A STUDY OF THE PERFORMANCE OF MAGIC DURING THE GOLDEN AGE

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Thesis

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Can the past illuminate the present? Can performers of the past instruct contemporary performers in their craft? To be specific, can a modern magician learn from those magicians who have passed before him or her? I believe that the older masters can offer the modern performer important guidance.

In this study I will look at the performances of a specific group of magicians who practiced magic during an age which spanned 121 years. This study will consider their performances as well as how they viewed their craft and will conclude with a working script of a magic show which incorporates the lessons learned.

Every magician looks out at the audience and asks the same question: “How am I going to mystify them this time?” The spectators enter the performance space steeped in the reality of daily life. They have an idea of what is possible and what is impossible. Each spectator comes to the performance knowing that two plus two equals four. The magician, however, knows better. He knows that two plus two might equal five. Before the performance is over, the spectators will also believe that this is true. The magician’s skill lies in his ability to make disbelievers believe in the impossible.
Throughout this study, I will use the terms “magician” and “conjuror” interchangeably. Although women have performed magic, for clarity’s sake I will use the masculine pronoun when writing of magicians and their craft.

The Golden Age began in 1844, when a French clockmaker, Jean Eugene Robert-Houdin, introduced a new style of stage magic. Previously, magic had been performed behind large tables draped with long hanging covers. Hiding under these drapes was the magician’s crew, thrusting items to the table surface through trap doors or purloining items from the sight of the spectators. The magician appeared costumed in wizard style robes equipped with all manner of hidden pockets for tricks and devices. This style of garb supported the magician’s image as a purveyor of ancient magic. As audiences grew more sophisticated, however, it became more difficult to fool them through this style of performance.

Robert-Houdin made major changes in the appearance and the content of the magic performance. He streamlined the presentation of magic by replacing the heavy tables and furnishings with thin tables adorned with attractive narrow draping. He dispensed with the bulky wizard’s robes, presenting himself to his audience dressed in elegant formal evening attire. In his performance, he relied upon sleight of hand. With the skill of legerdemain (sleight of hand), Robert-Houdin made objects appear and disappear with a natural ease. With his innovations, magic reached a level of sophistication, which it had never enjoyed before this time.

In revolutionizing the look and performance of stage magic, Jean Eugene Robert-Houdin earned the title “Father of Modern Magic” and ushered in The Golden Age of Magic. Many fine masters of magic followed in his footsteps. These masters included
Carl and Alexander Herrmann, Harry Kellar, Howard Thurston, William Robinson (a.k.a. Chung Ling Soo), Harry Houdini, and Harry Blackstone, Sr.

Throughout this period, the magicians continued to evolve from headlining their own shows to sharing the stage with other acts on the vaudeville circuit. Vaudeville offered a great opportunity for magicians to present their craft. Magicians and other performers crisscrossed the nation playing to a variety of audiences.

More than four thousand magicians played on vaudeville bills around the world between the 1890s and the 1930s. At the turn of the century there were twenty theatres presenting variety shows – acrobats, jugglers, comedians, singers, animal turns, dramatic skits, and novelty acts – in and around London and as many within a thirty-mile radius of New York City. Acts varied in length from eight minutes to an hour. Entertainers could work a hundred weeks in the United States without appearing twice in the same city by playing the Keith circuit in the East, the Orpheum chain in the West, and the other affiliated theatres in the South and the Midwest. (Christopher and Christopher 274)

In the early years of the twentieth century the world changed and magic moved from the vaudeville stage to the battlefront of the First and Second World Wars. Magicians and their crews were flown and shipped in behind the fighting lines to entertain the troops. Magic shows flourished throughout both world wars at home and on the front lines. At the end of the 1950s, stage magic began to wane in popularity. The Golden Age drew to a close with the death of Harry Blackstone, Sr., in 1965. The live performance of magic languished due to the popularity of television until it was reborn on the stages of Broadway and Las Vegas and in the 1980s, magic began to reach new audiences through big budget, large scale presentations on television. Today, magic has become big show business, performed at private magic nightclubs, such as the Magic Castle in Hollywood, California and The Centre for the Magical Arts in London as well
as in Las Vegas and on the streets of New York City (Einhorn 20, 27). Magic now reaches millions more people through spectacular presentations.

In the next chapter, I will analyze six pillars of a magician’s craft. Throughout the history of the craft, magicians have been aware of these basic pillars and incorporated them into their work. The master magicians of The Golden Age incorporated them into their performances as well as into their personal lives.
Upon analyzing the performances of conjurors, throughout the history of magic, I have identified six pillars upon which a magician builds his show. These six pillars are:

- The image of the magician
- Confidence in performance
- The relationship with the audience
- The ability to tell a story
- The timing of each effect
- The use of stagecraft

Pillar One: The Image of the Magician

The image projected by the magician can be larger than life. He is a keeper of arcane secrets and privy to mysterious wisdom. He can do things which are extraordinary. For the magician to succeed, however, there needs to be a personal side to his image which enables the spectators to feel comfortable in his presence.

Once the image is established, the conjuror begins building a level of trust with his audience. This allows the magician to play with their minds and stretch their
imaginations. The spectators will not entrust their imaginations to a stranger unless they feel this confidence.

The magician crafts his image just as a playwright creates a character in writing a play. Prior to The Golden Age, the magician performed as a worker of miracles. They dressed the part, creating miracles appropriate for their character. These early performers borrowed heavily from the legends of Merlin (King Arthur’s court magician) and Asian sorcerers.

However, the magician’s image changed dramatically with the French magician Robert-Houdin. In analyzing his craft, Robert-Houdin developed a working definition of a magician: “a magician is an actor playing the part of a magician” (Nelms 37). The role magician includes being a tour guide into the world of the strange and unusual to which the spectators don’t ordinarily have access. For example, in the hands of the magician a simple card trick can take the audience into the colorful world of the big riverboats which plied the Mississippi and the legendary gamblers who worked the boats.

The formation of the magician’s image began long before the magician appeared on stage. The image of the magician was introduced to the community through brightly colored lithographic posters. Everything about the magician was larger than life.

Next, the magician was seen about town, mingling with the public. This appearance often included visits to the local hospital and orphanages for impromptu performances for those who were unable to attend a performance in the local theatre.
The master magician, Alexander Herrmann, was noted for being a grand performer on and off stage. He had a talent for creating illusions on the spur of the moment to amaze the folks around him. He is remembered for causing a disturbance at a local fruit stand one morning when he “found” a silver dollar in a piece of fruit, which he had just purchased. Seeing the treasure that he had discovered, both fruit vendor and customers suddenly began attacking fruit, tearing open oranges and grapefruits, seeking similar riches for themselves (Rydell and Gilbert 74).

The magician’s image actually became a persona, which the performer lived offstage as well. This was the case of one of the most unusual performers of The Golden Age, the clever William Robinson. To take advantage of the public’s fascination with Chinese conjurors, Robinson created a fictional magician named “Chung Ling Soo.” Robinson developed to a fine detail the persona of a Chinese aristocratic conjuror. Robinson’s wife “Dot” adopted the stage name “Suee Seen” to fit in with her husband’s Chinese persona. Suee Seen performed as his assistant and co-starred in the show. Robinson and Dot appeared in character together both on and off stage (Steinmeyer 6b).

When on the street, Robinson enhanced his persona by dressing in Chinese-style clothing and speaking in a stylized gibberish which the spectators assumed was authentic Chinese language. The cast pretended that Chung Ling Soo didn’t speak English. During interviews with reporters, Fee Lung, a performer in the show, served as an interpreter to continue the charade. (Steinmeyer 220b) In the show, another performer’s own young daughter, Nina, acted as Soo’s daughter. Nina was half-Japanese, but her Asian features served Robinson well, adding to his image as a Chinese performer (Steinmeyer 287b).
The Chinese community understood the reality of this masquerade. They did not, however, resent his charade, but treated Robinson with great respect because of the honor which he brought to them. The Chinese community often sent him baskets of flowers and prepared special meals with gourmet delicacies when he ate at their restaurants (Steinmeyer 290b).

On one occasion, while in Australia, the Robinsons and their friends stopped by a Chinese restaurant after his last show. On that occasion, the Chinese staff and clientele at the restaurant were treated to an impromptu magic performance. In turn, they presented him with fine Chinese gifts. While in Australia, Robinson and Dot toured in Chinese clothes and raised money for the poor and sick in the Chinese community (Steinmeyer 312b, 313b).

Pillar Two: Confidence in Performance

The great magicians of The Golden Age succeeded in their craft because they gained the confidence of their audience. They did this by exuding confidence in themselves and their program. They had learned that confidence comes from practicing their effects and rehearsing their shows like a play. They had confidence because they knew that their cast, crew and technicians had rehearsed the placing and positioning of each prop. Each assistant had rehearsed various ways of presenting each prop to the magician. The master magicians knew that they could fool the audience because each angle had been studied from various sight lines. Through this process, the conjurors gained confidence in themselves and their staffs. The master magicians also found ways to do damage control if and when something might go wrong in the show. At last, when
the curtain went up, the magician presented himself as a person with great confidence because of all of this preparation.

Confidence also came to the magician because he trusted in the equipment and the technicians who created and built it. Percy Ritherdon was a master craftsman who created fine illusions for many of the master magicians, including the William Robinson Chung Ling Soo Show. He once explained the long process to develop a new illusion. He explained how each new illusion was tested and rehearsed before it was packed up to take out on the road. Ritherdon said:

“Each trick is perfected, (worked) a dozen times more and then probably put on one side for a time until (an even) more effective way of working it has been thought out. Mr. Soo (Robinson) always has half a dozen new illusions in the making “(Steinmeyer 246b).

The great magicians knew the importance of checking the visual aspects of their shows, the importance of considering the show from every angle throughout the house. The master magician Howard Thurston spent hours studying his stage setup, from various seats in the house to understand what the audience saw during performance. When he studied an illusion on stage Thurston looked for defects, odd shadows, and flashes of light which might give away the secret devices used in an effect. (Steinmeyer 242a)

Confidence also came when the magician, as actor, treated everything on stage as if it were absolutely real. This added reality to the performance, which was important in the audience’s suspending disbelief (Nelms 28). On stage, reality is whatever the magician and his cast says it is.

When he entered the stage, the magician had confidence in his ability to spellbind the audience. The magician began summoning his self confidence by reminding himself who he was playing. To succeed with his performance Bill Robinson took this extra step
farther. He created within himself a mindset that he was not only a great conjuror, but also a Chinese aristocrat. On one occasion, he told a friend, “The moment I step upon the stage, I lose my identity and become Chung Ling Soo” (Steinmeyer 218b).

Pillar Three: The Relationship with the Audience

The magician needs a good trusting relationship with the audience. The spectators must trust that the magician will show them wonderful feats of magic, but that he would never put them in harm or mislead them on purpose. There are things which a magician can do to enhance this trust. For instance he can make volunteers a part of several of his effects. He can do this by inviting members of the audience to come up on stage to participate in the show. Inviting them up on stage creates the illusion that what is taking place is real. It also affords the magician the opportunity to secretly pass items to and from accomplices, who come on stage, appearing to be random volunteers. These secret items can include keys or lock picks for escape acts and fake thumb tips. A fake thumb tip is a common device used by magicians to make silks appear from the finger tips. It consists of a flesh colored shell resembling a thumb. The shell is worn over the magician’s real thumb with a small silk hankie hidden inside of it.

Sharing the stage with members of the audience is very important in building a trusting relationship. Harry Houdini became a master escape artist and accomplished magician who knew the importance of audience participation. He believed that it was important to get close to the audience to help them feel the intensity of what was happening on stage, by inviting spectators on stage or performing near to the front of the stage, on the apron, close to the audience itself. Houdini said, “I never spoke to the front
row. I would walk down to the footlights, actually put one foot over the electric globes as if I were going to spring among the people, and then hurl my voice saying, ‘Ladies and Gentlemen’” (Steinmeyer 150a).

When selecting volunteers to come on stage, it is important to choose volunteers who will improve the performance of the effect. Certain volunteers can enhance the validity of what is taking place on stage. Men, women, boys and girls in uniform, such as scouts or sailors, are of great support when demonstrating that the knots of a rope are secure. These people are supposed to have an intrinsic expertise in ropes and knots. Following this same line of reasoning, police officers and detectives are ideal volunteers for checking handcuffs. “Inspectors should be people who will convince spectators that they are both trustworthy and hard to fool” (Nelms 61).

Even the appearance of certain volunteers coming on stage can work well to entertain the audience, especially if the magician is trying for comic relief. Volunteers who appear to have a good sense of humor are ideal. Several volunteers coming on stage together, who seem visually mismatched, are also worth selecting. For example, contrast is effective if the magicians select a short, heavy-set individual to come up with a tall, thin volunteer (Nelms 60).

Working with volunteers gives the magician the opportunity to be personable and friendly. These positive qualities communicate well to the rest of the house, who are not able to come forward. If the conjuror is of good humor and enjoying the performance, the audience will also enjoy the show. It leaves them wanting more. Audiences recall David Devant, English magician of The Golden Age, charming them at the end of his
show. As they exited the theatre, he would call out with a smile. “All done by kindness” (Steinmeyer 266a).

Pillar Four: The Ability to Tell a Story

Storytelling is important in creating illusion. The spoken word is still used in casting a spell over the spectators. Patter (the spoken words which accompany the performing of the effect) sets up each illusion. The story helps set the mood, mesmerizes the audience and sells the effect to the spectators. In each illusion there are many possibilities for interesting stories. Some stories are suggested by the designs painted upon the effect itself. For example, the jumbo Phantom Tube produced by Mak Magic (a production device) came painted with the image of a volcano suggesting a Polynesian or Japanese theme. Other illusions suggest themes because of their origin. Many illusions have traditional stories which are used when performing them.

Pillar Five: The Timing of Each Effect

As with comedy, timing is important in magic. Each illusion requires a different pace for its presentation. With some illusions, such as production boxes, in which a variety of items are produced from one box, the pace changes during the presentation. The pace is slower in the beginning of the illusion and then it speeds up as items start appearing in the box. Other illusions, such as The Zombie Ball (a levitation device), are enhanced by a slow pace which gives the impression of floating. Timing is important as well for the image of the conjuror. Slower pace helps enhance the image of the performer as a poised, polished and competent magician (Nelms 33).
Pillar Six: The Use of Stagecraft

Stagecraft is employed to set the mood for both the audience and the magician. The master magicians knew the value of stagecraft to enhance their shows. Sets, sound, lighting, make-up, costumes, props, styles of acting and movement all help suspend the disbelief of the audience. In theatre, these elements blend together to make the play believable to the audience. The magic show also needs suspension of disbelief to succeed. In a magic show, suspension of disbelief begins when the curtain rises and a particular atmosphere is revealed on stage (Nelms 28).

We will now look at the conjurors who came before The Golden Age to see how they constructed a successful performance. Long before the magic of Robert-Houdin became an elegant art form, it was a religion practiced on cave walls and forest clearings.
CHAPTER III

THE HISTORY OF MAGIC

For the magician an understanding of how the craft developed is important for two reasons: 1) To help the magician know where he stands in the history of magic; and 2) to give an understanding of how magic was presented. Magicians need to understand how particular effects were presented, the weaknesses, and the dangers of certain effects.

Magic in the Ancient World

Before magic became a performing art, it was religion. In many primitive societies, magic is a way of trying to control the world and keep away harm. The magician’s first parlor was the cave and the forest clearing. The evening show was performed in front of painted images of animals, in preparation for the next day’s hunt. The magician, dressed in animal skins, chanted and danced around the fire, lashing out at the animal paintings with a wand or a staff. The magician’s magic assured a successful hunt (Rydell and Gilbert 14).

The coming of civilization brought a division in the field of magic. Magic continued in many societies as religion, but for others it became entertainment (Rydell and Gilbert 33). Entertainment forms of magic borrowed from religious rituals. The ancient conjurors who followed these cave shamans adopted devices and deception to entertain.
Magic developed into entertainment in ancient Egypt through the work of a magician named Dedi or Deda. In 1832 the archaeologist Henry Westcar unearthed a papyrus scroll which became known as The Westcar Scroll (Rydell and Gilbert 35). The Westcar Scroll written in 1700 B.C. tells of magic performed in 2600 B.C. by the performer Dedi. It gives an account of his performance at the palace in Memphis. The Westcar Scroll indicates just how popular he was: Dedi was “requested” to appear before Pharaoh Khufu, rather than “ordered” to appear (Rydell and Gilbert 35).

