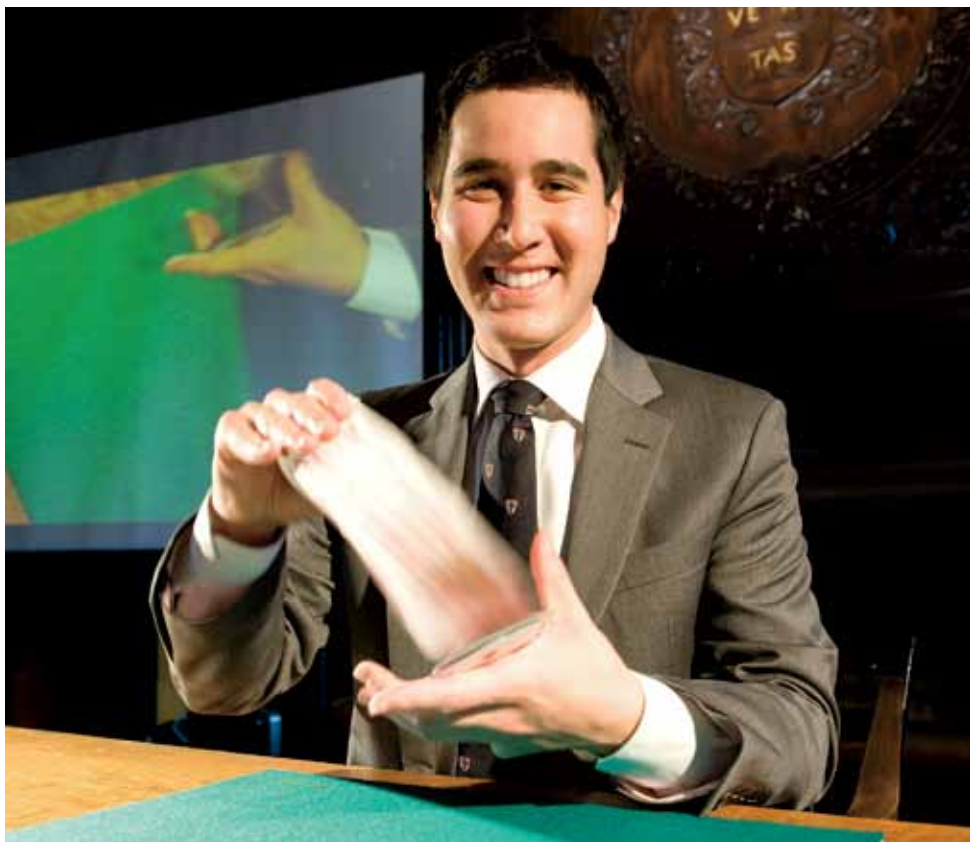


Montage

Art, books, diverse creations



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the middle,” he says of these performance-piece puzzles.) Next he tosses verbal clues to the crowd, seeking words common in *Times* crosswords.

Public participation is crucial in Kwong’s act. “A successful and engaging performance comes from performing for a sophisticated and savvy audience,” he notes. “The smarter the audience, the more fun it is, I think. I can start to stump them

David Kwong shuffles the cards. Behind him, a video gives a closer look at his hands.

and give them more interesting clues.” As people solve his challenges, he fills the grid with their answers, riffing cleverly off the audience responses as he goes along and

occasionally blocking out black squares in classic crossword style. When he’s completed the collaborative puzzle, he reveals the identity of the hidden card—miraculously embedded within the newly made crossword.

Although Kwong’s beginnings in magic stem from simple sleight-of-hand tricks he learned as a kid from books and a magic set he received as a gift, the evolution of his conjuring skills to include crossword construction is a career milestone. “In the 25 years I’ve been a magician, I’ve never before invented my own brand-new trick,” he admits. Though a long-time magic aficionado, he didn’t become interested in

Five-letter Word for Magic

David Kwong has a trick that’s all his own.

by QICHEN ZHANG

“IT’S CROSS-POLLINATION,” says magician and crossword connoisseur David R. Kwong ’02 about his unique one-man show. “I’m trying to combine my interests all the time.”

