

# EMINENCE **GRISE**

ém-i-nence grise  
(ā-mē-nāNs grēz')  
n. pl. ém-i-nence grises (ā-mē-nāNs grēz')  
A powerful adviser or decision maker who operates  
secretly or unofficially.  
Also called gray eminence.

[French, the power behind the throne : éminence, power + grise,  
feminine of gris, gray, shadowy.]



## PAUL ROMHANY

BY BEN ROBINSON

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In 1928, three films by three great clowns were all shot in New York City. Buster Keaton made *The Cameraman*. Harold Lloyd stopped traffic in multiple locations with his film *SPEEDY*. And, the most famous man in the world, Charlie Chaplin (1889—1977), made his masterpiece, *The Circus*.

While Chaplin influenced the world, on many levels—defining and executing the human condition with pathos, ethos and hilarity, the great silent clown could not have known he'd influence a little boy in New Zealand, born in 1968, who became entranced at the hilarity of The Tramp atop the high wire with a monkey perched on his back; or the faulty efforts of The Tramp assisting Professor Bosco, the magician in the circus.

Paul Romhany has spent decades studying Chaplin. His stage antics, films, and above all, the dedicated moves the balletic Tramp made that enthralled the world. Such study would one day help create an act that has been in demand literally all over the world.

To some in the variety arts Paul Romhany is mis-apprehended as the young Robert Lund first profiled the esteemed Editor of the longest running magic periodical of its time, *The Sphinx*. When Lund sent his copy for critical notes by *The Sphinx* Editor John Mulholland (1898—1970), Lund was gobsmacked at Mulholland's tart response. Mulholland wrote, "Your opinions, while valid, are most decidedly incorrect as to their factual nature." Lund had stated in 1948, in his forthcoming profile of Mulholland for *The Conjuror* magazine, that Mulholland was "largely known as a writer cum performer who sometimes did magic shows at conventions." Mulholland quickly disabused the young writer of his fallacies and the two enjoyed twenty-two years of friendship, with a good amount of the famed Mulholland Collection coming to rest in Lund's American Museum of Magic (Marshall, MI).

Similarly, in the few years I've been writing for *VANISH* when mentioning the Editor's name to others (circus historians, writers and filmmakers), the response has largely been, "Oh, you mean the guy who started that on-line, free magic magazine with an international reach?"

**PAUL ROMHANY** has been a professional magician for over 25 years. During that time he has travelled to over 120 countries, written over 40 books and created over 60 magic effects that are sold around the world.

In 2012 he started **VANISH - International Magic Magazine** which has well over 100,000 readers.

“ Paul Romhany has studied Chaplin's Tramp for many years. His stage antics, films, and above all, the dedicated, balletic moves the Tramp made that enthralled the world.”



PHOTO By George Bencze



PHOTO By Lorena Watters

This is a  
determined and  
appreciative man ...  
he is the true  
definition of  
The Renaissance man

Like Mulholland, Paul Romhany could not have been the first to start such an enterprise on line, fully free, and wildly interactive including the sound of pages turning, without the solid bedrock of a thirty-year performing career. This is a career lived partially aboard cruise ship stages that has brought his multiple-awarded comedy magic act to one hundred and twenty countries (and counting).

As you will read in the following interview, conducted by SKYPE between New York City and Vancouver Canada, Paul Romhany is a very thoughtful, hard-working, chap who wears many chapeaus. Paul Romhany is a master magician, writer, editor, ventriloquist, university-trained and teacher-certified musician (piano is his instrument); but most importantly, husband to his wife Natalie, and the father to an equally talented little fellow named Jon-Paul (at this writing, age 4).

Paul eloquently and definitively states in all of his press and interviews that "being a father is my most important role" and that he and his Canadian wife Natalie, "are blessed to live the life they lead, which took some planning."

