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KinderCare director

There’s magic in the air when 6-year-old takes stage

By RACHEL ZINN

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Eli Portala has Houdini magic, Fred Astaire moves, and Armani style.

And he hasn’t even finished kindergarten.

Eli is only 6 years old, but he has his own magic act. He tap dances through several tricks with the flair of a mature performer. Every scarf wave and wand stroke fits into the rhythm of old-fashioned background music.

“The whole theme of the act is his idea,” his father, Andrew Martin, said. “Even at an early age, he had a lot of the showmanship.”

Mr. Martin, an area magician who performs more than 400 shows a year, said he was shocked when Eli started experimenting with card tricks as a toddler. He never expected Eli to share his interest in magic.

“He took me totally by surprise,” Mr. Martin said.

As he got older, Eli would often imitate tricks he saw on television and improvise illusions of his own.

With the help of his parents, Eli put his talents into a 5-minute routine. He makes scarves change color, produces objects from nowhere, and shows off his three years of tap dance training.

His act debuted two weeks ago for students at the KinderCare Learning Center on Henthorne Drive in Springfield Township.

“He was great. It was really cute,” said Mary Beth Tercha, KinderCare director. “It was fun for the kids because it was another child up there performing.”

Eli plans to perform in August at a four-day magic convention in Colon, Mich. He will probably be the youngest to compete.

Performing is nothing new for Eli. He habitually breaks into spontaneous magic demonstrations. For example, he drew an admiring crowd ear-

lier this summer when he practiced tricks in Ottawa Park, just a few blocks from his house.

“There were kids all over playing and screaming, and they just stopped everything they were doing and came to watch,” Mr. Martin said. “I couldn’t believe it.”

Magic isn’t the only thing Eli is known for in the neighborhood. He loves to wear fancy clothes, so he gets a lot of attention when he rides his bike or goes to the grocery store in his tuxedo.

“He’s the only kid that would go around wearing

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THE BLADE/LORI KING

Eli Portala, left, takes a bow with assistant Gabby Mickel, 5, his cousinl.

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Magic

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tails,” said his mother, Melissa Mickel-Portala. She books appearances and does publicity for Eli and Mr. Martin.

Eli, who attends Grove Patterson Academy, gets much of his inspiration from watching videos of Gene Kelly and Fred Astaire. He masterfully mimics the flourishes of great dancers and magicians.

Even Eli is sometimes impressed by his dance steps. “I look really good when I spin around,” he said.

His parents said they will not push him to pursue magic, but they will help him refine his act as long as he shows interest.

Right now, Eli is perfecting a new trick. He can make a bouquet of paper flowers burst from behind a scarf.

“He’s always performing,” Mrs. Mickel-Portala said. “He’s not full of himself, it’s just what he does. It’s his life.”