



Anthony Darkstone Brook In Conversation With Murray SawChuck

Murray SawChuck, or as he is better known, “the cd guy” or “the guy with the hair “ and even more recently I heard several people in Vegas refer to him as the “that amazing cd guy with the hair”. Murray travels Internationally but now makes Vegas his base. A very long way indeed from his birthplace of Vancouver, Canada.

Before he was 18, he was already a Magical Superstar on The International scene and amazed audiences in several countries. He is the epitome of a consummate showman and he possesses that rare quality of being both a strategic and intuitive thinker.

I first met him at a Convention some years ago and he had that special something that made him extremely noteworthy. He delivered a flawless performance. I watched from the wings as an audience of experienced Magicians gave him a standing O.

I was doubly impressed not only with his skills as a Magical Entertainer but by his incisive grasp of what it takes to be an outstanding performer. He is exceptionally skilled at Stagecraft.

I recently met up with him in Vegas and he introduced me to John and Arlene Sawchuk his proud parents who were visiting.

<http://arleneandjohnny.com/>

(A website Murray made for his parents one Christmas honoring their life and times together.)

<http://murraysawchuck.com/>

ADB: Hello Murray, thanks for taking time out to converse a while

MS: Hi Tony, always a pleasure talking to you.

ADB: Y'know , in all my talk shows and articles of this nature , I absolutely avoid asking obvious questions like “how did you get started in magic? “ or “when did the magic bug bite?” but in your case, I will make an exception and ask them because the answer reveals a Circle of Magic that reads better than a Hollywood script, ..in a way, you were influenced by Las Vegas and then ... well, you tell the story

MS: Well, I guess that is just so; I was born in Vancouver , Canada in 1980 and at 8 years old I was given a Magic set...but not just any Magic set , it was a Siegfried & Roy Magic set. Now I live in Vegas and along my magical pathway actually got to meet and know Siegfried & Roy. That was truly amazing.

ADB: Let's fast forward a few years when you opened at The Frontier in Vegas and they came to your show. That was a bittersweet time wasn't it?

MS. Yes Tony it sure was ...I was going thru some things in my personal life. A divorce. You yourself and others have experienced similar things , but you know the cliché , “The Show Must Go On”...well , my contract at the Frontier was for only 2 months but was extended for a further two. Those were some heady months for me. I watched with amazement at the various stars who came to watch the show. One of my most thrilling moments was when I walked on stage and saw Siegfried in the audience. I was awe-struck. A legend at my show, watching me! A kid

from Vancouver, Canada who had a dream to have his own show in Las Vegas. Now Siegfried, the man who had changed magic in Las Vegas along with his partner Roy, was watching me !

ADB: Now you know why I brought up the question about your first Magic set...something even better happened after the show

MS: Yes it did Tony. After the show, Siegfried waited till the audience left so that we could chat. We took pictures, and Siegfried invited me to see his show. At their show, I sat in Siegfried's booth and was escorted backstage to meet the famous duo. The respect I was shown by two of the giants of magic, gave me an elation unlike any I had felt before. This wasn't just respect by my peers; this was respect from the top.

ADB: I bet it was...but let me take you back to when you were 16 and you went to Stan Kramien's Convention in some excellent company ...once you got there , you met two people who changed your Life forever ...share with us a little of that adventure

MS: Sure. That was really a huge turning point for me. At the time, I already had several shows under my belt, was doing OK and received many bookings because I was young, good at what I was doing, and a cute kid.

However, the only thing that was original about me was that I was young, and doing some pretty cool miracles. I was doing a good enough job fooling adults.

Then Shawn Farquhar, my first mentor, encouraged me to go to Brush Prairie, Washington for Stan Kramien's Magic Convention. My parents were understandably reluctant to allow me to go. There was a group of about 12 Vancouver magicians, including Juliana Chen who was going and Shawn assured them that I would be safe. Well, anyway, we all drove down together. The two major headliners that year were Johnny Ace Palmer and Mr. Electric. What an experience that was for me at 16!

