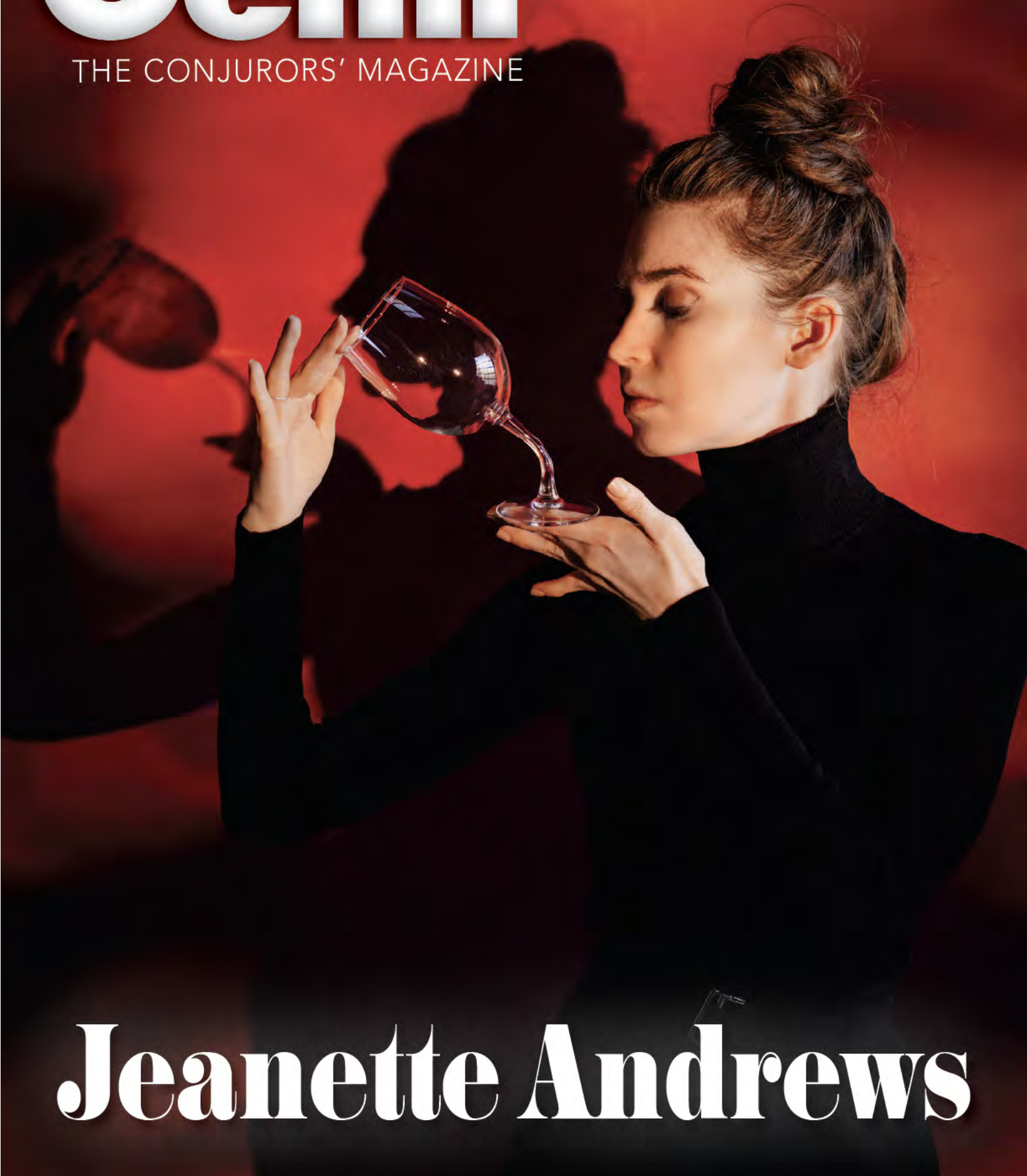


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# Genii

THE CONJURORS' MAGAZINE



# Jeanette Andrews

# Genii

THE CONJURORS' MAGAZINE  
VOLUME 86 NUMBER 12 DECEMBER 2023

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72

64



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## FEATURES

- 18 **Jeanette Andrews: Sensory Contemporary Artist**  
by Chloe Olewitz
- 42 **Alex Jarrett and The Amazing Rise of *Champions of Magic***  
by Carl Mercurio



42



18

## COLUMNS

- 6 **Genii Speaks** by Richard Kaufman
- 7 **In Memoriam**
  - 7 Larry Becker  
by Terry Wolkowicz, Carol Irvine, and Gayle Glade
  - 8 Darwin Ortiz by Ken Trombly
  - 9 Dan Garrett by Joe M. Turner
  - 10 Richard (Dick) Gustafson by Tom Ewing
- 12 **The Eye** by Vanessa Armstrong
- 53 **Exhumations**  
[REDACTED] by Jon Racherbaumer
- 54 **Conjuring**  
[REDACTED] by Jim Steinmeyer
- 58 **Material Concessions**  
[REDACTED] by David Regal
- 62 **Stage as Studio**  
Inherent Tenderness by Krystyn Lambert
- 64 **WWPD**  
[REDACTED] by Jonathan Friedman
- 68 **Dealing With It**  
[REDACTED] by John Bannon
- 72 **Magicana** by Richard Kaufman  
**A Larry Jennings Magicana for the Holidays**
  - 72 [REDACTED] by Larry Jennings
  - 73 [REDACTED] by Larry Jennings
  - 75 [REDACTED] by Larry Jennings
- 78 **The Academy of Magical Arts in Genii**
  - 78 Knights at The Magic Castle by Shawn McMaster
  - 81 Now Appearing at The Magic Castle

