

FANTASIO

magician-of-the-month



By Leslie P. Guest

We first met at the big Combined Convention at the Hotel Commodore in New York City in 1964, where I had charge of the contests. One of the few entrants who knew his act, his staging, and all that was necessary, was Fantasio. Watching him from the wings, I was greatly impressed, and not at all surprised when he took First Award for Apparatus Originality. Had he entered under "Manipulation," he would probably have taken that award also. A personable young man, he has since become a headliner, a member of our Parent Assembly, S.A.M., and was a feature act on our 1968 National Conference at Philadelphia this July.

Born Ricardo Roucau in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on October 3, 1936, Fantasio's interest in magic began at the age of ten with the usual Box of Magic Tricks. He learned to do them all, but felt discouraged. Then he saw the movie, "Three Little Words," in which Fred Astaire played the part of a magician. (Of course, Fred was portraying that lovable composer and magician, the late Bert Kalmar.) This prompted more practice, and the finding of a magic shop in Buenos Aires. At age seventeen he met Mario Lobo, who gave him his first lessons in real sleight-of-hand. Then he joined three magic clubs in the same city; met Dave Bamberg (Fu Manchu), Carlos H. Colombi, and others; and had his first chance to do magic for audiences.

In 1959 Fantasio was employed in a bank, was a student of chemistry at the University, and was doing clubs, benefits and kid shows on the side. He performed for the Annual

Show of his P.A.D.P.E.I. Magic Society, was seen by an Uruguayan T.V. Producer, and was promptly booked for two T.V. programs in the city of Montevideo. As he says, in his delightful Spanish translation, "I sent my renunciation to the bank; I leaved my studies; and I am very happy as a professional entertainer in magic."

For quite a while he played night-clubs in Montevideo. One of his numbers was the familiar Silk to Egg Trick. Each night, on the way to the club, he stopped at a restaurant to buy an egg, so that he could break it at the conclusion of the effect. One night the restaurateur rang in a hard-boiled egg on him. Fantasio was more surprised than his audience when he cracked it; but he nonchalantly ate the egg — "to convince all of you that it is a real egg!"

Later the same year he persuaded a young dancer named Monica to marry him, and she has been the "glamorous half" of the act ever since. Then in 1964 they had a daughter named Jacqueline — who will probably join the act when she is old enough. Fantasio & Monica were successful from the start, playing night-clubs, hotels and T.V. shows throughout Uruguay, Argentina, Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, and Caribbean resorts.

The Fantasio Family came to the U.S.A. in the spring of 1964, and made their presence known to magicians here. As mentioned earlier, he competed at the Combined Convention, then opened at The Latin Quarter in August. Columnist Earl Williams praised "his amazingly educated fingers." September was the start of a long run at The Desert

Inn in Las Vegas. A quick trip to Hollywood in October permitted his T.V. appearance on "Hollywood Palace"; then back to Las Vegas where he met Ed Sullivan, taping his first show for him on October 29th — a success which he repeated in April 1967. The very critical Great Stone Face broke down enough to say, "Fantasio is the fastest magician I have ever seen."

Next came a six months engagement with the Ice Revue at the Conrad Hilton Hotel in Chicago, followed in 1966 by another spell at the Sheraton Hotel in Puerto Rico. I believe it was there that Monica received repertorial praise as, "Fantasio's beautifully aloof assistant, Monica."

They played for three solid months with the Liberace Show, and that talented key-pounder remarked, "You are fabulous, and I hope we will work together again." Then came a string of shorter hotel engagements in the eastern U.S.A. One of these was a prominent New York City night club, and there he featured his dove productions. One night he had to cut his act, leaving him with one dove still secreted. In the hallway he was stopped by an enthusiastic viewer, who exclaimed his mystification as to how the doves were produced. Whipping out his handkerchief, he asked, "Fantasio, could you produce anything from this?" With an absolutely dead-pan expression, Fantasio produced that last dove from the man's handkerchief, and walked on, hearing behind him the repeated remark, "I can't believe it; I can't believe it; I can't —."

In early 1968 the act worked steadily, appearing in Puerto Rico, Netherlands Guiana, Venezuela, Grand Bahamas, Miami Beach, Aruba, Curacao, Santo Domingo — then a later single appearance at our Philadelphia Conference. From there they go to the spot-of-spots, the Paradise Island Hotel in Nassau, where they open on August 7. When you read this they will be playing at the El San Juan Hotel in Puerto Rico from Sept. 1 through Dec. 27.

Fantasio builds his own props and equipment, and each piece is beau-



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tifully hand-crafted. Many of his tricks are original and, when he has a better grasp of English, he plans to publish them. He does write well in Spanish, having been the Founder and First Director of "Fake," a magic magazine published in Argentina. Besides his S.A.M. Membership he belongs to four magic societies in Argentina, and one each in Uruguay, Colombia, Brazil, Venezuela, and India. This is just the beginning of a truly great magical career, and this article closes with the pertinent comment made by the late Walt Disney, "Fantastic is the word for Fantasio!"

P.S. The above article was typed before our July Philadelphia Conference. There, Fantasio appeared as advertised, and in his cheerful, quiet way gave the magicians several thrills, since many of the numbers were his origination, and not the straight act he did on T.V. He also swept up the trophy for the most original effect on the Contests which I was so unfortunate to miss. Earlier in the month, at the I.B.M. convention, he won three trophies: Best Original Effect; Most Commercial Trick (M.D.A. Award); and Best Stage Effect. Delightful people, these Fantasios; Monica is, as advertised, a most unusual type of assistant, and their little daughter Jacqueline is fast becoming another charmer.