Dedi understood the importance of image for a magician. He created various legends about his own powers and immortality. He marketed himself well, developing an image of a master magician. Dedi claimed to be 110 years old and able to out-drink and out-eat the gods themselves (Rydell and Gilbert 35). His material included removing, switching and restoring the heads of various large birds such as ducks and geese (Rydell and Gilbert 36).

Dedi is to be admired, not only for his skill as a magician and his aplomb as a showman, but also for his sense of ethics as a magician. Despite the respect and awe that Dedi inspired, he never proclaimed to be more than a master conjuror skilled in the art of misdirection and sleight of hand. He believed in mystifying, but not abusing, the audience. This ethic is still followed by magicians today. Their fellow performers label magicians who break this ethic as “charlatans.”

Magic spread throughout the ancient world in its entertainment form. The illusions, which were popular with the audiences of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Babylon, included turning walking sticks into cobras and bringing wax carvings of crocodiles to life (Christopher and Christopher 8). The effect Cups and Balls was also popular with
ancient audiences. Cups and Balls is the illusion in which three or more balls are hidden under three cups. The cups are moved about allowing the balls to appear, disappear, and change position under the three cups. Archaeologists discovered the drawings of a variation of Cups and Balls on the walls of the Egyptian tomb of Beni Hasan. The painting dates back to 2500 B.C. (Christopher and Christopher 11). This venerable early illusion is still a staple of modern magicians.

Greek and Roman magicians developed illusions using water and wine as well as very large illusions, including full sized temples which made eerie sounds when spectators entered. The effect was achieved by hidden pulleys and underground chambers. As the doors of the temple opened, water was released into the chamber. When the water rose in the underground chambers, it forced air through sets of trumpets, creating eerie music (Gibson 20).

Magic in the East and Middle East

In India the magicians known as fakirs developed the use of ropes and the charming of snakes to entertain spectators. The legendary Hindu Rope Illusion has been considered a staple of Indian magic for years. The fakir tosses the end of a coiled rope skyward. To the amazement of the spectators the rope remains taut, suspended from the sky. At this point, a young boy comes forward and climbs up the rope into the sky. With a flourish, the fakir pulls down the rope, but the child is missing. In reality, this trick is only a legend. It has never been performed (Christopher and Christopher 13).

Middle Eastern conjurors often performed in turbans and long flowing robes. They worked with silks and cabinets. The folk tales of Persia and ancient Babylon were
employed by these performers to add local color to their patter. The images and the 
stories of these cultures still serve magicians today.

Asian conjurors dressed in silken robes and worked with similar objects as their 
Western counterparts these devices included rings, silks, rice production bowls, fans, and 
cabinets. Many contemporary illusions date back to these early masters. These illusions 
include Linking Rings, Rice Bowls, Phantom Silk Tube, and illusions with fans. Asian 
conjurors and Middle Eastern magicians in flowing silk robes and turbans performed with 
exotic paraphernalia enticed the imagination to think of exotic and marvelous lands.

Magic is the most universal of the performing arts . . . Magic challenges the 
imagination, stimulates audiences to think – gives them an opportunity to relax 
and escape from the problems of reality. (Christopher and Christopher 7)

Magic in the West

During the Middle Ages (476-1450 c.) and the Renaissance Period (1300-1600 c.) 
magic in the West was influenced by the image of Merlin, King Arthur’s magician. 
Merlin presented an image of a wizard or sorcerer. A wizard is a magician who controls 
the environment around him through the use of mystical powers. A sorcerer is a 
magician who has the power or knowledge to manipulate the four elements upon which 
everything in the universe is constructed (water, air, earth, and fire). The four elements is 
a medieval concept. Illusions during this period centered on production of items from 
within the magician’s deep pockets of his robe or tall conical hat. Chemical illusions, 
mock decapitations, and simulated torture with knives with retractable blades were quite 
popular with the spectators. These devices often had blood reservoirs in the handles, 
adding the spice of gore. Gore is still a big crowd pleaser with spectators.
A master conjuror during the time of the French Revolution, Joseph Balsamo performed under the stage name of the Count of Cagliostro. Balsamo was quite popular at baffling his audiences with two illusions: The Elixir of Life and The Material Prime. Drinking the Elixir of Life, he would effect a radical change in his appearance before the eyes of the spectators. He appeared to become younger and younger. Applying the Material Prime to a cauldron of base metals, such as iron and lead, Balsamo appeared to change them into precious metals, such as silver and gold. In his patter, he explained how both of these mysterious powers were the dream of the ancient sorcerers, known as the alchemists (Gibson 35).

Magic in the New World

In Colonial America, there were difficulties for magicians to overcome before they could perform before their audiences. The Puritans who operated many of the colonies set the standards for morality and decency. They were not in favor of this prestidigitation (sleight of hand) business. They felt that magic was a cover for witchcraft. They also thought that sleight of hand was too frivolous for serious minded Christian folk. Magic was not a pastime for good God-fearing people to be watching or doing (Christopher and Christopher 48).

As the United States moved from the Colonial Period to the Pioneer Period, traveling magicians often performed in the local inns and taverns. A magician born in America, Richard Potter (1783-1835) changed the way in which magic was performed in the New World (Christopher and Christopher 63, 65). Potter developed large stage shows (Christopher and Christopher 68). Potter created a variety format, placing other
performers on his bill. Spectators, for the price of admission, enjoyed his illusions, as well as the skills of ventriloquists, orators, and singers (Christopher and Christopher 67).

As magic in the West expanded, the techniques developed by conjurors were borrowed by other performing artists in the fields of puppetry, ventriloquism, theatre, and animal acts. More and more magicians incorporated these variety show performers into their newly expanded programs (Christopher and Christopher 59).

Magic on the American Frontier

The magicians in the West included Native Americans performers. These skilled and talented magicians performed effects similar to the fakirs of India. Their performances, however, were rarely covered in the press at the time. This is perhaps because of a basic difference in the approach to performing by these two groups. The fakirs performed for money in the open where tourists gathered. Native American magicians, however, used magic only to entertain their tribe. It was a secret performance. Native magic was performed around the campfire, allowing the fire and smoke to help mask the use of devices, such as cords for suspending or moving objects. Magic was performed in over one hundred American tribes in the United States, with each tribe preferring different illusions. The Dancing Arrow Levitation was a favorite with Navaho audiences. For Algonquin audiences, Catching the Bullet was a crowd pleaser. The Apache spectators enjoyed seeing a magician’s assistant disappear in a woven basket. Hopi conjurors presented a growing corn plant that was quite similar to the Eastern magicians’ Mango Plant. Toltecan magicians presented a mysterious dancing doll. For
the Kwakiutl conjurors Dedi’s old decapitation (the removing of the heads of several fowls then redistributing them on different creatures) worked well (Rydell and Gilbert 41).

Magic of the Golden Age

By the 1800s, magic had become as popular as opera or the theatre. In Britain, the amazing Isaac Fawkes was drawing record crowds to the theatres where he performed. At the same time, the Italian conjuror, Giuseppe Pinetti was performing in Britain and on the continent (Einhorn 15). Joining this group of conjurors was the Scottish conjuror, John Henry Anderson (a.k.a. “The Wizard of the North”), who presented his show in Europe, America, and Australia. Through the fine performances of these three performers and other conjurors, magic became recognized as an art form as well as excellent entertainment (Einhorn 15). The stage was now set for a new magician, whose approach to magic would change the practice for the next two hundred years. Magic would soon begin its Golden Age.

The Masters of Magic of the Golden Age

Jean Eugene Robert-Houdin (1805-1871)

Robert-Houdin, became a magician as a result of a mistake at his local bookshop. Robert-Houdin, a clock maker born in Bloise, France, received a magic book instead of the book on clock repair that he had ordered. He became fascinated as he read about magic. (Rydell and Gilbert 62) Seeking to learn more he started attending the performances of various magicians performing in and around Paris. After observing the performances of Giovanni Bartolomeo Bosco, and Jacques Andre Noel Talon a.k.a.
Philippe Robert-Houdin concluded that stage magic, as he observed it, was unwieldy and contrived. He felt that a magic performance could be better than the way it was being presented (Christopher and Christopher 135, 136). With this resolve he began to craft his own magic show.

Robert-Houdin decided that if the performer was interested in pleasing the audience, it was important to see the show from the audience’s viewpoint. Later in his life, he explained:

I intended to have an elegant and simple stage, unencumbered by all the paraphernalia of the ordinary conjurer. Real sleight of hand must not be the tin man’s work, but the artist’s... Of course, I abstained from any eccentric costume, and I never thought of making any change in the attire civilized society has agreed to accept for evening dress. My only fear was whether the public would accept these important reforms and such elegant simplicity. (Steinmeyer 143-144a)

As he was beginning his study of magic, Robert-Houdin attended the performance of the Italian master of Cups and Balls, Giovanni Bartolomeo Bosco. In Bosco’s performance, a live canary was decapitated and its dead body was shot out of a pistol. Robert-Houdin objected to this crude, savage approach to magic that affected how he chose to present magic (Christopher and Christopher 135). When the time came for him (Robert-Houdin) to present his own show, he resolved never to include anything objectionable on the program and wear the fashionable evening dress of a gentleman (Christopher and Christopher 135).

Robert-Houdin also noticed that, despite the fine quality of the machinery being used on stage, on occasion equipment failed. He believed a conjuror should be infallible; Robert-Houdin resolved never to present any feat that was not mechanically perfect (Christopher and Christopher 136). The magic show that he constructed was well
rehearsed, elegant, tasteful and presented with suave sophistication. He created an evening of good entertainment for the entire family. Magic became an art form under Robert-Houdin (Christopher and Christopher 135).

Robert-Houdin knew the value of publicity to spread his name throughout the public. Along with creating exciting handbills and posters, he felt that a magician needed an enticing story about his origin, a legend about how he entered into the field of magic. According to the story he circulated, Robert-Houdin’s career as a magician began when he was a young man traveling on a lonely road. Exhausted and suffering from stomach poisoning, he collapsed by the road. The pain was great and he feared that he was about to die. Then out of nowhere a great multicolored show wagon came rolling up. A friendly man got out and placed Robert-Houdin gently into a bed on the wagon. The show wagon belonged to the great traveling Italian magician, Torrini. The kindly Torrini nursed Robert-Houdin back to good health. When he felt better, the old magician taught him his craft. For many years, Torrini and his young companion traveled together entertaining audiences. The public loved this story. Of course it was only a story fabricated to enhance his growing career. Torrini never existed (Steinmeyer 146b).

There was a touch of novelty in every number Robert-Houdin presented. A borrowed handkerchief appeared within one of the oranges, which materialized on a mechanical tree. The fruit split into four sections as two butterflies came from nowhere to unfold the handkerchief in the air. A silk handkerchief was covering enough for him to produce colored plumes and then a basket filled with flowers to be tossed to the ladies of the audience. (Christopher and Christopher 139)

For Robert-Houdin the atmosphere of the show was important in adding to the total effect of the performance. When ether became popular he adopted the idea of the mysterious power to put people to sleep. He used this idea as a gimmick in his levitation
effects. He would speak of the power of ether to lull a person into a trance (Christopher and Christopher 145).

The magic which Robert-Houdin and the other magicians of the mid-1800s performed employed objects such as coins, cards, and hats borrowed from members of the audience. The magicians of this period refrained from performing complicated effects with clumsy machinery (Steinmeyer 140a). Instead, they concentrated their effects on ordinary objects. This gave the spectators a false confidence in what they understood about ordinary objects. When a spectator observes a rope trick he only saw a piece of rope. To the magician, however, a simple piece of rope is a receptacle capable of secreting magnets, hooks, a rod, a silk or even another piece of rope. The magician knew that with ordinary objects spectators could be fooled.

At the end of his career, Robert-Houdin looked back over his long and illustrious work as a magician and how it all began with the mistaken book delivery.

I was eagerly devouring every line of the magic book which described the astonishing tricks; my head was a-glow, and I at times gave way to thought which plunged me in ecstasy . . . How often since have I blessed this providential error, without which I should have probably vegetated as a country watchmaker! (Steinmeyer 142a)

Robert-Houdin believed that magic should not be an amusement for children or fairground ruffians; it belonged in a theatre where it should attract a respectable audience (Steinmeyer 144a). To this end he prepared his finest performances.

Robert-Houdin performed throughout Europe, Great Britain, and North Africa. In Paris, he performed over the years in several small theatres on the Boulevard du Temple, Palais Royal, and the Boulevard des Italiens, as well as his own theatres, the
Soirees Fantastiques and the Theatre Robert-Houdin (Christopher and Christopher 146, 148).

Robert-Houdin’s magic shows were two-hour performances in which he offered his audiences such illusions as The Cup and Balls, The Linking Rings, The Classical Handkerchief Vanish, Second Sight, Coin Vanish and Production, Ethereal Suspension, The Crystal Cash Box, the Pastrycook of the Palais Royal, and the Fantastic Orange Tree (Christopher and Christopher 139, 140,141). In his performances, spectators gained an up-close and personal experience of sharing magic with the magician. There wasn’t any unusual stage craft employed by the shows of Robert-Houdin and his contemporaries. Their concern was that the spectators could properly see and hear what was taking place on the stage. Stagecraft, however, would later be developed to help fool the eyes of the spectators. Later magicians made use of wires and mirrors in various illusions.

Robert-Houdin performed in his own theatres in Paris for seven years before he retired in 1848. Seeking the peace of retirement, he turned the operation of his theatre over to his brother-in-law and retired to his home near Blois. In 1856, he came out of retirement to serve his country in French-held Africa. In Algeria, a local bandit turned rebel was traveling about performing magic in an attempt to prove that he had supernatural powers. Robert-Houdin was brought in by the French government to outwit and outshine the bandit. He was successful in doing this and a possible revolution was squelched. Robert-Houdin was honored and rewarded for his services by the French government (Steinmeyer 145, 146a).

Robert-Houdin retired again to write books on magic and prestidigitation. In 1871, he died in his home in Blois. His books became the textbooks for the magicians
who followed him. His theatre in Paris remained a center for magicians and their audiences into the next century (Steinmeyer 146a).

Carl Herrmann (1816-1887)

In the nineteenth century an amazing family of magicians came to the stage. Two members of this family became masters of The Golden Age of Magic. The first of these was the amazing Carl Herrmann, born in Hanover, Germany, the eldest of sixteen children of Samuel and Anna Herrmann (Steinmeyer 44b). Samuel was an accomplished physician, as well as a talented amateur magician. The children grew up in a home filled with mysterious magic instruments. Several of the older children assisted their father working in his magic shows. All sixteen Herrmann children learned their father’s craft and sleights (Rydell and Gilbert 71).

Despite his love for magic and his talent as a performer, Samuel and his wife Anna always hoped that their children would study medicine. Their oldest child, Compars or Carl, began his studies in medical school, but the call of the stage was stronger and he decided to become a professional magician (Rydell and Gilbert 71).

Carl would eventually be followed by a number of other family members. Samuel and Anna became the parents of the greatest family of magicians including their sons Carl and Alexander, two nephews Leon and Felix, and the wives Adelaide (Alexander’s wife), Gladys (Felix’s wife), Marie (Leon’s wife), Rosa (Carl’s first wife), and Rose (Carl’s second wife).
As a young boy, Carl often assisted his father when he performed magic, developing his own skills as a performer. Carl became a master of sleight of hand and could establish instant rapport with his audiences.

Carl Herrmann fit the image that the public visualized when they thought of a magician. He had a very distinctive look.

He was slender, satanic in appearance, and wore a black moustache and goatee. His artistic sleight-of-hand, continental manner, sly sense of humor, and ability to project his personality in the great opera houses of the world made him an attraction, critics said, on a par with the most talented actors, singers, and dancers of the nineteenth century. (Christopher and Christopher 181)

Carl Herrmann made a number of innovations in the way that magic was performed. During the period in which he performed, magicians were often a part of a larger bill of acts. Carl Herrmann changed this by presenting a three-hour program in which he was the only performer on the bill. He also changed the style of magic that he performed. Other magicians crowded the stage with large cumbersome paraphernalia. In these acts, the equipment itself did the work. Carl Hermann, however, presented amazing demonstrations of sleight of hand, relying on his own skills, instead of devices built into the equipment (Christopher and Christopher 185).