## LIGHT FROM THE LAMP

- 82 **Books Reviewed** by Nathan Coe Marsh  
82 [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]
- 86 **Videos Reviewed** by Suzanne  
86 [REDACTED]

- 89 **Tricks Reviewed** by Ryan Plunkett  
89 [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]
- 93 **Subscription Information/Advertiser Index**



# Sensory Contemporary Artist

By Chloe Olewitz

**W**hen I last interviewed Jeanette Andrews in 2019, she was preparing to open her new parlor show, *Bottling the Impossible*. “What if a scent could create magic?” her olfactory performance asked. It had been eight years since Andrews first encountered Harry Eng’s impossible bottles and six years since she first tried, unsuccessfully, to create her own.

But Andrews is obstinate in her creative pursuits.

# Jeanette



Andrews

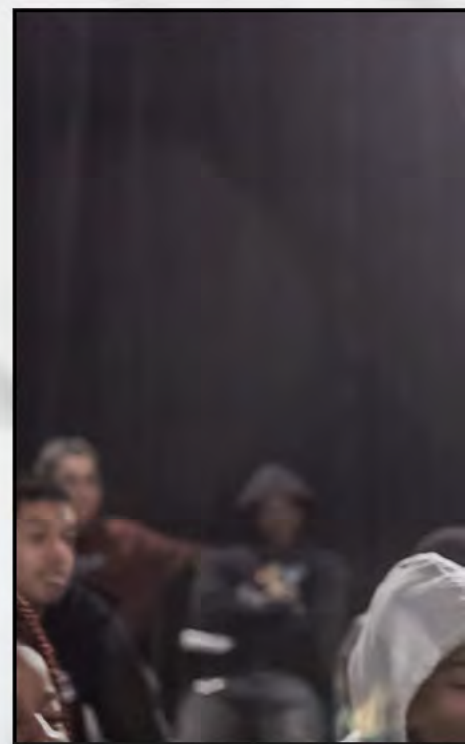


From  
*Bottling the  
Impossible.*  
June 2019

After many painstaking rounds of experimentation, she encased four impossible sculptures—a sealed deck of playing cards, a wooden chess rook, a potted plant, and a pocket mirror—in perfume bottles and built a show that the audience had to smell to believe: “the scents are dispersed in the room, either to the entire group or

to one person at a time,” Andrews told “The Eye” in September 2019.

Her signature effect in *Bottling the Impossible* was [REDACTED] with scent: “An empty perfume bottle gets filled with a bottle of water,” she told *Genii* earlier this year, “just a real, sealed bottle of actual water. Everybody in the audience



thinks of a scent, one gets chosen, they spray the perfume bottle, and it is—honest to God—the scent that comes out of the bottle.”

When I met with Andrews this summer, she had just started performing her “scent stuff” again. She was excited to dust off the effects in front of audiences, since for a few years there everything olfactory was off limits and inhaling anything felt like a risk. That pandemic period was hard on Andrews.

