

Jon Zealando



Trevor John Hodson was born in Auckland on 9 October 1939 to Myra (b. Forbes) and Bernard Hodson. Bernard was a teller at the *National Bank*, having transferred from Wanganui where his family ran *Hodson's Motor Services*, a public transport company and garage. Myra was brought up in Lawrence and had studied dental nursing with a view to becoming a missionary. In Auckland she met Bernard at the *Kingsland Methodist Church* and they married in 1928. They were assigned a state house in Sandringham and by the time Trevor came along they had 2 children; Neville (10) and Elaine (5).

Trevor was educated at *Dominion Road Primary*, *Balmoral Intermediate* and *Mt Albert Grammar*. As an 11 year old his father took him see American magician John Calvert at *His Majesty's Theatre* and Trevor became entranced. He also enjoyed Norman Tait the *Fun Doctor* and Ces Morris, who had toured with the *Kiwi Concert Party*. Trevor talked his father into buying him books on magic and he collected *Meccano Magazines* which had magic articles written by Norman Hunter. He also took up cycling and once rode to Rotorua and back. Later he toured with the *Akarana Wheelers Road Club*.

Bernard Reid shared his interest in magic and another school friend encouraged Trevor to draw and imitate sounds. His first paid public performance was in 1954 and in the audience was Steve Lovell, a member of the *New Zealand Society of Magicians*, who invited him to meetings and encouraged him to attend the *1956 Magic Convention* where Trevor placed 3rd equal in the *Best 12 Minute Act* competition.

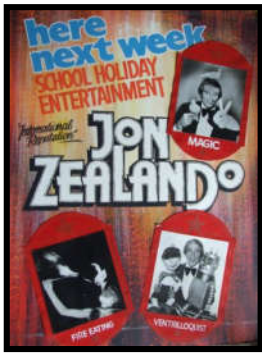


Leaving school he joined the *Bank of New South Wales* for two years then quit and went professional. He regularly brought new routines into his act until he had developed a two hour variety show; fire eating, lightning sketching, troublewit, mind reading, escapology, balloon twisting, magic and yogi stunts such as lying on a bed of nails, sword swallowing, fire walking, dancing on broken glass and the *Human Dart Board*. He also learned to play guitar and chromatic mouth organ. He built two ventriloquists dummies, Pinocchio and *Robbie the Robot*, from discarded odds and ends and was mulling over using 'Alberto' as a stage name, after his old school, Mt Albert Grammar, when 'Jon Zealando' was suggested. Jon soon put the missing 'a' back when club managers and journalists kept misspelling it.

In the 1960's there was enough work to keep variety entertainers busy. Television was coming online; newly built shopping malls put on school holiday shows and talent quests; nightclubs and restaurants provided cabaret, dance bands and afterhours drinking, and companies sponsored staff functions and children's Christmas parties. A & P show circuits dotted the country and parades and summer holiday shows were held at beach resorts. Jon joined Mary Thrall's *Fullers Theatrical Agency* and worked the Auckland supper clubs circuit; *Ranch House*, *Toby Jug*, *Dutch Kiwi*, *Back of the Moon*, *The Gourmet* and *Hi Diddle Griddle*. In 1959 he began a series of *Farmer's Roof Garden* shows which broke attendance records. He also worked with Peter Newberry and his sidekick David Baylis on two comedy slapstick shows, *Hit the Deck* and *Hit the Sack*.

In 1962 Harry M Miller toured *Showtime Spectaculars* with the *Howard Morrison Quartet*, Toni Williams, Rama White, Noel McKay and compare-comedian John Daley. Jon did his chapeau and puppet act and was now able to get Pinocchio and Robbie's voices to sing simultaneously, which usually brought the house down. It was while on tour that he inadvertently created a kiwi entertainer's catchword. As it is almost impossible for a ventriloquist to pronounce the letter 'B' without moving their lips, Jon's Robbie the Robot puppet would say, 'How are you going, doy?' The phrase became an in-joke with the Morrison group then eventually it spread through the entire entertainment fraternity. The only one nonplussed was pianist Carl Doy who constantly wondered how come complete strangers laughed at his surname!



