

Deceptively sexy magic on stage

SUNNY BURNS

Australia's hottest card shark, James Galea, will be lurking at the Sydney Theatre this week to prove why he is Australia's best magician.

His new show *I Hate Rabbits* is an inimitable blend of comedy and mind-boggling enchantment. It's an act for people who detest clichéd magicians and magic shows.

Galea said that the "pull a rabbit out of the hat" and rigid tux image is very much associated with magic and he felt a need to distance himself from that stereotype for his show.

"Often you see the same tricks, by the same people, in the same format. I wanted to create a show that I knew my friends and I would want to go and see. I always had an aversion to magicians who tried to convince people that what they were doing was real — trying to make people believe that they could really float in the air or talk to the dead," he said.

"They're just tricks, simple tricks. I think when people get too serious about it they take the real magic away from people. It really is a whole lot of fun when you can't work something out — it doesn't mean that people have special powers. Everyone knows I can't really walk on water or read your mind (I hope), but I can create the illusion that I can, and that's the fun part."

Galea started learning magic at 14 from

someone he thought was a magician. He later found out that his mentor was a professional card shark who used to do the things he taught as magic tricks to cheat in real poker games.

"There's no school as such, not like a Hogwarts or anything. Because magic is such a secretive art, it can be hard for people to learn. I was lucky enough to have a teacher ... of sorts," he said.

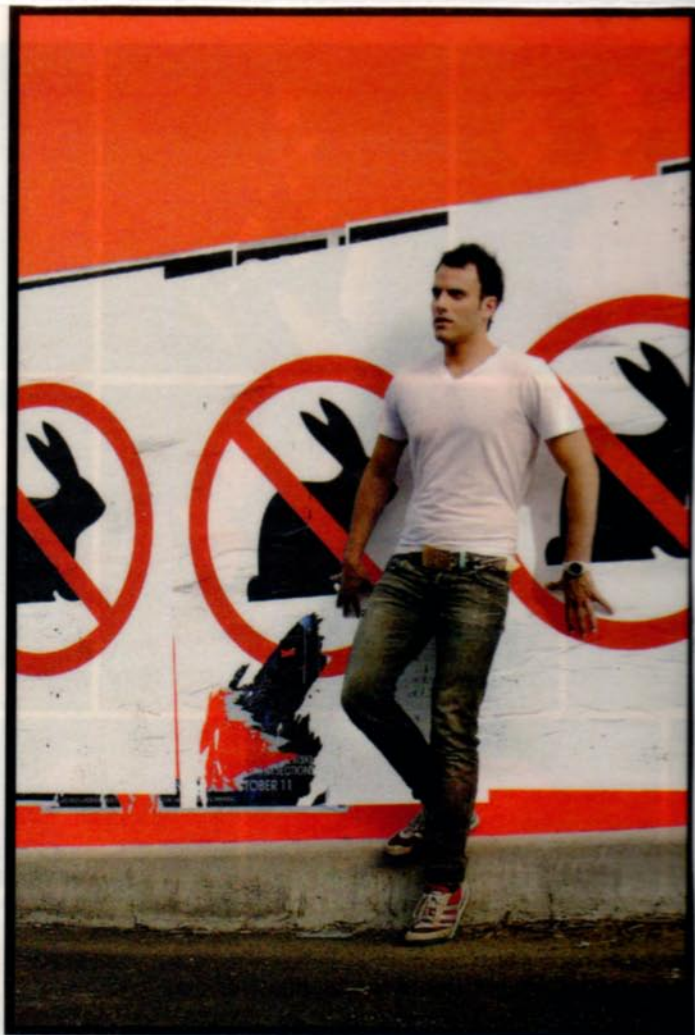
"It was a pretty cool way to learn actually. I had friends who were learning their secrets of how to make a hankie disappear from old magic books — meanwhile, I got to learn how to deal aces from the bottom of the deck and steal watches, from a con man."

Forget large fancy props and smoke tricks. This show has been stripped right back.

"I don't wear a magic costume. I wear what I would when I go out with my mates," Galea said.

"We utilise the audience throughout the show. They lead me in the direction they want to go and I try to hold on for the ride. It's lots of fun and keeps each show fresh."

info: *I Hate Rabbits* is at the Sydney Theatre from Thursday 4 December to Saturday 6 December, 8pm. Tickets from \$35. Bookings on 132 849 or www.sydneytheatre.com.au.



James Galea doesn't pull rabbits out of hats.