



Ring Events

THE INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD OF MAGICIANS

Jeff Hinchliffe Lecture at Ring 17 (Toronto, Ontario, Canada)

Like many Toronto magicians, I first became aware of Jeff Hinchliffe while he was working at the Browser's Den of Magic. I had heard rumours of his technical proficiency with cards, but it wasn't until I attended his lecture for Ring 17 (Toronto, Ontario, Canada) in September 2022 that I understood the depth of his knowledge of magic history. Jeff digs into the old texts and when he finds a piece that intrigues him, he works through permutations of the effect and method in an effort to clarify and strengthen the plot and simplify the handling.

I recall being impressed by his determination to extract the most value from each method and his judgment to not take advantage of every effect possible within a given routine since, as he pointed out, some tricks have ended up getting worse over time due to so-called improvements.

The lecture was jam packed with strong material, and I was floored to find out he had assembled it in under forty-eight hours after being asked to fill in for a lecturer who had to cancel at the last minute. I remember thinking, "If this is what he came up with at the eleventh hour, imagine if he was given ample time to prepare!" With that in mind, in September 2024 I was excited to see his one-man show *Stepping into the Impossible* (co-produced by Mahdi Gilbert). In my opinion, it was perfectly crafted from start to finish. I saw it again in April and, one week later, Jeff visited Ring 17 to lecture on the work that went into creating the show.

The show explores Jeff's life in magic over the past thirty years. He begins by talking about the moment he stepped into the impossible at Canada's Wonderland in August 1996 where he was amazed by the performance of the Svengali Deck. He's in



Jeff Hinchliffe lectures.

good company since the same trick also hooked Channing Pollack. Although he can perform Mark Lewis's entire pitch for the deck verbatim, in his show the routine includes just the highlights. As mentioned, Jeff puts a lot of thought and consideration into his work, and he explained the certain scripting choices he made to allow him to be in the moment during each performance. Again, always considering possible improvements, Jeff explained the features and benefits of the deck he uses for his routine which may fool magicians who are familiar with the standard Svengali Deck.

Jeff showed the wooden nickel that was given to him at the Wonderland shop which would lead him to step into Browser's Den, at that time located at the southwest corner of Bathurst Street and Eglinton Avenue. His love of sleight of hand started after that first visit to the shop where he witnessed Poney Chiang perform Darwin Ortiz's "Hitchcock Aces." In the show, Jeff recounts an amusing anecdote about the question he asked Poney immediately after seeing the trick. At the lecture, Jeff let us in on some of the changes he made to the effect both in script and handling to strengthen the trick's internal logic.

The next segment of the show is devoted



(l to r): Jeff discusses mentalism. • Jeff performs with knives and forks.
• Jeff works with a memorized deck. • Jeff works with cards.

to Jeff’s mentors and the knowledge they shared that nurtured his growing in the art of magic. We hear about the late Thomas Baxter who would drive from Oakville to Browser’s every Saturday to spend time with Jeff. We learn about Sorcerer’s Safari and how formative it was in his development as a magician. Jeff would attend as both a camper and a counselor and got to spend a lot of time with magicians like Aaron Fisher, Lee Asher and many more notables. The audience is introduced to Juan and Jeff explains how the book *Mnemonica* would open up a whole new world for him in terms of card magic. (And no, he did not speak about the book’s contents!) His gratefulness to all of them shines through.

Jeff explained that he felt it important to perform pieces that complimented each of his teachers. For Thomas Baxter, the chosen effect was something he calls “Hofzinsler Meets Ascanio,” wherein the aces turn face down one at a time and the last ace turns into a previously selected card. Jeff showed us his work on this routine and then demonstrated the Howie Schwarzman subtlety of sliding a double (or two) across the surface of a table without them splitting. This received an audible gasp from the gathering of magicians.

For Sorcerer’s Safari, Jeff took the routine “Child’s Play” from Simon Aronson’s *Art Decko*, changed some of the props, and turned it into a game that would be played at camp, renaming it “Rock, Paper, Scissors.” Andrew Sutherland would assist Jeff with this during the lecture. For Juan, Jeff performs “Mnemonicosis.”

Following this, Jeff talked about his time working in restaurants and said that doing this was the key to really improving the per-



Jeff and Artemus, a coffee thank you.

formance of close-up magic. During this portion, Jeff used a couple of standard props that typically look out of place but made perfect sense in a restaurant setting. I was also happy to see him incorporate a Jim Steinmeyer effect, “The Great Silverware Scam,” that I had only read about in *The Conjuring Anthology*. Again, a logical choice with this framing.

It was interesting to learn that Jeff stepped away from magic for a number of years and then shortly upon returning to it in 2020, along came ... well, you know. How did Jeff spend his time during the pandemic? He learned a very different rising card effect. This got a great reaction at both the show and the lecture. His finale was a Dani DaOrtiz creation that blew everyone away.

Jeff Hinchliffe has been in love with magic for thirty years; after watching *Stepping Into The Impossible* you’ll understand why. By the time you read this, *Stepping into the Impossible* will have played at The Red Sandcastle Theatre on May 22, so keep your eyes open for future performances from Jeff! You can follow Jeff on Instagram (@hinchliffejeff) or visit his website at www.jhmagic.ca.

David Sutherland