

TOM MESEROLL

Interview by Jay Fortune

Multi-award winning magician, L.A. based Tom Meseroll, has excelled in many disciplines as not only a successful magician but also as a martial artist, meditator, pastor, author, teacher and astro-physicist! Phew... He has worked and studied with some of the biggest names in magic. His sister even went to elementary school with David Copperfield! We managed to get ten minutes with one of magic's busiest people and began by asking him how he got bitten by the magical bug.

TOM: I was about 8 years old and was given a magic set as a birthday present (never heard this one before!), and I was delighted to find out that by doing magic I could provide a sense of joy in others. I was very introverted when I was young and magic allowed me to come out of that shell. I went on to learn as much as I could. Our library, in the little town of Lawrenceville, N.J., didn't have an extensive magic resource section. The only book I remember them having was Henry Hay's 'Amateur Magician's Handbook' - I probably read it 50 times!

I visited Walt Disney World in Florida at the age of 13. I went to the magic shop on Main Street, and the magician behind the counter performed "The Invisible Deck" for me. This changed my life. I was astounded; and to this day, I am always ready to perform this effect anytime, anywhere. I found out rather quickly that I could learn a multitude of tricks from a single book. So instead of purchasing ONE trick which might require special apparatus, I purchased a plethora of books with the money I saved up from my paper route. To this day, magic books are my passion.

JAY: You've crossed paths and studied with some big names in magic. I know you're quite a humble guy, but go on... spill the beans!

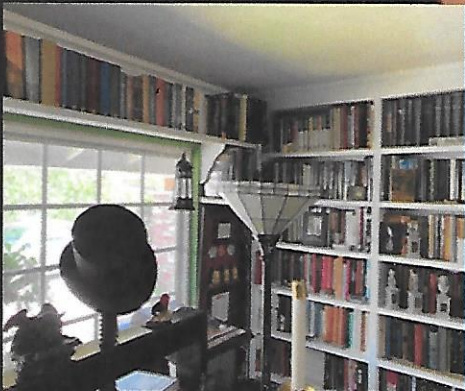
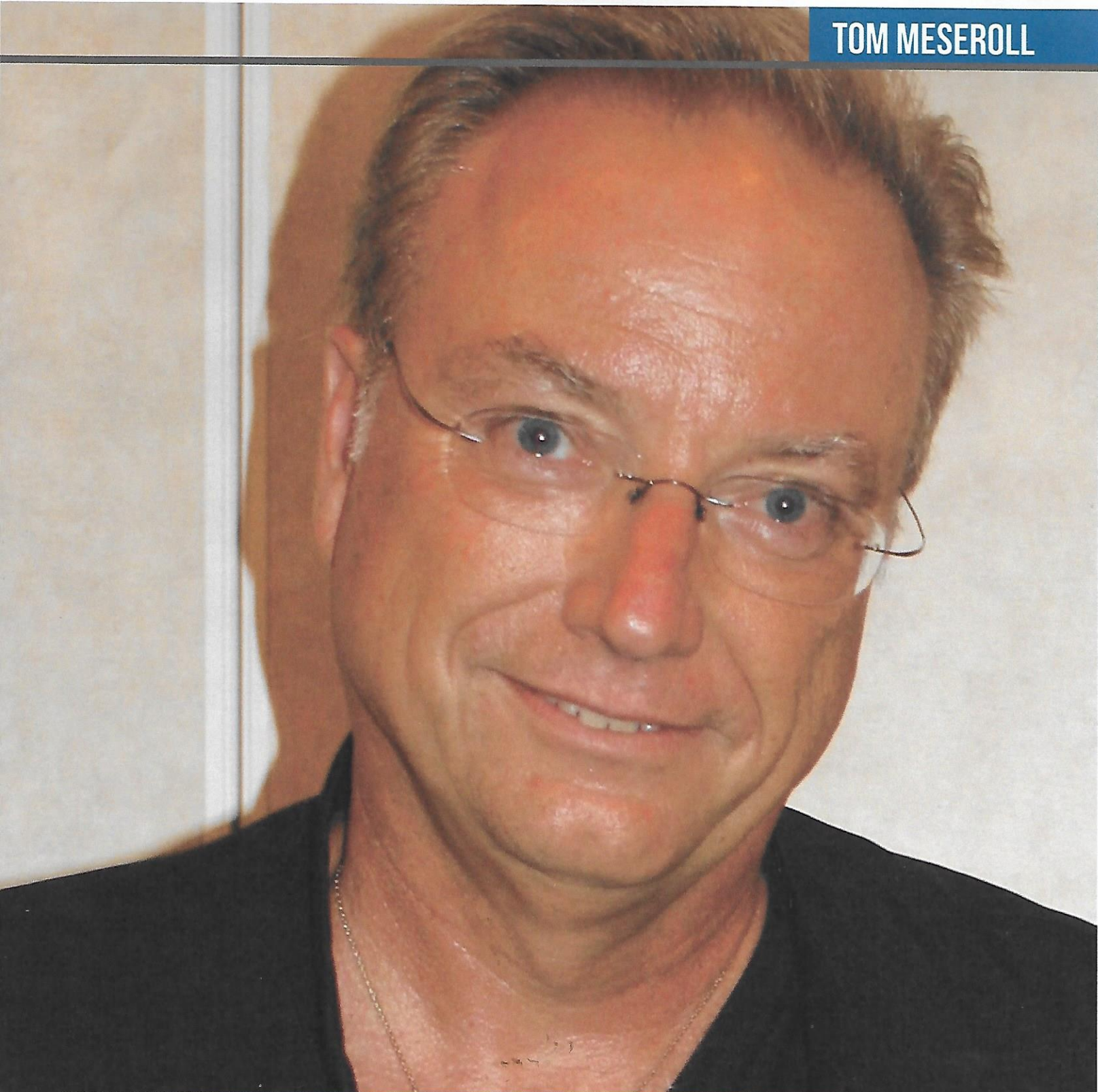


