



By Tom Ewing

PHOTOS OF AWARDEES BY DIANE PONTIUS PHOTOGRAPHY

On Saturday, September 6, magicians and their guests from around the world gathered at the Garde Arts Center theater in New London, Connecticut for the thirty-third annual Milbourne Christopher Foundation awards ceremony. As in the past, the honorees spotlighted the best magic has to offer contemporaneously in performing, writing, publishing, and invention.

The categories reflect Christopher's diversified career, including the areas of author and/or publisher, outstanding illusionist or illusion creator, rising star, mentalist, lifetime achievement, close-up performer, award of excellence, and master's award. The evening opened with a cocktail reception where guests and awardees mingled. And then at 7:30 p.m., the awards presentations began.

Each awardee received an engraved plaque, a custom-designed wand with 24 carat gold tips in a presentation case fashioned by magic craftsman Tony Karpinski, and a beautiful Milbourne Christopher token struck for these occasions. After a brief video reviewing past and present winners, the award ceremony began.

Close-Up Award: Daniel Garcia

Besides being one of the most skilled and amazing close-up magicians, Garcia is also a consultant to stars like David Copperfield, David Blaine, Jon Dorenbos, Dynamo, and many others who come to him looking for ideas and effects to amaze. These stars come to him from many directions. Some come with an idea or an impossibility they want him to make a reality. Some come to him and just say, "Give me something" and he'll come up with a hundred ideas.

He has the uncanny ability to visualize his creations, transfer them to paper, build working models, and then move them to stage or television, where audiences around the world enjoy his efforts. He's like a ghostwriter – the talent behind the talent.

Garcia is constantly on the move, splitting his time between performances, lecturing at conventions, appearing at Hollywood's Magic Castle and his consulting business. He has created well over a hundred effects that have been sold by all the major magic websites and businesses. His effects have inspired thousands of magicians. Garcia said, "Magic is not about smoke, glitter, fancy lights, or big boxes. It's about joy, wonder, love, and how magic makes you feel." Currently consulting on *America's Got Talent*, he accepted his award by video from Hollywood.



Literary Award: Richard Hatch

A childhood interest in magic that began in Germany became a lifelong obsession and career for Hatch. He has been a full-time professional "deceptionist," as he calls himself, since 1983. He honed his craft entertaining guests as one of the house magicians at Houston's Magic Island night club before devoting himself exclusively to private and corporate work.

In 2010 he and his wife, the talented violinist Rosemary Kimura Hatch, opened the Hatch Academy of Magic and Music. He is now dedicating himself to preserving the history of Guenther Dammann, a Jewish German who published a book in 1933 in Berlin chronicling the lives of Jewish magicians. Dammann and his entire family perished in the Holocaust.



Last year, the *New York Times* devoted three pages of their Arts & Leisure section to Hatch's work translating Dammann's book, which he discovered in the magic section of the Yale University Library card catalog. He thought it was an antisemitic tract at first, given the date. He then realized it was an important text and contribution to magic history. Hatch lectured on the subject at the Holocaust Museum of Houston this past March and his translation of the Dammann book will be published by Tannen's Magic next summer.

Among his other literary efforts are a translation of Ottokar Fischer's second book on the magician Hofzinser, the first four volumes of *Card College* by Roberto Giobbi, *The Magic of Paul Potassy*, and numerous magazine and online articles. From Budapest and Taipei to

the Kingdom of Bahrain, he has delighted audiences worldwide with his performances. He says his favorite performances are those with Rosemary and their son, Jonathan – an ensemble performance that made its debut at the Stony Creek Puppet House Theater in Branford, Connecticut, in 1984.

Award of Excellence: Connie Boyd

Connie Boyd received the foundation's Award of Excellence. Of course, all the awards recognize excellence in various forms. This award, however, is special and the person receiving it must be special as well.

