

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

March 15, 2019

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February 2019 Meeting

Mike Matson, our President called the meeting to order. The entire February meeting was used for the TC Tahoe lecture.

TC is an entertaining blend of Improvisational Stand-up Comedy, great Sleight-of-Hand combined with compelling storytelling. He is the two time winner of “Magician of the Year” from the Magic Castle and many other awards.

He began with a four color envelope prediction where the spectator seemed to know which one was hiding the jumbo bill. TC then went into explaining what makes a good emcee and relating fascinating stories and tips from his career. To demonstrate this, he had a hilarious running gag where he predicted the card chosen by a spectator.

TC went into one of his signature effects, the bill change. A borrowed bill changes into a blank piece of paper. He said that he sometimes tears up the paper and returns the bill by bringing it out of a tomato rather than changed the paper back to the bill.

Next was , his favorite style of magic, bizarre magic and storytelling. He had a delightful tale about capturing moonlight in a small spoon of water and drinking it. He also uses a dangling spoon as a pendulum for cold readings and auto-suggestion. He had a wonderful prayer vase effect with a semi-clear bottle and rope and you never saw the standard ball gimmick because of his clever moves.

He had an excellent coins across effect. Four coins went from his hand across his body and into a glass jar and he presented a great improvement on the “Out to lunch” classic effect using his thumb to do what normally is done by a rubber band.

TC has a wonderful self-effacing humorous Rodney Dangerfield approach , but also like the late Don Rickles, he can poke fun at audience members and it is always accepted in fun. He is a likable guy.

We were glad to be able to tap into his experience and enjoy a master entertainer.

Dennis Phillips



Dennis Deliberations ... Ring # 170

“The Bev Bergeron Ring”

March 2018

This show should have been a hit: The Magician



A dull sedan chases a white 1973 Corvette through an intersection. The Stingray spins out in the street. Trumpets blare. Smoke rises from the tires as the 'Vette sits on the pavement like a shark in a tank. The window rolls down. Bill Bixby coolly reclines in the driver's seat underneath his leather jacket and amber shades. Cue the spy guitar music.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=6&v=Hu7W0DKndek

Now that is an awesome opening to an hour of television. When it premiered in the fall of 1973, *The Magician* was a peanut butter & jelly combination of youthful fantasy, Harry Houdini meets James Bond. Here was a master escape artist who drove a growling sports car and lived inside a jumbo jet. ("It's like any other mobile home, only faster.") The playboy magician, Anthony Blake, assisted those in need while trotting the globe. The title character was played by rising star Bixby, who was hot off *The Courtship of Eddie's Father* and the earlier hit *My Favorite Martian*.

It seemed like an easy formula for success. Alas, it was not. And the reason might have had a little to do with gasoline, football and a writer's strike.

Beyond its handsome leading man, *The Magician* had a solid pedigree for action television. Bruce Lansbury was its creator, having produced dozens of episodes of *The Wild Wild West* and *Mission: Impossible*. Joseph Stefano wrote the pilot, having previously scripted *Psycho* and a bunch of *The Outer Limits*. Yet this talent led to some early turmoil. The network wanted a zippy, sexy adventure, while Stefano hoped for something a little darker and macabre. The two approaches came together most obviously in the car, that sleek Corvette, with a vanity plate that read "SPIRIT." As TV Guide wrote in its 1973 Fall Preview:

One way to get around current constraints on TV violence is to invent a hero who is capable of triumphing over the forces of evil without slugging or shooting anybody. One way to get around current constraints on TV violence is to invent a hero who is capable of triumphing over the forces of evil without slugging or shooting anybody.

The time slot did not help the Magician's chances. The Monday primetime adventure was up against two shows in the top 25 — *Gunsmoke* and *The Rookies*, the latter of which enjoyed the success that came with leading into Monday Night Football. But it was perhaps economics that truly sawed *The Magician's* hopes in half.