TOM: [Laughs] I guess the first big name that comes to mind is David Copperfield. Not because I had an opportunity to work with him, unfortunately, but because he and my sister went to the same elementary school. Apparently they got into a bit of a brawl in the first grade. So the first time I ever heard David's name was as a result of the phone call my mom got from David's mom regarding the "nose punching." Trust me, it was anything but magical.

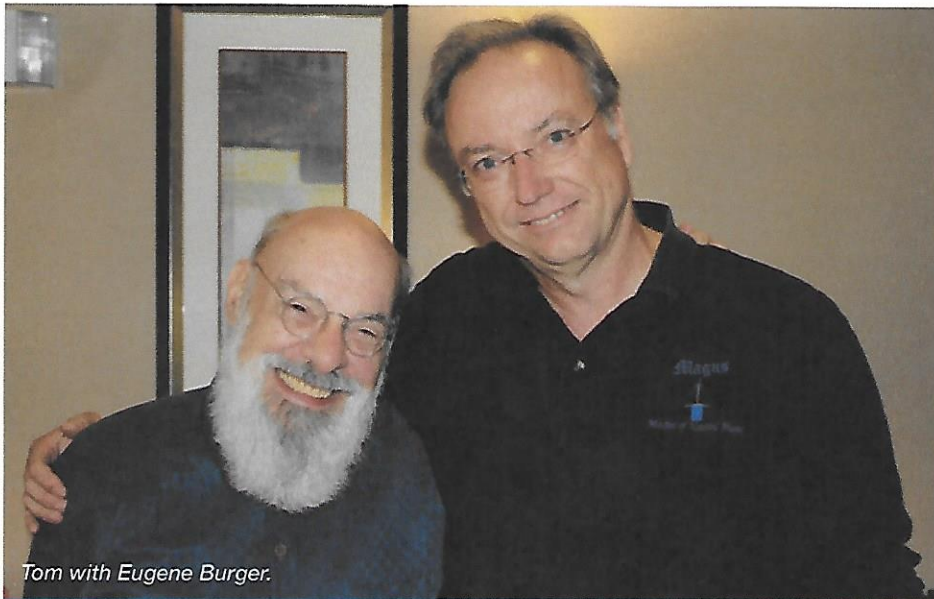
When I was 13 or 14, however, I remember sitting in a restaurant booth in a hotel with Fred Kaps and Slydini. Herb Downs was on the National Board in S.A.M. and was also a friend of our family. It was Herb who got me into an invitation only lecture by Dai Vernon at midnight in Boston. There are photos of this lecture floating around in many books, and I was in the third row. The youngest magi there. The lecture went until 4am and I had never seen anything like what Dai was teaching. Dai Vernon was the master.

I also had an opportunity to meet Doug Henning during his "Illusion or Reality" show tour when he was at one of our local colleges. I asked him to sign a poster for me. Then he and I sat on the stage and spoke about magic for some time after his show.

In Lawrenceville, where I grew up, there was only one other magician I knew of. A Mr. Teller! He was the local Latin teacher. We became friends. I even borrowed his Selbit Sawing in Half for a show I did at a local University. He would always work with me on presentation before the shows and during the dress rehearsals, and his insights were always invaluable. It was during this time, in the mid-70's, that he connected with Penn Jillette, and Weir Chrisemer to form the Asparagus Valley Cultural Society. I went to one of their first performances in Princeton, N.J. and still have the Xeroxed paper program from that show. (Teller has told me that I have much more memorabilia from those early days, than he does!)



