

# INTERNATIONAL MAGIC MAGAZINE

# VANISH

#122 | SEPTEMBER 2024

CHANELLE MUNROE

Métis magician uses magic for social transformation







## Métis magician uses magic for social transformation

By Jennifer Olson

Edited by Karen Kornelsen



# MAGIC & EMPOWERMENT

“

Chanelle Munroe has a lovely way about her on stage, in a style that is uniquely her own. I'm thrilled to have her as a headliner with my show, Magic Immersive Chicago.

— Jamie Allan —

”

The world's only female Métis magician delivers a performance that becomes a vessel for Indigenous (Native American) and female empowerment. Munroe, "The Mystical Trickster of Magic", shares her message through the eyes of the Trickster archetype, known across cultures for storytelling, pranks, passing down generational life lessons and entertainment...all the things that make up a great magic show.

Munroe is from Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. Manitoba is the homeland of the Red River Métis Nation, also known as "The Beaded Flower People" and "The People Who Own Themselves." Métis translates to "mixed-race"; Munroe is part Indigenous, European and Jewish.

### From the birthplace of modern magic...

She considers her hometown to be the birthplace of modern magic. The late Doug Henning, the world's greatest escape artist, Dean Gunnarson and the Gold Medalist Illusionist, James Cielien, are all from Winnipeg.

The International Brotherhood of Magicians was also founded in Winnipeg by Len Vintus, and the inaugural edition of the Linking Rings magazine was printed there.

### Uniting audiences and inspiring the next generation

Munroe was taught from a young age that the role of the Métis is to unite Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and she strives to do so with her magic and her message. Aside from performing at major venues, fairs and festivals, she also travels to remote Northern communities across Canada, delivering powerful motivational magic workshops to First Nations. From vocal empowerment and art therapy to her signature "Movement is Medicine Basketball Camp", she caters to kids and teens looking to explore their individuality and overcome challenges in their lives. Munroe shares a powerful anti-bullying message and creates a safe space for kids to nurture their creativity, all while wowing them with illusions and humor.

Munroe is a natural performer and has loved the spotlight

since she was a young girl. She started performing professionally at the age 16 as a singer in a punk rock band. Her brash, brazen, and gritty album, "From this beauty comes chaos and mayhem", took her touring across Canada, performing at Vans Warped Tour, Canadian Music Week, with a video on Much Loud. She continued to develop her stagecraft by obtaining a theater degree at the University of Winnipeg and studying music at Selkirk College in Nelson, British Columbia, Canada. She has also honed her skills in traditional jingle dress dancing, hula-hooping, fire spinning, pole dancing, singing and more.

### How did your career in magic take off?

As a self-proclaimed "starving artist," I was doing performances while bartending on the side to make ends meet. Then one day, a man walked into the bar... He immediately caught my attention, because something just seemed so different about him. I don't know how to describe it, but he had this real "mover and shaker" type energy that I wasn't used to seeing. Then he sat down for a drink, looked up at me, and I could tell by the look in his eye it was love at first sight! Which was very strange, because my girlfriend and I were casting love

spells right before I went into work that night, and usually my spells and my magick don't work that fast. Hahaha (cackling). Suddenly this guy made sugar appear out of a girls sleeve, and I started freaking out! I had never seen anything like that in real life before. A wizard! The whole bar got up and crowded around him, and he was doing all these crazy magic tricks. Needless to say, I gave him my number.

This "guy" was none other than Sean Watson, world renowned magician with an impressive career spanning over 30 years. He was on the cover of Vanish, headlining illusionist for Jamie Allan's Illusionarium and Magic



Photo by Prairie Focus Media

“

5 Ways to Kill A Magician was great! Chanelle Munroe did a very well scripted, well designed, and professional show.

— Dean Gunnarson —

”



Immersive, with performances at MGM Grand and Las Vegas Hilton, just to name a few.

So he wanted to take me on a date, and instead I invited him to come see my hip-hop duo show "DJ Jazzy Jess and the Fresh Princess" where I was the rapper, hype girl, and back-up dancer. Sean showed up with his friend and colleague Sean Fields, a.k.a. "The Mastermind", or as I like to call him, "The Man Behind The Magic." Liking my stage presence, Fields told Sean to hire me as his assistant. So I became Sean's assistant, and quickly moved to doing magic alongside him on stage. Now I'm a soloist magician, and the rest is history. We're also getting married!

