

How Do You Say 'Abracadabra' in French? Acclaimed Parisian Magician on Chicago Performances, Life in Magic and Fooling Penn & Teller



(Courtesy of Alexandra Duvivier)

She is a charmer, and not just because she refers to Lake Michigan as “Michigan Lake” and pronounces “big and little” with a French accent: “beeg and leetle.”

Paris-based magician Alexandra Duvivier charms audiences with the art of close-up – or parlor – magic. She’s one of a growing number of women in the profession, and she even performed a trick that fooled famed duo Penn & Teller.

Now she has a rare engagement in Chicago, appearing at the Rhapsody Theater in Rogers Park over the next three weeks, Feb. 22-March 10.

Duvivier spoke with WTWW News in advance of opening night.

WTTW News: Alexandra, welcome! What are your thoughts on Chicago?

Duvivier: I enjoy the city because it’s huge, like everywhere in the States, and there are many things to visit. It’s beautiful. Michigan Lake is just wow, mind-blowing. And I like Americans because you are so willing to be entertained.

Do you find audiences are different as you travel from place to place?

Yes, from country to country, and Americans are the best. It's in your culture to be entertained, to be fooled, to be amused. On the contrary the French are more descended from the philosopher René Descartes, so we want to analyze and understand everything. It's tough to fool a French audience.

If you master the French audience you can master people in any country!

You fooled Penn & Teller on their TV show: "Penn & Teller: Fool Us." What was that like? It looked emotional for you.

I can say I cried. It was a trick I'd never performed before. My dad invented it, and I had to be entertaining in front of two huge stars of magic. So I had a lot on my shoulders, and it was a relief when [Penn Jillette] said, "How do you say 'You fooled us' in French?" I was so happy and yeah, it was very emotional.



Alexandra Duvivier performs in Paris. (Courtesy of Alexandra Duvivier)

Students of magic might know that your father is the renowned magician Dominique Duvivier.

Yes, my dad is a magician and we do shows together. We have a magic shop in Paris and a theater. He didn't want me to be a magician. When he saw that I was hooked and had worked on my own, then he helped me. He didn't want me to do it to just please him, see? So when I was a child asking him "Please show me a trick" he never showed me a trick, and then one day he gave me a book he had written.

Is the magic community kind of a boys club?

You're completely right. I think there is maybe 2% women in this field, which is crazy. But it's not surprising, because when you see a woman onstage it's an assistant wearing a bathing suit and just serving the magician. So it's not something that little girls would say "Oh, when I grow up I'll be an assistant of a magician!" This is not a dream, you know? Now that is changing because we see more and more women onstage.

Your shows in Chicago are called "Extraordinaire." What can people expect?

What they could expect is to connect with a French lady sharing some nice moments with an American audience. We can see magic on the web or YouTube, but this is not the same thing. As human beings we need to connect to each other, and there is nothing compared to seeing somebody live. And I am privileged and honored to be able to work in this beautiful venue.

How do people react to your show?

There are three things people always tell me. First, I won't play poker with you. Second, can you make my wife disappear? And third, where is my wallet?

"Extraordinaire" runs Feb. 22 through March 10 at The Rhapsody Theater, 1328 W. Morse Ave., Chicago.