

Halloween Ring Meeting 2016

Posted on [October 24, 2016](#) by [Dennis Phillips](#)

Ring Report Ring #170 “The Bev Bergeron Ring” SAM Assembly #99 October 2016 Meeting

President Craig Schwarz called the October meeting to order. We had 24 present. We are revising our website to make it friendly across all electronic platforms. Nominations for next year’s officers will be at the November meeting. Lots of great lectures are planned for next year.

In light of Halloween, Bev Bergeron did his monthly teach-in which was a bar gag from many years ago. He reached up and pulled one of his eyeballs out and cleaned it off on the table cloth and then replaced it and pulled the other one out and did the same thing. After a few gasps he explained that his eyeball gimmick was a real glass eye and a blue eye rather than his brown color. No one actually noticed due to the shock of the effect.

Phil Schwartz presented Magic History Moment #80 in his long running series from Magic History. He began with a verbal teaser describing an entertainer known as “The Handcuff King” and “World’s Greatest Jailbreaker”, who was noted for jumping off bridges into icy water while handcuffed, escaping from jail cells while chained spread eagle and winning challenges by escaping from packing crates. He then shocked us by saying that this performer was not Houdini but George Brindamour. He lived from 1870 to 1941 and his escape act predated Houdini. Born George Brown his family moved to Woonsocket, Rhode Island when he was four. When he began performing, he assumed the stage name “Brindamour”. He was also a skilled photographer and photogenic himself. Houdini published the Conjuror’s Magazine for three years and minimized Brindamour’s accomplishment. When he died, Floyd Thayer acquired his act and offered his handcuff collection for sale for one hundred dollars.

Bev Bergeron led off the monthly show with a spectator helping him with the Jardin Ellis Ring. The ring was placed over the spectator’s thumb and then covered with a handkerchief. The ring was removed but reappeared on the thumb. Greg Solomon followed with some cute alphabet gags, a sponge rubber Red “E” and a Free “B” and a Green “P”. He then had three cards, two haunted houses and a ghost. The ghost card magically went to his shirt pocket. David Freeman made a spectator’s ring vanish and reappear. Mark Fitzgerald finally set us straight on the card flipping effect that we have been debating for the last few meetings. and brought in a giant card with a window flap that flipped while a spectator was holding the flap.

Dennis Phillips demonstrated his Abbott’s “Frame of Life and Death” illusion, the Bill Neff effect where a spectator’s head is placed in a square frame and slowly the flesh melts away and all that can be seen is a skull. The skull is removed and returned to the box and flesh again forms and the head is recreated.

Dennis got the trick a couple of decades ago from the late Harry Wise, a ghost show legend and carefully rebuilt and restored it and made it a part of his stage show.

Dennis Phillips



Spectators Head goes into the “Frame of Life and Death”

The lights slowly fade, the hair and flesh falls away from the bones...

The skull is clearly seen!



**The skull is removed, shown
and then replaced in the Frame
and the process reverses with the
flesh and hair returning to the head.**

**Dennis Deliberations ... Ring # 170
“The Bev Bergeron Ring”
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“Chuck Norris doesn’t make a card jump to the top, he makes 51 cards get out of the way.”

When you hear and repeat Chuck Norris jokes, consider that you are reinforcing his personal myth. Myth about one is the most powerful promotional tool that a magician can have! Houdini was an expert at creating a myth about himself, “The Man who walked through walls”. Sixty Years later, David Copperfield continued the myth by making with “Statue of Liberty Disappear” and “Walking Through the Great Wall of China”. As my friend Charles Windley after reminds me, “When selling a show, sell ‘you’.” Magicians complain, “I am on Gig-Salad and all the prospects want to do is get the cheapest price. I don’t have a chance!”. No you don’t , as long as you are selling yourself as a commodity as if you were: bushels of corn, crude oil or pork bellies. They need a reason to hire you and want you only if you want any pricing power.

So take an good look at your act and ask yourself why someone would want you. Are you funnier? Are you more artsy? Are you more colorful? Do you entertain better than anyone else? What do you do that they can’t get from anyone else? What makes you unique?

You could also focus on a niche market and be the only magician specializing in that market. That is a little easier in a highly populated area. A few years back, I specialized in doing entertainment at Ballroom Dance Showcases. I themed everything I did around dance with all the accompanying inside humor in the dance community. One effect I used was Steve Hart’s “Shoe Burning Machine” to clean an unlucky instructor’s dance shoe. In the 1970s and 80s my entire focus was on doing full-evening family shows for charity fund-raising. My signature was using many costumes and basing the scenes on classic fairytales. I toured with at least 4 assistants. In Virginia I did mostly atmosphere for lounges and when the Hookah craze was big, I worked several Hookah Bars in surrounding towns using that approach.

