



Ring Events

THE INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD OF MAGICIANS

Ring 17 (Toronto, Ontario, Canada) Hosts Guest Lecture by David Ben

The Sid Lorraine Hat & Rabbit Club kicked off with a new format this year. Before each lecture, one member will share a trick with the group. Our thanks this month to Rob Fishbaum (Fish the Magish) who taught everyone one of his favourite routines which involves the barehanded and quite deceptive vanish of a pocket handkerchief and its reappearance from a purse frame. Rob's handling was excellent.



Rob Fishbaum.

The Toronto magic scene ground to a halt one night in September. Not surprisingly, every magician was at David Ben's lecture. David has been a force in magic for the past fifty years. He is the sole protégé of Ross Bertram; a sleight of hand virtuoso; author; publisher; magic collector, historian, and consultant; and the star of numerous magic shows that played at the Shaw Festival, Luminato Festival, and Soulpepper Theatre. If

you ever saw *The Conjuror*, *The Conjuror's Suite*, *Tricks*, *Natural Magick*, *Card Table Artifice*, or *Hocus Pocus*, you are one of the lucky ones. Twenty-five years ago, David started Magicana, an arts organization dedicated to the exploration and advancement of magic as a performing art. Oh, and in 2024 David was appointed to the Order of Canada!

David opened his talk with his presentation of the Egg Bag, An Ode to an Egg. This was the opening effect in *The Conjuror* when it premiered at Shaw in the summer of 1996. David's version culminates in the production of three eggs from the bag, which are subsequently cracked into a wine glass to prove their validity.

David referred to his appearance at the club as a homecoming and stated this wouldn't be a typical lecture focusing on tricks or theory, but rather a presentation of his life in magic. It was chock full of stories and anecdotes about the many teachers, mentors, and friends he has met during his career.

If not the sole catalyst, David's interest in magic was piqued after seeing Doug Henning's *World of Magic* TV specials. The appearance of Ricky Jay on Doug's second special certainly made David take notice of how close-up magic was able to hold its own in the company of grand illusions. Doug opened with *The Vanishing Elephant*; Ricky demonstrated his ability to use cards as weapons and performed *The Exclusive Coterie* from *The Expert* at the *Card Table*, complete with a script that was practically verbatim from Erdnase. (Can they endure?)



(l to r): David Ben and The Egg Bag. • David drinks a little protein shake after performing the Egg Bag.

In the seventies, David attended the Society of Canadian Magicians conference for the first time and it is there he met P. Howard Lyons, who became a huge part of David's life. Most notably, Lyons introduced David to Ross Bertram by making them roommates at the event. Howard would impart much knowledge to David, including "an experience is only a mistake if you learn nothing from it." Something we would all do well to remember.

Following their introduction, David would meet with Ross every Saturday for four years, honing and improving his skills. Ross recommended that David learn as many sleights as possible so he could improvise.

Although David was performing magic as a teen and already a passionate student of the art, Ross consistently emphasized the importance of education and stressed that "you can't earn a degree studying Erdnase." David heeded his advice and would go on to attend the University of Western Ontario, the University of Toronto, and the London School of Economics where he would earn an advanced graduate degree in Tax Law (LLM).

David told our gathering that what makes great magicians is their capacity for management. If you can't go to school full time and perform magic on the side, he would argue that you don't have what it takes to be a pro-

fessional magician. As we know, most magicians have to be their own actors, directors, producers, script writers, set designers, choreographers, and promoters and marketers. Capacity for management is crucial.



David takes questions during the Q&A session.

When David was attending the University of Toronto, he worked at Morrissey Magic where he assisted Herb Morrissey in selling magic tricks behind the counter. Herb could sometimes come across as cantankerous and curt, but during David's many hours at the shop, he was an endless source of advice and wisdom. To wit: "You either treat magic as your vocation or avocation; if it's your vocation, learn one or two

tricks a year, but really study them in depth.” David would put this advice into practice and has amassed quite an impressive repertoire over the years. After watching one of his shows, I remember contemplating all the effects he’d performed and was floored upon considering the amount of time he must have spent learning and practicing each individual trick (not to mention having to deal with staging and blocking for that particular performance).

Stewart James was another person who inspired David. Stewart was in his Golden Years when David was invited to his home. Nevertheless, it was an honour because it was not a common occurrence. While visiting, Stewart showed him a blue steamer trunk that he had inherited in his teens but never opened. When David asked Stewart why he had never opened the trunk, Stewart said he found it better to imagine its contents since “unresolved mysteries ignite the imagination.” (On a related note, search YouTube for J.J. Abrams’s TED Talk about the Mystery Box he acquired at Tannen’s as a youngster but never opened.)