Several heartbreaking attempts took their toll on the family before Jon-Paul's grand entrance on Earth in 2011. "I now live the life I have always wanted" Romhany says. Think about that. Do you? This is a determined and appreciative man, who wakes, dreams and works on magical projects every second he is alive. It sounds like press agent puffery, but it is entirely true that Paul Romhany is the definition of a Renaissance man.

It may seem the height of narcissism of Editor Romhany to place himself on the cover of his magazine and hire his Contributing Editor to profile him. I know that. But there is a reason. Paul is a man of high ethics and integrity. I don't think you can name another with similar credentials in this business. I would not spend a single second writing about anyone I did not believe in. And that is what we have here: I trust him. His talents are obvious, even to the casual observer. What drives him; why he does what he does—that is what you are about to read in the interview that follows.

His output is exhausting and genuinely astonishing to those of us with less energy. For the largest selling magical supply house, Murphy's, he has nearly one hundred products on the market that range from his pre-sale sell out of his linking finger rings called MERGE, to his coveted blueprints of an illusion designed by Wayne Rogers, where a briefcase is laid upon a desk and all of a sudden a man steps out of the briefcase. It is the reverse of the illusion made famous by another clown — Buster Keaton in his monumental short Sherlock Junior (1924). His career as a special FX man has led to several consultancies around the world. While there are other directors of special FX and other illusion designers, Paul Romhany is in demand because star performers see him as "the whole package." He can write scripts, design the action and has a wide enough vocabulary as an illusionist and the boots-on-the-ground knowledge of how audiences react worldwide.



In October 2015, his fellow countrymen in New Zealand named Paul Romhany the 18th "Grand Master of Magic". This is an award only given if merited, and he is proud to have received it, though stated in his acceptance speech, "I'm too young to die." (The backstage joke being that a life-achievement award is only given when one is on their way out!)

To me, Paul is Ganesh-like. In case you aren't hip to Hindu mythology, Ganesh is the son of Shiva (the Creator and Destroyer) and his busty consort Parvati. Ganesh has the head of an elephant, put there because the boy god mocked the moon, and so he was forever

situated having an elephant's head and eight arms. Ganesh is known as "the remover of obstacles." He is also a gleeful sort who brings order through laughter and removing negativity. I'm not saying Paul is godlike. Let's be very clear about that.

What I mean is that Paul seemingly has as many arms as the great Ganesh. His fingers adorn so many pies; a conversation with him is shared by his typing endless notes to his many associates around the world on a variety of projects. In a one-hour conversation I believe he also was in contact with perhaps as many as ten others. To work with him is to share him with others he

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Paul with his son Jon-Paul

also works with — he is genuinely that busy. And perhaps that is why he is the very first recipient of the Robert-Houdin award given by Stevens Magic Emporium, because many consider him to be “the hardest working man in magic.”

One might think that this twice-awarded man from the Variety Arts club of New Zealand (Best Newcomer; and, Variety Artist of the Year, given years apart) would be enough praise or explanation of this fellow.

Paul states very matter-of-factly that he only seeks to impress himself concurring with my view that while there is room for us all; we only truly compete with ourselves. Paul’s

performance is selfless, in my opinion. His character gives and gives and then gives some more because his goal is that of a great magician’s—he seeks to create, share and instill wonder. It is not easy to do at all. Of course he pays attention to his spiritual guide Charlie Chaplin.

Throughout the 1990’s Paul Romhany cut quite a reputation with his pantomime act traveling the oceans of the planet, amazing audiences while at the same time putting them in the aisles in nearly a hundred countries if not as many cities on land. He has enjoyed performing onstage in make up and then not being recognized off stage. He doesn’t need an ego

**Paul’s performance is selfless ... he seeks to create, share and instill wonder.**

boost of being recognized off stage, preferring his anonymity when not before an audience. Most performers, he notes, get “into the game” of performing because they need to battle insecurity. Others, the famed talk show host David Letterman said, “either got too much attention as a kid or not enough.” Paul’s upbringing is very private, but I am betting sharing life with a twin had its challenges as much as the family is close knit.

