



Shell Game

A Monthly Newsletter for the London Magic Community
December 2019

Volume 15, Issue 4

November's meeting

A cold snap didn't stop a big turnout (including a couple guests) to this month's club meeting, where we went back in time to get a first-hand look at a real working Flea Circus!

But first – it was **Kohl Strange's** time to perform for the club. He first caused a ring to disappear and then magically reappear back on his finger! He also caused the ring to jump up from one hand to the other, and pushed a large coin through the much smaller ring! He then did an excellent torn and restored card effect, and ended by squeezing the card so hard that it became a block of ice! It was an excellent presentation – **welcome to the club, Kohl!**

We were then thrust back in time to when flea circuses entertained the crowds. **Mike Fisher** (as the **Amazing Corbin**) has created a remarkable *flea circus show* that impressed everyone! In full attire and playing circus music, Mike started the show by shouting at the crowd to gather around and giving away free tickets (for no reason other than to gather spectators for the show - brilliant!). He showed off his flea circus stage, fully lighted and looking just like circuses of old.

After collecting the "tickets", the show began. Mike introduced a weightlifting flea who flipped over a half dollar in his hand! Then the flea stood on the half dollar and balanced another half dollar on top of it. It then rolled a ball and moved a 1-ton weight across the circus stage!

Next up were two racecar driving fleas who did a race around the circus ring in two miniature cars while the spectators cheered. And we were introduced

Next Meeting:

Date: Wednesday, DECEMBER 11

Time: 7:30 PM

Topic: SHOW BY KEITH O'BRIEN!

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

to "Fleedini", who escaped from a locked and tied safe (by crawling out a hole in the back!).

Danger awaited our next female flea who walked around the circus highwire carrying a chair! She then did a hoochy-koochy dance on top of a bell!

Our final flea had the most dangerous feats. Amazingly, this flea was fired from a cannon by our guest, **Wesley Steele**, breaking a balloon and landing on trapeze bar that was in the balloon! And for the grand finale, our hero flea jumped off the circus dining board into the water barrel below (and getting the front row of spectators soaked!).

Mike then broke down his amazing performance by explaining how to gather and manage the crowd, and opened up the circus to show its incredible inner workings. The intricate detailing, inventive design and masterful use of old and new technologies left us all speechless. From start to finish, Mike hit this out of the park!

It was a show that most of us will never forget! We have no doubt that Mike's Flea Circus will be a smash hit! Marvelous job, Mike!

Mark Hogan

December's Meeting

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DATE: Wednesday, December 11

TIME: 7:30 PM

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



TOPIC: SHOW BY KEITH O'BRIEN!

You've likely heard – our own **Keith O'Brien** is creating a show! And he's getting input from many folks – including his friends **David Copperfield** and **Chris Angel**. And now we'll get a sneak peek at what Keith has been up to!

Keith has graciously offered to show us some of the effects that he will be using in his show, and discuss how he has put it together and his process for getting it ready for "prime time". Keith is well known in the magic community, and this night he has been collaborating with some of magic's best to put together a memorable show. This night promises to both amaze and inform.

So come out in December and see what promises to be an amazing show performed by one of our best!

We Want Your Reviews and Tricks!

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

magic_london@yahoo.ca

News Of Interest

“Magic at the Marienbad” ticket discount - December 12 show

(Mike Fisher)

Good news! London Magicians Guild members can use code **Christmas** when ordering *Magic at the Marienbad* tickets online for \$5 off in December! For more info and to order tickets, visit

<https://www.facebook.com/MagicMarienbad/>.



Browser's Bash performers starting to be announced

(Browser's Bash)

Performers for next year's Browser's Bash is being starting to be announced.

The Browser's Bash is being held for the sixth time on Saturday, April 4, 2020 at the Montecassino Hotel & Event Venue in Toronto.

Card guys, mentalists, stand-up magicians, children's entertainers, jam sessions, close-up, stage performers, great stuff for sale, and everything in-between! If

you love magic, the Browser's Magic Bash 2020 is designed for you!