When not singing with Lefty or telling tales of Juan Escodero, Jay Marshall was no slouch when it came to managing his finances, and he reminded David about a couple of harsh truths about show business: first, at the conclusion of each performance you are automatically unemployed; second, you have no pension when you retire. The solution? Invest. Indeed, Jay would consistently invest a portion of his pay by purchasing shares of the very same companies who had hired him. These included businesses such as IBM, McDonald’s, General Electric, and many more members of the Fortune 500. Jay ended up with a solid portfolio.

Jay’s advice to David regarding magic consisted of three words: “Master Table Crap.” *Table Crap* was the name of Jay’s book of impromptu dinner table magic and stunts. Each item was designed to make a strong impression and serve as a conversation piece. David obliged our members’ requests to perform a couple things from Jay’s book by swallowing a table knife and pro-

ducing his shoe from under a napkin.

David reminded us that Vernon’s secrets for success were twofold: pick one trick and commit to being the best at it, and learn how to use a knife and fork. (Please note that expertly swallowing a knife or producing a shoe while dining with guests may negate peoples’ admiration of your cutlery etiquette. Pick your moments.)

A lifelong student of Erdnase, David maintains that he finds the philosophy of the text to be most important. Specifically: every ruse is more or less dependent on another one, and the best deceptions combine the true with the blind.

David rounded out his talk by mentioning the work he did in conjunction with two Canadian heavyweights: Allan Slaight and Patrick Watson. Patrick was a former chairman of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). He and David teamed up for the aforementioned productions that had their genesis at the Shaw Festival. Patrick once told David, “If people sense you know what you’re doing they will follow your lead.” Over the years, many people have (correctly) sensed that David knew what he was doing and have followed his lead, whether it was joining forces with him in the development of his theatrical endeavours, taking the advice he provided via his keynote speaking engagements, being sufficiently inspired by his sleight-of-hand skills to pursue the study of sleight of hand in earnest, recognizing the important literature that has been published by Magicana, and buying the rights to its catalogue of materials as was done last year by Vanishing Inc.

In his early years, Allan was an amateur magician and later went on to found Slaight Communications, eventually becoming the CEO of Standard Broadcasting Corporation Limited, Canada’s largest privately owned multimedia company.

Patrick was one of the founding members of Magicana. The Slaight Family Foundation was a major benefactor to Magicana, enabling them for the past ten years to present the Allan Slaight Awards to individuals in recognition of their outstanding achievements in magic.



(l to r): David Ben and Nicole Lee. • Chris Mayhew performs *Everybody's Card*. • President David Peck.

Upon request, David performed his version of *Everybody's Card*, entitled “*Everybody's Card III*,” which can be found on page 128 of his book *Tricks*. (*Everybody's Card I* and *II* can be found on pages 292 and 297, respectively, in *The Royal Road to Card Magic*.) As I write this, I'm reminded that it was David himself who recommended my dad buy that book for me when we were on one of our regular visits to Morrissey Magic in the eighties.

David then invited Chris Mayhew to instruct him on his technique for executing the *Top Change*. (Hint: The positioning of your feet is as important as the positioning of your hands.)

To conclude, David performed Vernon's classic *Twisting the Aces*. He mentioned it had never been one of his favourite tricks, but he made some adjustments to it and it's now the one item he carries with him at all times. He performs it with the cards atop a wine glass, using the light from a participant's phone to bathe it in light. Similarly, he encouraged our members to find tricks they don't like and change them, bit by bit, until they become enjoyable to perform.

I enjoyed David's talk immensely and, as far as I know, the Toronto magic scene was up and running the very next day! For more information about David and *Magicana*, go to www.davidben.com and www.magicana.ca.

On September 24, 2008, my fiancée (now wife) graciously put off celebrating her birthday so we could stay home and watch David Blaine's *Dive of Death*. The special had been pre-recorded, but the *Dive of Death* finale was to air live. However, due to the Great Financial Crisis then rocking the world and its financial institutions, United States President George W. Bush made a special announcement at the beginning of Blaine's special. This forced the *Dive* segment to air later than planned, throwing off the logistics of the stunt and resulting in an anti-climactic and revealing moment.

We stayed home for *this*? The evening was ruined for both Blaine and my fiancée. Conversely, David Ben's talk was a glowing success! Thank you to my amazing wife for letting me, once again, postpone her birthday celebrations in the name of magic.

David Sutherland

Rafael Benatar Showcases his World-Class Magic at Ring 50 (Washington, DC)

Venezuelan magician Rafael Benatar came all the way from Spain to lecture for Ring 50, after spending a couple of weeks working at the Magic Castle, in Chicago, and at Marc DeSouza's new theater. He shared with us amazing magic representative

of the Spanish School of Magic thinking. Rafael is one of the most active members of that school.

First, he invited Tanveer Francis to the stage and gave her half of a deck. They both shuffled their halves and picked a card from