I am aware of Paul’s performances in Beijing and Singapore in the same year doing quite different things. For one four-minute appearance for a major sponsor in China he was paid as much as some performers make in a year. Later, in Singapore he was driven between four different shows in four different places by motorcycle, while still in make up, so he could enter the hall, do the gig, and exit the stage to be driven off whizz bang to the next. It sounds an apocryphal until you see the photos of him in costume sitting on the back of the motorcycle, smiling as his driver weaves in and out

of traffic. Recently, in Sweden (2015), he did a full forty-minutes on stage as his Chaplinesque character to the absolute delight of the Swedish in a historic theatre. His performance is truly international.

Paul and Natalie have enjoyed traveling the world and seeing the sights of just about anywhere you can imagine. To others, this is a fairy tale existence, being paid to travel, entertain and sip wine on the Danube; and then jetting off to Cairo for one show. However, the late Dr. John Booth (1912—2009) noted that all real performers such as Cardini always toured with such erratic travel routes. You go where the work takes you and the performer is often the last to have a hand in deciding the route. That is, until they reach the stage of their careers where they can pick and choose what they want to do. That is the position Paul Romhany finds himself in now.

Having created original work, such as his breathtakingly beautiful Floating Broom illusion done to Charlie Chaplin’s

**PHOTO RIGHT:  
PERFORMING FOR  
THE ROYAL FAMILY  
OF MONACO  
IN BEIJING.**





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signature anthem “Smile” (done with strict adherence of the Chaplin licensing agency, The Roy Export Co.), Paul has thrilled audiences repeatedly providing the performer with standing ovations. This is ancillary to his oeuvre.

As stated, he seeks not to impress fellow performers, only himself. He is his own harshest critic. A real artist he.

For him, *VANISH—International Magic Magazine*, is a genuine labor of love. It shows who he is and what he thinks about.

Bill Marx, Harpo Marx’s son, told me that he has no patience for those compared to his father just because they are silent and stand on a stage. Rather, countered Mr. Marx, such were anathema to the brilliant legacy his father created. Then Bill cited Paul. He said that the video he’d seen (of Paul’s work as a silent clown magician) was worthy to be included in the presentation given at The Museum of the Moving Image (New York, December 2011—January 2012) celebrating Harpo, Keaton, Chaplin and Lloyd. High praise.

Paul and his contemporaries don’t coddle to the cheap pot shots taken at the art of magic. Rather than tear down tripe, the contributors to *VANISH* esteem what it

takes to actually attempt to create wonder. Knowing we are all easy targets for childish criticism, those at *VANISH* seek to remind others of the beauty that the art of magic can be. Giving away others’ secrets to audiences, such as exposing the thumb tip as “the national magic trick” is akin to tearing down a house. Push a button—done. Simple.

But, to build a house? This can take years of work. Hard work. Inspiration. Light...dare we say, enlightenment. Real artists know this and do not take the easy route, no matter the mega money offered for bold mediocrity in the television medium.

Ours is not to over exemplify or offer unnecessary praise either. Ours is to call it as the truth that is. Such conflagration within the ranks is what propelled professional magicians to contribute to *VANISH*. Paul has repeatedly told me that if he saw magic being chopped at the knees and he did nothing about it, only then would he be unable to live with himself.

He feels it is his purpose to give back and inspire. Enter the idea for the first free, on line fully interactive magic-centered magazine, *VANISH*. It is the hope of the Editor/Publisher, I have now worked for over a decade, that *VANISH* will lead

the way to inspiring a new breed of magician. A breed that will think instead of follow. A breed that will act creatively instead of being told what “is cool.” Paul Romhany, and dare I offer, his mates, are art warriors. Yes, we seek revolution, but without conflict. The man who started this magazine gambled hard on an idea; let an art be an art. What a concept!

