

THE CENTURY

Joining the ongoing parade are a dozen more who have influenced and shaped the performing art in America during the 20th century. Those appearing in the first two installments were:

T. NELSON DOWNS	HARRY HOUDINI
JOSEPH DUNNINGER	RICKY JAY
ALEX ELMSLEY	JAY MARSHALL
S.W. ERDNAME	RICHARDI, JR.
WALTER B. GIBSON	MARVYN ROY
A.C. GILBERT	P.T. SELBIT
U.F. GRANT	SIEGFRIED & ROY
ROBERT HARBIN	SLYDINI
PROFESSOR HOFFMANN	HOWARD THURSTON
MARK WILSON	

As announced earlier, when "The Century" listing is completed in September, readers will be asked to vote on the top ten magicians of the last 100 years. Results of this ballot will be published in the December issue, which will be the 100th issue of *MAGIC*.

René Levand

In a previous century, Johann Nepomunk Hofzinsler wrote, "Card effects are the poetry of conjuring. Without poetry, there could be no poets. Without card effects, no conjurers — even had one the power to cast spells." For René Levand, spell-binding — with little more than a packet of playing cards — has been a lifestyle for almost half of this century.

It's near impossible to describe one of Levand's magical performances without resorting to abstractions. His effects and their methods are cloaked in mysterious stories of love, death, destiny, and other themes that border on the metaphysical.

Since his 1962 appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, Americans have been astonished by this charming Argentinean's incredible second-, third-, fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-dealing, impeccable palming, and invisible switches. But more than flawless sleight of hand, it is his poetical style that influences audiences. What René Levand performs with a deck of cards, his hand, and his heart... is sheer inspiration.

