

# HYPNOTISM

## ENTERTAINMENT OR SCIENCE?

Mark Leveridge



**Mention the word 'hypnotism' and most people will probably first think of famous entertainers such as Paul McKenna and will have an image of a line of people on a stage behaving badly! But given a little more time to consider it, people will probably recognise that hypnotism is also used in medical situations to help smokers to give up the habit or to reduce pain or banish phobias, for instance. Given the two hugely different applications of apparently the same discipline, it begs the question as to which is the real hypnotism, or are both equally valid?**



To help answer this question Magicseen approached two hypnotists who sit firmly on one side of the divide or the other. On the medical side we spoke to Trevor Hoskisson. Trevor is an international award winning hypnotherapist who advises clients such as psychotherapists, coaches, doctors and professors on the use of hypnotherapy and is part of the prestigious Harley Street Hypnotherapy Clinic. Trevor is an expert on the development of human potential and seeks to help his individual clients achieve personal happiness, whether that means helping them to lose weight or perhaps providing pain relief, and he finds that hypnosis is particularly effective for chronic conditions.

On the entertainment side we were looking for someone with a lot of experience and so we turned to Kev Bee who has been presenting a stage hypnotism show for over 20 years and who has a background prior to that in entertainment generally, particularly the music industry. Since most of our readers are



likely to be interested especially in the entertainment side of the divide, I asked Kev first whether he considered stage hypnotism to be all about audience management or whether there was any real science involved?

"If you're a good entertainer, it's about 90% audience management skill and 10% science. Anyone can hypnotise, but not everyone can hold an audience's attention and I think to make hypnosis interesting you need that showmanship. It's a controversial view but the only people who have ever asked me about the science of hypnosis are people who understand hypnosis, NLP or psychology. Everyone else just asks about the content of the show, as that's what interests them."

So this immediately tells you that stage hypnosis is all about the fun, the entertainment, and that the main skills required are presentational not scientific. I wondered therefore whether the training required would be radically different if you were using hypnosis for medical purposes? Here's Trevor's view:

"The skills to do stage hypnosis can be learned very quickly on a two or three day course. It takes a little while to build competence, but

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**Kev Bee**

generally a stage hypnotist does the same show in lots of different locations, and only occasionally makes modifications to his act.

It doesn't actually take too long to train to be a hypnotherapist – ten days of classroom based studies, and 240 hours of home based studying are about the minimum requirements to call yourself a hypnotherapist. However, there is much more to learn and I probably do at least three weeks of CPD every year as well as reading for half an hour to an hour in my subject most days of the week. Also, every client is different, and has differing needs. I quite often need to research the best way to deal with a particular issue."

These comments immediately raise a point that I would not have otherwise considered. Trevor is saying that stage hypnotism is an act that once learned can be used, just like with a magic act, more or less in the same way and format at lots of different venues. The people may be different, but the process will remain pretty much the same. When used medically, hypnotherapists come across a wide range of different conditions which may require a wider knowledge and so the way the treatment is administered could well be slightly different every time.

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**Trevor Hoskisson**

Does this mean then that someone like Trevor couldn't use his hypnosis training for entertainment purposes?

"I have mixed views about hypnosis being used for entertainment. If I was to do hypnosis for entertainment I would be struck off the professional bodies I belong to. I do use hypnosis and hypnotic phenomena to demonstrate the power of hypnosis, and whilst some people might think this is entertainment, it is actually education, and there is a difference."

I wondered what differences Kev perceived between the two types of hypnotism. Here's his take on it:

"Stage Hypnosis is much more rapid and I don't think the induction is as extensive. You're inducing people very quickly, whereas with hypnotherapy, you can spend time working on the progressive induction and relaxation and therefore induce a deeper state. I think stage hypnosis filters out very



quickly though. Watching the reactions of the people on stage you can tell the depth of hypnotic state almost immediately."

This seems to me to be the key differentiation. The hypnotherapist may need to induce a far deeper trance in order to effectively achieve the required outcomes, whereas the stage hypnotist has limited time to get things rolling. I asked Kev what the process is for selecting helpers on stage and he explained how he goes about it in his show.

1. He walks out into the audience and tries to identify the curious but slightly reluctant ones. He is looking for those he hopes to be able to set up a rapport with. Anyone who shows any firm signs of not wanting to be selected he leaves in the audience.
2. Once he has a selection of people up on stage he goes through a series of 'tests' in order to weed out those who are simply looking to hijack the show and attempt to make him look foolish.
3. He needs to try and ensure that none of the helpers is likely to suffer any sort of bad reaction to helping on stage. He doesn't mind people being a bit of a challenge, but he doesn't want to have anyone up there who is likely to have a panic attack or some other form of adverse reaction.

