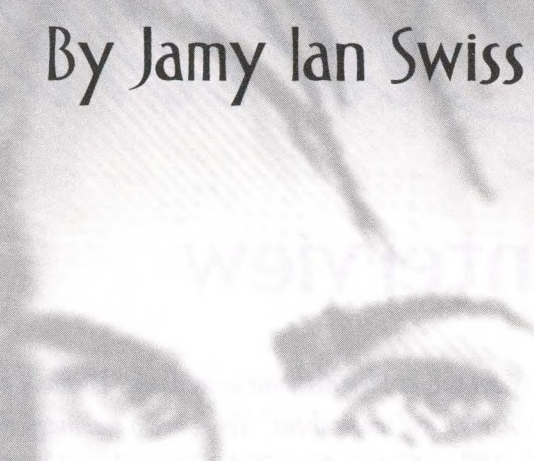


A SUCCESS STORY

By Jamy Ian Swiss



IN OCTOBER OF 1981, I WAS IN THE CATSKILLS ATTENDING the Tannen's Jubilee as I had regularly done through much of my teens. At the Saturday evening show in the thousand-plus seat showroom of Brown's Hotel, a young Lance Burton stepped onto the stage, preceded by the buzz of his having won the then newly created Gold Medal prize at the IBM convention the year before. Within months, he would make his first of an unprecedented string of appearances on the Johnny Carson show, and then, soon after, go on to become the first American to break the stranglehold of tradition that the Dutch held over FISM and bring home the Grand Prix.

This was a pivotal moment in Lance Burton's rise, and a memorable moment I'm sure for anyone who was in the room that night. Manipulative magic in the classical manner was redefined for us all at that moment, for us and a generation of magicians; if Lance had grown up wanting to be Channing Pollock, a new brood of magi would grow up wanting to be Lance Burton. But like any great artist, Lance was in fact not merely classical; instead, he sprang from those traditions and then sculpted them to his own vision, reshaping our own view of what classic has come to mean. While magicians talked about Lance, admittedly in awed and respectful tones, but nevertheless almost as if he was a throwback to an earlier time, I recall Max Maven pointing out that in fact it was the other young acts with space suits and flash pots that were the real traditionalists, and that it was Lance who, in the guise of classicism, was in fact the radical—with his elegant, high-collared costume, and his unforgettable choice of music—Lance who, carrying the torch of the past, led us into the future. How has he changed us? Let us count the clones.

Now, I should perhaps interject a small confession: I've never been a big fan of classic manipulative magic. Consider that the basic effects of this school consist of the apparent ability to produce seemingly infinite quantities of one or more of the following items: cards, billiard balls, thimbles, cigarettes and/or birds. As I see it, three of these things are useless, one can kill you, and the birds are too small to eat. Next case.

My point is that manipulative magic seems to me to be the branch of the conjuring arts most readily poised for the artistic junk heap, the branch which holds the least potential for relevant or meaningful content. What, after all, might such effects be "about," in the way that sawing a person in half, or destroying and restoring—anything—might be about something larger than itself? (Despite the fact that even these effects, so rich with potential symbolism, are most often performed as if they are not about much of anything either.) As Teller has said: "Content-free exercises in arbitrary juggling. Who *cares* if there's a dove where there wasn't one before?"

Umm... exactly. But then again, I am compelled to note and endorse Teller's adjoining caveat: "Now, maybe if you're Channing Pollock or Lance Burton and can make producing doves look like sex, you're in business, or Johnny Thompson, who can do the most exquisite production and then take it so lightly that it turns into hilarious, surreal self-parody, maybe then doves and silks have a place." [GENII, June, 1995] And so, when that young Lance Burton melted his Zombie ball into a pouring flow of silver beneath a foulard and the closing chords of Vivaldi, I was one of the many who leapt to my feet to join in the ovation. And, no doubt like many others, when soon after he appeared on the Carson show, I sat (with my friend Peter Samelson) in front of the VCR—an exciting new item in itself, as I recall—and paused and rewound and slo-mo'ed, and slo-mo'ed again, trying to understand how it was possible to make producing doves look like that—that pure, that magical—indeed, how was it possible to make any magic look so perfect.

Lance's success goes, I believe, hand in hand with the current success of magic at large. He is an integral part of it—leading, following, caught up in the flow, providing shining examples on multiple magic specials—his straitjacket escape on last year's Houdini special, as just one distinctive example, was a gem of understated class. Few magicians seem to garner such widespread praise from colleagues as does Lance; he seems almost universally regarded, not merely by his close friends, or distant audience admirers, but by magicians in all branches of the art; by competitors, by his business associates, his backstage and technical staff, by the Las Vegas showbiz community, by the waitresses in the casino delicatessen, the cab drivers from McCarran airport. And so, Lance's success is, I believe, all of our success; for Lance is a magician who cares deeply about his art and his audience, a man who has earned his success with honesty and artistry, with hard work and sincerity. A man of such skills makes a great ambassador for our art, because he does it honor and does not demean it, be it in his presentation of magic or in his personal or professional manner. In light of this, we must not only acknowledge Lance's success, we must not only encourage his success—we must thank him for it.

Lance Burton:

The GENII Interview

I'll never forget Johnny Thompson's parting words to me a few years ago, as I left his house to see Lance Burton's full-evening show at the Hacienda for the first time. "You're going to like it; it's a real magic show." Yes, it was a real magic show, the likes of which I had not seen since that of Richiardi, years before, at the Village Gate in New York City; and yes, I liked it—a lot. I liked it enough to come back and see it any chance I could when in Las Vegas—especially the time I brought my significant other, Carol Krol, to see it, and waited, bursting with anticipation, to see the look on her face when Lance suddenly appeared, standing directly over our table, blowing his whistle. The moment was, at the risk of stating the obvious, well worth waiting for.

The last time I would see the Hacienda show was a few months ago, on March 27th. After the show, Lance's able and appreciated assistant, Eta-Lyn Lampert, fetched me from the table to guide me backstage to the green room and Lance. Lance and I made our way to the hotel's all-night restaurant where, despite the late hour and Lance's horrific case of allergies from an unusually high Las Vegas pollen count, we talked for several hours. What a guy—we even squeezed into his Corvette afterwards so he could drive me back to where I was staying. Most of the following interview occurred that evening; select follow-ups were done by phone and e-mail.

We began by talking a bit about Lance's upbringing in the town of Shively, Kentucky. It didn't take long for the Southern boy to show his roots, along with his distinctly unprepossessing nature.

JIS: So, "Lively Shively," huh?

LB: Yup, "Lively Shively."

JIS: So, what was it like growing up in Shively?

LB: Shively, suburb of Louisville. Where we lived, it was sort of out... I won't say in the country, but you know, it's not like suburbs everywhere. I mean, I saw cows in the field on the school bus, going to school in the morning. It was a very nice place to grow up.

JIS: And when did you pick up the magic bug down there?

LB: When I was about five years old.

JIS: How did that happen?

LB: It was at a Christmas party for Frito-Lay employees. My mother worked at the Frito-Lay plant in Louisville. There was a guy that worked there, Harry Collins, and he was a really great magician. He started out as a salesman at the plant, and then was promoted to sales manager, but because he did magic, Frito-Lay created a job for a him representing the company doing magic at trade shows and fairs. Anyway, he was

doing a show at this Christmas party, and I remember he did the Sucker... (Lance pokes his finger into his other fist.)

JIS: Color Changing Silk.

LB: Color Changing Silk. I'm doing the international sign for Color Changing Silk.

