

“BEATING TIME IS OUR LIFE”

THE PETROSYANS
PERFORM
A MAGIC
FASHION SHOW



By Dr. Oliver Erens

Sos and Victoria Petrosyan are performing an extraordinary act. And they're fast — very fast. They have to be, because time is always working against them.

The art of Quick Change is not new. In the past, rapid costume changes could be surprising and entertaining, but not especially magical. Bulky layers of fabric, one on top of another, made the process of transformation quite apparent to the audience. The Petrosyans have improved on and moved beyond the technology of the past. Their form-fitting costumes and elegant, perfectly timed transformations have brought magic to the art of Quick Change, making it startling and seemingly impossible.

The Quick Change has become the signature piece for Sos (pronounced to rhyme with "boss") and Victoria Petrosyan. It is an act that the phrase "must be seen to be appreciated" fits perfectly. The couple's being based in Germany, however, has not afforded much opportunity for American audiences to see and appreciate the wonders of their artistry. Fortunately, that will soon change: The Petrosyans are scheduled to perform in New York's Big Apple Circus from August 2008 to June 2009.

Sos and Victoria Petrosyan have been awarded the title of Magicians of the Year 2007 by the Magic Circle of Germany, and they currently hold the Guinness World Record in the field of Quick Change for running through a series of sixteen costumes in two minutes! Their blend of pyrotechnics, transformations, music, dance, and magic, choreographed to the split-second, is truly amazing. But what looks so smooth and effortless in performance is hard work onstage and offstage.

"We always need our sewing machine with us," Sos explains. "Victoria takes care of our costumes after every performance. In addition to that, we always have two complete sets of costumes with us, just in case. It's very time consuming to keep everything the way it should be. All the costumes are handmade by Victoria. She's very good at that. We're not reliant upon other costumers and prop makers." The ability to make and repair the items used in their shows is of great importance, because the Petrosyans are always on the road, heading from circus to theater, from corporate event to magic show, from TV studio to the airport.

While the act onstage depends upon speed, the backstage work is quite time consuming. It takes the couple two hours to prepare before for each show, including forty minutes for each of them to get dressed, making sure every costume is in exactly the proper position. Repairs and maintenance take an additional hour after each performance. While a few of the costumes might last for as long as a year, the strain of the act takes its toll on the outfits, and most of them must be completely replaced every six months.

Victoria is the star of the duo's 6-minute-and-33-second act. Most of the magic happens to

her. It's an impeccably choreographed Quick Change act, performed to modern rhythms. "With our act, beating the time has become our life," says Sos. And even though the pressure is always high, Sos and Victoria never look rushed or stressed.

Part of the secret to the amazing transformations is in the work Sos and Victoria have put into modernizing the techniques of Quick Change. Sos explains: "The main problem with this type of act is finding the right fabrics. We keep getting questions about this from other magicians and all kinds of stage performers. The secret to that is, we're always looking for new fabrics, wherever we are. We know all the stores in every city we've been to. Whenever we find something suitable, we'll buy lots of it, even if we don't need it right away."

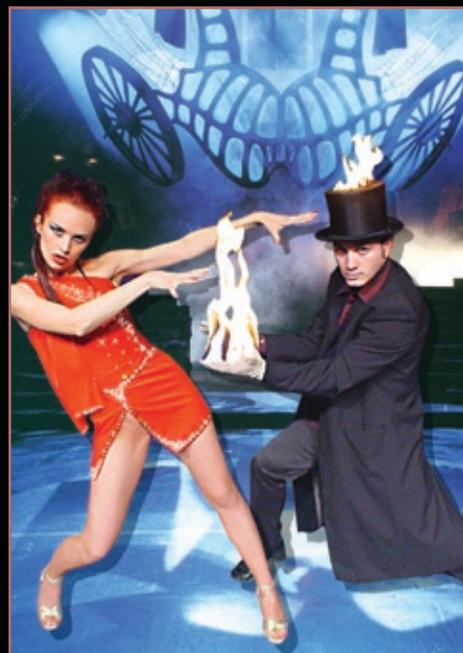
Sos was born in Armenia in 1972. It seems like he inherited being onstage from his parents. At the age of six, he was accepted to the Bolshoi Academy, where he studied dance and choreography. From his father, director of the Armenian State Circus, he picked up juggling. Later, he received prestigious awards for his professional juggling act, including a prize in 1991 from the legendary Cirque de Demain in Paris.

