



# THE BUZZ

AMSTERDAM MAGIC SOCIETY

Markus Tervo  
gives a lecture  
for the  
Society on  
September 4

September  
2024

ISSUE 9

# 1/ FRITZ WITH A Z

As I write this, I just returned from Sweden to participate in the Conjuring Course. I was in Course C where we learned about movement, worked on advanced magic techniques, and on creating routines.

3 p.



4 p.

# 2/ CONJURING A

## WILLEM VAN DER WEIDE

As magicians, we want to tell stories. We want to create a magical moment together with our audience. We learn a trick. We practice until we're exhausted, striving to perform the technique as perfectly as possible.



# 3/ REIMAGINED CLASSICS

## MARKUS TERVO LECTURE

Have you ever bought a magic prop or gimmick, used it for a while, but then left it in the bottom drawer as the excitement waned? You're not alone.

6 p.



12 p.

# 4/

## SECRETS OF THE MAGUS (1)

## MARK SINGER

The playwright David Mamet and the theatre director Gregory Mosher affirm that many years ago, late one night in the bar of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Chicago, this has happened.



This magazine is a production of the Amsterdam Magic Society. If you like to contribute, send this to our editor & designer, Frans de Groot: [amsterdammagicsociety@gmail.com](mailto:amsterdammagicsociety@gmail.com)

Copyright © 2023 by the Amsterdam Magic society. All rights reserved. No part of this publication be reproduced, stored in any retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without the prior permission of the Editor of The Amsterdam Magic Society. Views expressed in this magazine are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Amsterdam Magic Society unless specifically stated.





## DEAR READER

**A**s I write this, I just returned from Sweden to participate in the Conjuring Course. I was in Course C where we learned about movement, worked on advanced magic techniques, and on creating routines. This course allows me to get out of my comfort zone and create an act where I applied techniques from the last three years. It surprises me that with a few props, a deadline, and one idea one can come up with an interesting routine. My group only consisted of 8 persons and without them this act was not possible. You might see it at the Society one day. Willem was also in Sweden and he wrote a review about his experience of Conjuring Course A.

Staying in the Nordics, on the cover of this issue is Markus Tervo. Hailing from Finland, not only will he perform at the Amsterdam Magic Show on September 3rd but on September 4th Markus will do a lecture for the Society. His lecture is titled Reimagined Classics: Breathing New Life into Old Magic. Markus is a fun and creative guy (we met through the Conjuring Course!) and I recommend his magic highly.

Markus' lecture subject fascinates me. Almost everything I currently perform, at some point I looked at the original and thought: "How can I make this old effect interesting to my audience?" Effects like Hindu Thread, Egg Bag, and Hold-Out are currently on my reworking list. Maybe you also have a few effects that you really like but need to be modernized. Who knows, it might become your signature trick.



Enjoy reading!

*Fritz with a Z*







# Markus Tervo Lecture

## Reimagined Classics

“BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO OLD MAGIC”

Have you ever bought a magic prop or gimmick, used it for a while, but then left it in the bottom drawer as the excitement waned? You're not alone. In this lecture, I will share fresh and practical routines for both close-up and stage performances, using magic props you probably already have!

“Every once in a while we are treated to “Creative Geniuses” in Magic. I can honestly say that Markus Tervo is one of those brilliant people, who just blow you away with his unorthodox way of thinking and performing. When he shares ideas, listen.

See his lecture, be inspired, be fooled and just enjoy yourself for a few hours in the company of this smart, kind, goofy and very entertaining Magician. “

*Christian Engblom*

### **Routines Covered:**

#### **New Card to Bottle**

Most of us have a Refilled Bottle or a Nielsen bottle, but almost everyone uses it the same way. Here's an old but new take on the prop, adding a unique twist that will blow away your audience.

#### **Progressive Waltz**

Experience a new plot for the classic Anniversary Waltz routine. In this version, the effects before the fusion are logically connected, enhancing the overall impact and symbolism of the routine.

#### **Vanishing Card**

Learn a practical, real-world card vanish that is perfect to perform before your Mystery Box effect. This technique involves no black art, no flaps, and offers an instant reset, making it highly effective and efficient.

