

THE CENTURY

Those who Most Affected the Art in America

Assembling a list of people is an audacious endeavor. Because one significant name always entails another, the question of “Where do you start?” soon becomes one of “At what point do you stop?” Putting together “The Century” list was a bracing and enlightening experience, somewhat akin to planning and executing an ultimate New Year’s Eve dinner party. The challenge was winnowing the guest list from two-or-three-hundred potential invitees to the ones who made the final cut.

To assist in creating the list we assembled a panel of magic historians, established writers, and a few of *MAGIC*’s contributing editors. Among those who participated were Jim Alfredson, Stephen Minch, Jan Janson, Mike Caveney, Max Maven, Jon Racherbaumer, John Fisher, Charles Reynolds, Jim Steinmeyer, and Richard Hatch. Each was asked to suggest names — be they professionals, amateurs, writers, or innovators — that were felt to have most affected the course of magic during the 100 years soon to become the 20th century. At the time, the panelists were aware that, even though there were still two more years before the century’s end, certain contemporary names would not have had sufficient time to assert their true influence until the next century (which, incidentally, along with a new millennium, does not begin until January 1, 2001).

When the panel’s ten preliminary lists — some of them comprised with notations indicating their justifications for certain names — were received, they were combined into a master list. It was an unwieldy enumeration of 286 different names from the world of magic. This list was returned to the panel with the request to pare it to a hundred names, specifically those people who had influence on shaping the course of the art *in America*. One writer/historian stated: “It killed me to draw lines through good friends and performers

whom I have enjoyed and respected so much. A very tough assignment.”

Ranking the order of the 100 names was never considered; producing a list that ended at 100 was presumptuous enough. The plan was to announce the 100 magicians in nine installments, with ten-to-twelve names revealed each month. The first installment appeared in January 1999, along with information that when the accumulation reached a hundred, “Our readers will be invited to select the *ne plus ultra* of those who most influenced the art in this century.” A “Top Ten of The Century” ballot was included with the final installment in the September issue. Results of the reader poll were to be announced in the December issue of the magazine.

The ten names published in the inaugural segment of “The Century” (Professor Hoffmann, Siegfried & Roy, Jay Marshall, A.C. Gilbert, Slydini, Houdini, Mark Wilson, Erdnase, and P.T. Selbit) generated the first indications there would be some controversy over our choices. Each successive installment spurred its share of phone calls, letters, faxes, and electronic missives from readers. The reactions ranged from “it’s-about-time” praise to “cancel-my-subscription” resentment to the personalities being placed on (and *not* on) the list, along with a few pithy remarks about where the rest of the list could be placed.

Following the publication of the final installment of “The Century,” one subscriber wrote: “One hundred magicians for the end of the century is a nice round number, but I submit not a proper number.” Whether “proper” or not, that “nice round number” of people was arbitrarily compiled at a time when a couple or three zeros loomed on the calendar. And the upcoming milestone just seemed to give a special excuse to invite exactly 100 magicians with influence to the pages of the magazine to celebrate the prosperity that the art and craft of magic has experienced in America since the last century.

The result of our readers ballot to determine a “Top Ten” of the influential magicians of “The Century” is presented on the pages that follow. The photographs depicting the selections are from the archives of the Egyptian Hall Museum and courtesy of Dave Price. The words that accompany the ten pictures are from the pens (or keyboards) of Rick Davis, Christian Fechner, John Fisher, John McKinven, Max Maven, Gary Ouellet, Kenneth Silverman, Jim Steinmeyer, and Daniel Waldron.

— JOHN MOHRING

10

ON STAGE, HOWARD THURSTON WAS A REFINED GENTLEMAN, FULL OF GOOD HUMOR WHO SERVED UP A GIANT “WONDER SHOW OF THE UNIVERSE.” HIS GENIAL, DIGNIFIED MANNER WAS ROLE MODEL FOR DECADES OF AMERICAN MAGICIANS.

