# Holidays 2016 Meeting and Party

**Ring Report Ring #170 "The Bev Bergeron Ring" SAM Assembly #99 December 2016  Meeting**

President Craig Schwarz called the December meeting to order. We had 31 present and two guests, Helen Knapp, Dan's wife and Victoria Vasquez guest of Deland Wayne.

First up was the nomination and election of officers. The Committee recommended that the current slate of officers all stand for re-election. This was done, the voice vote election was held and Craig Schwarz returns as President along with Craig Fennessy as Vice President, Bev Bergeron as Treasurer, Dennis Phillips as Secretary, Dan Knapp as Director at Large, and Chris Dunn as Sgt. at Arms.

Jacki Manna has a dual role in the show and gift exchange, She opened with Matilda, a cute elderly lady ventriloquist figure. Matilda made a some wise cracks and sang a Christmas song. Jacki always does a fine job.

Then she emceed our annual gift exchange. Christmas names were drawn and each person took turns selecting a gift from the table or "stealing" a gift from someone who had an earlier turn. This is all done in good nature and seeing all the  stealing going on is hilarious.

One observation is that "prop magic" is being seen less and less. Maybe of the fine gifts were books, card packet tricks, DVDs  and hand magic. One gift was a wooden Ball and Vase. A dozen years ago most gifts were painted boxes and tubes. This shift reflects the changing face of magic.

Following the gift exchange we had a table full of refreshments and snacks and the management at IHOP provided a cake.

**Dennis Deliberations … Ring # 170**
**"The Bev Bergeron Ring"**
**January 2016**

Magician David Ben in the Magicana website tells us:

"For me, (and I hope that all my friends well-versed in Japanese culture will forgive my simplistic analysis), magic should be performed with deference to *shibui*—that is, be performed in a natural manner with an economy of form, line and effort. For me, the best magic is natural, elegant, minimalistic, balanced, and economical. My goal is to create something, however brief, that feels timeless and conveys tranquility. It is the only way to transform a three-ring circus into, well, art. *Shibui!*
Let's look the stated attributes of what constitutes GOOD magic:

Magic should be natural — true, but it begs the question: What, exactly, does it mean for a magician to be "natural", when his goal is to walk onto a stage and proceed to bamboozle an audience with completely UNnatural feats? Certainly he (or she) should perform in as "effortless" a manner as possible. No one wants to see "flop sweat" on the performer, any more than they want to see a highly trained classical pianist look anything BUT natural.  There is no tension quite like seeing an under-trained magician exhibiting advanced sleight of hand, wherein the dramatic punch stems not from any delightful "magic-of-the-moment", but rather — *will he, or won't he, drop one of those billiard balls?*  So in that sense, the magic should happen naturally, and so David Ben is correct.   (I once knew a magician from the West Coast [his name will be given only under torture] who used to joke: *"They say that the way to eliminate stage fright and to calm the nerves, is to eat a banana just before going on. I used to eat FIVE…"* — Then later, we were subject to the "tension" that I alluded to above, of seeing this same gentleman do a complete sleight-of-hand act with cards, balls, multiplying candles, silk scarves and dove productions — and his nervousness seemed to telegraph all the way to the balcony. But he never made a single slip! — and I guess we have to attribute that those *five bananas…*). I am aware that they contain a lot of potassium and sugar. Economy of form makes sense in light of the fact we sometimes criticize, as an example, the card trickster for making his routines and/or plot lines too difficult to follow. The common phrase often heard in that regard: "Too many moves!"  And an illusion act can be overly choreographed in any number of ways: superfluous distractions by too many scantily-clad female dancers; music that is outdated and tacky, or overpowers the visual impact of the effect; and an illusionist who makes so many flamboyant gestures that he seems to radiate an uncomfortable image of "god-like vanity".

