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TopHat

Finalé Edition...

...last ever monthly TopHat

By Jon Snoops



And so, at long last, the monthly ezine that is TopHat comes to an end. It seems as though these last few months have gone by so quickly since I made the announcement that there would be no more monthly publications of the ezine. Since then, the standard has continued to remain strong and I have (on occasion) pondered upon perhaps whether the decision to cease publication was made too early... but alas! Times must move on and good things must often come to an end.

This last edition is a celebration of all the spectacular material that has made this ezine a success for over four years. What we have developed over this time is what has often been referred to as goldmine of information. The advice contained in these pages ranges in relevance to the amateur hobbyist to the full-time, seasoned professional. All groups are also represented and reflected in the broad range of contributors that we have had over the years. Recent months have also seen the introduction of Will Wood's Chatter on Patter, an excellent supplement that has lived up to the standard that contributors to TopHat have set.

Early TopHat editions were started in an attempt to popularise the forums by showcasing some of the excellent material that was posted. The ezine archived specially selected posts in a format that was both clear and accessible. The format quickly transformed, as the site grew, into a full, monthly compilation of effects and articles written by columnists and other contributors exclusively for the ezine. With MagicBunny and the ezine now well into its fifth year we're moving on and laying rest to the monthly editions of TopHat which have been eagerly awaited each cycle.

This month's offerings as always encompass a large variety of articles aimed at all levels of performing experience. My assumption is that because of the long deadline and with this being the final edition of the ezine we've received such a large volume of articles. So many in fact that we have enough here to fill *three* separate editions. Well, that's not exactly what we've done but we have split into three parts each of which is complete unto itself but which together comprise this final edition. It's also a fitting number to finish on - we now have 52 issues of TopHat, MagicBunny's Exclusive Magician's Ezine. As cheesy as it may at first seem, this is a resource that will continue to aid members, hopefully for many more years to come.

So, this first part opens with the conclusion of Tam McLaughlin's series on his cabaret act. I've thoroughly enjoyed reading this series as Tam has shed light on exactly what is involved in producing a show from scratch. My thanks go to Tam for allowing us to publish this wonderful set of articles.

Next up, Tim Arends saves us some money in explaining his method of gaining secret information from a spectator using a homemade impression clipboard... which will have the benefit over some commercial models of not looking like an RF device!

Our article on being prepared for all occasions is an excellent essay on impromptu magic and passing up opportunities to perform. Despite this, the author has preferred to remain anonymous but if you would like to forward comments to them, you can do so through me.

And finally in this section is a piece by Will Houstoun. Will is the current British Close Up Champion (having

TopHat (cont.)

taken the gold at this year's Blackpool Magic Convention) and also an active member of our forums. Here he presents an excellent article on progressive strengths of magic effects. Taking a popular theme, he expands on it until the result is as strong as can be. One of the characteristics of Will's magic is the spellbinding nature of the magical effects which often leaves audiences literally with their mouths wide open. This article offers an insight into some of the thinking behind Will's style and with it you'll be able to begin thinking about ways in which to improve the strength of your own magic. Will is currently in Sweden competing in the FISM World Championships of Magic (The Magic 'Olympics' as it's sometimes known) so we'd like to take this opportunity to wish him the very best of luck.

...continued in Part II

Contents

FINALÉ EDITION

Due to the overwhelming number of submissions, this month's ezine has been split into three parts which together comprise the final edition.

Please click on an article below to jump to it (or its corresponding issue) or scroll down to begin reading. You can also use the Bookmarks panel (left) to navigate.

Part I - Issue 50

MAGIC SERIES: *"Developing a Cabaret Act Part V: Showtime!"* By Tam McLaughlin

MAGIC EFFECT: *"How to Make Your Own Mentalist's Clipboard"* By Tim Arends aka Cybernettr

MAGIC ARTICLE: *"Improvisation is Not Being Unprepared"* By Anonymous

MAGIC ARTICLE: *"Stronger Magic"* By Will Houstoun

Part II - Issue 51

MAGIC ARTICLE: *"Tips on Buying Magic"* By Alex Musciano aka philliefan4life1

MAGIC EFFECT: *"Rationalisation"* By Gerald Scanlan

MAGIC EFFECT: *"Two Classics"* By Matthew Smith

MAGIC ARTICLE: *"A Professional... am I not?"* By Gary Scott

Part III - Issue 52

MAGIC ARTICLE: *"A Thank You"* By Nigel Shelton

MAGIC COLUMN: *"Thoughts From Mid-West America: Another Thank You"* By Michael L.

