



Mind bender

Mystery entertainer **Allan Louie** spills the beans on what it takes to be a mindreader

BY NATASHA ALI

Imagine taking an ordinary two-rupee coin out of your purse, putting it in your hand, and then, thanks to the mentalist seated across from you, finding the coin, still clutched in your own palm, bent! This is exactly what happened

when Allan Louie, who goes by the moniker 'Mystery Entertainer', showed me his mystical prowess. He asked me to imagine that the coin in my hand, represented by an image of the coin he drew, was moving, and then seeing I couldn't make my imagination go

there, he asked me instead to imagine there was a steel rod in my arm that was tightening, and causing my hand to become less flexible. A few seconds later, the perfectly symmetrical two-rupee coin was now twisted! And, it has remained so—I've taken it out and



looked at it a few times.

To blow my mind further, Allan gave me a blank card and asked me to draw something, anything I felt like. As the kid who struggled in art class, my drawing skills are non-existent, so I picked what came easy to me – a house. I drew it, making sure he did not see what I was doing. He then asked me to imagine I was in front of a blackboard, drawing that image again. To my disbelief, Allan easily replicated what I'd done—the house he drew had a near identical structure and form as the house on my card!

Allan Louie is a mentalist, hypnotist, magician and illusionist. He can make people imagine they are in a different room and place than they actually are, under hypnosis. He can make you feel a tap on the shoulder, when there's no one behind you. Combine magic tricks, a dose of mentalism, a bit of hypnosis, and you get Allan's particular brand of theatre, which aims to wow and entertain the audience. And entertain he sure did. Allan is soft-

spoken but his skill and charm both worked their magic on me.

Allan believes everyone can do cool tricks with the mind. If not for mind reading or bending objects, honing the mind can help you become more aware of yourself and your surroundings. In a freewheeling conversation, he shares his thoughts on mentalism, his path to becoming a mentalist, and some of his cool tricks. Excerpts from the conversation:

What is mentalism to you?

Mentalism is perceived as a higher form of magic by the audience, where the performer appears to perform clairvoyance, mind reading, or telekinesis. But, what it really is, is a sleight of the mind, a science and an art, and a very skilled practice which involves observing and making use of micro expressions and having a good understanding of people. Human nature and psychology are both factors in mentalism and creating successful illusions.

Are some people born with certain abilities that allow them to become mentalists, or are there a certain set of skills that anyone can acquire to be a mentalist?

It is all about practice; anyone who puts in the effort can become a mentalist. And the more you practise, the better you get at it—that's what separates the amateurs from the pros. Books were my teachers, mostly, and videos. Some people practise mentalism unconsciously, without being aware of it and this is the shut-eye cycle. They mistake their mentalism skills for psychic powers, or intuition at work. But honestly, it's about learning and channelling. You put in the time, you put in the work, and you can become a mentalist.

What sparked your interest in this particular area, and how did it become a career?

As a 14-year-old, I watched a television special on David Blaine, the renowned American magician and illusionist.