Economy of effort makes sense in almost every kind of magic, short of two:  1) Elaborate, gravity-defying card flourishes, one-handed shuffles in the air, knuckle-busting coin rolls, and any other kind of manual dexterity where *spectacle* over-rides *mystery*. As controversial as this kind of display may be, I think it has a legitimate utility under rare circumstances, such as when the intent of the entertainer is to present himself as a "wonder-worker" gifted with skills that lie totally out of the ordinary. It may be "only juggling", as the purists of magic might say, but done sparingly and in a gracious manner with a wink and a smile, it could also be just considered added showmanship.  And 2) in Escapology, where the goal is to create the impression

of *extreme danger* and the overcoming — in as dramatic a way as possible — *extreme difficulties* encountered in the escape. Granted, Houdini's escape from a giant safe was, secretly, a premeditated exercise in "economy of effort", but his goal was to create exactly the *opposite* impression.  By promoting the stunt as a monumental struggle (that he may or may not pull off!) and possibly even life-threatening, "economy of effort" is deliberately disguised for the sake of showmanship.

Magic should be elegant, and convey a kind of tranquility, but even here, there are exceptions. The magic of some Comedy Club magicians spring to mind. Many could be accused of undermining the magic in exchange for "cheap laughs", but what they do is perfectly suited to the kinds of venues they work in.  All they have to do, to satisfy just two of the conditions for magic, is to be both ENTERTAINING and MAGICAL. They may lack elegance and tranquility, but they are still a credit to magic as long as they attract only the kinds of people who know what to expect. No one goes to an adult comedy club expecting elegance and tranquility. And in the wildly eclectic entertainment world of Las Vegas, just about anything goes.

So…. other than these few exceptions, I pretty-much agree with David Ben's philosophy of magic.

***********************

The late great Martin Gardner ( who I corresponded with since I was a kid!) was a kind of "Pascal Wager " type when it came to religion.  He told me that Math guided him to realize that he did not know it all. Math in some ways led him to reject Atheism, but in the same way it led him to reject Fundamentalist religion.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G%C3%B6del's_incompleteness_theorems
Gardner was an excellent close up magician, prolific author and expert at mathematical magic.

The first letter I wrote to him was about "zero".  I was about 12 (1960?) and liked the magic math stuff he put in magazines . I told him that I liked Math but there were things that I could not figure out like the fact that I can have a pile of 101 pennies and count them out but there is no "zero" in the pile! It is a full pile of 101 pennies. He answered the question in the magazine and said, " Math uses zero to mean "empty" and does not mean "nothing".  There is an empty set of tens…".  He did send me a private letter that said, "math never asserts an idea of 'nothing'.  It is not nihilistic. All it ever says is "empty" or irrelevant. He then explained far more than I asked is saying that "an asymptote" is a process of approaching zero and not value.  I was floored. I never had  this explained until I did graduate level math!

In the years that I corresponded with Gardner, I learned that he has very little formal math education. In time I had passed Calculus 3 and Differential Equations. But Gardener always had a way of making the concepts simple.

Before he moved to Oklahoma and passed away , he lived in North Carolina and we conversed by "Usenet". Remember that pre-email system?

By that time we were talking about the late John von Neumann
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_von_Neumann
Gardner was always trying to make the most complex math ideas easy to understand and entertaining to think about.

They can be...

I often tell some Gardner stories about Lagrange
Multipliers  https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lagrange_multiplier
(the fastest way to get to the river to rinse the milk pail so you can go on a date with the farm girl. It is an ideal Lagrangian problem, using a fixed determinate and optimizing the operation! )

***************************

Charles Windley , my magician friend of over 5 decades, said that he had a rather serious discussion with another illusionist in 1960. Most of their  audiences were around 400-500 people and they saw our show by purchasing tickets.
We concluded that the market would get much bigger and smaller but it wouldn't stay the same. The cost of production was rising and audiences wouldn't be able to support it. Magic shows would get much smaller (restaurant and strolling didn't exist then) or much larger and need audiences of 1200-1500 ( The Illusionists, Copperfield, etc.). It came to pass. It's not unusual for Jeff Dunham, the ventriloquist, to draw 10,000 or more.
The challenge for the future is not economic but safety as bomb and chemical threats will make it almost impossible for people to gather in large crowds. The electronic media has made it possible for people to get their entertainment in the safety of their home. Netflix is already replacing movie theaters and video games are out grossing the film industry.
Many Public schools no longer include a true auditorium in their building plans. They have a Cafeteria multipurpose room.

Benedict Cumberbatch does a trick

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4TsY6KnXD0
I still have a couple of the little clear plastic caps with a hole in it to do this. Surface tension makes it work.

Mine were designed for the old glass Coke bottles.

The hole can be bigger than is shown on this instruction video using a water bottle

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y0OEHVR5vos
Dennis