

October Ring Meeting: Story of Paul Valadon

Posted on [October 27, 2017](#) by [Dennis Phillips](#)

Ring Report Ring #170 “The Bev Bergeron Ring” SAM Assembly #99 October 2017 Meeting

President Craig Schwarz called the meeting to order. We had two special guests, Harold Twaddle and Lee Earle. Craig have a recap of the recent Genii Convention here in town. Dan Stapleton showed a beautifully restored and rare 3 sheet poster from the 1953 movie, “Houdini” starring Tony Curtis.

Bev Bergeron total a funny store about Lee Earle and Larry Becker going through airport security with Becker’s Russian Roulette pistols and Earle’s plastic comedy pistol.

Phil Schwartz presented Magic History Moment #89. This month is was about Paul Valadon. He was born as, Adolph Waber in Cologne, Germany in 1867 and became a determined student of magic manipulation. After being an assistant for magician Herr Basch, in Germany, he changed his name in the early 1880s to Paul Valadon. His wife Kate, helped him in a “Second Sight “ act. Valadon moved to London and worked for John Nevil Maskelyne and partner George Cooke at the Egyptian Hall for five years from 1899 to 1904. It was here that he learned the secret of Maskelyne’s famous levitation. American Magician Harry Kellar had tried to buy the levitation but was rejected. With a renovation of the Egyptian Hall, Valadon was out of work. Kellar signed Valadon as his successor and brought him to the United States along with the plans and blue prints of the Maskelyne levitation.

A young Dai Vernon saw Valadon on the Keller show doing sleight of hand in 1906. Valadon worked for Kellar for 3 years and assisted in designing illusions and reproducing the Maskelyne levitation until a personality clash between the men, as well as their wives ended the partnership. In 1907 Howard Thurston bought the Kellar show and became Kellar’s successor. On his own, Valadon received many rave reviews. His life was cut short by tuberculosis. He died in Phoenix, Arizona on April 23, 1913.

Many performers in the Ring show emceed by Phil Schwartz : Craig Schwarz had a spectator seeing visions on black playing cards, Greg Solomon had a cute gag with a rubber ear and a dollar bill guillotine. Mark Fitzgerald has a mysterious nut and bolt that wound and unwound itself without anyone near it. James Bailey III produced a ghost and a bloody hand from a paper bag. Joe Vecciarelli showed Lotta vases that he has printed in plastic from a 3-D printer. J.C. Hyatt returned this week for an updated version of his Three Little Piggies. David Freeman honored Bob Swaddling by performing for him Swaddling’s coin penetration with a cocktail glass and card deck. Harold Twaddle had a many funny bits with printed cards, a fast tie rope and silk off rope. Dan Stapleton did clever book test with regular books. And Bob Swaddling closed out the show with a blank deck that became printed and then a series of effects he learned from the Royal Road to card Magic.

Dennis Phillips, Secretary Ring 170



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

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His therapist suggested that he tell his wife about his magic trick addiction by writing her a letter. He said to the therapist, “I just can’t pick up the Penn and Teller”.

Every once in a while all of us wand wielders sit through a magic show that is so awful, so revolting and so stomach turning that we leave the performance and want to rush home and burn our equipment. At best, we have to spend all the drive back home with our spouse explaining how the show wasn’t really all that bad.

One of my most memorable stories was when I lived in the Carolinas in the early 70s. Back then; a person could make a fair living doing school shows, service club shows, Cub Scout meetings and birthday parties. The hills of Western North Carolina were filled with little mill towns and each town had company factory and community spirit.

One such enterprising performer was a bit of a local legend in that area. For purposes of this story let me call him Luke Porter. That is not his real name but I have every desire to let the dead rest in peace. His wife was Opal. Luke was a rather rotund character with thinning gray hair on the sides and patches of hair in the middle. His face was deeply wrinkled and resembled fifty miles of bad road ahead. He had a pencil thin moustache. His massive hands looked like they belonged to a plumber. In fact, his whole personage resembled a country plumber and that would be complete with a big potbelly and a belt that allowed it to hang over. Luke wore a tailcoat outfit that had been homemade by Opal. The store-bought black pants did not match the shade of black on the tailcoat! The tailcoat had actually been constructed by cutting down a black suit coat and merely tacking on tails made from black cloth. Are you getting the idea that this was not your class act?

