

SAM SANDLER:

DEAFinitely Magic

BY HEATHER HIGH-KENNEDY

The illusionist stands on the stage, as the music blares from the speakers and the crowd roars wildly throughout the auditorium. Sam Sandler has captivated yet another audience with his perfectly-timed comedic performance, charming smile and vivacious personality- yet the magician leading the crowd in uproarious delight is an illusion himself.

Deeper, stronger and deaf-er than the man they see on the surface, a man whose footwork masks the ultimate purpose of his feet (which is to feel the musical vibrations that cue his performance), Sandler has evolved as a comedic illusionist in the most unexpected ways- through the losses of his hearing, his home and his wife- and has become an inspirational success in the process.

Sam's career as an entertainer began when he was about 15 years old, and a friend of his father's, who worked as a circus clown, visited their home and started juggling. Mesmerized by the sight, Sam immediately started tossing various items into the air, learning the hard way how to juggle. After about two months of wandering around the backyard, throwing around balls, sticks and any other items light enough to become airborne, he mastered the rhythmical intricacies of the craft. His feet were set on a path as a performer. Soon after, he invented Gizmo the Magic Clown, a birthday party sensation who entertained young children with slapstick physical humor. "I have always loved kids and physical comedy," said Sam, whose father was a pastor who allowed him to practice his skills as a juggler and entertainer by performing for the kids in the church nursery. His comedic talents became more refined as he performed

for the various groups of children.

Shortly after graduating from high school, he got a job working for illusionist Toby Travis and toured with him for two years. It was this experience that encouraged Sam to step beyond the constraints of the juggling clown act, learn magic tricks and become a first-rate comedic illusionist. Once off the road with Travis, though, he found himself back in his hometown, holding down managerial positions at McDonald's and Wendy's, to acquire steady income; nonetheless, he managed to find ways to incorporate his skills while working at Wendy's, pulling out the equipment and performing for lunch crowds one hour a day, and then packing it up and finishing the shift. During one of these lunchtime performances, Sam was approached by an onlooker who asked him why he was working at Wendy's. "He told me, 'I've been out to Las Vegas and you are as good as any performer out there. You are really good,' and that got me thinking." Sam decided to quit his job and become a full-time entertainer.

Though it was a scary prospect, Wendy's gave him six months to try his hand at a full-time career as an illusionist. If, in that time, he decided to return, his old job would be waiting for him. Despite the comfort of that cushion, another frightening element made the move even more daunting: he was married and had a newborn daughter, Tessa. Still, mustering his gumption, Sam decided to take a chance, and in terms of his career, he never turned back. Soon after taking the plunge and successfully enter-