Kwong’s interests in crossword puzzles and prestidigitation propelled him into the *New York Times* for his one-of-a-kind

fusion of card trick and word game. He begins by asking an audience member to choose a card from a standard deck and keep it hidden from him. Then, standing in front of an easel holding a large blank grid of crossword squares, he asks the room for a word suggestion and fills the center of the grid with those letters to start things off. (“It all ripples outward from

professional magic until freshman year, when he attended a performance by Ricky Jay, who “gave an absolutely scintillating talk” on the history of magic. Kwong later wrote his history honors thesis on Oriental magicians and their impersonators: “I was captivated by stories of these magicians at the turn of the twentieth century, what’s commonly known as the Golden Age of Magic.” His love for magic extended outside the classroom as well. At one Arts First celebration, he reports, he performed Houdini’s “Metamorphosis” illusion before then Harvard president Larry Sum-



mers and taught Summers how to produce a bouquet of flowers from his sleeve.

After graduation, Kwong lived in Hong Kong for two years, hiring himself out as a magician for cocktail hours at events for banks and law firms (a practice he continues stateside: “There are hundreds of magicians who make a fine living doing corporate entertainment,” he says). Then he did a stint in marketing at HBO in New York before becoming an archivist for Ricky Jay in Los Angeles.

Around that time, he started constructing crossword puzzles with his friend Kevan Choset ’01. “Kevan had been doing it first and got me hooked,” Kwong recalls. The *Times* has published three of their idiosyncratic creations, including “Think Outside the Box,” which appeared in the April Fools’ Day issue in 2006. “That day features the trickiest puzzle, so it’s the trophy for cruciverbalists [crossword puzzle aficionados and creators],” he explains. The puzzle’s long horizontal answer read OUTSIDE THE



Kwong demonstrates his newest trick at left, using Scrabble tiles, a timer, and a dollar bill. Above, with audience input, he constructs a crossword puzzle containing a hidden message.

BOX and the word *THINK* spilled out four times into the margins of the grid. “We’re always making crazy puzzles like this,” he says. “We’re always trying to think outside the box and trick the solver.”

Now Kwong works in development at DreamWorks Animation, where he has helped create hits like *Kung Fu Panda*. His own movie consulting company, Misdirectors Guild, advises producers on magic in filmmaking. “For *All About Steve* [starring Sandra Bullock as a quirky cruciverbalist], I taught Sandra how to construct a puzzle for the opening sequence,” he recounts. “She was extremely bright!” He has consulted with screenwriter Noah Oppenheim ’00 on the upcoming biopic *The Secret Life of Houdini*, and worked on the script of *Now You See Me*—a film about magicians who rob banks using their skills of illusion—which just began production. And in early October, he returned to Harvard to give a magic show at Kirkland House in conjunction with the history department—a concentrator who’s made good in an unusual way.

One might categorize Kwong’s intellectual endeavor as the work of the world’s only magician-cruciverbalist. Though he sees his career heading toward the synthesis of magic and movies, he plans to continue performing live: “I’m slowly developing my act into a thinking man’s magic show.”

~QICHEN ZHANG

Chapter & Verse

Correspondence on not-so-famous lost words

Burton Caine asks who said, “If the result is absurd, it impeaches the logic upon which it is founded.” He adds, “I cannot find it in Cardozo. *Kingston v Chicago & N.W. Ry.*, Wisconsin Supreme Court, is close but substitutes ‘injustice’ for ‘absurd,’ and that makes all the difference.”

Judith Stix hopes to learn the title and author of a children’s book that ends, she recalls: “And that’s how they could tell the white horse from the black horse.”

Robert McGinnis wonders if anyone has traced the original source of a remark attributed to Mark Hanna: “There are two things that are important in politics. The first is money, and I can’t remember what the second one is.” The *Macmillan Dictionary of Political Quotations* (1993), he reports, “did not give a source. The *New*

York Times ran the quote in September 1993. It has been widely repeated since.”

Erik Levin seeks aid in determining “if there is a use of ‘stalk’ in the modern sense of obsessive, unwanted attention prior to John le Carré’s 1968 novel *A Small Town in Germany*: ‘He would never do such a thing. It was not in his nature.... He assured me categorically that he was not...stalking me.’”

Michael Comenetz seeks a source for: “As a man grows older, he comes to know, with gradually increasing astonishment, that he is mortal.”

Send inquiries and answers to “Chapter and Verse,” *Harvard Magazine*, 7 Ware Street, Cambridge 02138, or via e-mail to chapterandverse@harvardmag.com.