— John A. McKinven

(Magic historian who saw the Thurston show at age eight)





SIEGFRIED & ROY, HAVING WRITTEN THE MOST GLORIOUS PAGES OF THE ART OF PERFORMANCE MAGIC, WILL BE FOREVER AMONG THE GIANTS. THE NEXT CENTURY WILL ENVY US FOR HAVING BEEN WITNESS TO THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS.

— Christian Fechner

(European film producer
and creator of illusion)



MAGIC ON TELEVISION, LOGICALLY, SHOULDN'T HAVE WORKED. YET, MARK WILSON, PART SALESMAN, PART SAVIOR, CHAMPIONED MAGIC IN THIS EMERGING MEDIUM AND HELPED PULL THE ART FROM THE PAST INTO THE FUTURE.

— Rick Davis

(Producer of A&E documentary
The Story of Magic)



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NO AUTHOR HAS MANAGED TO SUPERSEDE HARLAN TARBELL'S MONUMENTAL COURSE, OR COME REMOTELY CLOSE TO TEACHING AND INFLUENCING THE NUMBER OF MAGICIANS IT HAS TAUGHT AND INFLUENCED. FOR OVER SEVEN DECADES, TARBELL'S COURSE HAS BEEN WITH US, AND IT LOOKS TO REMAIN *THE* COURSE ON MAGIC.

— Stephen Minch

(Author and publisher
of magic literature)

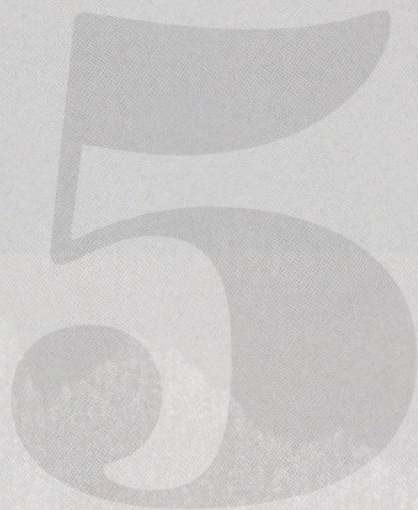




IN 1974, HE THREW AWAY THE STEREOTYPES WITH A BRIGHT, SPARKLING, HONEST APPROACH TO OUR ART. IF THE END OF THE CENTURY WAS A “GOLDEN AGE” OF STAGE MAGIC, THOSE YEARS WERE PERSONALLY GUIDED BY **DOUG HENNING**.

— Jim Steinmeyer

(Producer, creative consultant,
and illusion designer)