MAGIC EFFECT: *"The Seven Deadly Sins"* By Peter Marucci

MAGIC COLUMN: *"From the Desk of Michael Jay: Time to Say Goodnight"* By Michael Jay

Developing a Cabaret Act Part V

Developing a Cabaret Act Part V...

...Showtime!

By Tam McLaughlin



Editor's Note: This is a multi-part essay written by Tam which traces the development and performance of his first cabaret show. It's an excellent account useful for anyone interested in the experience. This final part in the series gives you Tam's summary of the show and lessons learned and you can find the preceding parts in the previous editions of TopHat.

SOUND CHECK

At last, the day of the show arrives – oops, wait a minute, let me say that again – at last, we finally get to celebrate ten fantastic years of marriage with our friends and family!

Everything was going to plan; we had taken the kids up to the hall and began filling balloons with helium. The kids insisted on exploring every single part of the hall at high speed. However, the band was running late. Very late. The band had planned to turn up early at 3pm to set up and rehearse so that they could get to the pub to watch the old firm game at 5pm. But they were running late and were not going to get to the pub on time.

I was assured that I would have time to rehearse with my hired microphone connected to their sound system. My rehearsal lasted five minutes and was with not without problems. You see, my mates in the band have years of experience with mixing desks and sound systems so I was confident that they would have me set up quickly and smoothly. This was not the case. This was to be the bands second gig and they were using a new mixing desk and spent a considerable amount of time getting their *own* sound correctly mixed. I seemed a lower priority to the band. After all, there were six of them and one of me with one microphone. I decided to let the band set up and come back for the sound check an hour before the start of the party. When I returned, I was slightly worried when the band were just finishing off and, being avid football fans, had missed most of the old firm game. My nerves turned into panic when I heard the guitar player, Brian (and my very own sound engineer) who is also my best mate, shout at the band members "remember, if you are late back, we will have to cut the set short... Tam lets get you hooked up".

The band had taken up the full stage which was fine as I was planning to perform in front of the raised stage. If you remember, the function was being held in a church hall so the stage was relatively small and there was plenty of room to work in front of the stage. However, this posed a problem for Brian. Working in front of the main amps was causing feedback problems which meant that the gain on the microphone had to be kept low. Luckily I was able to overcome this as I have a loud voice so did not need much gain.

Another problem we encountered was with my audio tracks. I had prepared my audio tracks in three different formats: mp3 player, personal CD player with an mp3 CD and a standard audio CD (wav files). If there were problems with one format, I had another two formats that could be used. We had no problems connecting the CD player or mp3 player up to the mixing desk; the problem was getting the music to play on queue. The mp3 player took too long to move between tracks and you could not pause the player. The CD player, when paused made a "beep ... beep ... beep" sound to alert you that it was paused. Technology can be a fantastic tool but it is not without its quirks. To my relief, when I was editing the audio tracks, I put a few seconds of silence at the start and end of each track which meant that the track could be started with the volume down and the gain quickly increased in time for the start of the audio.

Sound check over and as guests started to arrive, there was no time to think about magic. The band started on time; they were fantastic and everyone commented on how great they were.

THE SHOW

I do not want to go into great detail in this section otherwise I will never get this essay completed. The point of this essay is to provide an insight into the work involved in putting together a show rather than an analysis of the show. I have had some feedback from clips posted on the file sharing forum so I will just provide a basic summary of the show and lessons to be learned. You can, however, view videos of two of the effects performed – [Knife Through Jacket](#) (29mb) and [Paper Balls Over Head](#) (7mb)

Developing a Cabaret Act Part V (cont.)

Splash Bottle

I had prepared the gimmick for splash bottle and was waiting, ready at the side of the stage area. To my horror, the bottle fell to the floor with a thud. Luckily only one group of people noticed and it was some of my family who at a table close to the side of the stage. As they did not know what to expect, they had later said they knew the bottle would be used at some point but were still surprised by the actual production.