#### **Time Is Money**

Do you have a Quiver? Perhaps one of those new Timer apps? Combine the two for an organic miracle that's perfect for impromptu performances when someone asks for a trick. This routine seamlessly blends technology with traditional magic.

#### **Sympathetic UNO**

A classic card plot reimagined with UNO cards. The use of UNO cards enhances the routine, and I will share a new advanced handling for the pile switch, making the routine even more deceptive.

And that's not all! Many more tricks, ideas, and theories will be shared, offering you a wealth of knowledge and inspiration to rejuvenate your magic routines.

Join me for a session filled with creativity, innovation, and a fresh perspective on classic magic!

#### **About Markus Tervo:**

I am Markus Tervo from Finland. With 20 years of magic experience, I run my own Magic Theater in Helsinki. My passion is breathing new life into classic magic props and routines.





**A**s magicians, we want to tell stories. We want to create a magical moment together with our audience. We learn a trick. We practice until we're exhausted, striving to perform the technique as perfectly as possible. We come up with a presentation, or we use the one that comes with the trick.

In Sigtuna, Sweden, there's a course entirely dedicated to presenting, to storytelling. For six days, you are immersed in lessons on all aspects of magic and theater. Along with around seventy people, you stay on a beautiful campus where there's plenty of brainstorming about the art of magic. Throughout the day, there are three Fika breaks in addition to breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

Fika is a coffee break with cookies and other treats. Fika is cozy and delicious. But above all, it's a moment to get to know everyone better. For me, it was the first time. The course has three levels. Fritz was in Conjuring C, and I was in Conjuring A.

The first day began at 9:00 AM with an explanation by Tom Stone about "The effect as a narrative," followed by an assignment. We each received an "invisible" coin, which we had to make disappear. We all know the trick: the coin goes into the hand, a tap with the magic wand, and it's gone. We slowly open our hand to show that it's really gone. Tom looked at us with sparkling eyes, surprised. Where did it go? Did it just "zip"... suddenly disappear? Or did it turn into dust and float through the air? Did it melt? In short, this is the most magical moment, and it requires a clear idea. Play that idea out fully and take your audience along with your imagination.

This was just one of the many concepts covered. With each concept, we were given the

task to come up with and present an act in groups of three within 40 minutes, incorporating the discussed concept. It's amazing how quickly you can come up with something when brainstorming with others. Besides Tom Stone, Oskar Hejll (prop making class), and Peter Gröning (Exploring the Act), the workshops by Leif Olberius also caused the participants' brains to work hard. His lessons focused mainly on acting, the importance of writing a good script, and performing it.

In one of his lessons, he had us read a page from a film script. Then he invited us to read the text in different ways by making us move or stand still in the space, take distance from each other, sit very close together, introduce accelerations and decelerations, and so on. Playfully, you discover the choices you can make when telling your own story. A writing course and acting lessons are a rich addition to a magician's repertoire.

"Make contact with your audience, look at your audience," said Leif. For every action you want to perform on stage, the rule is: look-think-look-act. An important technique for people who work on stage. Example: There's a deck of cards on the table that you want to pick up. Then these would be the steps: 1- Look at the deck of cards on the table. 2- Look at the audience (they see you thinking). 3- Look back at the deck of cards. 4- Pick up the deck of cards.

In the evenings, there were extra events. One of my favorites was a Q&A with Jim Steinmeyer (via Zoom). Another evening featured a lecture on pyrotechnics with Ottar Kraemer. The last two days mainly consisted of performances by all participants.

Here, everyone had the opportunity to show what they had been working on. About seventy short acts were showcased, and there were some real gems among them!

As I write this, I'm still processing all the impressions and ideas I've gathered. I already miss the group. And I think Fika is a great tradition that we should adopt in the Netherlands.

**WILLEM VAN DER WEIDE**



## PHOTOS COURSE A, SIGTUNA SWEDEN, JULY 29 - AUGUST 3



Group Photo



Fika



Openingsact van Leif, Tom and Nikola



Fritz doing the tech during all the performances







AMSTERDAM MAGIC SOCIETY

# Discord

JOIN OUR DISCORD SERVER AND GET READY FOR THE NEW  
WAYS WE ARE BUILDING UP THE SOCIETY FOR YOU!!

