

ALL IN THE MIND

Preparing for his solo spring tour in 2026, mind reader **Alex McAleer** talks to **Fergus Byrne** about his craft.

Although the lines between supernatural and magic are sometimes blurred, magician and mind reader Alex McAleer is clear that he does not sit amongst the gods, ghosts or spirits. He's a mind reader, but very much not in the supernatural sense. 'I'm not a psychic, I'm not supernatural, I'm not reading palms or talking to the dead or anything like that,' he explains. Sporting a beanie hat and as many layers as possible on a freezing January morning, he is keen to ensure those unfamiliar with his show that it is not creepy. Instead, his performances are a unique blend of mentalism, psychology, and comedy. Alex is more about creating an interactive and entertaining experience for audiences. 'It isn't one of those shows where a soft Northern voice quietly tells you that your late Nan's here with you.'

Alex's fascination with magic began in childhood when, as an only child, he would set up games to entertain his parents. Sometimes he would be a magician, practising tricks that his dad would secretly help him with. Other times, he would set up a shop in the living room and expect his parents to buy stuff. In time the shopkeeper game was dropped. 'I just had the Paul Daniels magic kit and things like that, but I never really pursued magic until I was in my teens,' he recalls. A key moment came when his mother passed away when he was 14, leaving him quiet and introspective. During this time, he started reading books on psychology, and while doing his exams, his dad gave him a book about memory techniques, which led him to explore books about mentalism. 'At the same time, I just happened to flick on the television late one night on E4 and there was this show called *Darren Brown Mind Control*. He realised that combining psychology, memory techniques, and magic could be a potential career path.'

Still in his teens, he put together what he laughingly describes as a 'business plan' for the Prince's Trust to get an £800 loan. 'I got a website, got a suit, and they gave me my first gig,' he says. In time, the gigs grew from small groups to larger venues as he honed his skills in mind-reading entertainment. From performing at small parties and cabaret shows, Alex's career took a huge turn when he joined the ensemble show *Champions of Magic*. 'I went from playing to 50 people in a room in a cabaret venue to performing in

front of like 4,000 people in a venue in America,' he says. After 10 years with the *Champions of Magic* show, he left at the end of 2023 to focus on his solo career.

His solo show, *Alex McAleer: Mind Reader*, showcases his distinctive approach to magic. 'It's very much what it says on the tin,' he says. While the show is rooted in mentalism, it is also a comic and interactive experience. 'It's not sort of gag, gag, gag, but it's a very fun show,' he explains. He emphasises that his performances are not about supernatural powers but about creating moments of wonder and disbelief. The highlight for him is that moment when people in the audience collectively gasp. 'You can hear it,' he says. 'And you see people turn to their partners with their mouths open and a "what just happened" look on their faces.'

Reading the minds of his audience means that anything can happen. He talks about a scenario where the entire audience is involved and secrets can be revealed. 'Nothing too salacious, normally,' he says. However, he recounts one occasion where a young woman made an embarrassing admission in front of her parents. He asks a member of the audience to think about something and tries to work out what they are thinking about. 'What she chose to think about was that she had got her first tattoo a week beforehand, and her parents, who were in the audience with her, did not know. And I was the one to break the news. I think there might have been some lively discussion on the way home.'

Despite his confident stage presence, Alex admits he is naturally shy. However, he learned early in life that he had the choice to either 'just sit on my own and be quiet, or I can hold the room.' His confidence developed through years of performing, beginning with amateur dramatics in his village. 'I just got used to being on stage and sort of faking it till you make it.' Over time, he learned to embrace the vulnerability of performing and focus on the unique connection he creates with his audience. The confidence to do that is something he believes could help children and young adults if it were incorporated into their schooling.

He believes memory techniques, in particular, can be invaluable for students. 'Your brain thinks in pictures and you think in stories. That's why we like stories. You just combine those ideas, and you can memorise anything,' he explains. He used the



same techniques to help his son, who struggled in mainstream education but later excelled in mathematics. He struggled with maths and now 'absolutely loves mathematics. He's brilliant at it.' He also suggests that memory techniques may be valuable in later years, pointing to the 'neuroplasticity of people's brains' and how activities like memory techniques can keep the brain healthy and strong.

Alex also advocates for teaching public speaking and confidence-building skills in schools. 'I think if you ask people their fears as a general populace, the biggest is public speaking. It rates above being buried alive or eaten by sharks' he laughs. 'Confidence in public speaking and memory tricks and techniques would

absolutely help everyone.' He believes these skills are not only useful for education but also for personal and professional development.

While Alex McAleer continues to tour and develop new projects, his passion for mentalism and entertainment remains unwavering. Whether he's performing for thousands in America or a small audience in the UK, his goal is always the same: to create moments of wonder and connection that audiences will never forget.

Alex McAleer: Mind Reader is at The Corn Exchange in Dorchester on Friday 13th February. For tickets and more information visit <https://www.dorchesterarts.org.uk>.