

# Abracadabra and alacazam!

Stuart Watkins, from Rhydyfelin in Pontypridd, is one of Wales' leading magicians

Interview by Naomi Snelling

## How do people react when you say you are a magician?

I describe myself first of all as an entertainer and then there's a pause. I can usually see they are wanting to ask what kind of entertainer. Then when I say I'm a magician there's another pause, and then some people ask me to do a trick!

## So, why a magician?

I always had it as a hobby. I was a full-time sales representative and I used to perform for customers and clients and then people started asking me to do weddings, or saying I'd be brilliant for their trade show. It wasn't something I set out to pursue, I just went with the flow.

## How long have you been a magician?

I've been interested in magic since I was 10 and I've been working professionally as a magician for nearly six years.

## What do you do?

I focus more on close-up magic because that's what I enjoy and it's more popular. Cards, and coins and I vanish things, all sorts of close up work. It's a very intimate kind of magic.

## What kind of events?

Dinner parties, weddings, corporate events, student balls, I also do small house parties.

## What do you enjoy most?

I love performing. I always wanted to be a performer in some way or another.

## And least?

I hate it when my phone doesn't ring.

## What's your favourite trick?

I borrow something from the audience, like a ring and I wrap it in tissue paper that had been coated in a substance that is highly flammable. It literally bursts into flames. Then I go to my pocket and take out my keys and there's the ring attached to my keyring.

## Proudest moment of your career?

December last year, performing live on BBC One's Test The Nation programme, to five million viewers. Up until a week before I was just going to be part of a team of 50 magicians. But the researcher

was asking loads of questions about what I can do and she asked if I could do a trick on live television. I borrowed Philip Schofield's wedding ring for my favourite trick.

I had to rehearse it a few times in the studio because they couldn't believe it actually worked. It was a fantastic experience. I felt so proud to actually perform live on television.

Before that I won an award for a stage show with my mind-reading act. I have a routine where I interpret facial expressions, body language and gestures. I was asked to be part of a competition with a big magic society in March last year. I wasn't expecting to be part of it, let alone win it, so that was great.

I have just applied to become a member of the Magic Circle, so that will be another proud moment when it comes through.

## How do you make sure you get bookings?

Word of mouth plays a really important part.



I also have a website

([www.livemagic.co.uk](http://www.livemagic.co.uk)) and an advert in the Yellow Pages.

## How many hours of practise do you do?

It depends. I'm always sat down watching TV handling the cards.

If I decide to learn a new trick I learn a whole routine. So I might read it in a book and learn the basic method and then I change a lot of things and make it my own. I try a few presentations until I'm comfortable with it.

Some tricks I work on and work on and they never see the light of day. Others I think won't ever work and then they do.

My eight-year-old is part of my success. She's always there when I need to practise a trick.

## Why is it important for businesses to use someone like yourself?

It's a good icebreaker. People come up afterwards and thank me for a great evening. If it's a corporate event I'm always very aware and I can almost guarantee that their clients are blown away by the magic. These events are reputation makers and it's something I work hard to achieve.

## “I borrowed Philip Schofield's wedding ring for my favourite trick”

## What do you wear?

I always look presentable. If it's a dinner party I usually wear a dinner suit with a white wing collar shirt. If it's a corporate event where everyone is in black tie I tend to wear a black shirt, just to stand out from the crowd. When I go up to different tables I don't want to look like just another guest. You have to differentiate yourself.

## Most unusual moment?

Before I went professional I went for an internal interview at the electrical company where I worked and the person interviewing me said, "We've heard that you're a bit of a magician, would you mind showing us some tricks now?" This threw me a bit but I always carry some cards on me, so I did some tricks. Then he brought in the whole human resources team to watch.

## What kind of people do you perform for?

My clients include the CIA, Wetherspoons, HMS Cambria and a lot of corporate events. After one dinner, football legend Trevor Brooking called me over because he wanted to see some more. And Emlyn Hughes, the ex-England captain, he was really interested too. ■