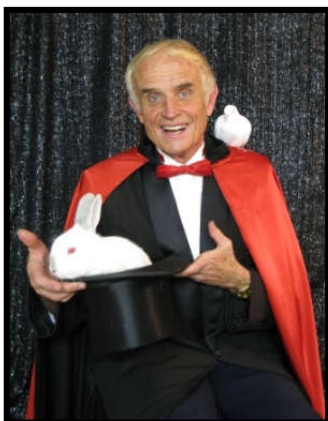


One night while performing at the *Crystal Palace Ballroom* he met Janet Boyle, a home-economics school teacher five years his elder. She was available to help during school holidays and soon became invaluable as his magician's assistant, often being cut in half up to 6 times a day. They married in January 1964, purchased a home on Mangere Mountain and she took over the office. On 15 July 1966 Jon rushed back from performing in Katikati to support Janet as she gave birth to their son, Brian George Hodson.

Later in 1966 Jon became a founder member of the *Variety Artists Convention*, an association dedicated to publicising issues concerning the entertainment industry.

In 1967 the licensing laws were relaxed to allow hotels to serve alcohol until 10pm but variety acts and live music were disallowed in public bars. Still, in December Jon broke his own record of number of shows in one day, thirteen in different locations. He flew to Tokyo to appear on the *World Surprise Television Show* in January 1968 where he performed his puppets and produced a hot enough flame on a portable gas ring to fry an egg. On his way home he stopped off for a 2 week season at *George's Night Club* at Surfer's Paradise and visited agent Graham Dent to arrange future work in Australia. In 1971 he returned to Japan to perform his *40 Gallon Drum Escape* successfully but did not escape the notice of the *Hong Kong Customs* when he tried to carry his starter's pistol onboard the aeroplane. Officials arranged for the pilot to pop it into his bag and return it to Jon when they landed in Auckland. He also brought back possibly New Zealand's first wireless lapel microphone and receiver, a great boon to any magician who chooses to work hands free.

When the *VAC* decided to present an annual lifetime achievement award in 1969 Jon sculpted the statuette which became known as the *Benny*, after it's first recipient magician Edgar Benyon. He also designed an award for the *International Brotherhood of Magicians* to be presented to the winner of the best illusion at a New Zealand magician's convention. It is now called the *Jon Zealando Trophy*.



1972 saw him and his family on board the *SS Monterey* with a one month stop in San Francisco while the ship was repainted; enough time to hire a car, visit the West Coast attractions and meet up with local magicians. He returned home to be presented with the 5th *VAC Benny Award*, which he promptly disappeared in front of a dazzled audience. Two years later he cruised the South Pacific on board the *SS Marco Polo* performing each night, then worked as a support act for Dick Emery's highly successful national tour.

An exodus of New Zealanders began visiting the Philippines to seek psychic surgery and Jon set out to prove that it was a hoax. He created a 10 minute illusion that involved swallowing a marked key then cutting his stomach open to retrieve it and then offered a \$1000 reward to anyone who could prove that the operations were real. He also went public with explanations of how other mystics fooled their audiences. *Consumer* magazine honoured him on its May 1975 cover.

He toured as support for Rolf Harris on the 1976 *British Paints, Sure Can!* show, fronted for Alice Cooper's 1977 concert and performed at dozens of out of town events. He had to cancel shows in August when his VW Kombi van and props were stolen but luckily it was found three days later with everything intact minus his guitar. In Oct he appeared at a *Guinness World Record* day at *Henderson Square Shopping Mall* and broke the longest flame of fire (7.45m) and the most cigars smoked at once (15). To promote the *Magician's Convention* he drove down Auckland's Queen Street in a sports car blindfolded and again escaped from a straitjacket while suspended from a crane in *Aotea Square*.

In 1984 he flew to Hollywood to show off his fire blowing skills on the *That's Incredible Television Show*. Union pressures prevented Janet from blowing darts into Jon's back for the 'Human Dartboard trick', so a stuntman was called in who managed to break the head off one: a trip to hospital by ambulance followed. At the 1984 Labour Party conference a gaggle of feminists prevented Jon from sawing a woman in half claiming that it was 'sexist, pornographic and reminiscent of snuff movies.' Jon agreed and offered to saw up a female journalist suggesting, 'You don't want to get blood all over that pretty dress. Would you like to take it off?'



