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PHILIP PARTRIDGE
PRESIDENT OF THE BRITISH RING

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By Ron Sylvester

Philip Partridge has performed for heroes and a king, on television, and in the world's only seven-star hotel. Yet one of his favorite roles as a magician is belonging to a magic club.

Partridge took over as President of the British Ring at a time when magic organizations, such as the I.B.M., have seen dwindling membership and diminishing interest in the club aspect of magic. Ring 25 remains one of the strongest clubs, with five hundred members. Leading this ninety-five-year-old group is just the latest endeavor in Partridge's decades-long love of magic organizations.

"There's a term that you can choose your friends, but not your family," Partridge said, paraphrasing American novelist Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* during a video interview from his home in Manchester, England. "My magic friends are very important to me. My parents have passed, and I don't keep in contact with my brother, so my magic friends are my family."

The fifty-four-year-old magician can count among his private audiences the Beckham family – yes, those Beckhams – and King Charles III when he was still the Prince of Wales. But it's children's shows that have become Partridge's top income producer as a professional magician.

While the thought of doing a show for a three-year-old might give some magicians nightmares, that's exactly what Partridge did for one of his most notable shows.

"It came out of the blue by an event organizer who contacted me," Partridge said when describing the call he received for a show in 2002. He met the organizer at a leased-out movie house in Manchester, where the organizer handed the then-thirty-three-year-old magician a lengthy confidentiality agreement.



A professional children's magician in his element.



Left to right: Philip Partridge, International President Charles Arkin, and Dr. Steven Jan. PHOTO BY GEMMA TYNAN

“I didn’t know it was the Beckham family until I walked in the door,” he said. Partridge had been hired to perform at Brooklyn Beckham’s third birthday party, the first child of football legend David Beckham and his pop star wife, Victoria. “One of the most memorable parts of that day was Victoria asked to borrow my microphone at the end of the show. Obviously at that time she was one of the Spice Girls.”

His family show website, *magicphilip.co.uk*, promotes nursery school and toddler

parties, which include children up to three years of age. The day of our interview, he’d just finished a gig for a toddlers’ Christmas show.

“What I do is a mixed-age show where you have fun games for the younger ones and more sophisticated magic for the older ones,” he said.

For Partridge’s toddler Christmas show, he opened with a game of musical statues. He makes sure his games are of the non-elimination variety, so that everyone can have fun – even the parents.



Peter Golstraw, one of the children in attendance at a birthday party where Philip was performing, uses a furry wand to strike the magician. PHOTO BY PETER GOLSTRAW

“It got the blood running, the children were dancing, and the parents got involved,” said Partridge. “The whole idea is the children have fun. I bring double the amount of magic. You never know what you’ll need, so you just kind of go with the flow. With children, it’s all about the journey. It’s like you’d never use a break-away wand for adults, or at least you rarely would, but with children it’s just a part of the journey.”

Partridge became hooked on magic at the age of eight, when he received a magic set for Christmas. That’s nothing unusual – many magicians tell the same story. But Partridge may be one of the few who, more than forty years later, still performs a trick from his first childhood set.

“Part of that set was the ‘Equal Unequal Ropes,’” said Partridge, recalling the effect also known as “Professor’s Nightmare.” “I didn’t understand it for four years,” he added. “When it finally dawned on me, I performed it for my mum, and she was really impressed. And to this day, I perform Equal Unequal Ropes.”

“Mum” was the late Joy Partridge, who proved quite impressive in her own right. One of her accomplishments was parasailing in the Alps, when she was sixty-five, for the BBC television program, *I’d Do Anything*. As a prize for that performance, she arranged for her son to fulfill his lifelong dream of meeting Lance Burton at what was then the Monte Carlo resort in Las Vegas, where Burton performed.

Partridge said he considers himself fortunate to grow up at a time when he could take inspiration from the magicians of the late twentieth century. In addition to seeing Burton’s original Monte Carlo show in Vegas, he also got to see Siegfried & Roy’s show. He grew up watching Paul Daniels and Wayne Dobson on television as a boy. *The Paul Daniels Magic Show* debuted on BBC1 just two years after Partridge received that magic set.

“I went ’round to grandma and grandpa’s house, and my grandma would spoil



Philip Partridge, who enjoys working tables, shows off his version of coins through silk.
PHOTO BY CETRA STUDIO

me with ice cream and cake, and we would watch the Paul Daniels show together,” he recalled. “He and Wayne Dobson were comedy magicians, and I know that some of their patter lines influenced me to become a comedy magician.”