Announced performers include:

- **Michel Huot** – Corporate Magician & Inventor Extrordinaire
- **Dick Joiner** – Our favorite Emcee is back!
- **Loran** – Illusionist will cast a spell over us

- **Aaron Patterson** – Class, Fun & Mystery
- **Bill McCourt** – hidden Canadian treasure
- **Eric Becard** – busy pro making time for us
- **Anthony Linden** – Magician? Clown? Mentalist? Wait and see.
- **Simon Rotstein** – Free balloon sculpture class
- Our own **Al Grose** – Police officer by day; expert magician by night

For more information and to order tickets, visit:

<https://www.browsersden.com/bash/>



The Illusionists - Live From Broadway - in Toronto

(Mirvish.com)

DATES: December 13 – January 7

PLACE: Princes of Wales Theatre, Toronto

The Grand Illusionist, Canada's own **Darcy Oake**: Over 200 million viewers tuned in to see Darcy Oake's electrifying performance on *Britain's Got Talent* and *America's Got Talent*. The newest member of The Illusionists has grabbed the world's attention with death-defying escapades, nail-biting feats and classic sleight of hand techniques. The master magician

The Manipulator, **Yu Ho-Jin**: Considered a rising superstar in the world of magic; Yu Ho-Jin was recently named the 2014 "Magician of the Year," by *Academy of Magical Arts* and was the first Asian to win the Grand Prix at the *Fédération Internationale des Sociétés Magiques*, also known as the "Olympics of Magic."

The Anti-Conjuror, **Dan Sperry**: Described as *Marilyn Manson meets David Copperfield*, Dan combines the art of magic with the macabre and is one of the top-10 most Googled people, thanks to a legendary "America's Got Talent" appearance.

The Trickster, **Jeff Hobson**: is the epitome of glamour and showmanship. Don't be fooled by his innocent appearance; Jeff has audiences laughing long after the curtain goes down.

The Escapologist, **Andrew Basso**: Italy's star escape artist, Andrew considers **Houdini** his hero and is fast becoming one of the world's most popular illusionists. He is the only person in the world to perform Houdini's famous *Water Torture Cell* with absolutely no covers.

The Inventor, **Kevin James**: known for innovative illusions, is an inventor, comedian and collector of the strange and unusual. Kevin is one of the

most prolific inventors of magic in the world and has created some of the most celebrated illusions of the last century.

The Deductionist, **Colin Cloud**: Colin Cloud is the best and maybe even the wisest man you've ever known. Cloud has performed for professional sceptics like **Penn and Teller**. He has wowed the hard-to-please **Simon Cowell**. He has certainly left people convinced that he does indeed have mystical skills of reading minds and influencing outcomes.

What do people love (and hate) about magic?

(Joshua Jay)

In September 2016, **Joshua Jay** published an article called "*What Do Audiences Really Think?*". He collaborated with **Dr. Lisa Grimm**, a researcher and professor from *The College of New Jersey*, involving 526 participants from ages 18 through 80.

Clips of Joshua's performances, and well-known clips from other magicians, were shown to the participants and used to gain valuable information about what audiences think of magic, what they love (and hate), how we can more easily get volunteers, etc. The following excerpt is from this study.

We now come to the centerpiece of the study, the part that I was most curious about before the study and most surprised about afterward.

What do you like best about magic shows? And the dreaded she's-just-not-that-into-you follow-up, What do you like least about magic shows?

This was the most challenging data to analyze because it wasn't a multiple-choice question; instead, it's an open response. We wanted each participant to speak freely and without limitation. We didn't want them to choose from a list of five options or emotions, but rather to let them unload their thoughts to us without constraint. We wanted to know if most people associated positive or negative emotions with watching live magic.

The result was overwhelmingly positive. Most people approach live magic with a positive mindset and mostly positive past experiences. So far, so good.

Better still, when we asked people what they like least about magic, the most common answer was simply, "*Nothing.*"

What people enjoy most about magic shows was a variety of the things we would expect: seventeen percent just *wanted to be "amazed"*, and fourteen percent similarly liked the *mystery of magic* best. Twelve percent liked *not knowing how the effects were done*, and ten percent liked *trying to figure out how the effects were done*. (There is a subtle but important distinction between enjoying not knowing and enjoying the thrill of "solving" a magic trick, which is

the focus of Dr. Grimm's current research.) *Showmanship* was what six percent enjoyed most, and six percent named "skill" as their favorite aspect.

But none of these important qualities was the most popular aspect of a magic show. Any idea what is?

Surprise! Twenty-five percent of people, in their own words, like the *element of surprise* best. People of all backgrounds, genders, and ages valued surprise more than they valued being amazed.

This revelation has caused me to reevaluate my magic. It made me reflect on the tricks I do in terms of where and how often I offer my audiences genuine surprise. The answer, for most of us, is not enough.

I predicted people would be drawn to danger or large props or comedy. I thought, to a lesser extent, people loved visual effects and the use of borrowed objects, but even when presented with these ideas, people gravitated more strongly toward surprise, or as many put it, "*Not knowing what will happen next.*" The idea that audiences expect a surprise is paradoxical, since surprise is the one emotion that must, by definition, be unexpected.

