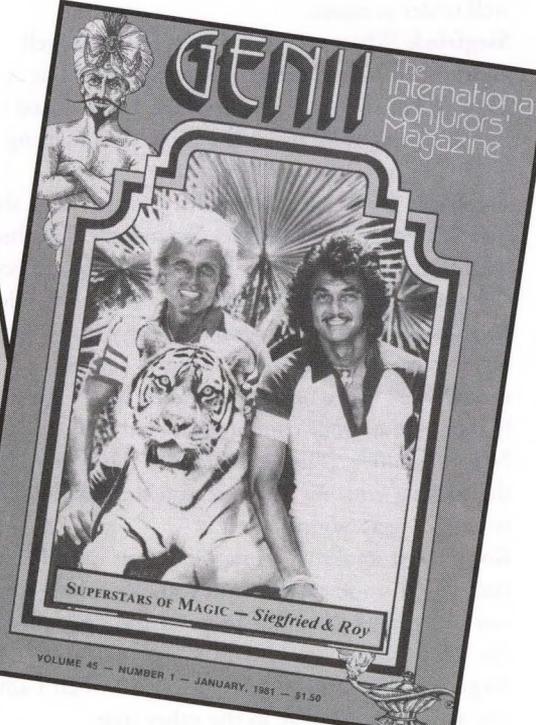
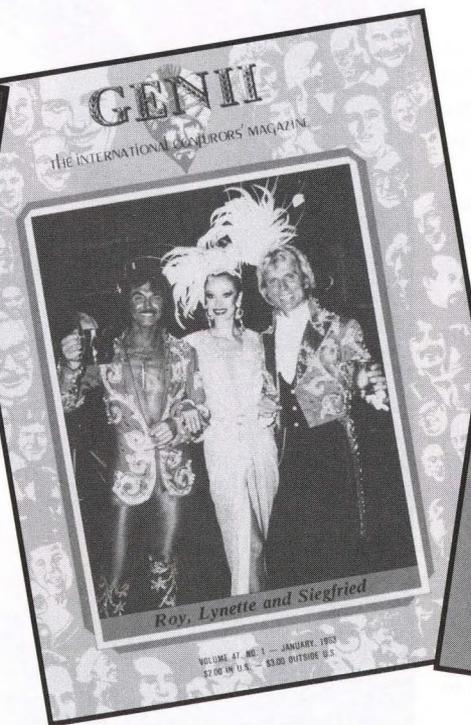
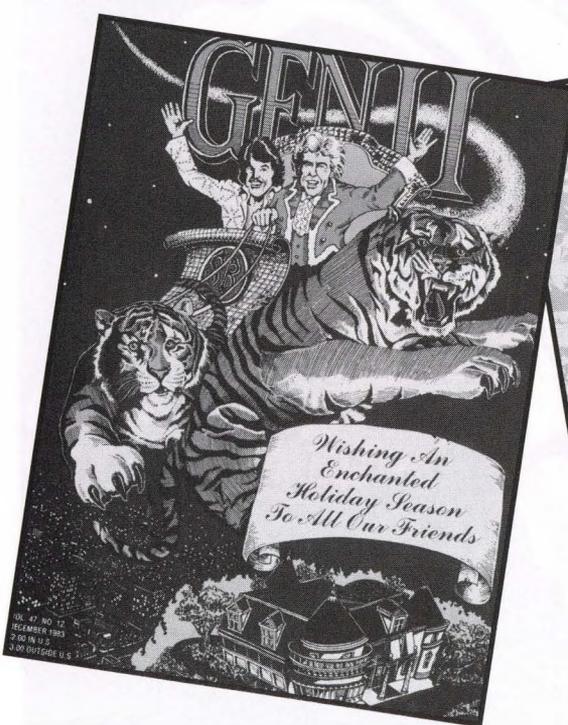
Roy: You have to have a heart and a soul in the show—it's the most important thing.

Siegfried: A heart and a soul, yes, it's the most important thing. You can't let the technology do the magic, then you're lost.

Roy: Anybody can do an effect—that's not the idea.