I am convinced that none of your props should ever look like anyone else’s props. Either paint them or decorate them so they look unique. Use some signature lines like Rene Lavand’s “ I can’t do this any slower!” or Don Alan’s “Isn’t that ridiculous!” Both Dante and Jack Gywnne had a signature ending for every illusion. Dante would stand , feet together, and swing both hands together in a great circle arc from his side to high above his head together and say, “Sim Sala Bim”.

If you are blessed with adequate skills, sustaining economic resources, time to market, rehearse and constantly perform, then consider creating a personal myth.

Ricky Jay, who does get journeyman level work, as an actor, has these myths and sayings.

Magicians from the nineteenth century threw cards distances, but I think I’m the first one to make a thing about using them as weapons.

Dai Vernon, the greatest sleight of hand figure in the history of the art, rarely performed. He invented magic and had an enormous influence on the whole range of sleight of hand. And so often, the magic he was doing was to fool other magicians.

Theft annoys me more than anything else. The purloining of effects from another magician. Some people think its massive to steal the secrets of nuclear reactors, but to steal a card move is trivial. They're wrong.

I was considered a comedy magician. And — how do I put this without sounding egotistical? — It didn't take me long to realize that comedy magicians usually couldn't do comedy or magic.

Like every art form, there are jealousies and angers and competitiveness in magic. But there's camaraderie among magicians, whether you perform it for a living or you're an enthusiast.

I grew up like an Athena — covered with playing cards instead of armor — and, at the age of seven, materialized on a TV show, doing magic.

My father was a Formica King of Long Island, and my mother was the daughter of a Bengal Lancer in India.

For the most part, magic secrets are available on a level that's overwhelming and frightening, and they are very accessible if you do the tiniest bit of digging. But, that said, there's a certain group of individuals, in which I am included, who are very tight about secrets and don't share them with anyone.

I'm probably the only kid in history whose parents made him stop taking music lessons. They made me stop studying the accordion.

I've been very lucky in terms of film projects with people, terrific actors and also writers and directors that I really respect.

Writing is the only thing in my life that doesn't get easier. It just doesn't.

Finally, I tried to put together 10 axioms of magic

1. A magic dealership is often, but not always, the last refuge of the untalented.
2. When the audience enjoys your performance, you feel like a magician who is doing magic. It's a great feeling! And if you're actually a magician doing other people's

magic, you might at times feel a bit fraudulent because you can't perform your own stuff.

3. Watching figure skaters, audiences may sometimes wonder why they cry after a performance. Watching cookie-cutter magicians, I wonder why audiences *don't* cry.
4. Magicians should be judged on the basis of their performance, and not ego, ambition, number and quality of the props, the female box-jumpers they hire, or the number of laughs they can command by doing someone else's material.
5. The next time I see some young magician bragging about beating Houdini's straight jacket time, I'd like him to explain how such an antiquated restraint should still be commanding rapt attention in the 21st century.
6. All good magic performances should have some philosophical validity. That's the difference between mere plebeian conjuring shtick (suitable at one end for children's parties, and at the other, for cruise ships) and performance art.
7. An ounce of genuinely breath-taking astonishment is worth a hundred pounds of loud cheesy music, strobe lights, fog machines, and scantily-clad dancing girls.
8. Robert Houdin said a magician is an actor playing the part of a magician. And yet the few brilliant magicians charismatic enough to get a chance at legitimate movie acting went nowhere or never became household names. Who can figure?
9. Every superior personality and every superior performance has something deeply mysterious to convey. Magicians, of all performers, need that quality the most, and yet so few have it. A steadfast concentration on the delivery of an effect over any effort to display a larger-than-life personality, is the undoing of many performers.
10. David Copperfield said that the real secret of magic is in the performance. In the world of magic, you can be a collector, a dealer, a writer, an inventor, a prop builder, or an historian; but however legitimate and necessary these skills are to magic, those who choose them take a distant backseat to *performing*. ...And they know it.

3 Bonus ones:

Magicians are here on Earth to fool others. What the heck the others are here for is anybody's guess.

Originality in magic is the fine art of remembering someone else's material, and forgetting who you stole it from.

Many magicians are great at fooling you. You think they will be good and you're fooled.

Dennis

John Ferrentino at Wizardz, Kissimmee, Florida.

Posted on [October 7, 2016](#) by [Dennis Phillips](#)

Show date, September 26, 2016 Reviewed by Dennis Phillips

Wizardz is a cozy little venue at the Seralago Hotel and Resort on 192 in Kissimmee. It sits in a small building near the pool and has a performance area about 15 feet by 30 feet and a small lobby. Professional magician Erik Olsen and his wife, Kim, run shows on Monday nights and typically feature nationally known name magic talent.

