

# Simon Drake's Weird USA

Part #2 of his strange encounters in the States

## YOUR GUIDE Simon Drake

The genius magician who was responsible for 1990s TV show *The Secret Cabaret*, Simon Drake now performs once a month at The House Of Magic, which is stuffed with spooky memorabilia, trinkets and books. He also acts as a consultant for music tours, films and TV shows. We sent him on a quest to visit the weirdest places in the USA.

[Houseofmagic.co.uk](http://Houseofmagic.co.uk)



A Gene Simmons look-alike spotted in LA!

## VISIT #2 Sylvester The Jester

Sylvester The Jester describes himself as a "real live cartoon", and he's brought to life via a 1950s quiff, brightly coloured clothes, and loony tricks. His real name is Danny, and he was born in Youngstown, Ohio, in 1961. His father was a plumber and his mother was a homemaker, but young Danny's life changed at age 15 when he saw a TV performance by Canadian magician Doug Henning. He studied fine art and theatre arts, then spent years developing his skills before creating the madcap character he is today. Danny's appeared on TV, performed in multiple Las Vegas shows, and now lectures and tours. →

PICTURES: SIMON DRAKE



Did someone leave the gas on?



Danny does a mean Robert De Niro



Attacked by piranhas wearing performance pyjamas!



Bingo: The angry redneck Wall Street tycoon puppet from hell



Danny's workshop of wonders!



Every morning I get up and give my teeth a good grind!

**"H**ill! Danny Sylvester at your cervix!" says a man with a wicked little grin, opening the front door to a rickety house. It turns out Sylvester The Jester, or Danny, is fresh from an argument with his room-mate about pre-Darwinism theory of evolution and infinity. The set-to nearly resulted in a fist fight. I think I knocked on the door at just the right time to break up a fracas.

On entering the front hall, I can barely see a thing it's so dark. I wonder if I'm about to get on a shadowy spook ride, until Danny opens some tatty wooden shutters and the dazzling California light streams into the place he calls home - a house he rents from a fan.

Danny became Sylvester The Jester in the early 1990s. Dressed in an over-sized suit, he gets squashed by falling anvils, yanks out his foot-long tongue and grins manically as steam toots out of his lugholes. Imagine an ultra-violent *Tom And Jerry* cartoon come to life, and you're close.

He's also a prolific builder of unique props and has created magic effects for Kevin James, stand-up comedian and magician The Amazing Johnathan and myself. There's evidence of his work all around the house; old plastic cups, Chinese lanterns, newspapers, sketches and plans are scattered across the flat and workshop where Danny slaves over new tricks and effects.

His passion for comedy and magic came after a traumatic childhood. He lived in fear of his father, and when he was 10 his brother died in a go-karting accident, aged six. When he was 15, his parents divorced. He still has a voice in his head that he first heard during this time.

**I WONDER IF I'M ABOUT TO GET ON A SHADOWY SPOOK RIDE, UNTIL DANNY OPENS SOME SHUTTERS AND LIGHT STREAMS IN**



I said dental floss, not mental floss!



"Is that my dream girl? Nah, it's just two bald guys..."

The Magic Castle in Hollywood where Sylvester is banned



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"The voice was the kid that I never got to be when I was growing up. I was numb with pain for most of the time, had a lot of stress and my dad was a pretty violent man," he recalls. "When my parents split up I thought the world was ending. My dad and I have a good relationship now, but my creative side definitely took shape way back then."

It was a TV programme featuring 1970s magician Doug Henning (Canada's version of Paul Daniels) that sparked Sylvester's interest in illusions. "I was an introverted and creative kid," he says. "When I saw Doug, I understood that maybe the world didn't have to be the



**HE SMASHES HIS FINGER WITH A HAMMER, TEARS HIS FACE OFF WITH FLY-PAPER, GETS HIS HEAD BLOWN OFF BY A BOMB...**

way it was. Around that time I invented a trick and fooled my dad with it, which was a big deal. Doug had buck teeth and silly clothes, and didn't look like a magician at all. He made me see that anything was possible."

The violence from Danny's childhood, coupled with a love for vintage cartoons, can be seen in his work.

He smashes his finger with a hammer, tears his face off with fly-paper, gets his head blown off by a bomb, attaches jump leads to his ears and gets electrocuted. Fortunately, Sylvester survives these assaults - his catchphrase is 'back to normal!'

His style has created controversy in the magic community. In one trick, he plucks out a giant nasal hair and the voice of God first threatens him with a bolt of lightning, and then offers to shake hands. Sylvester pulls God's finger and the Big Man lets off a huge God-fart.

I leave Danny's house and return to my hotel in Hollywood. It's right next to the US clubhouse of traditional illusionists, The Magic Castle, who've banned Danny for this kind of humour. I have a VIP pass in my pocket for the Magic Castle, courtesy of the late, great Ali Bongo. But I decide not to visit. I'd rather see Danny's fart jokes than old farts on stage.

**NEXT MONTH: MARVIN'S MARVELOUS MECHANICAL MUSEUM**