The problem was that I had used a different belt from the one I had been rehearsing with. This belt was thinner which meant that the gimmick did not sit as well as it did with the other belt. This demonstrates how you must rehearse properly and think about how your clothing can affect a particular effect.

The show was going well. I was relaxed and comfortable with my patter and got a few laughs at the right places. I did expect more laughs at my jokes so decided to ask for opinions from a few people I trusted a few days after the show. The opinions differed. Most liked the humour but one person thought that the jokes were not original so the reaction was bound to be more of a smile than a belly laugh. Can't argue with that!

Bill Switch

I got my two volunteers up to help as expected and borrowed a £10 for the bill switch. I was half way through revealing the fake note when I realised that I had not asked the volunteer to sign the £10. Argh! What could I do? Nothing! Getting the volunteer to sign the note was the one thing I had not been worrying about in this routine. This was one of the most important parts of this routine and I had always remembered during rehearsals to get the note signed. I can only put it down to the fact that as this was my first show with a lot going on I was bound to miss something. The routine played out well but would have been so much stronger if the note had been signed.

Knife Through Jacket (VIDEO)

This routine went well and I got the reactions I expected especially from my spectator, Gary, whose jacket I had borrowed. The idea of using material to look like I was pulling the lining through the jacket got strong reactions. This routine comes across very well if you have the right spectator. I am sure the reactions when using a businessman wearing an Armani suit would be quite different.

A few things that could be improved upon was that while dealing with Gary, the other spectator John, moved away to lean against the stage and looked a bit left out. This made me realise that I have to ensure that I manage my volunteers properly for any future performances. I can't just assume they will stand on the same spot listening to me and do what I expect of them. There was also a slight delay in the music clip starting on queue which was really down to the fact that we did not have time to rehearse with music.

Watching the video of this performance I also noticed that I took too long to steal the extra material which could have raised suspicions if everyone was not laughing so much.

Paper Balls over Head (VIDEO)

This was probably my strongest effect and the one people enjoyed the most. I had discussed with Clare how to get John, my spectator, to look away while I vanished the last large paper ball. I had said I would ask him if we would gamble on it and if his wife would allow him. Clare was not sure if this would work but sure enough, on cue John looked over at his wife and the ball vanished as expected.

Knickerbocker

This routine was going great until I asked for volunteers. No-one volunteered to come up and join me. I was sure that as the audience consisted of my family and friends, they would know me well enough to volunteer knowing that I was not going to embarrass them. Maybe they know me better than I know myself.

As I was watching who had raised their hands to my first question, I just picked four of the girls who had put up their hands and that I knew would not be shy to come forward and help out which they did without any problems.

I explained what I wanted the girls to do. I said "In a minute I want you to turn around and secretly write down the colour of the underwear you are wearing. But please be imaginative. Don't just say black or white; say for example, noir or cloud". The girls turned around with their sheets of card and then used the stage to lean on and collaborated. I had worked out how long it should take them to write the colour down based on

Developing a Cabaret Act Part V (cont.)

rehearsals with Clare and Jane but they seemed to take double this time and I had only prepared a few lines to say to the audience while the girls had their backs turned. I had to improvise and managed to get by without any dead time.

It was clear that the girls did not fully understand what I had been asking them. They thought that they had to make up the colour of the underwear they were wearing which I confirmed with them afterwards.

I now realise that despite my instructions being clear enough on paper, performance is a different matter. I believe that the volunteers are under slight pressure when they come up to the stage area and despite trying to relax the girls, they will find it difficult to understand instructions. I should have found a simpler way to explain what I expected and taken more time over what I was saying. Maybe I should have made more eye contact but to be honest I am unsure how to improve upon this and would have to seek advice from someone more experienced.

The rest of the routine played out as expected and then came the big climax.

Picture the scene. One girl is left on stage with one sheet of card sitting on a table out front, which clearly belongs to her. I explained that as I was going to read her mind to find out the colour she had written down and I was going to write it on my own blank sheet of card. I asked her to turn her card over and show the audience the colour she had been thinking of. She said "cerise" (which was written on the card). It was time to reveal what I had written. (As expected, I already knew what she had written but did not want to write down exactly what she had written. I wanted to let the audience think that I had got an impression of the colour she was thinking of. For example, if she had written "sky", I would have written light blue. I know very little about mentalism but I believe this is a basic concept).