Siegfried: When people watch a show and say, "Wow, the technology was just unbelievable," then you're in trouble. It's good to have all this stuff to enhance the show. I've always said that the "theater" is magic. But it's not just because it's the theater—you *have* to know the *elements*. You *have* to know *what* makes the theater magical, the ingredients, to get the feeling and emotions. And when you say there is a different energy, yes, of course there is a different energy in the second show. It can also change based on other factors. For example, in Las Vegas you can never predict the audience because it's so mixed ...

Roy: We have people from Chicago, New York, and everyone in the audience is on a different timetable. Their lives are upside down when they're in Las Vegas. For people in our showroom, some are business people ...



Siegfried: They all come to Las Vegas for different reasons, some are attending a convention ...

Roy: Some are just here to try and relax and forget ... and we have to respect that. The audience is king—you must give them that moment when they can lose themselves and become that dream that they have bottled up in the back of their minds. As a child we are innocent, but when we grow up we put up walls. As a magician, as an entertainer, you have to penetrate that. You have to know what they *really* need. You don't want to force feed them. It's like the magic of the white tigers and the magic of the white lions—I'm not force feeding the audience a message about conservation at all. I just let them see the animals and the message is there *if they want to see it*, but I am *not* telling them they *have* to see it. They discover it for themselves. This is how you get an audience to be on *your* side.

Siegfried: When you talk about an audience in Las Vegas it's so different than in most other parts of the country. You have tourists, people from all over the world, from different cultures, different time zones, business people, and people from California who just come over for the weekend to have a good time. Different languages, all these things, it's all here. People who've been gambling all night and lost everything and the hotel says, "C'mon, you can see the show for free." They want him to go back to the table afterward and so he's still thinking about gambling *during* our show.

Roy: It's very simple: the people in Las Vegas are not a theater-oriented audience. Las Vegas is the crossroads of the modern world.

Siegfried: We only realized how different and how difficult a Las Vegas audience is when we went out and worked Radio City Music Hall in New York, and then Japan. The people in New York and Japan knew where they were going that night: tonight we are going to see magic and illusion. They're pre-conditioned. In Las Vegas the audiences are *not* pre-conditioned. We are very fortunate because we have a lot of "repeaters" [people who come to see the show again and again], we have people who schedule their vacations to Las Vegas

around the times when we are performing. They schedule their *lives* around seeing our show.

Roy: It's like *Fatal Attraction*. (Chuckles)

Siegfried: It sounds a little ridiculous, but we have people who have seen the show more than a hundred times.

Genii: That takes a really dedicated fan at \$105.50 a ticket! You've been such an integral part of creating a whole new form of show in Las Vegas, it's difficult to imagine Las Vegas without Siegfried and Roy. How do envision your show in the future? Do you think it will continue to evolve?

Siegfried: I always think it will evolve ...

Roy: Always ...

Siegfried: Always ...

Roy: There's no stopping. There's so much to do. You climb one mountain and there's another one right behind it. If you're satisfied you stop growing, but we are never satisfied.

Siegfried: And now what we're doing with Darren Romeo is something very inspirational and it's a lot of fun. It's a creative thing where we can apply the knowledge and experience we've gained over the years and re-live some of the excitement from when we were young.

Roy: We see a bit of ourselves in him ... that inner fire that no one can diminish. We have that, and we can see it in him. He is not Siegfried and Roy—he never will be. He will be The Voice of Magic: he's a different guy. We loan our expertise and criticism to him a lot. Believe me, with two Germans beating on him the kid doesn't have it easy! We give him everything we can as a starting point, but he still has to prove himself just as we did.

Siegfried: It's a challenge.

Roy: He is not being given his new show on a silver platter. There *is* a support system and an energy that comes with it. But, he has to bring his own talent.

Genii: He's burning with ambition.





Siegfried and Roy on **The Tonight Show**

Siegfried: He's ready ...

Roy: He has a drive, just like we do. Only *passion* can create that love, and magic is our love, and our mystery, and everything else. It just has us so engulfed that there is nothing else. That's our lives, and you cannot fake that. There is nothing in between. And Darren feels that way, too.

Genii: He has a willingness to take risks ...

Siegfried: Oh, boy, is he willing to take risks! And so we challenge him, and he challenges us. We bring the best out of him, and he brings the best out of us. He's not a "yes" man.

Roy: That's very important.

Siegfried: It's an unbelievable thing.

