

SPECIAL PANDEMIC EDITION # 18

February 25, 2021 | Archived Famulus



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

-Orlando and nation on partial lockdown-

No Ring/ Assembly face to face meetings until future notice

Virtual on-line sessions happening on the regular monthly meeting night, the 3rd Wednesday of each month at 7:30PM

Our February meeting was again by Zoom and conducted by President Mike Matson. With the recent passing of Bev Bergeron and then his wife Alouise, we have lost two long time anchors of our group. Recognizing the contributions of Alouise, who was Treasure for many years and helped Bev, we now use both their names for our group, The Bev and Alouise Bergeron Ring.

Our Zoom meeting features a question and answer session with Lee Alan Barrett from the New York area. Lee's focus was on comedy magic and he offered tips on how to be funny and how to write material. He suggested that anyone interested in comedy take an Improvisation Class to learn timing and creative thinking.

He spent some time reminiscing long with President Matson about the old Ninja venue in New York, where both worked.

Lee demonstrated the comedy potential of a squeaker noise maker by pinching objects and noses. Both children and adults laugh. He showed a clever routine turning a ten dollar bill into a couple of two dollar bills using a clever method and finale giving them the choice of the two bills or the original ten dollar bill. The choice involved what was in a small change purse. Lee went into talking about Zoom shows and doing a ring and string and a mystery card spot.

His advice for successful performing was to always connect with the audience and listen to their reactions.



Dennis Deliberations ... Ring # 170, Assembly #99

“The Bev and Alouise Bergeron Ring”

“In times of great stress or adversity, it’s always best to keep busy, to plow your anger and your energy into something positive.”– **Lee Iacocca**

We all need dreams. Should we understand that dreams are the flower from the root of "faith and hope"? At what point do dreams move from constructive motivation to destructive and harmful compulsions?

How can some people live in a fantasyland hanging on to dreams that have long been impossible to happen? I have known a number of older magicians that have hung on to all their props and illusions until they have faded into the fog of Alzheimer's or become physically incapable of performing. They left their widow or kids or others with the job of cleaning up their mess. What drives a person to imagine themselves to be something they could or should never be?

Ernest Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea is the tale of an old fisherman and his young mentor. As a young man I knew a lot of old magicians (Santiagos) and I was their young Manolin. They were beaten up by many miles on the road and their livers corroded away from years of alcohol abuse. Yet they all still dreamed about "making it big" just as Santiago dreamed about one day catching the big fish.

The old magicians, I knew, had props as dilapidated as Santiago's skiff and yet they kept venturing out into the gulf stream only to return totally beaten time and time again with a giant marlin skeleton at the end of a line and a school of sharks , that feasted off the catch, swimming behind . Maybe ,like Santiago, it was the only life they knew or it was the only life they wanted.

I do not know the answers to these things but I believe we all live in a fantasy world and sometimes our fantasies can connect with each other in a constructive way. When this happens you will know it by the deepest and most special feeling and experience of true connection and community.

Make up a cheap "Add a Number" Pad from the Dollar Store. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CTSx0B6ww0s>

I like the math logic in this! Scam school Prediction

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0u4n8tMp44U>

Bill Schulert "Baffling Bill" has a massive illusion collection and a wonderful tour of his Michigan warehouse and display on Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/BAFFLINGBILL/> and

<http://bafflingbillmagic.com/>



There are other skills and stunts associated with magic entertainment and the touring stage shows of the past. Most of the old time magicians with touring shows always had other unusual acts that they presented as part of their whole show package. Willard the Wizard did puppets on his big show. Virgil and Julie did Rag Pictures and puppets. Ken and Roberta Griffin always had Roberta doing Rag Pictures. Vince Carmen had Yvonne doing her unicycle juggling as well as Plate Spinning. Harlan Tarbell did chalk drawings. Dick Stoner has his "Grave Mistake" paper-folding stunt. Jay Marshall always had Lefty but he

also did Chapeaugraphy and Troublewit. Many evening shows, such as Phil Morris', used a Punch and Judy puppet sketch. These acts were very entertaining even though they were not straight magic.



I leafed through the 1946 Abbotts catalog and saw that they were carrying Rag Pictures.

When I first got my Abbotts catalog in the early 1960s Rag Pictures were no longer listed as an item for sale. From the 30s to the 70s a company named "Balda Art Service" in Oshkosh was making several dozen Rag Pictures. I bought a couple of Rag Pictures from them and then began to make my own. Balda used both airbrushing, stenciling and screen printing on their felt fabric pieces.

The Rag Picture Act was an act where you had a 27 by 36 inch easel board with felt on it. With musical or spoken accompaniment you pulled strips of precut shapes of felt cloth from a flat box and stuck them on the easel board. The effect was that you were slowing making an art drawing. The audience saw the artwork evolve as you kept adding pieces of cut felt. This curiosity of trying to discover what you were making was what peaked their interest. Suddenly they would understand what you were making. If you are familiar with a children's church flannel graph presentation you will understand the idea behind Rag

Pictures. Balda also sold Rag Pictures that would look like one thing and then when flipped upside down look like something else.

I have no idea how an act like this would be received by today's audiences who have been raised on computer television graphics. I suppose that the 1940s and 50s audiences, who rarely saw color in magazines or television, probably were more receptive to this type of act. In the 1960s, I augmented my Rag Picture act by airbrushing fluorescent paints on the felt strips and adding colored lights and black light to the easel! I had a couple of dimmers and after making the Rag Picture I would then dim the main easel lights and raise the black light and create the nice effect of a silhouetted city skyline or country cottage at night with glowing stars. I remember that this effect was most compelling on the church programs I did. I had a nice Rag Picture of the Tomb of Jesus on Easter morning. I had it rigged so that by pulling a string at the back of the easel the stone would roll away revealing a glowing interior. Today, it might be possible to do a Rag Picture of the skyline of New York and as the dimming of the easel lights happen ,the destroyed Twin Towers could be seen in form with an American Flag or an Eagle in fluorescent paints appearing overhead! It might just bring down the house.

