October 20, 2007

David Copperfield cannot make warehouse raid disappear

Magician David Copperfield

(Louis Lanzano/AP)

He has made the Statue of Liberty disappear, levitated over the Grand Canyon, and walked through the Great Wall of China.

It appears, however, that clairvoyance is not among David Copperfield’s many magical talents. Otherwise he might have known in advance that the FBI was about to raid his warehouse in Las Vegas and seize nearly $2 million in cash, the source of which remains a mystery.
Although the reason for the raid on the 51-year-old’s property has not yet been confirmed, the Las Vegas Review Journal claims that it is related to an allegation of "sexual misconduct" outside the United States, citing as its source an anonymous person with 'knowledge of the investigation'.

The newspaper added that the case had fallen under the FBI’s jurisdiction because the accuser is a US citizen.

“If in fact those are the allegations, unfortunately false allegations are all too often made against famous individuals,” said Mr Copperfield’s lawyer, David Chesnoff, who confirmed that his client was under FBI scrutiny.

“We are respecting the confidentiality of the investigation,” he said.

The target of the raid was a warehouse used by Mr Copperfield (real name, David Kotkin) as a rehearsal studio and prop storage facility.

The warehouse - known as the International Museum & Library of the Conjuring Arts - also houses an apartment on the second-floor, a ‘career archive’ and a private museum featuring 80,000 pieces of magic memorabilia, which are stored by a full-time curator in climate-controlled cases. Mr Copperfield - who earns an estimated $57 million a year and was once engaged to the supermodel Claudia Schiffer - has been known to give midnight tours of the warehouse, taking his guests into his office through a secret door in the lobby, which is disguised on street-level as a lingerie shop.

The raid was carried out on Wednesday by 12 agents who seized a computer hard drive and a digital camera, along with the $2 million of cash. The FBI said the investigation was related to a case in Seattle, but wouldn’t elaborate.

Mr Copperfield has owned the warehouse in question since 1991 under one of his companies, Boy Magician, Inc.

Mr Copperfield is a veteran performer at the 740-seat Hollywood Theater at the MGM Grand casino-hotel on the Las Vegas Strip, where he performs in six-to-eight week stints, several times a year. On Wednesday night, the magician performed two regularly scheduled shows, which were at the end of his most recent run. Although many performers choose to stay in Las Vegas permanently, Mr Copperfield - who began practicing magic at the age of 12, becoming the youngest person ever admitted to the Society of American Magicians - tours for at least half the year and remains hugely popular around the world.

It was at the age of 18, while performing in the musical The Magic Man, that Mr Copperfield came up with his stage name, taken from the Charles Dickens book of the same name.