There was always a touch of class in every part of the Carl Herrmann Show. This included the music that accompanied his presentation of magic. During his performance a full Italian opera orchestra in the pit accompanied Carl Herrmann (Christopher and Christopher 187).

Among his many talents, as a magician, was his mastery of scaling cards out into the audience. For each performance, Carl had a large supply of scaling cards printed. Scaling cards are poker size cards with the image of the magician printed on them. These
cards were flipped out into the audience in a manner similar to skipping rocks in a stream.

One of Carl Herrmann’s specialties was hurling playing cards with amazing accuracy into all parts of the house. Sometimes he threw out small photographs of himself or of Rosalie Levy, whom he later married. (Christopher and Christopher 187)

Throughout the 1860s and the 1870s, Carl and his younger brother, Alexander, often performed together in the same show. Audiences loved seeing the two brothers together. Each one, however, cast a slightly different image.

Carl was dark and fascinating – aging, scheming Old Scratch, who spoke with a slightly indefinable German or Russian pronunciation – Alexander was the bright, witty Mephistopheles, whose words bubbled with good humor and sparkled with his Parisian accent. He was billed as the “Comique Necromantique.” (Steinmeyer 46b)

Carl entertained audiences throughout Great Britain, Europe, and the United States. After his younger brother Alexander began performing, there was a fear in the family that the competition between the two might hurt their friendship. This really wasn’t a problem, however, because there was very little jealousy between them. Three years after Alexander had become proficient in the craft of magic, the brothers went into partnership, sending their tours around the world, to eliminate the danger of competition (Rydell and Gilbert 74). Carl and Alexander divided up the world for their performances. While Carl would perform in Europe, Alexander would play to audiences in America (Steinmeyer 46b).

Competition was also avoided due to the type of illusions which each presented in their shows. Carl mothballed the large complicated paraphernalia that had been a part of his earlier performances and chose instead to develop his sleight of hand with cards.
Alexander decided to work with illusions, building and developing gigantic stage illusions (Rydell and Gilbert 74).

Throughout his career, Carl Herrmann sought ways of marketing himself. He knew that part of the image of a performer was the name or title that accompanied the image. Therefore, he needed to select just the right title, which he printed on his posters and handbills. During his numerous tours, he billed himself under several elaborate titles including “The Premier Prestidigitator of France” and “First Professor of Magic in the World” (Christopher and Christopher 182).

His success in promoting his performances was truly stupendous. For example, before his performance at New York’s Academy of Music, on September 21, 1861, he launched a spectacular advance promotion.

The fantastic advance promotion, plus thousands of heralds and hundreds of posters, drew the largest crowd in the history of the Academy of Music. More than three thousand New Yorkers were turned away from the door of the packed hall. (Christopher and Christopher 185-187)

Carl Herrmann throughout his career performed before kings, queens, sultans, czars, and emperors in Germany, Austria, England, Belgium, Italy, Portugal, Turkey, and Russia. He was paid well in money, priceless jewels, titles, and honors (Rydell and Gilbert 72). While performing for President Abraham Lincoln at the White House, he received a brace of perfectly matched dueling pistols in a polished wooden case (Christopher and Christopher 187).

(Christopher and Christopher 189). Included on the bill were illusions created by Johann Nepomuk Hofzinser, an official in the Ministry of Finance in the Viennese government and a friend of Carl’s who loved magic. His magic creations were The Card Star, The Crystal Clock Dial, The Ink Vase, and The Floating Wand (Christopher and Christopher 188).

Carl Herrmann continued performing until 1870, when he announced a farewell tour of the United States and retired to his elegant home in Vienna. His retirement was short lived, however, when the financial panic of 1874 wiped out his savings. When he was fifty-seven years old, Carl Herrmann returned to magic to support himself. After thirteen years of performing on the road he bought a new home in Vienna, and saved an estimated $150,000 (Christopher and Christopher 190).

While performing in Kiev, Russia in 1884, Carl Herrmann fell from a runway in the theatre. He fractured his foot, forcing him to retire for a second time. The injury left him with a limp. On June 8, 1887, at the age of 71 the master Carl Herrmann died of inflammation of the lungs. He was buried in Vienna (Christopher and Christopher 190).

Alexander Herrmann (1844-1896)

Alexander was the second son of Samuel and Anna Herrmann. Like his older brother Carl, he also disregarded his parent’s wish for him to study medicine. At age ten, he joined his older brother Carl’s magic show on its way to Russia. As he grew up on the stage, Alexander proved to be a world-class magician of the quality of his older brother, Carl.
The Brothers Herrmann brought their marvelous magic to audiences all over the world – to the United States where Alex was especially popular and to Europe, where Carl had always drawn the warmest applause (Rydell and Gilbert 72).

Alexander Herrmann (a.k.a. “The Great Herrmann”) was one of the most elegant of performers. He only performed in the finest theatres. From masterful sleight of hand to working with large precision built cabinets his shows were spectacular. He inspired many young people to become magicians. One of those young men was his assistant, William Robinson, who would one day become a master magician himself.

Every minute of the Herrmann show was an inspiration. Robinson watched Herrmann’s elegant entrance; the way he pulled off his gloves, rolled them into a ball and made them disappear at his fingertips. He studied the way the great magician scaled cards into the audience. (Steinmeyer 48b)

Alexander Herrmann presented the classical image of the magician. He was tall and slender with black hair and goatee, dressed in knee breeches, long tailcoat. His eyes flashed with life and a devilish smile played upon his face (Steinmeyer 46b).

Alexander, like his brother Carl, played the role on-stage and off of the suave, debonair master of sleight of hand. Wherever he went, magic took place at his command.

Alexander delighted in extemporaneous magic. He reached in the air, not his pocketbook, for cab fares. He produced cigars from the whiskers of President Ulysses S. Grant. Wine glasses vanished at his fingertips as he drank with friends (Christopher and Christopher 192).

Alexander Herrmann had a wonderful relationship with the spectators who came to his performances. He had a sly, charming humor that revealed to his audience that he was enjoying their time together. In one of his illusions, he turned a cannonball into a large fluffy rabbit. Next, he produced two rabbits from the one rabbit. Then with a sly
smile he said to the audience, “You’ll forgive me. I’ve been told not to split hares” (Steinmeyer 48b).

Alexander was a performer who knew how to use humor to help his audiences enjoy their time with him. Puns were a part of his humor; he knew how to deliver bad puns. He would deliver them with a flourish and then give a Gallic shrug, frowning slightly (Steinmeyer 48b).

There are times in a performance, even with a well-tested routine or equipment, when the equipment will fail. When this happened to Alexander he would use humor to rescue himself. Once while he was performing an illusion in which a bowl full of water was supposed to disappear under his costume, there was an accident. A black rubber cover under the costume slipped. The cover was needed to keep the water in the bowl from spilling. It was supposed to seal off the top of the bowl secretly. To the surprise of Alexander and the audience the rubber cover hit the stage with a loud plop in plain sight. Alexander paused and blinked slowly, and then he calmly, deliberately bent over and picked up the wet, sloppy cover, telling the audience, “Ah, my beret. I always wear it when I perform zis treek!”(Steinmeyer 51b). Then, he placed the wet, sloppy piece of rubber on his head. He continued his performance and produced two more bowls of water.

Herrmann seemed to never to have to work at his magic. He didn’t worry or plot the way that Kellar (Harry Kellar) did, he didn’t indulge in red-faced fits if a prop failed during the show. He was prone to shrug and laugh, knowing that he could carry his audience smoothly over any unfortunate mistakes. He trusted his staff to set up the show in the theatre. (Steinmeyer 115b)
Alexander was always in character, performing on and off of stage. Wherever he went, he always found the opportunity to perform magic to amuse and amaze those around him. Often this caused a great disruption, but always with good humor.

Startling things happened whenever Alex attended a dinner party. The wine glass he was holding might suddenly disappear from his hand only to reappear in another guest's pocket . . . Alex would turn to those around him and say, 'The closer you watch, the less you see.' (Rydell and Gilbert 74)

Alexander was a person of great compassion for other people, especially those whose hearts might be lifted by his special talents. He began the tradition of magicians taking their shows to the audience when the audience wasn’t able to come to the theatre. This tradition began when he went to Sing Sing Prison in Ossining, New York. He first went to the prison in June 1896, to perform an escape based on a real prison escape that occurred in 1893. Riding back home after the performance, he suddenly felt sorry for the inmates who couldn’t leave the prison and had so very little amusement (Steinmeyer 158b).

On July 4, 1896, Alexander, his wife, a few friends and his crew returned to Sing Sing Prison to entertain the inmates. New York Central Railroad arranged a special train for their transportation into the prison. 1,400 inmates greeted the Herrmann troupe. On that occasion, Warden Sage suspended the strict rule about cheering and making noise (Steinmeyer 158, 159b). The New York Times reported that it was a wonderful time for those men who rarely found anything to bring them happiness.

Murderers laughed until tears rolled down their cheeks. . . . Second story men guffawed as “The Great” gave them new points on their profession. Habitual criminals put on new faces for an hour. No stranger audience was ever assembled. (Steinmeyer 159b)
On December 16, 1896, Herrmann took his troupe to Rochester, New York, to the State Industrial School where they entertained the boys and girls incarcerated there. On that occasion, Alexander added extra illusions and jokes to lift the spirits of boys and girls in his audience (Steinmeyer 160b).

Alexander Herrmann was a person of compassion, especially for people in need of help. After his performance at the State Industrial School, he learned that the touring cast for *Our American Cousin* was stranded in Rochester. He came to them to see how he might help.

Herrmann was sympathetic with any theatre professionals; he unselfishly came to their rescue, paying the hotel bills, supplying train fares home and pocket money for dinner, and, according to one writer, “sent the actors on their way rejoicing.” (Steinmeyer 160b)

Alexander performed at a time when magicians traveled with a full technical crew and cast of assistants. Operating with such a large staff, as well as transporting such personnel, can cause difficulties. To deal with all manner of difficulties requires special planning. So Alexander developed a process to prepare for each performance.

He (Herrmann) trusted his staff to set up the show in the theatre. Herrmann arrived shortly before curtain time, put on his greasepaint, and touched up his graying goatee and eyebrows with black makeup. Then he donned his silk hose and patent leather pumps, his white linen shirt and tailcoat. He methodically filled the specially tailored pockets with small props, packets of cards, and rolled handkerchiefs. As the orchestra played an overture, he nodded to his assistants and the stage manager, put on his gloves, picked up his wands, and sauntered into the spotlight. He spoke and wrote excellent English, but as he walked onto the stage his Parisian accent – ‘it iz my plai-zir, lad-iez and gent-le-men’ – was concentrated to a sticky, attractive confection. (Steinmeyer 115b)

Alexander Herrmann’s magic show played in first-class theatres throughout the United States. In New York, Hermann worked at Niblo’s Garden of the Academy of
Music and the tickets might be a dollar, or a dollar fifty, the same price as an opera or the latest melodrama (Steinmeyer 47b).

Alexander Herrmann enlarged his show every year by continually introducing larger illusions. By the 1890s, he had included three to four new spectacular illusions including Cremation, Ko-Ya or Escape from Sing Sing, and the notorious Bullet Catching Illusion (Christopher and Christopher 192, 193).

After the early days of Alexander Herrmann’s career, the brothers did not perform on the same stage.

Many contemporaries who saw Carl Herrmann in Europe said he was the finest magician who ever lived. Those who watched his brother perform in America made the same claim for Alexander. As a family of conjurers, the Herrmanns have never been surpassed. (Christopher and Christopher 197)

In 1896, Alexander Herrmann fell ill aboard a train traveling from New York to his next performance in Bradford, Pennsylvania. Knowing that he was going to die, he returned to New York. As the train approached Great Valley, New York, Alexander Herrmann died (Christopher and Christopher 195).

Heinrich Keller (a.k.a. Harry Kellar) (1849-1922)

Heinrich Kellar was born to German immigrant parents in Erie, Pennsylvania. An unhappy childhood caused him to run away from home at age eleven. He took the train to Cleveland where he supported himself by selling dry goods and newspapers. A job at a drug store ended when the store exploded. Kellar was arrested and brought before the court. The judge placed him in the custody of Reverend Robert Harcourt. Harcourt took the troubled youngster into his home, making him his ward. He liked the boy and
thought that Kellar might follow him into the calling of the ministry (Rydell and Gilbert 82).

Kellar was introduced to magic when Reverend Harcourt took him to see the performance of a Buffalo, New York, magician, Isaiah Harris Hughes (a.k.a. The Fakir of Ava) (Christopher and Christopher 199). After watching Hughes perform, young Kellar became fascinated with magic and began to consider the idea of becoming a magician himself (Steinmeyer 86b).

During the American Civil War, the Harcourt family moved to Buffalo, New York. Kellar was working on a farm. One morning, he read in the newspaper that Isaiah Hughes was looking for a boy assistant for his magic show. Kellar ran two miles to the audition. When he arrived, he discovered that dozens of other boys had shown up for the position. Kellar shoved his way through the gate where he saw a very small, angry, black-and-tan terrier waiting for him. Each boy before him had been rude to the magician’s little dog, hitting it or pushing it away. The dog had disliked every youngster until Kellar arrived for the interview. The dog wagged its tail and showed a liking to him right away. Noticing this, Hughes announced that he, or rather his dear little dog, had made the decision. Kellar had the job. Hughes considered his dog a good judge of character (Steinmeyer 86b).

Kellar worked for Isaiah Hughes until 1867. When he turned eighteen years old, he felt ready to take his own show out on the road. He toured throughout the Midwest, performing in small communities. His tour, however, was a disaster. He lost not only all of his money but also his paraphernalia and wardrobe when a local sheriff confiscated all of his possessions. Despite the difficulty, Kellar put together a new show. With
determination to carry on, Kellar rented a small hall in Beaver Dam, Wisconsin and prepared a performance. However, when he stepped out on the stage, he discovered that his pathetically small audience was made up only of his creditors (Steinmeyer 86-87). Kellar began to feel suspicious when he noticed that the audience wasn’t really paying attention or laughing at the humor in his show. He understood that the audience wasn’t interested at all in magic. They were just waiting for him to finish so that they could seize what meager props and costumes he had left. At intermission, he escaped out of the window, running off to catch the next train out of town (Steinmeyer 87b).

Kellar continued performing in small theatres and halls throughout the Midwest. He got two breaks, however, when he was hired to work for two large magic shows. In Dunkirk, Michigan, he went to work for John Henry Anderson, Jr., the eldest son of the legendary John Henry Anderson, Sr. (a.k.a. “The Great Wizard of the North”), and The Davenport Brothers Ira Erastus Devonport (1839-1911) and William Henry Harrison Davenport (1841-1877) (Christopher and Christopher 200).

Kellar had been stranded for several months when he signed on to work the Anderson Show (Christopher and Christopher 200). Anderson had learned his craft assisting his illustrious father on stage (Christopher and Christopher 119). Traveling with Anderson helped Kellar grow in his understanding of magic and learn about operating a big stage show.

In 1839 in LaCrosse, Wisconsin, Kellar was hired as a road manager for the Davenport Brothers (Christopher and Christopher 202). The Davenports were famous Spiritualists who performed a spirit cabinet illusion in which all sorts of ghosts appeared. Their performance consisted of the Davenports being securely tied inside a wooden
cabinet large enough to accommodate them. Once tied securely, the doors were shut. At that point, ghosts would seem to appear and musical instruments would float about the cabinet, visible through a window. Spectators were invited to come on stage to open the doors. Every time the doors were opened, the spectators could see that the Davenports were still securely tied. The Davenport Brothers jealously guarded the secrets of the cabinet, as well as how they could easily get in and out of the tied knots. Kellar, however, discovered these secrets during the two years in which he worked on this show (Steinmeyer 87b).

