

Look into my eyes

■ Hypnotist Jerry Harris brings the misunderstood art to Eugene, hoping to mesmerize audiences

By Rory Carroll
Oregon Daily Emerald

Twelve years ago, Jerry Harris held a high-pressure job as the vice president of an investment banking company.

"Stress was actually killing me," Harris said. "My doctor gave me six months to live if I couldn't get it under control."

His doctor suggested that Harris try hypnosis to combat his soaring stress level, so Harris enrolled in a hypnosis institute in Los Angeles, where he reduced his stress level to almost nothing.

Shortly after graduating from the institute in 1988, Harris retired from banking and began teaching stress management to other executives in seminars and large groups.

"I started adding humor, and eventually, it evolved into the show we have today," Harris said.

Today Harris, a.k.a. "The Master Hypnotist," performs more than 300 shows a year around the country.

When he takes the stage at Kowloon's Restaurant in the Scandal's Lounge on Saturday, it will be his first performance of public hypnosis in Oregon. A historic state law against stage hypnosis kept him from performing in Eugene until it was decriminalized last October.

The show involves getting 10 to 15 volunteers from the audience onto the stage for an "induction."

"I will then give the participants suggestions, and they'll respond however they find appropriate," Harris said.

Harris' show has consistently been a huge success, mainly because of his professionalism and sense of humor, said his booking agent, Donna Richards.

"There is always a huge draw,

and I've been booking him for over 10 years," Richards said.

Harris also views the show as a success.

"In 12 years' time, I'll bet there's not five events that I have not been brought back to do again," he said.

Harris is not interested exclusively in the entertainment facet of hypnosis.

"Hypnosis can be used in a million different ways and help anyone accomplish anything," Harris said.

He sells 22 different self-help tapes that utilize hypnosis to aid people with everything from playing better basketball to expanding memory to having fantastic sex.

Despite his success, Harris said hypnosis is a field that is often misunderstood.

"It's not what the movies portray it to be. They make it look like we take control of that person's mind and body. We don't at all," Harris said. "You don't give up any power, and you don't give up any control. That surprises a lot of people."

A person under hypnosis won't do anything they wouldn't do otherwise, Harris said. Still, hypnosis has not fully escaped its negative reputation.

"There isn't a good scientific understanding of trance," said Dr. David Northway, a psychologist in private practice in Eugene.

Northway used hypnosis during the early 1980s in his practice but now avoids it because of its prevailing negative image.

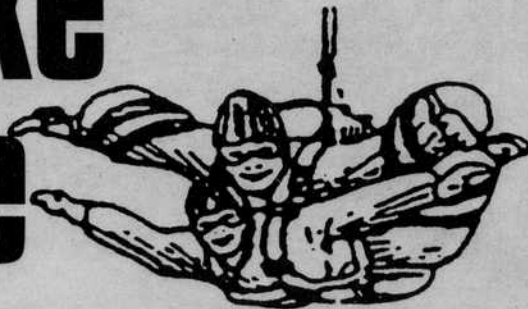
"It can be useful for habit control and it helps people to focus internally," Northway said. "But it is misused 90 percent of the time."

Hypnosis is by no means exclusive to the stage, according to Harris.

"Anytime you relax and your brain wave pattern slows down, you're actually in that same state of mind that we use for hypnosis," Harris said.



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