JIS: (Laughs.)

LB: And he did the Miser's Dream, and that was the one I volunteered for, and went up on stage. And you know, I can remember it today just as clear as when it happened. I was wearing a red shirt. Because I remember he reached behind my ear and pulled out a silver dollar, and of course when I... I mean, I was, you know, five years old, and I like reached up to my ear, and then he reached over to my elbow and pulled out another one. So I was a kid going, "Wow! Where are all these coins coming from?" And that's what got me interested in magic.

JIS: And you remember how that felt, huh? That's great. So was there a magic shop there? Did you have any local mentors?

LB: Well, starting off, I decided I was interested in magic, so I tried to make up my own card tricks. They were really bad; I was only a kid. And then finally, the next door neighbor, her children were already grown and had moved out, but I guess one of them had a little magic book. It was called *Magic Made Easy*. It had like ten magic tricks in it, and she gave it to me. I didn't even know there was such a thing as a book that you could learn magic from. So I started reading the book, and making little props, and started doing magic shows with those ten tricks. (Laughs.)

JIS: For your friends?

LB: Yeah. Then I got a magic set for Christmas, a big, huge Adams Magic set. It had the Rice Bowls, the Cups and Balls, the little box with the rubber bands

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and the coin slide, the sponge rabbits... So, then I had an act. (Laughter)

JIS: *And so you really enjoyed performing for your friends right away.*

LB: Yeah. I was always doing tricks for my friends, my family.

JIS: *So then you started doing kid shows in high school or thereabouts?*

LB: Yeah, well, my Mom talked to Harry at work. She said, "You know, my son is really interested in magic, and he's always bringing home magic books."

And so then for Christmas one year I got a Fantasio Vanishing Cane, and some silk handkerchiefs, and a couple of magic books. I think it was *Sleight of Hand* by Sachs, and *Our Magic*.

JIS: *Wow. And you were how old when you got that?*

LB: I was probably like ten.

JIS: *You lucked out.*

LB: Yeah. And then I discovered the local magic shop, in Louisville, called Caufield's—it's still there—and made a couple of trips to the magic shop. And then, let's see, I discovered Abbott's Magic Company, and sent off for a catalog. And that was like, "Oh, wait, this is..."

JIS: *Oh, boy. Up late that night.*

LB: Yeah. It was a whole new world. And then when I was about fourteen I got my first set of tails. There was a magician that had lived in Louisville named Rheinart who had passed away, and his wife was selling off all of his magic stuff. Harry said, "You know, you should buy this tuxedo." So it was like \$35, and I got a tuxedo, and it had some dove pockets in it, and I had the shirts with the collars and everything. So now here I am, like fourteen years old, and I've got a suit of tails, so now I'm ready to really perform. I just started out doing birthday parties.

JIS: *In the tails?*

LB: Yeah! (Laughter.)

JIS: *That's great.*

LB: My Mom would drive me to the shows. (Laughs.) And at about that same time I got a couple of doves...

JIS: *Because you had to fill those pockets.*

LB: That's right. And started reading the dove books, and making my own harnesses, and working on that stuff.

JIS: *And this would be about what year?*

LB: '74.

JIS: *You were born in '60.*

LB: Yes, 1960.

JIS: *So what kind of kid show did you do?*

LB: Well, I had some doves and the Zombie and candles, and additional things...

JIS: *But were you also doing any kind of standard kids type of magic?*

LB: Well, my big illusion was the Flying Carpet.

JIS: *You mean the Grant prop?*

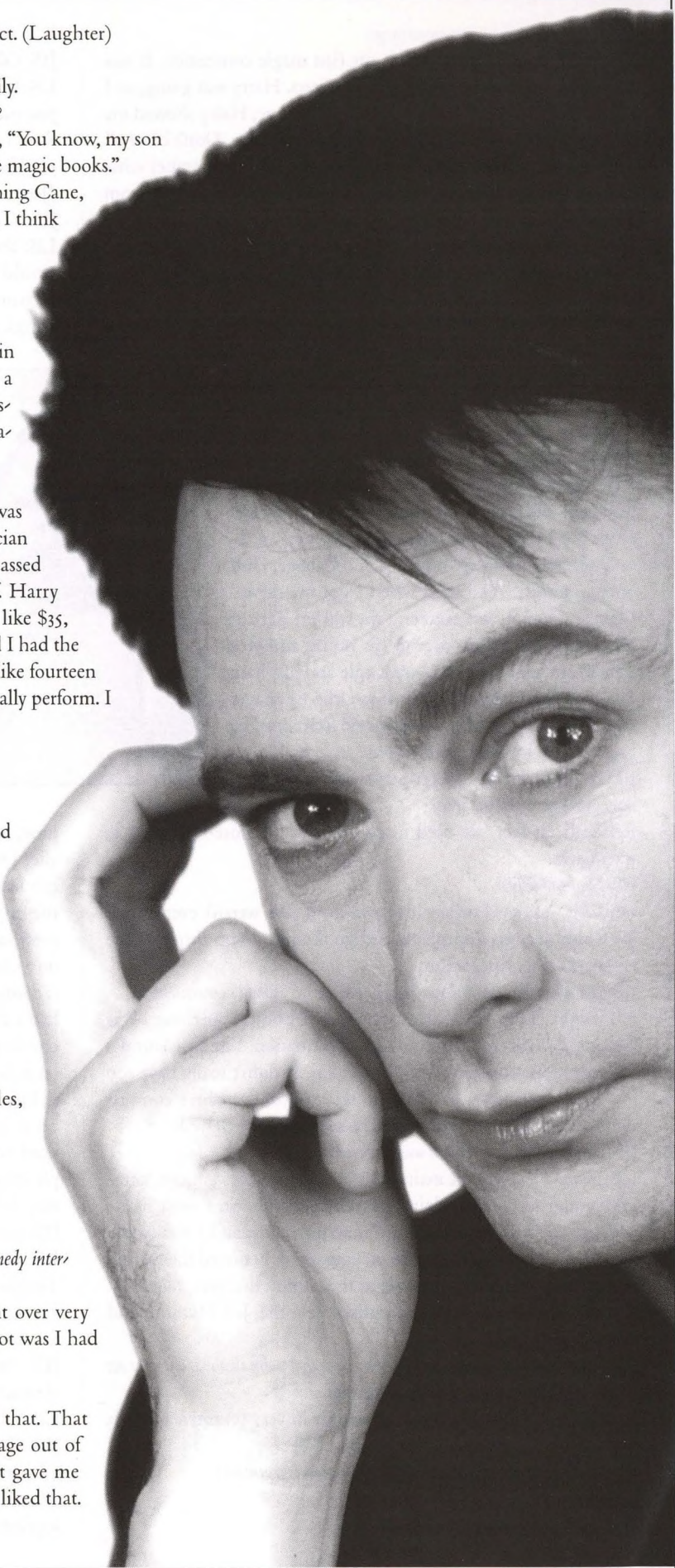
LB: Yeah. That was the big finish of the act.

JIS: *Uh-huh. But you weren't doing any of the standard sort of comedy interplay? Kids shouting, Die Boxes, that kind of thing?*

LB: You know, I did have a Die Box, but it never went over very good. For some reason it never scored. What I did use a lot was I had the little hat with the rabbit puppet in it.

JIS: *Sure. Charles' Out of My Hat?*

LB: Yeah, and it would find a card. They always loved that. That was a trick that Harry Collins did, he got a lot of mileage out of that. I did that trick because of Harry. Seeing him do it gave me confidence in it that this was a good trick. The kids really liked that. And the Miser's Dream.



