

Magician learns illusions abroad

Christopher Barker

All eyes on

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BY CHRIS BONING
Staff Reporter

Christopher Barker would like to show you some magic tricks.

Barker, a sophomore history major, said he started picking up magic when he lived in a flat in Scotland with his brother Paul last summer. A professional magician from London named Rob Hemmens also lived in the flat, he said.

“He got me interested in a way,” Barker said. “I kept asking him to show me tricks, and he never really taught me how to do tricks [except for] a couple of minor things. I brought those back, and I thought I should figure out how those [other] tricks were done. That’s essentially how I got into magic.”

He added that Rob reminded him of Christian Bale’s character from the film “The Prestige” — professional and very mysterious. Barker said Rob walked with a limp because of an illness that limited the mobility of the lower half of his body, although not his hands, which is how he started doing magic.

“I think that’s how most magicians end up doing things,” Barker said. “They just pick something up and start working with it and make it disappear and think, ‘Hey, I can do this.’”

He said that since he returned home, he’s been consulting magic books for new tricks, in addition to practicing the ones he already knows and making up some of his own. Barker said he thinks anyone can learn magic.

“It doesn’t matter how big your hands are or how your motor skills [are],” he said. “It’s just all about [being] willing to do it.”

Barker said much of magic is just sleight of hand, which plays on his own interest in psychology and how the human mind works.

“The way that people can just overlook the slightest thing or really be amazed by the simplest thing really intrigues me,” he said.

Magic also involves a great amount of memory, including being able to remember where every card in a deck is at any point, Barker said. He added that a cardinal rule of magic is to never show the same trick multiple times in a row to the same person.

“If someone says, ‘I want to see that trick

again,’ you don’t show it again because obviously they’re looking for the answer, and if they’re looking hard enough, they might find it — or they might not,” Barker said.

He said he has learned between 50 and 60 magic tricks, and he has about half of them fully mastered. His specialty at the moment is card tricks, which, most magicians start out with, he said.

Barker said the most difficult thing about magic is the art of patter, or talking to an audience to distract them during a trick.

“Anyone can make a card appear, but being able to make it nice and cool [is something else],” he said.

He said he performed street magic while he was in Scotland and also has done tricks in downtown Kirksville and in St. Louis, his hometown. Barker added that he would rather perform in front of small groups because street magic can become awkward sometimes.

“Some people just really don’t like magic,” he said. “I wouldn’t say they’re afraid of it, ... [but] magicians, I think, freak people out. It’s almost like professional lying in a way.”

Despite some people’s discomfort with magic, Pagliai’s restaurant hired Barker to entertain patrons while they dine.

In addition to magic, which he considers a hobby, Barker is also interested in traveling, he said. Barker said he lived and worked in Honduras for two months in 2007 for his high school senior service project and that his family lived in Spain for a few months in summer of 2007.

“I feel kind of bad about it because when I come back [home], I really don’t like being back,” Barker said. “A lot of people get homesick, but I’m actually the complete opposite side of the spectrum. I don’t really get homesick. I just love being out and away.”

He also said he would like to start an improv group at the University in the manner of the Oxford Imps, a comedy group his brother Paul performed with in Scotland. He said that after college, he would like to become a paramedic and a firefighter.

“I think [I like] the idea of helping people ... and serving them,” Barker said. “I just feel like I have talents I can utilize that would be good for that kind of job.”



Amy Gleaves/Index
Sophomore Christopher Barker performs a card trick for senior Chris Owens at Pagliai’s restaurant, where he is employed to entertain patrons.

BIKES | After years of trial programs and campaigning for funds, Kirksville’s Bike Co-op has a permanent home and a workforce in training

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them how to fix it, fix it with them. Not only will they have a better working bike, but also the skills necessary to fix it themselves the next time. A bike’s a pretty simple machine when you get to know it, but at first it can be kind of overwhelming.”

Rosell said the Co-op receives old bikes from a variety of sources, such as abandoned bikes collected by the Kirksville Police Department and repairs those bikes to offer to students for sale or rental. The price varies depending on the brand and condition of the bicycle.

To use the tools and shop for repairs, students and community members must fill out membership forms. Membership is free for Truman students, and faculty and community members can opt for annual or lifetime memberships with fees ranging from \$15 to \$125.

The do-it-yourself aspect of the shop sparked the interest of senior Jaela Harper, who stopped by the Co-op to learn more about renting a bike.

“I’ve always wanted to learn more mechanical stuff,” Harper said. “So I think that’s really cool. You know the old saying ‘teach a man to fish and he’ll eat for a lifetime, give a man a fish and he eats for a day?’”

Harper said she wanted to rent a bike for a variety of reasons, from environmental awareness to exercise and a quick way to get to class from off campus.

“I don’t get up early enough to walk to that 9:30 class,” Harper said. “I usually end up driving, which just seems like a waste.”

And as a senior, Harper said the Co-op’s rental option is appealing.

“It seemed like an ideal situation



Krista Goodman/Index
Senior John Estes (center, with tire) teaches seniors Justin Nickels and Nehemiah Rosell, both scholarship workers at the Co-op, the basics of bike care and repair.

to just rent one for a semester or two and be able to give it back and let someone else use it,” Harper said.

Senior John Estes is a head mechanic at the Co-op and one of the group’s two shop organizers. He said he has been part of the group working to make the Co-op a reality since 2006.

“I tried to advise on planning for what we would need,” Estes said. “What kind of space we would

want, what kinds of things we want to do with the organization besides just helping people learn how to fix bikes, like getting more racks on campus or ... working on trying to get a trail from Thousand Hills to Kirksville.”

Estes said he’s been working with bicycles for more than five years now.

“I started riding bikes in high school,” Estes said. “Then started finding them in the trash and fixing them

up in a friend’s garage — sort of an excuse to hang out in the garage and goof around. We were riding around just the biggest pieces of junk. They were missing brakes and cobbled together all different sizes and kinds of bikes, but it was fun.”

Now, as a head mechanic, Estes oversees the administrative aspects of the Co-op as well as bike repairs.

“It’s pretty much a group effort with the other head mechanics,” Es-

tes said. “We all decide what needs to happen. We organize the mechanic meetings to try to talk about training more mechanics, supervising scholarship workers, setting prices for sale and rental bikes.”

Estes said that now that the Co-op has the space and the tools, the next big step is training new mechanics and scholarship workers like Rosell.

“We just have our first batch of scholarship workers and volunteer mechanics,” Estes said. “And so we’re trying to get them all up to date with how the shop runs and what we do, how we try to deal with customers. We’re a work-in-progress institution. We’re a little wobbly at first, but we’ll get there.”

Estes said the head mechanics are training about 20 scholarship workers and volunteers — mostly through observation, possible weekend training sessions and weekly meetings at which members can discuss problems or plan events. For example, the group hopes to set up a demonstration area at the Red Barn Arts and Crafts Festival this month.

Estes said the Co-op already has nearly 200 members who he encouraged to get more involved with the program.

“Probably the easiest thing to do would be to just come and help the mechanics or just hang out in here and watch the mechanics helping people,” Estes said.

He said the Co-op has been successful so far and that he only sees it improving in the future.

“I expect it to get a lot easier once everyone is trained because we have a lot of people in here who are really capable,” Estes said.

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