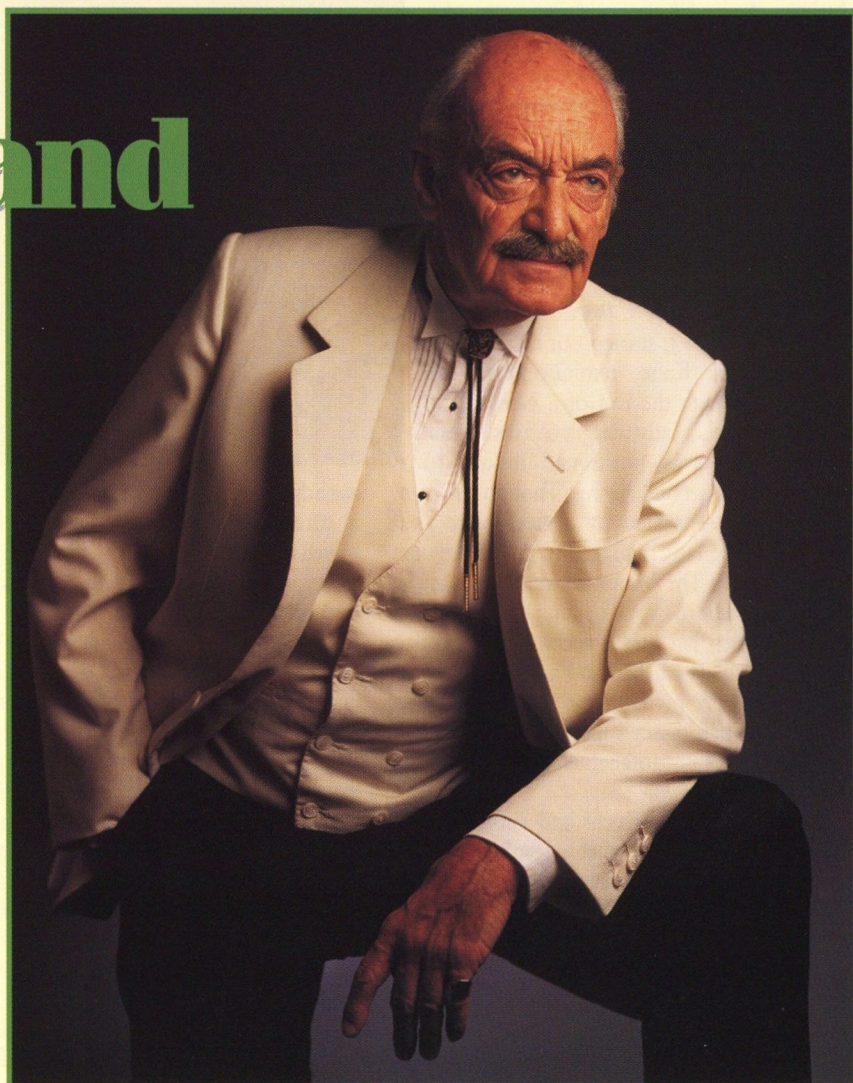


PHOTO: VIRGINIA LEE HUNTER

Harlan Tarbell (1890-1960)

One of the great teachers, he considered magic both an ancient art and a modern entertainment. Yet, Harlan Eugene Tarbell's renown came not from his performances or lectures; instead, from his study course. In 1926, he contracted with the Institute of Applied Science to write, illustrate, and produce *The Tarbell System*, a mail-order series of magic lessons. Homestudy and self-improvement were in vogue across America. "Master These Illusions and You Will Make Big Money" proclaimed ads in popular magazines. "Not in a Year or Six Months, but Almost At Once!" With its convenient time-payment plan, the correspondence course appealed to those interested in a seemingly lucrative occupation of conjuring, as an estimated 10,000 60-lesson sets were sent out by late 1929.

The mail-order venture disappeared when the stock market crashed. But Tarbell capitalized on the national recognition he had attained and traveled the burgeoning celebrity lecture circuits. Continuing as a magic illustrator, he did artwork for his own marketed tricks, dealers' catalogs, magazines, and other published works, most notably *Greater Magic*. Then, in a 1940 deal made with Louis Tannen, the lessons from *The System* were republished in book form as *The Tarbell Course in Magic*.

Whether it be sleight of hand, feats of mentalism, effects with apparatus fabricated at home, or illusions on a grand scale, all have appeared in the multi-volume course. And, numerous are the professionals who accredit that first interest, as well as modest career successes, to the teachings of Tarbell.



Lance Burton

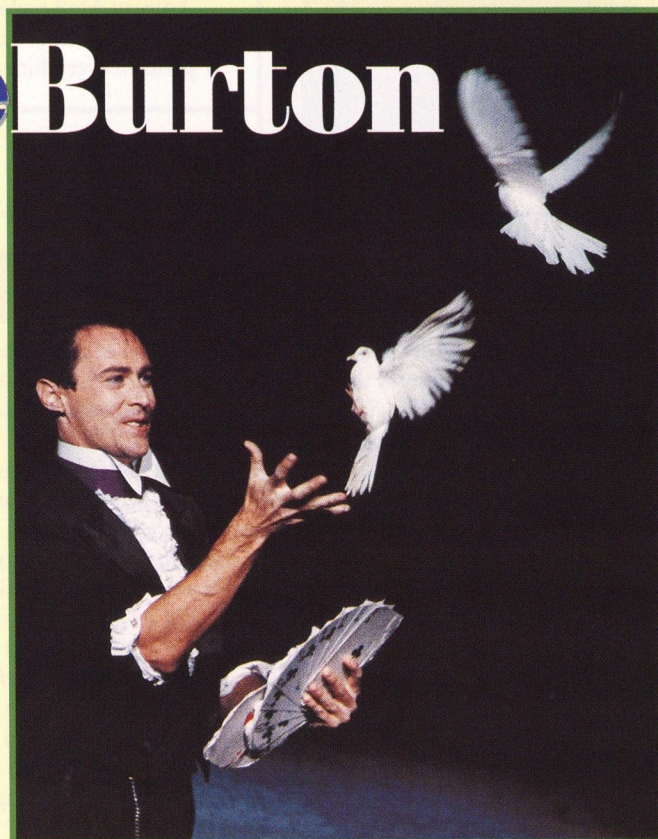
His is a career of many "firsts."