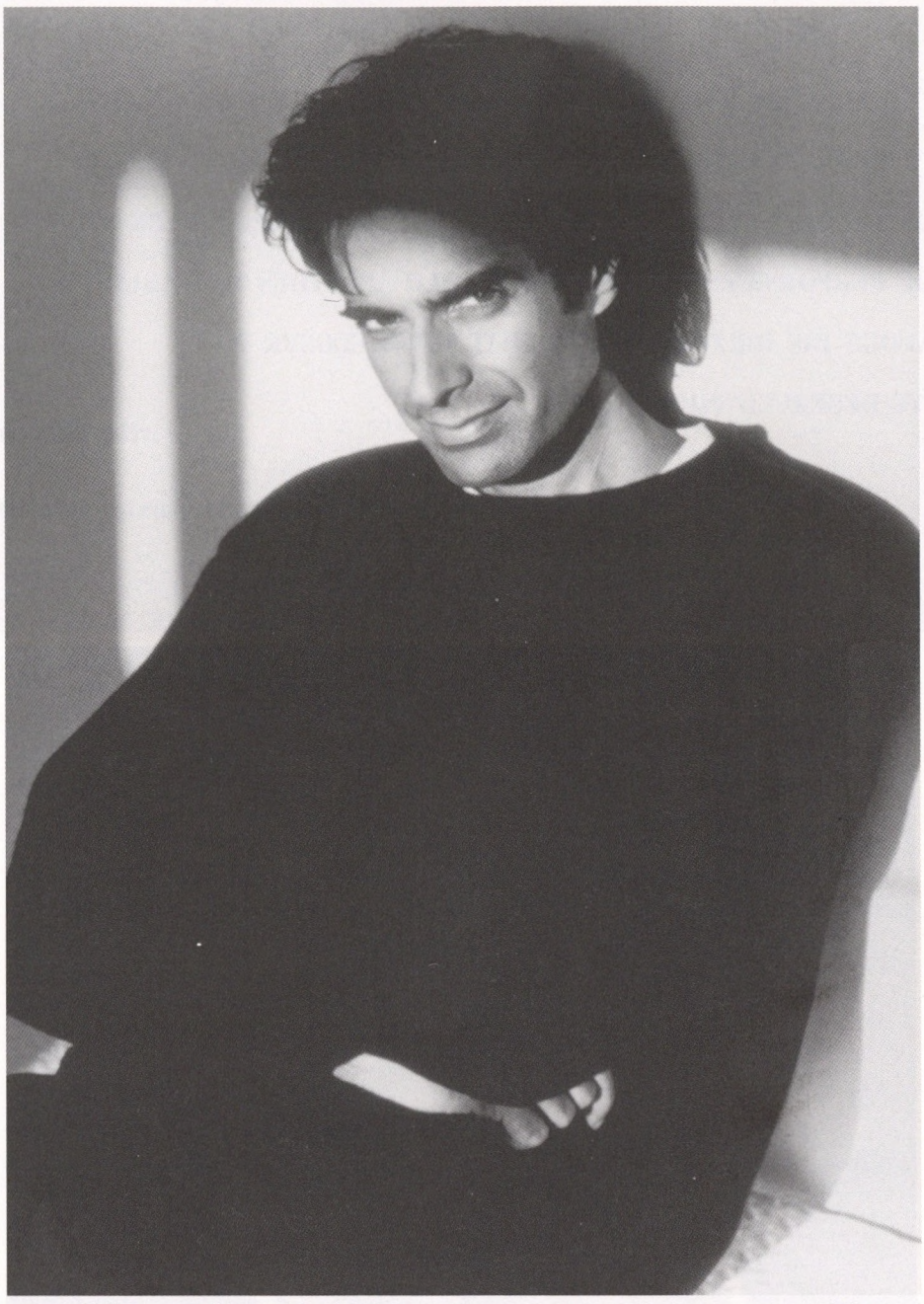
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BAFFLEMENT WAS ONLY PART OF THE MAGIC OF HARRY BLACKSTONE. HIS WINNING PERSONALITY, FLASH, DASH, AND DAZZLING CORPS OF ASSISTANTS CREATED A BREATHLESS EXCITEMENT NEVER BEFORE KNOWN IN MAGIC SHOWS.

— Daniel Waldron

(Writer and author of
Blackstone A Magician's Life)





DAVID COPPERFIELD HAS BEEN SEEN BY MORE PEOPLE AND HAS BEEN MORE FINANCIALLY SUCCESSFUL THAN ANY OTHER MAGICIAN IN HISTORY — AND HE HAS ACHIEVED SUPER STARDOM BY CONTINUALLY REINVENTING BOTH THE MAGICIAN AND THE MAGIC.

