



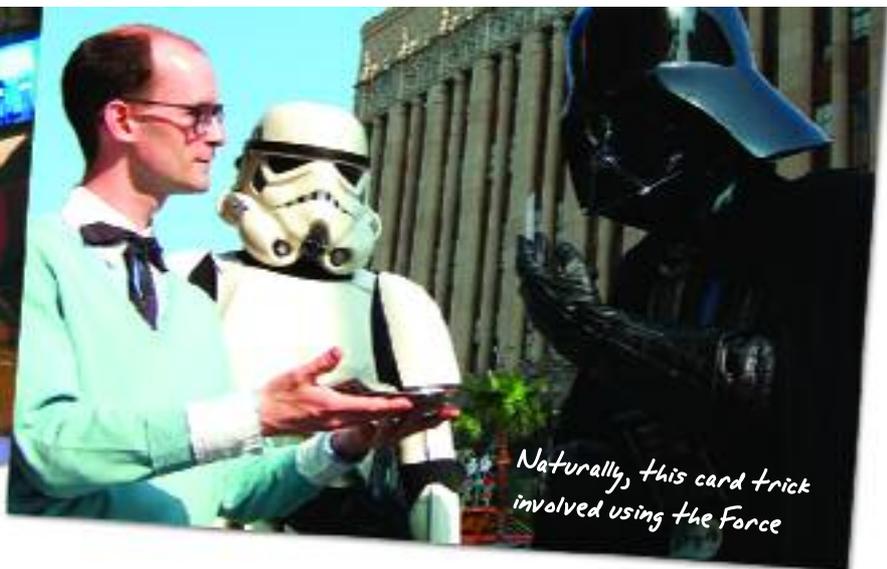
The Flicking Fingers discover themselves in Times Square

Flicking Fingers: The Tour

by The Flicking Fingers

The Flicking Fingers is a group of creative young German magicians who joined together in 1994. The magic world first took notice of them at FISM 1997 in Dresden, and they have been popping up around the world ever since. While all the members continue to pursue solo work, they frequently come together in various combinations to create shows, lectures, a book, a DVD, columns for *MAGIC*, and general mayhem. In the spring of 2006, they descended upon the US for a three-week tour, exposing new audiences to their unique forms of tag-team magic.





Wednesday, April 26th — Munich Airport, 8:00am

Thomas Fraps: Finally, we're on our way! Heading for a trip to the States: Fechter's, the Magic Castle, Las Vegas, and New York. A tight schedule, with tons of stuff that could go wrong, logistics-wise. The whole project for has been planned almost one year in advance. Coordinating the schedules of ten professional performers isn't that easy, and staging your own little convention in New York isn't either! Jörg Alexander, Ben Profane, Stephan Kirschbaum, Helge Thun, and I leave from Munich airport while the other Finger-fellows (Nikolai Friedrich, Gaston, Pit Hartling, and Manuel Muerte) start from Hamburg and Frankfurt. Our final destination is Batavia, New York. We're adding two more "F"s to FFFF.

That should be fun to begin with! Excess luggage stretches our arms and budget right from the beginning.

Thursday, April 27th — Batavia, New York

Thomas: We made it! The Germans arrived, including all our luggage! It's our "day off," except for a short teach-in session by Jörg and myself. The guys immediately enjoy the camaraderie at the FFFF convention. Meeting old friends and making new ones — five of us haven't been here before. Obie actually started it all. About a year ago he wanted to know whether it's possible to get all Fingers together for Fechter's. So here we are, struggling with the ever-present American air-conditioning and a good portion of jet lag. Rehearsals take place in the hotel's gym, strangely enough the only room that does not have an air conditioner!

Pit: Obie invited us to a "secret cheese party." It turns out not to be cheesy at all! Actually it's an honor, we receive the last ten FFFF pins — a collector's item that might lose us five bucks each time Obie meets us at a convention not wearing it! (Finally, I know how he finances this special convention...)

Friday, April 28th — FFFF

Thomas: Our one-hour show early afternoon went down rather well. Everybody's happy, except for Ben, who has to smoke outdoors.

The show was a mix of solo-acts, team-acts, and even parts of our FISM-lecture, customized for the knowledgeable Fechter's crowd. I guess our more ensemble- and theatre-oriented style surprised the hardcore close-up guys at FFFFs. Technically, only a few in our team can keep up with the average "Fechterian," but somehow the ensemble work projects a quality that is more than the sum of our individual abilities.