## I hear the engagement was quite the spectacle. Tell us about it.

It was New Year's Eve in Las Vegas and Sean took me to see David Copperfield's show. After the show we were invited backstage to the VIP area, there were about 20 people there, and Copperfield introduced Sean to everyone and said "we're gonna have some real magic now, this gentleman is going to perform some magic", and then Sean got down on one knee. I was so excited! I was shrieking, and shocked, and jumping up and down and was so happy to say "Yes". Then Sean made a speech and told Copperfield he was his childhood hero and the reason he got into magic, and was the reason why he believed in real magic and love, and that he was so happy to finally find the right one in life. Then Copperfield got all teary eyed and choked up. I think it was a highlight in Sean's career, haha.

## Where have your solo performances taken you so far?

I started out as the headlining illusionist for Jamie Allan's Chicago show, Magic Immersive. I was performing grand scale illusions such as fire cage, assistants revenge, Blaney ladder levitation, as well as the bullet catch. I've set a record for the most bullet catches executed by any female magician in the world.



Photo by Prairie Focus Media

That experience piqued my interest in dangerous magic, which inspired me to create my own show entitled, "5 Ways to Kill a Magician". My debut show was at the 2023 Winnipeg Fringe Festival.

I've also performed for kids at different fairs and festivals including the Summer Solstice Indigenous Festival and the Canadian Museum of Human Rights for "Festival of Rights - Celebrating the Right to be a Child."

But my true passion is performing at Indigenous communities across Canada and working with kids. I love leading workshops and performing magic for schools and youth conferences.

## How exactly do you unite Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences with your magic?

I've created my own magic act based on the classic linking hula hoop routine, but my hoops are a more traditional pow-wow style. The Métis symbol is a sideways figure eight, and the teaching passed down to me from my mother was that one circle of the figure eight is the Indigenous world, and the other is the non-Indigenous world. I explain this symbolism to audiences while holding up the two separate hoops and then go into the routine. For the finale, the two hoops defy the laws of physics and become attached and interconnected. This is where I take a moment to talk about reconciliation and the harmony that can be created when two different worlds come together as one, in unity.

Whenever Sean and I go on our big theater tours across Canada we invite local Indigenous tribal members and their families as guests to come watch our show. I start with a land acknowledgment. To stand on stage in front of a largely non-Indigenous audience and to say "this performance is taking place on Native land" is in itself a powerful practice.

Amongst all the injustices that Indigenous people have had to face and are still having to face in this country, it's nice to just be able to offer a night of magic where everyone can have fun. We invited

one community to come, and they had all been displaced from their homes due to flooding and treaty violations. They had been living in hotels for months. But when those kids came to the magic show, they were just so excited and smiling and laughing and would come take pictures with us backstage, and it's just a really nice way to be able to bring joy to people and give back. I have a tear in my eye as I say this, because...magic is just so wonderful and special. I feel so lucky to be able to do this.

I don't take what I do lightly. When I go into communities with my magic show and workshops, I go in with the knowledge that that the leading cause of death for First Nations youth is suicide. Magic has

this incredible way of opening up the brain to believe the seemingly impossible. Once I get kids believing that anything is possible, I offer the teaching that they can also believe in themselves, and that it's possible for them to achieve anything they want to.

## Can you describe your show, "5 Ways to Kill a Magician"?

In this show I give my audience 5 chances to try and kill me, and perform deadly feats such as beer bottle smash and razor blades. But I don't really consider this a magic show as much as it is a piece of theater, where I really dive into



“When I first met Chanelle Munroe I was captivated by her, and could immediately sense that she possessed star power and talent. Now I have the pleasure of watching audiences stare at her the same way I did when we first met. There is something about her that is just so enthralling, you can't look away. And her voice! It's sultry, almost hypnotic, and incredibly unique sounding. You just fall into the story she's telling, and hang onto every word.”

— Sean Watson —

the mystical, spiritual, esoteric side of magic, or magic with a "k" as I like to differentiate it. I weave my Cree, Jewish, and Celtic/Pagan heritage into the show, and comment upon the more mystical aspects of these religions and world views and how they relate to magic. For example, the word "abracadabra" is a Hebrew word meaning "I create as I speak".

I'm fascinated by the fact that stage magicians were once burned at the stake for performing simple magic tricks, so in the show I draw comparisons to that and the powerful women that were burned during the witch trials. Because of these persecutions, stage magicians have always fought to make it clear to the public that real magic doesn't exist, such as Houdini debunking different spiritualists. But I'm going in the opposite direction and trying to convince people that real magic does exist. I don't do this, however, for the reasons of taking people's money like the charlatans, or "snake oil" sellers of the past, but rather, because I believe that a world

where real magick exists is a better world. A world that is sacred. This universe is full of mystery, and magic surrounds us all.