— Gary Ouellet

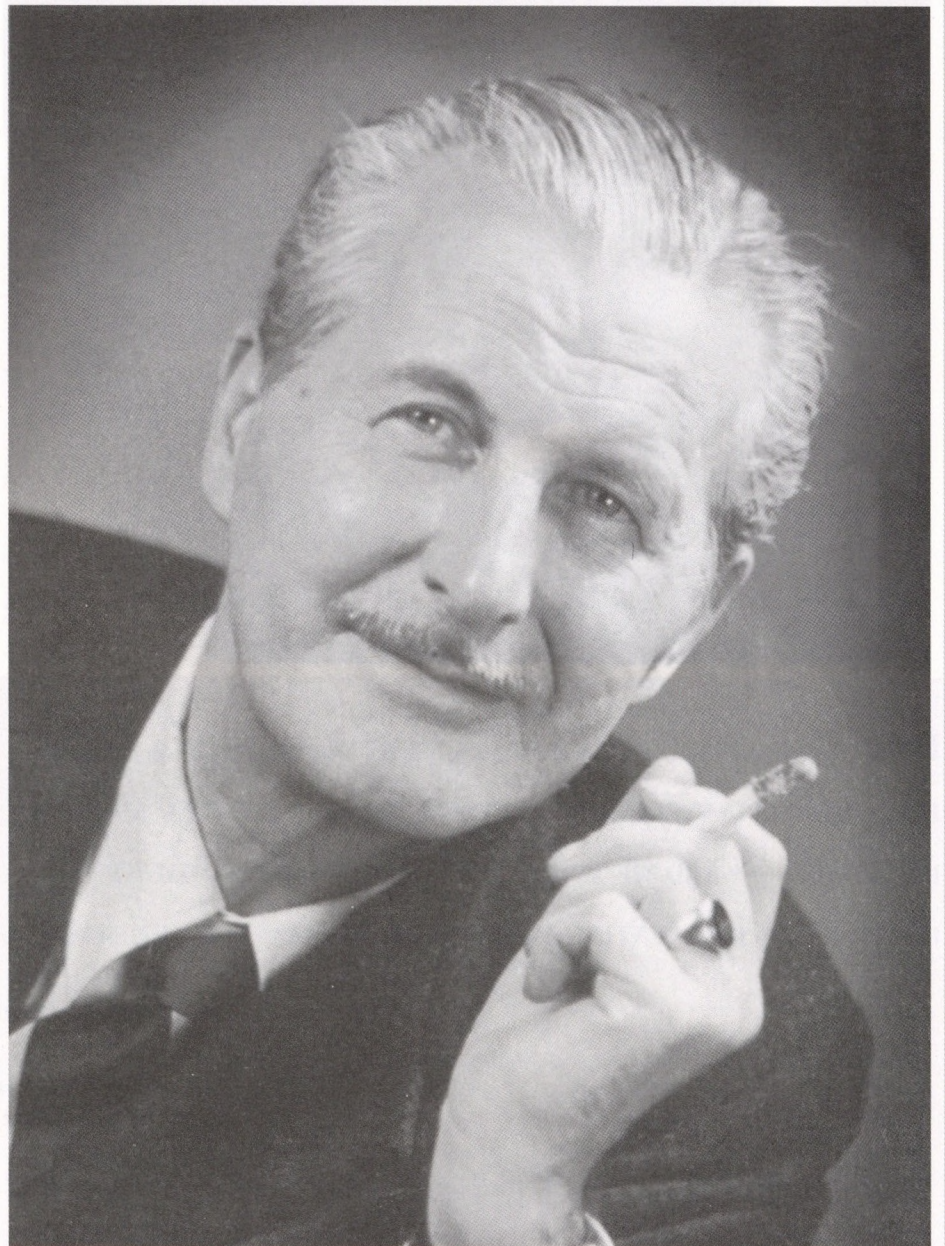
(Television producer
and magic consultant)



“OVER A SPAN OF MANY DECADES, THROUGH HIS STUBBORN INSISTENCE THAT CONJURING WAS A BONA FIDE ART WORTHY OF SERIOUS SCHOLARSHIP, **DAI VERNON INSPIRED GENERATIONS OF PERFORMERS AROUND THE WORLD AND THUS WAS ABLE TO NUDGE HIS BELOVED MAGIC THAT MUCH CLOSER TO ITS DESERVED PROFUNDITY.**

— Max Maven

(Friend and sparring partner)

