

## Dazzled in Atlantic City: Abacadazzle

### **GENII: THE CONJURORS' MAGAZINE**

by Simon Lovell

Jeff's opening piece incorporates Abbi Spinner and Scott Hitchcock in Voodoo People. Dressed in black, complete with top hat and sunglasses, and looking a little like the film images of a real Doctor Samedi Voodoo worker, Jeff moves swiftly through an opening sequence of silk and flame to cane, paper to liquid, a Head Spinner (on the "hexed" Scott), Candle through Arm, Botania and a long, long mouth coil using a young lady from the audience! Whew!



It was then that Jeff welcomed us all to the show and introduced the first of his large illusion sets. Our journey went back to ancient times of mystery and tribal drumming with Shamans Drum. Essentially this a Drum production of Joan DuKore but that simple skeleton is surrounded with so much more to give the final effect a very satisfying meaning. This is not, as so many illusions are these days, a prance around for three minutes to the music then produce/stab/slice the girl effect. Instead there is an identifiable build to the story where the magical illusion becomes part of a whole rather than a trick tagged on to the end of a dance routine. The fan versus drums sequence is especially satisfying as each tries to outdo the other yet maintain an admiration for the opposing element. A friendly "battle" enjoyed by all.

Working silently, Jeff then got a young man on stage to help with his exquisite Sorcerer's Apprentice routine. Although coins are produced and tossed into a metal bucket this really is not a Miser's Dream piece. The young man is taught to do magic! When the young apprentice produces a coin, the look on his face, combined with the applause of the audience, is a moment to savor. It is certainly a moment that the young man will remember for a long, long time. Holding up a magic wand, Jeff explained that this is a symbol of magic handed down from magician to magician. When he presented the wand to the newest magician of them all, his young helper, I took a deep and satisfied breath. I swear the woman in the next booth had a small tear in her eye, it really was a highly emotionally charged moment. The young man left the stage on cloud nine!

Next on our journey was a visit to Japan and kabuki Magic. Paper butterflies were fanned to dance above the stage leading to our magician using his fan to levitate a young lady. A lot of magic happens (a silk unties itself, more silks, a mask and costume pieces are produced, there's even a Snowstorm effect) but, more importantly, everything has a meaning to build to the climax of the piece.



The next three segments are signature McBride performances. Rainmaker tells the tale of a thirsty man, his water bowls empty, imploring the heavens for refreshment. The magic and manipulation of the ensuing water is astonishing but, better still, the use of magic for necessity rather than trivial trickery is an object lesson in giving the effect a reason for being. Reincarnation takes us to India where a Sword Basket becomes the central core of a deeper and darker plot line of death and rebirth and, finally, the Circles of Life showcases Jeff's martial art training as he links and unlinks the Chinese Linking Rings.

Now we take a break from Jeff's intense personal journey as he introduces his special guests, Scott Hitchcock and Joan DuKore known together as Magic Feets. This delightful performance is set in the days of swing music, zoot suits, and crazy dancing! The magic and dance, superbly choreographed by Joan and Scott, meld together beautifully to tell a romantic tale of boy meets and gets girl. Scott and Joan left the stage to loud and prolonged applause.

Now we enter a darker side of Jeff McBride's journey as the masked man fights to escape the multi-layered demons taking him over. Masks control him as much as he tries to fight away from them. He tears at his face to reveal a blank face beneath then a skull face. He dies and is reborn as a robot but still fighting to regain himself. Finally, in an ultimate example of man over his magic, he triumphs to be himself once more. Wow! This is, of course, a combination of Jeff's first mask act along with elements of the Mask in the Mirror performance. The result is a most powerful example of the effect magic can have on a performer and how he can grow and transform to both control it and himself as the magician. Huge applause for this breathtaking segment!

In control of himself, our magician now takes on a challenge in the form of the Spanish Torture Rack. Locked into a framework of bars and chains, Jeff explains that he will try to escape in 30 seconds. We see him steal the keys from one of the torturers. Ha! That's how he's going to escape. Unfortunately he's caught by the torturer and making it much more than a trick. Our wise mage is using his magic not just for tricks but to overcome a seemingly insurmountable obstacle!

Our journey was nearly over. We had traveled with Jeff through time and place to see the growth of his magic. We had seen the inner struggles to control and transform the arcane art and esoteric knowledge to his will. We had seen the man use his magic to escape the impossible. A most satisfying journey indeed. But the best, as it should be, was yet to come in the finale piece. Jeff explained to us that though he couldn't tell his how his magic was done (I guess he'd grown beyond the mask!) he could tell us why he did it. He spoke of his dreams as a very young man to be the very best that there could be at the most difficult of all magic, pure sleight-of-hand. Simply put, he wanted, like an early Houdini poster, to lay claim to title King of Cards.



So now we saw the culmination of journey. No big props or helpers, no fancy lights or smoke, just the magician standing center stage with only his finely honed skills to win over the audience. And win them over he did with a dazzling array of card fans, productions, and spins into the audience. The final focus, a production of cards from his mouth, so often used as a throw-away by others, centered everything upon the man finally in full control of his art and his dreams. He knew, as did we, that he was a magician of the highest order. The applause was deafening.

The show promised us a journey and delivered that and a great deal more. No mere magic show indeed but a compelling look into the heart of a master magician. It was not so much a show that Jeff put on but more that he lured us into his world for a while to experience, rather than just vicariously enjoy, his magical art.

Scott Hitchcock and Joan DuKore add a special magic all of their own within the show and Abbi Spinner both compliments and adds her own grace and style to many of the pieces that make up the whole. This is an ensemble show of the highest order.

Through the eye holes of my own mask I saw a show that was truly a magical journey that I'd be very happy to travel again. I advise you to do the same. It's a journey you'll thoroughly enjoy at many levels. You'll laugh, you'll be amazed, you may even shed a tear or two. But you won't see tricks. No, no my friends. You'll experience magic.