



Shell Game

A Monthly Newsletter for the London Magic Community
May 2023

Volume 16, Issue 6

April's meeting

Our meeting in May was all about Cups and Balls. And lots of folks brought out their sets and routines to show off.

Andrew Olmstead lead off the night by doing a terrific routine he calls "*3 Cubes and a Cup*", using a coffee mug and counting cubes. Every time he removed a cube, there were still 3 cubes! It was a brilliant routine, including a nice "counting 3 cubes as 4" sequence from David Roth.

Byron Berry showed off his collection of Morrissey chop cups and his own handmade ones, including an aluminum can, and a Tim Horton's paper cup for use in Craig Petty's "*Chop*".

Mark Hogan performed a few routines: **Bill Malone's** "*Rub-a-dub-dub*", **Michael Ammar's** "*Four Minutes of Fame*"; and his own modification to **Steven Balgatz's** "*Cup and Ball*" routine, where a cup and ball routine uncovered a pile of fake poop, which held a key to a locked box holding a spectator's signed coin!

Keith O'Brien demonstrated his collection of chop cups, including a very cool Martini mixer and a liquid measure (using olives as balls!) and some chop baseballs. He also performed his new acquisition; **Donnovan Mount's** "*Laced Up*", which blew us all away by linking a borrowed ring onto his toe of his shoe, then moved the knot in his shoe to the toe and the ring is seen on the knot – and then unties it! It was an amazing visual!

Next Meeting:

Date: Wednesday, MAY 17 (NOTE THE DATE CHANGE)

Time: 7:30 PM

Topic: ROPE MAGIC!

Location: Beal Secondary School
525 Dundas Street, London
Room 253

At that point we broke into smaller groups to practice some new moves we learned.

Thanks to everyone for sharing their Cups and Ball sets and routines!

Mark Hogan

May's Meeting

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DATE: Wednesday, MAY 17

TIME: 7:30 PM

**PLACE: Beal Secondary School
525 Dundas Street, London
Room 253**

TOPIC: ROPE MAGIC!

Rope magic has been around as long as ... well ... as long as there's been rope! The Professor's Nightmare, Cut and Restored, Ring & Rope, Rope Escapes, Vanishing Knots, ... there's tons of ways to mystify an audience with some simple strands of rope.

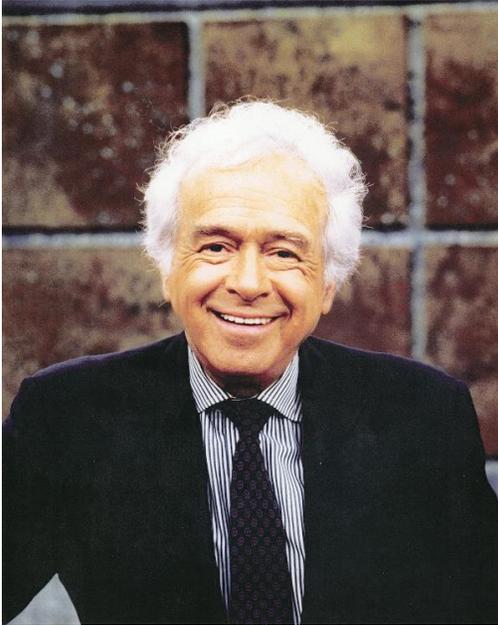
So let's "tie" one on in May and have some fun doing and learning some magic with ropes!

We Want Your Reviews and Tricks!

Please send any original reviews, magic tricks or routines to:

magic_london@yahoo.ca

News Of Interest



Memory expert Harry Lorayne passes at age 97

(Excerpts from The Washington Post)

While preparing for the 1983 wartime spoof *"To Be or Not To Be,"* **Mel Brooks** and his wife, **Anne Bancroft**, had to memorize the lyrics to *"Sweet Georgia Brown"* in Polish for one of the film's opening scenes. After the shooting was wrapped up, Bancroft sent a thank-you note to the coach who helped them lock down a language neither of them knew.