So, I slowly turned my card over with a huge smile to reveal... yes, you are already way ahead of me... green!

The audience looked bewildered. As did I - until I realised that cerise and green were not even close. All I could do was apologise and make a remark about not always being right but the damage had already been done.

So what happened? I panicked. I had expected the girls to write something like "London Bus" for red rather than make up colours.

This put me off and I just forgot that cerise was a red. In hindsight, if I was unsure what colour cerise was, then I should have just written cerise - at least I would have got the answer correct.

I then remembered a conversation I had with Clare the previous week. She said that I should have a think about the different colours people may be wearing and what they could pick. Why oh why did I not listen to her?

Some people still found the routine enjoyable and baffling and wondered how I was able to determine who was wearing what and thought it must be something psychological or I had mirrors in my shoes. Someone said "Tam, your magic's great but your sh*t with colours."

I quickly move on to thank the audience and prepare for the final bill in kiwi. I had planned to thank the volunteers and while thanking Gary, suddenly remember that he still had the kiwi. However while thanking everyone, Gary shouted out "Here you, where's ma tenner" which played right into my hands. Gary came up with the kiwi and I proceeded to cut the kiwi and reveal his £10 note (without the signature).

I thanked Gary and bowed and walked off stage after 30 minutes, to my finale music to a great applause and much relief ready for my first pint of the evening.

WHAT I LEARNED

It would be easy to say that as this was my first performance of cabaret magic, I was bound to come up against some unexpected problems and shrug off any mistakes. However, the only way to move forward is to learn from this experience so that I can be better prepared for any future performance.

It is not just the technical aspects of the performance that I should learn from; I also need to understand my strengths and weaknesses so that I can perform the routines that suit my character. For example, I probably

Developing a Cabaret Act Part V (cont.)

should not have done Knickerbocker as this was out of my comfort zone and may not have fitted in with the rest of the effects which were light-hearted comedy routines.

A summary of what I learned follows:

- Think of everything – don't take any chances and assume that everything will go to plan. Think of what can go wrong and how you can overcome this.
- If possible, rehearse in the place where you are to perform and rehearse with what you will be wearing for the show. This will show up any problems that you have not thought about.
- Take more time planning how you will interact with your volunteers. For example, with routines that involve the interaction of volunteers in such a way that you do not have absolute control e.g. writing something down on paper, consider all the possibilities of what they can do and what can go wrong and be prepared.
- Prepare extra gags, one-liners, something to say to the audience in case of any unexpected delays such as a spectator taking too long to come up from the audience.
- Be confident and relaxed. This shows the audience that you are in control and know what you are doing. The audience can then relax knowing that they are going to be entertained by a professional.
- Think of a microphone as another prop – think of how your routines will fit around the use of a microphone.
- Music can enhance your act but if you need to rely on someone else to control the music, rehearse first.
- If something does not go as planned don't panic but make sure you have an out or can quickly move on. For example, with Paper Balls over Head, the volunteer, John, spotted the ball in the sequence where the ball rests on the toilet roll. I repeated the move trying to get it right rather than simply move on. This could have given the audience the impression that what I was doing did not work whereas if I had ignored it, they would have been none the wiser.
- Plan a smaller show for a first attempt

CONCLUSION

Was the show a success? Was all the work I put in worth it?

At the beginning of this essay, I stated my goals... so let's see if I achieved them.

- **Prove to myself that I could create a professional like performance.**

I tend to do things on a whim and don't always think things through. I get an idea and go full steam ahead without any planning. However, on this occasion I took a more professional approach which came over in the performance.

In fact, one of the comments I received was that I sounded like a professional and I came across as if I had thought about every word I was saying (rather than improvising) and the patter between tricks helped to keep the flow going.

Another friend who is usually direct and to the point said that she could see me doing this professionally and that I looked natural and confident on stage. My view on her comment is that, compared to what she has seen me do in the past (close up magic in the pub), my performance was of a higher standard. I know I would have a lot of work to do before I could think of taking this any further.

I believe I reached this goal.