Roy: We want to help him make a career, not break a career. We've had plenty of offers for him with our support, multi-million dollar shows. We didn't want that. We think there's a logical progression for his growth. It may be old fashioned, but what's wrong with that? It's substance, every tree grows from solid ground. No one wants to build a house of cards that falls down easily. Siegfried and Roy are at The Mirage, and we wanted him to also be here at The Mirage. And that's what we wanted, and that's what we've done. And he's had to go through a lot to get here, but one day he'll carry the torch.

Siegfried: Today these youngsters are very smart, they know what they want, they know where to get it, and they go for it. The amazing thing is that Darren didn't come to us like so many others who've brought us videotapes. No. And it was coincidence ...

Roy: But it was meant to be. Nothing in life happens randomly.

Siegfried: Thanks to Irene Larsen we saw his show at the Flamingo, but Darren did *not* ask Irene to invite us. It was her idea. It's like what we tried to communicate when we wrote our book, *Siegfried and Roy, Mastering the Impossible*, and when we did the Imax movie: anything is possible. You *can* follow your dreams, you just have to know *what* you're dreaming of. Then your dreams can come true. Anything is possible.

Roy: If you live your dreams, you can fulfill your fantasies. We really believe that.

Siegfried: A couple of weeks ago, Darren brought us a videotape. I said, "What tape? I have tapes up to here!" And he said, "No, no, I went home to Long Island and I found it in my magic room. Check it out, it's only two minutes. You'll get a kick out of it." Okay, so I put the tape on, and there is Darren at a magic camp, 14 years old. And there are a lot of other kids there between 12 and 14. The counselor says, "Why do you think you should be a magician?" One kid says, "I got a magic set from my aunt and I like magic." The next kid says, "I saw it on TV and I liked it very much." The third kid says, "My Uncle taught me some magic and I'm very good at it, and when I get better I'll go to Las Vegas and make a lot of money." Eventually the counselor asks Darren and this is what he said, "Siegfried and Roy have a quote in their show which says: In all of us there is an elusive melody which when heard and followed leads to the fulfillment of your fondest dreams."

Roy: What an answer! And *that's* what it takes!

Siegfried: And how completely different from all the others. As he told you [Interview with Darren Romeo in *Genii's* June issue], he first described to me a musical he wrote. He explained the plot and the characters, the whole thing, what it's all about ... very smart and very clever and he sang all the songs. Well, in our lives we've heard a *lot* of things ...

Roy: Everyone is always coming to us with a TV show, or a movie, or whatever ...

Siegfried: Even our producers try to talk us into things. But never did we experience something like this kid. I was tickled by his passion and sincerity, and still the smartness and the thinking behind it. And I began to realize that there is something else there. You know how it is when you talk with other magicians, they talk about an effect, and this and that ... *No!* ... not with Darren.

Roy: And with him it was not about the money, either. We never in our life worked for the money. When you're good enough, money comes automatically one way or another. You have to go with what you feel, and Darren is pretty much that way, too. He's got an ambition to go somewhere, he doesn't really care about the pain it takes him to get there. And that's what you have to be willing to do. Nothing is harder than show business. It's hard ...

Siegfried: ... and he doesn't realize it yet.

Roy: He's not afraid to make mistakes and I like that.

Siegfried: I think what we're doing is making the music visible on stage and he makes the magic sing. It's not easy. We've purposely cut down and minimized the production. We just want to put the talent on stage.

Genii: Siegfried, *you* look happiest on stage during the parts of the show when you're talking.

Roy: Well, he lives for his audience.

Siegfried: Well, yes. I had a problem years ago when I was depressed. I realized that the only time I was enjoying my life was when I was on stage. And when I left the stage and went home ... well, I realized that this wasn't right. The day has 24 hours, so I had to change it so I was happy all 24 hours, not just a few hours a night on stage. I had to also learn to praise myself and be happy in what I was doing but, when you're in a state like depression, that doesn't have any meaning for you. Seeing Darren Romeo on stage has really made me look at the stage with different eyes: I realize that it's *our* stage.

Roy: Watching Darren, we saw what we have accomplished and felt that it should not go to waste: we should do something with it.

Siegfried: So now I realized that this is our theater ... we created it. They gave us four walls when we first came to The Mirage, but everything you see on stage is ours—we designed it.