ADB: Ah! Yes! Whatever happened to Shawn ? Just kidding. I first met him at The 2001 SAM Convention in New Orleans. He was competing in the Close-Up contest. Jon Racherbaumer and I were judges. Shawn blew us away and won Joint First Place. I met Juliana once at a FISM and she is amazing . She was also something of an inspiration to you as well....

MS: Oh yes she was ! Many people influenced my early magic, but the person who affected me the most at that time was Juliana Chen. She had just arrived in Vancouver from China, and her act with cards was amazing. It also sparked a creative idea that I was to develop and use later.

ADB: I can well imagine how you must have been feeling but little did you know, it was going to totally change your Life...

MS: Yes it did Tony , much better than I could ever imagine. I still remember it clearly as if it happened this morning. I was standing in the lobby of the hotel when Shawn tapped me on the shoulder and said, "See that couple sitting over there? That's Mr. Electric and Carol! They're legends!"

I thought Ok but I have to honestly say, at that time, I had no idea who they were. Shawn explained that they were one of the greatest touring cabaret acts in the world. Then Shawn told me that they turned on real light bulbs magically. I just couldn't believe it!

As luck would have it , the next day Shawn introduced me to Marvyn and Carol Roy. They didn't perform their act, but they lectured and played a video of it. I was stunned! I couldn't believe how original it was. They were classy, elegant and memorable. That totally changed my life in the magic world forever.

ADB: But that wasn't the best part was it? And just when it couldn't get any better it did

MS: Yes Tony and how!!! I even got to spend quality time with them and we exchanged contact information. Marv then told me something that I will always live by; Marvyn said, "Kid, you are

young now, and you're cute, and what you do is amazing because you are young. But one day soon, and sooner than you think, you will be old and your talent will have to shine through, not just your looks! What you are doing now is great! But you're young, so you have a choice. You can work on an act for 1 year and do it for 5 years successfully because you are young and cute; people will like that novelty. Or you can work on an original act for 5 years and perform it for a lifetime, because it will be different from anyone else, so you will be the only one they will want." Marv continued, "If you are at a show with 19 of the best bird acts, and one meatball act that is just as good, who is going to be remembered? Yes, the meatball act!" You need a hook and you need to be remembered!"

ADB: That set your mind racing ..right?

MS: Yes, it did; in several directions at once. A hook? I was thinking, I need a hook... a hook; I could produce a candle pretty well, and pull a mouth coil from my mouth differently. But I knew this was not nearly enough and so I began to work day and night to struggle up the ladder of originality to achieve, through trial and error, an act that I could call my own.

ADB: Well, as we all know , you most certainly did that but it didn't happen overnight did it? Another life changing event occurred at the PCAM Convention in Victoria, BC - Canada that helped move you towards that objective

MS: Yes Tony. At that time, I was producing budgies. Three minutes before an earlier competition the final production of my act flew out of my dressing room, out the open door into the parking lot. Fully dressed in my tuxedo, along with several stagehands I ran out trying to catch the runaway yellow parakeet. In the theatre, were about 500 audience members, with no idea that just behind them, outside, the next act was running between cars in the parking lot, trying to catch his act. The little bird was finally captured, but at the expense of all the loads in my tux, which were jolted out of place. I stumbled through the act, and learned a few more valuable lessons. I kept performing with the birds for about another year. The last time was at the PCAM convention in Monterey, California.

It was the same act, with a final production of two parakeets appearing on top of a jumbo fan of cards. I was told that in the audience were the Larsons. My dream at the time, was to perform at The Magic Castle. I was excited at the possibility of the Larsons seeing me and booking me on the spot.

I gave a great performance ..however,And yes ...wait for it ... at the end of the performance, one of my birds took flight and perched on the uppermost rafter of the room. The 16 acts that followed were forced to compete with birds chirping throughout their acts. After the competition was over I prepared to capture the bird when it eventually flew down to the seating rafters. Behind me was a lady, whistling to the bird. It seemed to listen to her, and eventually went in its cage. I thanked her. Then she introduced herself. Irene Larson.