In 1985 Jon and Janet were inducted as the *Grand Masters of Magic* by the *Brotherhood of Auckland Magicians* at a grand ceremony at the *Avondale Racecourse*. Janet had been diagnosed with Leukaemia and confined to a wheelchair and Brian and Jon cared for her until her death in May 1986. Then Jon's health broke down with chest pains and throat nodule problems and in July 1987 his car was broken into again outside the *St George's Tavern* in Papatoetoe. Things improved when he was asked to tour with Vince Carmen for 8 weeks then joined Marcus Craig for his last *Diamond Lil' Xmas Show*. Actor and singer Elaine Bracey began to help with Jon's promotion and office work and soon began

performing and touring with him as *Boo Boo the Clown*. She arranged contracts with *Cob and Co* in Avondale and the *Waipuna Lodge Restaurant*, then set up a circuit of primary school tours. He was invited to the '88 *FISM Magic Competition* in Holland to demonstrate his fire act and psychic surgery.

With his friend Jim Joll he developed an electronic flash-wand and began visiting magic conferences and shops to market it, careful not to sell too many locally as it was a great gimmick for his own shows. He was celebrity roasted by the VAC attended by many celebrities including; Max Cryer, Phil Warren, Les Andrews, John Maybury, Gerry Merrito, Chic Littlewood, Guy Cater, Monique Feron, Wayne Rogers and Alan Watson.

In 1997 his relationship with Elaine faltered while he was touring in the musical *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. He was able to pick up some short runs with *Whirling Brother's Circus*, turning up whenever they did a lengthy season. He visited Vanuatu to work at the *Waterfront Bar and Grill* then took a 6 week world tour accompanying his friend Jeff Parry who had been diagnosed with cancer. In 2002 the VAC granted him a *Scroll of Honour* and in 2006, while President of the *BAM*, he was declared a *Living Legend of Magic* to honour his 50th year as a professional magician.

The next year Elaine passed away to cancer, breaking Jon's heart yet again! When his weekly *Waipuna* residency finished in 2008 he took a holiday to Los Angeles with Brian to see old friends and revisit *The Magic Castle* then they flew to Nashville to stay with John Calvert (remember that performance way back in 1950 at *His Majesty's?*) and visit the *Grand Ole Opry* where his late close friend, Rusty Greaves, often performed. On Jon's return he turned up to do a gig at the *Onehunga Boating Club* to discover that a surprise 70th birthday party had been arranged.



Jon has toured the South Pacific many times. In mid 1961 Agent Eddie Hegan booked him to tour New Caledonia and Tahiti then, in 1970, Phil Warren arranged for him to perform at the 2nd anniversary of the independence of Nauru Island. In 1976 he was back in Tahiti for 8 weeks, which went well except for the mosquitoes, huge cockroaches, the humidity and the nearby atomic bomb testing. He was a victim to bureaucracy in August 1982 when Fiji refused entry to his rabbit Bun-Bun and his two

Javanese Doves, Hello and Goodbye. In 1990 cyclone Ofa struck Samoa and *Coca Cola* arranged for Jon and Elaine to perform two weeks of fundraising shows.

Jon was also a founding committee member of the *NZ Equity Actors Union*, the *Brotherhood of Auckland Magicians* and he also a life member of the *New Zealand Society of Magicians* and the *Brotherhood of Auckland Magicians*. He sat on the committee of the VAC for a total of 32 years and they presented him with a *Certificate of Achievement* in 2012. Over the years he has helped to raise funds for many charity organisations including: *Auckland Sheltered Workshops* (1968), *The Samoan Cyclone Relief Fund*, *Air New Zealand* for his participation in their Koru Care programme for disabled children, *Boystown Police and Citizens Club*, *Royal New Zealand Society for the Health of Women and Children*, and numerous *TV Telethons*.

Between 1979 and 1997 Jon appeared in 5 musical productions including *The Consul* as a singing magician, *Northern Opera's Aladdin*, *Arabian Delights* in Gisborne, *Cinderella* in 1988 and a two month national tour of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*.