

# THE MAGIC OF GERMANY



In Theaters,  
Salons, and  
Lounges



BY WITTUS WITT

Magic is a wonderful art. It is full of fantasy and offers a lot of creativity. Very often these aspects get lost when you watch a magician in a venue that is not ideal for the presentation of wonders. Close-up magic in particular is very often presented between soup plates or on tables full of “junk.” It is quite difficult to create a magical atmosphere in such places. Even the big magic conventions tend to handle close-up magic in a dull and unpleasant way.



Fortunately, there are some magicians who do not like this situation and have thought of their own ideas to find the best possible way to perform their magic. Germany has developed an independent close-up and parlor magic scene, especially during the past ten years. Right now there are ten magic theaters, salons, and lounges that offer wonderful close-up and parlor magic to the public.



Even if some of the venues mentioned here call themselves a “theater,” they are not theaters in the traditional manner. Two exceptions are the *Zaubertheater* in Berlin,

which has a proper small stage with a curtain in front and where some larger apparatus and small illusions can be presented, and the *Zaubermuehle* in Merklingen, which also features a curtained stage. All the other venues are strictly for close-up and parlor, and both quite often go hand-in-hand. For example, the Professor’s Nightmare rope trick can be performed either in a close-up or a parlor setting. As you can see from the photos, all the performers work directly behind a table, with the spectators seated very close to the performer.



The magicians featured in these venues are all very capable and skillful, and show a lot of tricks and routines during their performances. Spectators will mainly see card tricks, coin routines, and — almost everywhere — the Cups & Balls. But there is one important thing that all these theaters have in common, and it’s the reason why they are so successful: people just like to watch magic. No matter if it is presented very artistically or put into a special drama, spectators just love to watch magic tricks. Everywhere I went, at all of these venues, I could hear the same sentence from members of the audience: “It so close, and I couldn’t see how it was done!”





## WUNDERMANUFAKTUR

(Nuremberg)



“I just was fed up with the way close-up magic was usually presented. I was already earning my living by performing table-hopping magic, but I never really liked the venues in which I had to show my magic.”

That was what Stefan Kirschbaum of Nuremberg said when I asked him about his theater, wondering why he got the idea to build his own place. He further explained that he was inspired by his friend Jörg Alexander who, in the early 2000s, performed close-up magic at a hotel in Munich, similar to Steve Cohen in the US. Stefan gives credit to both of these predecessors.

It wasn't easy, and Stefan had to wait some years before he could make his idea a reality. He started thinking seriously about creating his own magic venue in 2007, and he finally found a charming building that was a bit outside the city center of Nuremberg. The venue already included a large room with two washrooms, and it had display cases outside the building, which Stefan could use for advertising his shows. He set to work, turning the room into his ideal magic theater, installing light and sound systems, chairs, and a backdrop.

In January 2009, Stefan opened his private theater, *Wundermanufaktur* — roughly translated, “Wonders made by hand.”

At the outset, it was not a big success, but business grew slowly from month to month and year to year. Stefan started to offer his shows twice a month, then expanded to four times a month. Now he plays three days a week and is sold out almost every night. Fortunately, he never really lost any money — even in the early years, he earned enough to pay for everything without having to put more of his savings into the project.

Early on, Stefan put a lot of money into advertising his shows.



But as time went on, he discovered that no advertisement was as effective as a word-of-mouth recommendation. *That* is the most important way to sell the shows.

The theater offers forty seats. The first row costs 59 Euros; seats in the second and third rows are sold for 49 Euros. After the venue opens at 6:15 p.m., the guests are first served

finger food and a glass of champagne. While they get used to the room, they may walk around and have a look at all the magical things that can be found there: magic puzzles on the tables, and photos and paintings by artists with a magic theme. It is a cozy place to be, and people there are ready to experience the handmade wonders that Stefan performs in his individual and pleasant way. People like him very much. His program includes coins, cards, the restoration of one playing card, Dean's Box, Bill in Lemon, Cups & Balls, and Fiedler's Gozinta Box.

From time to time, Stefan invites other magicians to perform there as well. One of his regular guests is his inspiration for the project, Jörg Alexander from Munich.