In 1841 Kellar left the Davenport Show when he discovered that William Davenport thought of him as his servant (Steinmeyer 87b). Taking with him what he had learned working for the Davenports, he put together his own Spiritualist show. He worked with several different partners while touring the southern United States, Mexico, and South America. The money made on the road was lucrative, but in two short years, he made and lost several fortunes (Steinmeyer 87b).

Kellar hired Bill Fay, another member of the Davenport Show, as his stage manager. Kellar prepared his new show, which featured the séance routine of the Davenport Brothers, as well as a fine collection of Kellar’s best original material. In 1873 his crew toured Canada. In the winter, they turned southward and in December 1873 their show opened at Havana’s Teatro Albisu. In Cuba, they fired their Spanish interpreter because he had tried to strong-arm them. Kellar then began a five-week crash course in Spanish so that he could communicate with his audience (Christopher and Christopher 205).
Touring south of the border wasn’t always easy for Kellar and his crew. While in Vera Cruz, Mexico, the gallery ticket seller ran off with the box office receipts. In Mexico City, the local newspapers began a campaign against the Kellar Show, accusing Kellar of using demons to assist him on stage (Christopher and Christopher 205). The team’s train was constantly in danger from roving Mexican bandits so Kellar hid the gold coins which he had collected by pouring them into two large cans of black roofing pitch (Christopher and Christopher 205). Transportation was expensive. Kellar discovered that it was more cost effective to have new magic cabinets built in each city they toured.

Travel in Mexico and other Central and South American countries, was also hard on Kellar’s health, causing the magician considerable physical pain. The spicy foods troubled his stomach so that he was tormented with stomach pains along with acute fever. Due to his failing health, he was hospitalized for three weeks in Mazatlan, Mexico (Christopher and Christopher 206).

In addition to these other problems the tour was also plagued with many problems involving customs, local authorities, spectators, and inept stagehands. These problems included secrets to large illusions being revealed by accident, serious damage to machinery, fires on stage. There were even hurt feelings because Kellar had yelled at a spectator for lighting up a cigar during the blackout of the seance illusion. Kellar was in trouble because he didn’t first ask permission from a local official in the audience to yell at the man (Christopher and Christopher 206).

From South America, Kellar’s crew steamed to England to conclude their tour. The tour ended with two additional disasters. A cache of precious stones, which Kellar was transporting for investment and all of the magic machinery, was lost in the waters of
the Bay of Biscay, when their steamer Boyne struck a rock and sank. Kellar survived with only the clothes he was wearing. When he arrived to England, Kellar discovered that his bank Duncan, Sherman and Co. of New York City had gone bankrupt (Christopher and Christopher 207). Kellar finished the tour with only the money he could raise from the diamond ring on his finger. His partner, Bill Fay, and the crew then left him to join up with the Davenport Brothers’ Show (Christopher and Christopher 207).

In 1878, while in London, Kellar visited Maskelyne and Cook’s Egyptian Hall. At the Egyptian Hall, spectators could see the latest wonders of the finest magicians (Steinmeyer 110a). The Egyptian Hall was where the latest illusions and grand effects were showcased before they were taken out on world tour. Here, among the finest magicians performing their best effects, Kellar was spiritually renewed. Filled with new resolve, he began preparing a new and better show (Christopher and Christopher 207).

Kellar billed his new troupe of performers as “The Royal Illusionists” (Christopher and Christopher 208). On the road, he had learned the tough lessons of a career in show business. It was now time to begin developing his skill as a master conjuror. Competition among professional magicians was tough, but his chief competition was the sophisticated, debonair master of sleight of hand, Alexander Herrmann (Christopher and Christopher 217).

In 1887, Kellar returned from Europe to begin a tour of the Midwestern United States. While Kellar was performing abroad, Alexander Herrmann reigned as America’s favorite magician. Kellar knew that Herrmann’s skills in sleight of hand were extraordinary, whereas Kellar had trouble manipulating small props. He was also rough
and unsophisticated in his speech and prone to fits of rage when things went wrong (Christopher and Christopher 217). Kellar knew that the only way that he could possibly compete was to offer his audiences a spectacular evening of entertainment. With this in mind, he produced a magnificent show complete with colorful sets, costumes, a cast of gifted performers, and the finest illusions from around the world (Christopher and Christopher 217).

The competition between Kellar and Herrmann was quite fierce as each show toured North America. In Canada, Kellar’s advance men pasted his posters over Herrmann’s posters. Herrmann’s men would then paste up Herrmann’s posters over Kellar’s posters. In Mexico, he offered the theatre owner of a Puebla theatre sixty percent of his receipts to allow him to use the theatre where Herrmann was performing on alternate nights (Christopher and Christopher 219).

Years later, the two great competitors became friends. When Herrmann and Kellar looked back upon their petty competition, they agreed that it had been counterproductive and for both of them quite costly. In 1898 Alexander Herrmann died, leaving the magic field open to Kellar (Christopher and Christopher 219).

Until his retirement in 1908, Harry Kellar brought his show to theatres around the world. By now, he was a master in the field of stage magic. His earlier clumsy, jerky, manipulating of apparatus, his awkward stammering, and his crude use of English were no longer an embarrassing part of his presentation. Instead, his calm, sophisticated demeanor mesmerized spectators as he came toward them on the stage. Every move, every gesture, every movement of the eyes were planned and carefully rehearsed. He worked out each part of his performance in fine detail (Rydell and Gilbert 84).
Striving to overcome these basic defects in his skills in legerdemain Kellar developed mechanical devices to aid him on stage. These consisted of flesh colored metal clips which extended from his hands, aiding him in catching cards and coins from the air. These devices are still used today in the field of magic. (Steinmeyer 89b)

Kellar was a stubborn perfectionist who tackled every imperfection that might stand in the way of presenting a perfect performance. Through hard work he became a master of his craft. Before the curtain rose every prop, ever device, and every member in the cast were exactly where Kellar intended them to be for the performance.

Kellar became a master magician because he also knew the importance of communicating with his audiences. While touring Mexico, and Central and South America, he faced a language barrier. Many of the problems which he experienced in the past were due to his ignorance of the Spanish language. Relying upon Spanish interpreters didn’t work. So when touring in Cuba, Mexico, and South America, he studied Spanish (Christopher and Christopher 205). His success from learning Spanish inspired Kellar to learn other languages. In Java, he performed in Dutch and to perform his show in Shanghai, he learned several Chinese phrases. (Christopher and Christopher 210)

Harry Kellar was a master showman who overcame great physical odds to become a master magician. In his magic show Kellar sought the finest illusions for his audiences. This search brought him the title of the “greatest traveler among magicians” (Christopher and Christopher 221).

Kellar was also a perfectionist in the construction of the equipment for his show. Great detail went into the creation of every piece being used on stage. Knowing that even the best equipment can fail during its use caused Kellar to put extra time into practicing
each illusion. “When he (Kellar) walked onstage, he was perfection itself. Not a move – even the blink of an eye – had been anything less than carefully planned and meticulously rehearsed in advance” (Christopher and Christopher 84).

Kellar worked at making everything that he did on stage surpass the work of other magicians. In each area of performance he tried to top the competition. Where other magicians might, with a flourish, produce a bowl of paper roses, Kellar would produce real roses, slowly and dramatically (Rydell and Gilbert 84).

The role that Harry Kellar chose for himself was master magician and purveyor of the world’s greatest illusions. He traveled around the world, watching magicians perform their latest and best material, and then he would arrange to buy, borrow or steal the best of these effects for the audiences on his own tours. “Kellar had exceptional taste in magic. Although not an innovator, he had begged or stolen the greatest illusions in magic and brought them to his audiences” (Steinmeyer 87b).

If his offer to buy was turned down, Kellar would study the effect, take notes and then create his own version (Steinmeyer 169a). In his zeal to bring his audiences the finest magic, he gained a reputation for being a master thief. He would visit the performances of other magicians with a note pad in order to sketch what was taking place on stage. At times, he brought with him his opera glasses and an engineer to study the fine points, even the secrets of an effect (Steinmeyer 169a).

Kellar’s audience respected him for his skill as a magician. The spectators who streamed into the theatre to see his latest feats of magic appreciated that they were going to witness the latest and finest illusions from around the world (Steinmeyer 87b).
Kellar began each tour with a strong marketing campaign designed to capture the interest and the imagination of the spectators. The first public image of the show was presented in handbills and posters. He strove to cast himself in a rather humorous light. In his stone lithographs Kellar presented himself in coat with tails, sharing the space with cute little red-horned devils. The devils were pictured helping him with his magic by tugging at him or slyly whispering things in his ear (Steinmeyer 168a).

The next step in the marketing campaign came with the arrival of cast and crew at the train station. The train station became a hub of activities as large crates of illusions, bins of draperies, and trunks of costumes were unloaded onto heavy horse drawn wagons. The Kellar Show brought excitement to the community.

It required a full day to set up the show for the week’s engagement; Kellar’s men depended on a good local manager who knew the backstage of his theatre and could supervise his crew of technicians. Philip Claudi . . . was Kellar’s stage manager. He supervised as the show was unpacked, curtains were hung, and trapdoors were cut into the stage. Like all magic show proprietors, Keller carried several cases of tools and building materials; invariably, the apparatus in the cases became jostled, dented, and broken… Metal props were polished. Wood cabinets were waxed, hinges oiled, and springs tightened. (Steinmeyer 92b)

After the setup, unpacking was the next item on the agenda of the Harry Kellar Show. Dot, the wife of his manager William Robinson, arrived after the crew and went directly to the theatre where she was in charge of setting up the dressing room. She would unpack costumes and lay them out. She then would prepare the props for the Black Art Act (Steinmeyer 94b).

Kellar and his wife would go directly to the hotel. After checking in, they would meet with the local press and go over the advertising for the show. In the afternoon, Kellar would arrive at the theatre to check the ticket sales at the box office (Steinmeyer 94b).
For Kellar it was important to study the sight lines of the theatre and observe the stage setup as the spectators would see it. He would go into the auditorium of the theatre. There, he would walk carefully up and down the aisles. His stage manager would give him a tour of the house and then accompany him to the stage. Kellar would check on how the illusions were installed, where the marks on the stage were located and how each prop backstage was positioned (Steinmeyer 94b). For Kellar it wasn’t enough that he was presenting the very best acts he could provide, it was also important that he and his crew give their finest performance in presenting the material.

During a performance Kellar told interesting stories to set up an illusion. To introduce an illusion he would go to the footlights to be close to his audience. He added color to his patter by describing the exotic places where he had first discovered the effect that the audience was about to see (Steinmeyer 92b). Kellar’s image of the all-seeing magician who traveled about the world bringing back the most wondrous of miracles is believed to have inspired L. Frank Baum in his creation of his character the Wizard of Oz (Steinmeyer 130b).

Kellar’s world tours continued to amaze and entertain until his retirement in 1908 when he handed over his show to Howard Thurston, a budding young talent. Thurston continued performing several of Kellar’s illusions for the audiences who came to see the heir to the mantle of Harry Kellar. Fourteen years later the master magician Harry Kellar died of pneumonia (Rydell and Gilbert 84).
Howard Franklin Thurston (1869-1936)

Thurston was born the son of a carriage maker in Columbus, Ohio (Christopher and Christopher 222). Because the family was poor, Thurston and his brothers did all sorts of work to support the family, including selling newspapers. At 5 feet 6 inches with a slight build, it seemed to be a logical career move for Thurston to become a jockey. At an early age, he ran away from home to follow the horse races (Christopher and Christopher 223).

When he was twenty years old, Thurston supported himself selling newspapers in New York City. It was hard work and led him to think about what he wanted to do with his life. While selling newspapers, on the streets of New York City, he came into contact with the street corner evangelists from the Broome Street Tabernacle. Through the evangelists he was converted to Christianity. Soon he was preaching on street corners and planning to go to seminary (Christopher and Christopher 223).

Along with the Bible there was another book that attracted Thurston’s attention. It was a small book by Alexander Herrmann on performing magic tricks to amaze your friends. He purchased the book to entertain his friends at a Christmas party. As he read the book, he recalled actually seeing Alexander Herrmann perform on stage when he was a child in Columbus. The book brought back wonderful memories of childhood and he recalled how once upon a time he had longed to perform on stage (Rydell and Gilbert 88).

At this point in his life, however, Thurston put off dreams of magic and began pursuing a career in ministry. To improve his elocution he took courses at the Moody
Bible Institute. His fiery street corner sermons often held forth against sin and strong drink (Steinmeyer 202, 203a).

After four years working the streets as an evangelist, Thurston decided that it was time to pursue his goal of studying in the seminary. Before entering seminary, Thurston needed first to get his undergraduate degree and he intended to enroll at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia (Rydel and Gilbert 89).

On his way to the train depot to check on train schedules, Thurston noticed a poster for Alexander Herrmann’s magic show. Without thinking about it he purchased a ticket to the show and entered the theatre (Christopher and Christopher 223). The orchestra, bright costumes, and paraphernalia on stage dazzled the eye. The flourishes of the master magician, as he entertained the audience, reawakened Thurston’s childhood desire to turn his own talents toward prestidigitation. There was now a second option for the young man as he considered his professional future.

But Thurston had a problem. He still felt drawn to the ministry, while being drawn towards a career on stage. Both of these options tugged at him. All night he wrestled with which road to take for his future. His skills as a speaker and a showman would serve him well in either of the two professions.

The next morning at the train station, Thurston was still wrestling with his thoughts, although the ministry seemed to be winning out since it appeared to be the more sensible of the two choices. With his mind set on the ministry, Thurston set out to go to Philadelphia to begin his studies at the university. As he approached the ticket window, Thurston noticed Alexander Herrmann and his wife boarding a nearby Pullman car leaving for Syracuse. Thurston asked for a ticket to Philadelphia, paid the ticket cashier
and prepared to board the train (Rydell and Gilbert 90). He left the ticket window feeling a little sad that he wasn’t going to Syracuse to follow magic and the Herrmann Company. Then fate stepped in. When the conductor called out time to board for those with tickets to Philadelphia, Thurston looked down to discover that he had been given a wrong ticket. He had a ticket to Syracuse. Quickly, he boarded the Pullman car behind the Herrmanns. In fact, he paid the conductor a little extra to be able to sit near the person who had inspired him throughout his life. The young man sat back in his seat aboard the train to Syracuse and never looked back (Christopher and Christopher 223).

In his early career as a performer, Thurston worked a variety of shows from sideshows to saloons out in the Wild West, including circuses, carnivals, and dime museums. Thurston performed sleight of hand tricks and did whatever else was needed in the shows that he worked (Rydell and Gilbert 90). This wide range of experiences, in his early work, added variety to his abilities later in his life as a master showman.

One of Thurston’s greatest assets was his wonderful deep baritone voice. He could almost hypnotize his audience with his voice. In the circuses with which he traveled and worked, Thurston had steady work as a “run-em-in and run-em-out man,” standing out front of the tent, giving a spiel to bring the customers into the show (Steinmeyer 202a). Thurston’s other asset was his appearance; he always dressed immaculately with a touch of style. Even when he worked as a front man for a troupe of hootchy-kootch dancers, he dressed impeccably (Steinmeyer 203a). He adopted the sophisticated debonair image of the eloquent suave magician of that era.

Magicians often specialize in one variety of magic, which becomes a part of the role that they play. To entertain their audiences The Davenport Brothers concentrated on
Spiritualism, Houdini became an escape specialist, and Cardini mastered cards and cigarettes. Thurston began his career focusing on the manipulating of cards. In the saloons of the Western United States, he mesmerized tough card playing audiences by performing his Rising Card Trick in which a selected card would rise out of a deck of cards (Rydell and Gilbert 89).

During his early years as a showman, Thurston made a meager living as a magician, but he knew that he had the potential to be great. What he needed was an opportunity. His opportunity came when he arranged to do a private showing of one trick for Leon Herrmann after the matinee show at the Tabor Grand Theatre in Denver, Colorado. His effect, the Rising Card Trick, mystified Leon, the nephew of Carl and Alexander Herrmann. When he knew that he would be performing before the master Leon Herrmann, he invited a reporter from the Denver Post to join him for the demonstration (Rydell and Gilbert 90). The publicity about his ability to amaze this master conjuror made Thurston famous (Rydell and Gilbert 90). His career took off and he scored more and more bookings. Thurston always understood how publicity and marketing could help his career. From the Rising Card Trick he developed his program into a wide variety of sleights with cards. From this repertoire of card tricks he developed his image and presented himself as “The King of Cards” and “The World’s Premier Card Manipulator” (Steinmeyer 204b).

