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Magic And Showmanship: A Handbook For Conjurers (Dover Magic Books)



Synopsis

Like theatrical presentations, conjuring is an art of illusion. A magician skilled in the craft is able to convince an audience that he or she can read minds, communicate with the spirit world, make objects appear or disappear, and perform other acts of seemingly genuine magic. Without having mastered the art of presentation or "showmanship," however, even the most competent sleight-of-hand artist can fall short in performance. With this in mind, noted authority Henning Helms goes beyond the basics to show how techniques developed for the stage by playwrights, directors, and actors can heighten the dramatic effect of a magician's performance. In this instructive book, Helms analyzes every phase of conjuring "from sleights, devices, and illusions to misdirection, controlling the audience's attention, incorporating "patter," and the effective use of assistants. Of particular interest is a chapter on body language, posture, positioning and movement. Also included are some 60 original routines "from simple card tricks to such major illusions as having the performer suddenly appear at stage center. Indispensable as an instruction manual for novices, this how-to guide "enhanced with nearly 200 of the author's illustrations "will also serve as a lasting source of advice and inspiration for veteran conjurers.

Book Information

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Age Range: 10 and up

Grade Level: 5 and up

Customer Reviews

As a magician since childhood and an actor/director by schooling, I have always been disturbed by the disconnect between the way magicians are portrayed in legend and literature (e.g., Merlin, Gandalf, etc.) and the average magic act (e.g., a greasy guy in a tux making fun of spectators). That disconnect almost made me abandon magic. However, the amazing Henning Nelms has given hope to magicians (and audiences) everywhere. Nelms, a successful Broadway theatrical jack-of-all-trades who wrote what have become definitive texts on set design, lighting and even drawing by hand, was also an excellent magician. "M&S" may be his most important work, however, because it gives the magician the tools of the theatre and the skills to use those tools. It is no accident that since the original 1969 edition of "M&S," magic has been changing into a more theatrical (and more compelling) art. The ground-breaking work of Eugene Burger, Jeff McBride, Alain Nu and others in the emergent "New Wave" of magic owe a great deal to Nelms' monumental book. To the actor, the knowledge herein will seem basic; to the conjurer, it will be revolutionary. Some magi will dismiss "M&S" as a pipe-dream and go back to their endless stream of "pick-a-card" tricks (what sleight-of-hand master Jamy Ian Swiss calls "magic aversion therapy"). But those who carefully read AND apply the wisdom it contains will find a door into a whole new world. This world has made it possible, for example, for John Tudor and Rebecque to use magic in award-winning videos to teach children how to relate socially in positive ways.

Nelms' Magic and Showmanship is like the Bible for magicians. By that I mean it is the MOST highly praised and the LEAST ACTUALLY READ of any magic book in existence! All magicians pay lip service to it, but I've never met that first one who actually followed the advice given. Actually, the author does make some very good points. When you do magic, it is like a puzzle to the audience. When they can't figure it out, like any puzzle, they expect to be told the secret, which the magician refuses to do. This causes frustration. The author's solution to this is to remove the "miraculous" aspects from the performance. For example, instead of doing the cut and restored string routine, you present it as a strong man feat in which a piece of string which has been cut in two cannot be pulled from your fingers. For a stage act, the author suggests doing a comedy routine in which the performer is playing a stereotypical magician, but he is possessed by an African Obeah man, who is causing all of his tricks to turn out wrong. By making it appear that the magician is under the control of someone else, he turns it into a comedy act which eases the audience's resentment at being fooled. No close up trick should simply be pulled out of the pocket and performed; rather, it should be carefully worked into the conversation before performance. For example, you talk about psychics which segues into talk about a mind reading demonstration that you've been working on, which

segues into the performance of a trick, practically without your spectators realizing it. While I think Nelms' premise is correct, I don't think his solution is very practical for most performances.

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