Magic to survive as special in the technological age must adhere to tenets rarely practiced by magicians. Paul Romhany has simply stated that the goals of *VANISH* are these:

- **(to realize) Magic is an art form.**
- **Magic must be practiced as an art form, to be accepted, and regarded as an art.**
- **Magicians must learn to honor their art by understanding the history of the art.**

When most magic aficionados are simply willing to follow the leader (read those who are famous), wealthy, or who is the hot topic for their Warholian fifteen minutes, Paul Romhany is decidedly none of the above. He follows his own beat. He is his own drummer, agent, dancer and publisher (we speak metaphorically, except in the last case). He doesn’t pander. He cannot be bought.

The knowledge and ability to create wonder is what intrigues this discerning Editor. Many hearing of the success of *VANISH* to attract advertisers, or attract a readership of over one hundred thousand strong in as many as ninety countries (all verifiable statistics), has brought calls from people who have assumed because they are famous, they would naturally be featured. Such folks clearly do not understand the mindfulness of the Editor and Publisher Paul Romhany; that the thrust and mission of *VANISH* is to dispense with the paradigms of the past. To put it colloquially, *VANISH* is about what inspires with something new, creative and largely unseen elsewhere.



While it is surprising, it is no accident that *VANISH* has attained its successful track record because of the careful and discriminating eye and mind of Editor Romhany. Being bi-monthly helps a timeline for development that a monthly magazine may not be able to achieve. Technology clearly had to catch up with Paul Romhany's concept of the magazine from the beginning. Now, print on demand, has also become a feature of this winning magazine. Other areas of commerce are carefully watching what *VANISH* does; the ever-changing world of cyber commerce flipping about in a nanosecond. (Speaking of which, a prime example being The FLIP video camera. Remember their 15-second wonder axed into oblivion by the Apple I-Phone developing a lens a hundred times more clear and capturing as much video?) It is Paul Romhany who created a technological first that genuinely puts him in a category with the scientist magician, Jean-Eugene Robert-Houdin (1805—1871). Hence the award was well timed!

***"I first heard Paul's name when I bought his guide to cruise ship bookings. I made my second swipe at the market, completely unsuccessfully. A few months and several emails later, my phone rang. It was Paul. He quipped, "So, consider yourself lucky. You are still too hip for the room."***

I've never been in the same room with Paul Romhany. Yet, this man of many wonders has inspired me to write for his books (check out *The Real Deal*, you'll be glad you did), and I don't think my bank account has fattened because of

my contributions. But that is not why I have added my thoughts to his enterprises. I have joined up because Paul and I see life similarly. He is one of the very few I have ever entrusted with my most valuable project.

As Bob Lund discovered the truth about John Mulholland beyond what was written in magazines, so too will you learn about Paul Romhany. He really is a **Grand Master of Magic**, no sinecure he. The magic and variety arts sub-culture is fortunate a man with his gambling nature; his forthrightness; and the sheer guts has stepped up to attempt saving an art form from ruthless attack from within.

Paul Romhany has spent thousands of hours creating a free, on-line magazine redirecting the notions of a beautiful art. The Art of Magic creates and perpetuates the saving grace of Wonder. Creating a modern vehicle that sets standards and popularizes excellence was something the Art of Magic deserved.

Paul Romhany has entered the pop culture batter box. So far, he has consistently gotten on base with a magazine that has changed the game. I'm proud to be on his team.

It's now time for you to meet him. Here's Paul —

PHOTOS RIGHT: Top - Paul doing a TV interview. Below - Paul at a Trade Show



PHOTO by Arto Airaksinen

# INTERVIEW

# PAUL ROMHANY

BY BEN ROBINSON



PHOTO by Arto Airaksinen

**Q Why are you a magician? What attracted you about magic initially?**

It stems back to wonder. Real wonder. Wonder I felt as a child. Age 7. I saw a magician. A Welsh magician named Peter Evans who lived in New Zealand. He made his wife float atop three swords. That moment of wonder is very special. It's real. It wasn't tricks. It was magic! I remember it when I see few performers work. Raymond Crowe does this for me. Later, Kevin James came to NZ and he made my dollar bill float in front of my eyes. Again; wonder! In both cases I did not want to know how the magic worked or how it was done. I just felt wonder for the world, which I feel every day concerning my life. Another influence was my mentor Wayne Rogers. I just wanted to do it too.