In the evening we enjoyed the smorgasbord and get to see fun acts (Rick Merrill!) in the formal show. While I'm enjoying a late-night donut in the hospitality suite, Pit's on the floor doing card miracles. Ben is once again smoking outdoors and Gaston lost his fight against the jet lag. A guy, named Gisbert, showed up and wants autographs. It seems we can't get rid of him, in his rainbow-colored sweater.

Saturday, April 29th — FFFF

Thomas: The Saturday evening show offers the highlight of the trip, so far: David Stone's award-winning movie about "the five laws of professional close-up." Everybody roars with laughter. Standing ovation. Followed by a very funny guest of honor ceremony with Aldo Colombini. The

Fingers are voted as the MVP (most valued person) of the convention. We're surprised and happy once again (except for Ben, who is smoking outdoors...).

Final late-night donuts and sessions end this fun convention.

Sunday, April 30th — MAWNY

Manuel: Pit, Jörg, Helge, and I stay for the MAWNY (Magic Alliance of Western New York) convention, while the other Fingers are already on their way to Los Angeles. We work four close-up shifts and a stage show in the evening. That's teamwork!

Thomas: Apparently it's easier to get into Buffalo than out of it. Our flight is cancelled; Chicago airport is a complete chaos due to bad weather.

We get rebooked to another airline and depart four hours late, flying to L.A. via Cincinnati, the Playing Card City. It's a pity that we miss the Sunday shows at the Castle due to our late arrival in Hollywood.

Finally we left the Gisbert guy behind.

Monday, May 1st — Hollywood

Jörg: I was on the MAWNY team and left Batavia today. Because Manuel and Pit had an early flight to Los Angeles, Helge and I also had to get up at 5 a.m. (!) to share a 6 a.m. taxi to Buffalo airport. After waiting there for almost three hours we were informed that our flight was delayed for yet another hour! At least we made our connection in Chicago and arrived in L.A. in the afternoon, managing to grab a cab around 4 p.m. Thank God for the three-hour delay gained during the flight! Our trip to the Castle proved to be yet another adventure as our driver had to find his way around a huge protest march that blocked most of the North Hollywood area.

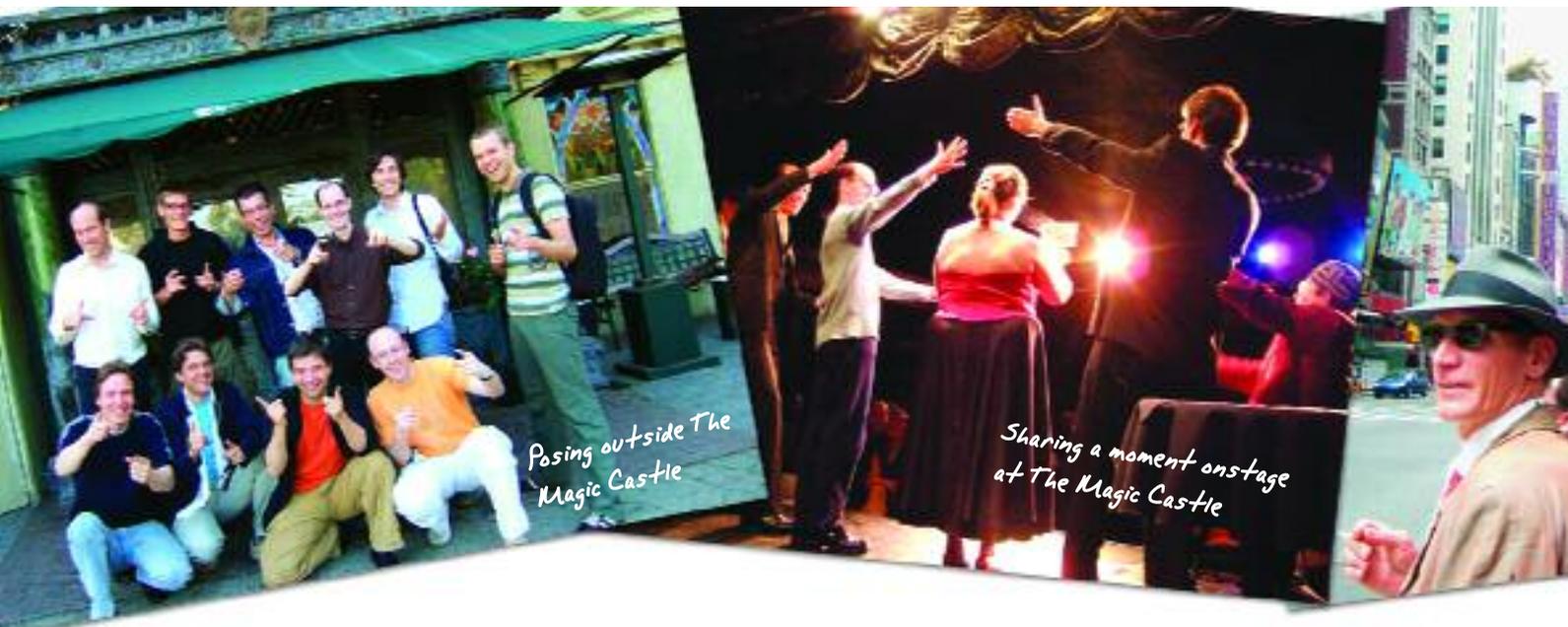
When we finally arrived at our hotel we just had time for a brief shower and change of clothes before hurrying to the Castle. My first Parlour show was due at 7:30 p.m. At least I had no time to get nervous and the shows went rather well. I love the working conditions at the Parlour — it's the perfect place to perform effects such as Hofzinger's Remember and Forget or the Sympathetic Ten.