- **Prove to myself that I could entertain with confidence**

Before the party, I had performed about six kids' shows over the year and always felt nervous beforehand so an hour before this show I expected to be nervous, with my belly doing somersaults, irritable and short tempered. Yet I felt confident, in control, not too nervous and was looking forward to the performance.

Again, I believe I reached this goal.

Developing a Cabaret Act Part V (cont.)

- **Most importantly, entertain our guests**

It can be hard to get objective feedback, especially from family and friends; they will not want to offend you by saying anything negative so you have to look for other signs.

For example, I was doing some magic at my work's Christmas night out. I had been entertaining the people at my table when a girl from the other table asked me to come over and entertain her table as they felt left out. The girl was so looking forward to seeing some magic that she did not go back to her own table. It became obvious when I got to the other table and that my colleagues were not interested in seeing any magic but I was already committed. I decided to just show Colour Monte as it is quick, simple, examinable, and not a pack of cards which could have put them off. The comment I got was "That was really good actually" which I took to mean "We expected you to be crap but you fooled me there." I made my excuses and left the table alone.

So, getting back to the show, I was able to tell from people's reactions and what they said, or did not say if they enjoyed themselves or not. They certainly did enjoy themselves.

I had said to Gary (whose jacket I had borrowed for KTJ) that I expected more laughs. He replied "You got a big laugh when you told everyone my good jacket was from Primark ya bas***d." They were all laughing at me ya b****d." Gary said this in the nicest possible way.

I had also reached this goal.

END THOUGHTS

After all the work I put in the best part of the night was still to come: celebrating our 10th wedding anniversary.

The band(s) were great, we got to dance with our kids, I got to play Bono on stage with the band and sing Vertigo. That was an experience and again, I could tell from peoples comments how well I did. Comments such as "Stick to the magic" or "You took that song and made it your own" and "You really acted like Bono" were very helpful...

The end of the night was very emotional. Do you remember earlier I mentioned how Clare said to leave magic out of the thank you speech? Well once again she was right. I had planned to say a few emotional words (or if you ask Clare – "cheesy rubbish") but I forgot everything I was going to say and had to ad lib so I would have had no chance trying to pull off a magic effect.

Most importantly I have learned that it *is* possible to achieve something that I thought I could never have done. It takes a lot of hard work and time (four months for this show) and means that you have to ask for advice from those that have more experience than yourself but in my view it is the only way to improve.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank those on Magic Bunny who have helped me either directly or indirectly including those that I have mentioned throughout and those that I have not mentioned.

I hope that when you come to plan your first cabaret show or indeed any similar show, then this essay may give you an idea of how much work is involved and allow you to then plan early, in order that your show runs as smooth as possible.

Thanks for taking the time to read this essay.

Tam McLaughlin

Previous parts to this series can be found in issues 46-49:

- [Part I: Introduction and Routine](#)
- [Part II: Rehearsing the Routine](#)
- [Part III: Planning and Preparation](#)
- [Part IV: The Script](#)

How to Make Your Own Mentalist's Clipboard

How to Make Your Own Mentalist's Clipboard...

...and find out exactly what they're thinking

By Tim Arends



An important utility device for the mentalist is the impression clipboard. This can be used in a large number of mental effects. Unfortunately, it also tends to be rather pricey. Here's how to make one yourself for very little money. In some ways, it will be more deceptive and free of suspicion than the magic shop type.

At office supply stores, especially the larger stores such as the chain stores, you will find ordinary clipboards made of hard plastic. These come in various colors ranging from clear to tinted to solid black. Some of these clipboards have the chain store logo imprint on the clip, which makes them seem even less suspicious.

Procure one of these clipboards. Next, rub a piece of bar soap or canning wax across the back of a sheet of paper, and put the paper on the clipboard, waxed side down.

When you need a spectator to write something down, hand them the clipboard after writing their thought on the paper, have them concentrate on it for a few moments, and ball the paper up and throw it in the wastebasket. You will find an impression of what they wrote will be on the smooth surface of the clipboard, which you can get a peek at in the same way you would with any mentalist clipboard, and you can then announce the thought of word or sentence, or reveal it in any way desired.