The chain started in 1977, when Lance won first place in the junior competition at Abbott's Get-Together. Upon returning to his Kentucky home, he got his first regular job, performing summers at Tombstone Junction. In 1980, the first year the IBM Gold Medal was awarded, its very first winner was Lance Burton. This led to his first booking on the *It's Magic* show, followed by a first appearance on *The Tonight Show*. And, when Johnny Carson requested that Lance perform his entire 12-minute act, without cuts or edits, it was another first.

An even bigger first-time achievement occurred when Lance traveled to Lausanne, Switzerland in 1982, and became the first American to bring home the coveted FISM Grand Prix.

His exemplary act ran nine years in the *Folies Begere* show, establishing a record and, of course, another first. But not to be content with this long-run success, Lance set about to self-produce his own traditional stage-magic show — a first for Las Vegas.

Finally, he was the first magician in Las Vegas to have a theater named after himself. The 1,200-seat Lance Burton Theater at the Monte Carlo, designed and constructed exclusively for his show, is destined to be his permanent performing home through the year 2009. Which brings up another first, Lance's unbelievable \$100-million multi-year contract — something so significant it should have been mentioned first.



Eddie Tullock

He spent his high-school summers stopping carnival crowds as a side-show Barker. He worked his way through college doing magic shows. After five years in the service and another decade or so working hotels, hospitality suites, and club dates in the Midwest, Eddie Tullock moved east to Pittsburgh.

In 1956, the year Elvis was almost censored on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, Eddie was booked to work a riverboat sales meeting for Westinghouse Electric. He was a hit, and a corporate executive gambled on using him in their booth at the upcoming Plant Engineering Maintenance convention. Tullock's tricks and talk drew huge crowds. "Nobody had seen anything like it," he recalls. "Everyone else had an exhibit that was static, but here was some action!" He had discovered the formula for combining the exact amount of entertainment with a deck of cards with just enough sales pitch for the client's product. Tullock was signed for four more conventions. He was in demand. The trade-show magician was born.

At a time when others could not find work with their magic, he put his magic to work for others. Many performers followed suit, but in the field of trade-show magic, its pioneer Eddie Tullock, was the undisputed leader.



Ed Marlo (1913-1991)

He began to put his work on paper in 1938, the very year that the ballpoint pen and the first *xerographic* (Latin for "dry writing") copier were invented. Always working in longhand, Edward Marlo amassed thousands upon thousands of pages of personal notes, manuscripts, letters, marginalia, and constructive criticism. He would eventually publish over 60 books and contribute in excess of 2,000 tricks, sleights, or ideas to other books and publications. Although the Marlo School of Card Magic was never a formal institution, there was at various times an ever-evolving roundtable in Chicago hosted by the master. He was its steadfast, energetic center, generating a chain-reaction of creativity that still reverberates.

Edward Malkowski was one of the most prolific and influential creators and contributors to magic literature. And, as Eddie Marlo, the man was just as famous for being able to expertly perform everything he devised.



Annemann (1907-1942)

As a performer, he desperately sought acclaim as "The Enigmatic Entertainer," yet it was through his short-lived writing ventures that Ted Annemann truly revolutionized mental magic. He took the tired trappings of the vaudeville Second Sight act and gave thought reading a performance logic, simply by doing "what a genuine magician or mind reader would do."

His madness for methods was set forth in his 1931 publication, *The Book Without a Name*: "It is my theory that any effect to be successful must first be founded upon a simple method, and then be performed with a direct to-the-point presentation. To follow that rule I have had to renounce all of the so-called performing ethics, inasmuch as I consider the effect upon my audience above everything."

In October of 1934, America was deep into the Great Depression. For 25¢ you could buy a dozen eggs or a half-gallon of milk or purchase the first issue of Annemann's new brainchild, *The Jinx*. The four-page periodical was conceived, as its publisher put it, "with a single thought in mind, that of supplying magicians and mystery entertainers at large with practical effects and useful knowledge."