The theater is a fantastic place, not just for close-up but also for parlor magic. Today, Stefan mainly lives on the income from his theater. He feels he is one of the luckiest magicians in the world, one who no longer has to go out to perform under circumstances that aren't ideal for presenting the art of magic.





## Krist & Münch

*(Munich)*



Alexander Krist and Christian Münch are two magicians from Munich. They started to run a magic shop with a showroom in 2007 and have offered magic shows since 2008. It was a difficult start. Alexander remembers the first eleven months, when almost nobody came to watch their shows. Then, in December 2008, they used all their money to get printed flyers and brochures to advertise their shows. The result was not a real success — they counted about the same number of visitors for December as they had during the previous eleven months. But “word of mouth” started, and they finally managed to secure themselves a spot in the theater world of Munich. They opened an attractive new venue almost in the center of the city.

The shows are presented from Thursday to Sunday, with two shows on Sunday. When audiences enter the first room, they get the impression of being in the elegant lobby of a five-star hotel. Alexander’s lovely wife, Michaela Krist, is behind the bar and offers various drinks. No meals are served.

The theater room itself holds 82 seats, which are in five rows, shaped like an amphitheater. The first row is sold for 89 Euros, rows two to four cost 59 Euros, and row five sells for 49 Euros.

Everything in this theater shows a surprising exclusiveness, with individual touches. Each seat is marked with the guest’s name in gold on heavy black paper. The seats were created by

the Spanish designer Figuera, who specialized in seats for cinemas and theaters.

The shows run for just over two hours with an intermission. Both Alexander and Christian offer segments of their own, plus parts of the evening in which both take part. Some of the magic they perform includes dice, cards, predictions, a disappearing silk, Eric Lewis’ card rise, the Hindu Thread, miniature Linking Rings, Linking Rubber Bands, Three Shell Game, and Cups & Balls.

So far, 35,000 visitors have seen their shows, which should make Alexander and Christian very proud. Besides the two headliners, some other magicians occasionally appear there too, such as Denis Behr and Jörg Alexander. The Krist & Münch theater also offers lectures for magicians, and even lectures for laypeople, which are run by Werner Fleischer.







## Strotmanns Magic Lounge

(Stuttgart)

Thorsten Strotmann used to be one of Germany's leading tradeshow magicians before he decided to create his own theater in 2009. In March of that year, he and his wife began looking for a suitable space. After four weeks of intensive search, they found a large building just outside of the city of Stuttgart. At first, they thought it would be much too large, but Thorsten had some good ideas for what to do in that space, and they finally signed the contract to rent the venue. They started building their theater in August and opened Strotmanns Magic Lounge in October 2009. Within the first three months, Thorsten was fortunate enough to pay back all the bank loans. After an additional year, the theater began turning a profit.

The lounge is made up of two very large rooms, each of which can hold about 150 people. The first room serves as an elegant bistro where they offer drinks and snacks; the next room is the performance space, which is formed into an amphitheater comprising five rows.

There were not full houses from the beginning. Some nights, just twelve or fifteen people booked the shows. But that soon changed. Now, Thorsten offers his shows five times a week, and most of the shows are sold out. The first row sells for 59 Euros, rows two to five cost 49 Euros. On Sunday, there is a special family show that costs a bit less than the other nights.



One of the most magical moments of the evening happens right at the beginning. After people have enjoyed the drinks and snacks, the light in the first room gets darker and darker. Then the curtain in the back of the room opens very slowly and offers a view into the theater which, when

illuminated, is incomparable. It is like walking from one planet to another planet. Somehow, it does not seem real — but it is, naturally.

Thorsten's repertoire covers three different shows that each last for just over two hours, including an intermission. The shows are called *Hautnah 1*, *Hautnah 2*, and *Hautnah 3* (the title meaning "very close," or "right in front of your eyes"). Thorsten has a pleasant way about him, and he performs strong close-up and parlor effects, such as an appearing glass of champagne, some rope magic, coins under the salt shaker, Shell Game, dice stacking, Cups & Balls, Linking Rings, and the Magic Square with a spectator's birthdate.