Now I have to don a baseball glove and hurry over to the Palace to join forces with the rest of the team: there is a hollow egg to be caught in "slow motion." What a crazy day...

Tuesday, May 2nd — Hollywood

Thomas: The day started off with a meeting (well, hanging out) in the hotel lobby, discussing our schedule and fixing a time for rehearsals in the Palace. First, a visit to Hollywood Magic — we needed another hollow egg.

Rehearsals went well and the Palace show with six out of ten Fingers got streamlined. Actually it's the first time that the group is able to rehearse and perform the same show with the same cast for several days in a row! This hasn't happened in Germany for years. We had to adapt the show to the 45-minute time-limit in the Palace, which is hard to do with six magicians, four of which have at least one or more full-evening theatre shows in their repertoire! Everybody has to cut down his act to no more than five or six minutes, so we're able to squeeze in two team acts.



Posing outside The Magic Castle

Sharing a moment onstage at The Magic Castle

Our version of Silk to Egg — the explanation phase is done in a slow-motion replay with two sports commentators explaining while the performer mimes the actions — involves all six Palace performers plus two more standing in the wings and operating a thread hook-up. This is sometimes last-minute timing, since the secret helpers have to be in time for their shows in the other rooms! We also did a special sucker card trick where each Finger fails in finding the selected-and-signed jumbo card before it is found in an impossible location.

The Castle is simply a great place to be. Helge uses the f-word in his emcee opening again; luckily, everybody laughs and seems to have a good time. ("Any hecklers in the audience tonight? Yes!? Don't f - - with us, we're Germans!")

Doc Eason at the W.C. Fields bar is the only native-speaking performer that week. (Funny, last time we met he had a booth at FISM right next to ours.)

Gisbert: I arrived at the YMCA, nice place with lots of animals. Went to the Castle, but they didn't let me in; because of my sweater, I think. It's just for members, the nice girl at the reception desk said I should wait at the back entrance in order to get my autographs. At the back entrance I met Ben! He was smoking.

Wednesday, May 3rd — Hollywood

Pit: I checked out Hollywood Boulevard and Mann's Chinese Theatre. The crowd went wild. Had a chat with Batman and showed Darth Vader my latest prediction card effect (using the Force).

Thomas: Apparently word spreads and traffic picks up — tonight we're doing two shows. Thanks to Irene Larsen, the General Director of the German consulate is attending and we even get to meet Elke Sommer, a former movie star in Germany and still a celebrity. This is Hollywood, after all!

Ben: Selling contraband isn't easy here in Hollywood. Fake watches are a good sell, though. Met the Gisbert groupie-guy and sold Doc Eason a ripped copy of his bar magic DVD set (and a hollow egg on stage for 100 bucks!).