For starters, the Writer's Strike of March 1973, which looked to raise the going rate for an hour of television from \$4,500 to \$12,000, marred the quality of the scripts. That Hollywood walk-out hit just as the pilot was airing. Secondly, the decade's long and ugly oil crisis rudely arrived in October 1973, just as *The Magician* was premiering. Weeks into the show's one and only season, the producers realized it was perhaps gaudy to have a character who cruised around in gas-guzzling sports cars and jet airliners. So Blake was moved from his mobile home in the sky to a more humble abode in *The Magic Castle* in Hollywood.

If Stefano had been able to see his grittier vision to fruition, if the oil crisis had not grounded Blake's globetrotting lifestyle... who knows what might have become of *The Magician*? The series was well liked but lasted only one season. An accomplished amateur magician himself, he hosted several TV specials in the mid-1970s which featured other amateur magicians, and was a respected member of the Hollywood magic community, belonging to [The Magic Castle](#), the exclusive club for magicians.

Bixby had trained vigorously for his role as the Magician, and those illusionist skills did not go to waste. His career continued on as "The Incredible Hulk" which was a big hit.

Bill Bixby (died – November 21, 1993) spent over 30 years on TV and sadly died at age the young age of 59 from prostate cancer.

Parts of this story from: https://www.metv.com/stories/this-show-should-have-been-a-hit-the-magician/?fbclid=IwAR346g2gPOM2_7k1tc19IA5-3MhTFxAm3IBomThyuvK2V7-5yiy3urjH3l

I had a great idea for a card trick. You know, one of those, “Pick a card and I will know it”. Oh....maybe not.



I see magical history everywhere I drive! Any of you have that problem?



You have to appreciate the current and great card master! Shim Lim. Bookmark this. It will become classic.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nhJRq12bZJY&app=desktop>

I have often heard it said, “Book a show first”, then get the act together. The problem is: what if you booked a show is in two weeks? You are going to have to perform what is rehearsed and ready.

You can’t book something that you don’t have. You must think to *only do what you can do* .

Too many times magician friends have advertised and booked an illusion show with illusions they did not have and then came to me wanting me to rent them the props. When I refuse to rent it for \$20 a tour or some other nonsense, they get pissed at me. (Sorry, I will not rent an Asrah Levitation and all the rigging and costumes for \$20 a tour! - Buy your own props instead of using my expensive investment- more over rent it for 3 months and learn to rig it and perform it!)

In the late 80s (when the phone-room operations all but died), I put a lot of time into researching the illusion market in the Southeast US. (Cruises, circuses, fund-raisers, fairs, etc.) Everything that I heard

was, “If you don’t have a Big Cat or major Vegas illusions, forget it”. They continued, “Your price will triple if you have the big stuff!” Guys that booked me said, “All our clients want is the big stuff. Get it or there is no more work!”

Thus, I built what I thought that I needed : A Big Cat illusion! It was a Lady to Lion. I solved the problem of touring with a Big Cat by using an ultra-realistic animated cat.

I booked it once! It was great but there was no regular market for it. The problem was that I was actually 10 years too late with it. Big Illusions were dying in 90s!

Owning a prop house and costume shop and being familiar with Disney’s techniques, I came up with the idea of an audio-animated Lion! In that it is always a closing illusion, I designed the cage to obscure somewhat the animal so that for a quick 90 seconds it would look real! The mouth snarled, it swatted, the tail moved, it lunged at the audience. Moreover, built into the base were twin ten-inch speakers that put out a massive 100 watt growl!

The genius was that I needed no special insurance and no permits and I did not have to feed a beast. There was no smell.

I booked it on a show in Atlanta. The show barely paid my cost to pay my assistants and rent on a Budget truck. We spent 3 weeks rehearsing and taping to see how real it was. IT WAS! The audience and client believed that it was real. The client wanted to bring his kids back to see the lion in the cage. I begged off for “insurance” reasons.

In fact, PETA picketed my show! They were none the wiser until I invited just the PETA director backstage and showed her the “lion”. I also explained that NO animal parts were used. The body hair was all artificial pile fabric from ,National Hair Tech, in Massachusetts . That only infuriated the woman more! She said, “You are using a phony animal to teach people to abuse real animals!” I said, “Look woman, you are nuts, get a life! What the heck do you want me to do? Turn the stuffed animal loose? Now go out there and tell the press and your cult that you got fooled and you are an idiot!” She left furious and all she said to the gathered outside was, “It was an evil illusion teaching people that animal abuse is tolerated!”