The show that I saw was a Séance and Spirit Anthology with manifestations. John Ferrentino based the evening's haunted events on stories about patients and nurses who had worked at the now abandoned Louisville Waverly Hills Tuberculous Sanitarium. The vacant building is located in southwestern Louisville/Jefferson County, Kentucky. It opened in 1910 as a two-story hospital to accommodate 40 to 50 tuberculosis patients. In the early 1900s, Jefferson County was ravaged by an outbreak of tuberculosis (the "White Plague") which prompted the construction this hospital. The hospital closed in 1961, due to the antibiotic drug streptomycin that lowered the need for such a hospital.

Waverly Hills has been popularized on the television show *Ghost Hunters* as being one of the "most haunted" hospitals in the eastern United States.

Ferrentino's connection to the Waverly Hills is that he was originally from Louisville and had a rotund friend who had connections with it and helped him obtain all the artifacts and antiques at an auction and Louisville antique stores.

The Wizardz Room was set up with dim lights mostly provided by large pillar candles (LEDs)

On stage left was a small table stand with a doily and semi-burnt toy doll and a small wooden chest and a bell hanging by a chain. There was a larger table in the center which John used and contained the majority of his artifacts that the spirits would use. There was a bar chair on stage right. In the center of the table was a collection of large photographs of the Waverly on the inside and outside and some of the nurses, patients and gruesome surgical procedures. He described removing ribs to allow the person to breath better, as well as compressing the chest of patients with stones to teach them to strengthen their breathing muscles. He showed the surgical instrument used for performing a Thoracentesis. It is a large metal syringe used to remove fluid from the space between the lungs and the chest wall called the pleural space. It is done with the needle inserted through the chest wall.

Soft eerie low toned music played during the entire performance, creating an ideal mood.

Ferrentino opened by showing the photos and explaining the horrors of the hospital where people only died and the anguish and pain and tragic stories of the doctors and nurses in dealing with terminally ill patients with no hope. To get in touch with the spirits of the nurses he placed an antique skeleton key in the open palm of his hand and it mysteriously turned to symbolically open the spirit world for those at the show. He has everyone hold hands as he invited the spirits to make themselves known. He invited a woman to come forward and sit in the bar chair and he had her close her eyes and he moved to the far side of the room. He invited the spirit of the nurse to make herself known and the bell on the left side of the room rang and the woman in the chair felt was is commonly called a "Psychokinetic Touch". The woman in the chair said that she did feel a slight touch. An antique wooden key box was opened and it contained numbered keys on tags and also he had a small journal one of the nurses used. Random

keys were selected and when the numbers were added the matched numbers and names revealed to him in the journal.

An antique camera was shown and the flashbulb removed and it was placed in a wine glass. The spirits made it flash. The burned bulb was then dumped out and shown.

He called me up from the audience and laid a paper napkin on the table and had me trace his hand with a Sharpie. He then lit a stick of incense and had me randomly select a finger on the napkin and at someplace on the tip of the finger I burned a small hole with the lit incense. He then showed that he had a blister on his finger at the place that I had burned on the napkin. I then held out my palms and ashes were mysteriously on my palm.

An antique perfume bottle that was owned by a nurse who had been murdered following a love affair with one of the doctors was shown. This was followed by contact with the nurse using chalk Spirit Slates.

Another assistant was called up and given a choice of whether she wanted to hold a watch, a patch or an antique glass case. He opened an envelope and the prediction of who would hold what was correct. The watch was given to a spectator and she was asked to set it to any time and when John opened an envelope, the time previously predicted in the envelope matched the watch.

Here is where the surgical instruments were shown and horrid tales of medical procedures.

A strip of paper with a list of nurses was shown and a spectator was told to tell John where to cut the paper. When the name that was cut through was revealed it matched the name of the predicted nurse.

A first aid kit was shown and when opened it contained a whisky glass and a ball. It was closed and the ball was found in the glass. The story line involved a young boy, who had died in the Waverly and his photo mysteriously appeared in a small picture frame that had been covered by a scarf.

A music box, owned by a young child, was shown and a story was told how the spirits caused music to be played from it and music could be heard. When the box was opened, there was nothing in it.

A deck of cards had been saved from a fire at the Waverly and he showed the deck and when cutting it, flames came out of the deck. The deck was placed in the small wooden box where the partly burned toy doll was sitting the cards flew out of the box like a fountain.

He then showed one of the incandescent bulbs taken from one of the rooms and he put it in a small plastic sandwich bag and it glowed dimly when the spirits were invited and then glowed brightly and exploded in the bag.

To conclude the séance, he asked us again to hold hands and he asked the spirits to leave us in peace and he lit incense and walked around the room.

The running time was slightly less than 90 minutes. The event was well received.