

SEPTEMBER 1997 \$4.99

# MAGIC

THE INDEPENDENT MAGAZINE FOR MAGICIANS

*Juliana Chen*





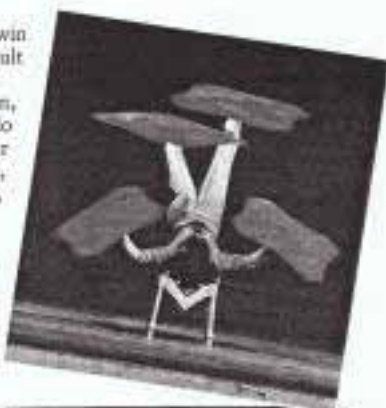
Chinese "Linking Rings" were part of her 1982 first magic act; (Below) By 1996, Juliana was touring China and Hong Kong with illusions.

Jason Byrne, and Greg Frewin to win the First Place Adult Stage trophy.

After the convention, she signed a contract to do her act in a Dick Foster revue at Harrah's Reno, and Juliana declared, "No more competition. That's enough." However, after a couple of years of performance tours in Asia and Europe, her competitive spirit would again be challenged. While working in Germany in 1995, she received an invitation to appear in

the contest at Magic Hands' Fachkongresse. A year later, with a completely redesigned manipulative act — new music, choreography and costuming, and as Juliana expressed, "a new personality" — she placed second. Not wanting to stop competition as a number two, within months, she went to Spain and won the Grand Prix of the 21st Congreso Nacional de Magia.

In late 1996, Ton Onasaka started to persuade Juliana to do one more competition — the really big one, FISM. Already convinced that her artistic act was more suited for the European market, she felt that a title win from FISM might be the key to opening more doors on the Continent.



Before becoming a magician, Juliana studied acrobatics, juggling and plate-spinning and was a foot-juggler with a Chinese circus troupe.



Juliana Chen's interest in magic emerged from a youthful

career as a ballet dancer. At 11 years old, she was among the 200 children in the Hunan province selected for auditions by the Chinese National Theater. After a series of competitions, she was in the company of the dozen or so that entered the school for performing artists. By age 16, she was traveling about the country with a government-sponsored cultural entertainment troupe.

After four or five years as a ballerina, an unfortunate accident occurred that reshaped Juliana's destiny. She fell and broke her leg, which forced her to abandon the discipline of dance. While recovering, she began to learn magic. Already studying acrobatics and juggling, she was soon performing with the circus. A female acro-



An award-winning competition act was created each time a contest was entered.

hat, who had some limited training in magic, showed her some basics of back-palming with cards, and every offstage moment was spent practicing. She actually kept a notebook of ideas on techniques that she observed and sometimes dreamed about. For example, Juliana remembers a routine with ten Ping Pong balls: "The idea of weaving an extra ball with a thread came in a dream. I woke up, worked out the secret move right then, and wrote it into my book." After seeing a videotape of Shimada, detailed notes on the act were into the book. She wrote as much about his presentation — how he used his eyes and body movements for misdirection — as she did about his manipulation techniques.

Juliana began to blend music, dance and costuming with her magic. By age 20, a performance philosophy had developed: "I started to see myself as an actress-magician. Above all, my performances would be skillful, artistic, soulful and appealing to the eye."



*"... the audience rose to the enchantment and mystery of her act. She effortlessly filled the stage, not just with cards produced, but with a stage presence that engaged the audience."*

— From a review [MAGIC, December 1996]  
of Juliana Chen on the 1996  
*It's Magic*



*Juliana's television work includes a show on TVB, Hong Kong in 1995.*

As FISM '97 drew close, Juliana Chen's thoughts were totally on the creation of her latest competition act. From January through May she worked on new music, new routines and the fabrication of new costumes and props. During the entire month of June, she accepted no engagements or shows. "I stayed home, practicing new methods of card manipulation," she said. "For the magicians, I felt I needed more technique. [See "Cards, Cards, Cards," on page 55.] I was rehearsing the routine as many as 50 times a day." Each run-through was with complete costume, masks, and the execution of all the steals and loads (approximately 700 playing cards). "I practiced while driving, and even had cards in my hands when I went to the bathroom." Juliana Chen was a disciple of the principle of the five "P's": Proper Practice Prevents Poor Performance.

She went to the Dresden World Congress with great confidence. "During the long two-day wait before my turn (I was 53rd), I kept extremely positive. I repeatedly told myself that I am very good. When I finally went on stage before the judges and the audience, I considered myself the star. But after the performance, I was like a little girl — running around with friends — having fun."

After her appearance, Juliana mentally judged herself. "I had lighting problems with the mask and threads," she noted, "but these were things probably not noticed by the audience." Considering some minor flaws in technique and timing, she evaluated her performance as being, "not what I wanted — definitely not a 10 — perhaps a 9 or an 8."

Sitting through the awards ceremony on that final convention day in Dresden was an unnerving experience for Chen. Looking around at the expectant audience gathered in the theater, she became tense and on the edge of her seat. The moment for the announcements in the category of Manipulation arrived. "For the first time, my hands were trembling," she said. There was a tie for third place between Tel Smit of the Netherlands and Roy Davenport of Great Britain. Then there was much applause as the second place went to David of Hungary. By now, Juliana's hands were not trembling, they were shaking.

The previous applause subsided to a murmur. The theater got quiet. "So quiet," said Juliana, "I could hear my teeth shaking. I was extremely nervous." Because there were two third places, she was fearful there would be no first place awarded. At the previous FISM in Japan, there had been a tie for second place and consequently there was no first place given for Manipulation.