Opal was very grandmotherly. Her gown was homemade out of lavender satin and she barely fit into it. It was sleeveless and allowed a generous hanging slab of arm flesh to

flop around. She wore loads of powder that accented her wrinkles and bright red lipstick that was the popular shade in 1954.

Luke had a bit of a speech defect and could not say the sound of “r” very well. He also had a curious shaking in his hands. Seeing his obvious hump back (kyphosis), it seemed to look like Trousseau sign of latent tetany (hypocalcemia). He moved like an elephant. To his credit he did have a warm smile and enjoyed what he was doing even though he was clueless as to how he looked and acted to the audience.

Luke and Opal traveled to shows with their son-in-law, Theodore. “Theo” was very thin country fellow about 40 years old. He had a receding chin and a bit of an overbite. His eyes were droopy and nose long. He wore a blue velvet sport coat that was two sizes too big and white pants and shoes and a long paisley necktie. Theodore was a frustrated Pentecostal evangelist. He had all the hand motions and staccato speech pattern with a deep breath between every 3 words. Theo carried props on and off stage and did his own specialty act in the show. Luke paused the show for a special word about each person’s soul and where they would spend eternity. Evangelist Theodore came out with an easel and some flannel pictures and preached a down home sermon.

The team rode and carried their props in a converted step van, better known to most as a bread truck. It had been painted white and Luke had free hand lettered the name of his show on the side. It said, “Luke and Opal Magic Shows. The best in magic shows. Call 704- xxxx” (The number ran down hill, as did the whole lettering.

Luke made almost every prop in the show. He must not have known about such things as sandpaper or a square or putting an undercoat on plywood before he painted. He made an attempt at creating a fabric backdrop by using plumber’s pipe. The backdrop fabric had huge gashes in it. After the show I asked him about the gashes and he said, “It allows the wind to go through it so it doesn’t blow over when we do outside shows”. His stage lighting was a pair of outdoor floodlights mounted on a square of plywood that sat on the floor.

The show opened with a very scratchy instrumental playing on a phonograph record. Luke plodded out and tried to do the gloves to spring flowers. He tossed the gloves into the air and they fell to the floor as he was trying to get the spring flower packet to open. Bautier DeKolts, the inventor of spring flowers, would have had a stroke watching this.

My wife, Cindy, commented on the way home that as low-class as we thought the show was, the audience enjoyed it. It really does not take a lot to please an audience if they can connect with you.

I've always thought that magicians who do "sideline" things do so because they've failed to make a decent living out of **magic** for a (largely disinterested) public. For every Copperfield or Paul Daniels, there are a thousand magicians seemingly "working their butts off" to avoid... ah... "*working their butts off engaged in regular employment.*" ...And so they end up:
Owning and/or running a magic shop.

Publishing a magazine.

Starting a school of magic to suck in the gullible (mostly starry-eyed youth).

Organizing magic conventions.

Morphing into Motivational Speakers.

Writing hack and re-hashed magic books.

Inventing and marketing oddball tricks.

Selling *Success!* literature and books that evangelize how "*You too, can make a million dollars out of magic!*"

Becoming a jack-of-all-trades: part-time close-up worker, trade show hustler, street magician, hypnotist, stage illusionist, mentalist, M.C., standup comic, juggler, trickster-clown-doing-balloon-animals, and anything *else* in "show biz" that helps them avoid the horrors of a mundane day job.

Or any combination of the above, either serially, or all-at-once. —While ending up going through three wives, Alcoholics Anonymous, several bankruptcies, accusations of pedophilia or chronic spousal abuse, psychotic visions of greatness, clinical depression and/or manic psychological break-down, and all topped-off with the bitter lifetime conviction that "*I COULD have been rich and famous if only this lousy rotten world had GIVEN ME A BREAK!*"

In the year 2525: (No apology to Zager and Evans for stealing the title to their 1969 popular song)

Two guys (1 and 2) questioning the "magic" on the stage

1) Why is he manipulating all of those decorated pieces of cardboard?