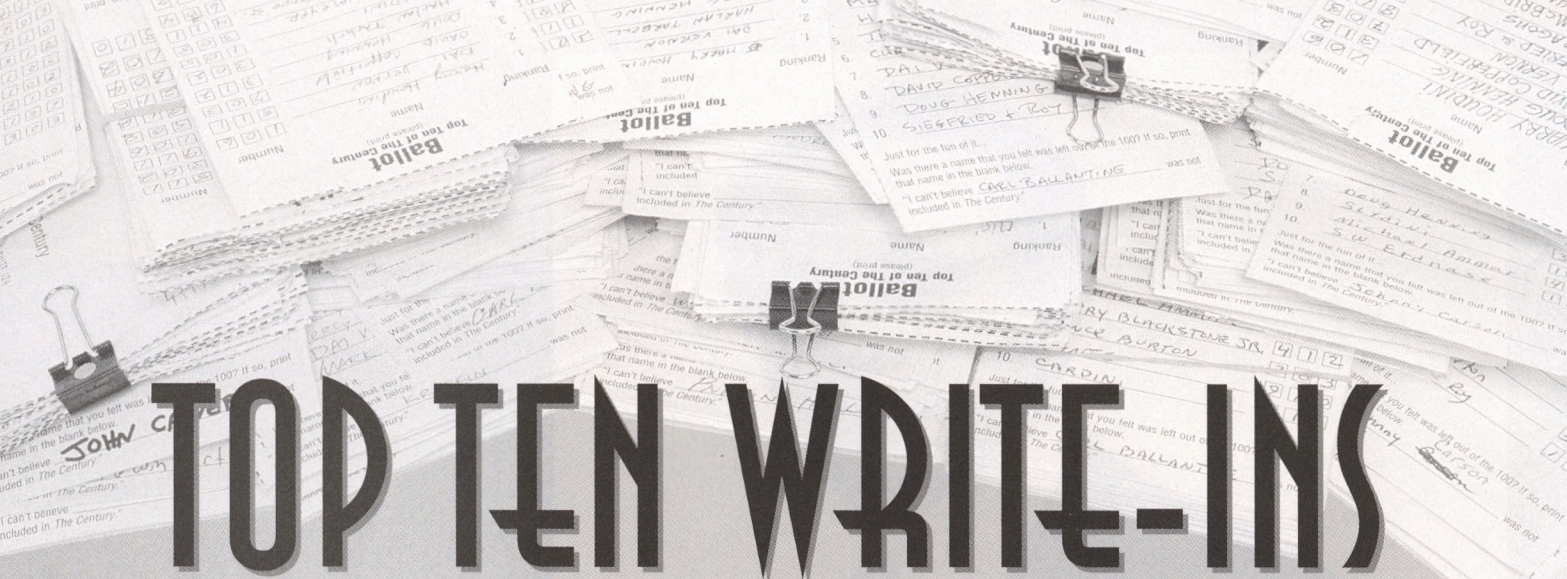




“HIS DEFIANT ORIGINALITY MADE HIM A NATIONAL ICON — LIKE BARNUM, EDISON, OR LINDBERGH. THUS HOUDINI GAVE MAGIC A PLACE IN THE MAINSTREAM OF AMERICAN HISTORY.”

— Kenneth Silverman

*(Biographer and author of
Houdini!!! The Career of Erich Weiss)*



TOP TEN WRITE-INS

Although 32% of readers returning the ballot elected to leave the space blank for an add-on name, there was a 54% majority that made suggestions, resulting in a list of almost 200 different names to supplement our list of 100. The remaining 4% suggested fictitious or obviously-phoney names. Of these, there were actually nine people who wrote “another hundred” could have been included in “The Century.”

When the down-to-the-wire counting of the ballots was completed, Carl Ballantine was the write-in winner by a nose. Less than a half-dozen votes behind Ballantine was the name of John Calvert.

1 CARL BALLANTINE

(September 27, 1917)

Getting into magic in the '30s, he experienced moderate success with an artistic manipulative act. Then one day, after a fellow vaudevillian suggested he drop the magic and do more talking, Carl Sharpe became serious about comedy. Creating the unique persona of “The Amazing Mr. Ballantine,” he parodied a bumbling, yet nonplused “World’s Greatest Magician,” becoming one of the most imitated variety acts in show business. Ballantine preferred not to be called a comedy magician, stating: “If I was a comedy magician, I’d do tricks that worked and tell jokes like every guy you see at the Magic Castle. I don’t do any magic. I throw everything away — burlesque, hokum.”