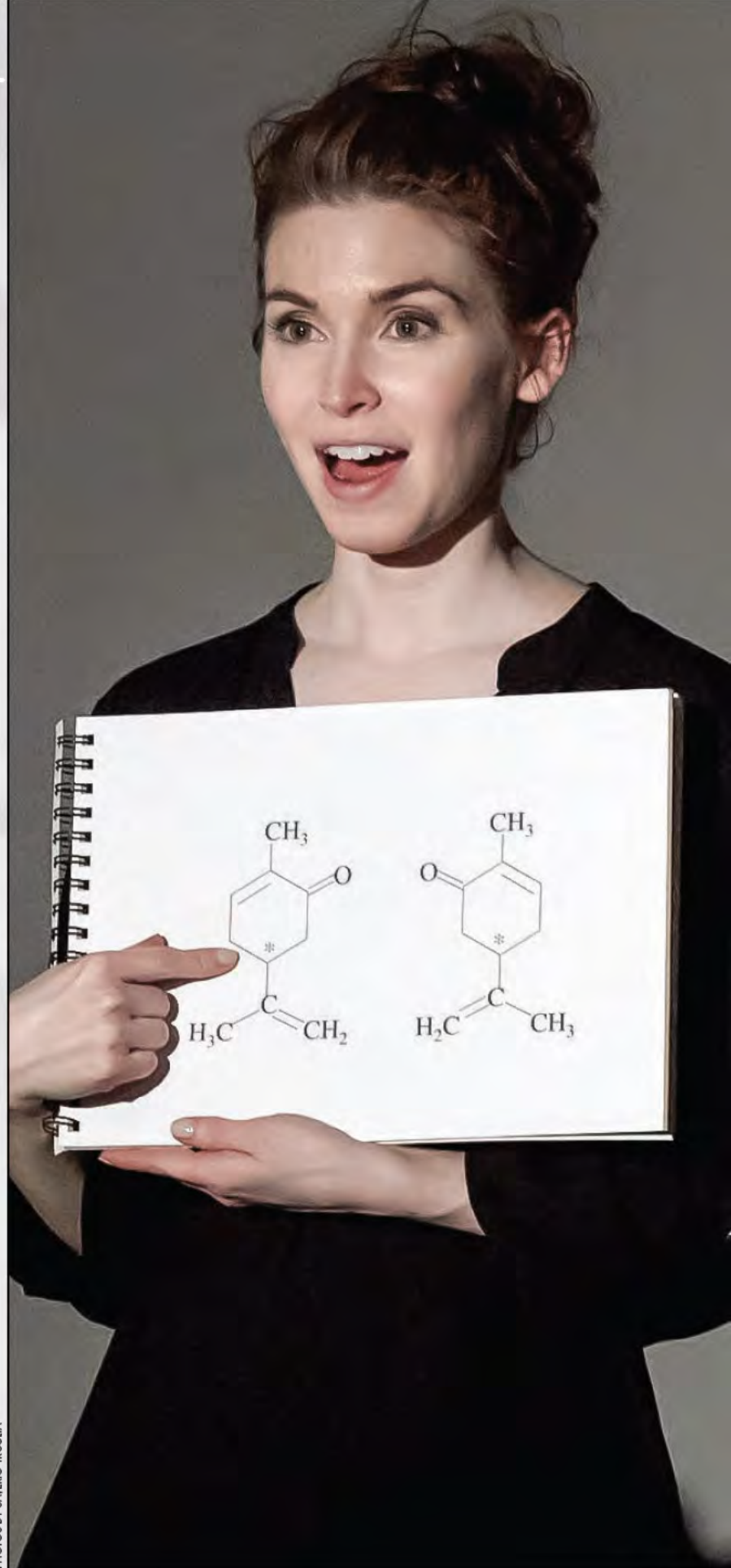
“I have been a magician for so damn long, I don’t even exist in the world otherwise,” she said. “I had a full-on identity crisis. As I was lying on my floor sobbing constantly, I was like, I literally have no conception of who I am as a human being on this Earth aside from being a performer. Being a magician. It’s all I can be in the world.”



**M**agic has never not been Andrews’ life. She has two memories that pre-date her identity as a magician: the upholstery in the car her parents inherited from her great-grandmother



PHOTOS BY SAVERIO TRUGLIA



and running into a coffee table at her grandmother's house. In both, she was three. In 1994, ABC aired *Siegfried & Roy: The Magic • The Mystery*. The full-length television special, like their stage show at The Mirage, was revolutionary, but four-year-old Andrews didn't know that.

She wasn't aware that some of the best Broadway-trained costume, set, and lighting designers had come together to produce a groundbreaking theatrical experience. To her kid eyes, Siegfried & Roy had set the standard for what magic was. And Andrews wanted in.

magic is," thought Andrews.

She got a magic set for Christmas that year. Before she turned five, she had performed eight minutes of magic set stalwarts for her preschool classmates. Her parents were not magicians—her mom, Caryn, is a graphic designer and her dad, Mike, works for the local park district—but they were along for the ride. "Here's me, four or five years old, I've learned everything from the magic kit and my parents are like, 'Now what?'"

Together, they crafted their way through the local library's collection of decidedly '90s magic books for kids, the DIY kind requiring reams of colorful construction paper and a whole lot of glue. Around that time, Andrews' mom read about a Chicago magician named Ralph Beck in the local newspaper. She looked him up in the White Pages and reached out to ask if he would give Andrews lessons.

As it turns out, Beck was both Howard Thurston's grandnephew and completely disinterested in teaching magic to a five-year-old. But Andrews' dad talked him into giving her a chance. Beck asked Andrews to bring what she was working on and turned their first lesson into a test. "Apparently, I showed up with this ball and vase and said, 'I bet you've never seen this before.'" After she performed her routine for him, Beck performed a variation. She parroted it back and added on another element of her own. "He saw that I was willing to learn, and he said, 'Ok, I'll teach your kid.'"

Beck remained Andrews' teacher until he passed away seven years later, during which time their two families grew close. He introduced her to much of the magic community in Chicago, starting with their local S.A.M. chapter. Soon, Andrews' parents were shuttling her back and forth to Bob James's Magic Shop in Elmhurst, Illinois, about a 40-minute drive from where they lived [REDACTED]

Throughout her childhood, Andrews performed as much as possible. She performed at local block parties and hosted "the backyard shows" at her parents' house, charging neighborhood kids a dime for 10 minutes of magic. When she was six years old, Andrews did her first paid show for a



Less than a month later, on the night before Thanksgiving, *The World's Greatest Magic* aired on NBC. Her second exposure to magic was another who's who of world-class performers. That first installment of the series featured Princess Tenko, The Pendragons, Max Maven, Greg Frewin, Fielding West, Lance Burton, Mac King, Juan Tamariz, Topas, Tom Mullica, Brett Daniels, Melinda, Bill Malone, Alain Choquette, and Franz Harary. "Well, this must be what





Jeanette's first entrepreneurial venture at age five, hosting magic performances in her parents' backyard. Tickets were 10 cents.



Jeanette's first magic performance, for her preschool class, age four.



Working with cards, age five.