JIS: *How else was your act progressing?*

LB: Well, then in '76 I went to my first magic convention. It was an IBM convention in Evansville, Indiana. Harry was going, so I kind of tagged along. Since it was my first time, Harry showed me around. You know, said, "Here's the dealer's room. Don't blow all your money in the dealer's room." (*Laughs.*) And I remember what I bought at that first convention, I bought a Wonder Bar from Steve Dusheck.

JIS: *Sure, '76, that's the year.*

LB: And two Jet Sets, from Abbott's. So now I had Jet Sets.

JIS: *Backdrop frames.*

LB: My Mom made me curtains, so now I had a backdrop for my act. And then later that summer we went to Abbott's, so actually I went to two magic conventions that summer. And Mac King—we kind of hung out at Abbott's.

JIS: *How did you and Mac first meet?*

LB: I think I met Mac when we were about fourteen years old, probably around 1974, at the magic club. He lived on the other side of town, so the only place I would see him was at the magic club, once a month. And then when I got my driver's license when I was sixteen, we started getting together more. I'd go over to his house and we'd have magic night, do close-up magic and just hang out and talk magic. Mac was into close-up magic, and I learned a lot of close-up magic from him. He had a lot of close-up magic books.

JIS: *So during the high school period you were doing close-up magic, perhaps socially at least?*

LB: Yeah. In fact, we used to go out and do close-up magic at restaurants.

JIS: *Professionally?*

LB: Well, no, we'd just go out and do it. We weren't even hired, we would just go someplace, and go around doing magic at the tables. (*Laughs.*) Just for fun.

JIS: (*Laughs.*) *So Mac and you hung out at the '76 Abbott's convention.*

LB: Right. So in '76, when I was up at Abbott's, the thing I was looking for was card manipulation information. I think I found a little pamphlet or something by Tenkai. It didn't really have too much on Split Fans, but I got to see a lot of it at these conventions. It's the first time I saw Neil Foster, and Dale Salwak.

JIS: *So you got an idea what it was supposed to look like.*

LB: Yeah. That was the main thing in going to conventions, actually getting to see guys doing this kind of stuff. So I went home and started working on the card manipulations, and I was working on the doves. And then the next year, '77, I entered the contest at Abbott's, and Mac King was in the contest that year, too. That year the first, second and third prizes were me, Jeff Hobson, and Mac King.

JIS: *Wow. Portents of future success. And so at that point that was a manip act you did at the contest, a silent act? Doves, cards...*

LB: Yes. Same like I'm doing now, only in very primitive form. It was doves, cards, candles, and Zombie ball.

JIS: *You had all those elements by the time you were seventeen?*

LB: Yeah.

JIS: *Isn't that something? And the music?*

LB: Well, at Abbott's it was live music, there was an organ player.

JIS: *Okay. You gave her some charts, or she just played something?*

LB: She asked me what I wanted, and I said, "Oh, I don't know. Just make something up." And she said, "Something fast tempo?" And I didn't know what to say, so I said, "Play something like you play for Neil Foster." (*Laughter.*) That's all I could think to tell her. "Just play like you play for Neil Foster."

JIS: *So you had worked up the whole act in silence on your own, without music.*

LB: Yeah. And Harry actually helped me a great deal with that. He would come over to the house, where the basement was my domain. I had my little stage set up there, and little floodlights and things. So Harry would watch my act, and he would offer critiques.

I was doing the candles and the birds, the silks, the torn and restored newspaper with the bird production, and the tails vanish, the card manipulation, and then closing with the Zombie ball.

JIS: *Now, this is during your high school years. High school was Butler High School, right?*

LB: Yeah.

JIS: *The "Butler Bears."*

LB: (*Does double/take.*) How'd you know that?

JIS: *Oh, I did some research.*

LB: Yeah? (*Laughter.*) Right, the Butler Bears.

JIS: *I'm interested in the evolution of the act, and some of the various elements. Going back to the music, when did that happen? It seems to me like it must have been an important moment.*

LB: It was probably about '77 or '78, somewhere in there. I was like seventeen or eighteen years old.

And Doug Henning was very popular at that time, and everybody was sort of going in that direction, chasing after Doug. Whereas Harry was a very traditional magician—a real gentleman on stage. And I had a tails, and I thought, "Well, I'll go the opposite direction that Doug Henning is going, because if everyone else is going over there, I'll go over in this corner, and I'll do a classic magic act. And I'll be different, because everybody else is doing the psychedelic thing." So I went to Radio Shack, and they had a bin of cassette tapes, like for a dollar a piece, the ones that no one would buy. And there was a tape that said "Classical Music" on it. So I went, "Aha! Here we go." I picked up the tape, I bought it, I paid a dollar for it, and I went home and I started practicing my act to it. And then I would use that tape whenever I did my act. And I didn't know what it was called. And then finally after a couple of years, the tape broke, and I went back to Radio Shack, but they didn't have that one anymore.

JIS: (*Laughs.*)

LB: So I had to go search it out, and it turned out it was Vivaldi, *The Four Seasons*. That was what I had been working to, not even knowing the name of it. And so I finally tracked it down and found another recording of Vivaldi.

JIS: *And so when did you become aware that this was actually a famous piece of music?*

LB: Uh... just now! (*Laughter.*)

JIS: *That's really a wonderful story.*

LB: It was all an accident. (*Laughter.*) So anyway, during high school, and even in college, Mac King and I did a lot of shows together; we were sort of a team. And also at that time, for a couple



of summers, I was in a theater company in Louisville called the Young Actors Company. It was a program sponsored by the local county government. We went around all summer long doing these little shows for whoever requested it; nursing homes, or parks, or wherever. I did that for a couple of years. And then the summer of '79, I didn't have a job, and Mac was cooking in a restaurant. And he got a call from a guy down in Cumberland Falls, Kentucky, who owned this theme park called Tombstone Junction, a little Western theme park. And the guy had had a magician, but the magician didn't work out or something, so this guy was looking for another magician, and he somehow got a hold of Mac, by some bizarre mistake. Mac said, "Yeah, I'll come down and audition. Can I bring my friend Lance?" And the guy says, "You can bring whatever you want, just be here tomorrow." (Laughter.) So we jumped in the car and we drove down, and we did an audition. And then afterwards he said, "Yup, we want to hire you guys, and we'll pay you \$300 a week, and we'll give you this trailer to live in."

JIS: *Wow! Professional showbiz!*

LB: And he says, "If you're back here Sunday by nine o'clock, there'll be a hundred dollar bill waiting for each of you." So we went back and grabbed our clothes and all our birds and stuff, and we were back. And we worked all summer doing three shows a day.

JIS: *Good way to get good.*

LB: Yeah. That was really the first real gig we had. After the summer, Mac went back to college in Minneapolis, and I was going to the University of Louisville, where I was a theater major. And then the next summer we went back to Tombstone Junction and did another season. And then the following summer we went and did another one, and that was '81. The summer of '80 I took a couple of days off from Tombstone to go back to Evansville, Indiana, where they were holding the IBM convention again, and I entered the Gold Medal competition. And I won the Gold Medal, and then I went back to Tombstone.

JIS: *And was that the first of the Gold Medal contests?*

LB: Yeah, that was the first time.

JIS: *They had just created the prize that year.*

LB: They had just created the prize. And Harry Collins was in the audience, and it was a great moment. His wife told me, "That's the first time I have ever seen Harry speechless." He was very proud; overcome with emotion. That was a great night.