Roy: If you think about it, 13 years ago to risk 38 million dollars ... well, people say that with money you can buy anything. But we had to risk everything ... we had been in this town for 28 years before that and we were risking everything we made and our fame to put into this theater. We took that chance ... and we see that in Darren—he will take every risk there is. I see it plainly.

Siegfried: If you fail The Mirage hotel was built only *after* the contract with Siegfried and Roy was signed. When we were playing Radio City Music Hall [S&R played in New York City and Japan in 1988 while The Mirage and their theater within were being built], after the show one night we had dinner with Frank Sinatra, Shirley



MacLaine, and some of the big boys from Vegas. A guy from the Riviera hotel was at the end of the table and said, "Siegfried, do you know that the hotel you're opening up is a white elephant." I asked him what he meant by that. He said, "In order to keep that hotel open it will have to make a million dollars a day. No hotel has ever made a million dollars a day." And the same thing was true with Siegfried and Roy. Of course when we designed the show we never thought it would cost 38 million dollars. Of course not.

Roy: But we followed our vision ...

Siegfried: It took a lot to modernize it with state of the art computers and lighting and those sorts of things. The computers are great when they're finally in place and working and all the music and

hotel wasn't finished while we were rehearsing, and I'm surprised it all came together. All the people involved, the set designer and sound designer, all of these people were bent afterward—a whole group of them went off to Spain for three months to get over the stress! They were completely burnt out. Several of them got divorced.

Roy: But we had to be here and clean up the show! We changed a lot of things after they left. Everything you see out there from A to Z is Siegfried and Roy ...

Siegfried: Our ideas, the music, it's all Siegfried and Roy.

Genii: Your show is in two parts: there's a spectacular production for the first 45 minutes or so, and then you come out and do a quiet levitation, just yourself, sitting with legs crossed. The stage is black, you're dressed in black, the music is soft. All of this sets a completely different tone than what has happened before. The music sounds like violins ...

Roy: ... It's the meditation performed by The City of Prague Philharmonic.

Genii: It's a very intimate moment on a huge stage and it works beautifully.

Siegfried: It is an interesting stage and it's very tricky. After this big music with loud drums and some rock, now it comes to just strings.

Roy: You have to clean the palette in between.

Siegfried: Clean your palette. And it works. We used to have the horse in before ...

Roy: The Andalusian stallion with music from the opera *Nabucco*.

Siegfried: And everybody said, "You can't put that music in—it's an opera! It's impossible. It doesn't work." And everybody talked about this. The music with strings you just mentioned is also from an opera.

Roy: We have music from U2 during the sawing illusion ... we have it all in the show and that's what makes it interesting. These days, and it doesn't matter where they come from, audiences are very very picky. They *know* what is real ... you cannot cheat them anymore. They are spoiled and have an expectation. After the special effects they've seen in movies, you can *not* sell the audience short. You can't give them just anything. You have to have respect for your audience.

Siegfried: Now, it's not just who's working across the street anymore ... No. It's the town. It's an expectation. When you walk up the Strip and you see all of these things, the pirates fighting in front of Treasure Island, Siegfried and Roy—all of these things you never see when you're at home. This is what Las Vegas is all about. The good thing for us is that we're magicians and we're in the middle of the Strip. Over the years we've opened up a lot of doors and changed a lot of things. We changed the whole *schmear*.

Roy: We brought family entertainment.

Siegfried: And nobody wanted to do it. We had to fight all the way and we believed in it. The good thing is that it has opened up doors for others, like Cirque du Soleil. They saw what we've done and *are* continuing to do.

Genii: It's made Vegas a more interesting town to visit.

Siegfried: We said that we wanted to make our show more theatri-



lighting works properly. But, if you want to change something during rehearsal, you have to go back each and every time and start from the beginning. And we used techniques which hadn't been used in Las Vegas before. When we performed *Beyond Belief* at the Frontier hotel, we had a guy on the side who held the rope out for Roy, and if he fell asleep you walked over and touched him on the shoulder ... (Roy laughs and nods at this memory) ... this is impossible in a show like the one we have now.

Roy: We had to get permission from the government to use some of our lasers! There are all sorts of things you have to go through in order to make things work. With the show at The Mirage, 13 years ago, we took the chance and gave it everything we had. That's what you have to do to get somewhere.