**Q Tell me a story about when you were starting out and you failed and what you did about it? How did you realize the failure? What did you seek as remedy?**

My twin brother Peter and I both played piano from a young age. From that I learned discipline. Waking early around 6am, and practicing for a half-hour. I learned that practice makes perfect. I also learned that there is light at the end of the tunnel, no matter what you go through. If you don't stop, then you build the confidence to move on.

In magic, if one does make a mistake, often the audience doesn't know what is coming next, so the young

magician learns the most powerful of all techniques for a magician's performance. And that is to "out." When I was 20 I was booked for a University dinner at the end of the year. I encountered a rough situation where a woman threw a bottle at my head and I stopped the show, went to the booker and demanded the police are called so I could file charges for assault. That would never happen today because I just would not have gone on with the audience being so rowdy yelling in unison "F%#& off, F%#& off!" They (the audience) were very drunk and had previously stormed the stage and taken over the musicians' instruments. So, you just can't work for people like that.

**Q In one six month period you two awards only presented if merited: The Robert-Houdin Award and in your home country of New Zealand you were given The Grand Master of Magic Award. In your life, what place does any award hold? And, has it affected your standing professionally? Do you make more money because you have these distinctions?**

Yes, no, yes! It is nice to receive awards, but I'm not a competitive person, so I consider my rudder that which I learned from my training as a musician. To tell the truth, at the end of the day, I am uncomfortable with awards. But, it is nice, and very surprising to receive some of the awards because you realize others

are thinking about you when you are not with them. I think about what I put into a routine or a show. I have learned to build confidence through repetition and that what I do stems from MY enjoyment. Do I like it? To me, it is about the enjoyment of life and the life I have and realizing that magic is a hard way to make a living. A hard road in general. I've sculpted my life to be able to have a home life, which is most important to me. My wife, son and the life we have — that drives me. That is what is most important.

**Q Your wife and son are the most important things in your life. Tell me how they contribute to your professional life and how do you see the next five years as your son grows. Meaning, have you projects you will say no to that previously you said yes to??**

It helps to put in perspective what I have already done, and realize I no longer need to do 300-shows-a-year. Before my son was born, my wife and I plotted out the life we wanted; which we now have. I do say "no" to many things that would take me away from them and home for say six months. I feel very fortunate to have the career I have (that I purposely created). I hope to inspire others to show that, with what I have done. To show others you can achieve your dreams. But you must be organized and have a plan.

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You take away all the other luxuries in life, and if you can make someone smile and laugh, you have given the most special gift: happiness.

**You've experimented with many different performance styles. Is this something you encourage in younger performers?**

Yes. You must find what works. You have to take the time to find out who you are. This can take a long time. You must be comfortable with who you are on stage. And, that may not be the same person you are off stage. I began admiring Harry Anderson and Paul Daniels a great deal. But when you copy someone, you will never be him or her. You have to find out who you are on stage. I am very comfortable with who I am. I have nothing to prove to anyone. The only person I am interested in impressing is myself. That is sort of a final knowledge that only comes after doing what you want to do in front of a live audience. Kids today on YouTube exhibit, but that is not working live and they will never understand the difference if they do not go out and learn in front of a real live, breathing audience.

**You've traveled extensively.**

**I think mostly you have visited countries on cruise ships. Is this true? If so, can you describe some of your favorite places and why they are your favorite?**

I've traveled mostly on cruise ships I suppose. I've now been to about 120 countries. Asia, the UAE, Australia, the US, all over, really. I seek moments that inspire. Inspire me. It's hard to name a favorite place. What I remember are moments. In 1997 I went to FISM, a very large magic convention. But what impressed me as much as the size of the convention was the city of Dresden and what it taught me about their history. Just walking the streets, endlessly, I asked so many questions: "What must this place have been like before the war?" All of the amazing artists that have come out of Germany throughout history. Again, it is about wonder in life. I feel this every day, but when I

travel, I seek the wonder that may not be present immediately. That is why you have to seek it; look for it. I remember being in Africa, seeing a shaman kneeling down in the dirt doing something like the cups and balls, but not that exactly. I just thought, "THIS is what this man does!" It was an incredible feeling. I remember those feelings that inspire me. That's what this is about...for me.