And then the IBM asked me to come back and perform at the convention in '81, which was in Pittsburgh. So the next summer, we were doing Tombstone, and we went up to Pittsburgh and I performed on the show. Then we went back to Tombstone, and Bill Larsen called me a couple of weeks later. He had been in Pittsburgh, and he said, "We want you to come out and do the *It's Magic* show."

JIS: *Was it '81, then, that you did Tannen's Jubilee?*

LB: Yeah. That was like two weeks before I went to do *It's Magic*.

JIS: *Okay, so it's after the IBM, and your first time East.*

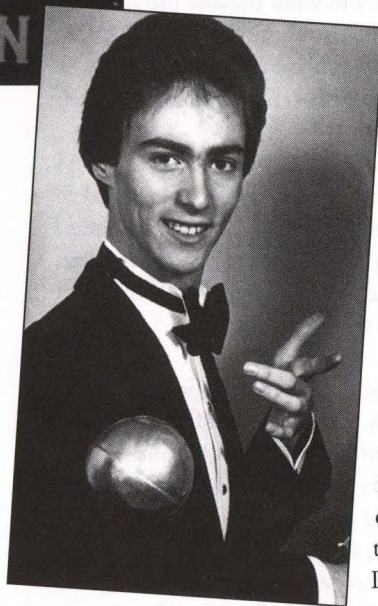
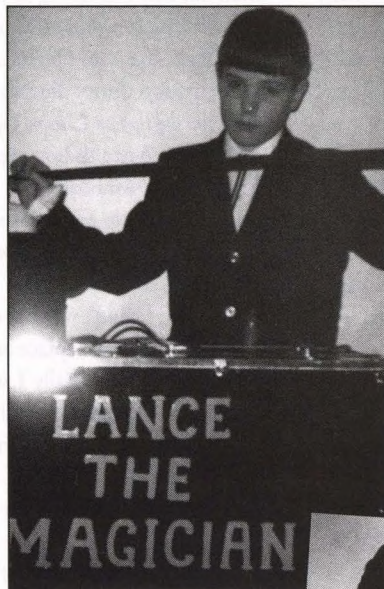
LB: Those magic conventions were the first times that I'd performed in real theaters or nightclubs of that size. I'd entered the contest in '79 at the St. Louis Midwest Magic Jubilee and gotten a good reaction on that show, but then in '81, working Tannen's and the IBM convention, those type of things, was a big difference from what I'd been used to working. Like at Tombstone Junction, people are on vacations, they're sitting there, they're watching the show, and there's the kids, and babies are crying, and you know, you produce a dove and they go, "Oh, that's nice." And then they go, "Hey, I heard there's a gunfight gonna be out here in a couple of minutes." Nobody ever got a standing ovation at a theme park. (Laughter.) So it was all kinda new to me, the big conventions, and then the *It's Magic* show. And then the *Tonight Show*, which was, of course, the "big break."

JIS: *And this story has been told before, but perhaps for those who came in late, you can retell your experience at the Tonight Show, where Johnny gave you the extra time.*

LB: Well, the talent coordinator was Jim McCauley, and he came down to the *It's Magic* show on the preview night and he saw the act, and after the show he came back and he said, oh, you know, "Nice act, Lance. So, you'll be there tomorrow at noon for the rehearsal?"

And I said, "Yes, sir." He says, "How long is your act?" I said, "Twelve minutes." He said, "Well, we probably can only give you about seven or eight minutes." And I said, "Well, okay, I just won't do the Zombie ball, I'll just do the birds and the cards and the candles." And he said, "Well, bring the whole act with you and do it in rehearsal, and then I'm going to try and get Johnny there to see you." So I show up the next day and I do a full rehearsal with all the birds and everything, and afterwards I'm talking to the stage manager and I see this hand coming towards me. So I reach out and I shake

the hand, and I look up, and there's Johnny Carson on the end of the hand. And I can't remember exactly what he said, I was sort of awestruck at that point. But he was very nice, and complimented me on the act. And I said, "Do you think we could have our picture taken?" I did have the presence of mind to say that. (Laughter.) And then he said, "Sure. After the show, we'll have it done." And then Jim McCauley came over a couple of minutes later and said, "Johnny loves the act, and Johnny says, 'Let the kid do the whole twelve minutes.'" So they kind of rearranged the show, and I was the first guest on, so they let me do the whole twelve minutes. And at the end of my act, the audience is





Harry Collins

applauding, and I bow, and then the director cuts back to Carson. And I didn't realize this until years later, looking at the tape, but Carson is supposed to look back at the camera and say, "We'll be right back after this," but he didn't do that. He kept looking at me, and he kept applauding. Now the director has to cut back to me, to take another bow. And then we cut back to Johnny, and then he says, "Beautiful act," and gives me the "okay" sign. And

then the next guest up was Dick Cavett. So now the two of them, for another ten minutes, are on the panel discussing my act, and how both of them had started out as magicians. So it was like twenty, thirty minutes of Lance and magic. (Laughs) So it was a great start. (Laughs) Great calling card.

JIS: Yeah, not bad!

LB: So I worked the Magic Castle after the *It's Magic* show, and I went up on a Canadian tour with Chuck Jones, and then I worked the Body Shop in L.A. for four months.

JIS: *The strip club in Hollywood. The owner, Jamal, was a big magic fan. He often attended the Castle, and booked a lot of magic acts in the club.*

LB: And he had some great acts working there. I mean, he had the Pendragons, Jonathan Neal Brown, Shimada, Norm Nielsen... And it was a great place to work because the audience wasn't there to see magic. So when you put something new in, you know, if it wasn't good, they let you know. (Laughter.)

JIS: *Right. So it's now '82 that you're at the Body Shop. Was the act changing again at that time?*

LB: Yeah. At that point I didn't want to do the Zombie, because I had it in the back of my mind during all of this that I wanted to compete in FISM. I knew I couldn't go to FISM with the standard Zombie ball, and so Johnny Thompson suggested a parakeet in a round cage. And a man named Carl Heck built that first cage for me. I haven't seen him in ten years.

JIS: *When did you first meet Johnny?*

LB: I had met John in '79 at the Joe Stevens magic conclave in Wichita. Joe had seen me in St. Louis at the Midwest Magic Jubilee, and had hired me to perform the act in Wichita. That's where I met and became friends with John and Pam, and we talked about doves, and he showed me some stuff there in Wichita. But then when I moved to L.A., I was able to spend more time with John, and he helped me a great deal with the doves, and just... you know, he's a genius with magic, technically and performing, so he gave me a lot of insight into doing a manipulation act. And also, in moving to L.A., that's when I met Max Maven. In fact, we were living in the same apartment building. So all these influences were coming into my life, like John and Max and the Castle... all these people that I was meeting. There were some great magicians in Louisville, but it wasn't like in L.A. where you have the Castle, and you have all this concentration of magical thought going on. So I became very good friends with Max, and he was influential in talking me into going to FISM at that time and not putting it off. And in L.A. I was working at the Body Shop, and that's when I got the gig at the Tropicana, through the *Tonight Show* tape. So I

closed at the Body Shop and I opened at the Trop on May 20th, 1982, and I had an eight-week contract. So I did my eight weeks, and they told me they were going to renew me for another eight weeks, and I said, "Great, but I have to have a week off," because I wanted to go to Lausanne. And I'd made some money at the Tropicana so I had the money to buy a plane ticket to go to Lausanne and compete there at FISM. So I went to FISM and did the competition, flew right back and went right back to work at the Tropicana. And so anyway, I wound up in Vegas, and I spent nine years at the Trop, and that's where I broke in most of the material that I'm doing in my show now.