Performing her "Color-Changing Tiger" at age seven, in the national finals competition of Kellogg's Razzle Dazzle Search for Magical Kids contest. Held at the Lance Burton Theatre in Las Vegas.

Jeanette at age seven backstage with Roy Horn at the Siegfried & Roy show.



nearby park district. At the time, she had her heart set on a \$40 magic book. “My parents said, ‘You did your show, you made your \$10, we’re so proud of you,’” Andrews said. “Now you just have to figure out how to do three more shows and then we’ll drive you to buy the book.”

It was an early example of the way Andrews’ parents simultaneously supported her dreams and empowered her to take ownership of her own path. By age seven, she was already a budding entrepreneur. “It was the start of me running a business to do magic,” she said. “I’m doing these little shows where I’m getting paid, I’m able to

buy things to learn more magic, and also trying to figure out how to make things more my own.”

Soon after, Andrews and her dad rigged up a stuffed tiger prop that turned into a white tiger as a kicker ending. Then they took it to Vegas to show Siegfried and Roy. “As a kid, I had two aspirations in life,” she said. “I wanted to be a magician and I wanted to meet Siegfried and Roy. That was all I cared about.” Right after their 1994 special aired, four-year-old Andrews had written a note to the effect of “I love magic” that her mother mailed to the duo. She enclosed photographs from Andrews’ first show, along with her own letter thanking them for inspiring her daughter. To their surprise, Roy wrote back inviting the Andrews family to be guests at the show.

Andrews wrote to them three times a year until Roy’s passing in 2020, keeping them informed about what she was working on and where she was performing. The deeper she got into magic, the more her act evolved. She did a and parasol production act, with a little quick change thrown in for good measure. There were flower productions, and, at one point, a fully themed *My Fair Lady* act. Andrews was

Performing at Speakeasy Magick in New York City, 2021.





PHOTO BY SAVERIO TRUGLIA

Above, from *Bottling the Impossible*, June 2019. Below, strolling at a gala in 2016.

nine when she started learning Billiard Ball manipulation and developing the “Rose Petal [redacted]” routine to which she says she owes her career. In just a few years’ time, the young magician would come to declare that she was also an artist.



When pandemic lockdowns began in March 2020, Andrews was still living in Chicago. The sudden shift from performing 365 days a year to an indefinite pause on in-person gathering threw Andrews, like so many among us, for an existential loop. Eventually, she wasn’t just lost, she was also depressed. “Live performance was the first thing to go,” Andrews said. “It was quite literally unnecessary, and by extension, not valuable. If my only iden-



PHOTO BY CLAIRE DEMOS



PHOTO BY ISABELLE GRYBOW

Jeanette hosting *Magic Distilled* at Great Jones Distilling Company in New York City, 2023.

tity is completely tied up in something that I'm being told is inessential and probably not that important, what am I doing? Who even am I? Am I even a functional person in the world?"

Beyond the challenge to her core identity, the pandemic forced Andrews to reckon with how she had been contributing to society. Her

home was sandwiched between two hospitals, and she tried to hold on to her sense of self while she watched an army of nurses march by her window. "These people are saving lives numerous times a day, and I'm sitting here crying because I can't do magic shows anymore? This seems," she pauses, "not right."

Ever the pragmatist, Andrews quickly started imagining how she might reinvent herself as a different person. "What if this continues?" was a constant refrain, a distant panic pushing her to consider where she'd move, whether she'd get a bachelor's degree, how she'd find a day job. She considered social work but decided she didn't have the emotional resilience. Experimental psychology seemed a good fit until she realized how much math was required. Law school seemed interesting for a while, but in the end, the idea of it made her uneasy. "I had this visceral reaction," she said, "that's not who I am. I can't describe it. I pictured myself having this other life and it didn't feel right to me."

By November 2020, there was enough talk of vaccines to give Andrews hope. She kept postponing her reinvention, always buying just a little time before she had to pull the trigger on a new life. While she waited for a big break in the pandemic news cycle, she decided to move to New York. Andrews had been visiting and working in the city since 2016, developing friendships and building up professional connections in art, magic, and academia. By 2019, she was already spending almost half the year in New York City.

Although she had quietly been dreaming of a permanent move, the fact that both her private client base and her family were in Chicago kept her close to home. Pre-pandemic, she regularly made the 45-minute drive from downtown

Performing at a private event, January 2020.



PHOTO BY ANNA KOMAROV



PHOTO BY LAURA PUCCI

Performing at a private event, November, 2021.

of those pandemic-born doubts lingered. “Is this enough? Am I contributing to the world enough?” Andrews still sometimes wonders about the functional merits of art and entertainment. But as she continues settling into her packed schedule delivering lectures, workshops, and performances across the country and around the world, she has

Performing at a private event, January 2020.

Chicago to the suburb where her parents live—they are very close. But after almost nine months of phone calls and Zoom meetings, she started to realize that she didn’t need to be within driving distance to stay connected to her family.

As for the clients, there was no work anyway. In August 2021, she made the move. Even though social distancing was the law of the land and masks were the accessory of choice, Andrews says everything changed when she moved. “The sheer number of performance opportunities in New York was at least 10 times what there was in Chicago,” she said. “And this is a place, as a society, that cares about performance and the creative fields. New York understands that these are things that add value to the world. It’s baked into the culture here. In other places, it can feel like an afterthought.”

