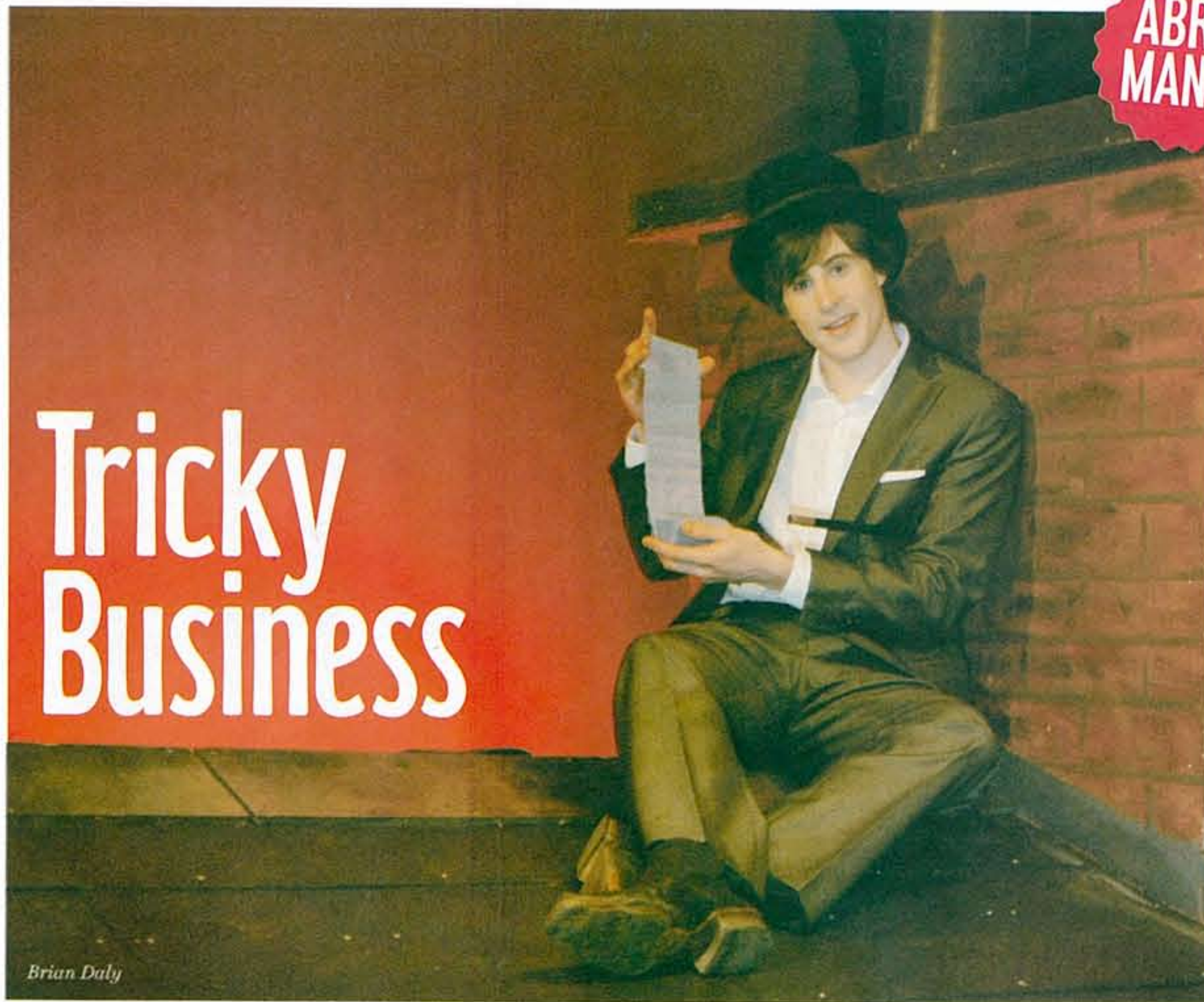


SARAH PHILIP - WWW.PORTRAITIRVY.COM



JOANNA ROBERTS hangs out with Dublin's magicians

IT'S THE first Tuesday of the month; you find yourself outside Cassidys Hotel on Parnell Square. Look closely at the guests filtering through the door. There, weaving around the business travellers and tourists are masters of illusion and sleight of hand; 50 people, drawn from all walks of life, united in a common passion: magic.