## Zaubertheater Essen

(Essen)



Although he has a side job as a fitness trainer, Viko has been a full-time magician since 1999. In September 2009, Viko rented an empty shop in the city of Essen to create a venue for his shows. It was a very spontaneous undertaking, without much prior planning. He had heard about magicians who performed close-up magic in special venues, but he'd never seen such a show himself. When he came across the empty shop, he made the decision to give the idea a try. It used to be a shop for secondhand clothes, but he quickly managed to turn it into a nice place for magic, opening the theater in October 2009.

The room is not fancy, but it has a pleasant atmosphere, where people like to stay and watch wonders happen right under their noses. The space can hold up to twenty people, and tickets sell for 43 Euros, including snacks and drinks. Viko plays there once a month, sometimes more. He opens the theater at 8 p.m., offering some finger food and a glass of champagne before he opens his magic suitcase for about 75 minutes, plus an intermission. His program offers a trick involving a puzzle with a missing piece, knots on ropes, Ambitious Card, Finger Chopper, Sponge Balls, Linking Rubber Bands, an ESP card routine, Color Changing Knives, Razor Blades from Mouth, and Cups & Balls.

## Zaubertheater Lübeck

(Lübeck)



In April 2013, Roland Henning from Kiel opened his magic theater in the heart of Lübeck, a town far up in the north of Germany. Roland is a professional magician who had the idea of creating his own magic theater. About a year and a half later, he brought that idea into the world. Along with his girlfriend, Annika, he searched for a proper location, which they finally found in the old part of Lübeck.

The building in which the theater is situated is a house from the 19th century, which naturally provides a nice ambience for Roland's magic shows. There are two small rooms: one serves as the lobby, where Annika sells soft drinks and snacks; the other room is the twenty-seat theater. Roland offers three different shows, playing in various combinations one day per week, with each being a two-show day. Some of the routines in the various shows include coins from an invisible purse, card tricks, miniature Linking Rings, Ring on Rope, Sponge Balls, and Cups & Balls.

The tickets sell for 15 to 23 Euros. When the theater is open, a distinctive banner is hung up outside the building.





## Black Rabbit

(Frankfurt)



Right in the city center of Frankfurt, behind the opera, theatergoers will find the Black Rabbit magic theater of Remo Kell, which he opened in March 2012. He was quite lucky to find a room just above an elegant Italian restaurant, with whom he could partner. This is an attractive arrangement: drinks and meals can be ordered at the restaurant, and Remo does not have to deal with any of the catering himself.

The theater room is sparsely decorated, with simple black walls and thirty soft red armchairs in four rows, ascending from the second row. When the audience has entered the room, Remo pulls a curtain in front of the door and starts his one-hour magic show, which features paper to banknotes, Find the Lady, coin tricks, the Hindu Thread, card magic, the Magic Square with a birthdate, Dean's Box, and Cups & Balls.

The theater is open five days a week and the tickets sell for 43.90 Euros. Last year, Remo performed by himself. But this year, he has started to invite other magicians to perform there, too.



## Zaubertheater Igor Jedlin

(Berlin)



Now 74 years of age, Igor Jedlin belongs among the ranks of Germany's most prominent magicians. While he is originally from Russia, he has lived in Germany for forty years. In 1978, Igor opened his first magic theater near the former Europe Center in what was then West Berlin. In 1990, he moved to the crossroads of the famous Kurfürstendamm and Roschestrasse, where he turned an old car garage into a lovely little theater holding 93 seats and a small bar for drinks. Igor mainly offers two different programs: one for children, which he plays in the afternoon, and one for adults in the evening. Both shows offer various classic routines and all sorts of magic. The theater is open from Thursday to Sunday at 3:30 and 8 p.m.; tickets sell for 19 Euros.

From time to time, in addition to his magic shows, Igor also welcomes well-known actors who tell about their lives or read from their books. In 1998, Igor was honored with the Order of Merit by the Federal Republic of Germany, an honor that was also given to the late Hans Moretti. The Order of Merit is awarded for outstanding achievements in political, economic, cultural, intellectual, or voluntary fields.