Andrews dove headfirst into that culture, and quickly began to feel like part of an artistic community. She felt both comfortable with and challenged by performing for an audience with its own sense of taste: “When you’re dealing with more educated or at least more opinionated consumers, you have to level up in certain ways,” she said. Andrews describes herself as exacting, but admits her precision is also a better fit for the fast pace of New York. “I get things done, and I can work with clients here who need stuff done immediately. So do I. Here you go.”

As the world began to reopen, Andrews fell right back into performing. But even then, some

PHOTO BY ANNA KOMAROV



been reminded that magicians have an important role to play on the global stage.

"I've had enough people share their experiences with me to validate why magic, art, and performance are essential," she said. "Everybody can't be a doctor—society wouldn't function. Everyone has different skills and is contributing something different." The idea that sustaining people's emotional health is a worthwhile endeavor pushed its way through the doubt, eventually. Her epiphany is no great surprise considering the damage her own emotional state sustained during those months in lockdown.

Andrews also came to understand that every job, every pastime, every hour in the day cannot be completely utilitarian. "Life isn't only going to the grocery store and the doctor's office," Andrews said. "There's no joy in that. Or, not as much as there could be when there's a wealth of

people who care deeply about bringing beauty or contemplation to the world through their particular lens." She no longer doubts that a magician is who and what she is, through and through. "The thing that I doubt now is how I can or should be contributing to the world more."



The particular lens Andrews brings to her performances today has been germinating since she was 12 years old, when she met and befriended Arthur Trace at *Nothing Up My Sleeve*, an annual magic showcase at the Raue Center for Performing Arts in Crystal Lake, Illinois. As we are wont to do in our youth, Andrews thought a new friend 10 years her senior had it all figured out. She remembers the moment Trace told her, practically in passing, that magic could be used to express other ideas.

"I'm 12, I'm figuring out who I am," Andrews said. "He was an adult who knew all the answers. I thought, 'Oh my god, he's right.' And he was. He was very right about that." The seed was planted, life went on. Andrews kept performing in and around Chicago, searching for more ways to make her magic her own and starting to explore what ideas she wanted to express.

High school was not a great experience for Andrews—she felt out of place with her classmates and had a hard time caring about her schoolwork. She begged her parents and her guidance counselor to let her drop out, but only after researching every truancy law on the books to make her case. "I felt like I couldn't relate to anyone around me, which I didn't know at the time is how everybody feels. I was like, 'I've got to fax a contract. May I go?' I was just so frustrated."

Andrews finished high school in the end. But along the way, she killed time in the philosophy section of her local library. One day she pulled a tome off the shelf, a massive black volume with bright red letters down the spine—it was an anthology of western philosophy. In each short essay, Andrews started to draw parallels with magic.

"It was all these different philosophers ques-

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PHOTO BY MICHAEL SULLIVAN

Above, Jeanette performing at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, 2017. Below, performing at Tannen's Camp in 2022.



PHOTO BY TODD SEIDENBERG





tioning how we perceive and understand the world around us. Objects and our interactions with them. What constitutes knowledge. I thought, “These are the same questions that magic is asking!” How do I know this cup is really here? How am I sure about that?” She worked her way through the anthology every day at school, flipping through sections on rhetoric, politics, and morality, until she found herself drawn to the back of the book: aesthetics.

Around the same time, Andrews made her first trip to the American Museum of Magic in Marshall, Michigan, and started falling in love with magic history. She remembers learning about French magician Jean-Eugène Robert-Houdin and the height of magic’s cultural esteem. She started to imagine how magic might be revered once more. “Why not try to situate magic in a contemporary art context?” she asked. “That seemed like the way forward, not only to bring these meaty questions into a more cohesive dialogue, but also to say hey, this is something really valuable.”

For Andrews, the incredible investment of time, thought, and effort that have contributed to magicians’ ability to make a signed card appear in a box is an astounding feat worthy of appreciation. Her awe extends beyond her own devotion and that of her contemporaries, to the long tradition she has inherited, passed down through generations and augmented by interdisciplinary thinking. Books, teachers, lectures, lessons—legacy libraries that make the art form so much of what it is today.

“We all know magic is an incredibly technical thing, but there’s no public understanding of that,” she said. “There’s no education about what goes into magic, because there can’t be.” In music, by contrast, there is no such absence of understanding. Someone who has never played an instrument can go to the symphony and appreciate that the violin soloist has likely trained for decades, progressing through levels of instruction with the help of renowned teachers, mentors, and conservatory programs.

They know that it’s wildly unlikely they would be able to recreate what they just saw if, say, they

got a violin in their Christmas stocking and they spent a few weeks plucking the strings. “I know nothing about music, but I have enough of a cultural understanding of what it takes to be a symphonic violinist.” The low barrier to entry in magic offends Andrews, in a way. “People are like, ‘I got a magic set for my birthday when I was four, I’m a magician.’ What?!”

By the time she was 15, Andrews was full



of aesthetics-inspired questions: “What would magic look like in an art museum? What would it look like if it was something else? What even is magic performance?” She remembers that time—the mid-2000s—as the era of the sucker trick and throw-away gags. Within that climate, she took her first steps on a long road toward what has become the focus of her work to this day: magic performance as installation in designated contemporary art spaces.