JIS: *The first of which was the illusion you did on the Carson show.*

LB: Yeah, the sword fight. And then the next one was the audience participation thing; dress the guy up with the cape and the hat.

JIS: *You did that on Carson, too.*

LB: Yeah. After that came, like, the Backstage illusion, and then the Gramophone, and the Artist's Dream... and then pretty soon I said, "Hey, I got enough material to do a show!" (Laughs.)

JIS: *And you mounted that show more or less under your own steam.*

LB: Yeah. I didn't have a big pre-production budget. (Laughter.) Originally, I didn't want to do the show in Vegas. I wanted to take it up to Tahoe or someplace and break it in, but I couldn't get arrested up in Tahoe. So finally I was leaving work one day and I looked down at the Hacienda, and I said, "You know, that little Hacienda, they have a nice little showroom, and they're building a new tower down there, it's all by itself. You know, I bet if I could sell my show there, they wouldn't fire me right away... if it's really bad."

JIS: (Laughs.)

LB: Because it was kind of a small hotel. It's not like it has to be a smash hit from day one. So anyway, I went and pitched the show, and they bought it. I offered the show at a very reasonable price. (Laughs.) I didn't want to get rich, I just wanted to be able to break my show in, to get to do it.

JIS: *You were kind of taking a big... I mean, not kind of, you were certainly taking a big risk. You had a comfy revue spot.*

LB: Yeah. Nine years... I mean, I could have stayed the rest of my life in the *Folies Bergere*. I just felt like I'd outgrown doing twelve minutes.

JIS: *The levitation was the big new trick when you went into the Hacienda.*

LB: Yeah. Well, originally it evolved from seeing Richiardi. He was really the only magician I ever saw do the levitation that somehow it really looked like the girl was floating.

JIS: *Right. And that he had something to do with it!*

LB: Yeah. But I always had an idea in my mind that this whole idea of doing the levitation should somehow be a sexy number, a romantic number. When I came to Las Vegas and was in the *Folies Bergere* I would watch the adagio teams, how they do the lifts, they pick the girl up and do all that sort of thing, so I thought that that's what the levitation should be,



Harry Collins always said, "Work on your magic and have fun, but have something to fall back on." Because there's always gonna be crazy guys like us who just have to do magic.

that sort of adagio number. Anyway, I was talking to Mac and I said, "I want to do a levitation in the show, but I feel that this number should be really romantic and sexy." And so Mac said, "Well, why don't you float in the air while you're..." Well, I can't actually repeat the words he used.

JIS: *(Laughs.)*

LB: Anyway, that was his idea.

JIS: *While embracing, let's say.*

LB: While embracing. And then the light bulb sort of clicked in my head, and that's what it turned out to be. And I'd always wanted to see the Kellar levitation... actually the Maskelyne levitation. I'd always wanted to see it because I'd always seen these pictures... like these pictures of Blackstone Sr. doing it, and I'd read over the diagrams in the old books, and it was a piece of magic technology that had sort of been lost over the last thirty or forty years or more, however long it's been since someone had done it.

JIS: *That's right, we certainly had never seen it in our lifetime.*

LB: So that whole idea—which actually comes from DeKolta—that whole technology had sort of been lost. Also, by adding the part with having two people floating in the air, I felt I had something unique. Anyway, we put it together and put it in, and it turned out to be successful. I had planned that to be the trick that people would talk about after the show. You know, it's sort of naughty, and it's something different, and I hoped that it was something that people would remember and would talk about, and it turned out to be the case.

JIS: *It turned out that not only the public would remember and talk about it, but a lot of magicians would as well. You seem to have started a trend.*

LB: Well, I certainly didn't invent that method, but I'm very happy that I was the one that kind of reminded everyone that it existed.

JIS: *And what year was this, now?*

LB: This was '91.

JIS: *And now, heading into a full evening show, you'd been working on that twelve minutes for about fourteen or fifteen years.*

LB: And I knew how to do twelve minutes. That was easy. Doing ninety minutes, that was a whole other matter. So when we opened the show, it was pretty slim pickings at first. We did a lot of shows with less than a hundred people in the audience.

JIS: *And how big is that room?*

LB: It's 450 seats. And they didn't have a lot of advertising budget either, so it was a lot of word-of-mouth. And it took about a year before we actually had our first sold-out house. But eventually, by summer of '92, we were sold out every show, all summer long, because the show had caught on. And so we've been here five years,

and even now, this is like the slow time of the year right now...

JIS: *It was a full house out there tonight.*

LB: ...but since the television special aired, we've been sold out every night. It's amazing, the power of television. *(Laughs.)* You know, all of a sudden, whammo! Everybody wants to see the show. I remember Mac King and I one time, when we were at Tombstone, we had these little 8x10 pictures of ourselves, and we would sell them for like a dollar apiece, and autograph them, and that was how we got grocery money. We used that to buy food, so we could kind of save our salary to buy magic books. So we were signing autographs, and this lady came up to us and said, "Oh, you boys are great." And I said, "Thank you very much, ma'am." She

says, "No, no, I mean you guys really did a great show!" I said, "Well, thank you very much." She said, "When are you guys gonna turn professional?" And I looked at Mac and said, "I thought you told me we were getting paid for this gig."

JIS: *(Laughs.)*

LB: And she said, "No, no. When are you gonna be on television?" And that's when I realized that the public perceives amateur and professional as being: Amateur magicians perform in person, and professional magicians perform on television. And it's a bizarre concept to me, but... *(Laughs.)*

JIS: *But that perception is undeniable.*

LB: That's a perception that a lot of people have.

JIS: *And particularly bizarre because ultimately, magic just doesn't really work very well on TV.*

LB: That's right, it's a live art form. But... *(Laughter.)*

JIS: *Give the lady what she wants.*

LB: *(Laughs.)* Give the lady what she wants. So I'm a professional magician now! *(Laughter.)*

JIS: *So now you're a professional. Congratulations!*

LB: Thank you!

JIS: *You're welcome. Let me ask you this. Now, I know this is a trite thing to say, but maybe there's a certain amount of truth to it, anyway. You're about to go into 1200 seats they're building for you, the Lance Burton Theater. You weren't thinking about that, I bet, back when you were working in Tombstone Junction.*

LB: Peter Reveen came up with that. He has more imagination than I do... as far as career goals. *(Laughter.)* As a businessman, the smartest thing I ever did was hire Peter Reveen. I mean, I was here at the Hacienda, and nothing was really happening career-wise. And Peter came on board, and within eighteen months he had a TV special and a contract at a new hotel with a new theater. So yeah, we're moving into the Monte Carlo, and we've got a lot of new things going into the new theater.

JIS: *Some of which we saw in the special. The cars, right?*





My Rich Friend

by Mac King

A few years ago I was working with a comedian who had just started doing comedy full time. At the time, I had been performing professionally for about ten years and she was full of questions for me. Because I am lucky enough to have many friends who have, throughout the years, happily answered my show business questions, I was happy to oblige her when she asked me if she could ask me a couple of questions. Her first inquiry was, "How much money do you make a week?"

I hate that question. Especially from a stranger. I tried to evade it. "It varies," I responded. "Well, what's the range?" she persisted. "Look," I said, "I'd be happy to answer just about any question you have, but the subject of my salary is a personal one, and I just make it a point not to talk about it. Sorry."