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Tom with Eugene Burger.

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JAY: Pretty cool! Do you still stay in touch?

TOM: Yeah. When I was a Director in aerospace I gave him a private tour of the Satellite factory and we both did a performance together on the high bay floor for the Air Force and employees. We were in full "bunny suits." Not like rabbits. But for a "clean" room. In other words we were wearing smocks, booties and hairnets for our performance. It was very entertaining because it was pretty much impromptu!

JAY: You have combined your love of martial arts with magic to create a signature routine. How did that come about?



Tom and Jeff McBride.

TOM: Through a lot of experimentation. Once I mastered the physical routine, it was Jeff McBride and Eugene Burger who really helped me polish the performance and script. They truly changed my perspective on how I approached the "Sightless Samurai" by including a sense of "wonder" to my routine. It's what I continue to strive for. I have performed Martial Arts & Magic at the Magic Castle, and I am the only magician to ever use a Samurai Sword in the Close-Up Gallery!

JAY: Quite a claim to fame!

TOM: [Laughing] Indeed! The effect does involve a "Sightless Vision" but has a bit more in regards to the actual execution. Don't try this at home! I have a volunteer sign an agreement to participate at their own risk (Max Maven's idea) and I tie their hands together behind their back. Truthfully, this is for their own safety. I then place them face up on a table and place a watermelon on their stomach. My assistant then places half dollars over my closed eyes, Play-Doh, a metal mask, wraps a bandage across my eyes and places a bag over my head. I am then handed a Samurai sword and am spun around. After some apparent misalignments, I swing the sword very fast and hard and slice the watermelon in half on their stomach. So far, no one has been injured. So far...

JAY: Wow! What makes you start a new art form,

or martial art form, and what drives you to succeed?

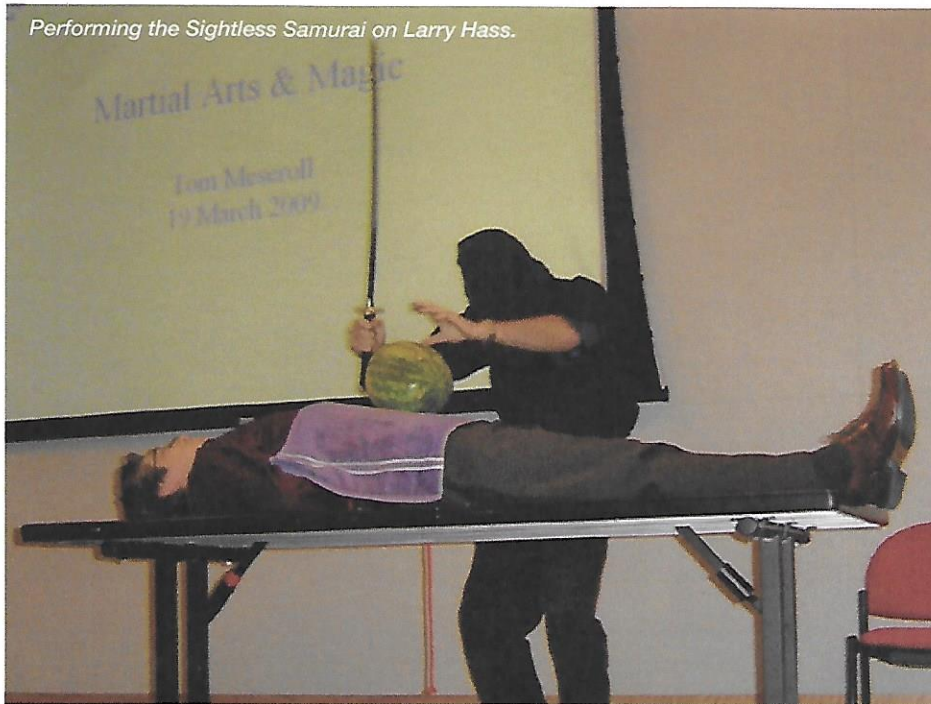
TOM: Mostly I engage in a new study of any kind, because it intrigues me. Whether it be magic, Zen, science or martial arts, there is always an underlying mystery which I seek to understand, which truthfully ties back to the ultimate question of our existence and the wonder and magic of it all. Driving me to succeed is a relentless pursuit to understand everything I can about the magic behind what we call reality and the universe.