I have a publication booklet from Magic Incorporated called "Painting with Cloth: A Complete Manual of Rag Pictures" by Willard S. Smith. It was written in 1956.

When checking with Google.com on Balda Art service all I got was a reference to a Martinka Magic Auction that contained a nice photo of an antique Balda Rag Picture called, "On the Road to Mandalay". E-Bay has also has had a few Rag Pictures for sale. In the mid 80s , Supreme Magic in England republished a book by Eric Hawkesworth called "Rag Picture Shows". I bought a whole set of Hawkesworth books from Steven's Magic and this was one of them. Hawkesworth's Rag Picture act is not as artistic as Balda's but he has some very entertaining ideas. One is the concept of clipping on little prop house to the easel and pulling things out of it. The other is to gimmick up the easel board to be able to pull things from the easel. This is similar to the concept that Steve Axtell did when he augmented his magic drawing board.

David Chavet's book on Virgil shows a few photos and tells the story of Virgil's "Rag Paintings". Julie, his wife and assistant worked with three easels waist high. She would place the rag cloth on each painting to music and at the end she would signal the applause cue by putting a gold frame around each painting. Forever the showman, Virgil constructed the easel of the "Holland Windmill" Rag picture with a built in motor. As the audience was applauding the completion of the Rag Pictures Julie would turn and make a magical gesture to the painting and the windmill would turn!

Is it me or am I just nutty enough to believe that this sort of act could still entertain an audience? I certainly believe it could still be a nice interlude to a longer magic-based show.

Magic is part of Show Business and Marketing and Promotion are vital to a discretionary consumer driven product.

That is why the most successful Illusionists and magicians who I have known, were masters at promotion and building a myth around the performer and event.

No one wants to be left out of a historic event by their performing hero.

That is why David Copperfield walked through The Great Wall of China and went over Niagara Falls and David Blaine was frozen in a block of ice. The event is historic and captivates the imagination.

The popular music business has many great examples of myth and hype. It this event, Elvis: Aloha from Hawaii, it is a fading music legend reviving his career, with the help of his clever personal agent, and I'll bet that you and most of those around in 1973 fell for the hype!



Aloha from Hawaii Via Satellite was a concert starring Elvis Presley transmitted around the world by live via satellite on January 14, 1973. The concert took place at in Honolulu, but, here is the fact, it was only broadcast live to audiences in Asia and Oceania. Elvis' manager, Col. Tom Parker was a genius like P.T. Barnum and he knew how to craft a story which could be interpreted in epic proportions.

Do you still believe that it was a global live event? It wasn't.

Let's take a look at the myth now: The most popular one is that the show had been broadcast live around the world, which most people wrongly believe.

The geostationary satellite 'Intelsat IV F-4' (launched on 22 January 1972 from Cape Canaveral to its position at 174° East over the Pacific Ocean) transmitted the show live only to Australia, parts of Asia and the oceanic island world of the Pacific; it didn't have more range, technically. Parker claimed to have gotten the idea watching President Nixon in China ,live by satellite. Understand that a political event is vastly different from an entertainment event, at least it was back in the early 1970s.

Everywhere else the show had to be broadcast from videotape, days, weeks, or even several months later. The show was then presented (by way of video tape) in Europe. In the United States, to avoid a programming conflict with Super Bowl VII, NBC opted to air a ninety-minute television special on April 4 by way of video tape and months after it was recorded!

For an actual worldwide live telecast several satellites would have to be connected in parallel. But that would have been pointless, because due to the different time zones on the globe, in most countries the show would have run at a very unfavorable time when no one sits in front of the TV. Of course, a hardcore Elvis fan would surely tune in at 5 in the morning to see his idol, but Parker wanted to reach the masses, and that would only have been possible at a time that was acceptable for the average consumer. Home video recording did not exist.

'Worldwide' is also not true, if you keep in mind, where the show actually was NOT broadcast: In the entire communist Eastern Bloc (i.e. in all states of the Warsaw Pact, including the Soviet Empire), in China, in India, throughout the whole African continent, in Central and South America (except Brazil), and in the Arab-Islamic culture (except Iran which was not Islamic back then). Even on the British Isles, where Elvis had the most loyal fan base outside of his American homeland, the show did not run until after his death, five years later.

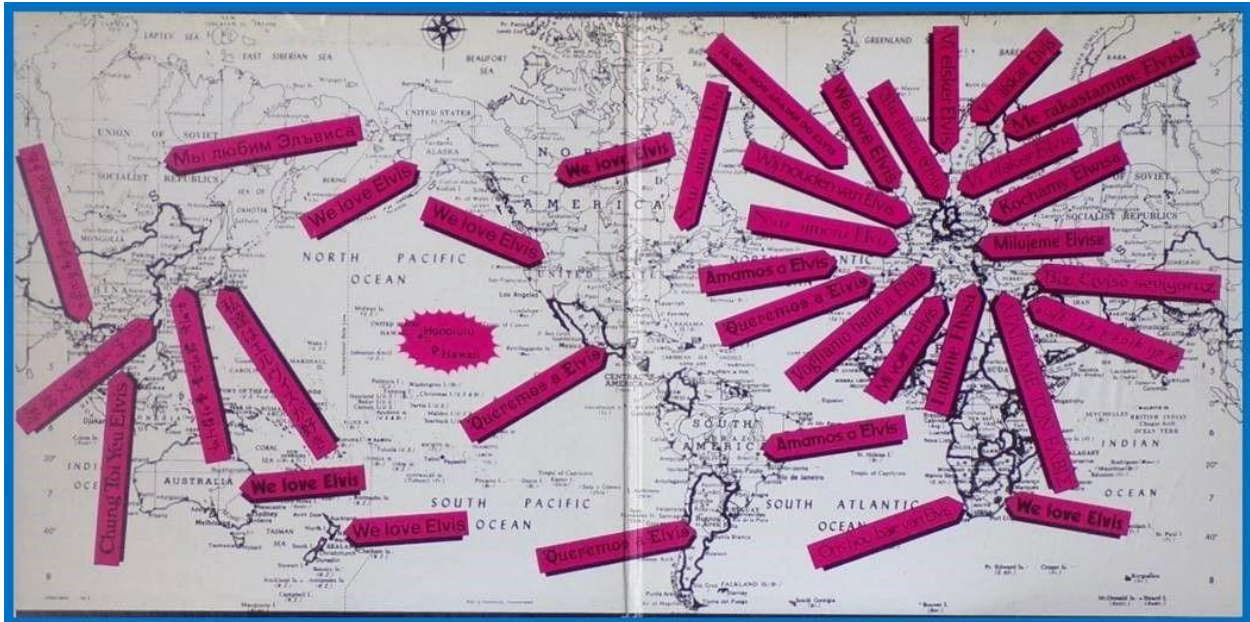
So how did it come to the preposterous legend of the worldwide broadcast? Well, beforehand Colonel Parker and his staff had really done everything to give that impression, and the following factors have helped make it work:

- First of all, there was a press statement by RCA, co-authored by Colonel Parker, which reads: 'RCA Record Tours will present Elvis in a one-hour concert from Hawaii which will be beamed worldwide via GLOBCOM Satellite. It is expected that the largest audience in excess of one billion people ever to see a television show will view it on successive evenings beginning January 15, 1973. The concert will be televised from the Honolulu International Center which will be set up to accommodate over five thousand for the show on January 14, 1973, at 1:00 AM Local Hawaiian Time. The live performance will be viewed in prime time in Australia, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, the Philippines, Thailand and South Vietnam. The following night it will be shown in 28 countries in Europe via a Eurovision simulcast. NBC will show the program in the United States at a later date. Notice the press release is a mixture of truth along with misleading hype.
- At the Las Vegas Hilton press conference on September 4, 1972, which was held in order to announce the show, Parker proudly presented a board with 33 straw hats, bearing the names of the countries allegedly involved in the broadcast; three more spaces were left empty in order to symbolize some mystical countries to be added soon.
- Parker had the rumor spread that they were even negotiating with the Soviets and the Chinese to take part in the broadcast. (It may be doubted if such negotiations really took place, but even if so, they definitely turned out unsuccessful)
- In the opening title of the televised show, the word 'Elvis' appears in a variety of fonts, including: Hindi, Greek, Mandarin, Cyrillic and Arabic, although the show was not shown in any of the countries where these fonts are used. (The Cyrillic transcription was wrong, by the way, correctly it spells 'Елвис' instead of 'ЕлвНс'.)
- The inside cover of the album displays a map of the world, where most countries are pointed to by an arrow with the slogan 'We love Elvis' written in the respective national language and writing. China, India, the Soviet Union, and several more countries where the show actually was not broadcast have such arrows, though.
- The cover photo of the LP with the globe and the satellite beaming on it does the rest to suggest a worldwide (live) broadcast. (see photo at top)

All of this promotion was so elaborate that until today it is believed that the show could be watched worldwide, or at least in most parts of the world, and live, too.

Here is the inside of the cover which implies it was broadcast live around the world!

When you create a myth, create a big one. Make it so big and so outrageous and illogical that it will be believed because rationally most people will think that no one could be that bold! The late mentalist, David Hoy, did that.



The show is over and no one “Found the Lady”? AMAC goes home sad.



Hey, you people who love Zoom!

Virtual meetings are basically modern seances



"There's someone who wants to join us."

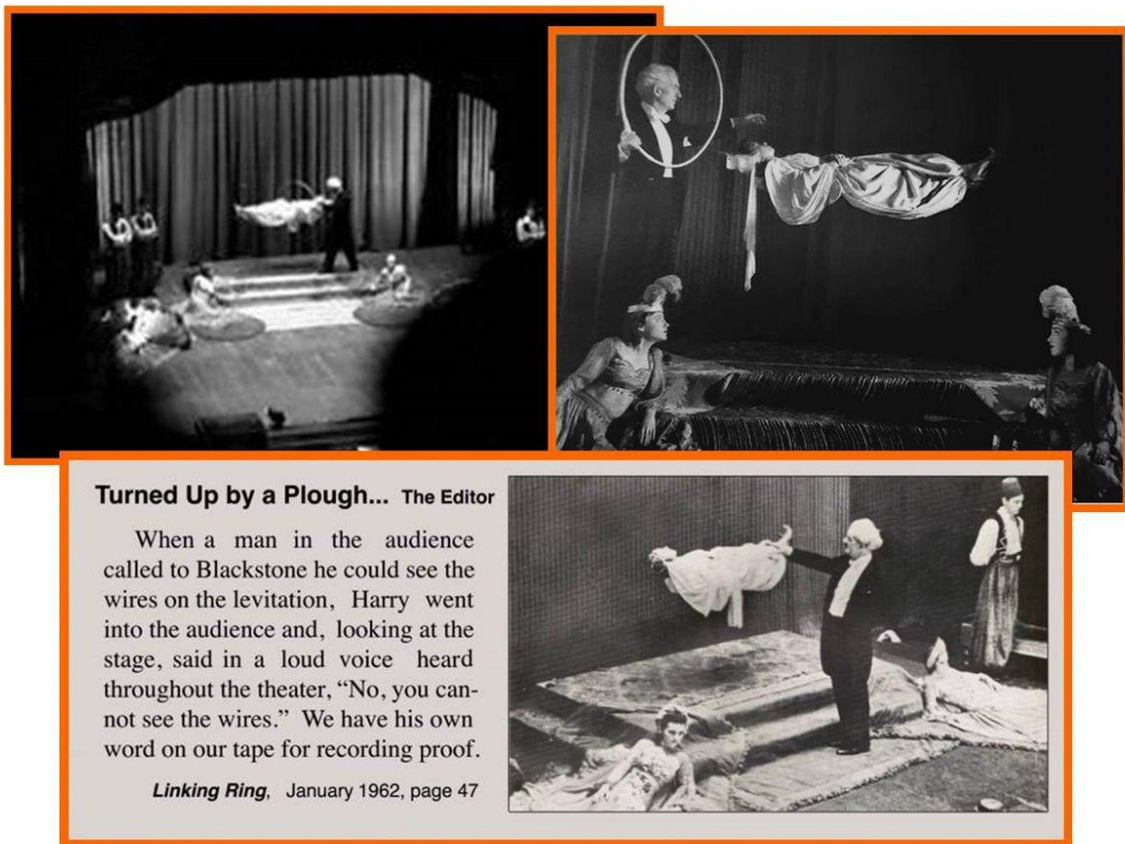
"Elizabeth, are you there?"