She kept it up. "I'm just trying to figure out how much money I can make in this business."

I guess there's nothing wrong with that attitude, but it really bothers me anyway. I think that it's a really bad idea to become a performer because of the money. I know Lance Burton pretty well. I am fairly sure he didn't get into magic because he wanted to make 100 million dollars. He got into magic because he had to. He had no choice. He's a magician.

In his interview with Jamy, Lance mentions that he and I used to simply show up at a restaurant and walk around doing close-up magic. There was no money involved. We simply needed to perform. Lance was a bit sketchy about what we did. I'm sure that's because he got involved talking to Jamy about something else. It couldn't be because he was embarrassed by what we did, because if you've seen Lance's show recently you've seen him dance, and you know he's not easily embarrassed. So, because I think our little scheme was pretty funny, I'll give you a quick rundown of our formula for a typical night of performing...

Lance would pick me up in his fabulous Plymouth Duster. We would pick a restaurant. We would enter as customers. We'd have dinner. After we ate, but before we paid, I'd get up from our table and wander over to a table of strangers who seemed to be having a good time. I'd interrupt them by saying, "I'm sorry to bother you, but my friend over there," (I'd point at Lance, who'd wave back in acknowledgment) "bet me five dollars that you folks wouldn't sit through three magic tricks. Please help me win my bet. Please just watch my three tricks." I was sixteen years old. Clean cut. Of course they'd watch my tricks.

After my three tricks Lance would walk over—and this, to me, is the most hilarious part of the whole thing—he would walk over carrying a Vanishing Bird Cage. He'd vanish the cage, and then reach in his pocket and take out five bucks and hand it to me. Then he'd do some more tricks. We'd keep this up until we were tired, or until we got kicked out of the joint.

We weren't after money, we were after some time spent in front of actual people. We did this because we had to, not because of any potential profit. But, of course, as it turns out, my friend Lance Burton is a very rich man.

Not only that, he's also ended up with big piles of money.

LB: Right, the appearing car, the vanishing car, and another car surprise.

JIS: *Okay. Stay tuned.*

LB: Stay tuned. I think there's like ten new illusions in the show, and of course I'll still do the birds and the levitation, the sword fight, the floating cage.

JIS: *And that opening twelve minutes is still evolving, it seems. I noticed it even in the live show tonight. You didn't always do this talking over the birds. I think it's terrific on you.*

LB: Well, what happened was, I had that little speech that I did on the TV special, to introduce the bird act. And Peter kept telling me, "You need to say something. You need to talk during the bird act, to somehow break the ice." And he'd been telling me that for like a year. And I thought it was a good idea in principle, but I didn't know what to say, or where to put it. Then after we taped the TV show, Gary Ouellet was in, saw the live show, and he said, "You know that speech you did for the TV show? You could work that into your live show, or a version of that speech." And again I thought, "Well, that's a good idea, but where do I put it?" And then Johnny Thompson came in, and he said, "You know, when you're rolling up your sleeves, that's a good moment for you to say hello to the audience, and talk." And so then I had all the pieces of the puzzle. I knew what to say, and now I knew where to say it. So I edited the speech down, and I went out and I did it, and I noticed right away, first night, that it made a big difference in audience reaction. Because normally I'm not talking in the show, and it takes the audience a while to warm up to me. Because you're a magician and you're tricking them, and they don't like that, so they're not going to warm up and like you right away. But when I started telling the story, you know, this is the first American to bring home the gold, now all of a sudden you get some national pride in it, and "Oh, he seems like a nice guy." And I started getting bigger reactions with the bird act, and it really made a big difference. It just breaks the ice, within the first sixty seconds, just to say hello. And then, of course, I just started playing, and started adding this other stuff... "I'm trying to decide which side of the audience I like the best," and that whole thing just sort of like... it's been evolving the last couple of months. Yeah, once he starts talking he doesn't know when to shut up.

JIS: *(Laughs.)*

LB: So it's just fun. You know, I've been doing birds now for twenty-two years. And it's nice to be able to have something new to play with, to be able to discover something new about the act.

JIS: *Now, considering how influential you've been in this particular branch of magic, do you think by next year they'll all be talking over their music?*

LB: *(Laughs.)* You know what? If it hadn't have been for guys like Channing doing birds, and Jack Kodell, Cantu, Johnny Thompson, these guys, I wouldn't be doing birds. So if my name gets added to that prestigious list, that's fine with me. *(Laughs.)* I'll die happy.

JIS: *(Laughs.)* And yet, I see more of you in the way they stand and move, perhaps, than I do necessarily in the tricks themselves.

“What’s missing perhaps is the element of surprise. After two or three birds you have diminishing returns. The fifth bird will get less reaction than the third. So the birds have to come on the off-beat—the “change-up”—to maintain the element of surprise.”

LB: Frankly, what you said about seeing my stance or something on other people, I don’t see it, because I can’t see myself working except on videotape. And Max Maven says, “It’s the way you hold your shoulders,” and to me it’s just the way I’m built, the way I just am.

JIS: *Well, you might have been born that way, but a lot of other people seem to have learned it.*

LB: Well, I don’t see what the rest of you see. Somebody’ll say, “Oh, he’s doing you, he’s doing your stance.” And I’m looking, I’m going, “I don’t see it.”

JIS: *Well, I’ll never forget sitting at the back of the room of a New York Magic Symposium contest in the mid-eighties, and watching twentytwo acts in a stage contest, sitting with Avner Eisenberg. And when it was all over... I do remember it was twenty-some-odd acts, and when it was all over and the lights came up, Avner turned to me and said, “So who won? Jeff, Vito, or Lance?” (Laughter.) In other words, it was a contest between imitators. What do you think about yours?*

LB: Well, I started out wanting to be Channing Pollack.

JIS: *Well, that’s good, but you ended up being Lance Burton, and I guess the point for the next guy is that maybe it’s okay to start out thinking you want to be Lance Burton, but somewhere along your path you have to end up being somebody else. When did you finally meet Channing?*

LB: Johnny Thompson arranged a meeting about 1984. We went back to Channing’s house and sat around talking until seven in the morning. I remember I asked him about his invention of the dove toss; I told him that I felt bad about missing the dove toss sometimes. Channing told me, “I missed the toss in twenty-one consecutive shows at the London Palladium.” Then I didn’t feel so bad. (Laughter.)

JIS: *In terms of where bird magic is going today, on the technical side, I have noticed a growing trend towards dependence on repetitive, flashy productions with invisible harnesses. You can see entire acts where almost every bird is in an invisible harness. And to me it’s more of a flash effect than the more magical effect of a slow, deliberate, graceful bird production. It becomes just special effects, at a cost of a loss of mystery and beauty.*

LB: I use one invisible harness, and I think it’s a great technique, but it’s just another tool. You can steal birds from any number of places, and I’ve seen some of the new guys, like in the last five years, just doing amazing things. Of course, Shimada, when he came along, like in the late ’60s, early ’70s, I think he was the first one that I was aware of, that the American magicians saw, that was doing the invisible harnesses.

JIS: *On the cane and so on. Although actually, I understand that Ken Whitaker created the invisible harness principle, which was then further developed by Dirk Arthur. But like you, I first saw it used by Shimada*

LB: Yeah, we’d never seen that before, and he just knocked everybody’s socks off. But my personal theory is to mix it up as much as possible, in terms of the techniques of the steals and the location

of the steals, and the methods of releasing the birds. My thinking was, use as many different combinations as you can, and that way nobody’s going to zero in. If they see the same motion every time you steal a bird, eventually someone may connect that motion of the hand with the bird coming out of it. So I think it can get repetitive, whether you’re using invisible harnesses, or whether you’re using loops, or whatever.