2 JOHN CALVERT

(August 5, 1911)

As the dashing detective/magician “The Falcon,” John Calvert’s cinematic adventures were seen by millions. Yet, even the giant silver screen could not capture the larger-than-life adventures of this debonair movie star, big-game hunter, stunt pilot, yachtsman, daredevil, and globe-trotting wonder worker. On stages around the world, he continues to tour his “Hollywood Magic Spectacular,” *Magicarama*, making John Calvert a true living legend of magic.

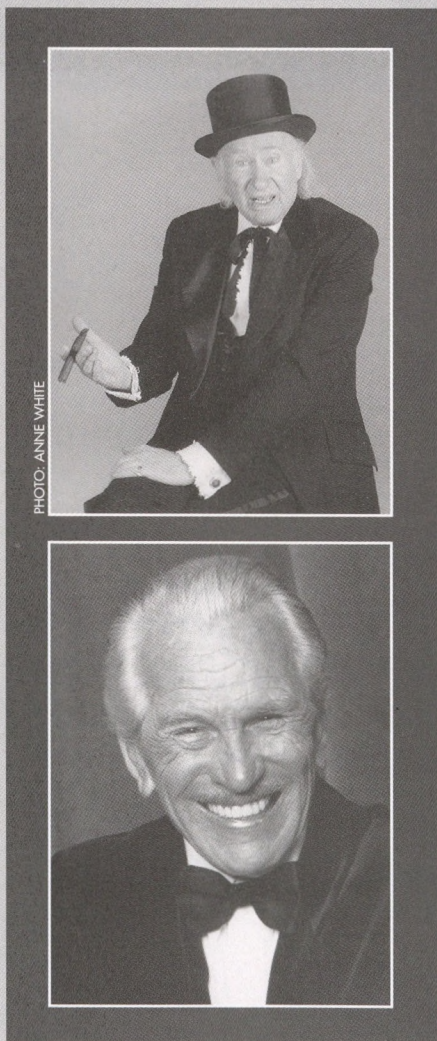
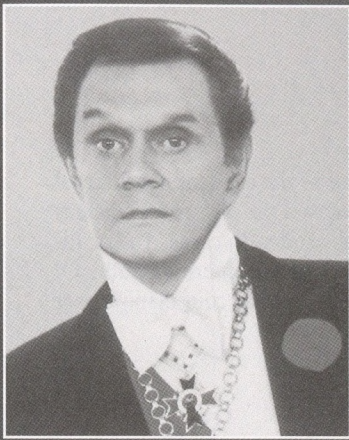


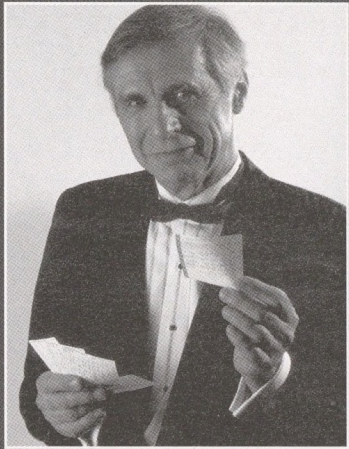
PHOTO: ANNE WHITE



3 JOHN THOMPSON

(July 27, 1934)

Even though he's enjoyed popularity and success with his comedy magic act, The Great Tomsoni & Co., Johnny is acknowledged among peers as the art's foremost "general practitioner." As a disciple of Charlie Miller and Dai Vernon, Thompson possesses a keen expertise in sleight of hand. Because of his vast experience with stage magic, Thompson is regularly called upon as a technical consultant for movies and television. He has created illusion shows internationally, and many Las Vegas shows proudly display the artistic fingerprints of John Thompson.