"We can't hear you."

"Can you hear us?"

Let's talk about a few "Wire Rigged Levitations"...

Here is Blackstone's Keller Aga with the "no stage trap method" set up.



The original wire rigged "Levitation" was created by Maskelyn in London and used in his Egyptian Hall, where the illusion was first performed.

Harry Kellar was the leading American magician and was determined to get the illusion or make a copy. When he was in England, he tried to buy and then steal the illusion method but failed.

Kellar lured away Maskelyn's assistant, Paul Valadon from the Egyptian Hall with promises that Valadon could perform and take over Kellar's show when he retired. When Kellar got his prop he dismissed Valadon.

There were two levitation units built by Harry Kellar. The levitation then became a feature in Kellar's show for many years.

The apparatus was heavy and used weights and a winch. It took a great deal of set up time. In his first version, a trap had to be cut in the stage floor. The levitation used a fan of thin wires attached to a cradle that the assistant is lying on and was obscured by the pattern lines in the back curtain.

After Keller sold his show and passed his mantle and this version to Howard Thurston, Kellar worked in Floyd Thayer's Hollywood workshop with Carl Owen on a new improved version that could be performed on any stage, without a trap. Keller wanted to give it to Thurston, but Thurston angered Keller by exposing the method to a few audience volunteers.

Thurston would get a committee to come on stage to look and though they did not walk around the floating princess, they were close enough to see the secret mechanism. If they fully understood it is debatable. Keller saw Thurston do that in a performance and was furious and would not give him the new method.

At a later time, Thurston stopped bringing a committee up but still invited one child up on stage to see the floating princess. Thurston never got the improved Keller version.

Fritz Bucha was Kellar's former stage manager and mechanic who would later be hired by Charles Carter. He gave the secret and sketches to Carter to be duplicated. The cosmic injustice is that Kellar stole the secret through Valadon and Carter got it the same way by stealing it through an assistant to Kellar.

Carter tried to buy the improved Keller version.

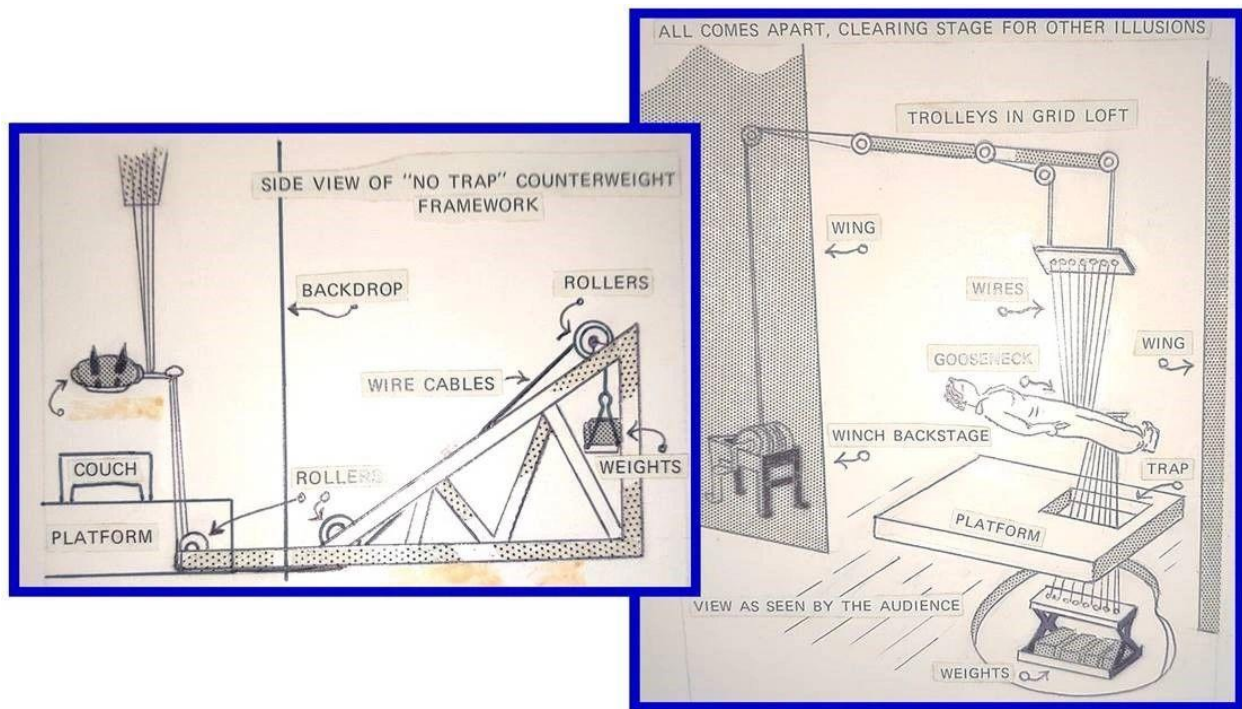
Harry Blackstone Sr. eventually got the levitation and made it a feature of his show for many years. He used both the below floor method the counterweight frame-above stage method.