“I’ve always been interested in being a catalyst for bringing magic into a cultural conversation,” she said. Today, Andrews’ colleagues identify her contemporary art bent as the thing that makes her magic stand out. “Jeanette is a distinctive performer who has a keen sense of the world around her and the bigger picture of what life is all about,” said Todd Robbins, host of *Speakeasy Magick*, where Andrews is a regular member of

Jeanette talking with Eugene Burger before her first performance at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, 2013.

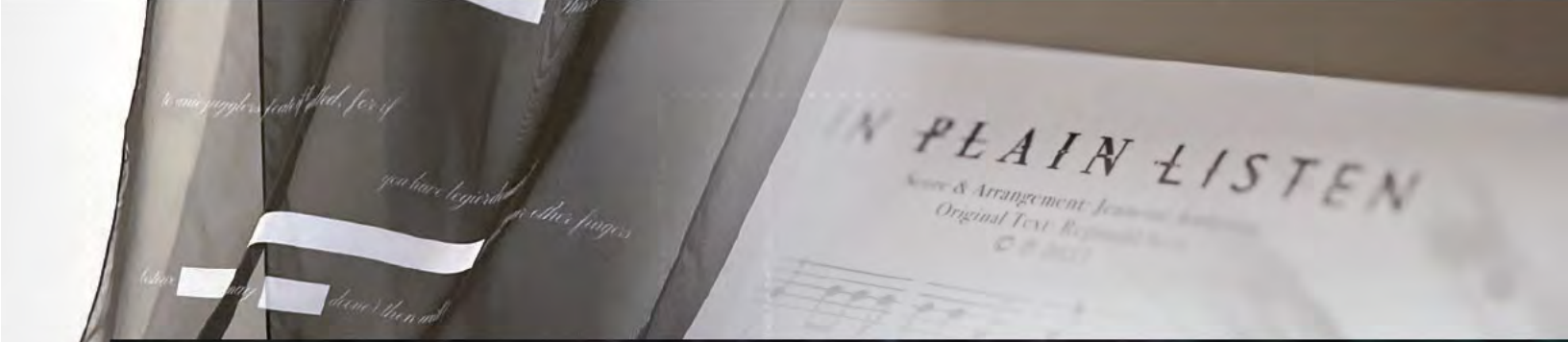


PHOTO BY PIN LIM

Premiere of *In Plain Listen* at the University of Houston, March 2023, with cellist Mizu.



PHOTO BY JADE CHONGSAHAPORNONG FOR MIT MAD

Boston premiere of *In Plain Listen* at the MIT Museum, September 2023, with cellist Valerie Chen.



PHOTOS BY DERRICK BEICHAM



New York City premiere of *In Plain Listen* at the National Arts Club, June 2023



Post performance interview / Q&A with Professor Charlotte Kent

the ensemble cast. “She playfully incorporates this into her work, which is one of the reasons her performances are so engaging and truly unique.”

Although she uses music as an example of an art form with a higher and more respected barrier to entry, one of her most recent projects revolves around an interpretive musical score that Andrews composed herself. The piece, *In Plain Listen*, debuted at the University of Houston in March of this year. She has since performed it at the Magic Circle in London, the National Arts Club in New York, and at Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

*In Plain Listen* is a Torn and Restored Thread routine. A solo cellist accompanies each performance with a live rendition of a piece of music Andrews developed through a multistep process of abstraction. First, she translated the method of the effect originally published in 1584 in

into Morse code. Then she used her own musical notation system to translate those dots and dashes into melodic sound, maintaining the rhythms and rests of traditional Morse code but replacing the monotone beeps with notes on a scale.

In that respect, *In Plain Listen* is a multisensory experience. Audiences are simultaneously watching the effect and hearing its method explained, although not in any language that their brains can interpret. At the installation I saw in New York, elements of the abstraction were captured in physical form; a key mapping each Morse code letter to notes on a musical staff unfurled on ethereal black gauze hung from on high. A printed and bound copy of the score was displayed on a pedestal with a pair of archival gloves as an invitation to reverence.

Anyone who paged through the book could



PHOTO BY SARAH TUCHEL

Jeanette presenting her talk "The Phenomenology of Surprise" for the The British Society of Aesthetics symposium "Art and Aesthetics of Illusions" at the Magic Circle in London, July 2023.

read a description of the effect like lyrics on a piece of sheet music, although in a further abstraction, Andrews redacted most of the method for fear of exposure. One of the most compelling ideas put forth by *In Plain Listen* is that the trick is not the magic. Reading about the effect is no more an experience of magic than letting a highly abstracted—and quite haunting—musical translation of the secret wash over you. Listening to the secret is no more an experience of magic than reading a redacted account of the method. The secret is integral to the magic, but it is not the art.

"With magic, there's so much theory, psychology, and written tradition that is inseparable from the performance," Andrews said. "I look at magic as a performance, but it takes other forms and mediums that maintain most of the integrity of what magic is, in an information sense." Is a musical score also music? Is choreographic notation also dance?

