

Magician has new tricks up his sleeve at Claridge

THE PRESS OF ATLANTIC CITY

by Scott Cronick

ATLANTIC CITY - **Jeff McBride** is different from the average magicians out there. He doesn't pull rabbits out of hats or use elaborate illusion machines to make things disappear.

Unlike most magicians, and I'm including the likes of the master entertainer David Copperfield, McBride relies on the skills of incredible athleticism and above-average intelligence, and he can take your breath away with his tricks.

You can get a first-hand glimpse of the magician/illusionist who was named The Best of Las Vegas in a Las Vegas Review Journal Poll in 1997 at the Claridge Casino Hotel, where he performs nightly (except Friday) until Nov. 16.

If McBride's name sounds familiar, it should. He has performed in Atlantic City before, starting out as an opening act and eventually working his way to a headlining gig at the Showboat Casino-Hotel a few years ago. He has appeared on national television network specials and has earned kudos for his magic around the world.

If you did see him at the Showboat, you won't believe how much he has improved. Sure, he still has some of the same tricks up his sleeve, but like a good magician will say, "Practice makes perfect." And McBride's show is nearly that.

If you're a fan of simple magic, the type of magic that doesn't challenge the viewer, McBride may not be your type. He's an intellectual musician who mixes the lessons he's learned around the world with the magic he picked up as a child.

This show, called "Abracadazzle," takes the audience on a journey around the world, as he performs tricks with corresponding music, dance and martial arts techniques from Japan to the United States and dates back 5,000 years.

McBride's segments are usually complemented by a story that adds depth to his show. After seeing magician after magician, this reviewer found McBride is a refreshing treat.

While some of his tricks are complicated illusions - such as when he levitates one of his assistants or sticks swords into a box holding one of his assistants - McBride is at his best when he keeps it simple.

On the show's second night, McBride pulled a child from the crowd and had the audience, and the boy, in stitches as he dropped coins out of the boy's ears, hair and hands and dropped them into a bucket. The trick wasn't overly complicated, but it still

made the audience and the participant question how it was done. In fact, the boy was looking in his hand for coins after the trick was over.

One of McBride's greatest tricks involved Houdini's famous Spanish Torture Rack routine, which McBride promises to escape from in 30 seconds. It took Houdini five minutes. And on top of that, there's a nice surprise ending to the trick.

On a side note, opener Scott Hitchcock, who also assists McBride, looks to have a promising career of his own.

Performing completely silent, Hitchcock performed simple magic with tremendous originality, precision and humor. He made old-hat standards like the knot-in-a-rope trick and the dancing cane fresh again. He's worth the ridiculously low \$15 ticket price alone.

On the way out, some people were muttering that this show is the best the Claridge has offered in more than 10 years. While this critic hasn't been in town that long, it would be hard to believe that isn't the truth.