

June 2015 Meeting

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Ring Report Ring #170 “The Bev Bergeron Ring” SAM Assembly #99

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Our meeting opened with another excellent card technique lecture by Wallace Murphy. President Craig Schwarz gaveled the meeting to order and we welcomed back Charlie Pfrogner after being away for a while. Nick Comis was a guest. Nick is a regular performer at Sleuth’s Mystery Theater and does a great 45 minute show there. Phil Schwartz invited us to all sign a card commemorating English magic legend Edwin Dawes. Dan Stapleton told us he would soon have big news about magic in Orlando next year.

Phil Schwartz, our resident magic historian presented Magic History Moment #67 on Horace Goldin. He began with a cute sight gag turning four Linking Rings into an Audi car logo. Goldin was born Hyman Elias Goldstein in Vilnius, Lithuania (then Russian Poland) on December 17, 1873. He stammered after falling into a water well but conquered the affliction. He became interested in magic. At 17 his family came to the United States and he worked for his uncle in a grocery store in Nashville. He also sold jewelry door-to-door and learned English. He was inspired by seeing The Great Albini at a Washington, D.C. performance.

By the turn of the century he changed his stage name to Horace Goldin. He did not speak when performing, perhaps compensating for his early stammer and heavy accent; instead, he performed at breath-taking speed. He became well-respected and performed for European Royalty. He began billing himself as The Royal Illusionist. He presented many themed illusions and invented one of history’s most famous illusions, The Sawing and spent his fortune protecting his invention and using the courts to prevent others from copying it. Goldin died on August 21, 1939 while filling an engagement at London’s Woodgreen Theater where Chung Ling Soo was accidently killed 21 years before doing the Bullet Catch.

For our Ring show, NJ “Jaybo” showed us how to make an Origami paper puppet and did a spelling game with volunteers. David Freeman presented a Sword Through the Neck that he had rebuilt and improved. Danny Sanz did a “Mindjack” with a volunteer and cards and he knew what the spectator would select. Charlie Pfrogner had 4 small change purses with a \$100 bill in one. He gave someone the opportunity to select a purse. Charlie was left with the one with the money and Roger Reed showed a rare Waterford Crystal Wand and thimble..

Dennis Phillips, Secretary

Dennis Deliberations ... Ring # 170 “The Bev Bergeron Ring”

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I use to work a few nights a week in a restaurant doing walk around magic. One customer loved my close-up magic but he believed that “everything works with mirrors”. I would force a card and he would say, “Wow you are good with mirrors!” So..... One

day I decided to take Mylar silver tape and cover the backs of a deck of cards and coins, I put a square on a pocket handkerchief and a band of silver around my Professors Nightmare rope. I even put 3 or four small hand mirrors in my close-up case. I went over to his table at the lounge, he was a middle aged lawyer with a young girlfriend, and I showed him a few things and he keeps saying to his date, "Mirrors! Isn't he good!?" So I said, "Dave, you got me and I need to level with you. I started pulling out all the mirror things in my case and showing it to them and his girlfriend was giggling and he was smiling. He said, "See!" I said, "Yep, you figured it all out". He said, "I still want to see your tricks, you're good with mirrors!" He pulled out two \$50 bills, handing them to me and said, "You're so good with mirrors and a great magician!"

Where is the back story on your act?

Magic on TV in the US today is mostly cheap and camera assisted reality-type stuff and practical joke magic (Carbonero and others)

The Variety Arts (in America) are not viable today on Broadcast TV. It seems the entire country has Attention Deficit Disorder and we are self-consumed voyeurs. That's is why "Gotcha Walk-around magic" is big. We seem to enjoy seeing other people's embarrassments. Do I really care about the private life of Bruce Jenner or wardrobe malfunctions or twerking on TV? These are vivid but transient events always washed away with the sands of time.