At the heart of aesthetic philosophy is a fundamental question: what is art? Are Brillo boxes art if they're stacked under a Queens elevated subway track instead of on the floor of a museum? What if someone other than Andy Warhol stacks them? The aesthetic inquiry necessitates the deconstruction of an artwork—or an art form—to its



PHOTO BY JADE CHONGSAITAPORNONG FOR MIT MAD

Jeanette in dialogue with Professor Graham Jones and Professor Arvind Satyanarayan at the MIT Museum, September 2023

component parts. "If you could turn magic into sound, or into movement, is it still magic?" Jeanette asked. "Probably not, but it's interesting to think about what gets maintained and what gets destroyed in that process."

I left the National Arts Club after Andrews' performance with a piece of *In Plain Listen* in my pocket—she had a studio recording of the score (performed by cellist Issei Herr) pressed onto a run of 200 cassette tapes. Andrews had originally considered pressing to vinyl, but there was more symbolism waiting in the tape than she could possibly ignore.

First of all, there was the nostalgia of recording to cassette every magic lecture she ever attended as a child. In the same way she idolized and studied her own collection of early magic secrets, audience members would leave with a record—however refracted—of one of the world's first written magic secrets. Then Andrews realized she could perform the effect with the ripped-out cas-

Cassette of the full score of *In Plain Listen*.





Performing at the MIT Museum, September 2023



sette tape. "It was too meta not to do it," she said.

Eugene Burger was one of Andrews' long-time mentors and was the one who originally suggested she perform the Torn and Restored Thread just a couple of years before he passed. Andrews remembers the first time she met Burger at a Society of American Magicians convention: "I did not love his lecture," she said, "because he was doing ██████████ and talking about the Inquisition and torture. I was scared!" She was eight years old.

But Andrews' dad could sense Burger's wisdom and saw that he was an important figure in the community, so he encouraged her to approach him. As Andrews came up on the Chicago scene, their paths crossed many more times. While she was working her way through the ranks of Magic Chicago from on-stage production assistant to regular performer, she and Burger reconnected. Burger was considered a resident mentor of the monthly show, and he was often in attendance. "We just hit it off," Andrews said.

Burger helped steer Andrews away from overwrought conceptual traps and risky effects that left too much to chance, toward magic that he thought would help her connect more meaningfully with her audience. "Jeanette," she still remembers him saying, "there is the way of the potter, and the way of the sculptor. The potter adds, and the sculptor chips away." To this day, when I'm making stuff, there's a Eugene sitting on my shoulder saying, "Be the sculptor, be the sculptor, be the sculptor."

He was also a master of giving feedback and was never afraid to say what he really thought. Once, shortly after she performed a show about light waves and optical perception at an art gallery called Lumia, Burger met Andrews for lunch at P.J. Clarke's. "He broke his own rule of saying something nice first," she said. "It was an hour of 'here's everything that was wrong.' I was reeling. Then we had a conversation about agency while dying that helped shape the way I think about death. I remember feeling like I'd just been pummeled about how bad I was for an hour, and then having this weighty conversation. I walked to my car in a stunned physical stupor."

Andrews is wistful when she talks about the time she spent with Burger and seems genuinely glad she abandoned her rebellious teenage instincts in favor of his advice; he wasn't just inviting her to perform his signature piece, he was also envisioning how beautiful, even graceful, it would be in her hands. Now, the Torn and Restored Thread is a core piece in Andrews' repertoire, even outside of the *In Plain Listen* context.

And as far as mentors go, Andrews and Trace remain close. "Most magicians are not artists," Trace said. "That sounds so pretentious, but I think we need to get rid of this whole pretention around art. Art is a beautiful thing, and most magicians are so focused on the trick. Envision a musician playing a piano. In magic, most magicians play one key: 'fool me, fool me, fool me.' But when we play all the other keys, that's where the real art happens. That's where you can really branch out and express yourself and share your ideas with an audience. There's so much that we can learn from magicians like Jeanette who are playing all the keys on that piano."



**B**efore Andrews started learning close-up magic in earnest at age 14, she wanted to be an illusionist. The first of two forks in that road was laid in Las Vegas, when she performed her homemade tiger ██████████ for Siegfried & Roy. She couldn't wait to tell them all about her obsession with ██████████ and her specific plans to put her own stamp on her favorite illusion. The box was going to be triangular, and there would be pyrotechnics and glitter. (She was seven.) After patiently listening to her vision, Siegfried said two words: "Learn thimbles."

Andrews was devastated. "This is the most boring sounding thing in the world! What are you talking about? Thimbles like my grandma has?" But ever the obedient student, Andrews went home to Chicago and told her magic teacher, Beck, what Siegfried had suggested. "I ended up learning all the basic thimble magic and thank God—I say this with all love and respect to illu-

sionists—because I could not do it. If I had gone down that road ... I'm exhausted just thinking about it."

The second sign was hung at Terry Evanswood's touring illusion show. Between the ages of 12 and 14, Andrews worked as backstage crew whenever the show passed through Chicago. She did everything from steaming costumes to setting props, and playing such an integral role showed Andrews just how dependent Evanswood, like all illusionists, was on other people. "If his main assistant got sick or had a family emergency ...," Andrews trailed off. "Terry is an excellent magician, he could have carried the show, but he wouldn't have been doing what he had planned to do. He would have had to pivot everything on a dime."

