

Hauntingly entertaining show to be staged at the Ohio Theatre

Making magic for Halloween

BY TAHREE LANE

BLADE STAFF WRITER

Igor's evil twin, Algoré the politician, will make an appearance.

So will Trixie, the magician's lovely assistant. She will materialize from dust inside a clear glass casket.

And two Variations on a Theme of Houdinini (that is the classically trained magician's spelling of "Houdini") are designed to leave 'em gasping in the aisles of the venerable 963-seat Ohio Theatre.

The Halloween Spookatorium, an original magic show created and produced by Andrew Martin, plays three times this weekend and nine next week. Suitable for all ages, the hour is full of surprises and comedy, and it's only mildly scary. No blood or gore, other than Al, of course, says Mr. Martin, a Toledoan and father of his own two small creations.

However, let it be known: the lights *might* blink off, and spirits *might* flit over head.

"I try to think of putting on a show as a Walt Disney movie. The kids are going to like it and the adults are going to get something out of it too," said Mr. Martin, 38.

After a 1998 Halloween sell-out show Mr. Martin did in Sylvania, he and his partner in work and marriage, Melissa Mickel, decided to build a larger show and run it for two weeks. She directs the production, which features Mr. Martin and three other actors.

The format is inspired by the Ghost Shows that were popular in the 1930s through 1950s. Those were aimed at teenagers and combined live magic/horror/comedy on stage with a late-night movie or two, called a "screamer."

One of the Ghost Show greats was Jack Baker, a Toledoan who traveled the country as Dr. Silkin with his Asylum of Horror show that generated soprano screams and plenty of laughs. Mr. Martin was captivated by the Ghost Show era.

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BLADE PHOTO BY DIANE HIRSH

Andrew Martin, with the help of his assistant, Trixie, levitates a candle, one of the feats he will perform in Spookatorium.

Magic

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"I thought, 'Wouldn't it be neat to do a Ghost Show, but in another way?'" he said. "I've never seen a Ghost Show so I'm doing my own rendition."

The Spookatorium includes two tricks popularized by Harry Houdini, who died on Halloween in 1926 of a ruptured appendix during a show in Detroit. In one trick, Mr. Martin is bound tightly in a strait-jacket and races to physical freedom against Trixie, who's wrapped up in 100-feet of rope.

In the other, Mr. Martin is chained, locked up, and put inside a box on which stands his lovely assistant, Trixie, when in a split second he ... but we won't spoil the surprise.

Mr. Martin has been a magic nut since he was knee-high to Frankenstein. He knows magic history like some people know sports statistics. When he was a child, his parents would help him figure out tricks in the kits he'd sent away for, such as the linking rings or the chopped-off finger. "Magic instructions are sometimes hard to understand," he said.

By 1992, he decided to go for it. He did parties for children and adults, and walk-around magic in restaurants, and worked at corporate events. He also did stage shows.

"He's got a wide variety. He's almost the guy for every style," said Michael Night, who owns The Magic Studio in West Toledo.

In addition to the Martin-Mickel partnership, there's more family behind the scenes of the Spookatorium. Ms. Mickel's aunt, Patricia Miller, is the costumer and set designer. Ms. Mickel's cousin, Sarah Hourigan, 22, plays Trixie. A friend plays Spidora, Queen of the Spiders, and Ms. Mickel's 87-year-old grandmother, Mollie Miller, babysits for the Martin-Mickel-Portala children.