Thursday, May 4th — Hollywood

Thomas: After our morning meeting we visit the Goethe-Institut, a institution promoting "modern German culture" with over 200 offices world-wide. We browse their collection of German movies and play Kicker — not even Goethe can escape from the soccer-craze caused by the World Championship.

Afterwards we all meet for lunch with Max Maven. He's been a supporter of the team since it's beginnings in 1996, so it is nice to finally spend some time out of the context of a magic convention!

After the second Palace show I'm introduced to the entertainment manager for a cruise company. He liked our show and asks whether we could do the act in German. too. (He's serious, since his company often books cruises from Hamburg to New York for German clients only.)

Nikolai: Beautiful women are all over the place here in the evening. Luckily I am doing the late Parlour shows.

By the end of week I guess, some of us could be named "The Flirting Fingers" ...

Friday, May 5th — Pasadena

Thomas: We drive to Pasadena with Mike Caveney while Jörg has to work Friday Brunch Close-up shows. (Actually his own fault — he wanted the "record" of playing all the rooms in one week!).

The visit to Mike Caveney and Tina Lener's house (or better, museum of magical arts) turns out to be the group's highlight of the week! We are treated to a huge amount of finger-food, a guided tour through the house with all its gems of magic history, and get to know Mr. Skidmore, the cutest rabbit on the planet. Relaxing on Mike's tree-house and playing basketball in their backyard is a much better idea than another rehearsal, which is spontaneously cancelled for today.

Saturday, May 6th — Hollywood

Thomas: Today was Malibu Beach day, which turned out to be a good idea. We even got a standing ovation in the second Palace show. This is a rather nice and very unusual act of sympathy in the eyes of performers who are used to German audience reactions (they almost never rise to their feet, except for leaving the theatre). But then again, it might be a rather unusual act to American audiences witnessing "German Comedy" (Magic), similar maybe to "Canadian Military" or "English Cuisine."

Sunday, May 7th — Hollywood

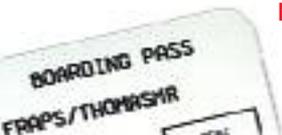
Thomas: We did the FISM lecture for the first time in years. The timing was off a bit during the transitions, but luckily the actual explanation scenes worked. Gisbert showed up; he changed the sweater for a rainbow-colored tie and shirt, so they finally let him in. During the beergarden/heckler scene Helge surely must have broken the record for using the four-letter word in the Castle. It made Gisbert faint (again).

We spend a nice farewell evening at the Castle. The week definitely was a blast and worth the trip alone.

Monday, May 8th — Las Vegas

Jörg: Had to get up early again. We leave the luggage and Gisbert behind and head for two days to Vegas. For my European mind this is still another parallel universe. Attractions like "Sushi King," "Bikini Bull Riding" and "Michelle van Ree featuring the Hypno Pup" stretch the continental imagination to the limit. However, we adapt quickly, having conversations like these: "I would like to see the mentalism-show," "You mean the women with the dog?" "No, no — not the hypnosis show!"

Thomas: I finally got to see Penn & Teller live! Knowing some of their TV specials, I was definitely looking forward to this show and I wasn't disappointed. The opening of the show already fooled me and Teller's Miser's Dream is a piece of art, an instant classic. Only the American flag piece doesn't work for me, but then again, I'm not American!





Tuesday, May 9th — Las Vegas

Ben: Las Vegas is paradise! Smoking is allowed indoors, there are poker tables 24 hours a day, and lots of free drinks!

Thomas: Stan Allen invites us to lunch (thanks!), and we get to see the MAGIC headquarters! The graphic designer has three computers in his little office. Stan seems a bit suspicious... Before we drive to the Mexican diner, we literally forget Gaston! Maybe we thought he's Gisbert. Stan has to drive back to pick him up. Returning from lunch we're just in time for the 3 p.m. show by Mac King.

All: Mac King's show is the best! Happy Finger faces and a standing ovation in the afternoon. *Le Reve* is nice and impressive, but so *Cirque du Soleil* — Mac rules!

Wednesday, May 10th — Los Angeles

Thomas: We're leaving Las Vegas very early; we have to catch a flight in L.A. at 3:30 p.m. Ben's dead and sleeping in the back seat of the car. I enjoy the ride making pictures and taping video footage. I've assembled 1,000 photos and ten hours of footage, so far.

