

A dramatic photograph of a male magician performing a fire-breathing act. He is seated on a dark surface, holding a woman in a blue dress who is leaning back. A large ring of fire surrounds them, with bright orange and yellow flames at the top. The background is dark, and stage lights are visible at the bottom.

Magician Rob Lake's Heart For Rescue Is No Illusion

BY JEANNE GRIMES



Norman native Rob Lake knows magic when he sees it. And he's not a man to pass it up. After all, Lake is recognized as one of the world's most celebrated illusionists.

But that's not the magic starting this tale. No, we're starting out with Lake, the dogless dog lover, and Roger—a Yorkie mix—homeless and in the care of a rescue.

Lake grew up with dogs. There was a Cockapoo, another dog he claims was part Chewbacca, and a Schnauzer, among others—all rescues. So clearly, Lake is a man who values the company of a good dog. But with the travel demands of his career, not every dog is compatible.

He would find himself on the road wishing for a dog, and on the rare breaks in his show schedule when he could get back to Norman, he would “borrow” his parents’ pet to satisfy his need for a canine fix. That worked fairly well, at least until 2016.

“I took two weeks off last year,” he recalls. “And I took my grandparents to lunch one day.”

As fate would have it, a small rescue was having an adoption event for a few dogs near

the restaurant. Being a dog person, he had to look. And that’s when it happened—magic.

“He looked at me, and I knew we were here for each other,” Lake says. “I got him out of his little crate, and I couldn’t put him down. The connection, it felt like magic, and obviously he was small enough to travel. It was a divine intervention.”

His grandparents also adopted a little female dog that day that has proved to be “so beneficial for their lives.” She was Roger’s

Continued on page 40

companion, and the two dogs still get to see each other.

"I try [to talk others into adopting dogs]," he says. "Adopt versus shopping for dogs. There are so many dogs that need to be rescued."

Believed to be 5 or 6 years old, Roger is still a youngster for a small breed dog. Lake has what he longed for—a good dog with which to share his travels.

"He's great, very calm," Lake says. "He likes traveling, and he's very adventuresome when we get to a new place."

Roger is even part of the show.

"He basically makes a cameo," Lake says. "He appears unexpectedly and is introduced to the audience."

Lake, now 34, knew at the age of 10 that he wanted to be a magician.

"When I was a kid, I saw a magic show, and it changed my life. You never know where your reach may go. I knew that was what I wanted to be. I started as a kid and never grew up."

That catalyst was a magic show performance by Kirby Van Burch. In time, Van Burch and Lake became friends, and Van Burch became a mentor to the younger man. Van Burch is retired now, but he and Lake still stay in touch, bound by respect and the magic they create.

In turn, Lake is now a mentor to a few up-and-coming magicians and illusionists.

"Absolutely, I put on magic shows as a boy," he says. "I am pretty much self-taught."

He gleaned his early knowledge from books he checked out of the school library and Norman Public Library. "Looking back, I was so impassioned; I was willing to put in the hours of practice."

And he enlisted his lone sibling, younger sister Katelynn, as his assistant. A willing assistant? "Not really," Lake chuckles. But all is forgiven now, and Katelynn also has a dog that Lake gets to play with when he's in town.

After high school, Lake enrolled in the University of Oklahoma and declared health and exercise science as a major. But two years in college was enough to convince him his career path led in another direction.

Over his parents' misgivings, Lake dropped out of OU to pursue a career as a magician.

"My parents were pretty concerned and worried I was making a mistake," he recalls. "But once I started tours, and they saw it was working out, they came around."

His first major break came at the age of 20 when he landed a months-long tour in Japan.

Lake doesn't really watch other illusionists and finds his inspiration in people who are "true wizards in their field"—men like Walt Disney and Steven Spielberg.

No, they're not magicians per se, but "if someone can make you believe, that's magic," Lake says.

The elements of Lake's very large stage show travel in four semi tractor-trailers, and he employs a staff of 20.

"Everybody pretty much knows their duty, but nobody knows everything. So there's still magic and mystery," Lake says.

The interactive 90-minute show is "very

high tech, lots of lasers and lights." It is, in Lake's words, "a concert of illusions."

And to Lake, that is his strength—connecting with an audience and bringing them into the magic to experience it firsthand.

Such an audience was treated to Lake's show in January when he performed a benefit for the "Friends for Folks" program at the Lexington Assessment & Reception Center and the Norman Animal Shelter. The show was in the state-of-the-art Nancy O'Brian Performing Arts Center near Norman North High School.

evolving. In fact, he is working on four potential new illusions now. That development is something that may take years or only a matter of weeks.

He got one idea for a new illusion last summer and incorporated it into his show by December. Another has been in the works for eight years. "I actually have a warehouse in Norman, and a lot of the work is done there," he says.

The warehouse is where the trappings of old illusions are lovingly kept and those of new illusions are developed. And just to keep



It wasn't his first benefit for local animal causes and won't be his last. "We definitely will do it next year. It's such a great cause, such a success," Lake says. "Friends for Folks is a wonderful program, great for the inmates and the dogs. There are so many wonderful animal lovers in Oklahoma."

