

SyFy Channel star coming to Greene County

By Kate Seckinger Columbia-Greene Media | Posted: Wednesday, February 11, 2015 12:30 am

CATSKILL — One day, an eight-year-old boy picked up a book from his school library that would change his life.

Known as the class clown who didn't pay attention much, he plucked a random book from the shelf when the teacher told him to choose one for a book report.

When he sat back down on the carpet to read, he was taken to a place he'd never want to leave: A world of magic.

It was a children's book that contained basic tricks, and the boy had a blast fooling his friends around the streets of New York City for the next few days. Before long, he earned himself the nickname of "the magic man."

Now more than 30 years later, Magick Balay is a professional magician and illusionist — and the star of the show "Close Up Kings" on the SyFy Channel. He has performed for audiences nationwide.

"After I did those tricks for some friends, I was hooked, and it was all downhill — or uphill I guess you could say — from there," Balay said.

The illusionist has performed for dozens of celebrities including Michael Jackson, Britney Spears, Steve Martin and many more, and has delighted in entertaining others with his magic tricks since he was that eight-year-old in the school library.

"Entertainment is first," Balay said. "Whether you're a singer or whatever you do, entertaining our audience is what comes first."



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Magick Balay will perform in Catskill at the Bridge Street Theatre Speakeasy at 44 W. Bridge St. at 2 p.m. Sunday. The famous magician will follow with a second Sunday show at 8 p.m. at the Windham Civic and Performing Arts Center at 5379 Main St. in Windham. Photo contributed

Balay will perform in Greene County this week in two shows with entertainers Dave Murillo, Steve Allen Dane and Sean Doolen.

The first show will take place in Catskill at the Bridge Street Theatre Speakeasy at 44 W. Bridge St. at 2 p.m. The famous magician will follow with a second Sunday show at 8 p.m. at the Windham Civic and Performing Arts Center located at 5379 Main St. in Windham.

In the years that passed after cracking open that first magic book, Balay could always be found in a magic shop at the Crossroads of the World — 42nd Street in Manhattan.

“Back then, that street was full of drugs and hookers and my parents didn’t want me there, but there was a little glass counter with more tricks I could buy,” Balay recalled. “Then I found a magic shop, and once I found it, you couldn’t get me out of that space. Whenever I saved 10 bucks, I was there blowing up more tricks. It became my haven.”

When Balay was a teen, the magic shop he’d been going to and learning from hired him. The rest was history.

Over the years, Balay has worked as a magician for companies such as FAO Schwarz, Marlboro, Fantasma in Times Square and Tannen’s — the largest magic shop in the world.

“Every single job I’ve had in my life has been in a magic shop, and it’s been handed to me,” Balay said. “That kind of blessing is amazing.”

The professional magician performs many tricks, but is known for his ability to make things levitate, or what Balay calls “Centrifugal.”

“There’s a trick to the mind, and there’s no explaining it,” Balay said. “It looks like the thing is flying around, and it really is. It’s amazing with the techniques we have that we can create the illusion that it’s happening. Anything is possible.”

Balay performed his famous levitation trick for “Superman” star Christopher Reeve, and said it was one of the most memorable tricks he’s performed in his life.

“Growing up, I knew Christopher Reeve was Superman,” Balay said. “Being that superhero, I couldn’t just tell him to pick a card. As I looked at him in his wheelchair, I said, ‘When I was a kid, you made me believe that a man could fly. You’ll always be Superman to me.’”

Balay took an object and made it float in front of Reeve’s eyes. The eyes of Superman lit up in seconds.

“His face was priceless,” Balay said. “His wife told me I’d made his entire year, but she didn’t understand — he’d just made mine.”

While Balay is known for his levitation trick and others, he said has no issue with sharing how he does them. The illusionist sells several instructional DVDs that range from around \$30 to \$50 that reveal how his famous tricks are performed.

“That’s how we all learn,” Balay said. “We all learn from someone else. Back in the day you had to know another magician to learn it yourself, but I learned from scratch without a mentor, and now I teach, and I want to teach anyone who wants to learn.”

Balay admitted that people can’t pick up his levitation trick and expect to do it immediately, but he won’t stop anyone from trying.

“You have to crawl before you can walk, and walk before you can run,” Balay said. “I know others would would push this stuff on people and not be honest, but I’ll be straight with them because I remember that feeling of being behind the counter.”

Balay said he is eager to perform for people in Greene County because it’s a new place he’s never performed before.

“We know people in that area don’t get to see this kind of thing a lot,” Balay said. “It’s great to have fresh faces to give us that new vibe.”

Balay said unlike other magicians, he doesn’t try to convince people that he has special powers.

“I have the gift of magic, and it is a gift,” Balay explained. “My gift is to make you believe and make you see what you want to see.”

Both the 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. shows will have common material like Balay’s levitation trick and popular card and coin tricks, but the tricks aren’t planned with a strict script like people may think.

“It’s magic,” Balay said. “Anything can happen.”

Tickets are \$15 for general admission and \$10 for students with an ID. Reservations for the afternoon show in Catskill can be made by calling 518-943-3818, and reservations can be made for the evening show in Windham by calling 518-755-3433.

To reach reporter Kate Seckinger, call the Daily Mail at 943-2100 ext. 3323 or email kseckinger@thedailymail.net.