At about this time, the manner in which stage magic was performed was going through a radical change. When Thurston started performing magic, the large full magic show with one or two main performers was the standard. By the time that Thurston developed his magic show, the full magic show was being phased out and replaced by the
shorter programs more appropriate for the vaudeville and music hall circuits. The full shows, which presented the skills of a well-known magician, included a full repertoire of illusions. These shows often included two or more major production numbers and would run for several hours. The new shorter acts on the vaudeville and music hall circuits were fast-paced. The subtlety of fine illusions was replaced by illusions which were gaudy with lots of flash emphasizing novelty (Steinmeyer 203a).

Vaudeville was difficult on magicians because its format did not allow enough time to deliver a proper patter to set up an effect. A conjuror often built the necessary relationship of trust through the spoken word. Storytelling patter and congenial words were used to soothe the audience, drawing the magician closer and closer to them. The format for performances in vaudeville, however, made this difficult. The acts in vaudeville allowed very little time for a performer to develop a monologue of any length. The new format was staccato and fast paced for all performers. This made it difficult for magicians, such as Thurston, to talk to the spectators and build up a working relationship with the folks who came to his performances. Vaudeville damaged the presentation of illusions (Steinmeyer 203a). This new form of theatre called for magicians to develop a faster presentation of effects and a pitchman’s rapid-fire delivery and snappy patter, moving quickly from one effect to another. This style was more designed for tricks than for illusions, which took much longer to set up. The result was a short magic performances running a mere seven, twelve or twenty minutes in length (Steinmeyer 203a).

Magicians had always talked to their audiences. They depended on the monologues to establish their effects and considered the quality of their patter, their funny remarks, and puns, to be essential elements of their act. (Steinmeyer 203a)
Audiences loved Thurston as a performer. He succeeded in mystifying them because he understood how they thought and reasoned. He saw his performance through their eyes. He knew what would mystify them. This was of great value when performing magic. He was especially effective when working with volunteers on stage assisting him.

Thurston depended on the spectators’ being confused by what they saw, and once on stage, too awed to say anything; he also had a particular skill for “cuing” (spectators on stage) whispering cues or instructions under his breath, being able to direct the volunteers quietly. (Steinmeyer 210a)

Thurston loved performing before all sorts of audiences. He especially enjoyed performing before spectators who weren’t otherwise able to attend in the theatre. Like many of his colleagues, he brought his show into the lives of those who would not otherwise experience his “magic.” Alexander Herrmann began the tradition of taking his show to the inmates of Sing Sing Prison. Harry Houdini regularly visited hospitals for bedside performances (Kalush and Sloman 479). Harry Blackstone’s show was popular among servicemen out on the battlefield. Blackstone and his troupe of 53 performers entertained at 165 military installations (Rydell and Gilbert 109). The magic community often took their talents to folks who needed cheer and entertainment in their lives.

Thurston believed in the joy of attending performances of magic in the theatre. He understood that a performance is enhanced by where it is performed. Magic on the stage of a theatre adds grandeur and a touch of fantasy to its performance. On one occasion, five hundred children from the orphanages in the Washington, D.C. area attended his show as his guest. Wherever he appeared, patients from nursing homes and other institutions were brought to his theatre. For those left behind because they were
confined to their beds or too sick to make the trip into the city, Thurston made a special appearance at their bedsides (Christopher and Christopher 232).

Thurston performed throughout the Eastern and Midwestern United States. The demand for his show was so great that he decided to set up several touring shows under his name. A Chicago magician, Harry Jansen, headed up the first touring company under the name of Dante. A Pittsburgh magician named Raymond S. Sugden headed the second touring company. The third company was under the direction of Thurston’s own brother Harry (Christopher and Christopher 233).

During this period, when magicians were shortening their shows to fit the vaudeville format, Thurston maintained his full show in addition to performing on the vaudeville circuits with other performers. When the Depression came, there was another change in attendance because people had very little money to spend on entertainment. Theatres offered their audiences a variety of live acts combined with a feature film. Thurston closed his full show and signed on to perform in this kind of format, sharing the film with one hour of his best material. From here, he moved on to the new world of radio. On 3 November 1932, Swift and Company began sponsoring Thurston’s radio show on the NBC-WJZ network. Thurston’s deep hypnotic voice worked well in performing magic where the audience couldn’t even see what he was doing. Over the radio waves he gave an introduction to each effect, then he explained what they might see if they were watching him perform on stage. Every week radio audiences tuned in to hear him perform magic. This says a lot about the trust that the audience placed in him. The audience believed that whatever Thurston was describing on the radio, actually was happening in the studio (Christopher and Christopher 236).
Thurston’s prestige as a magician grew when he replaced Harry Kellar as America’s favorite magician. On May 1908, Thurston purchased Harry Kellar’s show when Kellar retired (Rydell and Gilbert 93). Thurston could see the business advantage of purchasing the Kellar Show. What he gained in publicity was much more than what he gained in inventory. What Thurston acquired was the mystique attached to becoming America’s most popular magician (Christopher and Christopher 222).

Thurston couldn’t use many of Kellar’s illusions. He was preparing a new show for a world tour. The new show was titled the “Wonder Show of the Universe.” Such a show required large extravaganzas. Kellar’s illusions tended to be too small for the large stages that Thurston played. Thurston was preparing the large production numbers for his tour. Of the illusions that he inherited from the Kellar show, he only used one levitation illusion and a spirit cabinet routine (Christopher and Christopher 222). Kellar’s format usually included five large-scale illusions, but Thurston offered eighteen large illusions in his program.

Howard Thurston’s show was a massive undertaking requiring baggage and skilled crewmembers. Transportation of Thurston’s massive productions required three railroad baggage trains along with a crew of forty stage crew, technicians, maintenance, and performers (Christopher and Christopher 222).

In addition to the large-scale productions and illusions, Thurston performed many sleight of hand tricks with cards. The mastery of cards was after all the skill that first brought him fame. He opened his show with the manipulation of a pack of cards as the orchestra played The Zenda Waltz. He followed this with his version of The Rising Card Illusion and then followed this by scaling a deck of cards to individual spectators in the
audience (Steinmeyer 204, 205a). Various beautiful and exotic effects then led into the Levitation of Princess Karnac.

In Thurston’s hands, the Levitation of Princess Karnac became a masterpiece. The beautiful trick was perfectly suited to Thurston’s lyrical baritone. During the introduction, when he told the audience that they were about to witness a ceremony from the Temples of Love in India, the audience watched breathless in anticipation. As the princess rose in the air, she was seemingly held aloft by Thurston’s beautiful oratory. (Steinmeyer 346b)

Thurston’s sincerity was one of his greatest qualities. His gentle words alone were enough to convince his audience that he would never “lead them on.” Thurston once said of his work as a magician: “My object is to mystify and entertain. I wouldn’t deceive you for the World” (Steinmeyer 197a).

Thurston retired in October 1935 after a stroke. His show was sealed and put into storage in New York until he recovered. In 1936, he felt rested enough to mount another tour, but he died on April 13 (Steinmeyer 304a).

William Ellsworth Robinson (a.k.a. Chung Ling Soo) (1861-1918)

William Robinson was born in Westchester County, New York. His father, James Campbell Robinson, was a professional showman who headlined at the rowdy, notorious Harry Hill’s Concert Saloon in New York City. James Robinson was a singer with a strong clear tenor voice. Among his many talents was his ability to do characterizations of different ethnic groups. Early in his career, he traveled with Charley White’s touring minstrel show (Steinmeyer 26b).

In the minstrel show, James was expert at timing and delivering punch lines to jokes. He was a consummate showman, no matter what he was called upon to do in the theatre. His talents included ventriloquism, puppetry, and stage magic. It is recalled that
He was a natural performer who “knew instinctively how to deliver a performance” (Steinmeyer 21b).

His young son William Robinson grew up watching his father perform from the wings. Robinson was especially interested when his father did characterizations. He was also fascinated as well with the technical side of show business. Although young Robinson was skilled in dialects, he was embarrassed about his singing voice. He found puppets, such as Punch and Judy, quite boring. Because he had trouble getting the timing right for punch lines, Robinson felt uncomfortable in telling jokes. However, he was fascinated by his father’s work as a conjuror. Despite his self-consciousness and his dislike of giving lines, he knew that he wanted to become a great magician (Steinmeyer 31b).

Robinson was living in New York City when he began to watch magicians performing on New York stages. Among the many fine magicians whom he saw were Robert Heller and Signor Blitz. From Heller he learned the value of humor in presenting magic. Heller is recalled for his scandalous posters, which employed the catch phrase “GO TO HELLeR’s” (Steinmeyer 32b). Signor Blitz was known for a fast paced show in which he combined magic with ventriloquism and plate spinning. The entire show was light and very humorous (Steinmeyer 33b).

As Robinson began formulating his ideas for his show, he was greatly influenced by these two magicians, as well as a small book on magic by Professor Angelo Lewis Hoffmann titled Modern Magic. In the book Hoffmann gives the following advice:

He (Hoffmann) advocated slow and deliberate presentations, avoiding undue humor. The program should consist of a series of ten or twelve groups of tricks… Between each of the items, there should be an interval of one or two minutes (fill up with music), while the operator leaves the stage and makes the necessary
preparations for the next trick. The few minutes break is always acceptable to the audience (who are apt to become fatigued by too long protracted attention). (Steinmeyer 36b)

Before Robinson approached the big stage, he performed his magic in parlors, church basements, school auditoriums, and at family picnics. His practice was to open with a monologue about the little scientific demonstration that he was about to give. His show was small; he traveled with all of his props in a small trunk including the table that his father had used in his own show. Each show earned him between fifty cents and a dollar (Steinmeyer 37b).

Robinson was performing but felt that he wasn’t quite ready for the big stage yet. He was sure that one day he would be a great magician. During this time, he thought about the large illusions that he would prepare for his future performances (Steinmeyer 41-42b).

Francis Martinka of the Martinka Brothers Magic Shop heard that Robinson was a skilled builder, so he hired Robinson to work in his shop in New York City. While working in Martinka’s shop, Robinson met a tall, distinguished gentleman who came in to purchase some of the larger illusions for which Martinka’s was famous.

The visitor was wearing a fashionable maroon coat, buff-colored trousers, and a bright gold silk cravat. He was flourishing a gold-topped cane in one hand and a soft Homburg hat in the other. He looked, Billy thought to himself, exactly like Mephistopheles, dressed for a stroll in the park. His expressive face was trimmed with a shock of black hair, parted severely in the middle, a pointed goatee, and a long waxed moustache. Two dark eyebrows bobbed above his coal-black twinkling eyes. Billy recognized him from the newspaper engravings and lithographic posters. It was Alexander Herrmann, the greatest magician in the world. (Steinmeyer 43b)

Alexander Herrmann became interested in the talented young builder and wanted to secure his talents for his own show. Robinson was hired by Alexander Herrmann to
design and build for his full magic show. During his early years in magic, Robinson would do the same for Harry Kellar. Along with designing and building illusions he also acted as assistant and managed the shows for Herrmann and Kellar. Along with being a master builder, Robinson was also considered to be one of the finest magician’s assistants working on stage. After assisting other magicians, Robinson finally became weary of assisting and decided that he wished to perform in his own magic show (Rydell and Gilbert 87).

In the early stage of his career as a magician, Robinson followed the suave image of legerdemain that other performers such as Alexander Herrmann and Harry Kellar were projecting. He assembled a long and complex show to play the theatres of New York City entitled “Robinson, the Man of Mystery and The World’s Marvelous Enchanter” (Steinmeyer 60b).

He was not, however, successful in this endeavor. His show and his performance were both rather lackluster. There was no originality to his persona. He presented similar effects to those of other conjurors, using the same patter and format. Robinson’s show included a smattering of dependable stock material from the book Modern Magic, illusions which he learned working at Martinka’s shop, some of his father’s ventriloquism material and a Spiritualist routine (Steinmeyer 60, 61b). The show followed Alexander Herrmann’s format of a two-hour show. Robinson copied his style from Alexander Herrmann and he even copied the names of various illusions from Herrmann’s show (Steinmeyer 62b).

The show was too long and the theatre managers of the houses, which he played, strongly suggested that he trim the show. Even with these changes the show received
very little attention in the magic community or with spectators (Steinmeyer 62b).

Robinson would have dropped out of magic, except for his love of his father’s work and his love of magic. Then he found an idea that would lead him into the ranks of the great masters of magic. The plan that he began formulating would also solve his problem of speaking to his audience and doing jokes with punch lines. If he were a Chinese magician, he wouldn’t be expected to speak English.

The role William Robinson created was that of Chung Ling Soo, an aristocratic Chinese conjuror. His character was based on the real Chinese conjuror Ching Ling Foo who was having a successful run in America at that time (Rydell and Gilbert 87). Not only did he create his own alter ego, but he also created the character Suee Seen for his own wife Dot. Suee Seen in Chinese means “Water Lilly” (Steinmeyer 207b). Once he had the idea, Robinson developed the sets, illusions, and costumes to enhance the theme of his new persona.

For the rest of their lives, Robinson, Dot, and their family maintained the ruse of being Chinese both on stage and in public. They became quite popular in the local Chinese communities wherever they performed. The family feigned any understanding of English and required the services of a translator for any interviews that the press might request. This role was also filled by one of the many Chinese crew members, such as Fee Lung, who served as a Chinese translator with the press and traveled with the show (Steinmeyer 220b). The role of Chung Ling Soo worked extremely well for Robinson.

On April 16, 1900, at ten o’clock in the evening at the Alhambra Theatre in Leicester, England William Robinson, as the Chinese master conjuror, entered the spotlight to begin his most incredible deception. The audience cheered; Robinson smiled.
He clapped his hands and bowed from the waist. His wife, as Suee Seen, joined him on stage and their act began (Steinmeyer 208, 209b). In this way, William Robinson transformed himself into a master Chinese conjuror.

Throughout his career Robinson developed a formula for positioning his illusions in the show. Every illusion was greater than the one before it. His fifteen-minute performance was arranged in stair-step formation leading the audience into a stronger response with each illusion (Steinmeyer 215b). The show built toward the last illusion.

Although Robinson presented his magic show as Chinese, very little of his illusions were truly Chinese, except for the fire-eating effect and the Bowl Production. Even these two were shallow copies of Ching Ling Foo’s effects. As for the music that he used, it was composed of western songs that American audiences associated with the Orient (Steinmeyer 211-212b). Robinson worked toward building surprises into the show. He also added old illusions and illusions from other magicians. He reworked each effect to give it an authentic Chinese look (Steinmeyer 235b).

Robinson knew the importance of setting up the atmosphere before the audience even entered the house. To accomplish this he allowed the theatre managers to display many of his pieces of Chinese costumes, furniture, and other artifacts from his own private collection, in the lobby (Steinmeyer 237b).

Robinson and Dot continually re-evaluated their show. They knew the importance of adding new effects, larger illusions, and more spectacular acts. They also knew that it was important to be always in mind of their audience (Steinmeyer 241b).

Robinson and his troupe worked his full shows, in which he headlined, as well as smaller shows on the vaudeville circuits and in the music halls of England. Robinson’s
crew was quite versatile and adaptive at preparing whatever stage they were hired to play.

If the stage did not have trap doors, the crew’s carpenters installed them (Steinmeyer 93,94b). Box office sales, facilities, and hotel rooms were checked before Robinson ran through rehearsals and before the curtains went up for his performance. When performing a full show, the magician, crew and cast had the dressing rooms, facilities, as well as the stage, to themselves.

American vaudeville theatres were often designed with narrow stages. Most vaudeville acts traveled light and worked with few props or scenery; a performer might enter from the wings with a hat and cane, move directly to the footlights in an effort to get as close as possible to the spectators and the pit orchestra, perform, take a bow and dash back into the wings. Few acts demanded much room on stage, so the stage area was meager and the backstage cramped. (Steinmeyer 244b)

Vaudeville theatres did not lend themselves well to stage magicians. Distance from the audience was necessary for some illusions. Most illusions required a certain amount of delicate setup on stage. It was difficult to move heavy equipment to and from the wings. The crowded conditions, on and off stage, hampered preparations and entrances. Magicians who worked vaudeville at best performed only one or two illusions plus one descent major production (Steinmeyer 244b).

