

# CONNY RAY

## Magical Transformations

By Bobby Warren

In his nearly six decades of performing, one could say Swedish magician Thorbjörn Holmqvist's best trick was a transformation effect – or, rather, a series of transformations. What did he transform? Himself.

Among the presents Holmqvist received for Christmas when he was twelve years old were two copies of the same book: *Robinson Crusoe*. When he returned one of them and walked away with *100 Fun Magic Tricks*, little did he know how the book would guide his path for more than a half century.

“In that book there were no illustrations, only written text, but it did not matter – it all had started,” he said. He also recalled seeing a classmate perform a very simple trick using two matchsticks. His friend blew on the matches, and they drifted apart. “I remember this sequence like it was yesterday,

but it was sixty-three years ago,” he said. “That book and the simple trick were the beginning of the Conny Ray story.”

Thorbjörn became a member of the Gothenburg Magic Club in 1956 at the age of eighteen. His first exposure on television came in 1958, and by 1981, after

twenty-five performances on *Good Morning Sweden*, the children's magician was a national celebrity. Yes, a children's magician was a national celebrity.

For many years, he performed under his given name but, along the way, Holmqvist discovered that the children might have remembered the magic, but they didn't remember the magician's name. So, he transformed himself from Thorbjörn Holmqvist to Conny Ray. During his shows, the children would wave



Conny Ray in 1982.

a finger in the air and shout, "Hey! Hey! Conny Ray!" The kids were hooked, and the name stuck.

While the dozens of television appearances helped make Conny Ray a recognizable figure, his passion remained performing live for children. As he gained experience performing, Conny found his own way to communicate with the children, who were very involved in his shows. He believes these factors led to his magic being very well received by his audiences.

There's an old adage that says the amateur magician performs different effects for the same audience, while the professional performs the same effects for different audiences. Conny described his approach: "For many years I produced a new show every year, with the premiere on the first weekend in December when

the corporate Christmas parties began," he said. "All the effects were quite new, and so was the ventriloquist doll with which I ended the show. In 1986 I introduced my vent rabbit 'Tokige Totte' which is 'Crazy Totte' in English. Since then, Totte has been the last number in the show. My wife finds new clothes and dresses him every



*Right: 1962 promotional photo. Below: From the beginning, Conny Ray mixed ventriloquism with his magic performances. 1963 photo.*





year. One year she even found small roller skates which were a good fit for him.” His act became known at the Conny Ray Magic Party.

Conny Ray liked to keep things fresh and new. He got an idea to carry his magic accessories in a box for easy handling during the show. For five years he would use a new box. Then he would revive the oldest box, give it a new color and design, and repeat the cycle.

“Each year, I also had a new suit that matched the box,” he said. “I found a good dressmaker who used to sew for dancers. I still have twenty-one different cravats. Each year there were many requests from the same companies and other principals that wanted me to come back. I think one reason was because they knew that I always had a new show. The new show I started in the beginning of December ran to the beginning of December the following year, so I had a whole year to prepare the new show.”

Though the vent rabbit was introduced in the 1980s, Conny had actually started on the path of ventriloquism three decades earlier in the 1950s. “As my interest in



*Some of Conny Ray's performances before enthusiastic audiences.*



magic and ventriloquism started when I was quite young, I always, more or less, have had magic in my mind,” Mr. Ray said. And, it has stayed on his mind all of these years. He subscribed to many magic magazines from around the world, always looking for news about the latest children’s magicians and effects. He would read publications coming out of the Scandinavian countries, England, New Zealand, and the United States.

“One way to get inspiration is to read books, so on my shelves are many books (‘too many,’ says my wife),” Conny said. “During the years I have bought all of the new books on the market concerning children’s magic, so I have almost a complete library of children’s magic. When magicians read books, their imaginations run on high speed. Watching DVDs does not allow your brain to develop its own style,” he said.

For years, he corresponded with Frances Marshall of Magic, Inc., and he purchased all of her books on kids’ magic. In 1983, while visiting the United States, he met Frances and Jay Marshall. In 1977, he helped organize a magic convention in Sweden, and Dai Vernon was the featured magician. After the convention, Conny Ray played host to The Professor and others in his home. He is a longtime friend of



*Conny Ray with his rabbit puppet, Crazy Totte, in 1990.*

David Ginn, and Ginn included some of Conny Ray’s material in his book, *Children Laugh Louder*.

Conny Ray has lectured around the world on children’s magic, including an appearance at Clown Camp in LaCrosse, Wisconsin. He lectured on children’s magic at the I.B.M. Convention in Southport, England, in 1985, and was one of the performers in the Children’s Showtime at the Southport Theatre. A few years later, he lectured in Oslo, Norway.

Conny Ray wrote booklets for his many lectures and seminars. Among them are *Children’s Magic Swedish Style* (1983), *Book of Ideas for Children’s Magicians* (1985) and a book about children’s magic



*Performing at the Gemla Folkpark in 1996.*



Left: Colorful show poster from 1985. Right: Conny Ray's first promotional poster, 1982.



(1990). In 1985, he received the Swedish Magic Circle of Merit for his contributions in children's magic. Christer Nilsson of the Sweden Magi-Archive wrote, "That was the first time a magician in this category received this nomination." In 1990, Conny Ray received his hometown's Cultural Award.