The Jinx was filled with contributions from the best minds in magic — Al Baker, Bruce Elliott, Martin Gardner, U.F. Grant, Stewart James, and Dai Vernon, to name but a few. But more importantly, the magazine revealed the genius of Annemann, as he shared his diabolical creations and his innate understanding of the presentation of mystery. While he committed suicide at age 34, Theodore Annemann still survives in magic literature as the Father of Modern Mentalism.



Ben Chavez

(1901-1962)



It was the spring of 1941, and the world was at war when the Chavez College of Manual Dexterity and Prestidigitation opened its doors in downtown Los Angeles. "It's the finest thing to happen to magic in this city," stated a press release by The Walter Trask Theatrical Agency. "It's the opening of an new avenue of stars to the entertaining world." Chavez's timing was perfect. The United Service Organizations had just been formed to troupe morale-boosting shows to soldiers worldwide, and several who had taken the eight-month Chavez Course were booked immediately as USO performers.

Sleight-of-hand expert Ben Chavez, billed in the '30s as "The Boy from Manila," and wife Marian, were the founders of the new college for conjuring. The couple had toured some 18 years with a suave manipulative act, playing what was left of vaudeville theaters and the beginnings of night clubs on the West Coast.

The curriculum of the Chavez College consisted of intense personal instruction in sleight of hand, with emphasis on learning an artistically framed act. Printed lesson cards monitored a student's progress with with cards, cigarettes, coins, balls, and thimbles. Other lesson cards scored stage deportment, acting abilities, and poise. In the '40s, enrollment and tuition was \$500.

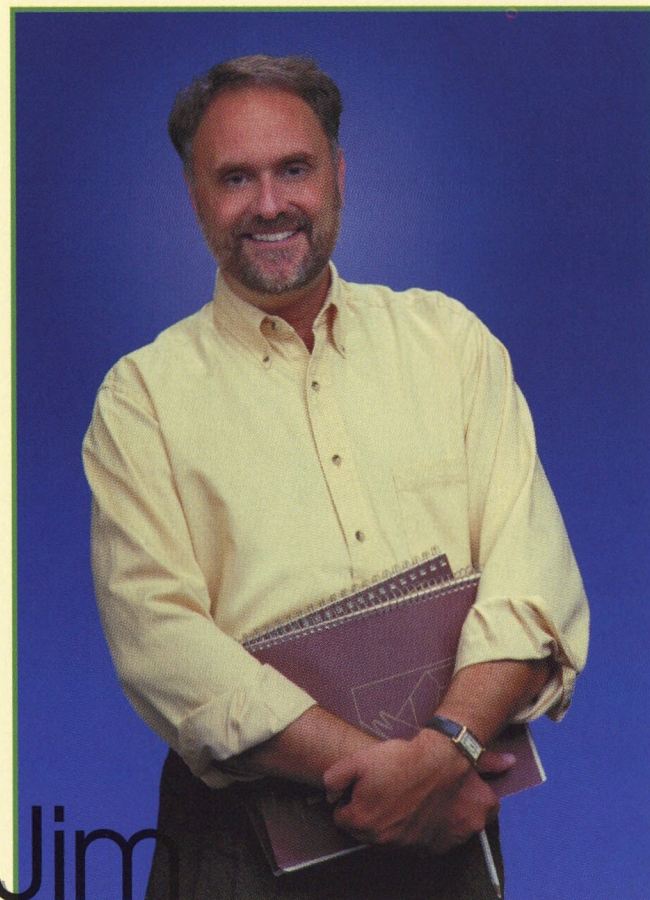
The study course was licensed by the California State Department of Education, and by 1946, veterans of World War II who wanted to become magicians, could study at Chavez under the GI Bill of Rights. A few apt pupils who reaped benefits of a Chavez diploma were Walter Cummings, Don Alan, Albert Ching, Neil Foster, Dale Salwak, Norm Nielsen, and of course, Channing Pollock. After Benny passed away, Marian continued teaching until her death in 1978.

Magic designer, consultant, producer, writer, dreamer, or whatever credit-line fits the particular project — all are indicative that Jim Steinmeyer is in the business of intellectual properties. "Origami Box," "Pole Levitation," "Walking Through a Mirror," "Interlude," "Elevator," and "Osmosis" are a mere half-dozen of his illusion inventions. The "Vanishing the Statue of Liberty" and "Disappearing Herd of Elephants" are but two of his ideas dramatically realized on television.