CHAT WITH OTHER MEMBERS 24/7, LEND OR BORROW  
BOOKS IN THE SOCIETY LIBRARY, BUY OR TRADE TRICKS IN  
THE SOCIETY SHOP, OR SIMPLY SIT BACK AND BE  
ENTERTAINED BY BUZZTV.

SOON, WE'LL START HOSTING INTERNATIONAL CLUB NIGHTS  
WHERE OUR MEMBERS IN AMSTERDAM AND WORLDWIDE  
CAN GET TOGETHER TO ENJOY SPECIAL ONLINE PROGRAMS.

THE BUZZ

SOCIETY  
LIBRARY

SOCIETY  
SHOP

BUZZTV

BUZZTALKS

[DISCORD.AMSTERDAMMAGICSOCIETY.COM](https://discord.amsterdammagicsociety.com)





# AGENDA

September 3 - [Amsterdam Magic Show](#), Boom Chicago, Amsterdam

September 4 | [Lecture Markus Tervo](#)  
Mascini, Amsterdam (free for members and Apprentices)

September 5-7 - [Magicians' Alliance of Eastern States](#), Cherry Hills, New Jersey

September 5-8 - [Fröhlich Magic Convention](#) (National Austrian Convention) Bad Aussee, Salzburg, Austria

September 9 | [AMSociety](#) - Showcase (exams of the Apprentices)

September 11 - 15 - [Magic All Festival](#) - Spa, Belgium

September 13-15 - [IBM British Ring Annual Convention](#), Llandudno (Wales)

September 16-22 - [Magialdia Magic Festival](#) in Vitoria, Spain.

September 18-20 - [Original Close-Up Magic Symposium](#) in Wien, Austria.

September 19-22 - [Magistrorum](#) - Las Colinas, Dallas, Texas.

September 20-22 - [Magic Festival](#) Dreamfactory, Degersheim, Switzerland.

September 19-22 - [Festival de Magie de Québec](#)

September 26-28 - [Abano National Convention](#) ITALY, Abano (Padua), Italy.  
Website:

September 27-29 - [New York Magic Conference](#) in Callicoon, New York (the Catskills).







# Secrets of the Magus

Ricky Jay does closeup magic that flouts reality

## Part 1

**T**he playwright David Mamet and the theatre director Gregory Mosher affirm that many years ago, late one night in the bar of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Chicago, this happened:

Ricky Jay, who is perhaps the most gifted sleight-of-hand artist alive, was performing magic with a deck of cards. Also present was a friend of Mamet and Mosher's named Christ Nogulich, the director of food and beverage at the hotel. After twenty minutes of disbelief-suspending manipulations, Jay spread the deck face up on the bar counter and asked Nogulich to concentrate on a specific card but not to reveal it. Jay then assembled the deck face down, shuffled, cut it into two piles, and asked Nogulich to point to one of the piles and name his card. "Three of clubs," Nogulich said, and he was then instructed to turn over the top card.

He turned over the three of clubs. Mosher, in what could be interpreted as a passive-aggressive act, quietly announced, "Ricky, you know, I also concentrated on a card."

After an interval of silence, Jay said, "That's interesting, Gregory, but I only do this for one person at a time."

Mosher persisted: "Well, Ricky, I really was thinking of a card."

Jay paused, frowned, stared at Mosher, and said, "This is a distinct change of procedure." A longer pause. "All right—what was the card?" "Two of spades."

Jay nodded, and gestured toward the other pile, and Mosher turned over its top card. The deuce of spades. A small riot ensued.



**D**eborah Baron, a screenwriter in Los Angeles, where Jay lives, once invited him to a New Year's Eve dinner party at her home. About a dozen other people attended. Well past midnight, everyone gathered around a coffee table as Jay, at Baron's request, did closeup card magic. When he had performed several dazzling illusions and seemed ready to retire, a guest named Mort said, "Come on, Ricky. Why don't you do something truly amazing?" Baron recalls that at that moment "the look in Ricky's eyes was, like, 'Mort—you have just fucked with the wrong person.'"

Jay told Mort to name a card, any card. Mort said, "The three of hearts." After shuffling, Jay gripped the deck in the palm of his right hand and sprung it, cascading all fifty-two cards so that they travelled the length of the table and pelted an open wine bottle.

"O.K., Mort, what was your card again?"