Harry Lorayne said he had no doubts that **Brooks** and **Bancroft** could pull it off with his assistance. It's what **Mr. Lorayne** did: marveling audiences and talk-show

hosts with his prodigious ability at recall and tirelessly marketing the idea that anyone could build a steel-trap memory if they followed his system.

"Nobody thinks twice about going to the doctor to help them see better, or help them hear better," said **Mr. Lorayne**, who died April 7 at a hospital in Newburyport, Mass., at 96.

There were times **Mr. Lorayne** worked behind the scenes to help actors, politicians and business executives with memory-aiding techniques. But the spotlight was his natural habitat. He was a showman, salesman, author, name dropper and weaver of stories that went back to how he mastered sleight-of-hand card tricks as a boy on Manhattan's Lower East Side.

"It took me out of that cage of shyness," he said. *"I had to say those three words: pick a card."*

By the 1960s, magic was mostly put aside and he was fully vested in his memory act, first honed on stages in the Catskills. **Mr. Lorayne** would hear the names of hundreds of audience members and then rattle them off — "Mr. Stinson, Miss Graf, Mrs. Graf, Miss Finkelstein" — in his rapid-fire New Yorkese. He could recite every page from a small-town phone book or the exact order of a shuffled 52-card deck after hearing it just once.

He would challenge the audience to stump him with questions on obscure Oscar winners or populations of a far-flung country. If some wag yelled out

"What's your name?" or another no-brainer, **Mr. Lorayne** would always get a laugh by pretending he couldn't remember.

The talk shows loved him. He was a regular on "*The Tonight Show*" and struck up a friendship with **Johnny Carson**. In 1985 on "*The Merv Griffin Show*," **Mr. Lorayne** nailed the names of 150 audience members after being told them one time. Griffin playfully chided **Mr. Lorayne** for not going for 300.

Mr. Lorayne, always the self-promoter, replied that he once memorized the names of 1,000 strangers. "*I could remember 10,000 if I had the time,*" he said. "*It would take a couple of days.*"

It earned him nicknames such as the "*Yoda of memory.*" **Mr. Lorayne** basked in the attention decades before the current wave of games and activities claiming to improve memory for a graying population. Advertisements for his books or courses, filling half pages of newspapers in the 1960s, promised to turn an ordinary person into a "mental wizard."

Among the various showbiz acts involving mental prowess, **Mr. Lorayne** was more like the practiced craftsman compared with the more elusive qualities of mentalists and others proclaiming mind-reading abilities.

He started performing in the 1940s and became **Harry Lorayne** after the middle name of his wife, **Renée Lorraine Lefkowitz**, whom he married in 1948 and became part of his shows. At one gig in the early 1950s, the audience included actor **Victor Jory**, an amateur magician. At Jory's table, **Mr. Lorayne** had run out of card tricks. His fallback was what he called a "bottom-of-the-barrel" stunt: reciting the order of a card deck after hearing it once. **Jory** was astounded and began extolling **Mr. Lorayne's** memory.

"*Well, that changed my life,*" **Mr. Lorayne** said. The magic act faded, and the memory act was on its way.

How do they do it?

(What Do Audiences Really Think?)

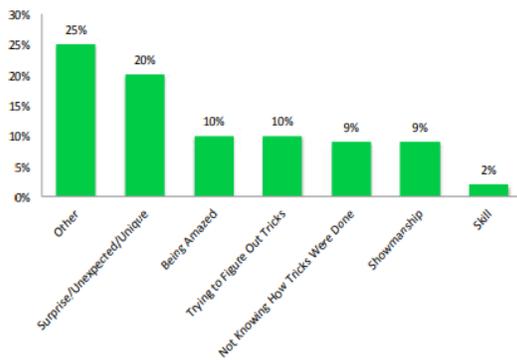
In September 2016 Joshua Jay published the article "What Do Audiences Really Think?" in *Magic* magazine. In it he outlines the results of a study involving more than 500 participants on how they view various aspects of magic. The following is an excerpt.

For centuries, magicians have worried about audiences finding out how their tricks are done. It turns out that audiences don't care nearly as much as we think they do.

