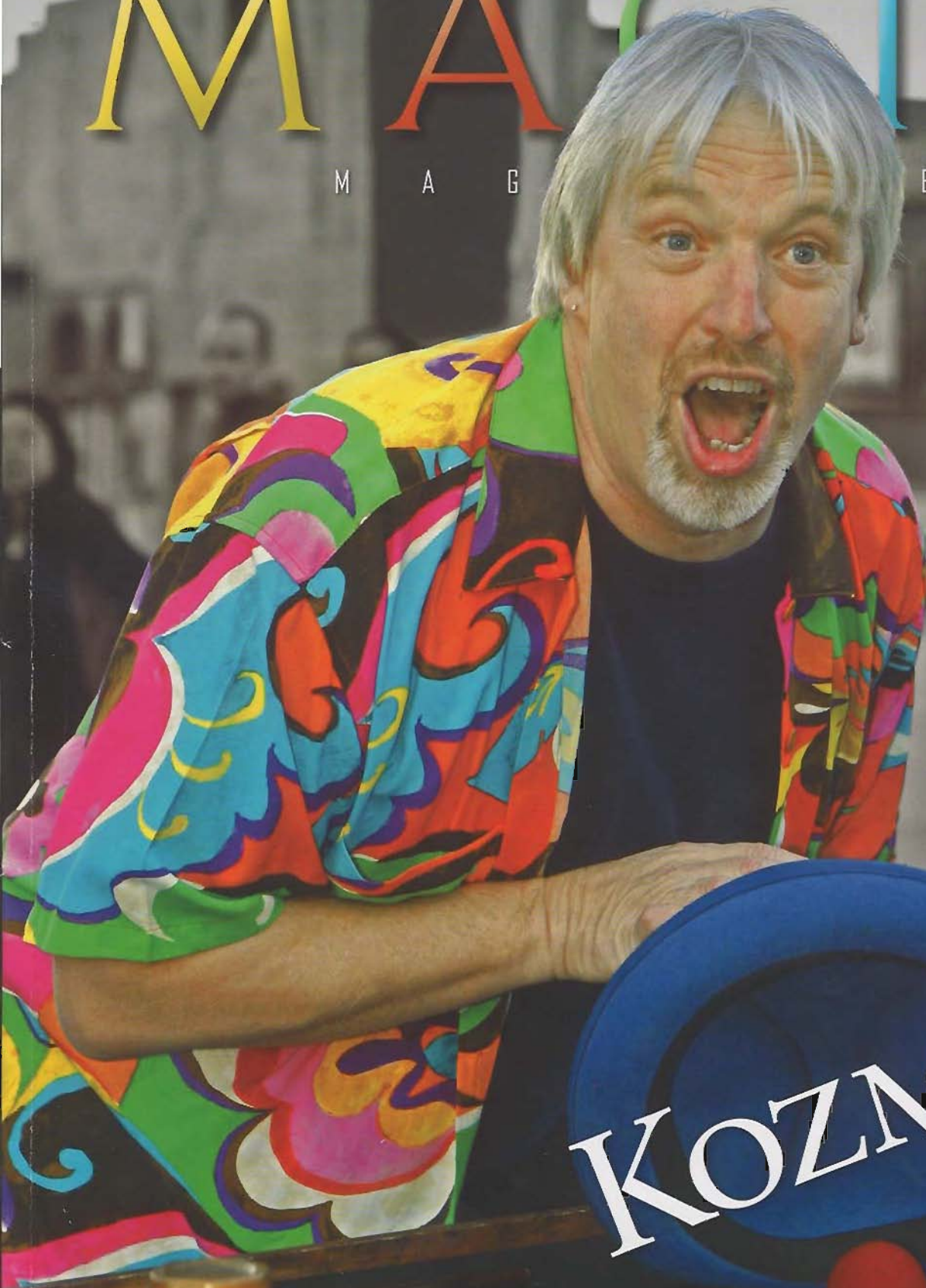


FEBRUARY 2010 U.S. \$6

# MAGIC

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Beckett Studios  
Design: Chris Sieracki

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PHOTOS: RONALD WAINWRIGHT / BLOOMBERG VIA GETTY IMAGES

# BACK IN VEGAS

FOR THE FIRST TIME



BY ALAN HOWARD

When Tony and Ferdinand Ferco shot into the air on December 22, they landed on the Las Vegas Strip for the first time in almost thirty years.