Several groups donated some 200 tickets to the performance for underprivileged children from Norman Public Schools to attend the show, along with some children of those incarcerated.

Lake's magic and illusions are constantly

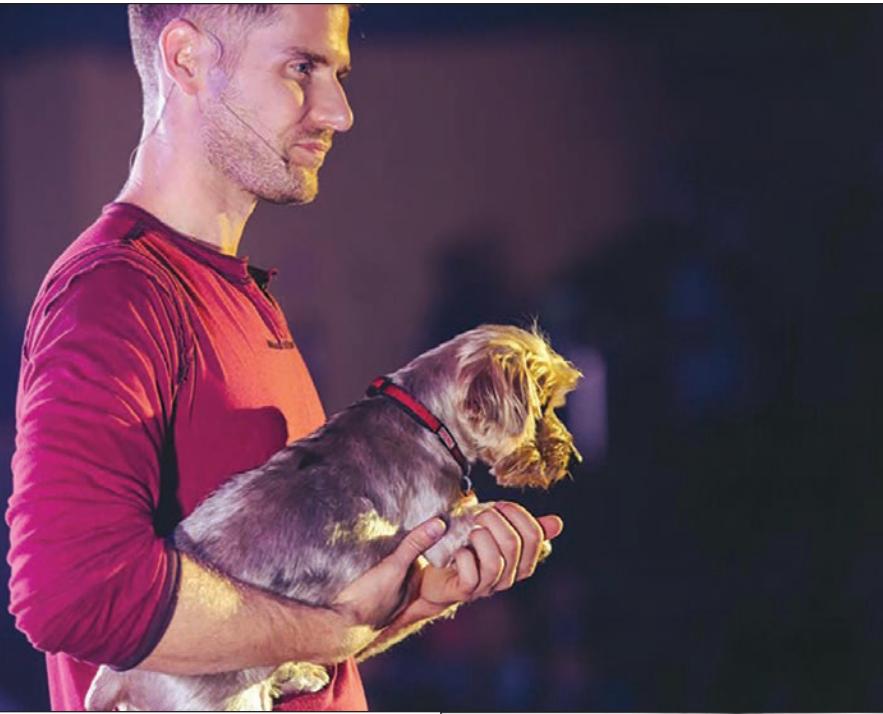
things interesting, it's also where he stores his collections of magic memorabilia—posters from old magic shows and antique swords.

"I love history, especially the history of magic," he says.

Asked if the study of physics is among his strong suits, Lake has a short answer: "Gravity is the same, no matter where you are from."

Still, there is a lot of engineering and theatries to what he does, along with many other elements.

Lake and Roger spend about 90 percent of



the year away from home, and for Lake that's time spent either performing or consulting. According to his website, he has worked as a magic consultant on network TV shows and feature films, as well as created illusions for other famous magicians.

Rob's magical effects can be seen in numerous theatrical productions across the globe, including the smash hit musical "The Phantom of the Opera" and in over 900 productions of Disney's "Beauty & the Beast."

Over the last few years, Rob has headlined in venues around the world, bringing his physics and sometimes even death-defying illusions to audiences at the Atlantis Paradise Island Resort in the Bahamas, Harrah's Lake Tahoe and even the White House.

Caesars Entertainment, the world's largest gaming organization, named him the Top Illusionist in the World, and in 2008 he became the youngest magician in history to receive the coveted Merlin Award as International Stage Magician of the Year. To put it into perspective, the Merlin Award is the equivalent of an Oscar.

This path he has taken has led him to more countries than he can count—dozens, easily. He recently returned from Europe where, for the 10th year, he performed for troops and their families as part of Armed Forces Entertainment. He's known to conjure helicopters seemingly out of thin air.

Why, at Caesars' bidding, he even made a 20-ton armored truck carrying \$1 million cash appear at the FedEx Forum arena in downtown Memphis.

Skeptical? Ask the 15,000-plus people in the arena what they saw materialize before their eyes. Actually, Lake loves the skeptics because they play into the audience interaction that is a mark of his show.

It's that interaction from which he draws his energy on stage. He likes to select random volunteers from the audience to join him on

stage when he performs his jaw-dropping illusions. Up close and personal, they are free to search for, only to fail to find, any trickery behind his magic.

After all, what he does on stage, with certain elements that change or evolve, is magic. Isn't it? Some spectators, those skeptics mentioned earlier, eventually come to a point where all that is left is to believe in the moment.

So perhaps...just maybe...Sherlock Holmes was channeling some magician's spirit when he said, "When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."

Lake loves his career and his illusions every bit as much as he loves Roger. And for that reason, he shows no inclination to slow a schedule that would leave most of us breathless.

"As long as I still love doing it and make people happy and provide joy for the audience," he says, "there are always more people I want to make magic for, more theaters I want to perform in, more illusions."

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