

NEW YORK POST

FRIDAY, MAY 30, 1997

POST PLUS

WHAT'S ON TONIGHT

Magician with Saxe appeal

Melinda's amazing feat: Breaking the prime-time gender barrier

By JOSEF ADALIAN

MELINDA Saxe isn't just the First Lady of Magic — she's virtually the *only* lady in magic.

In an industry filled with male magic superstars like David Copperfield, and Siegfried & Roy — all of whom have had TV specials in the past year — Saxe stands out as the best-known female magician working today. And tonight, she breaks through another gender barrier when she becomes the first female magician to ever headline her own prime-time special on network television with "Disney's Melinda: First Lady of Magic" (8 o'clock on WCBS/Ch. 2).

"It's always been a male dominated field," Saxe told *The Post* yesterday. "I think that women, from a very young age, don't like to be fooled. And we've always seen the ladies being sawed in half instead of doing the sawing."

Even Saxe didn't originally set out to be a magician.

"My first love was dancing," she says. "I started to dance before I could walk."

Growing up in Las Vegas, Saxe also knew she wanted to be an entertainer. She ultimately decided to try her hand at magic after a series of vivid dreams.

"I'd see a lot of stage shows with magicians and then I'd have a dream I was on stage performing magic," she remembers. "The dream was so overwhelming, I decided I'd have to go after it."

Saxe got her first big break in 1985, landing a gig at Vegas' Bourbon Street Hotel. She then moved from one hotel showroom to another, becoming one of the most popular showroom acts in Las Vegas.



Melinda Saxe — the self-proclaimed "First Lady of Magic" — brings her amazing Las Vegas act to prime time tonight in her first TV special.

Despite her success on the Strip, about two years ago, Saxe decided to leave town to go on tour with other magicians. It was a risky move, but one which ultimately paid off with a lucrative deal with Disney for tonight's special.

The hour-long extravaganza — featuring special guest stars Shelley Long, Al Unser and Kelsey Mulrooney — showcases Saxe performing 12 amazing illusions including:

- Making Unser disappear while he's driving a Lamborghini speeding along at 180 miles per hour.

- Reading the minds of the home audience by having them touch their TV screens.

- Causing a Lear jet carrying

Roger Rabbit to appear out of nowhere.

Saxe says her career has changed for the better since signing with Mickey Mouse and company.

"Having Disney attached to my name is so neat," Saxe says. "It's a worldwide brand and my act has always been family. I try to make people feel things in their heart rather than just being glitzy."

Meanwhile, Saxe says her success isn't due solely to her sex.

"The fact that there aren't many female magicians helps, because there isn't that competition," she explains. "But for me, I felt that whether you're a male or a female, what's important is that you have to bring out who you are."