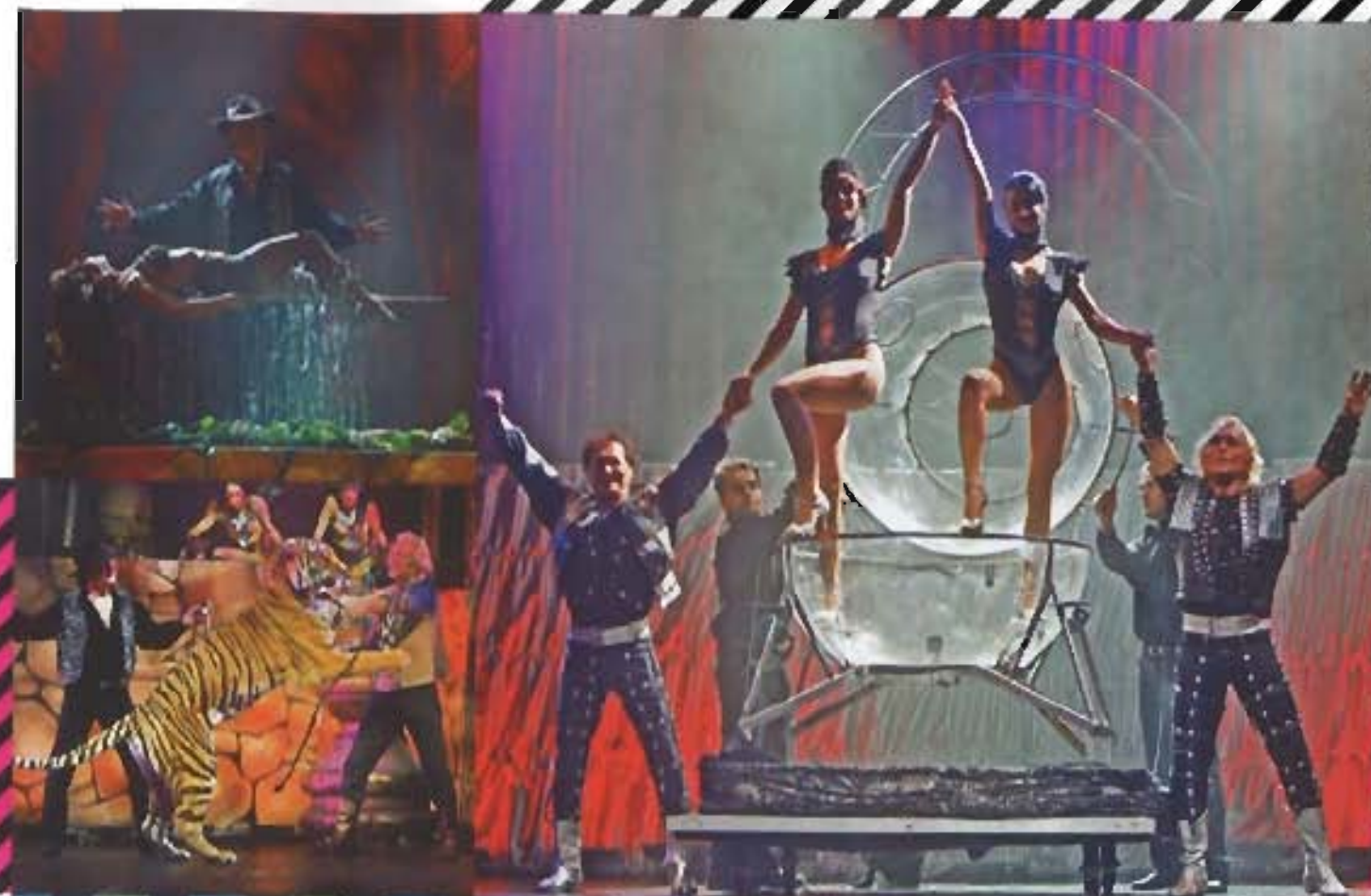
Their show, *The Ferco Brothers: Untamed Illusions*, opened with an ensemble dance/production number, followed by the dynamic appearance of the two stars, propelled upward from backstage in a "roaster" effect, such as seen in the recent Michael Jackson movie *This Is It*. The brothers have played all over the world, with long engagements in Europe and Asia and extensive tours throughout South America. In the US, they have settled into runs in Reno, Biloxi, and Atlantic City. Yet somehow, despite being

longtime Las Vegas residents, this was the first time the family played there in their own ninety-minute show. Their last extended Vegas gig wrapped up back in 1981, when the Czech family was doing acrobatics and juggling and not yet performing magic.

Since that time, the Ferco have toured the world with large illusions and menagerie of exotic jungle cats. It must be admitted that they have long been compared to another Las Vegas magic duo: two men — one blond, one with black hair — who presented major illusions and became internationally famous for their work with large cats. Comparisons are still unavoidable, but with their decades in the business, they have moved farther away from seeming like a direct copy.

*Untamed Illusions* played a limited engagement at the Planet Hollywood Resort & Casino for two weeks in December and January. Along with Tony and Ferdinand, the production featured Ferdinand's daughter Juliet as the lead magic assistant, along with a cast of ten dancers, plus assistants and other acts. In the circus tradition, several of the cast and crew are also family members.