ADB: Yeah! ..and I hate you as I was one of those 16 acts that had to follow you with a bird chorus in the backgroundno! no! I'm just kidding , but I bet those 16 acts following you really loved you What happened at the Competition?

MS: You are right Tony; I bet if I was one of the 16 acts, I too would have loved the birds in the background ...but in my defense... what can I say, that's showbiz. And seeing that you asked , I won First Place in the Youth Stage Category, but I also made an on –the –spot decision . It was the last time I performed with birds. Now they are just pets.

ADB: He! He! Good decision. Can't say I blame you but these happy mishaps propelled you further into originality ...but before we explore that, I recall, a few years ago, you and my son had a conversation about competing and how you lost at a major competition . I bring that up because you had the extraordinary maturity to use that as a learning curve. What was that competition and how did losing help you to improve?

MS. Well...not losing exactly, there were only four competitors and I came fourth ...well... Ok you're right, I lost well..here's the full story, the PCAM competition was coming up in Reno, Nevada at the Flamingo Hotel and I wanted to be in the Pro-Challenge, the highest competition in the PCAM. I was accepted and booked a flight to Reno. My parents, along with a few friends flew in to watch the competition. It would be my first time performing, and competing in an American casino in front of a public audience. I was confident of winning a prize.

I flew into Reno, Nevada, picked up my table from the baggage area - but no suit! They had lost the piece of luggage that contained my custom suit and props. It was 9:00 AM and there were about 4 other flights arriving from Vancouver. Reno Air didn't have the usual Bar Code suitcase checks. Rather, they had numbers staple to each suitcase so that luggage was not registered to their destination. Not exactly high tech! I gave them the details.

After all, it was early morning, and the show wasn't until 8:00 PM. At 4:00 PM the last plane from Vancouver landed..and yes ... without my luggage.

By 7:00 PM I was absolutely exhausted, both physically and mentally. I realized I could not compete. As I said before, there were only 4 competitors, so this would have given me a huge chance of winning something. I would have been competing against Ice McDonald 'birds', Knowlen Kraver 'birds', and Jason Bryne 'birds'. I knew I would have been the Meatball act.

By 7:20 they had crossed my name off the list. I was sitting backstage and to put it mildly, depressed. And then , would you believe it , at 7:30 the stage doors burst open and Reno Air delivered my bags. I was totally stressed and not a bit concerned about winning but back in business. I just wanted to say that I had performed on the Flamingo stage. I opened the competition. The audience response was nice, and the winner was by People's Choice. After the show I waited in the wings with the rest of the competitors: 1st place Jason Byrne, 2nd place Ice Mc Donald, 3rd place, Knowlen Craver. I was placed 4th out of 4! My luggage had been lost, been stressed out all day, my parents and their friends had flown from Vancouver and I was placed 4th out of 4.

ADB: Well, there's that old saying, " You're not really a Pro unless your suitcase goes in the entirely opposite direction to your performing venue" Yes indeed, I can empathize with you on that one ...it's happened to me, and others too...but you learn to adapt and pack differentlyyou did ...

MS: Yes I did. Once I got over the initial set-back I use it as a learning curve. It is all part of being a Pro.

ADB: Ah! the Life of a Super Star , but what people don't often know is the behind the scenes hassles and agonies. Another memorable incident was organizing Props and equipment for your first Cruise ship gig ..share that with us ...

MS. It's funny now , but at the time it was, as you said, agony . I had just landed my first gig on a cruise ship. It all began when I saw a cover article in MAGIC with a cruise ship on the front. That was it, I thought. I also wanted to work on cruise ships. It paid well, I could see the world. I tried to obtain a job on a cruise ship for 2 years, with 4 different promotional tapes, edited professionally. Nothing.