To me there is no joy in pop culture anymore. Much of it is a sucker's climb up Mt. Stupid, a mindless way of relieving you of your money or getting you to watch a commercial for something don't need and can't afford and then offering to lend you money for it.

What happened to the happiness, joy and low-key rational wonderment days of Mark Wilson, Doug Henning and the Blackstones? Was it all lost in the Copperfield camera lies and the hype at The Statue of Liberty and Great Wall of China? Was it then buried in the grunge of David Blaine and Criss Angel?

We have nothing like the classy French TV variety show , "*Le plus grand cabaret du monde*", the French entertainment show series produced by Magic TV and presented by [Patrick Sébastien](#). It is broadcast on [France 2](#) on Saturday nights once per month at prime time and on [TV5 Monde](#). The show first aired in 1998 and has since become one of the biggest entertainment shows in the world, but it is not seen on American TV. I have 985 TV channels of Brighthouse and can see Gilligan's Island 24/7 on 6 of them but I can't get the French Show. Note: there are a few variety type shows from Latin America on the Spanish language Channels.

Here is a cabaret act from the French show. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXm-dBSUGCs>

It is the only place to see more than 90 seconds of Dani Lari , Peter Marvey and many top American variety acts. American TV never did support anything here like a David Nixon or Paul Daniels TV series on British TV.

The heyday of American Variety shows on network TV was from the late 1940s until the early 1970s. The ending of the Ed Sullivan Show was the high water mark for the prime time format. Today, some afternoon and late night talk shows keep a bit of variety entertainment alive and it could be argued that Americas Got Talent has some (in 90 second clips more reminiscent of “The Gong Show”) but the full service prime-time TV variety show is a thing of the past on U.S. TV. Maya Rudolph tried one heavily featuring comedy sketches on NBC a year ago and it gained no traction. Maybe the great writers, children of vaudeville and the Borscht Circuit are gone or viewers today want more adrenalin rushes from their flat screen. More than likely advertisers can't be sold on the format. American Variety shows always appealed to an older and more rural crowd. Think about how long, Hee-Haw lasted. The other factor in the business of prime-time TV is the ability to syndicate re-runs for revenue. A police drama can have a good ten years or more in reruns. Shows are developed and produced with re-run revenue in mind. Variety entertainment, especially where acts have dramatic surprise such as juggling, magic, ventriloquism and stand-up comedy have limited re-run potential. Once the element of surprise in the act is known, watching it again is not so much fun. I know the argument could be that crime shows have plots, but the story lines can easily be forgotten.

My wife will be watching a show and I will say, “Didn't you see that before”. She will say, “Yes” and I will say, “Then you know who did it.” She respond, “I forgot all the details”. When “Titanic” first came out , she wanted to see it. I resisted as long as I could, saying, “You know how it ends, the ship sinks! I can give you all the details.” She said, “That is not what the movie is about”. I didn't say anything more but went with her to the theater. I kept saying to myself, “ How can a movie about the Titanic sinking have anything else that matters?” Then I realized that I use to love World War Two movies and I knew how the war ended, we won. But I went for the back story.

Usually a run-of-the-mill variety act does not have a back story and that is why repeats don't work well. If a variety artist can add an emotional back story to the act, then it can be seen many times. Think about the magicians and illusionists with the greatest fame. They all had a back story. Perhaps Houdini had the best with his constant death challenge and his anti-spiritualism. He was also a role model for the little man, the immigrant struggling to break social chains on his life. Doug Henning seemed to exude wonderment and happiness and even his exploits into Eastern Religion was a compelling backstory. Blackstone's backstory was that he was a family man and heir to the secrets of his father. Copperfield was a talking store-window manikin personally but he framed his persona with clever interaction with nice looking women helpers, clever storylines and by conquering national landmarks and challenging nature and manmade dangers.

When you perform ask yourself, “Am I just doing tricks or does my total stage personality have a backstory”.

The backstory will move you up to a whole different level.

Dennis Phillips