

# NEW YORK

## Theater

### Onstage

## Stupendous and Amazing Feats!

Carmine Street's Mostly Magic club shuttered in 1994, and it was three years before New York's homeless magicians got a new place to strut their stuff. Michael Chaut opened **Monday Night Magic** in June 1997, and the popular series, which just celebrated its 200th performance, now showcases at least six magicians each night. Some perform classic routines (Linking Rings of Steel, Levitations of Beautiful Women, Vanishing Birds); others, close-up magic, card tricks, and contemporary twists on the standards (like Simon Lovell's comic straitjacket routine, pictured). "This is the only place where people make a decision to go see magic," says Chaut, a skilled pickpocket and close-up trickster himself. "Otherwise, we're just part of the entertainment package at a wedding or a corporate event." Jamy Ian Swiss, one of Chaut's four partners and a frequent accomplice of Penn & Teller, adds, "That's why we get so many top performers. We can't pay them any kind of money, but magicians from all over the world come in and say, *Wow, I forgot what it was like to just do a show!*" The magic offered in the tiny, 151-seat Sullivan Street Playhouse (on dark nights during the *The Fantasticks*' legendary run) is a far cry from the smoke-and-mirrors TV-special style of David Copperfield. "This isn't illusion magic—it's parlor magic," explains Swiss. "It has a lot in common with magic's nightclub era in the late thirties and forties, when the wealthy built these showrooms, like the Rainbow Room, and held miniature vaudevilles. Like Monday Night Magic, those shows didn't depend a lot on the apparatus—the apparatus was small, but the personality was big." So, for one night a week, New York's conjurers and illusionists have a home where their white doves can roost, grandmasters mingle with tyros, and their feats amaze audiences. "Life is so great, but things happen so you don't get your head blown out of proportion," says Chaut. "Just do a bar mitzvah, where you have 13-year-olds throwing stuff at you. *That's* a reality check." (See "Off-Off Broadway.") L.H.