JAY: You have quite a book collection which, for a magic-book-junkie like me, does make me work hard to get into your Will [laughs]!

TOM: Thanks! My library is my magical haven. I have well over 2000 books, mostly on magic. I also have Occult, Philosophy (all kinds) and signed first editions by authors that I like. I am a true bibliophile. I even have about 30 books about books! But the great majority are written by magicians. I've many signed editions, and have books dating back to the 1600's. I have the English version of Francis Bacon's "Sylva Sylvarium" which has the first card force ever in print (according to some scholars, although I have written a discourse disputing this). I did have the Latin edition, but I sold that to Teller since I don't read Latin. I have an excellent bookbinder and have created many very large tomes. One has the majority of the texts on the psychology of magic from 1584-1950. I have other works that I have compiled by extracting all of the articles written by a single author, bound in one book of magic. There are many novels pertaining to magic. I have first editions of the rare Bloomsbury Press UK editions of all the Harry Potter books, printed on ancient-forest-friendly paper. And everything ever written by and about JRR Tolkien (that I can find, some very rare). I also have prop books that my book binder makes for movies, like the Holy Grail Diary from "Raiders of the Lost Ark: The Last Crusade", used by Sean Connery and Harrison Ford, or The Nine Gates of the Kingdom of Shadows a.k.a. De Umbrarum Regni Novem Portis supposedly written by Satan from Roman Polanski's "The Ninth Gate", and many others. My library is framed by beautiful wall-to-floor shelves, magical apparatus and posters, wand displays, a fireplace and has two comfortable leather sofas where you can read. Many magicians stop by to peruse. I lend books to magicians who are in town to perform. Eugene Burger even gave a lecture in my library.

JAY: Sounds amazing! Rest assured I'll take good care of them! [Both laugh] Through your work as an astrophysicist you've performed at some pretty cool venues as well.

TOM: Well, I have performed at the Pentagon. I also did a show for about 200 people in a highly classified facility that required intense scrutiny of all my effects before they could be brought into the facility. Some props were not allowed in, so I



filled that void with mentalism effects, which also bothered the security folk when I performed them. There was a de-brief after my performance which was also rather in depth (no magic secrets were revealed!). I think this was truly the most "secret" magical performance ever! In LA you do have the opportunity to perform for many celebrities. It just goes without saying, that as a performing magician, that this is the case. The one celebrity I have performed for who was not an actor was Rudy Tomjanovich who was the basketball coach for the world champion Houston Rockets, the Lakers and the winning Olympic basketball team. Rudy was also probably my most difficult audience due to his analytical skills and his need to understand how the tricks work. Making Rudy have a sense of "wonder" was a huge challenge that I did finally achieve.

JAY: Having achieved so much, and I know we're only touching on a fraction of your life in magic and beyond, do you still have any unfulfilled ambitions?

TOM: I have always wanted to obtain a Ph.D. in philosophy. I pursued this online for a while at the University of Sheffield, but too many other distractions kept me from getting very far. As Prof. Larry Hass has said, I may be the only person on the globe who has read both his texts on magic, and his philosophical works.

JAY: Has your interest in the martial arts and philosophy also affected the way you perform magic?

TOM: Definitely. As a young magician, it was more about soliciting amazement in the audience and saying, "Hey, look what I can do". This has changed dramatically throughout my career, working with so many mentors and the changes in my own philosophies. Astonishment and wonder are what I strive for today. I do not wish to have anyone think I possess any powers that they could not possess as well. But I do wish to point out through my magic

that the universe is a wondrous, mysterious place, and that even astrophysicists don't know what is really going on; actually, especially astrophysicists.

JAY: What does the future hold for you?

TOM: This is a tough question...I really do take it a day at a time these days. I still need to write my third book which is in the queue and is being co-written by my wife, a very talented author, Annette Cascone (who's written more than two dozen books). I will always perform magic and be part of the magic community, until I am no longer. I just believe in magic, and magic as an art form, and I love to share that with others, because I can... And Buy More Books!!!

To find out more about Tom's work, check out www.martialmagician.com.

Win a signed set of 'Magus: Master of Martial Magic'

Tom is giving away a SIGNED set of 'Magus: Master of Martial Magic' his magic fiction books! Over to Tom...

My books are fictional (for the most part) novels about a magician, astrophysicist, and martial artist. The protagonist, Nicholas Thompson, ends up going to the Karakorum's to study "real" magic with a magi sect descendent from Zoroaster and even more intriguing, some other culture before that!

To WIN simply answer the following question: **Q: What was the first magic book Tom read?**

Email your answer to markleveridge@magicseen.co.uk before 30th November 2019. Good luck!