Siegfried: So what happens is when you realize that you've spent 38 million dollars, it scares the hell out of you. And it was tough, the

cal, put in the things you see in the first half of our show now, and they said that you can't do that. It's not "Las Vegas." We said, if it doesn't work we can fix it ... *of course it worked!* It was the first and only show in the history of Las Vegas that for the first five years the only way to get a ticket was to wait in line *that day* for tickets to the show that evening. The line started at 6 a.m. If you stood in line all day and the tickets ran out, they wouldn't sell you a ticket for tomorrow. You had to come back and wait in line again. They did all of this because the show was so successful. We showed everyone that a show like this *could be* successful. And so others have also come in with big family shows, or magic shows. At first people thought these other shows might hurt Siegfried and Roy, but ... no.

Roy: There's room for everyone.

Siegfried: And then came September 11 and the terrible attack. Everyone out here thought it was going to be the end of Las Vegas. We were very lucky. For the first few days our early show was still sold out, but the later show dropped 10% in sales. Then it came back to normal. It showed everyone out here, again, that a show like Siegfried and Roy can be successful. When we first came to this country, something like this, our show, was unheard of, impossible. A two-hour magic show in Las Vegas—nobody wanted to see that.

Roy: Well, they didn't even want a magician as a closing act because magic is serious, and they only wanted comedians.

Siegfried: No, it wasn't because magic is "serious," it's because they thought that magic wasn't good enough. It was for an opening act or dumped into the middle, but not strong enough to close. People forget this! For the first 15 years we worked seven days a week ...

Roy: Three shows on Fridays and Saturdays.

Siegfried: We never had a day off! All the shows ran every day. We changed it so that now most shows have a day or two off each week. At that time it was *impossible*: if we asked for a day off we were told that we could go back to Europe where we came from and take a whole year off and not come back.

Genii: Did you ever take a vacation?

Siegfried: My first vacation came when we were working at the MGM Grand and my appendix burst. I had to take a vacation!

Genii: Didn't you have the flu last year?

Siegfried: Yes, and that was a *tough* one. The problem was that I took a trip to Europe for the Bambi Awards, went to Paris, Frankfurt, then New York, slept too little and had too much fun, and by the time I flew back I had the flu. Then I went back to work but felt pretty bad. So I stopped for three days, then came back to work, and then had a relapse, which is the worst thing that can happen. A lot of people had this kind of flu—it wouldn't go away!

Roy: A lot of dancers had it as well.

Siegfried: It was very scary.

Genii: You were out for a couple of weeks ...

Roy: Well, I *made* him take the time off. It was a tough call, but once he got a relapse I said, "No more. That's it! You're not going on."

Genii: Just for the record, Siegfried, how old are you?

Siegfried: Who ... *my* age? (Chuckles)

Roy: Why do you want to know that?

Siegfried: It's ... it's in that book! (He laughs out loud and points to *Mastering the Impossible*.)

Roy: Read the book!

Siegfried: Read!

After the laughter subsides ...

Genii: How old are you now?

Siegfried: I'm 63 ...

Roy: 62!

Siegfried: 62.

Genii: Okay, let's say you were 61 last year when you had the flu. (Just as a point of reference, *Mastering the Impossible* states that Siegfried was born in 1939, so according to that timetable he is 63.) The flu can be pretty serious once you're in your sixties.