In the early 60s, Harry Sr's levitation were to Blackstone Jr. and then to Recil Bordner of Abbotts Magic Co. Later it was acquired by Ron Urban in Chicago. And now is owned by David Haversat.

Though Kellar's claimed his new version was a more portable version, it was still very heavy and took much time to set up.

The Carter version was rescued from storage in San Francisco by Mike Caveney in the 80s. Carter's had motorized the wench for the wires. The apparatus went to John Gaughan who rebuilt it and presented it at a Magic History Conference.

For more details, you can see complete photos of all the parts in The Melbourne Christopher Collection , "The Howard Thurston's Illusion show Workbook" Volume One from A Magical Publication (Mike Caveney)



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The Kalanag Levitate Sequence

His Aga had wire fan connections at her ankles and neck. You will see them partly cover her to connect them.

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Lance Burton was also known for a long multimethod Levitation sequence that appears to use a wire rig at the end.

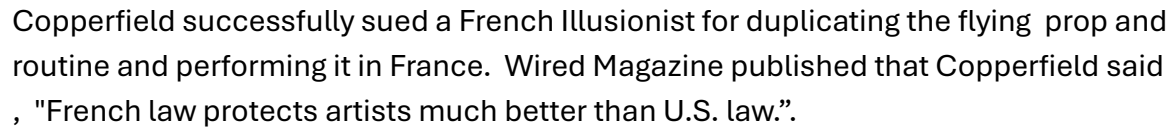
It was choreographed to be highly sexually suggestive.

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Here is the John Gaughan Levitation apparatus said to be used by David Copperfield for "Flying" <https://patents.google.com/patent/US5354238A/en>

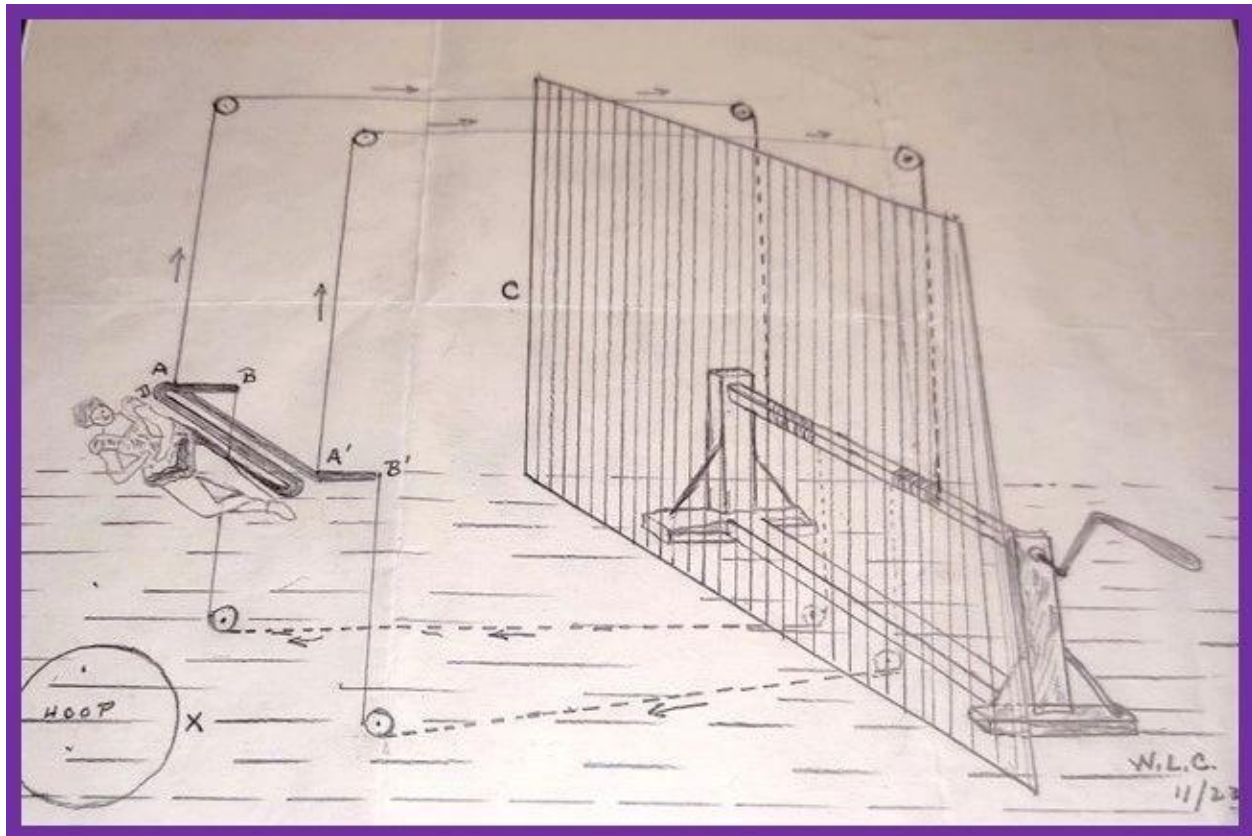
This was found on line in an open internet patent search.

Copperfield successfully sued a French Illusionist for duplicating the flying prop and routine and performing it in France. Wired Magazine published that Copperfield said , "French law protects artists much better than U.S. law."



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I am not sure if this was ever built, but many magic builders have experimented and made wire levitations.