The illusions of a conjuror took time to set-up properly. There were wires to be strung and equipment to be set in front of trapdoors. Props needed to be placed in a certain order for the performance. These tasks were difficult to accomplish for magicians on the vaudeville circuit with other acts coming on and off of stage in an almost constant stream (Steinmeyer 244b).

The music halls of Britain were quite different from American vaudeville houses. They were ideal for stage magicians. They offered enough space to set up illusions and
move freely among other acts on the bill while others were coming and going off of the stage. There also was adequate space on stage to properly perform even the larger illusions.

Stages were deep and spacious, built to accommodate trained animal acts or circus performers as well as magicians. There was plenty of room in the wings, big loading doors that led to an alley and floors that could be easily equipped with trapdoors. (Steinmeyer 245b)

To the audiences of the vaudeville circuit and the music halls of England, William Robinson brought not only the marvels of magic but the wonderful image of an oriental fantasy as well. At show time, the spectators would quietly settle into their seats as the orchestra began setting the mood of the mysterious Orient. The music began to lower as the curtains opened, revealing the stage set with Eastern furnishings and plants. Then he arrived, the inscrutable Chung Ling Soo. Chung moved, almost floating, slowly toward the footlights, his assistants on each side of him. The conjuror and the cast bowed to the audience. Each of his two assistants stepped forward to take away his mandarin hat and long yellow robes. Chung’s costume was designed to be simple in comparison to the bright elaborate costumes of his assistants. This difference put attention on Chung (Steinmeyer 309b). Toward the end of his career, Robinson’s show was forty minutes long. In those forty minutes, he created for the audience a magnificent fantasy, which they took with them back to their everyday lives (Steinmeyer 309b).

Robinson had begun as a classic magician in the image of Alexander Herrmann but made an abrupt change to become a conjuror in the style of the master magicians of the East. His career was not what he first expected. His choice, however, served him remarkably well. Toward the end of his career Robinson looked back over his life as a magician and the performances he brought to his audiences.
To supply the needs of his show and create the look of the Orient, Robinson maintained a large workshop. Performing magic on the stage, as well as, working on new devices in his elaborate workshop, brought him great pleasure. Props, cabinets, and all manner of paraphernalia used in his elaborate stage production were tested, turned out, and painted in his shop (Steinmeyer 292-293b). Art shops were commissioned to produce a series of marvelous lithographs to display the wonders produced in the shop and the beauty of the show on stage.

The first glimpse spectators would get of Robinson would be the posters that began appearing in their community. The posters did more than tease folks into coming out and buying a ticket. They also planted the theme of the show in the minds of potential audience members. The multicolored lithographs began the magical journey for the spectators who would enter the theatre.

Robinson understood the value of high-quality advertising. He not only sought the finest quality for his posters, but he also sought to produce a wide variety of posters.

Soo’s contracts called for the magician to supply advertising posters that could be pasted up sound town to draw crowds to the theater. Chung Ling Soo’s color lithographs became famous throughout the industry. Most magicians focused on two or three different styles of posters, but Chung Ling Soo produced a dazzling array of images to advertise his show. (Steinmeyer 299b)

Robinson was the innovator of the Saturday matinee performance. During his time the standard format in the magic business was the evening program that included two full magic programs. He improved upon this format by including the idea of a two-hour matinee performance (Steinmeyer 340b). The Saturday matinee was popular with parents and children, as well as with the theatre managers themselves. Robinson filled the two hours with tricks and illusions. In his program he presented forty tricks one right after another. In the first half of the show small tricks were presented, in the second half some large illusions were performed. Throughout the program dozens of gifts were given away to the audience. Robinson and his audiences loved the matinee shows. His
assistants, however, found the shows quite tedious because the small tricks took a lot of preparation (Steinmeyer 340-341b).

On March 23, 1918, the Chung Ling Soo Company opened their full program at the Wood Green Empire just north of London. There was a matinee and two evening performances. On the playbill the various illusions were listed but not “The Bullet Catch,” which Robinson called “Defying the Boxers” or “The Charmed Bullet.” This illusion was maintained as a special treat for the audience and was never brought out for the matinee show, where children might be in attendance, but was always reserved for the late evening adult show. It was also used to add interest to the billboard for the show (Steinmeyer 382b). As the last act for the evening, Robinson decided to give the audience a special treat and perform the famed Bullet Catch. At 10:45 p.m., the master illusionist stood in front of his own special rifles, holding a ceramic plate to catch the bullets when fired. One plate exploded as bullet passed through and entered the magician’s heart. He died at 4:55 a.m. at Passmore Edwards Hospital in Wood Green where he had been taken following the terrible accident (Steinmeyer 390b).

The death of William Robinson was attributed to his distrust in allowing anyone else to inspect his equipment, especially the rifle that took his life. It would have been safer if he had allowed a licensed gunsmith to inspect and make repairs at least twice a year. But he was obsessive about letting anyone else get close to his props and it cost him his life. Robert Churchill, a noted gun expert, concluded that: “The lethal grains of gunpowder had seeped slowly from the barrel to the cylinder. Chung Ling Soo had been drawing closer and closer to death with each performance of this, the most dangerous feat in all of magic “the Bullet Catch” (Christopher and Christopher). His passing was
mourned throughout the magic community and the Bullet Catch, which took his life, has become notorious.

Ehrich Weiss (a.k.a. Harry Houdini) (1874-1926)

Ehrich Weiss was born in Budapest, Hungary (Rydell and Gilbert 94). He was still a baby when his family came to America, making their home in Appleton, Wisconsin. He and his brother, Theo, grew up the sons of the parish rabbi. Erich was a boy with unlimited energy and curiosity. His interest in magic was sparked by the book Memoirs of Robert-Houdin. There was romance and adventure in the idea of a humble clock-maker’s apprentice becoming the most well known magician in France (Christopher and Christopher 339-340).

Young Erich worked a variety of jobs, including material cutter in the tie garment industry, but his thoughts turned again and again to the book on magic that he had read. In the end the call to magic was too great, so he joined with his younger brother, Theo, for a career in magic (Christopher and Christopher 340).

As he imagined his career on the stage, Erich felt that he needed an impressive stage name and prestige. Borrowing from Robert-Houdin, the magician who had inspired him, Ehrich adopted the name “Houdini”, claiming that it was a French touch to add an “i” on the end of the name of someone who inspired you. From that time, he went by the name Harry Houdini (Christopher and Christopher 340).

In pursuit of a show business career and fame as a magician, Houdini performed magic in a variety of arenas. These engagements included circuses, carnivals, sideshows, dime museums, vaudeville houses, and all sorts of theatres where performers got their
start or their careers went to die (Steinemeyer 223b). He performed wherever a stage and audience might be found.

Houdini and his brother Theo’s first big show was their magic program at the 1893 World’s Fair in Chicago. Here the two were billed as “The Houdini Brothers” (Christopher and Christopher 342). Their presentation became a family affair with their mother, Cecilia, making the costumes. The Houdini Brothers performed card illusions. Their best act, performed at the end of the show, was The Metamorphosis, organized around a large escape trunk the size of a steamer trunk (Christopher and Christopher 342). In this illusion, the magician is bound in chains and locked in the trunk and then suddenly appears on top of the trunk while his assistant appears inside the trunk in chains.

Shortly after the World’s Fair Houdini married Wilhelmina Beatrice Rahner who was known as “Bess.” Bess replaced Theo when Houdini joined the Welsh Brothers Circus on the road. Houdini had wanted to be a magician since he was a teenager, but he was never quite sure which type of act to pursue. On the road, he and Bess considered what worked best for his particular talents (Christopher and Christopher 342).

While touring with the Welsh Brothers Circus, Houdini learned many things that he could use throughout his career as a magician and as an escape artist.

A. Lutes, an armless man, so impressed him with his ability to use his toes as fingers that Houdini practiced and practiced until his own toes developed prehensile abilities, which would be invaluable to him in later escape work. He learned the techniques of circus strongmen, fire-resisters, and sword-swallowers. (Kalush and Sloman 36)

Whatever show, circus or carnival he worked, Houdini mingled among the other acts, seeking knowledge that would serve him in his career as a showman. During this
time, he learned how to make the spectacular out of the ordinary and the fine points of pitching his act. Houdini also mastered the art of mental misdirection. He discovered ways of creating ideas in the minds of spectators and directing their vision wherever he wanted. Houdini’s skills as a storyteller became finely honed. Houdini became aware of what it meant to be in the public eye and how to get the public to fall in love with him. During these early days of his career, he also became aware of the secrets of false mediums. He learned how mediums used psychology to tell people what they wanted to hear. For his coming career as an escape artist, Houdini learned ways of convincing spectators that an escape being performed was not only real but actually death defying (Kalush and Sloman 74). Houdini acquired skills in generating energy, creating enthusiasm, and belief in what he was performing in the spectators and in the press. These lessons would serve him well both as a magician and an escape artist.

Throughout his career Harry Houdini projected two distinct images. He began his career in magic trying to project the classic image of the sophisticated stage magician. His success at this was fleeting. The second image was that of a well-built, physically disciplined master of escape, which proved more successful for him. Throughout his career he longed to be recognized as a great magician, but it is his work as an escape artist that has never been surpassed. To prove himself as a great magician he produced a full magic show and often traveled in the presence of other magicians. However, the magic community of his day considered Houdini to be a terrible magician (Steinmeyer 5a).

The public, however, both during his lifetime and after his death, regards Houdini as the prime example of a professional magician and a thrilling escape artist. Spectators
came to see him escape from any enclosure. In the public’s imagination, the name
“Houdini” has become synonymous with both magician and escape artist (Steinmeyer 5a).

Colleagues found Harry rough around the edges, in a profession whose
practitioners were suave and elegant.

As a showman, though, Houdini was extraordinary. He loved his audience and
they loved him. His feats were spellbinding and Houdini knew how to make each
escape appear life threatening. He was the hero of the common man and woman,
working hard at his craft so as not to fail them. He loved sharing his adventures,
challenges, and triumphs with them. “He (Houdini) never failed in an escape. He
was too much of a perfectionist, too careful in his planning. He also never
disappointed an audience” (Steinmeyer 9a).

Servais LeRoy, a master magician, a colleague, and a good friend of his recalled
watching his friend’s many performances:

Houdini had a pleasing stage presence but in no sense a finished magician,
although this detail never seemed to trouble him. As an illusionist he never left
the commonplace. His escapes were incomparable. I frequently wondered at the
indifference of the one and the perfection of the other and finally was forced to
the conclusion that his want of originality was the answer. (Steinmeyer 11a)

Harry Houdini’s image as a magician and an escape artist were important to him.
He understood the value of publicity and how to attract it, since publicity was quite
important in his work. Houdini would begin an engagement in a community by checking
into the local jail or prison and then issue a challenge that he could escape from the
town’s finest lock-up. After he succeeded in escaping, he would show the officers of the
institution where the weaknesses were in their system. The officials would, in turn, issue
a statement that he was indeed a master of escape. The publicity would bring in hordes
of spectators to see his show (Kalush and Sloman 78).

Houdini became a master of all manner of handcuffs, shackles, cell doors, and
padlocks. On one occasion, he was appearing with his good friend, Will Goldston, at the
prestigious St. George’s Hall in London. The hall filled with an enthusiastic crowd. Houdini was introduced to the audience. Then, just before he bounded out to the footlights, he suddenly turned to Goldston and said, “You know, Will, every lock can be opened.” Then he went out and amazed the audience (Steinmeyer 251a).

Houdini would collect fine illusions by purchasing or copying the illusions of other magicians. Unfortunately, in his hands the best illusions came off poorly.

Houdini’s friend, Servais LeRoy, believed that he just wasn’t adept at presenting magic. “His (Houdini’s) performing of illusions such as cabinets and trunks was anything but subtle. Using other men’s ideas, he was unable to improve on the original and was forced to let it go at that or produce something still weaker” (Steinmeyer 255a).

LeRoy, while watching Houdini perform, felt that he spotted Houdini’s problem. He noticed that Houdini tended to rush and “bully” his way through his illusions, without concern for his audience. LeRoy commented sadly, “It was somewhat difficult to realize that a great showman should entirely fail to see this; possibly it was that eternal belief in himself” (Steinmeyer 255a).

In January of 1918, Houdini joined the Dillingham and Burnside’s Hippodrome Show in New York City. In four months, he became the feature performer. The run lasted for nineteen weeks, doing only matinees, but this was the longest run of his career. His act featured Jennie, his elephant, who weighed ten thousand pounds (Steinmeyer 267a). In her act she was led into a large eight by eight by fifteen foot cabinet on stage. After showing that she was secure inside the cabinet, Jennie would give a little salute with her trunk and then the curtains were drawn to a close. With the help of twelve
assistants the cabinet was turned around. The curtain was opened again, revealing a seemingly empty cabinet (Steinmeyer 269, 270a).

Although the new act brought great applause from the audience, it didn’t impress the magic community. They considered the illusion unimpressive. The illusion became the seed for a popular joke shared among conjurors. The joke was told like this: “Three men wheel a cabinet onto the stage. An elephant steps inside and disappears. Then twenty men stepped out from the wings in order to wheel the cabinet offstage. Where do you think the elephant went?” (Steinmeyer 271a).

Houdini succeeded in his work as an escape artist because of his well-disciplined, muscular body. He could escape from whatever confinement presented because he was able to force his mind to eliminate all other distractions, to focus on a single problem at a time, and to elude fear as he worked out each problem for his escape (Rydell and Gilbert 97, 98).

On Sunday October 24, 1926, Ehrich Weiss (a.k.a. Harry Houdini) the master escape artist, prepared at the Garrick Theatre in Detroit, Michigan, to take the stage for the very last time in his life. He wasn’t feeling well, as he entered the stage door to the theatre. By the time he entered his dressing room, he was limping from a broken bone in his foot. He was exhausted from the long tour, which had begun early in the fall of 1926. For weeks he had felt exhausted and drained by the pain in his foot (Rydell and Gilbert 102).

Two days earlier, on Friday October 22, an accident occurred in the dressing room that caused him to collapse on the October 24. Getting ready for a performance was always a hectic time for him backstage. In the middle of the confusion, students
from McGill University stopped by the dressing room to meet the great Houdini. They wanted to know if the offer still stood that Houdini could take a full fist blow to the stomach without injury. He told them that he was able to endure a blow to the stomach because he needed to be physically strong to perform the work that he did in his act (Christopher and Christopher 364).

One of the McGill students, J. Gordon Whitehead, asked if he could hit him in the stomach (Kalush and Sloman 508, 509). Whitehead leaned down near Houdini and began hitting him in the stomach as fast as he could. Four or five of these well-aimed blows were strongly delivered with a terrible force to Houdini’s stomach. The young man was told to quit and was pulled off of Houdini (Kalush and Sloman 510).

Houdini feigned being unhurt and the boys were asked to leave the dressing room. Several days later, however, he was overcome with excruciating pain, a high fever, and collapsed. His appendix ruptured and poison was rushing through his system (Steinmeyer 299-300a).

October 31 (Halloween) is officially designated as National Magic Day because it marks the death of Ehrich Weiss (a.k.a. Harry Houdini) at Grace Hospital in Detroit, Michigan. Harry Houdini died of peritonitis from a ruptured appendix at 1:26 p.m. in Room 401 at the hospital (Christopher and Christopher 366).

Hari Boutin (a.k.a. Harry Blackstone Sr.) (1885-1965)

Blackstone was born in Chicago, Illinois. He would become the last of the masters of magic during The Golden Age of Magic. With his death in 1965, a magnificent era in show business came to an end (Christopher and Christopher 369).
Blackstone’s father was a French-Canadian who had a drinking problem, often going off on binges and leaving his wife and children for weeks at a time. One of the binges lasted for three years. When he was a child Blackstone saw his first magic show and this experience changed his unhappy life. It was at the McVicker’s Theatre in Chicago that he was introduced to the colorful, exciting world of magic when the master, Harry Kellar took the stage. Magic became a release and a hobby for Blackstone (Christopher and Christopher 369).