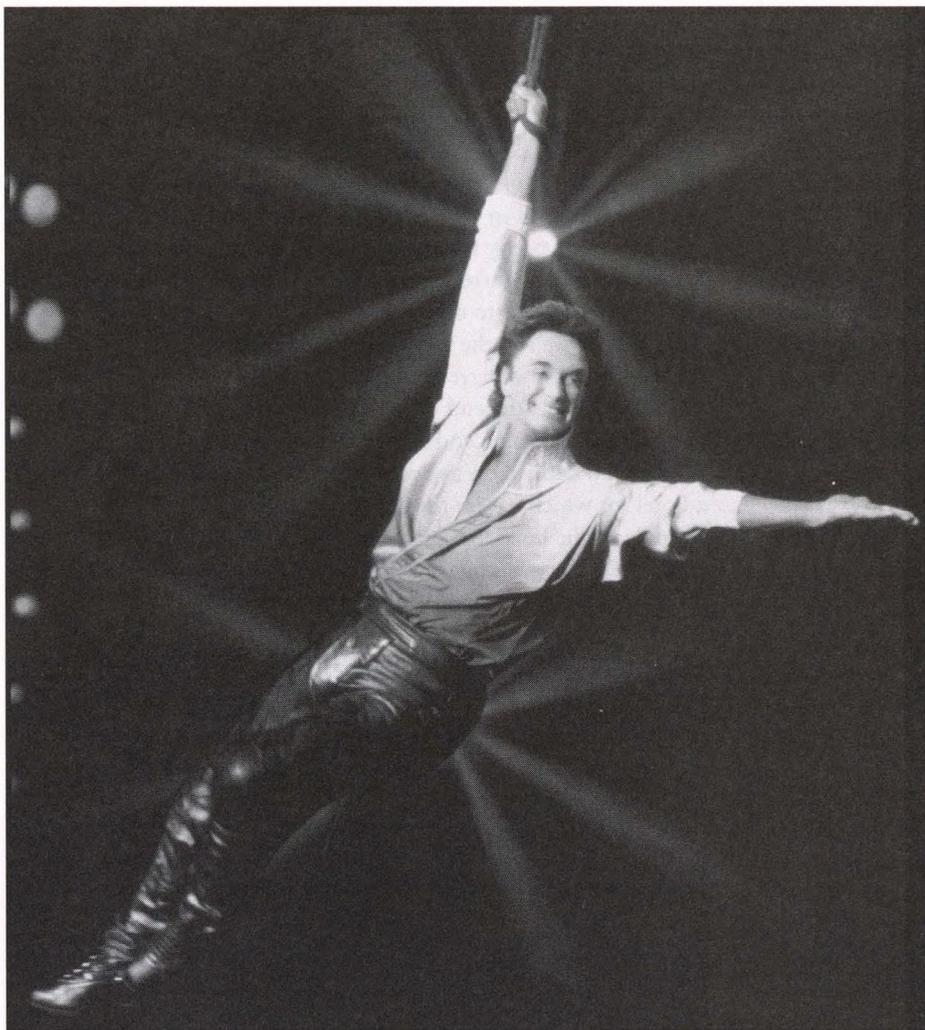
Siegfried: When you're young you think you're invincible and you go on and you *have* to do it ...

Roy: It's like we run the Olympics every night, but we *always* do the show even when we have a headache or the flu—we have to because too many people depend on us. Between the people who work out front, those on stage, and the technicians backstage, there are 169 people who depend on us every night. And there's also The Mirage, a hotel for which we are the support system.

Siegfried: The hotel knows very well how important we are because when we're not working the income of the restaurants and casinos drop by 30 to 50% ... which is quite something.



Siegfried and Roy with Steve Wynn



Roy: You don't want to let them down.

Genii: Roy, do you work out?

Roy: Yes, after the second show I would normally have my dinner at 1:30 in the morning if you guys weren't hanging around. Then I go to the gym for two hours.

Genii: You're almost 60?

Roy: 57.

Genii: You hear about movie stars who claim to do their own stunts, but that's often just a lot of publicity. But there's no question that you are doing what we see on stage: it's not a movie with Arnold Schwarzenegger where it's a stuntman wearing an "Arnold" mask. You are the one, at almost 60, swinging way out over the audience on that rope.

Roy: Stephen Spielberg said to us, "You make movies live in front of my eyes."

Siegfried: That's been copied many times, but these other guys are always swinging around up there like a wet towel.

Genii: Do either one of you get tired doing the show?

Siegfried: No.

Roy: Well, actually, the show is our lives. Our life is the stage and the stage is our life. So, we live on stage ... it's our sandbox. We play on stage. It's our chance to do all of the things in life we want to do. When you're working in Vegas, and you've worked for 32 years like we have, you cannot stop when you leave the stage. The stage energizes you: you see how far you can go with the audience. Can you make them happy? You really want to serve the people—you want to give them something, that's the reason why you're on stage.

Siegfried: Of course, when you get this age, you grow up and realize that you can't do everything. You hear people say that you can't be on stage past 60 when you're in Las Vegas. You think about that, maybe "they" are right—then you put yourself in that frame of mind. We had a contract for 11 years and now that you've put yourself in that frame of mind, you start thinking, "Okay, I've worked all my life, I think now it's time." And then you stop. And then something happens to you because you've stopped thinking and stopped doing your thing. And then, in my case, I went into a deep depression without realizing it. Something went wrong and nothing made sense any more. The past, the present, the future, nothing made sense any more. And everybody said, "What? You should be happy, you should be grateful because you have everything you ever dreamed of." But ... No. And why? Because I stopped. Then we saw Darren and I realized, "No, no, no ..."