**The rise of technology, smart phones and the like has become pervasive to Western society. What is your opinion of how this affects the art of magic, if at all?**

It absolutely affects magic. Also magic affects technology. Scientists ask, "How can we make this go from here to here in a second?" Well, magicians do that, so they imitate us, but with a concentrated use of technology. We do it through psychology and magical technique, but the relationship is ever-changing and constantly revolving. I beta-tested a new effect recently where my business card appears in every smart phone in the audience. Because of this, I now have the ability to have my "call list" (people I will call) when I appear in their area. Magic leads science. We provide the goals they seek.

**Can you give some advice to those wanting to be as successful as you are and give an inkling as to your work habits? Do's and don'ts to actually calling yourself a professional magician.**

We're talking about those who perform and have magic as their sole income. That is a pro. Others dabble, and they do not have to make the sacrifices a professional does. That's what it comes down to really. A pro may do things because it is commercial, or can be seen by many people. Others who have magic as a hobby don't have these concerns. Secrecy is another concern of the professional. A pro spends

their life learning their craft, so those who come to me or you after a show expecting answers of how we do it, just don't have a clue as to the work that is put in. And that is understandable. (Though it doesn't make it any easier!) The other thing is to stay away from negativity. I find that when you expose your dreams to others, they tend to tear you down. You can't listen to that stuff. You have to work hard, set goals, have a clear vision and surround yourself with like-minded people. Easy to say. Difficult to do.

**And, VANISH was the first on line magic magazine, free, jam packed, and almost immediately hit the ground running to 100k people.**

**What made you go "all in" with such an amount of work?**

When I was a boy, age 7 or 8, I used to read a New Zealand magic magazine called *Magicana*. I wanted nothing in life more than to be an Editor of a magic magazine of quality that spotlighted performers and events I thought interesting; that held the art in a high, bright light. Well, now I am!

But, it took the technology a while to catch up to what I envisioned. Today *VANISH* reaches 100,000 strong, but as we both know, there are people in other arts and industries listening. It is such a compliment to the mission of the magazine to have someone like Aurelia Thierree and her incredible show grace our cover. No other magic magazine has ever done anything like that. Others can't do what we do, because our mission is different.

I wanted to go "all in" as you say, because it is important to me to give back.

I've had a fortunate career and it has come through a ton of hard work. Raising a family, while traveling is not something I wanted to do. So,

the magazine, developing quality products, having in depth interviews with people I admire is what turns me on. At the end of the day I do what I like; what entertains me; what I want to read. I don't see it as work. Designing, computers, the technology involved, none of this I am trained in professionally. I do it intuitively. But the magazine brings together all of my interests and this is my enjoyment really.

I don't model *VANISH* on what the magic fraternity has seen before. I look outside of magic for inspiration. With the printed copy of *VANISH* I looked at MAC magazine as my model, and created a high end publication that elevates the overall quality and feel of a magic magazine. I'm extremely proud of the printed version and the response has been overwhelming.

**Thanks Paul, I'm sure the VANISH readers are going to inhale who is at the helm and finally understand why you do it.**

My pleasure. My hope is that those reading will really take to heart all of our work and perpetuate the art of magic as something that provides wonder. That's what is important.

*Ben Robinson has conducted in-depth interviews for VANISH with international star Aurelia Thierree, master illusion designer Jim Steinmeyer and performing (and philanthropic) legend Paul Daniels. Paul Romhany serialized Robinson's The Importance of Wonder and later published it as an expanded book (April 2015). Ben Robinson lives in the quiet center of one of the world's largest cities. His new book will appear in 2016.*