## Zaubermühle Merklingen (near Stuttgart)



In 2002, after touring all over Germany, the magic couple Frascatelli & Tre Face found an old mill near Stuttgart, which they turned into a wonderful magic theater and something of a museum of curiosities. The top floor of this building offers 100 seats, which are always sold out whenever Frascatelli & Tre Face announce their new program. They perform twice a year — for one month in spring and again in autumn — presenting very individual magic shows, and no show is similar to the previous one. Their recent offerings include six different routines of storytelling magic, mainly parlor magic, with no coins and almost no cards. They perform the Linking Rings, Ring on String, and mental tricks such as finding the nail under paper cones (a routine of their own their invention).

People come in at 7:30 p.m. and are served some food specialities of the region. The show commences at 8:30 for 100 minutes, plus an intermission. Tickets sell for 16 Euros (adults) and 8 Euros (younger people).



## Closer to Magic (Cologne)



In May 2013, magician André Desery opened his small theater in the back courtyard of a building of the south of Cologne. There, he performs shows with fellow magician Florian Severin (and occasionally with another magician) twice a month and sometimes six times a month. The room holds 25 seats, which sell for 35 Euros for the first row, 25 Euros for the rest. The shows start at 7:30. This is the only venue in this article that I have not seen personally, so I am unable to report on the programs presented there.



## Zauber-Salon

(Hamburg)

I opened a magic gallery of my own in October 2012. It turns into a magic lounge every Friday for the presentation of special magic shows. The gallery is close to the center of Hamburg. It offers twenty seats that are sold for 17.50 Euros, including snacks and drinks. The shows start at 9 p.m. and lasts seventy minutes with no intermission. All the magic and mentalism in the shows has a close connection to the exhibition that is on display at the time. The first shows dealt with magic from periodicals, and the exhibition in the gallery showed well-designed covers of magic magazines. From now until January 2014, the shows deal with magic from magic sets, and cover illustrations of old magic sets have been enlarged and displayed on the walls, like paintings.



While many of the presentations in these lounges and salons are often “the usual” close-up material, it was my intention here to show this increasingly popular way of presenting magic shows, focusing on the surroundings that allow the magicians to properly present their work. These small, specialized theaters are able to showcase magic in the manner the proprietor magicians feel best suits their work. The magicians mentioned here all work well and draw an audience to their shows, which is, to my mind, the most important message. ■

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## For Reservations:

Wundermanufaktur  
Stefan Kirschbaum  
Fürther Str. 22 – Hinterhaus  
90429 Nürnberg  
Tel. 0911-366 94 21  
[www.wundermanufaktur.de](http://www.wundermanufaktur.de)

Krist & Münch  
Unterer Anger 3  
80331 München  
Tel.: 089 – 37003464  
[www.magic-theatre.de](http://www.magic-theatre.de)

Strotmanns Magic Lounge  
Naststraße 27, im Römerkastell  
70376 Stuttgart  
Tel. 0711-57715290  
[www.strotmanns.com](http://www.strotmanns.com)

Zaubertheater Essen  
Hosterhauser Str. 64  
45147 Essen  
Tel.: 0201-45843982  
[www.zaubertheater-essen.de](http://www.zaubertheater-essen.de)

Zaubertheater Lübeck  
Mengstraße 17  
23552 Lübeck  
Tel.: 0451-98988740  
[www.zaubertheater-luebeck.de](http://www.zaubertheater-luebeck.de)

Black Rabbit  
An der Welle 3  
60322 Frankfurt  
Tel.: 069-407662580  
[www.blackrabbittheatre.de](http://www.blackrabbittheatre.de)

Zaubertheater Igor Jedlin  
Roscherstrasse 7  
10629 Berlin  
Tel.: 030 – 3233777  
[www.zaubertheater.de](http://www.zaubertheater.de)

Zaubermühle Merklingen/Weil  
der Stadt  
Mühlgraben 9  
71263 Weil der Stadt  
Tel.: 07033 694837  
[www.zaubermuehle.eu](http://www.zaubermuehle.eu)

Closer to Magic  
Mannsfelder Str. 1  
50968 Köln  
Tel.: 0221-28075946  
[www.zaubertheater-koeln.de](http://www.zaubertheater-koeln.de)

Zauber-Salon in der Galerie-W  
Ifflandstr. 64 – Hinterhaus  
22087 Hamburg  
Tel.: 040-41542674  
[www.galerie-we.de](http://www.galerie-we.de)