Victoria, born in Russia in 1978, also comes from a circus family. Her father is technical director of the Yuri Nikulin Circus in Moscow, and her mother is a lighting designer for the circus. Victoria's parents had hoped she would become a lawyer; she even began studying law, but never graduated. Instead, she found a way back to her artistic heritage when she met Sos and became his partner, both in life and onstage. First, she assisted him with his juggling act, and later she became a Quick Change expert.

Sos recalls, "The Quick Change act started for me in 1991 in Casablanca, Morocco. I had received some Quick Change costumes from an Armenian magician. I tried to make them work with my sister, just for fun. Never had I intended to perform them onstage. But when politics in the former Soviet Union changed, we were the first to perform a Quick Change act and got bookings very easily. Later, Victoria took over from my sister."

Victoria adds, "And we got married, too!" "In 1996," Sos continues, "I got bored of my juggling act and moved to Moscow to put together a new act. But it was a difficult time and nobody in Russia had money to spend for something like this. Therefore, I asked the State Circus in Moscow for their support. Director Leonid Kostjuk loaned us the money needed for the new act, even though he already had a Quick Change act." Kostjuk took a chance on the Petrosyans' ideas for "faster and more startling" transformations. Sos recalls, "We spent all the money in one month!"

In 2000, Sos was inspired by Italy's Arturo Brachetti to apply a new twist to the classic art of costume change, which originated in Russia. Sos



The Act: THE SECONDS TICK BY

- 0:00 – Sos enters the stage, wearing black trousers, brown shirt, black coat, black bandana, and white gloves. He's carrying a walking cane. After greeting the audience he gestures to the right side of the stage.
- 0:10 – Victoria enters, wearing a black-and-purple costume with bandana. Both dance on the stage, changing positions.
- 0:30 – Sos puts a cigarette in his mouth, throws the cane over to his wife, and wants to light the cigarette.
- 0:39 – Instead of the cigarette, the gloves light up! Sos gesticulates with flames all over his hands.
- 0:56 – Sos extinguishes the flames and shows that the gloves are unharmed. Victoria throws back the cane to Sos, followed by another change of positions.
- 1:03 – Victoria slowly raises a curtain that was draped on the stage.
- 1:08 – The curtain is up.
- 1:09 – Victoria lowers the curtain. Now she's wearing a sexy black-and-red leather corset outfit and long black gloves.
- 1:16 – Victoria is dancing.
- 1:32 – Sos lights a silk, which catches fire easily.
- 1:58 – Suddenly the fire is dead. The silk is unharmed, of course.
- 2:02 – Victoria dancing again, carrying two large metal rings, while Sos rolls an illusion prop to center stage. Then they dance and gesture with the rings.
- 2:41 – Sos attaches the rings to the prop, while Victoria dances in the foreground.



realized there was more to costume changes than just wearing something different — the use of props, music, acting, and other theatrical touches added to the effect. As the couple started applying these ideas to their own performances, this became the genesis of Sos and Victoria's "New Generation of Quick Change" act, which they now perform throughout the globe. They have become one of the busiest acts in the field and have won numerous prizes.

Although the Petrosyans have become most identified with the Quick Change act, their repertoire is considerably broader than that. From grand illusions, such as *Sawing a Woman in Half*, to close-up magic — they feel comfortable in almost any field of conjuring. And nearly every act comes with a different hair color for Victoria!

Quick Change remains the couple's all-time favorite act, even though Sos wonders, "Why do they call it Quick Change? I believe that sounds more like computer technology than like magic. The Russian word for Quick Change translates to 'transformation.' But if you talk about 'transformation' in the English-speaking world, nobody will understand what you mean. What I personally like best is to call this field 'Costume Change Magic.' That translates easily in any language."

Sos and Victoria are not the only show-business successes in the immediate family. Their sons, eight-year-old Tigran and eleven-year-old Sos Junior, perform their own magic act together. They are getting booked more and more, whenever their busy school schedules will allow, and even without their parents!