But magic wasn’t going to be Partridge’s first calling. He studied pharmacy at the University of Manchester, where in his final year he worked a practicum at Alder Hey Children’s Hospital in West Derby, Liverpool, one of the largest children’s hospitals in Britain. It was there he developed a love of performing for the youngest of audiences.

“After hours, I did cheer up the children by doing shows,” Partridge said. “I believe in a holistic approach. There’s a joke that says laughter is the best medicine, unless you’re diabetic, and then insulin is.”

Partridge could only perform when he wasn’t on the clock for his other job filling pharmaceuticals for patients. His supervisor wasn’t too patient about his magical aspirations.

“It was brought up in my appraisal that I should stick to my pharmacy focus,” Partridge said with a smile. “I think my manager wasn’t too keen on me doing magic. After six years, my enthusiasm for performing overtook my pharmaceutical interests.”

He went to work for the Wizard’s Den, a magic and toy shop in Liverpool managed by Paul Stone, who would go on to produce corporate and theatrical shows in

London and Las Vegas. Stone would be instrumental in teaching Partridge about the business of magic.

Partridge's job at the Wizard's Den included demonstrating tricks with Sven-gali and other magic decks of cards. When Partridge attended his first British Ring Convention in 1992, he entered the close-up competition. He performed a routine he'd developed using the Nudist Deck, or Mental Photography Deck, involving a washing machine. He didn't place, but later that year he co-founded the Merseyside Junior Magic Club with two friends.

"One of my greatest joys is seeing young people progress in magic," said Partridge.

Five years later, in 1997, Partridge turned full-time professional. He was funded by a loan from the Prince's Trust. Partridge gained a mentor who helped him set up a business, a role he would later serve in to help other fledgling arts and entertainment entrepreneurs.

One rule he vividly remembered was that when the Prince's Trust office called, you answered. He received a call in 2003 to do another mysterious show – similar to the one at the Beckham's party a year earlier. This time, his audience was His Royal Highness Charles III, the namesake of the Prince's Trust and a literal crowned head of Europe.

What do you do for the man who will be King? Well, the rope trick you got in a magic kit when you were eight years old, using the colors of the Union Jack, of course.

"I was really proud that I performed the Equal Unequal Ropes with red, white, and blue ropes," he said, "something I continue with to this day."

Partridge has performed on the television show *The Weakest Link*, as well as with the London Philharmonic Orchestra. He also performs strolling magic for guests at the corporate luxury boxes at Old Trafford Stadium, home of the Manchester United football team.

"At the bigger games, like when Manchester plays Chelsea, there may be nine magicians working various areas of the corporate boxes," said Partridge.

One night, Partridge walked into a box and performed for professional footballer Cristiano Ronaldo. For an American magician, that's like performing close-up magic for Barry Sanders.

"One thing I've learned and tried to pass on is use your television appearances and those kinds of performances as your biggest marketing material," he said.

The Beckham party led to bookings for other football stars. After he performed for the then-Prince of Wales, he landed a residency at Burj Al Arab in Dubai, United



Left to Right: Partridge delights a pair of newlyweds with his signature close-up magic. PHOTO CREDIT: LAURA BAREHAM PHOTOGRAPHY. Partridge, shown here with King Charles III when he was still the Prince of Wales, performs Equal Unequal Ropes for His Royal Highness.



Partridge creating magical merriment and hilarity.

Arab Emirates, billed as the world's only seven-star hotel.

But Partridge said to not overlook the power of a kid's birthday party. "When I'm doing children's entertainment, if the grownups like me, I'll get booked for their fortieth, fiftieth, and sixtieth birthday parties," he explained.

Still, Partridge said nothing quite beats the magic community, which organizations like the I.B.M. and British Ring personify. That's why he and his partner, Dr. Steven



Partridge poses with his puppet rabbit for a publicity shot. PHOTO BY PAUL STOREY

Jan, are now the first family of Partridge's extended family. He proudly wears the medallion of the President, which is inscribed with the names of past Presidents who have served the Ring since 1928. They include expert manipulator Geoffrey Buckingham, author Ken de Courcy, and legendary British youth mentor Cynthia Neptune.

"I am very loyal to magic clubs, and people have seen that, which is why I think I was asked to serve as president," he said. "I stand on the shoulders of legends, the names on this chain."

He added that you should never underestimate the power of tricks you may have received as a child, even when you're performing for heroes and kings.

Ron Sylvester is an associate editor of The Linking Ring and a lifetime member of the I.B.M. A journalist, writer, and editor for more than forty years, he lives and performs magic in central Kansas with his wife Gaye Tibbets.