Boyd is a classically trained performer, not just a magician. She began her performing career as a dancer with the National Ballet of Canada. She then performed as an aerialist and juggler with the circus. That continued until a piece of rigging holding her aloft broke, sending her plunging to the ground where she broke both of her feet. During rehab and under the guidance of Barkley Shaw, she started to study and perform magic and eventually ended up as the principal magician on the Folies Bergère show at the Tropicana, replacing a recently departed Lance Burton.

Last May she lectured at the Magic Collector Expo in Las Vegas on the topic of magical women. It was outstanding and tremendously well received. Along with her lectures on magical women, Boyd arranges shows featuring them and is finishing a new book titled *The Power of Magical Women*, published by Vanish Press and Paul Romhany this coming November.

She has performed on many stages and cruise ships, at corporate events, and for thirteen years in Las Vegas and Europe. She is also a producer and director. In 2022 she received a Fellowship Award from the Academy of Magical Arts in Hollywood.

Through her diligent efforts, Boyd is revealing the wonderful and long-overlooked contributions of magical women. Magic has been and still is, in many ways, an all-boys club. Through her research and efforts, she's proving that's not true. Women have always been at the forefront of performing magic.

Ambassador of Magic Award: Terri Cook

The role of ambassador is an important task that can, and should, have wide-ranging impact. It takes a special person – someone dedicated, understanding, sensitive, and willing to put in the hard work. Those qualities perfectly describe this year's awardee Terri Cook. She is closely associated with Tannen's Magic Camp, which takes place each year in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, the city that has served as its location since 2007.

It's the only sleep-away magic camp for young magicians in the US. The days of this week-long camp are filled with instruction from professional conjurors, counselors, and guest lecturers, with performance time and plenty of space for personal interactions and more. Cook took over as director of the camp in the mid-1990s and continues to preside over the event to this day.

The list of past performers and lecturers who have appeared at the camp is quite extensive. In the past forty years, the lineup has included performers like Criss Angel, Banachek, Harry Blackstone Jr., John Calvert, John Cassidy, Michael Chaut, David Copperfield, Eric DeCamps, Marc DeSouza, and Joe Devlin, just to name a few.



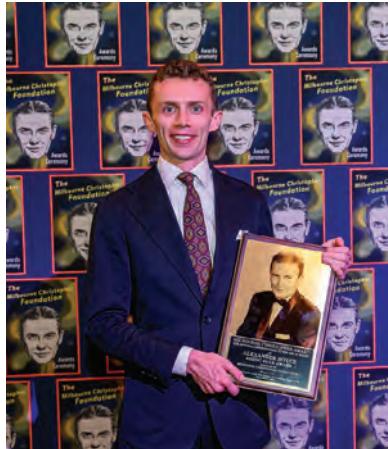
Cook and her talented staff have launched many a career through the camp, including those of Jay Sankey, Steve Cohen, Joshua Jay, David "Silly Billy" Kaye, David Blaine, Nathan Burton, Harrison Greenbaum, Darren Romeo, and TV stars Jason Alexander and Michael Carbonaro.

Cook handles not only the details of running the camp but also the interpersonal relationships among counselors and campers. As she has done for forty years years, she continues to preside over the camp where she is known affectionately as "Mamma Magic."

Rising Star Award: Alexander Boyce

The Rising Star Award is uniquely named because it can refer to either a young magician who is rising in prominence, or a magician who is constantly rising. Both of these are true of Alexander Boyce, especially the constantly rising part.

Not yet thirty, Boyce has accomplished more than many magicians who are much older and have been performing longer. His appearances include New York City's long-running Speakeasy Magick, appearances at The Magic Castle in Hollywood, Harvard's American Repertory Theater, and Salon Rojo in Havana, Cuba. Boyce has appeared on national television shows like *Penn & Teller: Fool Us*. Teller said of him, "He joyfully melts my brain with virtuoso sleight of hand. He's a master."