JIS: *And different kinds of time misdirection.*

LB: Yeah.

JIS: *Because there are some productions in your act that are almost instantaneous, immediately following the steal, but then there’s one where you’re holding onto that bird for a hell of a long time.*

LB: Yeah. It’s the old one-ahead thing. And I think at one point I’m four ahead (Laughter.) ...like I’m already three or four steals ahead, so it’s just a series of revelations. You know, the candle and the bird, and then there’s the cards, and... so it’s the one-ahead principle, taken to its extreme. I know what you’re saying. You’re saying that sometimes you think the invisible harness thing...

JIS: *To me it relies more on spectacle than a sense of magic. Look, audiences are not stupid. They kind of have this idea, maybe those birds are in your suit. But I think when they watch you or Johnny Thompson they say, “Well, they can’t just be in their suit, because there just wasn’t any bird there, and now it is there, and look how super-slow it was, and he was nowhere near the suit.” And then on top of that there is going to be a specific and very wonderful moment of pure magic when, after such a relaxed pace, you finally cause the bird to magically appear.*

LB: What I try and do is think what the spectator’s thinking. So the first dove is fast with the fire, and then the gloves come off, and then the the gloves change to the bird. That’s Harry’s technique, by the way; that’s how he opened his act. So then I do a little speech, roll up the sleeves... because obviously, they’re going to think the birds are in the sleeves. You roll up the sleeves, and then the scarf... now they’re going, “Now, I’m gonna watch real close now,” and then there’s a candle, so it’s a change-up. And then they go, “Oh, a candle! There’s a new element.” So you have a surprise. They’re expecting a bird, and instead it’s a surprise. Then it vanishes, and they’re going, “Wait, wait. His sleeves are rolled up. Where’d that candle go?” And then it’s back and then it multiplies, so that by the time the next dove arrives, they’ve forgotten about the birds. They’re suddenly reminded, “Oh, yeah, there’s going to be birds.” So now when I pick up the newspaper, now they’re sure they’re ready for me. “I’m gonna watch that newspaper; I’ll catch him this time.” So that when I tear the paper and make the little paper bird—that’s an idea Jeff McBride gave me—it’s like I’m teasing them. “Yup, you know there’s gonna be a bird coming.” But then I hold the hand high, showing a bare forearm, so there can’t be a bird, and suddenly—gotcha!—there’s the bird, anyway.

JIS: *As promised, as it were, but still not quite expected.*

"If it hadn't have been for guys like Channing doing birds, and Jack Kodell, Cantu, Johnny Thompson, these guys, I wouldn't be doing birds. So if my name gets added to that prestigious list, that's fine with me. I'll die happy."

LB: I think the fault is not in the invisible harness, the fault is in the construction of the act, of the tricks. If they're expecting a bird every time, they'll pick up the pattern of the method and the performer's actions. What's missing perhaps is the element of surprise. After two or three birds you have diminishing returns. The fifth bird will get less reaction than the third. So the birds have to come on the off-beat—the "change-up"—to maintain the element of surprise.

JIS: *I think that a manipulative act is all too often just a series of effects, and your point about surprise is well taken. Just because a bird appears and the method isn't apparent doesn't mean it's truly a surprise, if we already know the theme; yet you use that knowledge to create anticipation and genuine surprise. This subject of construction is too rarely discussed in manipulative magic, if not all magic; construction, and also plot. An act can have plot without telling a literal story; an act should have plot and character. Again, I look at the Great Tomsoni & Company, or for that matter, Tommy Wonder's stage act.*

LB: Yes, exactly. And a master of that was Cardini. The whole act was about the change-up.

JIS: *When did you first see it?*

LB: I first saw the tape in '82 at the Museum of Broadcasting in New York City. I spent two hours watching the tape, and I felt like a child again. He was so engaging... I had to rewind the tape six, eight times to catch the steals. The act was so layered... layer upon layer. Nobody can wake up in the morning and do an act like that. Only years of doing it over and over, of getting bored—"How can I change it around?" It's like my tossing the cigarette and catching it. I just kind of did it one night, and it worked so I kept it in. Then I tried it with the match, and burned myself—and I kept that in. It's just from boredom! You're always trying to make it more interesting, trying to figure out what else you can add, how can you improve it.

JIS: *Switching gears now, have you any advice to offer to young magicians starting out?*

LB: Harry Collins always said, "Work on your magic and have fun, but have something to fall back on." Because there's always gonna be crazy guys like us who just have to do magic.

JIS: *No matter what.*

LB: No matter what. Guys like us. *(Laughter.)* Also, read as much as you can, and perform as much as you can. That's it. Find your Tombstone Junction; three shows a day. The only way to do it—and every act I know that's good—did it through repetition. Also, find somebody experienced in the business to look at your act and help guide you. A pro, somebody well informed who knows what they're doing. Because most of the good stuff isn't in the books.



JIS: *Even today, with the explosion of books and videos?*

LB: Even today. Some of the best stuff I know, Johnny Thompson told me, and it's not in print anywhere.

JIS: *What do you think about the future of various styles of magic?*

LB: It's funny, all my friends are comedy magicians. I mean, not literally all, of course, but a lot of the ones I hang out with the most, Mac

King, Johnny Thompson, Fielding West. Maybe they're the most fun to be around. Or maybe I'm a frustrated comedy magician. *(Laughter.)* Getting laughs is addictive. Getting laughs on stage is better than getting applause.

JIS: *Better than gasps, even?*

LB: Yeah.

JIS: *Well, it's an interesting point. It is something extra, in addition to the applause and the gasps. And it's a distinctly emotional response, rather than an intellectual one.*

LB: It's another response, and it may be the most pure. It's really the one that gives you the most satisfaction, because the laugh is real. They might applaud a good trick, but they might also still be thinking about how it worked. The laugh is beyond the point of their analyzing. Laughter is often the key to get the audience over the hump, to the point where they stop analyzing the tricks. And also it's the greatest moment to make a steal. I cover hooking up the thread for the floating cage with a laugh: "This is Elvis. Not the real Elvis." And I steal the parakeet on a laugh after sip-

ping the drink: "It's a little dry." I also steal a lot when the bird is in flight. Nobody's looking at you!

JIS: *You're talking about the importance of misdirection. Even though you have tremendous technical chops, you're still thinking about how to cover the moves with misdirection.*

LB: I think misdirection is one of the most under-studied parts of our art form. The books tell you to draw attention up here with your manipulat-



Lance with his proud Mom.

JIS: *Why not?*

LB: Well, I think most of the public is aware of that sort of simplistic notion of misdirection, that the magician is going to distract their attention. I remember when I was, oh, about twelve, being at a magic show, and the guy sitting next to me was talking to his friend and he said, "Now, remember, no matter what this magician says, don't pay any attention to him. Watch his hands." So I think the public is aware that the magician's going to be coming out and saying, "Hey, look over here," and then they're trying to look at... I think they're aware of that sort of simplistic approach to misdirection. I think like the Slydini approach is far more effective... There are many great performers that use misdirection, but the idea is that you're not blatantly trying to get someone to look someplace, but that the magician is aware of where the focus is, and takes advantage of that, which I think is a more subtle approach to misdirection. Like the Professor always said, quoting Erdnase, if you can't improve the method, then change the moment.

