

Radnevsky's Real Magic

Legendary underground magician Anton Radnevsky first made a name for himself in Chicago, performing alongside his mentor, the Polish magician Janós Gacs. When their partnership ended in 1969, Radnevsky moved to New York, where his reputation continued to grow. In 1976, on the verge of his most anticipated show ever, an audience member died at a preview performance. The show never opened. The Great Radnevsky disappeared on opening night, and spent the next three decades well out of the public eye.

In 2009, Radnevsky returns to the New York stage in a new performance in which he weaves a captivating web of illusion and narrative, opening windows within windows, where all is not what it seems.

— Adapted from Radnevsky's Real Magic press material

While Anton Radnevsky never really existed, he was brought to life last fall in a new theatrical production, *Radnevsky's Real Magic*, staged in New York City at La MaMa E.T.C., a theater company known for experimental works. Peter Samelson inhabited the title character, showcasing his magic within the play. "The goal was not to create a play with ancillary magic," says Samelson, "and not to stage a magic show using a plot as a wrapper," but to merge the two into a theatrical evening filled with magic.

Peter had known writer/director Paul Zimet for many years and admired the work of Zimet's theater company, The Talking Band. Having

seen Samelson perform in August of last year, Zimet suggested a collaboration, although warning the magician that he wanted to create a project to explore the concept of death. Peter agreed and began



Gopnik plays the young protégé

"flooding" Zimet with literature on magic ideas and personalities.

The show was originally planned as a solo, but Peter brought in fellow magician Dennis Kyriakos. The team then began fleshing out



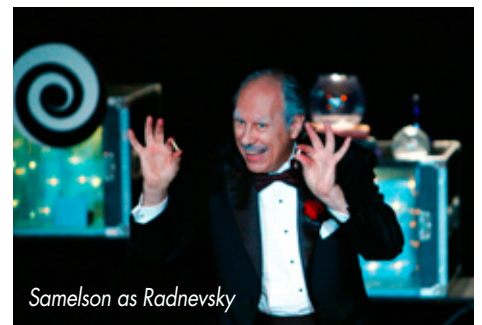
The Real Magic performance space at La MaMa E.T.C.

stories, with Zimet writing new texts for Samelson's magic repertoire, and everyone brainstorming and contributing material they would be comfortable with. Workshops of the project began last January, leading to staged readings in June to garner feedback, then three weeks of rehearsals in September. The actual show ran for sixteen performances, October

9–25. The 99-seat theater of La MaMa was "quite full most of the time, which is quite remarkable," Samelson says, playing to about eighty percent capacity most nights. Audiences witnessed Radnevsky presenting card manipulations and Samelson's signature Snowstorm in China. Kyriakos, in the role of Radnevsky's protégé Harry Telkhines, performed close-up routines such as Cups & Balls and Three Fly. They were joined in the story by a young stooge, played by Luke Gopnik, and the trio worked an unusual version of Origami. Jim Steinmeyer and Imam were credited for consulting on the magic for the show.

The production team is looking into possibilities for future productions, but as Samelson says, "It's a challenging show to move forward." He feels the close-up and routines such as Miser's Dream and Gypsy Thread limit the audi-

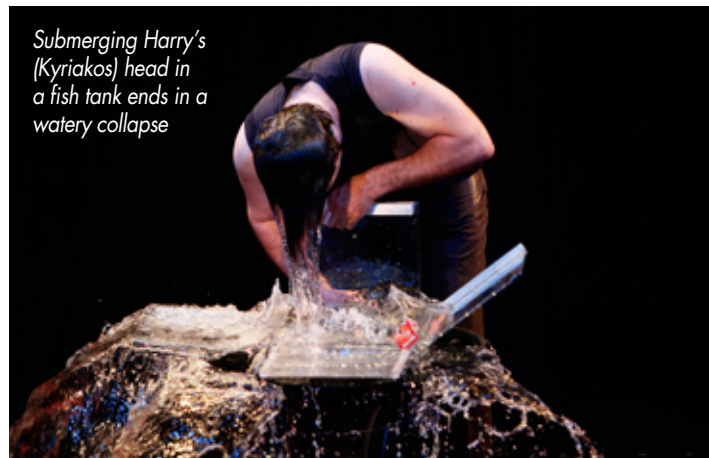
ence to about 300, and it is difficult to make a profit at that size. While he believes the play would



Samelson as Radnevsky

have to be rewritten to encompass a larger stage, possible venues, perhaps on the college circuit, are being considered.

— Additional information by Richard Steven Cohn



Submerging Harry's (Kyriakos) head in a fish tank ends in a watery collapse



Radnevsky haunted by his mentor, Janós Gacs