You always hear from the so-called magic experts. “Do something different!” “Be unique!” “Have what the other guy doesn’t”....

I have lost jobs to guys who carried almost no props and were far more expensive . One guy brought Linking Rings and did card tricks. He was not entertaining . Booking decisions are never logically made, it seems.

The Lion and Cage was sold to a hobbyist in New York in 2003. His son was trying to sell it two years ago. I believe the asking price was \$1,000.

Dennis



Set up in my warehouse 1994



My artist, Allan Duckworth with "Leo"

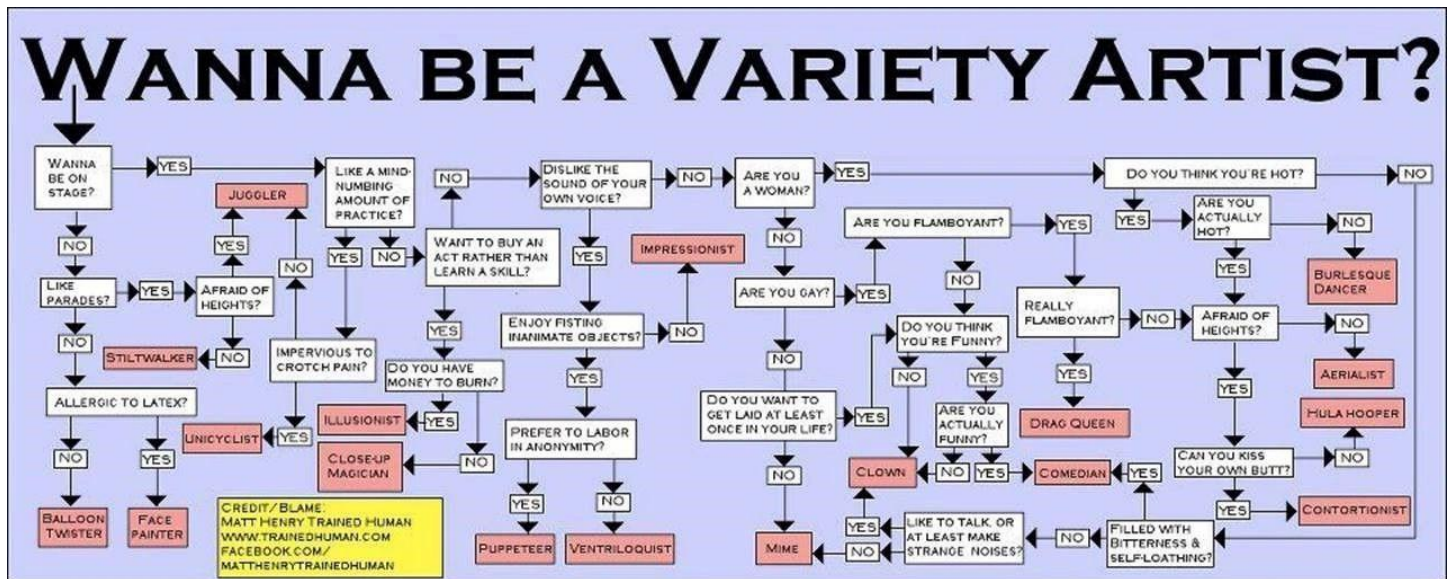


Close-up finished the head



Working on the cage in my garage at my house in Oviedo 1993

This has been around the Internet but seems to sun up things fairly well.



<http://sydneymagic.net/LEVANTE/levante.html>

Kent Blackmore just posted online 250 photographs of Leslie Cole, "The Great Levante". Blackmore wrote the 1997 biography of Levante ("Levante - His Life No Illusion" published by Mike Caveney). Many images have never been published before.

This is a nostalgic trip back to the days of the touring illusion shows of the 40s-50s and 60s.

Dennis