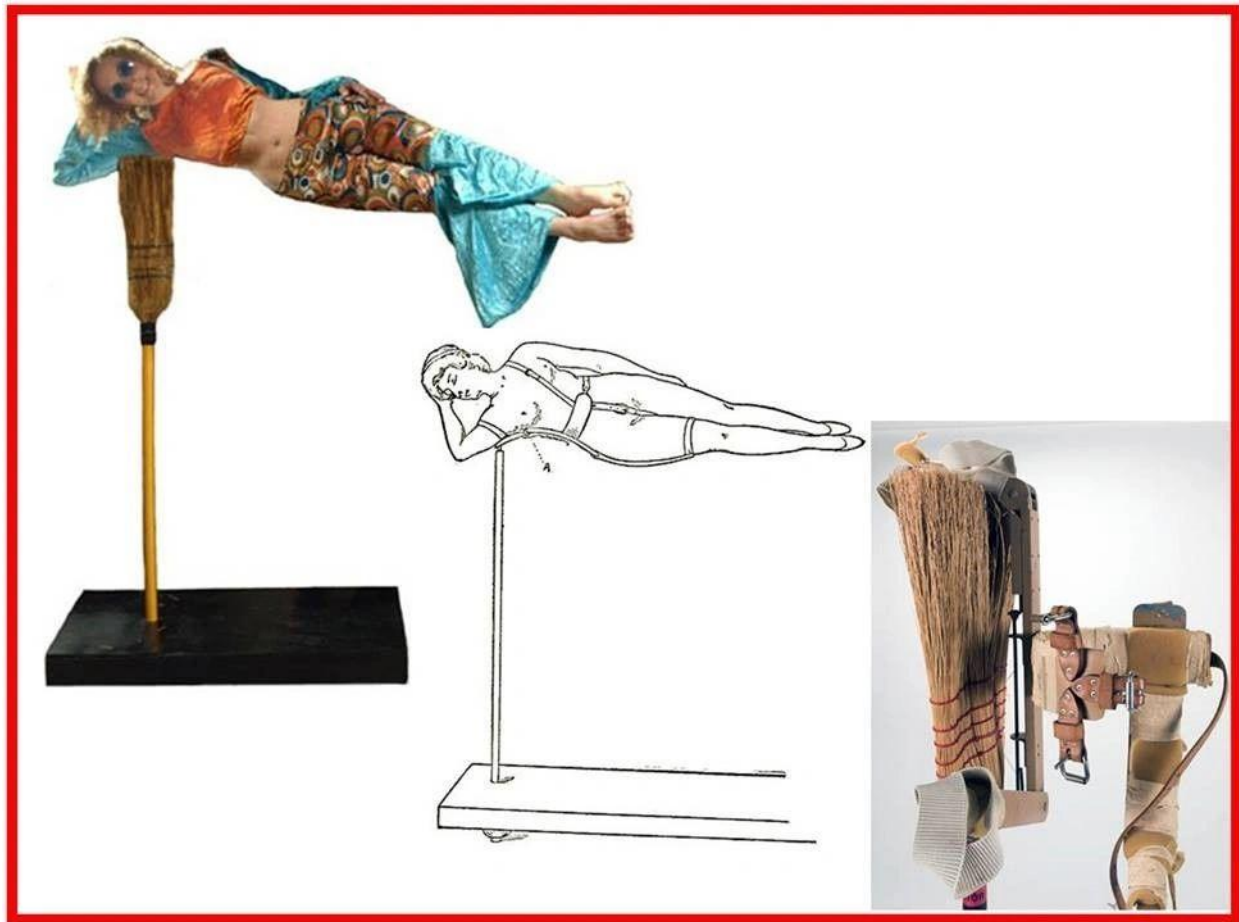


Most people have no idea of all the complexity in mechanical illusion props.

The actual mechanical action can be modeled using kinematics. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kinematics> You get much of this in basic engineering. The early courses, after Calculus 1,2 and 3 are “Statics and Dynamics” and Thermodynamics.

NOW... you get to hard part! The materials and all the components (mostly metal) have required properties such as tensile strength, elasticity, compressibility etc.

Nothing brings this home more than when you have to rebuilt the harness on a magician's broom suspension.



The retaining pin has to have the required hardness (measured on the Rockwell Scale) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rockwell_scale

I learned a lot about metal work when I was maintaining Charles “Chuck” Windley’s props in the late 1960s. Windley had a broken Sherms’ Broom Suspension. Bob Sherman (“Sherms”) used a lot of aircraft aluminum but the pin was nickel-chromium steel and it was heat treated, or so I thought.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heat_treating.

It was my job to get it fixed. The machine shop , that I took Windley’s broken one to, was not all that technical of a place and the foreman said, “We just get specs and don’t deal with a

lot of fancy engineers”. They mostly did welding fabrication but had a milling machine and mental lathe.

Anyway, Sherms was in his final illness at the time (died in 1969) so he could not fix the pin, spring and holding plate.

I found out that the pin was not only heat treated but nitrided in an a hot ammonia oven, under high pressure! <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nitriding>

This drives nitrogen into the steel alloy and makes a brittle surface to resist wear. Sherms had a military parts supplier make those parts and they used the same ovens they used to make the piston sleeves for the Curtis-Wright engines for the B-17s.

I found out that Owens Supreme of California’s Brooms were all made in two and three batches, on the sly, by an amateur magician-machinist at an Aviation factory in LA by a friend of Carl Owens and later Les Smith. I often wonder if it was made through the famous “Skunk Works”. The Skunk Works division was in Palmdale, California, and was the site of Lockheed’s Advanced Development Programs, where the U-2 and SR-71 were created. Lockheed did have outside suppliers all over the LA area.

When Jonathan Pendragon created the seemingly invisible harness for Charlotte, the main support bar ran up her back, which meant there was no visible waist strap. Johnny Gaughan used a unique grip ratchet and not the 3-stop pin and slot method.

I currently have Florida White. Medium size. They are a jumpy breed, but “Thurston” is 6 years old and mellowed out a lot.

Part of the jumpiness is because I don’t play with him every day.