## Tell me about your name "The Mystical Trickster of Magic"

The Trickster is a figure in many different cultures, including Indigenous cultures. Trickster may appear as a coyote, raven, rabbit, or other beings. In my Cree culture, it is the Whiskey Jack, or "Wisakedjak". I find there to be many similarities between this cultural hero and the magician. Trickster is most usually depicted as male, as are most magicians, but also has the ability to gender bend. Trickster is the embodiment of lawlessness, a supreme boundary crosser, upholder of secret knowledge, a shape-shifter, and is known for being both humorous and deceitful. The original prankster!

## You've adopted the Trickster identity, a role usually reserved for men. How do you feel about being a woman in magic?

This is a loaded and controversial question, but I won't sugar-coat my reply. I have witnessed and experienced a lot of misogyny in this industry. That's not to say that I haven't also received a ton of support, love, and encouragement from a lot of male magicians, because I have, and I truly appreciate it. But others have thrown a lot of shade. I'm not a "good" girl or a "yes" girl. I refuse to be a doormat, and that rubs a lot of men the wrong way. I started out in this industry as a loudmouth snot-nosed punk rocker with an attitude, and I'm not about to change my ethos now.





16 SEPTEMBER | 2024



Photo by Carey Lauder



Photo by Carey Lauder

SEPTEMBER | 2024 17



“

Chanelle's magic seamlessly combines humor, history, storytelling and charm. She is a natural onstage and the weaving of her Métis teachings with magic provides a unique and truly interesting approach. As far as magicians go, Chanelle Munroe is a breath of fresh air in a world full of repetition and tired routines

— James Cielén —

”

My partner Sean is shocked to witness how I'm treated at times while doing this work, and men aren't the only culprit. Some female agents can't seem to wrap their head around the idea that I'm not Sean's assistant. I'll introduce myself as a magician, and they will go on to introduce me as "Sean's assistant." So we are all a product of the patriarchy and have a lot of unraveling to do.

I also just want to make it clear that I am only speaking from my own personal experience, and am in no way speaking on behalf of all womankind here. I hope other women in this industry have had better experiences than me. And then on the flipside there's the mass benefits to being a female magician. It's so rare, so there is less competition, and sometimes you will be more likely to be picked for a gig just because you're a woman. So that's a huge advantage that shouldn't be downplayed either. The whole thing is quite complex.

Speaking my mind like this has never earned me popularity points in the magic world. But I went to judge a Society of Young Magicians contest where a young girl took the gold medal, and she told me she was so happy I was there, and had never had a female judge before. It seemed as though she looked up to me in a way. So I have to open my big mouth and make things awkward and uncomfortable for myself to pay it forward to her, so she can have an easier time, just like the amazing incredible feminists before me did. Only 8% of magicians are female, so clearly we have a lot more work to do.

### How would you describe your personal brand?

I've struggled with this my whole life, and when I started my magic career it was difficult to pin down a specific image or look. It was only when I received my Indigenous name from a dear mentor that things began to clarify. My spirit name is Wasbshkibinishkwe which means White Bird Woman in Anishinaabe. The teaching I received with my name is that I am all of the

SEPTEMBER | 2024 19





Photo by Prairie Focus Media

birds at once. That is the hat I wear now and I don't pressure or force myself into a box or brand. I allow myself fluidity as an artist and include many different aspects.

In the Cree language there is no way to say "I'm a magician", only "I am a person who does magic." You don't say "I am a singer", rather "I am a person who sings." I find that concept to be freeing. What you do as an artist does not define you as a person.

I don't have a brand but I have a purpose, a mission and a passion. I am a Creator, or rather, I am a person who creates.

### What is your favorite thing about magic?

I love that magic encompasses all of the arts, and I get to direct my entire show. I use my passion for music to curate the song list. My acting background helps me to get into character. I apply my dance experience when I have to make the physicality of an illusion look beautiful. My writing and storytelling skills help to create a show from scratch. My love of fashion inspires the curation of a wardrobe with different costume changes throughout the show. And of course, I get to use my witchcraft skills to make everything come together in a magically delicious way. I get to be the master of my make-believe. An alchemist. A magician!!! The Magician is the ultimate artist.