JIS: *So perhaps even dove workers should be reading Erdnase. Let's shift again here and talk about some fans of yours: Penn and Teller. I remember Penn telling me a story years ago about your asking him about a line in his show.*

LB: Oh, yeah. I think we were out at dinner one night, and I think what happened was, he was saying something and he mentioned that line from their show... he used to do a line about Doug Henning.

JIS: *Right, it was during their original opener, Casey at the Bat, and he would say something like, "You've probably heard that we do magic. And when you think of magic you probably think of a greasy guy in a tux with a lot of birds, or some aging hippie stuffing women into boxes."*

LB: Yeah, I loved that. So I asked him about that greasy guy in a tux, and I said, "Hey, are you talking about me?" And at first he said, "Well, it's sort of a conglomeration," or something like that. And so I said, "Well, it better be me, because I'm telling everybody it's me!" (*Laughter.*) I think it's flattering to be mentioned in somebody else's act, even if they make a joke. I went to the state fair here in Las Vegas a few months ago, and there was a magician performing. And he was doing the Linking Rings or something, and he does a fancy move and he says, "Lance Burton, eat your heart out." And I thought he knew that I was in the audience, and that's why he was saying that. So I went up to him afterwards and he went, "Oh, my God! I didn't know you were out there!" And I said, "I thought you did that because I was out there," and he said, "No, I always say that." So I was really flattered. There's only one thing worse than having people talk about you—having them not talk about you. (*Laughter.*) Oscar Wilde, from *Portrait of Dorian Gray*.

JIS: *I understand Penn and Teller gave you a quote for the program for the new show.*

LB: Yeah, they're they're using that quote in the new print ad.

JIS: *"In a word, the best magician in the world." Penn and Teller.*

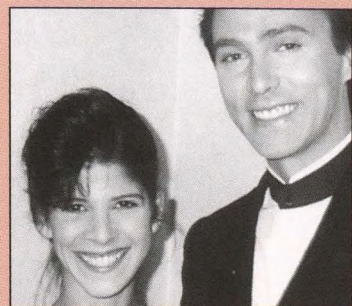
LB: Right.

JIS: *But what about the fact that in a piece in Playboy magazine last year, Penn called you a "hillbilly?"*

LB: It's all true. I cannot lie.

THE BALLAD OF ETA-LYN

by Jennifer Sils



She joined the circus two days after her eighteenth birthday. She rode an elephant, was a dancer and line captain, and did an aerial routine. And then a few years ago, she really hit the big time: she became the personal assistant to Lance Burton. She's Eta-Lyn Lampert, and she is talented.

The sheer pace of her work is perhaps her most death-defying feat. After working during the day for Peter Reveen, she dashes to the Monte Carlo, goes over Lance's schedule with him, puts out a few fires, attends to a thousand details, and even manages to have a small part in the show. After the performance she makes a quick change and entertains guests in the green room until Lance can make an appearance. "Is there anything you need? Can I get you anything? Don't hesitate to ask," she offers while juggling a cellular phone and a beeper. She works like this into the wee hours of the morning, gets a few hours sleep, before getting up and doing it all over again the next day.

She seems to intuitively know what do in most situations. She'll just unobtrusively glide past Lance and utter the name of the person standing in line to shake his hand. They met once—two years ago for about ten minutes—but Lance doesn't want to hurt any one's feelings by not remembering a name. Not that many of us would remember in those circumstances. Except, of course, for Eta-Lyn.

The unenviable task of having to tell people that there were no more seats available for the taping of Lance's special last year fell to Eta-Lyn. If you had to hear that bit of bad news there is simply no other person in the world you would want to hear it from. She's bright, charming, good humored, organized, a born problem-solver, and the soul of patience. If Eta-Lyn has a fault, it's that she's too self critical, never willing to accept applause.

She made a party for sixty guests the night that Lance's special aired, arranging for his three favorite foods: sushi, Kentucky Fried Chicken and pizza. Eta-Lyn raced all over town to arrange the particulars; at this stage in Lance's fortunes she could have easily employed the best caterer in town. But you've got to love a woman who tries to save her boss a few bucks. And speaking of love, for any of you that might want to speculate on the nature of Eta-Lyn's relationship to Lance, forget it: it's purely professional. Sorry, guys, Eta doesn't date magicians.

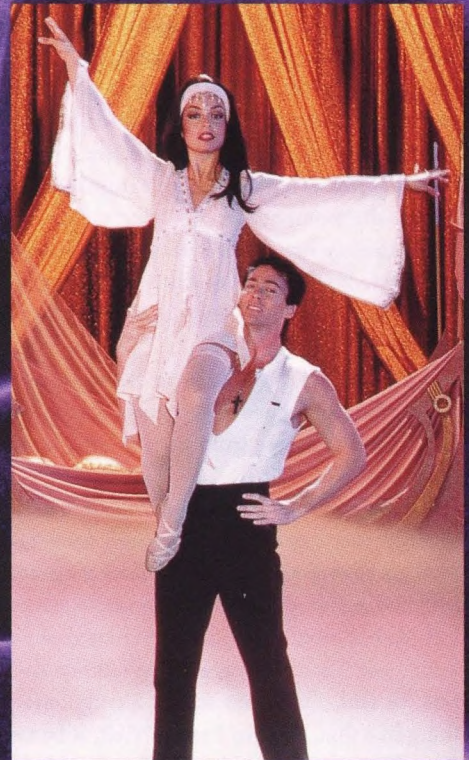
But there is clearly a mutual admiration. Lance gratefully says: "Eta-Lyn basically runs my life. She makes sure I show up where and when I'm supposed to." And her devotion to Lance, and to the smooth running of the show, is apparent. "I'm just here to make Lance's life easier."

So what's it like working for a magician who's managed in the past year to tape two television specials while simultaneously opening a new show in a new theater? Let's just say that Eta-Lyn's circus experience has come in handy.

Lance Burton:



"Burton's Babes" show off their international charms as Lance makes a pre-boarding announcement.



The levitation has been toned down a bit, and now Lance's mom likes it.



A moment from now, he'll be whistling in the audience.

It's been a long journey, but now Lance Burton has found a home at the brand new Monte Carlo casino in Las Vegas. That's his picture on the huge marquee out in front, and his name on the elegant theater inside that was built to his specifications.

In the early days of Las Vegas the showrooms had tables and booths, as most shows included a meal. That's changed; there are very few dinner shows left in town, and the Lance Burton Theater has taken that fact to its logical conclusion: The tables are gone. It's a real theater, with 1200 plush seats that all face the stage. Twice a night, Tuesday through Saturday, audiences enter that theater to be amazed by its 90-minute enchantment.

Master Magician



The expanded "midnight ball" sequence that closes the show. What's a finale without ducks?

The show retains the basic structure of the Hacienda show, but the production values have been upgraded with new sets and costumes. Magically, it's a mix of old and new: You'll find many of your favorite routines from Lance's repertoire, as well as some of the pieces from the television special he did last year for NBC, plus a number of brand new effects.

At this time the GENII won't give a complete rundown of the show; it wouldn't be fair to reveal the surprises, and besides, if Lance holds true to form he'll be constantly changing and improving the show but here are a few glimpses of the new production that's going to be a fixture on the Las Vegas Strip for many years to come.

A hint as to the masked jester's identity: This is the only time she isn't carrying a cellular phone.



After all this time you'd think he'd have figured out that the candelabra does not make a good defensive weapon.