Lops, as a breed, are okay. Good for a laugh. Hold up his ears and let them fall and ask him if he is having a “Bad Hair Day”...

I use all the lines. “He disappears. Why not? His name is Jimmy Hopper”... “His favorite Restaurant is IHOP.”

I have an approved size cage in the back yard. Make sure they have clean water in the bottle every day. I avoid chlorinated tap water and use distilled water.

I feed him rabbit pellets and Timothy Hay, and occasionally carrot tops, cabbage trimmings and small pieces of carrots and apples. They don’t need a lot of care. Rabbits are able to get nutrition from cellulose based fiber food (for us it is undigestible fiber) because they

have a massive complex digestive system where their good bacteria breaks down what we cannot digest in our gut.



I am going to tell to bit about rabbit physiology and anatomy. The bottom line is that, like a horse and cow, they have a complex digestive system.

If the rabbit , that is less than 5 years old dies, I typically autopsy it and if I have questions, I work with a vet. I know that rabbits are cheap compared to vet fees but I must know if the rabbit died because of my fault, bad commercial food or some pathogen like ear mites, torticollis etc.

The abdomen of the rabbit is large in comparison to the chest cavity. The gastrointestinal tract is long, and the rabbit has a large stomach and cecum.

The large stomach usually contains food (hay, pelleted feed, vegetation and fecal pellets that have been ingested) at all times.

Due to the unique anatomy of the rabbit's stomach, it is unable to vomit! If the stomach is distended by food, gas, foreign bodies or hair, or if the liver is very enlarged, this can prevent the stomach from emptying into the intestines.

The last portion of the small intestines connects to the cecum and is an expanded area of the intestine called the sacculus rotundus, which has a honeycomb external appearance, contains a large number of lymph follicles, and is sometimes referred to as the ileocecal tonsil. This is also a common site for foreign body impaction (like accidental ingested plastic).

The cecum, a portion of the intestines, is by far, the largest internal organ in the abdomen. While the human cecum is also called the “appendix” and appears to serve no useful function (other than to provide a diagnostic challenge to human surgeons when inflamed).

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/McBurney%27s_point#:~:text=Deep%20tenderness%20at%20McBurney's%20point,also%20known%20as%20Aaron's%20sign

Recent physiological thinking is that the human appendix is a needed repository for good gut flora to replace what may be lost in a digestive upset, such as dysentery.

The cecum of the rabbit folds on itself three times and contains semifluid ingesta.

Normally, the intestines contract sequentially, to propel ingesta through the gastrointestinal tract from north to south, so to speak, and this is called peristalsis.

But in the rabbit, there are also anti-peristaltic contractions *that move fluid and ingesta retrograde back up through the colon and into the cecum!*

In the cecum, fermentation of the intestinal contents occurs, and periodically, the cecum contracts and the fermented ingesta is propelled into the colon and then out the anus, where the fecal pellets are directly ingested by the rabbit.

This is called coprophagy or cecotrophy, meaning “the ingestion of feces”. The soft feces from the cecum are called night feces or cecotropes, and they are clusters of small pellets and not single, hard fecal pellets, as are normally produced during the daytime. The night cecotropes are coated with a type of mucus that acts as a barrier to the acidic pH of the stomach, ensuring that the contents will be absorbed from the small intestine.

This was probably more than you wanted to know... I could go on but will conclude with an interesting link between human health and the human gut. We are not rabbits or ruminants but our gut health is vital to our survival. One recent development in medical treatment, is that “good human poop with good flora” is collected, from volunteers, processed and put into capsules (fecal microbiota transplant -FMT-) to be taken by people with Clostridium

difficile (a nasty infection called C-Diff)! FMTs are wildly effective at treating Clostridium difficile. Almost 90 percent of adults treated with the capsules, as distasteful as it sounds, were cured. The findings can be found in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.



Run Bunny Run

Inspired by Paul Osborne and Don Wayne

The plot is simple but loads of fun. Invite a boy up from the audience to help. Show him your small lovable white bunny and put it under the white hat and explain that it will magically and invisibly go under the black hat. A bit of Twilight Zone music is heard and the white hat is empty and under the black hat is now where the rabbit is found.

The magician will repeat the magic and this time a movement is seen in back of the curtain. The live bunny peeks up in the middle (he seems lost) and then it can be seen that he is being held by the BIG BUNNY! The BIG BUNNY puts the small rabbit under the correct hat and the magician distracts the boy and behind his back and hands a bunch of carrots to the BIG BUNNY who waves good-bye to the audience and sneaks back down.

The small boy does not know what has happened but the audience is laughing. He sees that the bunny is back under the correct hat.

The magician turns to the small boy and says, "Isn't that amazing?" He then looks at the audience and says, "And this is even more amazing!" He pulls off the cloth cover and the area under the table is bare!

Trick includes the waist-up bunny suit with a collapsible foam rubber frame under the head so it fits between the legs of the assistant in the Zimmerman base.

