

IN MY ELEMENT



“I’d Like to Get People Hooked on Physics”



Dr. Matthias Salewski (30) used to investigate semiconductor nanostructures in the laser laboratory at TU Dortmund University, but today he stands in the spotlight and performs experiments on stage. In his role as “Professor Liebermann” he’s one of the creative thinkers behind the company “Die Physikanten & Co.,” which stages science shows all over Europe

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Nitrogen is often the central element in our shows. We use it in almost all our performances. It’s stored in a vacuum jug—it’s a liquid at a temperature of -196°C , but as soon as it’s exposed to normal room temperature it becomes a gas. We can use it to generate fountains that are meters high, explode objects, or form a gigantic cloud in fractions of a second. All of these effects look spectacular on stage and thrill the audience. When I was a doctoral candidate at TU Dortmund University, I worked with nitrogen every day. I would chill semiconductor samples in cryostats so that I could investigate them. Today I have a doctorate in physics, but I no longer work only as a scientist—I’m also an entertainer. Admittedly, this is a rather unusual career trajectory, but back when I was

an undergraduate at the university I once saw a poster for the Physikanten. I was immediately electrified, and I applied to join the group. The Physikanten are a group of scientists, actors, and presenters who stage science shows all over Germany and the rest of Europe. The job of conducting experiments in front of an audience was just right for me, because I had always wanted to perform on stage. I’m a huge comedy fan and a passionate Latin

dancer, and I love to perform in front of an audience. My first performance with the Physikanten was on the Open House Day at the Federal Chancellery in Berlin, where we hosted a workshop. I performed as a Physikant during the entire time I was studying, and today it’s my main occupation. What I especially love about my work is the fact that I’m getting lots of people enthusiastic about science, and physics in particular. Doing research at a university is often so specialized that only a few people understand it. At our shows, it’s completely different. —