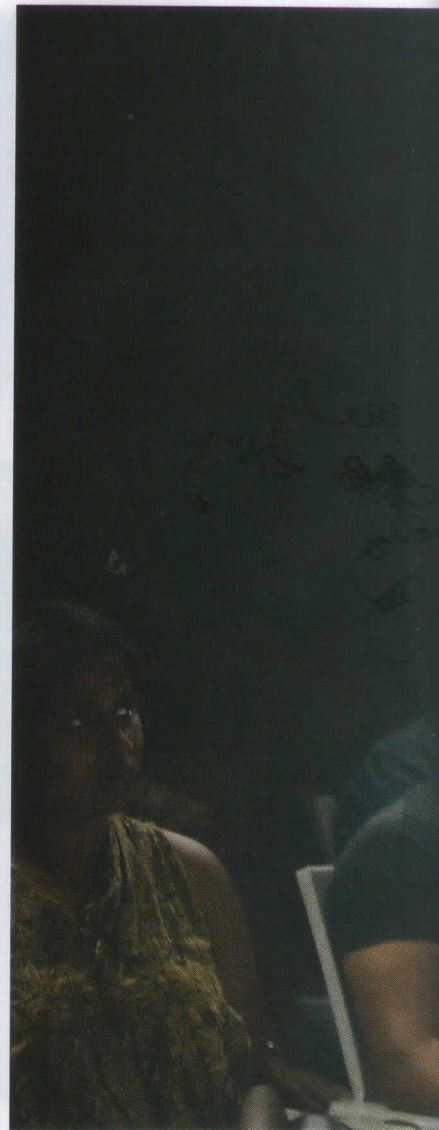


I was following along as Blaine performed a mentalism trick on his audience, and when Blaine picked the card I had chosen, it didn't just wow me, but also had me intrigued. I began doing magic tricks on family and friends as a hobby, after learning my first card trick from a book. Their reactions were inspiring and a confidence builder. This set me in search of knowledge—for more tricks. Scouting the local libraries and bookstores in my hometown for more and better books on magic became quite the pastime, with the experience of impacting people and their awestruck expressions making me want to learn and do more.

At that point I looked at it as a hobby, and when it was time for college, I pursued a degree in animation, and continued to work on my mentalism skills on the side. A meeting online with a fellow magician led to my first professional gig—performing tricks for the Sunday brunch diners at the Oberoi Hotel. And, this whet my appetite for more knowledge, alongside a desire to get even better at mentalism. I also came into contact with other magicians and mentalists. It is quite a small community in Bangalore at present—we're five guys. I should add, that it is important to go out and prac-

tise on different people, preferably not family or good friends, since one learns more from working on an unknown person. At present, I do corporate shows, and also perform at the Sunday Brunch at The Crowne Plaza Hotel, and at The Black Rabbit restaurant.

As an introvert, it took some time for me to get comfortable with the requirements of a performance, and I had to learn to draw out and engage with the audience. A key component of being a successful mentalist and magician is understanding people. Having a high EQ (emotional quotient) is helpful. I use NLP (neuro linguistic programming) techniques to create a rapport with people. [NLP uses a mix of communication, personal development and psychotherapy to help one understand one's mind and how one interacts and communicates]. It took many years of dedication and constant practice to reach the level I am at now. In the earlier days, I had to practise a certain number of hours each day, but now I have reached a stage where the practice time is devoted to mastering the more difficult or rare mental tricks, and the goal is to hone my craft, and get deeper into the possibilities of mentalism and consciousness.



What have been some exciting moments and crazy tricks you've done?

Between 2012 and 2016, I was working with Carnival Cruise Lines in America, performing aboard their ships during cruises to the Caribbean and back, and I got to perform for a variety of folks. American audiences are so enthusiastic; receptive to magic and mentalism tricks and during this phase I was able to build on my understanding of people and read them better. Audience perception plays a part in how the act goes. Indian audiences, especially men, are more sceptical, and, rather than getting caught up in



the moment, want to figure out the how of the visual illusion. Well, with so many engineers, it is bound to happen—that urge to dissect!

I am always fascinated by the kind of things subjects do under hypnosis, and how susceptible to suggestion they are. One of the craziest stories is from my pickpocket act (“theatrical pickpocketing”). I swiped the subject’s wrist watch, and when I asked for the time, he realised he did not have his watch on. However, he actually thought he had not worn it that day, and so I had him visualise where he usually keeps his watch, and then of course, gave it back. The subject felt

like he had time travelled and gone back to get the watch. I was happy to give this kind of a unique experience to this person, something he would remember for years to come.

In the US, I’ve had audiences react quite vehemently, and some African-American guests would be so freaked out, they would actually just walk out, not able to wrap their minds around what was happening!

So, what is Allan’s advice to those who want to pursue mentalism?

Simple! Practise, don’t be shy, try new things, don’t limit yourself, interact and practise on different people and

learn to read and understand people.

So, it’s a constant journey of learning?

Absolutely! My focus now is moving towards exploring intuition and meditation and to the awareness that comes from it. There is a higher truth out there, and this awareness has helped me to not take myself so seriously. I find that meditation is the best reset, and helps bring in clarity. When I meditate before a performance, I am more focused and present in the moment. This is something everyone can practise in order to get out of being in autopilot or conditioned mode. □