The impression will probably show best on a black or dark colored clipboard, but it will also work with one of the clear or tinted boards. A bit of experimentation with a couple of different colors of board will quickly indicate which color works best--you want the impression to be readable but not too apparent.

By Tim Arends

Tim Arends lives in Indiana and posts to Magic Bunny as "Cybernettr" (a nonsense word he made up). He can be reached at cybernettr@aol.com or timarends@aol.com.

Improvisation is Not Being Unprepared

Improvisation...

...is not being unprepared

By Anonymous

Many amateur magicians have difficulty drawing a line between improvisation, impromptu performance and being unprepared to perform at any given time. This article aims to define and separate those three things with clearly defined boundaries because I believe that - despite seeming relatively similar at face value - there is quite a lot different about them.

Let us first look at being unprepared to perform. I believe that if you are widely known to be a magician, you should always be ready to perform in any given situation. Be it in the magic shop or in the sauna; there should never be a moment when you cannot perform some sort of effect. Therefore, I believe that it is wholly unacceptable to brush people off when they ask you perform and even more shameful to pass up a prime opportunity to create wonder, because you were not prepared. Many times whilst out with friends I used to brush people off when they asked me to perform. This not only left them feeling slightly disappointed and annoyed, but did nothing to help my credibility as a magician. So many times I heard, "well if you were a real magician, you wouldn't need a pack of cards." A truer word was never spoken. Even if you are a pure cardician, it doesn't mean that you can't perform a few bits and pieces with borrowed coins, a £5 note, matches or indeed anything which might be lying around. Real people don't care if you just perform card tricks; to them you are a magician and as such you should be able to perform magic whenever and wherever

Improvisation is Not Being Unprepared (cont.)

you are. How ridiculous would it sound if you responded to a request by saying "Oh no. I only do card tricks. Sorry."

I now have several "pieces" that I can do whenever I want. Some of these are completely impromptu and sometimes they are improvised. We will get to the distinction between these two performances shortly; the important point here is that I am now always prepared to perform magic. Another important thing to note here is that, just because I am always prepared to perform, it doesn't mean that I always will. I still try to exercise as much discretion as possible, picking my moments carefully and for maximum impact. But that is a completely different topic, so we will not digress. If you wish to look at this area in more depth I suggest Darwin Ortiz's writings on prestige, found in *Strong Magic*.

So how can we be prepared? I think the best way of being prepared in any given situation is a broad knowledge base. Therefore, I suggest you dip your toes into the ethereal waters of as many magical disciplines as possible. I don't mean attempt to master everything, that is impractical, but maybe read a book on mentalism, watch a video on coin magic or sit down with a pack of cards and play around for a bit. Also, when you're out and about, be aware of what is around you and try to think of ways you can use them magically. Cutlery is a perfect piece of everyday stuff that can be used in all sorts of magical ways. Look around you now as you're reading this; what is lying around that you could use to perform magic? Take the magical knowledge you have already and apply it to these items. And like I've already said, always try to broaden your knowledge base and try new things.

Personally, the likelihood is that I will always have a deck of cards with me. This obviously opens up a whole world of possibility when somebody asks me to show them a trick. It even helps when I'm the one who wishes to instigate a performance. Cards for me are something I really enjoy performing with, so there is plenty of material I can perform when a deck of cards is lying around. However, there are, of course times when I will not have a deck of cards with me and so I have to have pieces which can be performed without cards. Sleight of hand with coins is a good thing to have up your sleeve (if you'll pardon the pun), and I personally love the coin through table effect, which requires very little technical ability but plays quite big. Just by learning a few generic coin sleights and a few basic effects, you will have a bunch of tricks you can do whenever there are coins around, which is quite a lot of the time!

Another good solution is some form of mind reading. I say mind reading, rather than mentalism because the usual mind reading effects usually require very little in the way of props. For example, a good mind reading effect which I have used in the past is Marc Paul's AAA Book-test. If you are interested by that sort of thing I suggest you look this particular effect up. Of course, the ideal mind reading effect for this situation would require absolutely nothing to perform, either from the spectator or performer's point of view. Unfortunately I can't direct you towards such an effect because I don't specialize in such areas, but a good mentalist should be able to, should you wish to follow that path.