Roy: There's so much to do.

Siegfried: When Darren was on stage I saw myself! All of my life I had never seen myself. And then it came time to renew our contract, and the hotel did something that I never thought they would. They said,

"We realize 14 shows a week is a little bit too much, but we'd like to see two shows on Fridays and Saturdays and maybe one show the other days. Is that all right?" I realized that by taking two days off each week and by doing only one show the other three nights all of a sudden I had a life! I never did. By doing only one show, we can go out to dinner afterward or go to a movie or go meet friends!

Roy: We had a life outside the theater.

Siegfried: If you're doing two shows a night plus the work behind the scenes ...

Roy: We have worked together for 42 years!

Siegfried: And we have 58 big cats that need attention, and The Secret Garden [a lushly landscaped sanctuary behind The Mirage where some of Siegfried and Roy's animals live during the day to which the public can purchase admission]. You have all the dancers and other cast members and everyone always has a problem.



Siegfried and his sister

Roy: Who would ever believe that two endangered species have been preserved for future generations—that's what we did with The Secret Garden. And with The Secret Garden, not only are people coming to see something they literally can't see anywhere else in the world, but it's also a breath of fresh air in this casino environment.

Genii: You've got some great new publicity material around town for it.

Siegfried: That's something the hotel has started to do. Because they realized ...

Roy: I had a dream to create a sanctuary like this, but the hotel didn't want to do it. It was a parking lot!

Siegfried: So now it's successful: 3,000 to 5,000 people a day come to see these beautiful animals.

Roy: Think about it!

Siegfried: And this is quite something. Everybody in town would love to have these bodies walking through their casino *during the day*. That's incredible.

Roy: It creates awareness of the animals, and it creates a message that you don't have to preach or force feed. Let them see for themselves and discover the magic. This is so fulfilling—it's my greatest passion.

Siegfried: And so The Mirage has a theme and an identity, and that is Siegfried and Roy.

Genii: So, what about the rumors of your impending retirement?

Siegfried: I spread those rumors! Everybody came out of the woodwork thinking they were going to be able to take our place.

Genii: Now you're down to seven shows a week: are you happy with this schedule? Has it rejuvenated you?

Siegfried: It's unbelievable.

Roy: We have a totally new drive.

Siegfried: I've experienced something that I never have before: I live!

Roy: Now we can concentrate a little more on some of the other things we do, such as our sponsorship of new talent through the World Magic Seminar, which we've been involved with since the beginning. We also sponsor a Magic College in South Africa.

Siegfried: My sister's a nun, and she had an idea about five years ago for us to build an orphanage in Romania and she would leave Germany and go run it.

Roy: It's amazing.

Siegfried: My sister said the kids in Germany have everything, the kids in Romania have *nothing*. So now we've built this orphanage which houses about 28 kids and hopefully it will give them a better future. It's unbelievable.

Genii: So, you guys have a lot to do ... you're jazzed! You're not old and tired!

Siegfried: No, no, no.

Roy: I think we're anything but!

Siegfried: You've seen the show. What you see onstage, this is our thoughts, our conversations, our dreams. This is our lives.

Roy: We are fulfilling our destiny by living our dreams.

Siegfried: When I spread these rumors about retirement, the first thing I had to do is convince him (points at Roy) to retire. Now, he was upset.

Roy: Well, yes, I had just built a new house!

Siegfried: I convinced him to retire, which was a tough thing to do, and then when I changed my mind again ...

Roy: I had just bought a winery in Africa to live on, and then he comes and changes his mind!

Siegfried: In other words, MGM took over The Mirage from Steve Wynn, and everybody in Las Vegas knew that Siegfried and Roy wanted to retire. MGM said, "No, this can't be. You're at the top of your career and you can't give it up." So, we asked for different things, and they gave us everything that we asked for.

Genii: So MGM made you an offer you couldn't refuse.

Roy: That's exactly right.

Siegfried: And so we live happily ever after!