His magical expertise extends beyond live events, serving as magic consultant for the Lincoln Center's show with Marisa Tomei, NBC's *New Amsterdam*, and Netflix's feature *The Week Of*. Boyce has performed magic for clients like NASDAQ, Amazon, Google, and Hugo Boss. *The New York Times* named *Bizarre Brooklyn*, a production he co-created and in which he starred, among the best theater of the year.

Along with loving and supportive parents in his younger years, Boyce also credits his success to early experiences at Tannen's Magic Camp, which he attended when he was eleven. David Corsaro, one of those Tannen guys, said of him, "His enthusiasm is infectious, and he is wise beyond his years. A deeply studious magician, a classically trained actor, and a surprisingly good dancer – I would jump at any opportunity to collaborate with him again."

Masters Award: Steve Valentine

There was no question among the nominating committee that Steve Valentine deserved its Masters Award. The one question that arose was, "Is he a magician-actor, or an actor-magician?" Well, he's both – and to a tremendous degree.

Valentine was born in Britain and began his career as a magician, but was also very interested in acting. When he came to Los Angeles to make his way, he believed he could do both magic *and* acting. He soon realized most producers did not consider magicians to be actors, so he left magic behind and jumped into acting.



That has gone pretty well. The various television shows, movies, and other performances he's done include playing Nigel Townsend on NBC's crime

drama series *Crossing Jordon*, and guest starring on shows like *House*, *Monk*, *Just Shoot Me*, *Will & Grace*, *Dharma & Greg*, *Psych*, and *Charmed*. Valentine was the voice of Harry Flynn in the video game *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves*, and the voice of Alistair in the *Dragon Age* video game franchise. He also portrayed Dracula in *Monster High: The Movie* and its sequel *Monster High 2*.

But with acting success came the urge to return to magic and that he did. Valentine appears regularly at Hollywood's Magic Castle, has starred in his own one-man show *Life and Other Deceptions*, completed a national tour with *The Illusionists*, streams magic lessons and personal training to people around the world, and has been featured on the cover of nearly every English-speaking magic magazine in the world. The foundation is pleased Valentine decided to be who he has chosen to be.

Illusionist Award: Leon Etienne & Chelsea LaCongo

The recipients of the Christopher Foundation's Illusionist of the Year award, Leon Etienne and Chelsea, were originally selected in 2024. However, they were so busy performing that they were moved to 2025 when they could take an ever-so-brief break from their non-stop performance schedule. Their website gives you an indication of their busy and accomplished lives.

From Radio City Music Hall to Planet Hollywood Casino, and from Studio City Casino in Macau to his very own theater on the beautiful island waters of Saipan, the unique performance style of illusionist Leon Etienne attracts entertainment producers to book him all over the world. He's rocked stages from coast to coast in the US and dozens of other countries, including England, Ireland, France, China, and Australia. His performances frequently leave celebrities like Jimmy Fallon, Howard Stern, and Heidi Klum speechless.

Hailed by critics as "America's Rock Illusionist," Etienne is a worldwide hit with audiences, critics, and producers. He is recognized for his on-stage charisma, no-nonsense approach to magic, and a fast-paced, high-energy, edgy rock n' roll performance style. He has appeared on the world's biggest TV shows, trended worldwide on social media, and performs live at entertainment hotspots around the world.

Etienne's original creations, a passion for sleight-of-hand magic, and the best jaw dropping grand illusions in the world explode on stage in his critically acclaimed hit show, "Magic Rocks!"

However, Etienne has not done it alone. He has had by his side the skills and daily contributions of Chelsea LaCongo. They met years ago on a cruise ship, where he was doing magic and she was a professional dancer. When they started working together the effect was immediate: they hit it off and their audiences saw that. LaCongo is active both off stage and on. She co-produces and choreographs the show, checks people in, sells merchandise, and runs the entire production, allowing Etienne to focus on getting ready to amaze people.

