

Murder at the Folly – Oct 10th & 17th, 2009

By Charles F Kerner

Magic wasn't enough. Now its murder, blackmail, bribery, theft, fraud and extortion as Charles F Kerner returns to Körner's Folly

"The work of creating an illusion involves transformation, and the first transformation is in the shift of perception." ~unknown

"To fabricate an idea within the consciousness of an audience is the ability to work among the laws and forces of Nature with subtlety."
~ Charles F Kerner

"Nothing I do can't be done by a 10-year-old ...with 15 years of practice."
~Harry Blackstone, Jr.

The beginning...

October 31st, 1953. Halloween, Samhain on the pagan wheel of the year, and children were being born to this, the last day of the summer season. Not much thought, if any, was given to the magic show that was going to take place in about twenty-five years but that was understandable since the magician-to-be was currently being held aloft and smacked on the bottom (a condition with which he would not be totally unfamiliar throughout his life). And what is that cord thingy anyway? He thought he might be electric but that was probably a mistake since it didn't seem to be plugged into anything at the moment.

He was named Charles.

Early in his life Charles had his first really big disappointment when he learned that the other children were dressing up as ghosts, ghouls, skeletons and witches not because it was his birthday and they wished to celebrate with him but because it was Halloween and that meant candy harvesting.

Saddened, Charles afterward felt the day lessened because instead of the perception that he was giving presents to others it now seemed that his birthday observance had turned its emphasis toward acquisition. The fact that his parents, and not he, supplied the treats that he was giving away did not register at this point either, a perfectly understandable inaccuracy for someone who considered the appearance of objects out of thin air to be a natural and completely expected occurrence.

Later that life...

A quarter century passes and takes nearly 25 years to do so. Along the way Charles picks up an interest in magic and sleight-of-hand as well as theater and interactive murder mystery shows. In a profound revelation he discovers a way to bring back the concept of giving to others as a way to salute Samhain, his birthday (although still disappointed about not being electric).

He conjures up a magic show! The ubiquitous vampire makes an appearance in the guise of one particularly striking beauty in a black dress. Another guest comes in a costume made of two giant dice. Other even more eerie and bizarre apparitions attend.

It was a wonderful success.

Today...

The century ends, the century begins. One of the milestones in life is reaching the age of 50. The year that marked this event for Charles came and so after an additional quarter century of study, it was time to give a different expanded set of magic shows with all the skill and discovery of artifice acquired since that first birthday performance. Not long afterward, the idea of producing interactive murder mysteries finally began to bear fruit. Although magic stays the focus of most of Charles' shows, an ever growing number of murder mystery parties have been added to his schedule.

The penchant, for now, continues erratically without heed to what day or season is indicated by the calendar.

Q: You are related to the builder of Körner's Folly?

A: Jule Gilmer Körner is my first cousin 5 generations removed. I am the seventh generation of the family to live in Kernersville.

Q: I understand that your latest show is not a magic show at all but an interactive murder mystery called 'The Auction' to take place in October at Körner's Folly.

A: That's right, two events actually, one on the 10th and the other on the 17th. Although I will be performing a magic routine at the end of the night as a preview for the current version of my magic show 'Familiar with a Wizard', the evening is not about seeing a magic show but participating in a continually evolving plot centered around the murder of a fictitious woman and the auctioning of her priceless artifacts.

Q: So the people attending the 'show' are actually the characters in the murder mystery?

A: Correct. All those attending the murder mystery are given a character in the plot. Although only one of them is the actual murderer, nearly everyone is a prime suspect. As guests arrive, the Baroness's lawyer, Freddie Farr greets them. They get the chance to

view the Baroness's splendid relics, investigate her murder, bid in the auction and do whatever wheeling and dealing is required to achieve their character's other main objective: to end up the richest person in the room!

Q: Without giving anything away, how is the plot structured?

A: Following the suspicious death of Baroness Audry von Munchen, the fabulous von Munchen relics are to be auctioned off to the highest bidder. In the absence of a legal heir, it looks like all the proceeds will go to her favorite charity - unless a claimant comes forward at the last moment. What is the truth behind the Baroness's death? There's only one way to find out!

An auction as important as this one is bound to attract a wide range of guests. Apart from antique dealers and private collectors, you may also find prominent members of the Church, political activists, spies, assassins, and even the occasional drug dealer - as well as all of the Baroness's 'loyal' staff. Take nothing for granted, however: not everyone is who he or she appears to be.