Then one day, I was mowing my parents lawn when the phone rang. On the other end was John Whitefoot, from Whitefoot Entertainments. Whitefoot Entertainments is one of the top cruise ship-booking agents in Canada. He had seen my tapes and offered me two-month engagement on the Regent Sun Cruise Ship traveling from Montreal to New York. I had to do two 45-minute shows. I had about 10 days to get ready. The fee was \$1100 USD a week. I was stunned. I didn't expect to be on a cruise ship until I was 30! I said yes, and did 3 cartwheels. I realized I had only about 30 minutes of material for the cruise ship. I needed 1 ½ hours of magic in just a few days. I ordered a plethora of magic Tannen's in New York and Perfect Magic in Montreal to make up the 2 shows and wrote down routines to piece the tricks together. Some of the material didn't arrive in time so I had them shipped to New York so that I could work on new routines for the 1 week cruise back to Montreal. Sleepless nights became a fact of life.

I had no professional cargo cases, nothing to transport my equipment. So I borrowed my Uncle Bill's old 'steamer' trunk with the real leather handles and brass pop riveted corners, and mounted it on an orange dolly from Home Depot because those trunks didn't have wheels.

At Montreal's Dorval Airport, I had to pull the luggage from one end of the airport to the other, trying to find a taxi. The steamer trunk was extremely heavy, and the dolly wasn't made for that load. As I was straining, half way to the other side, both wheels on the dolly caved in. I almost missed my first Cruise ship!

ADB: Well, we are laughing now ...but at the time I bet you weren'tand obviously, you solved the problemanyway, enough of Props and baggage....Let's talk about happy memories It is great feeling to be on the cover of a Magic magazine, I was very honored to be on the cover of M-U-M back in January 2001 and if my memory serves me right, you were on the cover of M-U-M back in December 2000. Dave Goodsell (Editor at that time) told me you ordered 500 extra copies as promo material. Was that your first cover?

MS: Yes M-U-M was my first magazine cover and it was GREAT! That's right. The December 2000 issue. The one just before you. Such a thrill and I have to thank David Goodsell for believing in me and doing such a great job on the story! Yes I did order 500 copies as I am a HUGE promoter and so work hard on getting the WORD out! Actually the cover photo was taken especially for that cover and now is my 'signature' Magic headshot photo and poster photo. I have redone the photo, as my black framed Armani glasses have become a fixture of my LOOK now...

At that time, and I remember it well, I was performing at The Magic Castle and in LA at the time but I wanted my photographer in Orlando, FL to take the photo so I flew back to Michael Cairn's photo studio in Orlando to take the photo... my original idea was to have a blow dryer on my hair in front of a dressing room mirror and a comb and out of the dryer FLAMES would be coming out... well I don't like Photoshop much... especially FIRE... it never looks REAL... so when I arrived in Orlando, I went to Home Depot to buy a blow torch...

ADB: A blowtorch? You're kidding right?

MS: No, really, I did buy a blow torch.....that way he could take the pic with the dryer by my hair... then take a pic of the blowtorch FLAME and drop the REAL flame onto the dryer... Well as soon as I picked up the blowtorch... I knew THAT WAS THE PHOTO... NO dryer... I'll use the whole blow torch as MY DRYER... and that's how my 'signature' photo happened! Always take a RISK it usually turns out better than you planned!

ADB: That's for sure ...! Now , I've been saving the best for last, I want to talk to you about your CD act and your image. Share with us some of the back-ground story on how all that came about...

MS: I had been doing fairly well but still in the back of my mind, I knew there was an unfulfilled need for me to go that extra mile. I had always loved horses and riding.

I even rode in the rodeo for a couple of years. So not surprisingly, the idea of a western act appealed a great deal .I thought it would interesting to produce horseshoes, riding gear, and then end with a big saddle. I built a folding horseshoe that fitted into the bend of my hand, with a spring hinge for easy production.

I was also, at that time, working at The Hudson's Bay Company department store in Burnaby in the electronics section, helping people choose cameras, radios, tapes and CDs. This is when cassette tapes were going out of fashion, being replaced by CDs. One slow night, I picked up a returned CD and held it in the same grip as I held the horseshoes. BINGO! That was it! I vanished it. I then did it again for a colleague and completely fooled him!

From that moment on, including the rest of the workday, I wrote down the classics of magic and figured out a way to create an act with a CD. By the end of the day, I had about 15 different

ideas! Good-bye horseshoe act. Hello CD act! As I mentioned earlier, Juliana Chen's card manipulation was also inspirational.