It is also important to choose the right kind of tricks for impromptu performances. Looking at the example of Coin Through Table again, it fulfills all the criteria for an impromptu performance. It's quick, it requires very little in the way of props, it's visual and it has a very strong and direct effect. Those are the sort of things you need to be looking for in a possible impromptu effect. Don't use long winded effects that take a long time for a minimal pay off. You want to hit your audience as hard and as fast as you can, and then get on with whatever you were doing, leaving them stunned.

So now that you are prepared to perform in any given situation, we can look at improvisation. Improvisation comes from knowledge. You will find it very difficult to improvise if you only know three tricks, and that's it. You need to have a broader understanding of ideas and techniques. Luckily, the way most magicians learn magic means that they will pick up all sorts of techniques and ideas along the way.

You must also pick your moments well. Improvisation carries with it an inherent risk of failing miserably, so choose the right time to try it. However, despite that risk, a lot of good things come from improvisation, and it can be a very creative process so I suggest you try it whenever you get the right opportunity.

Good effects for improvisation require a basic framework. You then work around that frame, filling in the blanks and adding texture. For example, the Ambitious Card premise is a fantastic framework for improvisation. You can go in so many directions with it and still follow the same idea, which you know will work in the end. That brings me onto my next point; always end on a high note. If you get to a climax which

Improvisation is Not Being Unprepared (cont.)

is well received by the audience, stop there. There is nothing worse for an excited audience than an anti-climax. Whatever you end with will be what sticks in their mind, so make sure it's something incredible. Basically, the key to good improvisation is understanding the theory behind what makes a good effect. Fundamentally, that means that you want the effect to be easily understandable, ever increasing in strength and ending on a killer climax. With that in mind, what effects do you already know that fulfill those criteria? We've already mentioned the ambitious card, but other effects include the cups and balls or chop cup, coin across, cards to pockets, and many other classics. If you already perform any such effects, go back to them and re-evaluate them. By that I mean, look at what makes them work, because once you understand that, you can apply that theory to improvisation.

So in conclusion, expand your knowledge base, and learn a few great effects you can do at any time and if you want to improvise, make sure you know where you're going with it.

By Anonymous

Stronger Magic

Stronger Magic

...a short treatise on magical effect

By Will Houstoun

When performing my magic, I think it is very important that the effects chosen are clear, non-convoluted and primarily as magical as they can be. As a magician I feel that it is a crucial goal to be able to present to an audience the most miraculous effects possible. I believe that there are many, many factors that influence how strong a magical effect is both regarding the effect itself and the way the performer portrays it. In this article I will look at some of the factors that make one effect stronger than another effect. As there are many thousands of effects in existence (and to explain the concepts generally would require a small book rather than an article!) I will try to explain how and why various versions of just one example vary... and the effect in question will be the assembly. In the category of assembly I am including card assemblies (e.g. ace assemblies) and coin assemblies (e.g. matrix and chink a chink) as well as assemblies with other objects.

I will start with what I think are the weakest effects and progress to the strongest. You will allow me some leeway with the fact that not all of the effects described are in general performance or possibly even performed at all. They are, however, all very clear effects for which methods could certainly be created with a bit of thought!

THE CLASSIC ACE ASSEMBLY

In this section I am talking about the effect in which four aces, placed amongst three indifferent cards each, assemble in one pile whilst being replaced by indifferent cards in the piles they came from.

Weaknesses:

- There are only three cards which do anything magical in a trick that involves sixteen cards in total.
- The effect is not technically an assembly but rather a transposition of aces with indifferent cards.
- All of the magic happens with objects that are being heavily handled.
- None of the magic happens visually.
- Cards are objects that can obviously be handled and manipulated easily.

THE CLASSIC MATRIX

In this section I am talking about the "standard" matrix in which four coins placed in a large square are covered by four cards and the one by one assemble under one card.

Improvements:

- The number of objects used has been reduced from sixteen to eight.

Stronger Magic (cont.)

Weaknesses:

- There are only three coins which do anything magical in a trick that involves four coins and four cards.
- All of the magic happens with objects that are being heavily handled.
- None of the magic happens visually.
- Cards and coins are both objects that can obviously be handled and manipulated easily.

2 CARD MATRIX

In this section I am talking about the variation of the matrix effect in which only two cards are used instead of four.