Q: And if the mystery is solved quickly? Is the evening over?

A: Murder isn't the only crime guests are likely to encounter. Blackmail, bribery, theft, fraud and extortion also lurk not far beneath the surface. Why has the Brooch of Salaar gone missing? Whatever happened to the Baroness's husband? And why are some guests so keen to bid for the Japanese sword? Come to the auction to find out.

Q: And Körner's Folly will be hosting this event?

A: The Folly's staff is familiar with the nature of my events and shows. In this instance the guests attending the 'auction' will be engaging each other in surreptitious attempts to obtain information needed to solve the murder. A wine and cheese social prior the auction is the perfect atmosphere so the venue has graciously agreed to provide for this.

Q: How about costuming?

A: I love it when people come in costume but it's not a requirement by any means. I send out each person's character information via email as soon as their tickets are purchased. In this 'invitation' I inform the guest what character they'll be playing and a short paragraph describing that character. There are also a few hidden clues. Costuming is not vital since each guest receives a nametag on a lanyard that is worn throughout the evening so everyone always knows to whom they are speaking. This nametag also contains the character's confidential information, describing their persona in detail, and a few items that can be used to solve the murder and accumulate wealth.

Q: I know that your organization, Acts of Magic, is clouded in a bit of mystery itself. Just how many people does it take to put on one of your performances?

A: I could tell you but then I'd have to turn you into a frog. No, not really. The secret degree of involvement by other performers, stagehands and technicians in my shows started out as a joke and then took on a life of its own so I've simply allowed it to be another one of the obscurities surrounding Acts of Magic itself. A few reporters have tried to break through that veil unsuccessfully and would most likely have found the answer implausible anyway.

Q: So what is the 'Micro Theatre'?

A: The Micro Theater is a tiny performance venue I've have built in my home that seats less than half a dozen people. Whenever possible I give private performances to test out whatever magical effects and illusions I'm experimenting with in order to enhance the shows I give in public and at private homes. Some very terrible routines have died a quick death there and on rare occasions a great bit of magic is created.

Q: How do you decide who attends these 'experimental' performances?

A: The same way it's done by politicians, you can know the right people or just bribe me. Kidding, sort of.

Q: How long have you been doing magic?

A: If by 'doing' you mean studying that would be about 35 years. If by 'doing' you mean performing then I must tell you that my shows have always been rare so that before now I would never have referred to myself as a regular performer. Recently my shows have become far more numerous. I attribute this to one thing; time. Just having more time. I've made a good living and established a solid 30 year career as an IBM large system mainframe programmer. Now, having taken early retirement, I have more leisure time to indulge what has literally been a lifelong passion.

Q: Will you do a show for my kids?

A: The style of magic for children is very different from my shows. I have seen some of the finest magic done by children's magicians and if I had chosen to pursue that style I would hope to be as good. Alas, I did not, so it's more a matter of 'I can not' rather than 'I will not'. This doesn't mean that my shows are so bawdy or offensive that they should be labeled 'for adults only'. A far more accurate description would be 'intelligent and sophisticated acts of arcane magical art'.

Q: What's the difference between studying and performing?

A: Less than you might think. I have spent thousands of hours reading about magic history and technique, which naturally leads to several more thousands of hours of performing to see if these things are really possible. They are.

For example, the amount of time it has taken to create my magic show “Familiar with a Wizard” is at least 6 years although a case could be made for a far longer time. The interactive murder mysteries are far quicker to produce, a matter of months, only because I contract for the scripts. Remember, until now this has been done in my leisure time. The actual amount of time spent working on the show is now full time so ask me again in a year.

Plan now to attend Charles F Kerner’s acclaimed evening of murder and mayhem at Kernersville’s historic Körner’s Folly on October 10th and 17th. Each show is limited to 40 guests so everyone experiences the action close up. The show's intimate setting inside beautiful Körner’s Folly combined with a wine and cheese social makes the presentation feel like a trip back in time to the parlors that characterized posh early 20th century private homes

All proceeds go to the Körner’s Folly Foundation for continuing restoration. Tickets can be purchased by contacting the venue.

Körner’s Folly www.kornersfolly.org
Acts of Magic www.acts-of-magic.org