It turns out you'd have to be a rocket-scientist-turned-pathfinder kind of guy to find our L.A. airport rental car return. Luckily I studied physics once and Ben's been a pathfinder in his youth, so we arrive just in time at the check-in for our flight to New York.

Thursday, May 11 — New York City

Thomas: Actually it's our day off, but I have to meet Thorsten Happel at the new Fantasma Magic Store. He was so kind to act as our organizer in New York; without his help the Festival wouldn't have happened at all (thanks again!). I'm still a bit worried about how things will work out logistics-wise, but then again there's nothing much to change now! Some Fingers meet for dinner in a nice restaurant. Once we arrive, the waitress gives us the full "today's specials show," which is nice but also unheard of in Germany. It's always a bit odd — if there are many specials. I sometimes don't understand a word and have to look at the menu anyway. So those five minutes of friendly food-recital can be a long time, especially when you're hungry! I also start to get a little nervous about our Festival. Will the venue (Tribeca Performing Arts Center) be nice, will people show up, especially for the evening stage show, etc.?

Gisbert: New York really is expensive — \$200 from JFK airport to Manhattan. The cab driver told me there's a law in New York and he has to charge extra for rainbow-colored sweaters. I didn't know that.

Now I am sitting in front of the Tribeca Center. And this time I will ask for an autograph of all of them. And I will not faint. I will not faint. I will not faint.

Friday May 12th — New York City

Gisbert: I fainted.

Thomas: We have a photo-shoot on Time Square with Michelle Spillner, who flew in for a short vacation. Jörg Willich also joined us here in New York. A guy from Canada recognizes us on Times Square: "Hey, aren't you the Flicking

Fingers? I have your DVD, what are you doing here...?" We're famous, sort of... We thank him for this anecdote and, as a bonus, he receives free tickets for our stage show tomorrow evening.

Finally, we have a look at the theatre. It is nice and feels good, so we're all set and happy. Except for Ben, who once again has to smoke outdoors.

Saturday, May 13th — New York City

Thomas: It's Festival frenzy. Parlour show, FISM lecture, four solo lectures, and a full-evening stage show keep us really busy all day long. The evening show is well attended; a bit less than we hoped for, but then again, New York isn't exactly waiting for ten unknown German magicians... It's a unique experience anyway. Mark Mitton, Charles Reynolds, Meir Yedid, Herb Zarrow showed up and seemed to like it. We finally could do our new act, a three-phase mental routine where the multi-medium (five Fingers with spray-cans) finds smiley-symbols, words, and pictures that were only thought of. It's fun to perform, since it's a change of pace for us — less comedy and character and more effect!

Again the ensemble-style show interspersing team and solo acts seems to have a novelty effect on the audience, even in New York. The rhythm of American audiences is quite different to German ones, e.g. shows have to be paced faster. We put our Castle-week experiences to good use in the first half of the evening, even though the second half had a few longer pieces (and thus was more German). I think the fast-paced structure (quicker transitions and shorter solo acts) is a general improvement to our former full-evening shows.

Oh, by the way, the Gisbert guy showed up, too. We finally let him do a trick. He seems happy now, but fainted again.

Sunday, May 14th — New York City

Thomas: The second festival day starts with a Q&A session, followed by Helge and Gaston's theatre workshop, which is very well received and gets the attendees moving! Close-up and card workshops, two solo-lectures, and a final formal close-up show round up these two days of Finger-Food.

We're all a bit exhausted... and so are the participants! I'm glad there weren't any logistical nightmares, and the attendees seemed to have received their moneys worth, judging from their comments.

We celebrate at the Surf Bar in Brooklyn, where Thorsten lives. Mark Mitton joins us and Gisbert waits outside with Ben, who is once again enjoying a cigarette. Finally, our very own Flicking Finger Frolic is over.

Wednesday, May 17th — Germany

Thomas: Everybody's back in his hometown, whether it be Frankfurt, Hamburg, Stuttgart, or Munich. Memories are still fresh and so many impressions — magical and cultural, performance- and private-wise — have to be absorbed. Hey, this trip was a blast! We even might be back, some day.

But first, a certain magic journal's deadline is approaching fast, and a diary-style write up of the trip has to be put together... ♦