"The three of hearts."

"Look inside the bottle."

Mort discovered, curled inside the neck, the three of hearts. The party broke up immediately.

One morning last December, a few days before Christmas, Jay came to see me in my office. He wore a dark-gray suit and a black shirt that was open at the collar, and the colors seemed to match his mood. The most uplifting magic, Jay believes, has a spontaneous, improvisational vigor. Nevertheless, because he happened to be in New York we had made a date to get together, and I, invoking a journalistic imperative, had specifically requested that he come by my office and do some magic while I took notes. He hemmed and hawed and then, reluctantly, consented. Though I had no idea what was in store, I anticipated being completely fooled. At that point, I had known Jay for two years, during which we had discussed his theories of magic, his relationships with and opinions of other practitioners of the art, his rigid opposition to public revelations of the techniques of magic, and his relentless passion for collecting rare books and

manuscripts, art, and other artifacts connected to the history of magic, gambling, unusual entertainments, and frauds and confidence games. He has a skeptically friendly, mildly ironic conversational manner and a droll, filigreed prose style. Jay's collection functions as a working research library. He is the author of dozens of scholarly articles and also of two diverting and richly informative books, "Cards as Weapons" (1977) and "Learned Pigs & Fireproof Women" (1986). For the past several years, he has devoted his energies mainly to scholarship and to acting in and consulting on motion pictures. Though he loves to perform, he is extremely selective about venues and audiences. I've attended lectures and demonstrations by him before gatherings of East Coast undergraduates, West Coast students of the history of magic, and Midwestern bunco-squad detectives. Studying videotapes of him and observing at first hand some of his serendipitous microbursts of legerdemain have taught me how inappropriate it is to say that "Ricky Jay does card tricks"—a characterization as inadequate as "Sonny Rollins plays tenor saxophone" or "Darci Kistler dances." None of my scrutinizing has yielded a shred of insight into how he does what he does. Every routine appears seamless, unparsable, simply magical.

Before getting down to business in my office, we chatted about this and that: water spouters and armless origami artists and equestrian bee trainers, all subjects that Jay has written about. As we were talking, an editor friend and two other colleagues dropped by. I had introduced Jay and the editor once before and—presumptuously, it turned out—had mentioned earlier that morning that he would be coming by for a private performance. Politely but firmly, Jay made it plain that an audience of one was what he had in mind. There was an awkward moment after the others left. I apologized for the intrusion, and he apologized for not being more accommodating. He reassured me that he still had something to show me. My



cluttered office didn't feel right, however, so we headed upstairs to a lunchroom, found that it was unoccupied, and seated ourselves in a corner booth, facing each other. He unzipped a black leather clutch that he had brought with him and removed a deck of red Bee playing cards imprinted with the logo of Harrah's Casino.

In "Cards as Weapons" Jay refers to Dai Vernon, who died last year, at ninety-eight, as "the greatest living contributor to the magical art," and he quotes Vernon's belief that "cards are like living, breathing human beings and should be treated accordingly." I was reminded of Vernon's dictum as Jay caressed the deck, as gently as if it were a newly hatched chick. He has small hands—just large enough so that a playing card fits within the plane of his palm. There is a slightly raised pad of flesh on the underside of the first joint of each finger. "Not the hands of a man who has done a lot of hard labor," Jay said—a completely disingenuous line, to which he added, "One of the best sleight-of-hand guys I know is a plumber."

Jay's hands seem out of scale with the rest of him. He is of average height but has a hefty, imposing build. During the seventies, he regularly toured with various rock groups as an opening act and could easily have passed as foreman of the road crew; at the time, he had dark-brown hair that reached the middle of his back, and a dense, flowing beard. He now keeps his hair and beard neatly trimmed. He has a fleshy face, a high forehead, and dark eyes. His eyes light up and then crinkle when he laughs—a burst of what might or might not indicate pleasure, followed by a dry, wise-sounding chuckle that could mean anything. His inflection is New York with a Flatbush edge. In three of Mamet's films—"House of Games," "Things Change," and "Homicide"—Jay has been cast to type as a confidence man, a gangster, and an Israeli terrorist, respectively. In one scene of the play within a play of "House of Games," he portrays a menacing professional gambler.

