

Siegfried Fischbacher – from Rosenheim to Las Vegas

Rosenheim, Siegfried Fischbacher had a difficult childhood during World War II before he managed to make his own magical dreams come true together with his partner Roy. During the first years after the war, Siegfried – whose primary school teachers were generally negative about his future prospects – noticed a book of magic in a shop window in Rosenheim that attracted him intensely. From this moment on, his greatest wish was to possess that book. The price – 5 Marks – was a fortune for a young boy at that time. After begging his mother to no avail to lend him the money, he had to rely on fate. While walking along the kerb on the opposite side of the street from the bookshop, Siegfried suddenly caught sight of a five-mark piece on the ground – and he was able to fulfil his dearest wish. The purchase – Siegfried still believes it was made possible "by magic" – laid the foundation of his later career. Siegfried practiced every moment he could, making use of every spare minute to perfect his knowledge of the magic arts. Usually a shy boy, he started to do magic tricks for his fellow pupils, but remained unsuccessful and unappreciated. Even after the local priest in Rosenheim encouraged him to do weekend performances at weddings, parties and municipal events, and Siegfried had become quite well-known, he still felt that could never achieve the success he dreamed of in the small provincial town. His life was thus rather unspectacular to begin with. At the age of 14 he began an apprenticeship as a weaver for a carpet-maker. He still wanted to develop his knowledge of magic, but found he could discuss the topic with no-one in Rosenheim: "Magic could never be more than an amusing hobby. As a job it would have been blasphemy." At night, Siegfried secretly visited the hall of the Kolping Theatre and practiced all alone on the stage there.

In 1956, against his mother's wishes, he decided to leave Rosenheim, and worked for a while in a hotel on Lake Garda, first as a kitchen assistant and then as a barman. Here he felt accepted for the first time. In Italy he was also able to perform his magic arts on a greater scale, and finally received the recognition he deserved. Nevertheless, in 1960 he felt the urge to travel again and got himself a job as a steward on the MS "Berlin". On the way from Bremerhaven to New York, the captain very soon discovered Siegfried's magic gifts and had him perform before an audience on board. Suddenly Siegfried was in seventh heaven. By a stroke of fate, Roy Uwe Horn from Nordenham was also working on the MS "Berlin", and secretly keeping a cheetah in his cabin. Roy successfully persuaded Siegfried to make his cheetah "Chico" disappear instead of a rabbit. This magic number earned Siegfried the first standing ovation of his life.

From that moment on, Siegfried and Roy performed together, and their magic show with the cheetah became increasingly successful. From the MS "Berlin" they switched to Caribbean cruise liners, where they took over responsibility for all the on-board

entertainment. The duo spurred each other on to peak achievements, and became increasingly ambitious. When they started becoming successful in Europe and were even given their own show in the Lido, the European temple of variety shows, Roy suggested they go to Las Vegas. People there were sceptical at first, because "magic" had so far sold badly in the desert city and jarred with its image. During the 1970s, however, the two of them took the risk and moved to Las Vegas. After a long period full of difficulties and crises, they finally succeeded in getting their first one-and-a-half-hour-long show – 12 years after their arrival. Their last show, which premiered at the "Mirage" in Las Vegas on February 1, 1990, broke all previous records: the production cost over 50 million dollars and made the successful duo world-famous once and for all. The mixture of Broadway show, magic and opera attracted an entirely new clientele to Vegas: families, yuppies and young couples.

With this success, Siegfried and Roy managed to break all previous records in Las Vegas as far as wages were concerned, with an income of roughly 52 million dollars a year. Siegfried and Roy number among the most famous protagonists in show business, and Siegfried is probably the world's best-known Bavarian – even though many are unaware of his origins. Their exciting shows have brought them global fame, and they have been invited to the White House as guests of honour. Despite all this success, the two of them have never forgotten their "home state": the wayside cross in the grounds of their vast estate is a souvenir of Bavaria.

On October 3, 2003 their career was interrupted abruptly when Roy was badly injured by a tiger, but Siegfried and Roy announced that "the show is our life" – and so the two emigrants will continue to live the "American Dream" that so many others have sought with varying degrees of success.

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Literature

Siegfried & Roy, Meister der Illusion. Die Geschichte eines Welterfolges, aus dem Amerikanischen von Wulf Bergner, Düsseldorf, 1995; Stern, spezial Biografie. Menschen, Dramen, Lebenswege. Nr. 1 / 2004; www.siegfriedandroy.com