2) They're called playing cards.

1) Playing... what?

2) Playing cards. People played games with them. They gambled with them, and that, more often than not, destroyed lives. But you're watching 'fantasy magic' from a bygone era. We haven't had factory-made, three-ply, air-cushion-finish Bicycles, Aviators, or Bee decks since 2040....

1) What? Played games and gambled with Bicycles, Aviators and Bees? — *What the HECK are you talking about...?*

2) *Sigh* You just don't know your magic history, do you?

1) That's a fun act, but where did he get all those shiny disks of metal? And that odd-looking bucket?

2) Ah, you're beyond hope. That dude's doing The Miser's Dream, a classic of ancient magic where you pluck money out of the air and toss it into champagne —

1) What? There hasn't been physical "money" since the first Mars colony was established. I read in a history book when they used to use that stuff.

2) Have it your way. The guy is presenting a classic illusion of desire: The ability of a magician to pluck large sums of physical cash out of thin air...

1) Yeah, right. When I want large sums of 'cash' as you call it, all I have to do is plug into the Cloud and Google it. It's only digitized information, after all—

3) Hey buddy, *shut up!* I'm trying to watch the show!

1) Now there's an act you don't see very often. Talk about doing things the *hard* way!

2) He's called an illusionist. The Zig Zag and the Substitution Trunk haven't been seen for a very long time. Ten thousand hack magicians overworked them and killed those effects for at least a hundred and fifty years —

1) And now they're a novelty again, right? But the "novelty" is not what he's doing, but *how* he's doing it!

2) It's a mechanical kind of magic. Not seen since the Alien Invasion of 2180. The unique thing about it, is that there are no electronics, no photonics, no time warps or three-dimensional holograms —

1) Hah! And as the dealers used to say in ancient history, "no threads, no magnets, no trap doors, no mirrors, and your fingers don't leave your hands at any time during the performance!" (laughs).

2) Yeah, we all know the illusions of the past were made obsolete by holography, teleportation, quantum invisibility, and I.M.J. [Internet Mind Jack) so this guy is just giving us a magic tour down *memory lane*. Just play along with it and pretend you don't know what the heck is going on!

1) Okay. But right about now, I'd rather be out camping on the moons of Saturn with my kids.

2) What? You had *kids!*? Do the P.C.P. know this? [Population Control Police]

3) *That does it!!* In about two nanoseconds I'm going to Telethink the theater's Android ushers and have you *thrown out of here!*

I remember the time when it took hours of physical practice to do magic instead of the latest download of prepackaged software.

Learning to play an instrument, faro a deck, juggle balls, dance — you name it — involves an initial resistance of a very stubborn brain (what is it — some kind of evolutionary defense mechanism NOT to master new skills??), but then persistent repetition coupled with dogged determination, and the brain eventually “breaks down” and readily absorbs the new skill, which can then be a relatively easy task — for a lifetime.

I read this once: Some famous classical pianist (forget who) had just done a long and complex recital. A voice in the audience was heard: “Man I'd spend my *entire life* just to be able to play like piano like that!” To which the pianist responded, “I already have.” One more: A pianist was heard to say, “If I don't practice for a day, I know it! If I don't practice for *two days*, my *agent* knows it. And if I don't practice for *three days*, my audience knows it.”

Two magicians are watching a fantastic sleight of hand artist. The magician is effortless ripping through the most complex pieces of Vernon, Marlo, Elmsley and so on. ... After about forty minutes of this, one magician leans over to the other and whispers, “Man, it's hot in here. That guy is great! I'm sweating like a pig. Can't you feel the heat?”

“No,” says the second magician calmly, “*I just do birthday parties.*”

Most of you know that I am a professional educator and I spent 22 years as a college professor. The education business has expended an enormous amount of effort in trying to determine how people learn. Much of the progress was made in understanding the process of learning during World War Two when we had to take untrained farm boys and quickly teach them war technology. Out of that effort Benjamin Bloom developed a taxonomy to understand the education process.