"I'm always saying there's no correlation between gambling and magic," Jay said as he shuffle-cut the cards. "But this is a routine of

actual gamblers' techniques within the context of a theatrical magic presentation."

He noticed me watching him shuffling, and asked softly, with deadpan sincerity, "Does that look fair?"

When I said it looked fair, he dealt two hands of five-card draw and told me to lay down my cards. Two pair. Then he laid down his. A straight.

"Was that fair?" he said. "I don't think so. Let's discuss the reason why that wasn't fair. Even though I shuffled openly and honestly, I didn't let you cut the cards. So let's do it again, and this time I'll let you cut the cards."

He shuffled again, I cut the cards, he dealt, and this time I had three tens.

"Ready to turn them over?"

My three-of-a-kind compared unfavorably with his diamond flush.

"Is that fair?" he said again. "I don't think so. Let's talk about why that might not be fair. Even though I shuffled the cards"—he was now reshuffling the deck—"and you cut the cards, you saw me pick up the cards after you cut them, and maybe you think there was some way for me to nullify the cut by sleight of hand. So this time I'll shuffle the cards and you shuffle the cards."

Jay shuffled the deck, I riffle-shuffled the deck and handed it back to him, and he said, "And I'll deal six hands of poker—one for myself and five for you. I'll let you choose any one of the five. And I'll beat you."

He dealt six hands. Instead of revealing only one of my five hands, I turned them all face up. "Oh, oh," he said. "I see you want to turn them all over. I only intended for you to pick one—but, well, no, that's all right."

The best of my five hands was two pair.

Jay said, "Now, did that seem fair?"

I said yes.

Jay said, "I don't think so," and showed me his cards—four kings.

I rested my elbows on the table and massaged my forehead.

"Now, why might that be unfair?" he continued. "I'll tell you why. Because, even though you shuffled, I dealt the cards. That time, I also



shuffled the cards. Now, this time you shuffle the cards and you deal the cards. And you pick the number of players. And you designate any hand for me and any hand for you."

After shuffling, I dealt four hands, arranged as the points of a square. I chose a hand for myself and selected one for him. My cards added up to nothing—king-high nothing. "Is that fair?" Jay said, picking up his cards, waiting a beat, and returning them to the table, one by one—the coup de grâce. "I. Don't. Think. So." One, two, three, four aces.

Jay has an anomalous memory, extraordinarily retentive but riddled with hard-to-account-for gaps. "I'm becoming quite worried about my memory," he said not long ago. "New information doesn't stay. I wonder if it's the NutraSweet." As a child, he read avidly and could summon the title and the author of every book that had passed through his hands. Now he gets lost driving in his own neighborhood, where he has lived for several years—he has no idea how many. He once had a summer job tending bar and doing magic at a place called the Royal Palm, in Ithaca, New York. On a bet, he accepted a mnemonic challenge from a group of friendly patrons. A numbered list of a hundred arbitrary objects was drawn up: No. 3 was "paintbrush," No. 18 was "plush ottoman," No. 25 was "roaring lion," and so on. "Ricky! Sixty-five!" someone would demand, and he had ten seconds to respond correctly or lose a buck. He always won, and, to this day, still would. He is capable of leaving the house wearing his suit jacket but forgetting his pants. He can recite verbatim the rapid-fire spiel he delivered a quarter of a century ago, when he was briefly employed as a carnival barker: "See the magician; the fire 'manipulator'; the girl with the yellow e-e-elastic tissue. See Adam and Eve, boy and girl, brother and sister, all in one, one of the world's three living 'morphrodites.' And the e-e-electrode lady..." He can quote verse after verse of nineteenth-century Cockney rhyming slang. He says he cannot remember what age he was when his family moved from Brooklyn to the New Jersey suburbs. He cannot recall the year he entered college or the year he left.

"If you ask me for specific dates, we're in trouble," he says.

Michael Weber, a fellow-magician and close friend, has said, "Basically, Ricky remembers nothing that happened after 1900."

Jay has many loyal friends, a protective circle that includes a lot of people with show-business and antiquarian-book-collecting connections and remarkably few with magic-world connections.

Marcus McCorison, a former president of the American Antiquarian Society, where Jay has lectured and performed, describes him as "a deeply serious scholar—I think he knows more about the history of American conjuring than anyone else."