Juliet makes her appearance in the first illusion of the show, a diamond-shaped crystal box on a pedestal. She is soon placed into another cage and transformed into a tiger, the first of several animals featured in the show. Tony presents a fast Metamorphosis, appearing from the trunk, which then has the sides dropped to show a tiger there as well. The



[Facing page] The Ferco Brothers, Ferdinand [left] and Tony [right], produce Juliet in their opening illusion. [Above] Magical moments in the show include a levitation, an appearance from a crystal ball, comic bypplay with a duck, a shrinking of one of the stars, and the Ferco's trademark exotic cats.



brothers next put Juliet into a tube-shaped stretcher, after which she gets some measure of revenge by shrinking Ferdinand in the Squeezer illusion. Tony returns to do a version of *Things That Go Bump in the Night*, in which the mysterious shapes produced from the cabinet are shrouded in cloths with large masks on the front. Two of the shapes are revealed to be female dancers, the shape in the center becomes Tony, and the cabinet is opened to reveal a white tiger.

After this flurry of illusions, the brothers step forward to speak for the first time, welcoming the audience in ten different

languages. They bring on an animal-themed number with the dancers, then return to using a real animal — in this case, a duck. Ferdinand gathers a group of kids from the audience to come onstage. While one small child comically gets to hold the duck, the others look into an empty bucket, then sit on top of it. After Ferdinand vanishes the duck in a cage he soon dismantles, the bird is found inside the bucket. Ferco again hands the duck to the kid, and the crowd laughs as the child proudly walks back down into the audience with his prize, sitting down with the animal before it is retrieved.

Home movies of the Ferco family with their animals are shown, followed by the first of the specialty acts in the show, an acrobatic contortionist and three male breakdancers. The dance company returns in futuristic mode, leading into a high-tech sequence. Ferdinand and Tony ignite flames inside a clear plastic globe, out of which two girls appear. A square crystal box transforms a girl into a black leopard, followed by a unique version of the Interlude, featuring a massive prop designed by Paul Haynes. Tony gets locked into a circular target, with his head and limbs sticking out. After being hoisted into the air, he is low-



The high point of a high-tech sequence: Tony is lowered down onto Juliet's sword [left]; they are then raised up as their bodies intersect.

cred down over Juliet, who stands below with a spear pointing upward. Both spear and girl pass through Tony's body, which is revolved and raised up to show the top half of Juliet sticking out from Tony's chest.

Next up is a version of the Triple Alliance, in which a hooded Ferdinand transforms into Tony, while Juliet disappears and a tiger takes her place in a cage. This leads into Tony talking about the tiger, then introducing a ten-week-old tiger cub, which he carries through the audience.

The star specialty act of Ross & Elisa Hartzell take the stage for their dual crossbow routine. The sharp-shooting climaxes with multiple arrows shooting across the stage to pierce an apple on each of their heads.

The next series of magic effects takes place in a fiery jungle temple, the large stage having been transformed into a scene out of an Indiana Jones movie. Ferdinand appears with requisite whip and safari hat, and causes Juliet to float over the fountains of a Water Levitation. This

is followed by Tony presenting Impaled after a swordfight. An incongruous upright cabinet is then wheeled out — painted with an image of a woman as a tiger, to try to fit the theme — and used by both brothers to separate a girl into eight slices, pulled apart to each side.

Aerial contortions on silks end with a magic touch as the acrobat is lowered not to the stage but into a cage, where she is transformed into yet another tiger. The Fercos brothers currently have ten feline partners, seven of which are used in this show: two striped white tigers, one snow-white tiger, an orange tiger, the baby tabby tiger, a black leopard, and a lion.

Ferdinand returns to the stage to encounter a large mechanical contraption. He is placed in a trunk and hoisted upward over flaming spikes. When the box crashes down, empty, Ferdinand makes his whistle-blowing appearance in the center of the audience.

Tony comes out to talk about his family history and to show film of the Fercos' cir-

cus acts over the years. Tony in particular is still known as a great juggler, and the films lead into a live performance with clubs and juggling up to seven ping-pong balls with his mouth.

The illusion show is concluded with the Disappearing Tiger, in which a cage containing the cat is draped and lifted above a retaining box. The cage is shown empty, and the sides of the lower box drop to reveal the appearance of Tony. The show wraps up with more feathered showgirls, cast bows, and a large set piece featuring the magicians posing with several of the cats. The leopard leaps from high up and far away into Tony's arms. The curtain comes down on another evening of magic and variety, and the cast and crew head for home, right here in Las Vegas. **M**

The Fercos: *Untamed Illusions* opens a tour of Mexico on February 12, beginning in Toluca, then moving on to Mexico City for several weeks. **M**