If you look at the Psychomotor Domain, I hope it will give you encouragement if you ever try to learn a physical skill such as sleight of hand! It will show that it takes times and goes in

stages. <http://www.businessballs.com/bloomstaxonomyoflearningdomains.htm>

“Common Sense”. Seventy years ago the humorist Will Rogers said the problem with common sense is that “it ain’t so common.” Well, it is much less common today than it was back then.

I will keep you posted from the future.

I am well known for my selective appreciation of card magic. In my aggravated moments, you will hear me say, “I hate card tricks!”. Much card magic is just boring to me, but some is amazingly entertaining.

especially if it has a premise and is more than the “pick a card- I know what it is and you are a moron” variety (I am quoting some professional, I forgot. I think it was Penn Gillette).

Here is a master at work in a TED Talk. Lennart Green!

https://youtu.be/1_oa8m5Oq00

Green’s psychology is brilliant. He fumbles around with playing cards that keep collapsing in disorganized heaps on the table making him look like a ten-thumbed buffoon. And yet! While apparently “struggling” with such clumsiness, he is inexplicably able to pull off effortless feats of *masterful card control* that make all but the most hardened card mechanics *gasp*.

For those among us in the magical arts with the mature cerebral capacity [what — five percent?] to appreciate the depth to which Green has gone to paint such a jarringly sharp contrast between total ineptitude and a god-like control of the pasteboards, this man is a delight to watch. However much it may seem “du rigour” for me to venture the opinion, *carte blanche*, that “I hate card tricks” (and which was often echo’d by one, Penn Gillette), it behooves the more astute of you to realize, that however rare the “REAL” playing card entertainers are (and the operative word here is “entertainers”), virtually *all* of conjuring falls in line with the iconic quotation of science fiction writer Theodore Sturgeon when he wrote, “*Ninety percent of everything is crap.*”

In Wikipedia we find the following revelation:

A similar adage appears in Rudyard Kipling's *The Light that Failed*, published in 1890: "Four-fifths of everybody's work must be bad. But the remnant is worth the trouble for its own sake."

I am going to risk being brought before the Religious Inquisition... Please do not burn me at the stake.

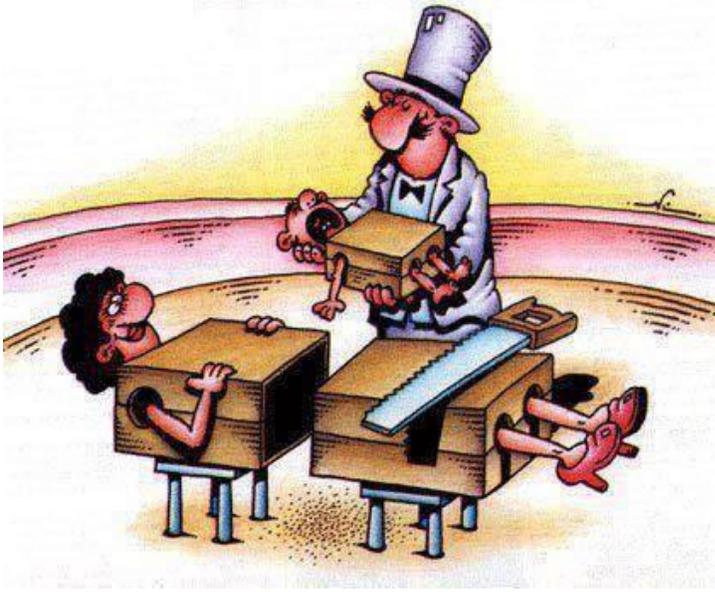
But for all magicians who are not humor challenged and want a good laugh, please enjoy this

comedy sketch by Rowan Atkinson reading , in the style of a Bishop in The Church of England, the story of Jesus turning Water-into-Wine.

I had a well-known evangelist once tell me that if God did not have a sense of humor ,he would quit preaching.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XbY8MH1TpEw&feature=youtu.be>

When an Obstetrician is a magic hobbyist?



Dennis