As if in a slow motion dream, Juliana Chen felt herself walking toward the stage, as she heard the echoing words of the presenter, Magic Christian: "It is for the first time in the history of FISM that a woman wins the coveted First Place Manipulation!"

"It seemed as if I was already on the stage, when I heard my name called," Juliana said. "The whole place was standing, shouting, 'Bravo! Bravo! Bravo!' I was crying. I looked out at

the audience. They were crying, too, clapping, whistling, shouting, 'Bravo!'"

Acknowledging the crowd, Juliana walked down to the stage apron, taking bows and waving thanks. She almost forgot about the trophy and was called back to the winners' dais, at which point the ovation seemed to get louder, if that was at all possible. "I was very touched," she said. "I had to leave the convention center. I walked back to the hotel, carrying the beautiful trophy, and cried all the way."

When asked if there was disappointment at not winning the FISM Grand Prix, she answered, "No, I did not do a perfect performance, which it should be to win the Grand Prix. As I said, I had not judged myself as a 10."

Many felt that the Grand Prix should not have gone to Ivan Netcheporenko, citing that the Russian act was entertaining and unusual, but it centered around only one effect.

In the 20-year history of World Congress of Magic, almost three-fourths of the Grand Prix-winners have been performers with acts that were entered in the Manipulation category. Great manipulators to win have been Nic Niberto, Viggo Jahn, Fred Kaps (three times), Moroso, Tony van Dommel, Pierre Brahma and Mr. Cox (the only tie), Richard Ross (twice), Ger Copper and Lance Burton. Only in recent competitions (since 1983) has there been a trend for Grand Prix-winners to be selected from a category other than Manipulation. Juliana Chen later commented on this change, when she was asked about the magic skills of this year's Grand Prix-winner. "The Netcheporenkos had a wonderful act," she said. "Because they only have the one effect, there was very little chance for a mistake, but they did a beautiful job."

Before parlaying the FISM win into a promotional tool to gain more European and worldwide bookings, Juliana feels she has a major priority. "I need to find a manager," she admitted. "I am not a good business person, and I first plan to get organized."

There are plans to expand her 12 minute manipulative act. "I had a successful illusion show in Hong Kong, and I want to return to doing illusions. I liked the idea of what Peter Marvey did with his illusions at FISM. It was very artistic." However, because manipulations are her first love in magic, she wants to do a half-hour package of larger things combined with the sleight of hand. She adds, "I'm thinking about performing comedy. Not talking or joking, but using facial expressions and movement to make people laugh — something far beyond pantomime magic. A lot of this new personality will be determined by the directions I get from my manager."

It's reasonably sure to say that whatever Juliana Chen sets out to do will not only be magically creative and artistically satisfying, but also competitively successful. ♦



Sweet victory... Juliana Chen, First Place Winner Manipulation, FISM 1997.

# CARDS, CARDS, CARDS

Although Juliana Chen performs magic with coins, balls and thumbtacks, the expert manipulation of playing cards is her specialty. During her 12-minute act she deftly produces 700 cards — that's over 13 full decks — literally covering the stage, as she gracefully and magically mystifies her audience.

Juliana's elegant styles of back-pairing, split fan productions and single card productions are rather unorthodox. Because Chinese magicians are extremely reluctant to teach others, she had little opportunity for private instruction. She learned most of her techniques by observation and improvisation.

Nowhere in her routines are Chinese-style split fans, those picture-perfect, 180-degree spreads, with every pip showing. Instead, handfuls of playing cards appear — fanned simply as a poker player might show a winner.

They are proudly displayed, then flippantly thrown away. Demonstrating her differences in handling cards, Juliana explained, "As for as standard back-pairing, I use it, but I vary it with at least three different methods of dropping the cards." As she spoke, handfuls of cards appeared, which she threw to the floor.

She turned her body and single cards began to appear at the fingertips of her other hand. "For example, from one card-stock steal,

I utilize many techniques," she said, as a half-dozen cards crisply popped into view using the Cardini Method of Producing Single Cards (explained in *Greater*

*Magic*). She then turned her wrist and, teasingly wiggling her open fingers, coaxed more cards into view. "This is a technique that I came up with after studying a beautiful

mannequin hand. While shopping in a mall, I saw a jewelry display with a ring on the finger of a slender, elegant hand. It was the pose and the position of the hand that struck me. I went back to the store several times to study the position and adopt this beautiful pose for this open-fingered card manipulation. Later, I saw a similar move used by Christopher Hart on a videotape. My technique is different in that it is suited for a female hand."

Juliana has built a reputation for filling a stage with her cards. She commented, "Most card manipulators simply throw cards into a hat, creating a feeling that cards are precious and few. I prefer to create an impression that my magical abilities to produce cards are endless. They come from everywhere and fall anywhere. I go through lots and lots of cards while practicing and performing."

While in Austria in 1992, Juliana had her own playing cards printed. Former FISM First Place Manipulation-winner, Magic Christian, designed a Patrik single-ply card exclusively for Juliana. The decks were much in demand at FISM, before and after her victory. By the second day of the convention, the balance of a 5,000-deck order had been sold out, leaving less than 500 packs for use in her act. Immediately after the awards ceremony, single cards were in even greater demand by those who wanted a souvenir of Juliana Chen, the first lady to ever win the top award for manipulation in the 50-year history of FISM. ♦