Before the two boys were old enough to speak or walk, their father taught them pantomime, dance, juggling, and magic. At the age of three, Sos Jr. had a video of Michael Jackson. Watching it over and over again, he became obsessed with the way Jackson danced and began imitating him down to his smallest movements. Noticing his son's love for dance, papa Sos — a former professional ballet dancer — decided to introduce the boy to other dance styles. Watching Fred Astaire, Rudolf Nureyev, Mikhail Baryshnikov, and others became the boy's favorite pastime.

At the age of four, Sos Jr. was traveling with his parents. On one occasion, Finn Jon shared the bill with the Petrosyans. Finn Jon was one of the first to recognize Sos Jr.'s incredible talent for manipulations. The youngster began learning manipulation from his father, who taught him the same routine that had been passed down to him by his own father. Sos' hands were too small for normal playing cards, so his father had to trim them down to a smaller size.

Today, Sos Jr. is very successful with his own manipulation act — using normal-sized cards. Eberhard Riese, respected magic coach and author, recently expressed the following opinion in the German magic magazine *Magie*: "I almost can't think of any other kid who was as good as Sos Jr. at his age. Only one name comes to mind: Topas, world champion in manipulations."

Performing is the Petrosyans' profession, but Sos and Victoria clearly express that "the boys and school, as well as their homework, have first priority." Sos teaches the boys Armenian, and they learn Russian from Victoria. They have also picked up German and English and other languages during their travels. "But we don't really teach them magic," says Sos. "They see us in our profession every day and they want to help us with it, as well as find their own way in magic. Sos Jr. started in magic at the age of four, and today he accomplishes techniques that even I can't do. I encourage him to improve, but it's his free choice. After all, he's only eleven. Whenever he's together with our friends in magic, they are impressed by his dedication. He even won first prize at the Prix Juventa Magica in Berlin. Should he decide to do something else for a living, that's fine with me. Also, Tigran is very active manipulating cards. It's like a dream come true for me, because I believe that the basics of magic are manipulations. The fact that my kids are happy performing in this field makes me feel very proud."

In addition to Sos Jr.'s solo act, the Petrosyan boys also perform together. They have developed a fast-paced act in which Sos Jr. handcuffs and chains his younger brother Tigran, but the boy manages to escape from the chains within seconds — even though he's still handcuffed! Recently, the parents performed nightly for several weeks at the Friedrichsbau Varieté theater in Stuttgart. The management put together a special edition of the show, on Saturday and Sunday afternoons, for families with kids. It was the perfect setting for the brothers' performance. There, they had the opportunity to star in their own show, work toward improving their act, and take advantage of coaching sessions with Stuttgart-based Eberhard Riese.

Even though Sos and Victoria are still amazing audiences all over the world with their Quick Change act, they have decided to share some of their legendary secrets, planning a series of books that will explain techniques they have developed for their transformations. The first volume, scheduled for release in July, will deal with the complete change of a man's suit.

"I love this kind of magic" is how Sos expresses his deep feelings for the art of Quick Change. You won't find more devoted or more professional performers in showbiz today than Sos and Victoria Petrosyan — always racing against time and, somehow, winning.

To see performances of Sos & Victoria, as well as Sos Jr. & Tigran, visit "WebSource" at MAGICmagazine.com.

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3:11 – Victoria stands beside the rings of the illusion.



3:12 – The curtain is raised over her.

3:16 – The curtain is lowered. Victoria is now inside of the rings.

3:33 – Curtain up.

3:37 – Curtain down. She's outside of the rings.

3:55 – Last time up with the curtain.



3:59 – Curtain down. Victoria now wears a small, glittery blue dress.

3:38 – She steps into position at center stage. Sos throws a large silk over her. She does not move at all.

4:41 – Sos removes the silk. Victoria hasn't changed position, but the color of her dress is now red.



5:11 – After a brief dance, Victoria puts a large hat on her head.

5:20 – The hat contains a curtain, which is lowered and hides her.

5:24 – The curtain falls to the stage. Victoria now wears a black bustier with knee-length skirt.



5:34 – Sos indicates that he should have a change of costume as well.

5:56 – He steps to a curtain that was draped on the stage. Victoria raises the curtain.

5:59 – She lets the curtain fall. Sos is wearing white trousers, white T-shirt, and white coat.

6:23 – Sos puts a silk on Victoria's shoulders.



6:31 – Victoria stretches her arms under the silk.

6:33 – Sos pulls the silk aside. Victoria now wears a long, white evening gown. They accept the thunderous applause.