Improvements:

- The number of objects used has been reduced from eight to six.

Weaknesses:

- There are only three coins which do anything magical in a trick that involves four coins and two cards.
- All of the magic happens with objects that are being heavily handled.
- None of the magic happens visually.
- Cards and coins are both objects that can obviously be handled and manipulated easily.

THE ADVANCED ACE ASSEMBLY

In this section I am talking specifically about the assembly David Copperfield has performed in his "grandfather's aces" sequence.

Improvements:

- The effect becomes clearer, in this version three aces vanish from packets of four cards before appearing under the fourth ace that was put to one side at the beginning of the trick.
- The vanishes are made more visual through the use of colour changes.

Weaknesses:

- There are only three cards which do anything magical in a trick that involves 13 cards in total.
- All of the magic happens with objects that are being heavily handled.
- Cards are objects that can obviously be handled and manipulated easily.

Note: Although the number of objects being used in the effect without reason is larger in this assembly than in the classic matrix or 2 card matrix I think that the visual nature of the vanishes make it a stronger effect so it has been ranked higher than the classic matrix.

CHINK-A-CHINK

In this section I am talking about the classic chink-a-chink in which four coins are made to assemble in one corner of a square when only the hands are used to cover them.

Improvements:

- The number of objects used has been reduced to four.

Weaknesses:

- There are only three coins which do anything magical in a trick that involves four coins.
- All of the magic happens with objects that are being heavily handled.
- None of the magic happens visually.
- Coins are objects that can obviously be handled and manipulated easily.

SHADOW COINS

In this section I am talking about the variation of the chink-a-chink effect in which the coins jump in the same manner but without the hands touching them at all. Instead the hands are used to shield the coins from view when they jump from a distance of about 2 inches above the performing surface.

Improvements:

- The magic happens with objects that are not being handled or touched.

The Birthday Party Magician (cont.)

Weaknesses:

- There are only three coins which do anything magical in a trick that involves four coins.
- None of the magic happens visually.
- Coins are objects that can obviously be handled and manipulated easily.

NAIL MATRIX

In this section I am talking about an effect in which four nails are hammered into a bit of wood at its four corners and then proceed to assemble in one corner when they are covered with the hands.

Improvements:

- The magic happens with objects that are not being handled or touched.
- The magic Happens with objects which can not be handled or manipulated.

Weaknesses:

- There are only three nails which do anything magical in a trick that involves four nails.
- None of the magic happens visually.

Note: Michael Webber performed a similar effect in the International Magic Competition (1994) in which three nails hammered into a bit of wood jumped from one place to another when covered by coffee mugs, this benefits from some of the improvements explained above but also has the weakness of the use of the cups and so I modified the effect to make the progression clearer.

MISDIRECTED NAIL MATRIX

We have now reached the boundary between what is commonly done and what is not commonly done, this assembly pushes it but still remains commonly do-able! In this section I am talking about an assembly in which the nails are positioned in the wood as described above, the spectator is then asked a question or caused to look away in some other manner and when they look down the nails have all assembled in one corner.

Improvements:

- The magic happens with objects that are not being handled or touched.
- The magic Happens with objects which can not be handled or manipulated.
- The magic happens with objects which are not hidden from view.

Weaknesses:

- There are only three nails which do anything magical in a trick that involves four nails.
- The magic, while not being hidden from view is not strictly speaking visual.

VISUAL NAIL MATRIX

Now we definitely step out of the world of what is commonly done...not that it isn't possible, just that it really isn't standard in any way shape or form! In this assembly four nails are hammered into the four corners of a block of wood, they then visibly and slowly disappear from three of the corners and appear in the other one.

Improvements:

- The magic happens with objects that are not being handled or touched.
- The magic Happens with objects which can not be handled or manipulated.
- The magic happens with objects which are not hidden from view.
- The magic happens visibly.

Weaknesses:

- There are only three nails which do anything magical in a trick that involves four nails.

So as you can see, we've taken a well-known and used plot and, with a little thought, transformed it into an effect which is so much stronger, more magical and also in fact a whole lot clearer. It is my hope that you'll be able to take away some of these ideas and apply them to your magic with the aim to create stronger miracles coupled with wonder and admiration.

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