Well-studied in theater and magic history, Jim often grasps something old (that you didn't even see or had forgotten) and gives it a new significance on stage. Other times, he cajolingly approaches an ordinary object or structure, analyzes its ambiguous properties, then creates for it a lifestory and perhaps a soul. A poser of questions and a true illusionary artist at heart, Steinmeyer thrives on the process of creation.

With its voracious appetite for new material, television seems to bring out the best of Jim. Beginning with Doug Henning's specials in the '80s, Steinmeyer has suggested, created, and staged magic for network shows of David Copperfield, Siegfried & Roy, and Lance Burton. In the role of producer, he delivers quintessential media magic, as evidenced by specials such as CBS's *Learned Pigs and Firepoof Women* with Ricky Jay, NBC's *Hidden Secrets of Magic*, and the four-hour A&E *Story of Magic*.

A dedication to the principles of the past have shaped his careful creative process. Jim realizes that an innovation must be practical and, above all, performable. The genius of Jim Steinmeyer was best expressed by Doug Henning: "He understands the psychology of magic and how to create wonder."



Jim
Steinmeyer

PHOTO: BILL TAYLOR

William W. Larsen (1904-1953)

His lifelong practice of criminal law consumed much of his time, however, his avocation of magic was his passion. When William W. Larsen Sr. married Geraldine Conrad in 1925, little did he dream that he would become patriarch to a dynasty — complete with castle — devoted to the art of magic.

Always inventing new tricks and routines, many in collaboration with magician friend T. Page Wright, Larsen was a prolific writer, and in 1936, he launched his own monthly magic journal, *Genii*. As the magazine enjoyed a modest success, Bill and Gerri, with their two sons William Jr. and Milton, took off on a yearlong tour. In 1939, The Larsens played social clubs and resort hotels as “Magic’s First Family of Magicians.”

When William Sr. purchased the prestigious Thayer Magical Manufacturing Company in 1945, he acquired the Thayer house, “Brookledge,” located in the exclusive Wilshire area of Los Angeles. The artistic studio setting, the extensive library, and the cozy theater made the estate a gathering place of prominent magicians. Less than a year before his untimely death, William Larsen announced in *Genii*, the formation of the Academy of Magical Arts and Sciences. That visionary plan became profound inspiration for the next generation of Larsens.

Bill Larsen Jr. (1928-1993)

Whereas, *Genii* had been a 17-year labor of love by William Sr., publishing the monthly became a way of life for Bill Jr. At the time of his father’s death, he was 25 years old and building a career in television production. However, by 1955, the same year that Disneyland opened its gates, Bill had assumed the total responsibility as editor of *Genii*. He soon succeeded in making it the largest, most-popular, and single most-respected independent publication in magic.

When Bill’s brother Milt told of his discovery of a marvelous old mansion in Hollywood, both saw the opportunity to open a private club for magicians, just as their father had envisioned. Bill took it upon himself to solicit memberships, file all the necessary applications, and organize a board of directors for the Academy of Magical Arts, the future tenants of the clubhouse that would be called the Magic Castle.

The Castle opened the day after New Year’s in 1963, and helping with the grand inauguration was beautiful Irene who, within the year, would happily marry Bill. The Castle’s success, with its initial 151 members to its present status of over 5,000 members, can be attributed to the dedicated work of Bill and Irene Larsen.

