

Joseph Fröhlich – keeping Magic History alive!

Talk by Hanno Rhomberg, European Magic History Conference 2019, Vienna

Why do we concern ourselves with the history of magic? Why should it be important to learn about historical people – and what could we learn from their ideas?

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, my name is Hanno Rhomberg. I am the representative of Magischer Ring Austria and also editor of "Aladin", an Austrian magic journal, established in 1946. I am – such as yourselves – fascinated by the art and history of magic.

The History of magic – is it just pastime for a fringe group or more?

When nearly one-hundred enthusiasts of the history of magic meet in Vienna, there are manifold reasons why they do so. Interesting presentations, the history of Exlibris or the history of cheats and frauds in Vienna's Prater – just to name a few.

Every one of us has his own motivation, his own special reason to be here. For some of us, it is the love for old props, for other the love for old books. People like Helmut Klaghofer hunt down every rare magic kit available – both old and new ones.

Some of us have a scientific approach, with others it's the passion for collecting things and the love of the extraordinary. But what – I dare to say – we all have in common is the deep conviction that the history of magic is a treasure; a treasure that nourishes our art; a treasure from which we can learn on a daily basis.

Still, we are a relatively small group, compared to the increasing number in people interested in our art. Most of the things discussed here will – despite ongoing coverage in our specialist journals – be recondite for the public.

Every day, we see ourselves confronted with a sheer endless flood of information. A circumstance that forces us to set our priorities – compelled by passion and potential benefit.

Do we have to occupy us with the history of magic? Certainly not.

In a world, in which – according to recent academic studies by Freie Universität Berlin – 40% of all adolescents can't define a clear difference between democracy and dictatorship, we shouldn't set the aspirations for our small magic community too high.

To do something with passion does not mean that one has to know every piece of background information there is. Especially passionate gourmets are characterized by their ignorance of the coherence of food and health. They just want to enjoy their food – without any distracting features.

In a recent survey – conducted in the magic community – regarding the importance of the history of magic – it was repeatedly stated, that people "just wanted to enjoy magic", without rationalizing it with too much academical and historical background.

Why Joseph Fröhlich

"What the hell does any of that have to do with Joseph Fröhlich, famous trickster and jester?" one might ask. The title "Joseph Fröhlich – keeping Magic History alive" contains not only the name Joseph Fröhlich, but also "keeping Magic History alive", so it all seems to be a question of emphasis.

The life of Fröhlich is thoroughly researched. Which makes it even more intriguing for me to ask: "How can we make a historical figure more popular – and by doing that – how can we use this to raise interest in the history of magic?"

Therefore, I would like to use Fröhlich as a core emphasis in our discussion on if and how we can benefit from concerning ourselves with this historical figure, whose 325th birthday would be this year. Eventually I would like to talk to you about a project, which we began back in 2017 and will be presented to the general public in 2019.