Welcome to the monthly gathering of the Society of Irish Magicians, founded in Dublin in 1939 "to foster the art of magic and organise social functions whereat the members may gather." Open to anyone who demonstrates a commitment to magic, the society embraces practitioners of all levels, from enthusiastic hobbyists to professionals.

It's an opportunity to swap tricks and talk illusions; rookie magicians can find mentors and guest lecturers come to share the latest news and techniques. Most magicians still learn their craft from books, and the titles available at the society's library read like the Hogwarts curriculum: *Aunt Kate's Conjuring*, *Practical Mental Magic*, *A Whirlwind of Wizardry*.

Nevin Cody, the society's secretary, is, in his own words, a "part-pro"; banker by day, magician by night. It's important to him that all magicians' acts – whether amateur or pro – are high quality and offer value for money. "If there's a not-so-good magician out there, it reflects badly on our art. People hear music all the time, but they may only see a magician once or twice in their lives – if they

have a bad experience, they will hate it forever."

Given the amount of material available on the Internet and DVDs, anyone can learn a magic trick these days, but the two things that set a good magician apart, according to Cody, are practice and performance. "The trick is a very small element of a show; it's how you perform it that matters. I call it 'going-home magic,' because the audience should be enjoying the show so much that they only ask themselves how I did the trick in the car on the way home."

Brian Daly, a professional magician, agrees. Banter and "messaging" are a big part of his act. "I've always been a messer, and lots of people told me it wouldn't get me anywhere. But it's my job now."

Like many of his colleagues,

Brian's interest in magic was sparked at a young age; by a kindergarten teacher who could juggle and do tricks. He studied engineering at college, but found himself stuck for a job when he came out – at this point, he started to work as a professional magician.

He has picked up many things from other professional magicians – such as the timing of taking a bow – but

"The audience should be enjoying the show so much that they only ask themselves how I did the trick on the way home."

knows the best way to learn is through mistakes. "My first paying gig was a Christmas party in a Presbyterian church hall. I was hired to come in and do a magic show for 45 mins, at which point I would 'produce' Santa. But Santa turned up late so when I tried to produce him, he didn't appear." (Lesson one: Don't start the show before Santa arrives.)

Few magicians specialise in just one type of magic, like Ireland's most famous illusionist, Keith Barry. Pat Fallon, a

member of the exclusive Inner Magic Circle – an invitation-only club which has just 300 members worldwide – says the key to success is versatility. "To survive as a professional magician in Ireland is not the easiest thing to do. Most of us do a little of everything."

Fallon began his professional career 23 years ago, and has since performed in pretty much every setting: cabaret, kids' theatre, shopping centres, corporate events, weddings, on TV and at magic conventions. Credited with introducing close-up magic or 'pocket tricks' to Dublin in the 1980s, he is also a consultant for the film industry – he worked with Aidan Quinn on *The Playboys* and Cillian Murphy on *Breakfast on Pluto*.

He's keen to take magic back on the road and finds it a bit depressing that the only time most of us really see magic is at private parties or corporate events. Nevin Cody, who performs a monthly "spooky magic" gig in Fairview, agrees. "Back in 1940s, before television, there would be a lot of magic shows and touring theatres. Our objective is to get magic back out there."

Prepare to be amazed.

Brian Daly will appear at D'Relish at the Plough on Abbey Street on May 8th.
briandalymagic.com;

Nevin Cody performs at the Secret Castle of Magic at the Bram Stoker Museum on June 23rd. secretcastleofmagic.com; patfallonmagic.com