Conny wrote and drew the illustrations for several of his books: *The Conny Ray Magic Book* (1989), *Fun with Playing Cards* (1992), *Fun with Matches* (1993), *Magic with String and Paper* (1994), *28 Fun Effects and Contrivance* (1996), and *30 New Effects and Contrivance* (1997). He also produced the DVD, *Conny Ray Magic School*, and wrote, *The Family Magician Encyclopedia*.

Conny Ray's work as an illustrator led to him designing the logo of the 2006 FISM

when Sweden was one of three countries competing for the World Championship of Magic. There was a competition among the country's magicians to come up with a design, which he won. He depicted the Zombie Ball effect using "The Midnight Sun," well-known in his country, as the ball, and two snow-capped mountains representing the foulard. A professional illustrator honed the idea into the final design.

In addition to his work as an illustrator, Conny Ray also developed a course: *Entertaining Presentations: How to Capture Audience Interest Using Simple Magic Effects*. He did this in 1983, using his decades of experience as a performing magician. Six years later, he wrote a book on public speaking: *Presentation Skills: A Handbook on How to Do Entertaining Presentations*. His illustrations were featured in the book.

# Hej, hej Conny Ray – ropar barnen i kör

NORRÖPING: Visste ni att trollkarlen Conny Ray trofornell inspirerar? Gullspennas Farber Frj till ramsan "Hej alla barn nu blir det barngam-gram...? Hej, hej Conny Ray", ropar Conny och barnen svänger med pek-fingret i luften. På träffen i Nykölping trollede han under taktet på stompa-scenen medan regnet smattrade utanför.

Han pratar med ett porträtt på en gubbe som pönlög. Börjar prata tillhålls. Conny Ray är en av Sveriges få trollare och när han står i ett litet utrymme stängande och pratande deklarar han barn.

Publiken får jodla som en varmingsång när Conny Ray biter sig i tygken på presenten. Händes Ramon i ett lida där mellan två olika dörrar. Barnen kan se gossen att tället av-lådan när Ramon flyter plus. Till alla lyckas Ramon komma i Conny Rays byxor utan att stanna för sig själv.

Den magiska plösen och troll-stanen i alla färger från skold med i showen som blir mycket uppskattat av barnen. "Thea-miska", ropar Conny Ray och barnen blir som förtrollade.

**Lockade stopp**  
När SN pratar med Träffschefen, Lenn Vålling, blir han först inte beträdd när han säger att 300 barn och föräldrar har kom- ut i regnet för att titta på Conny Ray. Sittfäst i stället och frågar: "Er om tate Conny Ray trollede alla poeken. Han lyckades i alla fall inte trolle bort regnet."

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Trollkarlen Conny Ray lyckades engagera många barn.



Det trollede med barn på träffen i måndags.



Lynn och Otto fick hjälpa Conny med diverse trollkonster.

# Dagisbarn fick vara med om trollerikalas

Med 40 års erfarenhet av framträdanden runt om i Sverige och utomlands, kom Conny Ray med sitt trollerikalas till Degerfors på måndagen.

Inför en entusiastisk skara barn fick de vara med om trolleriets konster vid en föreläsning i Folkets hus.

Conny Ray har ett eget framträdande koncept: att bygga upp sin show, med en unik variation mellan trolleri, musik, dans, ballongskulptering och akrobatik för barn. I går fick 400 barn vara med på scen i Folkets hus i Degerfors för att titta på Conny Rays föreläsning.

Det var första av två barngam-gram som Folkets hus i Degerfors arrangerar tillsammans med Conny Ray. Den andra föreläsningen kommer från Lenn Vålling och betecknas som trolleri för barn. Den kommer att äga rum i Folkets hus i Degerfors på onsdagen.

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Conny Ray roade med flera olika trollkonster under sitt framträdande i Folkets hus på måndagen. Bland annat fick barnen hjälpa till med några trick.



Barnen från flera förskolor i Degerfors var entusiastiska och roade av det trolleri de fick vara med om på Folkets hus i går.

pedagogisk. Inspiringt, vilket kommit till tillgång när han till- vixt inbjuden till till England och USA med seminarier där han visat och lärt hur man trol- ler för en barngård.

Det är tack vare sitt arbete för och med barn, säger Thea- beten. Händelsen "är en beteck- ning mer ropen och framåt idag än för 40 år sedan."

I går fick cirka 400 barn möta Conny Ray och så del av hans trollkonster.

Den 19 oktober kommer han till Folkets hus och den 16 november är det Degerfors.

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Two examples of Conny Ray's press coverage.

Writing this book proved to be a challenge for Mr. Ray, but it came at the right time. The first edition sold out within a few months. Two other books related to presentations followed. He wrote, *The Overhead Book*, which presented information about producing and using computer slides. Then there was *Presenting More* in 2002, which built on his teachings from his earlier books.

He was sought after as a lecturer, and he began traveling around the country to speak and teach. While the weekdays were filled with lecturing, on Saturdays and

Sundays Conny Ray's Magic Party was delighting children and their parents.

These days, Conny Ray is known as the Grandfather of Magic in Sweden, and he helps younger magicians. He is comfortable with his new role because, for him, magic was never about fame and fortune, but about entertaining others.

Through all of these transformations, life is going well for Conny Ray.

Bobby Warren is an Associate Editor of *The Linking Ring*.