Nicolas Barker, who recently retired as one of the deputy keepers of the British Library, says, "Ricky would say you can't be a good conjurer without knowing the history of your profession, because there are no new tricks under the sun, only variations. He's a superbly gifted conjurer, and he's an immensely scholarly person whose knowledge in his chosen field is gigantic, in a class by itself. And, like any other scholarly person, he has a very good working knowledge of fields outside his own."

The actor Steve Martin said not long ago, "I sort of think of Ricky as the intellectual élite of magicians. I've had experience with magicians my whole life. He's expertly able to perform and yet he knows the theory, history, literature of the field. Ricky's a master of his craft. You know how there are those teachers of creative writing who can't necessarily write but can teach? Well, Ricky can actually do everything."

A collector named Michael Zinman says, "He's instantly reachable, up to a limit." Those most familiar with his idiosyncrasies realize that there are at least three Ricky Jays: a public persona, a private persona, and a private persona within the private persona. Jay can remember his age—somewhere in his forties—but says that it is irrelevant. It is also irrelevant that Jay was not his surname at



birth; it was his middle name. Janus Cercone, who wrote the screenplay for “Leap of Faith,” a recent film that stars Steve Martin as a flimflam faith healer and credits Jay as the “Cons and Frauds Consultant,” told me, “I talk to Ricky three times a day. Other than my husband, he’s my best friend. I think I know him as well as just about anyone does, and I know less about his background and his childhood than about those of anyone else I know.”

Mamet and Jay have been friends for several years—a bond rooted, in part, in their shared fascination with the language, science, and art of cons and frauds.

“I’ll call Ricky on the phone,” Mamet says. “I’ll ask him—say, for something I’m writing—‘A guy’s wandering through upstate New York in 1802 and he comes to a tavern and there’s some sort of mountebank. What would the mountebank be doing?’ And Ricky goes to his library and then sends me an entire description of what the mountebank would be doing. Or I’ll tell him I’m having a Fourth of July party and I want to do some sort of disappearance in the middle of the woods. He says, ‘That’s the most bizarre request I’ve ever heard. You want to do a disappearing effect in the woods? There’s nothing like that in the literature. I mean, there’s this one 1760 pamphlet—“Jokes, Tricks, Ghosts and Diversions by Woodland, Stream and Campfire.” But, other than that, I can’t think of a thing.’ He’s unbelievably generous. Ricky’s one of the world’s great people. He’s my hero. I’ve never seen anybody better at what he does.”

I once asked Mamet whether Jay had ever shared with him details of his childhood. Mamet replied, “I can’t remember.”

I said, “You can’t remember whether you discussed it or you can’t remember the details?”

He said, “I can’t remember whether or not I know a better way to dissuade you from your reiteration of that question without seeming impolite.”

Jay’s condensed version of his early life goes like this: “I grew up like Athena—covered with playing cards instead of armor—and, at the age of seven, materialized on a TV show, doing magic.” Confronted with questions about his parents, he suggests a different topic. Whatever injuries were inflicted, his mother and his father were apparently equally guilty. Any enthusiasm he ever expressed they managed not to share. “I’m probably the only kid in history whose parents made him stop taking music lessons,” he says. “They made me stop studying the accordion. And, I suppose, thank God.” He loved to play basketball. There was a backboard above the garage of the family house, which had aluminum siding. “Don’t dent the house!” his mother routinely warned. His father oiled his hair with Brylcreem and brushed his teeth with Colgate. “He kept his toothpaste in the medicine cabinet and the Brylcreem in a closet about a foot away,” Jay recalls. “Once, when I was ten, I switched the tubes. All you need to know about my father is that after he brushed his teeth with Brylcreem he put the toothpaste in his hair.”