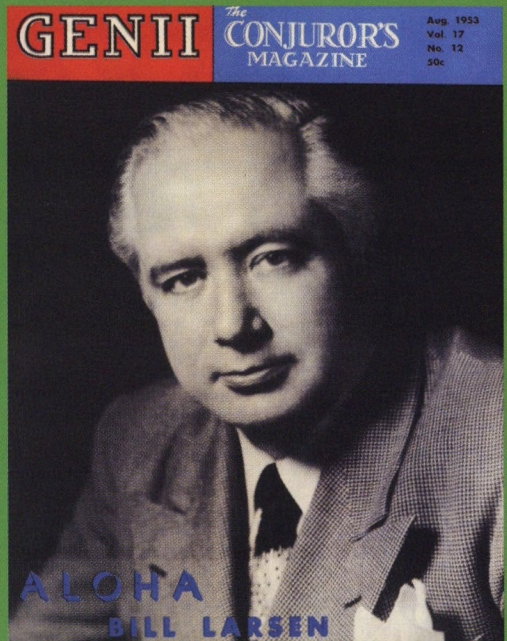
For four decades, Bill traveled across the United States and around the globe, promoting the Magic Castle, the Academy and, of course, *Genii*. He not only served as goodwill ambassador for these interests, but also turned the attention of the world toward the art of magic in America.

Milt Larsen

Hustling, bustling... he’s always made things happen. At six, he was the modus operandi for the “Spirit Cabinet” in the family act. By age 13, he was an advertising exec, painting signs for Gimpy’s Hot Dog Stand, compensated entirely in franks. While in high school, Milton Page Larsen and a partner, Harrison “Red” Baker, made real spending-money publishing the *Comics Information Service*. Skipping college, Milt decided to pursue a writing career in radio and television.

While sitting in his Hollywood office at Ralph Edwards Productions, overlooking a particular rundown Victorian mansion on Franklin Avenue, Larsen began to scheme of a way to realize his father’s dream of building a clubhouse for magicians. The success story of “The House that Milt Built” is known by most. Yet, it was a gamble when Milt signed that original property lease. In the ’60s, when half of America was sitting at home watching their new color TVs, opening a night club with close-up magicians was a near-impossible sell. But armed with crowbar, his own saw, hammer, and nails, Milt transformed the abandoned house into the fantasy-like Magic Castle.

With its acclaimed restaurant, vibrant bars, parlors, and intimate theater, the Castle became the most famous showplace of the world of magic. It provided performing opportunities for literally hundreds upon hundreds of magicians. Perhaps of greater significance, the Magic Castle was the Larsen’s realization of the lofty Academy of Magical Arts goal to “encourage and promote public interest in the art of magic, with particular emphasis on preserving its history as an art form, entertainment medium, and hobby” — exactly what Milt created behind those Castle walls.



A hippie era in American theater had its roots in *Hair*, the 1968 rock musical. The peace/love, day-glo extravaganza experienced a 1,742-show run into the early '70s. Then in May of 1974, *The Magic Show* opened and, 1,920 performances later, became one of the top-ten, longest-running musicals in the history of Broadway.

Doug Henning

The 27-year-old Canadian magician who couldn't sing, dance, or act, but had studied with Slydini and Dai Vernon, suddenly became a Broadway star. Actually, *The Magic Show* was a musical built around the role of a magician, and Douglas James Henning — who had already produced his own rock concert of illusion called *Spellbound* — happened to be the auspicious lead for the new show. On a more historic note, Henning was the right magician for the times. Dressed in jeans and tie-dyed T-shirts, his flower-child persona appealed to audiences of the tuned-in, turned-on decade.

After *The Magic Show*, Henning fully exploited the potential of television, the most powerful communications medium ever, by performing his wonders live. *Doug Henning's World of Magic*, broadcast December 26, 1975, remains the highest-rated magic special in the history of television. Over the years, seven more NBC television specials appeared, and his *World of Magic* road show toured nationwide. In 1982, he again opened on Broadway, this time in *Merlin*, a \$7-million extravaganza that ran nine months.

Henning retired in 1987. Yet, when he sold his costumes, props, and tangible illusions, and moved to India to study transcendental meditation, he left behind a legacy. He had ushered in a renaissance of magic in the '70s. And Doug was that wondrous merchant of innocence, who had an unbelievable belief in his product — pure magic. ♦



Next month,
"The Century" continues...

An inventive performer whose "Asrah" became a classic, a contemporary conjuror who emulates The Professor, and a family of magic that spanned the century with a distinctive grand stage tradition.