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Oklahoman magician Rob Lake receives Merlin Award

Lake is youngest ever to receive magic's top honor

BRANSON, MO - Rob Lake, a magician who tours his large scale productions internationally but got his start in his hometown of Norman, OK took home the Merlin Award as International Stage Magician of 2008.

At just 25 Lake is the youngest recipient of the coveted award. He now joins the ranks of previous Merlin Award winners David Copperfield, Kirby VanBurch, Siegfried & Roy, Doug Henning, Penn and Teller, and Criss Angel as recipients of the most prestigious award given in the field of magic and illusion.

The Merlin Award is given out annually by the International Magicians Society, the largest magic organization in the world as listed in Guinness World Records with more than 37,000 members across the globe. The award is considered the equivalent of the Oscar for film, Emmy for television, and Tony for theatre. Lake received the award from the society's world president, magician Tony Hassini.



Rob Lake receives The Merlin Award from Tony Hassini, World President of the International Magicians Society.

"It's the most prestigious award a magician can receive. It is truly the highest honor to be recognized by my peers and the society," Lake said.

According to the International Magicians Society, The Merlin Award is presented only to those entertainers who have achieved the highest level in their craft, on an international global consideration. The voting members begin with approximately one hundred names and narrow the list down to a select few. The criteria considered for a winner include talent, showmanship, originality, skill, and above all, the rare ability to entertain under any conditions.

Lake chose to receive the award in Branson because as a 10-year-old boy he caught the act of Kirby VanBurch, a Siegfried and Roy-type magician who has been playing in the Missouri resort town since 1992.

"I knew immediately while watching Kirby's show that I wanted to be a magician," Lake said.

After returning home from Branson Lake rushed to the local library and checked out as many books on magic as he could. "I am sure I drove my friends and family crazy with card tricks," Lake laughed.

Almost immediately Lake was performing magic around Oklahoma for schools, churches, community groups and at annual festivals.

Lake's family continued to visit Branson annually as he grew up, and Lake left the University of Oklahoma in 2003, moved to Branson and became VanBurch's protégé and start his career.

"The first years were tough. I didn't have any illusions, hadn't become comfortable being on stage, and had some scary situations with manager-type people trying to scam me," Lake said. "But I was persistent and kept learning, growing and getting better, and eventually my dream and dedication paid off."

Lake's performances have recently been seen on television, in theatres, casinos, and cruise ships around the world.

His mentor VanBurch, who was present when the Merlin was given to his pupil, agreed with Lake's self assessment

"No one deserves it more," VanBurch said. "He is the hardest working person in all of show business. I met him when he was 10 years old and I had the pleasure of watching his love for the art of magic grow."

VanBurch said he is awed by how much Lake has accomplished at such a tender age, although he isn't surprised.

"I can only say that at this young age, if he has already won this award, I cannot wait to see what the future holds," VanBurch said.

As for the future, Lake said he is continuing to focus on his magic career, which he said is more like a calling than a job.

"My show will never stop changing and growing, it will always continue to evolve," Lake said. "The timing of this award just gives me more excitement and fuels our creative fires."

Lake recently wrapped up shooting five of his illusions for "Great Magicians of the World," a national TV special that will air in 2009.

Lake is currently performing at theatres and special events across the USA, and a future tour of Japan, which will be his third, is in the works. European and China tours are also in negotiations now, and Lake recently was offered a spot on the NBC summer ratings cow "America's Got Talent," although he turned the gig down because of the contract offered by the network.

"They wanted not only to own me and my career for life but also own my first 10 children," Lake joked about the terms required by NBC.

And while the life of a magician is hectic and he misses his loved ones in Norman, including his dog, Lake said the sacrifice is worth it.

"I like traveling and working on new and exciting things," Lake said. "In some ways, I feel more comfortable living out of a suitcase in a hotel. This is my calling in life."



Magician Rob Lake poses with his mentor Kirby VanBurch after Lake received the Merlin Award in Branson, MO last weekend.