4 KRESKIN

(January 12, 1935)

Whereas Joseph Dunninger first astonished the world with thought reading and mentalism on the airwaves of radio, Kreskin popularized mental magic for generations via television. Scoffing so-called psychics, Kreskin took to the tube in the '70s to perform stunts and tricks that he linked to "the power of the mind." The Amazing Kreskin has elevated the image of mentalist to that of pop entertainer.



5 STAN ALLEN

(April 6, 1950)

Much of his career has involved the spread of magical knowledge. Even while enjoying a career of performing, he's always managed to crank out a magical publication of some sort, whether it be dealer newsletters or the monthly *Stan Allen's Inside Magic*. For almost ten years, he's devoted his full-time energies to publishing what has become the world's-largest independent magazine for magicians.



6 DARYL

(August 13, 1955)

His is an award-winning career of creating magic that baffles magicians. In 1981 and '82, Daryl won Close-up Magician of the Year awards from the Academy of Magical Arts. He also brought home a FISM Gold Medal in '82. In 1986 and '87, he won Parlour Magician of the Year from the Academy in 1986 and '87, then in 1988 and '92, it was Lecturer of the Year. These victories, as well as numerous other recognitions from the world of magic, have indeed earned Daryl his résumé title of "The Magician's Magician."

PHOTO: H. RICK BAWMAN

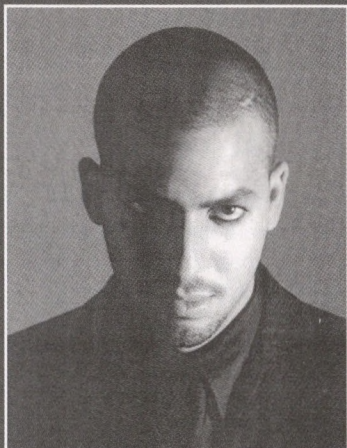


7 DAVID ROTH

(March 13, 1952)

In the '70s and '80s, New Yorkers knew of this young wizard as the resident magician of the F.A.O. Schwartz toy emporium on 5th Avenue. However, across the country, magicians were rapidly recognizing David for his outstanding sleight of hand with coins. Today, his in-demand demonstrations and lectures on coin magic are acclaimed internationally. Of David Roth's expertise, Dai Vernon wrote, "I consider him the greatest coin manipulator in the entire world."

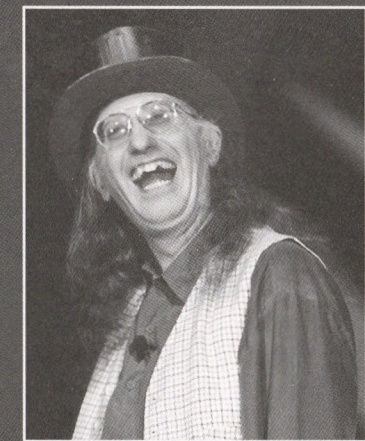
PHOTO: YARIV MICHAN



8 DAVID BLAINE

(April 4, 1973)

He's 26... and the enigma of the '90s, who walked onto the television scene from literally nowhere. Blaine produced quite a stir among other magicians, not so much with the tricks in his repertoire, but for his feats of marketing a new genre of TV magic specials. His interactive magic, with emphasis on creating overwhelming audience reactions, has caused David Blaine to be a mystical celebrity to be reckoned with.



9 JUAN TAMARIZ

(October 18, 1942)

He is a household name in his native Spain. However, in the last decade or so, the delightful influence of the magic of Tamariz has been felt in America. His flawless sleight of hand is seamlessly blended with his passion for comedy and an innate understanding of how to create enchantment. The performance of a simple card trick by Juan Tamariz is one of magical inspiration.

PHOTO COURTESY DIEGO DOMINGO



10 ROBERT NELSON

(1901-1973)

His name will always be linked to mindreading and what he called "the occult arts." As Dr. Korda RaMayne, he was a nationally known radio astrologist. As Bob Nelson, he was author of over 45 titles on mental magic, spook shows, fortune telling, crystal gazing, and allied entertainment endeavors. Through his Nelson Enterprises, he became the world's foremost purveyor of all things seemingly psychic.