Harry Blackstone became a cabinetmaker’s assistant and learned about building fine furniture, as well as creating cabinets with hidden devices that would later serve him in his own magic show. As he became a skilled cabinetmaker, he found his services sought by magicians. Harry Blackstone’s break came when August Roterberg, the supplier of magic equipment to the Midwestern market, ordered from Blackstone a supply of trick chests (Christopher and Christopher 369).

Blackstone and his brother, Peter, decided to create their own magic show. They billed themselves as Harry Bouton and Company. Blackstone was greatly impressed by Harry Kellar, so he changed his first name from Henry to Harry before he began practicing magic (Rydell and Gilbert 108). In their act, Blackstone played the magician dressed in dinner jacket. Peter assisted him as a clown dressed in baggy pants along with a coat several sizes too big, a bald wig, and clown grease paint (Christopher and Christopher 369). The act had trouble making expenses so Peter dropped out and Blackstone went on as a single. He set up his new show with effects and apparatus purchased at a discount from a Midwestern magician named Herbert Albini (1870-1913) (Christopher and Christopher 370). Albini’s show presented an array of large spectacular
illusions such as the Human Butterfly in which a girl materialized in a glass-lined trunk (Rydell and Gilbert 108). Blackstone became fascinated with the older magician. Albini had performed as a headliner in the Midwest on the Sullivan-Considine Circuit. Albini was a Polish magician named Abraham Laski and was recognized as master of The Egg Bag Trick, producing an egg from a small velvet pouch. Blackstone was impressed by the way that even the smallest illusions astounded the spectators. For example, Blackstone received great applause whenever from one deck of cards he would produce pack after pack of cards. For a grand ending, he would scale the cards out into the house.

At the conclusion of his performance, the stage was covered with cards (Christopher and Christopher 369).

In 1913, Albini died at age fifty-three due to the strenuous nature of his act. Harry Blackstone bolstered his own show by purchasing some of Albini’s illusions and paraphernalia. This time Blackstone billed himself as “Fredrik the Great.” He still retained his family name of Bouton. As Fredrik, Blackstone played the theatres until World War I when German names became unpopular at the box office. His booking agent suggested that he might Anglicize his stage name to one which was also easier to spell. Blackstone took the maiden name of his grandmother, which was also the name of the popular Blackstone Hotel on Chicago’s Michigan Boulevard (Christopher and Christopher 370). From then on he was known as Harry Blackstone. In 1917, Blackstone launched his full show with ten assistants billed as “Blackstone, the Master Magician.” It was a family operation. His brother Peter was back with him as his main assistant, stage carpenter, and his double for a quick-change illusion. Blackstone’s wife,
Inez, performed musical numbers. His show played as a full act in theatres and headlined, as well, on the vaudeville circuits (Christopher and Christopher 370).

Blackstone was influenced by the popular image of the magicians of his day. He dressed impeccably in formal attire. Throughout his career he borrowed from the best. The role he played was a classical stage magician with large cabinets and apparatus.

Stagecraft was very important to Blackstone from the beginning of his career on the stage. As he expanded his show, he launched into a full program performance complete with a dozen assistants, pretty girls dressed in colorful costumes, large spectacular cabinets, and a whirling buzz saw to cut girls in half. All managed and presented to the spectators by Blackstone with his sly sense of humor (Rydell and Gilbert 108).

For his audience he also offered a variety of small, intimate illusions performed before the closed curtain. Two of his finest of the small intimate effects were The Dancing Handkerchief and The Vanishing Bird Cage. The Dancing Handkerchief was a handkerchief that was borrowed from a spectator in the audience. Under Blackstone’s manipulation, the hankie appeared to wriggle in his hands and then dance about, even playing hide and seek with him. The Vanishing Bird Cage was a cage complete with a live canary that suddenly disappeared from under the watchful eyes of volunteers on stage (Einhorn 27).

Blackstone continually watched others in the magic community for ways to improve his show. Noticing that Thurston presented illusions in which he played several parts on stage by switching himself with his assistants, Blackstone did the same in a
spectacular switch in which he played the part of the victim of a Ku Klux Klan abduction as well as the hooded Klansman on a galloping horse. (Christopher and Christopher 370).

Many original innovations in stage magic came from Harry Blackstone. For example, he created a method of making large livestock disappear. He developed this technique using first a horse and then later a camel which became part of his full stage extravaganza “Oriental Nights.” Blackstone developed the use of a break down tent. One of the sides of the tent had a false side in which the animal vanishing could hide (Christopher and Christopher 371, 372).

Noticing that Houdini was doing well escaping from trunks and metal tanks, Blackstone added death defying escapes to his repertoire. These attempts, unfortunately, didn’t go as well as it was hoped. On October 10, 1922, he was being lowered in a sealed crate into the Mississippi River from the Minneapolis Steel Arch Bridge when the cables broke and the crate hit the water. The box splintered, but fortunately Blackstone himself was only bruised (Christopher and Christopher 372).

As a performer Harry Blackstone was quite versatile. He played the vaudeville circuits and he presented his own full magic show. During the Second World War, he became one of the popular stars on the USO (United Service Organization) circuit. With a cast and crew of twenty-six performers, assistants, and seventy tons of equipment he joined the USO’s vast troupe of performers. His show was officially listed as “Camp Show 53” (Christopher and Christopher 109).

The troupe performed at 165 military installations, traveled over thirty-six thousand miles, and faced the most horrendous logistics problems in moving its equipment. The troupe played in bare auditoriums or on make shift stages when nothing else was available and still managed to become one of the most popular of all USO shows. (Christopher and Christopher 109)
Blackstone and his troupe went from outpost to outpost to military installation, undaunted by cyclones, tornadoes, rats, and illnesses, such as polio. The troupe often played drowsy from lack of sleep. They set up without curtains or backdrops, which are needed for a proper magic show. They risked their health, but still they went on performing where the troops expected them (Christopher and Christopher 109).

After the Second World War, the management of the show was under the direction of a theatre owner named Charles MacDonald. The first part of the show now included such large illusions as “The Bachelor’s Dream,” one of Kellar’s levitations, “The Indian Rope Trick,” and a buzz saw routine for cutting a woman in half. The second part of the show Blackstone performed up close with twenty or thirty spectators around him on stage. Included in this format were a quick escape from ropes, the picking of pockets of spectators, and close-up card tricks (Christopher and Christopher 376).

The coming of television, allowed Blackstone to introduce viewers of the small screen to the wonders of magic. Blackstone appeared on both CBS-TV and NBC-TV in the mid-1950s. Television shows like It’s Magic, The Tonight Show and Edward R. Morrow’s Person to Person served to keep the name Harry Blackstone before the public (Christopher and Christopher 376). While living in New York City, he worked with various corporations selling and performing at their trade shows by using magic to dramatize products and presentations (Christopher and Christopher 378).

Harry Blackstone was a master magician. His fellow magicians marveled at his ability to be totally at ease while on stage, even under fire during the Second World War, Blackstone wouldn’t get shaken very easily (Christopher and Christopher 374). He had a wonderful loving relationship with his audiences. It was this calm manner, even in tense
times, which enabled him to save the entire audience when the Lincoln Theatre in
Decatur, Illinois, caught fire. Blackstone was about to go out on stage to begin his show
when he learned that the theatre was in danger of burning down with the audience still in
their seats. He didn’t feel that he could just go out on stage to announce the coming fire,
because the audience would have stampeded out, trampling one another in their attempt
to escape (Christopher and Christopher 374). Blackstone stepped out on stage and
announced to the audience that he would begin the show by producing a fire engine for
them but there just wasn’t room enough on the small stage. If they would but walk
quickly outside, he would conjure up a full hook-and-ladder truck for their pleasure. He
kept an eagle eye on the spectators as they exited the theatre. True to his word, when
everyone was safe outside the theatre, standing on the sidewalk a full-size fire engine
complete with firemen did appear on the street before them (Christopher and Christopher
374).

Harry Blackstone was the last of the masters of magic of The Golden Age. As his
career was drawing to a close, television began to threaten the magic community. Gone
were the full magic shows. Vaudeville had already succumbed to television. There
would come to magic a whole new breed of showmen. These superb performers would
skillfully use new technology with the wit and skill of street performers to mystify their
audiences. Magic would become a major attraction on the great “White Way” of
Broadway and on the stages of Las Vegas. Magicians would perform on the small screen
of television on television variety shows and as headliners of television specials. In the
mysterious rooms of magic clubs, such as The Magic Castle, magicians would entertain
their audiences. The Golden Age of Magic was finished and a new age had begun (Rydell and Gilbert 110).

On November 16, 1965, at age eighty, Hari Bouton, a.k.a. Harry Blackstone Sr., died at age eighty of pulmonary edema. At the Magic Castle of Hollywood, there is a Blackstone Room. In Colon, Michigan, where Blackstone is buried, there is a street named in his honor (Christopher and Christopher 378).

During the years, which followed, magic seemed to fade away as magicians restudied their craft, seeking a way to mesmerize the spectators and draw them back into the theatre. The magic community began studying the new medium television, trying to discover how they might make use of television to present their craft. The conjuror’s age old question now became “how can I mystify them on that wee small stage?”

Magic After the Golden Age

The Second World War offered a wonderful opportunity to perform before live audiences even if the conditions weren’t ideal, magicians on both sides of the conflict found steady work.

Three hundred or more magicians entertained Allied and Axis troops on the Continent during World War II. Some flew to rest areas with civilian shows; others served with the armed forces. Conjurers in uniform, carrying lightweight props along with their weapons, performed in the field for infantry, artillery, and armored companies. Working with cards, coins, cigarettes, and ropes, they exhibited on such improvised stages as the tailgates of ammunition trucks and the tops of tanks. (Christopher and Christopher 401)

The occasion of the Second World War offered employment possibilities for magicians to take their shows to spectators who were unable to attend the theatre. Behind
the allied battle lines magicians, such as Harry Blackstone, entertained the troops (Rydell and Gilbert 109).

German troops took a break from the fighting to be entertained by master German magicians, such as Helmut Ewald Schreiber (a.k.a. Kalanag-Kala Nag, a.k.a. Black Snake). Along with entertaining the German front lines for the Blitzkrieg divisions, Schreiber also played the Luftwaffe (German air force) base in Lapland. His annual Christmas show at Karin Hall for Field Marshal Hermann Goering and family was a big hit in Germany. Schreiber was the favorite magician of Adolf Hitler. At the end of the war, before coming to England, Schreiber changed sides, performing for General George S. Patton and the American Third Army (Christopher and Christopher 401, 402).

With the coming of peace, magicians again took their shows to the open road, but it was difficult to find success in the post-war world. Magicians were in competition with other magicians, as well as with all sorts of other performers. The number of first-class theatres was fewer than before the war. It was a tight market. The magicians who succeeded were fantastic showmen with good temperaments, sound business skills and artful, clever promoters on the team (Christopher and Christopher 426).

In 1936, a new obstacle had presented itself to the magic community when regular transmissions of television began in London. A magician named Fred Culpitt was the first conjuror to venture forth into this brave new world. He appeared as an experiment on the BBC’s first transmission. There were several problems, however, when Culpitt gave his first performance on television. First, the camera drastically distorted his image, making his body look twisted and stretched out. Second, the cooling system for the
electrical system broke down during Culpritt’s performance (Christopher and Christopher 426). These problems affected the magician’s self confidence.

In 1939 at the New York’s World Fair, Radio Corporation of America in their exhibit presented a television studio. The further development of the television field, however, was delayed due to war-time shortages. After the Second World War, television developed quickly. In 1945, there were barely eight thousand receivers in the United States. By 1948, that number rose to nine hundred thousand homes with television sets (Christopher and Christopher 426).

As television was developing, conjurors were performing in night clubs, hotels, and in the shrinking number of theatres. Some felt that viewers who watched them on the small screen for free would hesitate to pay the price of a ticket to see the live shows. Others thought that appearing on television would arouse interest, bringing more spectators to the box office (Christopher and Christopher 426).

Performers, who embraced television, began booking their performances on television variety shows. Here they faced problems they hadn’t encountered before. The Mexican conjurer, A.J. Cantu, worried for the safety of the livestock in his show. He was afraid that the strong lights of the television studio might suffocate the doves he used in his acts (Christopher and Christopher 426).

As more and more homes acquired television sets the number of magicians performing on the small screen grew. Magicians performed on Milton Berle, Ed Sullivan, and other variety shows. Every week CBS-TV’s Masters of Magic highlighted several magicians. Other television shows spotlighting magicians were CBS-TV’s It’s Magic, Dell O’Dell’s The Queen of Magic, ABC-TV’s Super Circus and ABC-TV’s magic
program featuring Jack Gwynne. Television presented a problem, however, for single-illusion magicians. A weekly show wore them down because in the fast paced world of television, performers were expected to produce new material each week (Christopher and Christopher 427).

Along with discovering how they might develop their programs for television, the magicians of this new age also investigated the new technologies and new materials developed during and after the war (Rydell ands Gilbert 110). Jack Gwynne developed techniques for working in confined spaces of small stages. Richard Pitchford (a.k.a. Cardini), Nate Leipzig, John Scarne, Fred Keating, and John Mulholland created ways of presenting magic in the round. Up until then, it was always a challenge to perform with the audience at your sides and back. Joseph Dunninger developed mental magic to a fine science and presented this variety of magic every week for television (Rydell and Gilbert 110, 111). Television provided magicians a great service, because each week it offered spectators the opportunity to see fine magic performed by some of the best masters of illusion. Mark Wilson performed illusions intended for children on CBS-TV’s *Mark Wilson’s Magic Land of Allakazam*. After a run of two years, Wilson moved to ABC-TV to perform on his show *Magic Circus* (Christopher and Christopher 430).

While conjurors were performing in night clubs, in theatres, and on the small screen (television), events were taking place which would return magic to the level of the spectacular and raise master magicians to the status of super-stars. This change began when a young magician, Douglas Henning, opened his Broadway show *The Magic Man* in 1974. He followed this with eight television specials (Einhorn 28). Following Henning into super-stardom were other master magicians. David Seth Kotkin (a.k.a.
David Copperfield) also introduced his talents in the Chicago production of *The Magic Man* before he, too, turned to television magic specials. Paul Daniels in Britain became a megastar for television audiences. In Las Vegas, the German magical duo Siegfried Fischbacher and Roy Uwe Ludwig Horn (a.k.a. Siegfried and Roy) began as the key attractions at the Mirage Hotel. They became one of the highest-paid acts in the world (Einhorn 27). Lance Burton became one of the stars of magic performing in Las Vegas at the Monte Carlo Theatre. From his success at the Monte Carlo, Burton was afforded the opportunity to design and build his own theatre. In his theatre he still performs two shows daily, introducing his audiences to the classic magic that has always astounded and mystified audiences (Einhorn 27).

Magic has grown and flourished in all sorts of settings. With the coming of David Blaine and a group of impromptu performers, magic has again returned to the streets. Blaine is a part of the avant-garde of magicians, who set aside tradition to present magic without its classic accoutrements, its glamour, and its grandeur. He follows the lead of Houdini, gathering publicity about him as he performs death-defying escapes and confinements (Einhorn 29). The magic of Blaine and his fellow street magicians returns magic to the streets where it flourished before The Golden Age of Magic. The goal of these new-age magicians is to return magic to the audience and to entertain them regardless of race, barriers of language, and differences of status (Christopher and Christopher 489).
CHAPTER IV

STRUCTURING THE MAGIC SHOW

Having analyzed the performances and the styles of the conjurors of The Golden Age I will now use this understanding to create my own magic performance. To be specific I will create a Golden Age period magic show. The show will consist of two acts. The first act in keeping with The Golden Age will have a Victorian theme and the second act will have an oriental theme. These are in keeping with performances of that period.

For both acts the themes will be carried out in the following areas:

- Effects presented
- Patter used in presenting the effects
- Sets which showcase the performance
- Props which enhance the illusions
- Costumes of magician and cast
- Make-up of magician and cast
- Lighting of sets
- Music which accompanies the show

Designing the Sets and Costumes for Act One

In designing the sets and the costumes for both acts I am concerned about authenticity as well as color and image to delight the eye. I am working for a lavish
classic look. For inspiration I have turned to material from the Victorian period, oriental designs and the world of film.