Andrews learned at an early age that she had immense control over herself. In the mid-'90s, Kellogg's held magic competitions across the United States to find a new spokesperson for a magic-themed cereal brand: Razzle Dazzle Rice Krispies. Andrews won her regional competition and advanced to nationals at the Lance Burton

Promotional photo, age eight



Theatre in Las Vegas. But the night before she was set to perform, she had a bout of terrible food poisoning. "I was vomiting uncontrollably," she said. "I was vomiting in the hotel, in the elevator, backstage."

But when they called her name, Andrews took the stage and did her set without so much as a hiccup. When it was over, she walked back into the wings and immediately stuffed her head in a garbage can. She learned a valuable lesson that day about her ability to turn it on under the most extreme circumstances. "If I'm sick, I can stop vomiting for long enough. But other people? I don't have control over their situation."

It didn't surprise me to learn that relying on other people is what turned Andrews off the illusionist's path. Although she is gracious about the collaborators and mentors that have helped her on her way, she is also hyper-independent. If she could do it all on her own, she just might. In magic and in media, Andrews has been pushing back against the way the world wants to pigeon-hole her—and performers like her—ever since she was old enough to understand their game. "I have dedicated my life to making sure I'm not typecast," she said.

A lack of trust is practically archetypal to the conjurer. To Andrews, carefully constructing the narrative around her career affords her the illusion of control. There is an instinct, perhaps, to affect others' perception of her in much the same way she might manipulate their perception in a magic trick. She takes great pains always to be perfectly buttoned up, simultaneously craving acknowledgment for how hard she works at everything all of the time and also concerned that wanting her effort to be known might make her guilty of the sin of pride.

"I feel like I work a thousand hours a day and it's never enough," Andrews told me. "When is it ever going to be enough?"

She is neither the first nor the last over-achiever to fall for the trap of winning the busy Olympics when that black hole beckons. In between multi-city performances of *In Plain Listen* this year, Andrews also premiered a talk called "The Phenomenology of Surprise" at the



Left: Still from *A Magician Brings Forward a Bottle*  
Below: Performance photos from *Taken by Artificial Surprise*, July 2023, New York City

British Society of Aesthetics. In it she compares the conceptual experience of surprise to things that are weird, eerie, startling, and interesting, and things that violate our expectations.

The work is an indirect continuation of another recent installation, *Taken by Artificial Surprise*, in which Andrews performed classics of magic alongside effects described by an AI that she then figured out how to accomplish in the physical world. She took up the Turing mantle—“Can a machine take us by surprise?”—and opened windows on not only the future of artificial intelligence, but also the future of magic. After three years of research into surprise, Andrews is still haunted by her core inquiry: “Is surprise an intrinsic part of human consciousness?”

“I was completely blown away,” said magician Matthew Holtzclaw of his experience at *Taken by Artificial Surprise*. “The show was full of heavy content but Jeanette never spoon fed her point of view to the audience ... In a world of magicians

PHOTO BY ARI ISENBERG



PHOTOS BY DERRICK BELCHAM





From *Taken by Artificial Surprise*, July 2023, New York City

blathering about whether or not what we do is an art, Jeanette is silently, specifically proving that magic is a heavily intellectual way to express oneself.”

Despite calling herself a contemporary artist, Andrews refuses to engage with any specific politic. Her latest project, *magi.cia.n*, has taken her uncomfortably close to the explicitly political by dealing directly with government agencies. The Boca Raton Museum commissioned the work for an exhibition called “Smoke and Mirrors: Magical Thinking in Contemporary Art,” and it is scheduled to be on view until May 2024. Andrews drew inspiration from *The Official CIA Manual of Trickery and Deception*, published in 2010 with a big red “declassified” stamp on the cover. The book features the sleight-of-hand instructions that professional magician John Mulholland detailed for United States’ agents in the Cold War. (Mulholland’s manual was first published in this magazine in August 2003, before it was released without redactions.)

The installation highlights two components: *The Manual*, a blank journal that transforms from a magic book into a spycraft instructional à la *Magic* [redacted] and *The Attention*, a video work in which Andrews demonstrates how the very same sleights can be performed for either entertaining or nefarious ends. “The parallel worlds of magic and espionage rely on the learning of secret information, rehearsal, and split-second timing to execute unseen gestures which are of ultimate importance, yet never to

be seen and only perceived by their effects,” reads her artist statement.

Or, from another perspective: “People think of *Mission Impossible* and *Alias*, skintight leather outfits and bombs, but it’s usually people sitting in hotel rooms alone, which is quite the same as magic,” she said. “It’s people sitting around late at night doing the same boring thing.”

As with any piece of art, there were obstacles along the way to opening *magi.cia.n*. The museum wants to change the floor plan, the gallery ceilings are higher than she realized, whence the resources to execute the piece perfectly. Andrews is aware that her exactitude can sometimes feel overbearing, and she is learning to soften how she can. “How do I advocate for what I want, and what I think will make this the best, without coming across as controlling?”

In addition to its artistic aspirations, Andrews’ work also serves as a direct challenge to the attitude that she saw prevail when she was coming up in magic: “I’m going to show you this because I’m better than you.” She remembers how often magicians many years her senior were condescending and showy, and she is adamant that while she dreams of elevating magic as contemporary art, she also wants her work to be relatable. “I just want to make something where I’m not assuming the worst of people and being blanketly disrespectful,” Andrews said. “You never know who’s in your audience. I perform in front of people who are a lot smarter than me all the time.”•