Etienne and LaCongo have logged thousands of shows over the years, and both have grown into the entertainers honored that night. They've already won a few awards along the way, including successfully fooling Penn & Teller on their CW show *Fool Us*, being named Illusionist of the Year from Madrake d'Or in Paris, winning the Wizard Wars as seen on the SYFY network, and being awarded Stage Magic Winner at Magician's Alliance of Eastern States.



Lifetime Achievement Award: Alan Watson

This year's winner of the Lifetime Achievement award, Alan Watson, is no stranger to awards. Most recently, as part of his seventy-fifth birthday celebration, he was honored with a star on the New Zealand Walk of Fame. The installation will take place this November. The New Zealand Walk of Fame celebrates legendary Kiwi entertainers who have made a lasting impact on the country's entertainment industry, an accolade that is certainly true of Watson.

Alongside his wife Michele and his family, he has enjoyed an extraordinary career spanning decades. Once one of the busiest teams in show business, the family's cornerstone of success has been their enjoyment of performing, whether it be at a children's party, corporate event, television show, or live tour.

Over the years, he and Michele have brought their magic to countless audiences across New Zealand and beyond. He performed more than 1,400 nights over five and a half years at Fisherman's Wharf Restaurant; spent eleven years amazing guests at Waipuna Hotel's Wellingtons Restaurant; was the resident magician for twenty-six years at Rainbow's End, New Zealand's largest theme park; and was also the resident magician for The Pavilion of New Zealand, Auckland Lion Safari Park, and Foot Rock Flats.

In 1987, he and Michele made history as the first Kiwi close-up magicians to perform at the world-famous Magic Castle in Hollywood, proudly promoting their country with a New Zealand-themed magic act. In 1991, their three daughters, ten-year-old twins Larissa and Melanie and thirteen-year-old Nicole, performed at the Palace of Mystery at that same Magic Castle. They were the youngest and only twins to have performed there.

Watson also founded the world's first online graphical magic bulletin board and published the globally read *Magic New Zealand* e-zine, connecting more than seventeen thousand magicians in seventy-eight countries each week for twenty-five years.

As for awards, in 2006 he received both New Zealand's prestigious Benny Award and the Grand Master of Magic Award. Internationally, he and Michele were honored with the DRAGON Award in 2002 in New York. In 2015, he received the Award of Merit from the Academy of Magical Arts in the US and was inducted into their Hall of Fame. In 2015, he received the Queen's Service Medal for his services as a magician – a testament not only to his talent but to his generosity and impact. The foundation was extremely proud to present him with its Lifetime Achievement Award.

The evening closed with a magic show performed by the amazingly funny and astounding Jim Spinnato. The foundation was lucky to lure him away from his regular, four-shows-a-week schedule at the Mohegan Sun Casino, a gig that he has held for the past fifteen years. The noted magician, author, and magic dealer Meir Yedid filled in for Spinnato at the casino that evening. Spinnato is very well known in the New England and Connecticut area. For five years he lit up New Haven with a monthly comedy magic show. For twenty-five years he produced seasonal magic shows at Ocean Beach Park in New London. Appearing at the Garde Arts Center was very meaningful to Spinnato, who sat as a young boy in that same theater. Now he was performing there, completing the circle. The audience roared throughout at his humor and magic.





Chair of the foundation, David Haversat, (far left) and Tom Ewing (far right) flank this year's recipients listed above. (Daniel Garcia not present).

The chair of the foundation is David Haversat and the treasurer and secretary is Lorraine Anderson. These awards would not be possible without their hard work and attention to detail. The award winners were selected by a panel of judges comprised of leaders in the magic community, including: Tom Ewing as chair, David Haversat, Tony Clark, Paul Mayer, Rob Allen, Kenneth Trombly, and Mike Miller.

Sign Up a New Member

Ask our Headquarters Office for some Membership Brochures and Application Forms (or visit www.magician.org) and sign up someone interested in magic. Show them a *Linking Ring*, invite them to a meeting, and tell them about our magic-filled Convention!