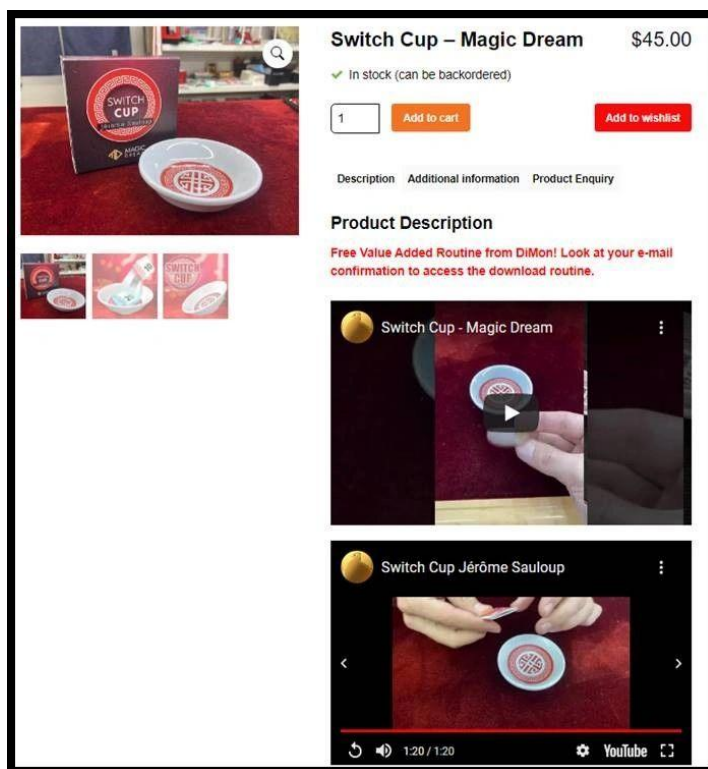
Here is an interesting concept for a mechanical switch, from Stevens Magic. Please support Stevens. They are one of the last of the independent purveyors of quality and unique props, books and materials.

See the demo video here: <https://www.stevensmagic.com/shop/switch-cup-magic-dream/>

This is the ability to mechanically switch any small flat object. The video demos do not go to great effort to hide the method.

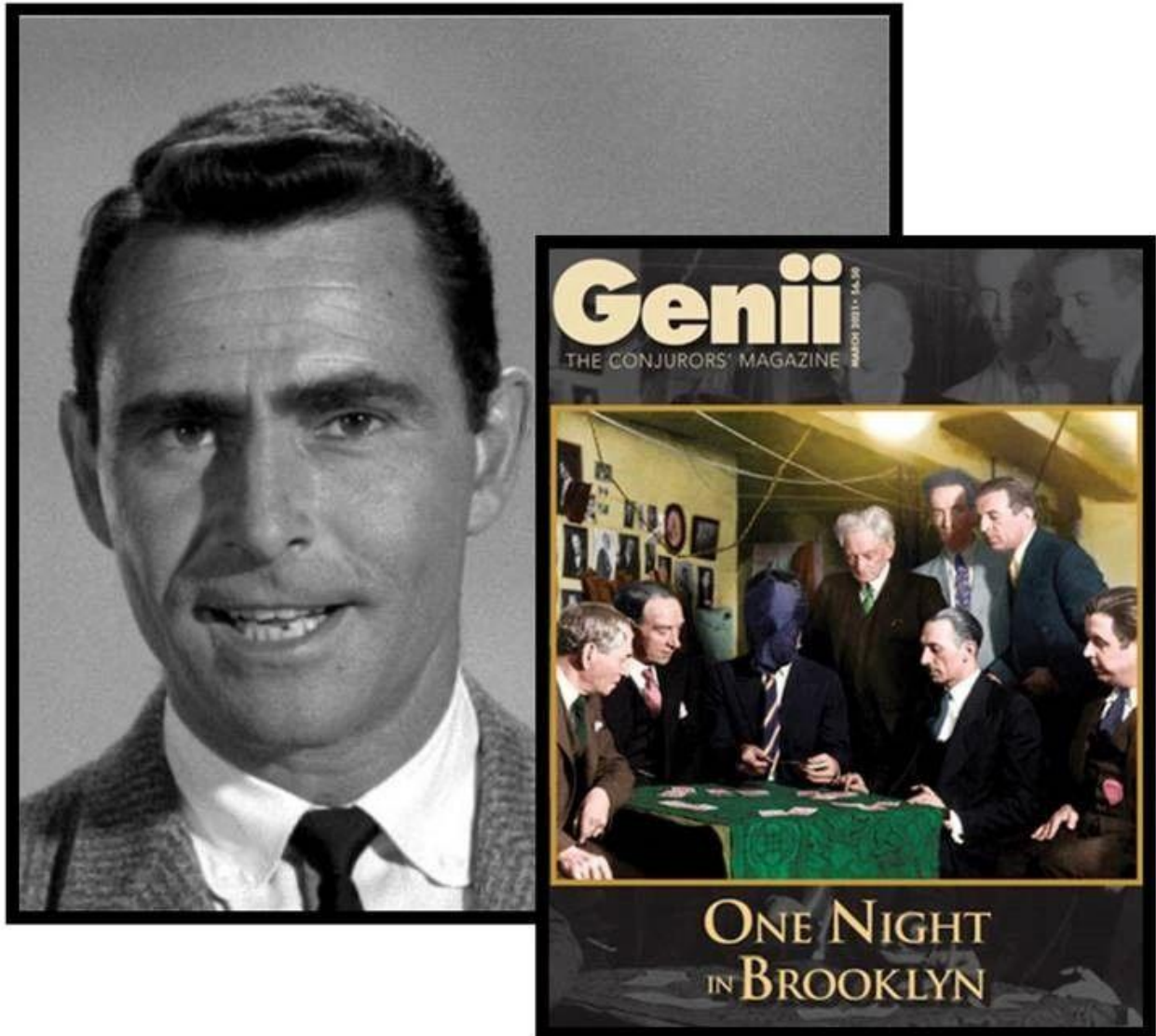
There is a domed flat disk(looks like the design in the cup) that you palm onto the object already in the dish and it covers the original object and magnetically locks in place leaving the

switched object on top in the disk. The price seems very reasonable for something that you could not easily make yourself.



Please enjoy my humor...

The upcoming Genii March 2021 issue:



“You’re travelling through another dimension. A dimension not only of sight, sound and mind, but of clans of aging magicians who have become so insular that their final greatest thrill in life is to get together and study each other’s techniques. They accept the futility of focusing a lifetime of hard-won skills on a largely uncaring public. Their magic ride ends at their final destination, with a card table set up by the hill next to where the cursed Sisyphus eternally rolls his stone up the hill only to have it roll back down, again and for eternity... ONLY IN THE TWILIGHT ZONE!”

Dennis