We showed our group a video of an appearing helicopter illusion (and controlled the test with other similar effects). After the trick ended, we gave everyone a choice. Would they rather watch how the trick was done or watch a performance of another trick? We are giving people a choice to watch magic or to scratch the itch and learn how magic works.

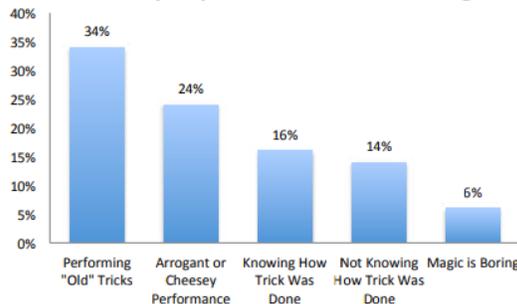
Sixty percent preferred to watch another amazing magic trick; the other forty percent were more curious to learn how the trick was done. To our delight, the people we tested were more interested in watching mysteries than solving mysteries.

What do people like *most* about magic?



We also need to rethink what it means when someone wants to know how a trick is done. We often take this as a negative *How Did They Do It?* quality in a spectator. We even tend to blame ourselves if a spectator seems frustrated when they can't figure out how a trick is done. We've all heard the phrase "*It's not fun to be fooled,*" and some of us believe this. But when asked what people love most about magic, nineteen percent of people cite being fooled as a positive experience. (Ten percent of these people are distinguished as loving "*being fooled,*" and nine percent most enjoy the act of trying to solve tricks.) Trying to figure out a magician's tricks is, for many, their favorite part of the whole experience.

What do people like *least* about magic?



We can unpack this concept further. In another experiment, we showed participants clips of three different levitation videos: *levitating a dollar*,

levitating a card, and *levitating a girl*. The dollar levitation was filmed extremely close to the performer. The card video would be considered parlor magic, and the floating lady was seen from a distance, as it would be if you watched the illusion in a theater. Afterward, we allowed spectators to guess at the method for each and to rate their enjoyment of each performance. After each trick, spectators were offered the chance to replay the video in full or to take a guess at the method. The order of the videos changed randomly, in case spectators tended to remember what they saw last more favorably.

This experiment answers several important questions: *Are people's guesses at the methods accurate? How much do they care about methods? Is bigger better? Or is being close to the magician more important?*

Let's explore guesses first. People attributed the most enjoyment, surprise, and complexity to the floating lady illusion (finally, some good news for the box pushers). Scale, in this case, does matter.

People also opted to rewatch the stage illusion more and they thought they knew how it worked less. The illusion fooled them more completely. Forty-three percent of the people who watched the card levitation had a guess as to how it was done (and nearly all of them guessed correctly: thread).

With age, people become less curious about how magic works. Across all effects tested, older people were less curious about how effects were done. The average sixty year-old in our survey was most likely to be fooled and least likely to offer a solution. The younger the person, the more likely they are to think they know how something is done.

There are two important conclusions to be drawn here, and both of them may affect how we think about our magic. The first, obvious point is this: repeatedly during the experiment, spectators nailed magicians on methods involving invisible thread. If you use thread for audiences, be careful you aren't fooling yourself. The evidence doesn't preclude using thread entirely, but if you're doing a floating bill effect, be aware that almost half the spectators believe they know how you're doing it.

The most interesting conclusion we can draw from this data is that people want to know how something is done when they already have a suspicion. When people enjoyed an effect, they were less likely to guess (or to want to guess) how it was done. When they had a suspicion about the method, they preferred to guess at the method instead of watching more magic.

This means that if our effects are soundly constructed and highly entertaining, our audiences will be less concerned with methods. If we are challenging in our presentations, or our tricks have moments that arouse suspicion, people will treat our material like problems to be solved.

By the way, many times in the survey we asked people if they "*would like*" to watch a video exposing how various tricks are done. Once they decided this, however, you'll be happy to know that they didn't actually get to see how anything was done. We were interested in the data, but not interested in actually revealing methods.

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The Shell Game is a free newsletter sent to members of the London Magicians Guild and other people in the community interested in magic.

Opinions expressed do not reflect the views of the London Magicians Guild.

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