Though Jay first performed in public at the age of four, he rejects the notion that magic—or, in any case, his mature style of magic—is suitable entertainment for children. Nor does he apologize for his lack of susceptibility to the charms of children themselves. I once drove with him from central Massachusetts to my home, near New York City. We had to catch a plane together the next day, and I had invited him to spend the night in a spare room, on a floor above and beyond earshot of my three sons. While acknowledging that they were Ricky Jay fans, I promised him that they would all be in bed by the time we arrived and off to school before he awoke the next morning. As it turned out, we had no sooner entered the house than I heard one of my six-year-old twins announce “I think Ricky’s here!” Before he could remove his coat, the three of them, all in their pajamas, had him cornered in the kitchen. My eleven-



year-old son handed him a deck of cards. The other boys began parroting the monologue from one of his television appearances—patter from a stunt in which he tosses a playing card like a boomerang and during its return flight bisects it with a pair of giant scissors. Jay gave me the same look I imagine he gave Mort, the unfortunate New Year's Eve party guest. I immediately reached for the phone directory and found the number of a nearby motel.

Just as resolutely as he avoids children, Jay declines opportunities to perform for other magicians. This habit has earned him a reputation for aloofness, to which he pleads guilty-with-an-explanation. According to Michael Weber, he has a particular aversion to the “magic lumpen”—hoi polloi who congregate in magic clubs and at conventions, where they unabashedly seek to expropriate each other's secrets, meanwhile failing to grasp the critical distinction between doing tricks and creating a sense of wonder. One guy in a tuxedo producing doves can be magic, ten guys producing doves is a travesty. “Ricky won't perform for magicians at magic shows, because they're interested in things,” Weber says. “They don't get it. They won't watch him and be inspired to make magic of their own. They'll be inspired to do that trick that belongs to Ricky. Magic is not about someone else sharing the newest secret.

Magic is about working hard to discover a secret and making something out of it. You start with some small principle and you build a theatrical presentation out of it. You do something that's technically artistic that creates a small drama. There are two ways you can expand your knowledge—through books and by gaining the confidence of fellow-magicians who will explain these things. Ricky to a large degree gets his information from books—old books—and then when he performs for magicians they want to know, ‘Where did that come from?’

And he's appalled that they haven't read this stuff. So there's this large body of magic lumpen who really don't understand Ricky's legacy—his contribution to the art, his place in the art, his technical proficiency and creativity. They think he's an elitist and a snob.”

Jay does not regard “amateur” as a pejorative. His two most trusted magician confidants are Persi Diaconis, a professor of mathematics at Harvard, and Steve Freeman, a corporate comptroller who lives in Ventura, California.

Both are world-class sleight-of-hand artists, and neither ever performs for pay. Jay extolls them as “pure amateurs in the best sense.” The distinction that matters to Jay is between “good” magic and “bad.” Magic “gives me more pleasure and more pain than anything else I've ever dealt with,” he says. “The pain is bad magicians ripping off good ones, doing magic badly, and making a mockery of the art.”

One specific locale that he steers clear of is the Hollywood Magic Castle, a club whose membership consists of both amateur and professional conjurers. On a given night, one can see a great performer at the Magic Castle, but all too often the club is a tepid swamp of gossip, self-congratulation, and artistic larceny—a place where audiences who don't know better are frequently fed a bland diet of purloined ineptitude. Many years ago, Jay had an encounter there that he describes as typical.

BY MARK SINGER

APRIL 5, 1993

(To be continued)

This article appears for the first time in the New Yorker.





# 86th Annual Convention

13 - 15 SEPTEMBER 2024

VENUE CYMRU, LLANDUDNO

PRE-CONVENTION EVENTS AT THE MAGIC BAR LIVE, 12 SEPTEMBER



Billy Reid



Max Fulham



Joel Dickinson



Taylor & Rebecca



Sooty And Friends

**WORKSHOPS ★ LECTURES ★ COMPETITIONS**  
**SHOWS ★ ALI BONGO MICRO MARATHON**  
**PLUS MUCH MORE TO BE ANNOUNCED!**

**REGISTRATION:** [ibmbritishring25reg@gmail.com](mailto:ibmbritishring25reg@gmail.com)



[www.britishring.org.uk](http://www.britishring.org.uk)





# DUTCH CHAMPIONSHIP STAGE & CLOSE-UP MAGIC

5&6 OCT. 2024  
FIGI ZEIST

— powered by —

**BICYCLE**  
TRUSTED SINCE 1885®





Amsterdam Magic Society

Zeedijk 24

1012 AZ Amsterdam

[www.amsterdammagicsociety.com](http://www.amsterdammagicsociety.com)

[amsterdammagicsociety@gmail.com](mailto:amsterdammagicsociety@gmail.com)