The look...well, I decided to add a costume change. I had seen Rudy Colby's costume change in Japan, and loved it, so I phoned Colby to ask if he could buy the idea from him. Naturally, he wanted his to be unique to his act, so I had to come up with an idea of my own. In Japan, an idea clicked. I wrote it down for later.

Fortunately, my Mom is an 'at home seamstress'. I showed her my costume change designs and during the next month, often with the costume material draped over me, my Mom worked on a trial and error basis to perfect my idea. Four nights a week for four weeks. Then one night, it worked, the costume change I still use was born.

Back to the CDs. I made some drastic changes. I colored the CDs and changed the color of my suit. I was inspired to change the suit to blue by the Jim Carey's movie Mask in which Carey wore a yellow one.

The hair! I was watching the MTV music awards and saw Rod Stewart come on stage to accept an award. I loved his hairstyle and realized no one in magic wore a similar style. I changed my hairstyle for a Halloween Party and people thought it was cool. Then a few months later when I still COMBED my hair... I went camping with a couple of guys and girls from my school... I woke up in the morning out of the tent to make coffee on the fireplace and one of the girls said 'Your hair looks cute!' So I thought well if my hair looks cute at 8 AM...in the morning... it probably would look cute at 8 at night... I decided to keep the look as my HOOK. Thanks to Rod Stewart, it is now my trademark and is copied by other magicians..

ADB: There was something else that propelled the CD act...I'm referring to some comments made by Marvyn and Carol Roy....

MS: I was in the fall of 1998, asked by the Roys to work on The Lawrence Welk Christmas show in Escondido, CA. I remembered watching the show with my parents when I was young. This would be such a nostalgic thing to do. But, as a Canadian, I needed a Visa and in order to get an American work visa, I had to prove that my act was unique, and that there wasn't an American who could perform it.

The first visa was denied because of improper paperwork and I was unable to perform for the Welk show that year. It took another two years to have my visa application accepted. So to be totally unique, I kept working on the original CD act and winning awards. I had to have an original act that was above standard.

Eventually, I flew to San Diego, CA for my engagement at the Lawrence Welk Show. Marv and Carol who were living 2 hours away in Palm Springs and came down to see my CD act. I was ecstatic that my mentors Marv and Carol were coming to see me. By then, we had a friendship spanning 8 years and the CD act was developing well. I had put in larger productions, had a custom suit designed and had some quality effects with CDs. Naturally, Marv and Carol were given the best seats in the theatre.

After the show, the Roys critiqued the act. Although they knew it was good, they were equally aware that improvements could be made. Marv encouraged me to talk more during my FULL show; he said people liked to listen to me because I had charm. And one more thing he added was, "During the act, HOLD your BOW LONGER" !!!

Carol suggested stage make-up, then added, "and Murray, comb your hair. It's a mess!" "You must wear make-up... you look like you're in a rehearsal, a good rehearsal, but the white lights wash you out. You just need a base, some eyeliner and you're set."

Marv then gave me some advice that all magicians should heed. "You have so much potential. You have the personality, you look great, you have this great idea, but it is still only a great idea.

It's not an act yet. Your music has to flow like a movie with high and low points. You are using modern music with no flow or build up. You must build up to your applause or the audience won't know when to clap. You have to re-organize your effects. Take your closing effect and make it your opening, then make a better closing. Once you've done that, make the closing effect your opening again, and build an act of miracles. Don't fluff around. Get to the point and kill'em! If the buyer hears the applause you will be rebooked and that's what it's about! Tighten it up. Take all the magic effects in the act, write them down and take the ones out that just are getting only a weak applause, and find music that crescendos."

I was honored to be critiqued so honestly, yet shocked at the same time! Then, he really scared me completely. "Look," said Marv, "you have the skill and personality to be a name in the business, but you have to get it together. 'YOU ONLY HAVE ANOTHER FEW YEARS TO MAKE IT, OR YOU ARE JUST GOING TO BE ANOTHER MAGICIAN' Nothing is wrong with being another magician and you can make great money, but you've got what it takes to be better than that. You just have to home in on it."

