

Black Magic Imaginings

It was in a small garage filled with hay that I first encountered Stuart Lightbody. There were others there, I hasten to add - a good friend of mine had turned his front garden into an open-air theatre in celebration of his 21st birthday. The stable-like garage was the performance space and Stuart Lightbody was the entertainment. Watching him last week, I tried again to hold my best poker face, but he still managed to know what I was thinking. Darn. How come he gets it right, every time?

By [Maïke Gevers](#) 5 Apr 2012



This time around his show took place in the old church building that is the Kalk Bay Theatre. After all the audience members had been given a card with a print on it akin to the Rorschach inkblot test, Lightbody emerged from the recesses of the low-lit stage.

Black magic and spooky things

He started by reciting a poem about death and spoke of black magic and similarly spooky things. When he began putting needles in his mouth I had to be grateful that the show has a 13+ age restriction.

A surprisingly approachable and friendly young man, Lightbody told us that as a child he would spend hours and hours in a dark room attentive to nothing but his touch and a pack of cards. Hungry to develop a feel for his fingers for the art of sleight of hand, he meticulously devoted himself to the study of performance magic.

He studied - and now teaches - at the College of Magic and he has won many national and international magic competitions, and has represented South Africa in various World Magic Championships. Recent shows of his include: Sleight of Mind, Telling Lies and Superstition, which won him a Standard Bank Silver Ovation Award at the National Arts Festival.

Very well planned and thought out

His latest offering, Dark Imaginings, was a very well-planned and thought-out show, with every little detail under his masterful control. With a non-stop narration throughout, Lightbody taught some psychological advertising techniques and demonstrated the effects of colour on a few hand-picked volunteers.

Up next was his flawless sleight of hand demonstration. Blindfolded, he was able to isolate any given card from a deck. Cutting, shuffling and card picking in ways my mind had not yet imagined, he flicked cards into his hands (still blindfolded) with ease and finesse. His concentration levels must have been through the roof because during that act his face started sweating immensely. He seemed a bit startled by the shuffling done by the chosen audience member, but managed to keep it together and still wax it - the trademark of a

performer who can think on his feet and do much more than the show alone would suggest.

Two disquieting acts

Following that were two disquieting acts - one of which was what appeared to be Lightbody manipulating needles and a thread after he swallowed them. Even more unsettling was a voodoo spell that he tried to cast on someone, which, thankfully, had no effect.

Explaining the power of placebo, he then presented the final and most fascinating act. We were asked to write a thought on our cards to the sound of a morbid audio clip. As we did that, Lightbody continued talking to the audience, facing the wall to avoid seeing any of our cards. He was given an audience member's card to analyse and was able to pick out who had written that card. He did this through his learned graphology skills and his insight into people's body language (I think). Throughout the show he squeezed in tricks for continual amazement.

The confidence that Lightbody displayed during the show can only come from a deep knowledge of the subject matter. For this, presumably, he has to be a human polygraph, as audience participation is a key part of the show. I left more of a sceptic than I came - tricks like that are just way too cool. I was even convinced that a live mouse, which caught my attention before the commencement of the show, was a distraction technique. "No, no", Lightbody assured me after the show, it was an unwanted guest (which Lightbody actually disposed of after an outcry from the audience). I believe him. But maybe that's his mind tricks getting to me?

True or not, he provides unconventional entertainment and food for thought. His expert card-handling skills and his freakishly nurtured talent to read people should definitely make you think twice before challenging him to a game of poker - and encourage you to watch his shows instead.

www.stuartlightbody.co.za

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