Much like viewers go to scary movies expecting to be shocked, we have found, conclusively, that a majority of people watching magic expect the unexpected. As playwright William Goldman wrote, "You must surprise an audience in an expected way."

How each person defines surprise is slightly different, of course. But people's answers tend to support the idea that a surprise occurs when a plot twists unexpectedly. When you lift the cup, there is a live chick. When you whisk away the handkerchief, a bottle has appeared. You shuffle a pack of cards and then, without warning, throw it into the air — and the chosen card sticks to the ceiling.

With some classics, there is no surprise: think of the *Linking Rings* or *Coins through Table*. Amazing? Yes. Surprising? Not so much.

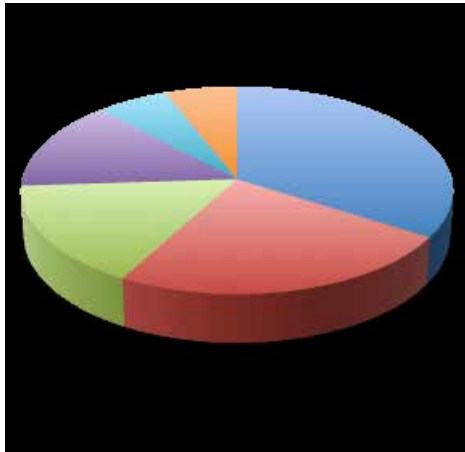
This result yields two findings. First, *tricks that inherently lack surprise can generally be improved by adding something unexpected*. Second — and perhaps most importantly — *tricks that audiences have seen so many times that they are no longer surprising should be avoided*. The *Zombie Ball* and *Sawing a Lady in Half* used to be surprising to the audiences that first witnessed them, but as these routines descend into cliché, they lose the element of surprise that our audiences crave so much.

The study didn't test whether any effect is strong or weak, and I don't think we should conclude that a magician should only perform tricks with surprise. But if your show consists of *Torn & Restored Newspaper*, the *Zombie*

Ball, and *Sawing a Lady in Half*, you are depriving your audience of what they want most: *something they didn't see coming*.

Some performers deal with this by turning these clichés on their head, finding ways to surprise us within the context of what we've come to expect. For example, in **Penn & Teller's** version of *Sawing a Lady in Half*, they attempt to explain the method many already suspect, and end by inadvertently sawing through the woman's "actual" midsection, ending with blood and guts scattered around the stage. The ending certainly comes as a surprise.

Now the bad news. What people dislike about magic shows is equally unexpected and almost unanimous in our study. People dislike when *magicians do the same tricks*. They used phrases like "cliché," "repetitive," and "old tricks."



- 34%** - *Performing old tricks*
- 24%** - *Arrogant or cheesy performance*
- 16%** - *Knowing how the trick was done*
- 14%** - *Not knowing how trick was done*
- 6%** - *Magic is boring*
- 6%** - *Did not respond*

I was convinced that what people would dislike about magic shows was the magician. I figured most people would find magicians unfunny and unlikeable (and some did), or that they would find most magic presentations dorky and outdated, even cheesy (you know who you

are, *fedora-and-suspenders guy*). But given the opportunity, few people expressed these sorts of things.

Thirty-four percent (which was the most popular response) were concerned about the repetitive nature of a magician's material. This casts a shadow over a sacred tenet of magic: "*Do the classics.*" "*The classics are classics for a reason,*" and "*you can't go wrong with the classics*" — as it turns out, maybe you can go wrong with the classics.

That doesn't mean everyone on Earth hates the *Linking Rings*. There may be people who love *Linking Rings* and will seek out any performance of it. (And if you find that person attractive and you're into that kind of thing, marry her. Or him.) There will always be exceptions, and you might even be the exception. The key here is to keep in mind that this data suggests what a majority feels about various issues in magic, not how we think they should feel.

We can also make a tentative connection between what people like best and least about magic. Most people *like surprise best* and they *dislike repetition most*. By adding more surprises into our work, we automatically minimize what sixteen percent of people said they detest most about magic: *knowing*

what happens next. The undeniable truth revealed here is that most people dislike the idea of seeing magic effects they think they have already seen.

The data suggests that we should perform material unknown to our audiences, or find ways to frame classic material in a new way. "*Be original!*" is an obvious point, but one we can, for the first time, back up with empirical data.

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Concept by: Steve Seguin

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.

London Magicians Guild web site:
magiclondon.brinkster.net

London Magicians Guild e-mail:
magic_london@yahoo.ca