ADB: Tough but honest words and given to help you unleash your true potential ...what did you do?

MS: I had the good sense to understand that although it scared me , I was being honestly shown how to bring out my real potential and so I went back to the hotel room, found a pen, grabbed some hotel notepaper and wrote the whole act out.

I eliminated tricks I loved, but for which I got no response - tricks that took me half a year to learn! I didn't sleep that night. I stayed up, re working the act. I kept working on the act until show time.

I completed my contract at the Lawrence Welk Theatre in January, 1999. I was committed to living in the States with my future wife, and began thinking ahead to competing in some of the serious competitions offered in the US.

The timing was right. I couldn't get a work permit for another six months to work in the States and competitions would provide a venue to show off my new improved act to a good cross section of magicians.

ADB: And that you did do in grand style

MS. Yes Tony. I messed up my hair more. I also changed the color of my suit to blue. My music now had 28 different tracks, all professionally edited so that everything was choreographed and timed perfectly to my movements.

TB: That kind of commitment, dedication and fine-tuned Professionalism has brought you International stardom and with it many accolades and Awards...but one is very special

MS: I am very grateful to be honored this way. I've won 24 awards, 1999 was very special ...I won a total of 7 that year!..... but the one that has a special place in my office is the TAOM's Herman Yeager Award for the best overall performance. It hadn't been presented in 17 years. I won that in 1999

ADB: Excellent. Congratulations. I love TAOMs . I've been to a few and been honored to perform as well. As I mentioned earlier, you have had all kinds of accolades, are a true International Star Performer and have had many wonderful compliments from several leading names in the business, but apart from Marvyn & Carol there are two other people that mean a lot to you....

MS: Yes Tony, you are referring to Jack & Mary Kodell. Jack Kodell, as you know, was the magician who basically invented bird magic specifically using parakeets. I have many wonderful stories relating to them and it would literally take hours and hours to even begin to scratch the surface of my relationship with them. For now, it is enough to say I am blessed and honored by their love & friendship.

ADB: I know. You are just incredible. There is so much of your amazing life I have had to leave out because of time and space but I am in awe of all that you have accomplished and you are not yet 30! At the beginning of our conversation, I referred to your Life reading like a Hollywood script. And you know what? Someone should make a movie or TV Documentary about you ...wouldn't surprise me at all if that happened ...well ..let me correct myself ...not 'if' but 'when' that happens ..and by the way, Mur, you better call me to write the Script!!!

MS: You got it Tony! It's a deal. I sure hope a Producer somewhere is reading your words.....

ADB: Well, you never know ...Hey! After your amazing story you are the very best person to believe in Magic !!! Not anything's possible but everything's possible!!!!

Meanwhile, you have heavy traveling schedules, you spend time in Hollywood, where you've been working on a pilot for the new television season.

You do stand-up comedy at the famed Comedy Store, and Laugh Factory on Sunset Blvd., Ice House Comedy Club, Hermosa Beach Magic and Comedy and The Comedy Store. You've been a guest artist on Comedy Central, Fox, CBS, VH1 and NBC. Your most recent shows include Alice Cooper's Christmas Pudding Show, VH1's 'Celebracadabra', 'Tough Love', and 'Famous Crime Scenes'. You are a Celebrity Host and already a Master Magician. What's next?

MS: That's easy. Whatever Life holds for me. I know I am an Entertainer and I love audiences and despite the various ups and downs, I've had a wonderful time and been very blessed for the past 29 years. If the rest of my Life is only half as good then I would consider myself very lucky. I must thank my parents, John and Arlene Sawchuk; I owe my success to both of them because without their support I wouldn't be anywhere!

ADB: Lucky, talented & dedicated. That's for sure. Murray, it has been truly fascinating. Thank you. I've enjoyed conversing with you. I wish you good fortune & tons of success to come.

MS: Thank you Tony. My pleasure. It was wonderful talking to you.

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