One reason why some people are reluctant to come up on stage is that they have a fear that they will suffer after effects of being part of the show. I wondered whether Kev ever had potential bookers who expressed any concern about the hypnosis used and if so how he reassured them?

"I think you have to be honest. People will always ask the "is it dangerous" question or tell you about a horror story, but their main concerns when booking are about nudity/offensiveness. I always answer their questions openly and honestly. I point to the fact I am fully insured, that my show is family orientated and suggest they look on YouTube as I think YouTube gives a good measure of what kind of show I do."

Does Trevor think there are any potential dangers with stage hypnotism looked at from a more medical standpoint?

"The main issue I see with stage hypnosis is that it makes hypnosis look like mind control, which it's not. Mind control is just an illusion in a stage show. The way that all hypnosis works is that it makes whatever you want to do almost effortless. A good stage hypnotist will demonstrate hypnotic phenomena, like name amnesia, number amnesia, catalepsy and negative and positive hallucinations as well as sticking people's hands to tables or



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their feet to the floor. This is all good stuff. The good thing about stage shows is that the whole world, just about, knows that hypnosis is a powerful tool for facilitating change, the bad thing is that they have the misconception that it is mind control."

Derren Brown's TV shows certainly appear to show him using almost instant trance inducing effects on volunteers, who he then proceeds to apparently control to do all manner of outrageous and out of character things. He likes to imply that he is using mind control to achieve these aims, and so it is little wonder that the lay public thinks that hypnotists are looking to create a situation in their volunteers which enables them to manipulate them. But both Kev and Trevor stressed that it is not possible to hypnotise someone who genuinely does not wish to be placed in that state. Even if you could momentarily hypnotise them, it would not last very long. And that is why stage hypnotists use the on-stage sifting process in order to flush out those who simply are not going to enjoy getting involved.

So if someone would like to become a stage hypnotist, what advice would Kev like to pass on to them? He offers 3 main tips.

**Tip 1:** Shop around but avoid, at all costs, training for a couple of hundred pounds. You have to ask why someone would sell their techniques for that much as the market is saturated anyway, so cheap training and DVD courses I would avoid. I would be looking to be trained for a good few thousand pounds and not someone who trains all of the time. My trainer told me the only reason he agreed to train me was because he knew I would bring something

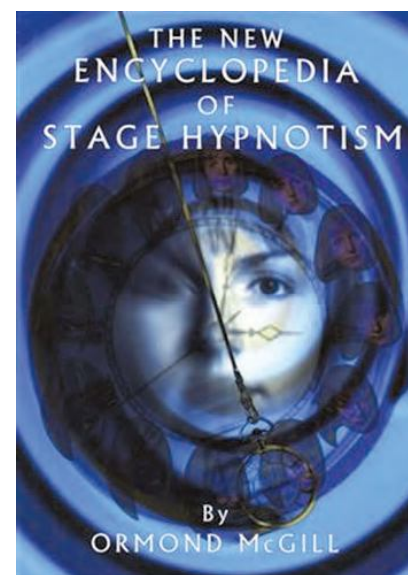
good to the industry. It shows my trainer is passionate about protecting his own craft but willing to share with people who he has considered carefully, not just to line his pockets. Look for the same when shopping around."

**Tip 2:** When doing shows, have an idea of what you're worth. We have rubbish hypnotists cheapening the art by doing shows for less than 100 pounds. I know of one who was doing it for expenses only!!!!

**Tip 3:** Create your hype, but don't believe it! The industry is flooded with 2nd rate hypnotists at the moment. They offer no real entertainment value, they can talk the talk, but walk the walk very badly. Take time to create a look and feel, but don't just become another pub hypnotist in jeans and t-shirt. However, don't let your ego run away with you. None of us are in McKenna's shoes etc, and it will be a long time until a UK hypnotist has that kind of run in the country again.

The key messages here for all wannabe hypnotists seem to be - get proper training, learn how to be a good on stage entertainer, treat your volunteers with respect and avoid making them do unpleasant things that are designed purely for a cheap laugh. And remember, there are no lasting symptoms from being involved in a hypnotist's show, or as Trevor rather aptly puts it, "There are absolutely no after effects apart from occasionally some slight embarrassment." For more help, advice and guidance you can look to join FESH (Federation of Ethical Stage Hypnotists), because although hypnosis is not currently regulated, FESH is the only organisation which is recognised by local councils etc.

## RESOURCES



The best book for learning the tricks of the trade is Ormond McGill's Encyclopaedia of Stage Hypnosis. If you prefer learning from DVD, Trevor recommends Igor Ledochowski's stage hypnotism course which is available on DVD, while Kev says that while he can't recommend any one title specifically, dealers such as Alakazam and Magic Box both stock some good quality suitable titles and therefore he recommends you contact either/both of them to see what is currently available.