For Act One the set will follow style of a Victorian drawing room, consisting of a variety of unrelated object and period furnishings lending a mysterious look to the set. Backdrops consist of large panels of frock wallpaper framed with imitation mahogany strips. The set I furnished with tables of a Rococo style.

For Act One I want authenticity in creating the magician’s costume. I selected an ensemble of black frock coat, trousers, and waist coat, white shirt with high wing collar, and white dickey. The ensemble is made complete with wide white bow tie, black patent leather shoes, black satin spats with double row buttons on front, white gloves, gold capped walking cane, and black top hat.

In designing costumes for the magician and cast I turned to the world of film. Specifically I turned to three films:

- *Meet Me in St. Louis*
- *Hello Dolly*
- *House of Wax*

The first film is Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer’s 1944 film *Meet Me in St. Louis* with costumes by Irene Sharaff designing for Art Directors Lemuel Ayer, Cedric Gibbons, and Jack Martin Smith. The second film is 20th Century Fox’s 1969 *Hello Dolly* with costumes by Irene Sharaff designing for Art Directors Harman A. Blumenthal and Jack Martin Smith. The third film is Warner Brothers’ *House of Wax* with costumes designed by Howard Shoup designing for Art Director Stanley Fleisher.
Designing the Sets and Costumes for Act

The Second Act is designed to give a fantasy oriental motif to the sets and the costumes. I want the sets and the costumes to be rich in color and lavish in appearance.

For sets and the costumes of this act I turned to three film:

- *The King and I*
- *The Shadow*
- *Flash Gordon*

The first film is 20th Century Fox 1956 production *The King and I*. The second film is Universal Pictures 1994 production *The Shadow*. The third film is Universal Pictures 1980 production *Flash Gordon*. I am impressed with the lavish oriental throne room in *the King and I* designed by Set Directors Paul S. Fox and Walter M. Scott for Art Director John De Cuir.

I find that the temple court room of the Tulku as well as the court room of Shiwan Khan from the film *The Shadow* display a certain power. Both are the creations of Garrett Lewis for Art Directors Jack Johnson, Dan Olexiewicz, and Steven Wolff.

I studied the sets designed for the film *Flash Gordon* by Art Director John Graysmark and Set Director Danilo Donati. In his work on the film Donat created a fantasy oriental court room for Ming the Merciless. In my second act I need a particularly lavish set. These sources serve me well as I design the look of Act Two. For my base colors I chose red, back, and gold. For the walls I decided upon the symbol of the Chinese dragon. The wall panels will be topped by pagoda style top pieces which are curved upward on the ends.
For the costume design for the second act I borrowed from the same three films mentioned before for the oriental sets. I was impressed with the lavish costumes designed by Irene Sharaff for *The King and I*, Costume Director Bob Ringwood designing for *The Shadow*, and Costume Director Danilo Donati designing for *Flash Gordon*. Ringwood’s spectacular wardrobe for Ming the Merciless especially caught my eye and held my attention.

I am impressed by the royal robes of the King in *The King and I*. The royal robes are finished in maroon and dark blue velvets and satins trimmed in gold. In *The Shadow* Shiwan Khan’s royal robes are predominantly black and gold with black fur collar trim on his robes as well as his hat. In *Flash Gordon* Ming the Merciless wears magnificent robes with stiff high circular collars. The robes were created in bright red with metallic gold trim.

**Formatting the Show**

The order in which illusions appear on the bill is very important. In planning the order of effects for a period show I have chosen an order which many of the magicians of The Golden Age followed. It is based on the order of acts presented in the Vaudeville theatres where they presented their craft. In practice it looks like the following:

- Act 1 introduces magician
- Act 2 introduces new material
- Act 3 presents a large illusion with a lot of flash
- Act 4 generates enthusiasm and builds up momentum
- Act 5 is a headliner act which sets up audience for intermission. It gives them something to talk about at the drink bar
• Intermission is introduced with sleight of hand performed before a closed curtain
• Intermission
• Act 6 helps the audience get settled down after intermission
• Act 7 presents a full stage effect which surpasses illusions of Acts 3 and 5
• Act 8 is the top act on the bill
• Act 9 the unique even bizarre act.

Creating the Costumes for Act One and Act Two

For Act One I designed the magician’s costume following guidelines employed by the magicians of The Golden Age. For the pattern I selected Simplicity pattern number 4482 Phantom of the Opera. Patterns included in the packet are for the following:
• Frock jacket
• Vest
• Pants
• Dickey
• Cape
• Tie

To this I added spats, jodhpur fashion boots, gloves, and top hat. As costume is being constructed traditional pockets employed by magicians of the period are added. These pockets include:
• Loading pockets inside breast coat for livestock
• Two Profondes pockets inside tails for steals and disposals
• Elastic around lower hem of vest to hold balls, and small objects
• Clips to hold coins, and spring flowers at waist
• *Pochettes* small pockets in trousers at back of thighs for steals. For Second Act I have borrowed from William Robinson in his alternate persona of Chung Ling Soo. The costume consists of:
  • Long yellow embroidered robe
  • Black embroidered blouse with buttons down the side Chinese style
  • Black blousy silk trousers with tie cords at ankles
  • Conical mandarin yellow hat
  • Black ballet slippers. (Steinmeyer 309b)

Musical Accompaniment for the Performance

Sam Randlettan has suggested the use of classical ballet music to accompany a magic performance because it is designed to accompany action on stage (Marshall 25).

To accompany Act One I will be using music from the classics including Johann Strauss II’s *Blue Danube* and *Viennese Walt*, Camille Saint-Saen’s *Danse Macabre*, Peter Illich Tchaikovsky’s *Swan Lake*, and Modest Petrovich Mussorgsky’s *Night on Bald Mountain*. To accompany Act Two I will be using music with an oriental flavor including Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Song of India*, John W. Bratton’s *In a Pagoda*.

The musical score is composed with the timing of each illusion and segue. Music is selected, timed then entered into the computer. A playlist of these pieces is put together. From this two cd disks are burned (one for the show and one as backup).
The Lighting of the Show

Lighting is used to illuminate the areas of my show which I want the audience to see and hide that which I don’t. The best light for illumination is a white light. The white light is accompanied by pink gel to cover me as I perform to give me a nice healthy glow. The only other color gel I require is blue. This is used to illuminate levitations and other illusions with a dramatically climax such as decapitation effects. Colored gels are used less than fifty percent in my show.

In my show I rely upon the following sources of light:

- Scallop ornamental footlights to give period look
- Ellipsoidal spot to spotlight action
- Tungsten Halogen Fresnel spots to soften the edges

For my period piece I have decided to forgo the border lights to use old fashioned footlights instead. True border lights would enhance visibility and help give my stage the look of a well lit picture box. What I am going for, however, is the look of a period magic show. I have also selected footlights because they cast eerie shadows on my sets. This will help and maintain mood.

All lighting and music will be controlled from a switchboard under the command of the show’s technician. The switchboard will be a EDRC (Electronic Dimmer Remote Control) system.
The Illusions and Special Effects Presented

In my performance I will be presenting illusions presented by magicians of The Golden Age or those recreated by contemporary magic producers such as U.F. Grant. If I find a modern piece which enhances my show will use cosmetics to give it a period look. For my show I have selected the following:

- Traditional Rabbit from the Top Hat
- Walsh Disappearing Cane
- Gloves to Spring Flowers
- Mandrake Cape (U.F. Grant) Wine to Glass
- Milk Pitcher to Flowers
- Silk Cylinders
- Astro Spheres
- Silk Change Bag
- Sword Livestock Box
- Thomas Nelson Downs’ Miser’s Dream
- Card Wheel with Forced Deck
- Harry Houdini style Cremation Head
- Linking Ropes
- Transcardia
- Alexander Herrmann’s Scaling Cards
- Collapsible Fan
- Hurricane Confetti Storm Fan
- Mark Wilson’s Arabian Tent Illusion
Temple Screen
Double Dove Pan
Imperial Rice Bowls
Ching Ling Foo’s Linking Rings
Chinese Sticks
Zombie Box
Lotta Jar
Ching Ling Foo’s Egyptian Water Suspension
Pharaoh’s Bunny Box
Imperial Dragon Pagoda Square Circle
Howard Thurston’s Floating Princess Kanac

The progression of my show follows traditional lines. I begin with light effects to get the attention of the spectators and relax them. This follows the style of Robert-Houdin, and the Herrmann Brothers. The early effects employ legerdemain to establish myself as a suave master of magic.

My next illusions are on the bill to impress the spectators. These are performed in the style of Harry Keller, and Howard Thurston. Each of these illusions is bigger and more spectacular than the one which preceded it. I conclude this section of my show with an effect to wow the spectators. This is intended to give them something to talk about at intermission and to bring them back afterwards. For this I have selected the Cremation Head.
Leading into intermission I follow in Harry Blackstone’s tradition of performing small illusions in front of the closed curtain close to the audience. I conclude this with card scaling in the style of Alexander Herrmann.

Act Two pays salute to Ching Ling Foo, and William Robinson aka. Chung Ling Soo. Again I move from light oriental effects to the more spectacular. In this act I present some of the most colorful and spectacular effects of The Golden Age. In this way this act is ideal for the last spot on the bill as it follows the idea of saving the very best for last. In this way I give the spectators something pleasant to remember when they exit the theatre.

Cast and Crew of the Show

My period piece consists of the magician, two assistants, two stage hands, one technician, and two confederates in the audience. Behind the curtains there are one wardrobe mistress, and one make-up artist. Working the house there are one ticket booth operator, two ushers, and one head usher.

Acquiring the Look of the Golden Age

The theatre for my show undergoes a face lift to achieve the look and the feel of a theatre of the late 1800s. These changes include the following:

- Sandwich boards outside and in the lobby display period magician’s posters.
- Personnel dressed in period costumes.
- The walls of the house decorated with large framed lithographs of famous magicians of The Golden Age.
- Stage set with period footlights, potted ferns.
Costuming the Cast and Crew

The assistants undergo one costume change at intermission from Victorian to oriental. During Act One the assistants wear black dresses, white blouses, maroon ribbon ties, gold vests, and comfortable black flats. They wear hair up and simple stage make-up. For Act Two they appear in costumes of conjuror’s assistants. This consists of yellow short Chinese tunics with black dragon symbol on back, black trousers tied at ankles with black cord, black sash, black flats, and black and yellow beanie. From beanie hang false pig tails. The assistants wear yellow pancake with modest black eye liner.

The stage hands during both acts wear tan and maroon plaid work shirts, brown work trousers, brown leather belts, light brown vests, brown bandanas at throat, heavy tan socks, brown leather work shoes, and brown derbies. In their back pocket tan leather gloves hang out.

The technician wears cream work shirt, brown trousers, olive vest, grey and maroon broad ribbon tie, poor boy olive hat worn turned around, brown socks, and work shoes. He is equipped with clip board.

Lobby crew and ushers wear long cream blouses or shirts with maroon pin stripe, black trousers or long ankle length shirts, maroon paisley wide ribbon ties, black vests, black socks, leather tie shoes, maroon sleeve garters, and gold brocade vest.

Confederates in the audience dress to fit in with the other members of the audience. For this show, the look will be casual without standing out.
The Sets and Furnishings on Stage

The show consists of two acts. To create each of these a backdrop extends across the back of the stage. This backdrop has a fancy framed opening in the center through which the magician makes his entrances into each act. The backdrop is reversible serving both acts.

The backdrop consists of four panels each eight by eight foot. This gives me a thirty two foot span plus the three by eight foot span of the center entrance portal. This expands my space to thirty five foot across the stage.

The side for the first act is finished in Victorian period maroon flock wall paper. In the center of the panels left and right of the opening are mounted three-by-one foot omega symbols cut out of plywood and painted gold. The center opening of the backdrop is decorated as a Victorian doorway.

The side for the second act is finished in yellow brocade flock wallpaper. In the center of each panel to the left and right of the portal are three by one foot wooden glossy black Chinese dragons. The top of the portal frame is fitted with a pagoda style curved end piece.

The set for each act is furnished with three magic tables plus two utility tables and two three by five foot screens. The utility tables flank the doorway and are masked off from the audience by the ornamental screens. These tables serve as work space for the assistants preparing and setting out effects. The screens are finished to blend in with theme of the two acts.

The three tables are performance pieces consisting of one black arts table and two side tables. I perform off of each in turn while my two assistants remove and replenish.
each table throughout the show. Each table serves as a miniature stage or performance space for which effects are spotlighted.

Concessions for Intermission

During intermission tradition is maintained as we offer period snacks orange drink in small cardboard boxes and yellow cardboard boxes of salt water taffies. Inside every box is a piece of memorabilia to help remember the show. For my show the prize in each box is a scaling card. It is an exact copy of the scaling card cast out into the audience as intermission time. The box is printed with image of top hat and rabbit.

After the Final Curtain

I will come out and sit of the apron of the stage to answer questions from the audience about the amazing magicians of The Golden Age of magic. I will not, however, answer questions concerning how magic illusions are performed.
Literature Cited


APPENDIX
APPENDIX

THE SCRIPT THE CAVALCADE OF MAGIC

The Characters

Magician, a stage magician of period of The Golden Age

Madeline, chief assistant to the Magician
Sven, Chief crewman
Hermione, second assistant to the Magician
Angus, second crewman

Bill, loud mouth heckler
Head Usher / Candy Barker, head usher in charge of lobby and sales of concessions
Barb, Bill’s long suffering wife

Crew of Show

Second Usher, assists Head Usher
Lobby Mistress sells tickets and concessions

Lighting Engineer, in charge of lighting the show
Soundman, in charge of music and sound
Make-up Person, in charge of make-up for the cast
ACT ONE THE CAVALCADE OF MAGIC SHOW

The house of the theatre. Enter Barb with the rest of the audience.

BARB:

Enter from lobby, stage left.

[Enter with other spectators entering the house. Have some trouble finding seat. Settle in seat. Begin making friends with those seated around you in a good natured manner.]

Oh wherever is my seat?

I can never find, oh I think, oh there is. [Nestle into seat].

Bill?

[Call out for Bill seeming to have lost him. Up until now you don’t realize that he isn’t in room.]

Bill? Where are you?

[Speak to those women nearby, check if they too have irresponsible husbands].

He just hates coming to these things.

I suppose that it’s my own fault for trying to get him to come to a play.

I just got tired of staying home, every night just watching television, and listening to his snoring.

BILL:

Enter from lobby, stage right the aisle across from where Barb is sitting.

[Come down aisle half way look for Barb. Embarrass her by calling out for her]

Barb, Barb, where are you? Why are you all the way over there?
HEAD USHER:

*Enter from lobby, stage right.*

*[Follow Bill down aisle trying to calm him down.]*

Please, Sir, lower your voice and take your seat the show is about to begin.

BILL:

*[Antagonistically snap back at the Head Usher].*

You shush, she’s not your wife.

*[Muscle way through an entire row of seats to the other aisle. Move down stage left aisle to take seat by Barb. Snap at Barb smugly].*

Well now are you satisfied!

BARB:

*[Embarrassed and fed up with Bill].*

Shhh just sit down!

HEAD USHER:

*[Follow Bill to where she is taking his seat].*

BILL:

*[Looking at Head Usher hovering behind. Snap at Barb].*

Shush yourself!

*[Turn to Head Usher].*

I ‘m taking my seat, don’t make a big thing of it.

*[React to others around who may try to but in.]*
HEAD USHER:

[Shake head. Mumble as return to lobby].

LIGHTS DIM

MUSIC OVERTURE BEGINS

ROBERT- HOUDIN, HERRMANN BROTHERS PORTION OF THE SHOW:

CURTAIN OPENS

MADELINE AND HERMIONE:

Enter stage

MADELINE:

Enter stage left

HERMIONE:

Enter stage right

MADELINE:

[Move toward center stage to the entranceway to backdrop for arrival of Magician. Lift right hand in flourish to honor Magician].

HERMIONE:

[Move toward center stage in unison with Madeline. Mirror Madeline’s action. Raise left hand in flourish to honor Magician].

MAGICIAN:

Enter through center opening.
[Bow, turn graciously with sweep of hand honor Madeline and Hermione].

MADELINE AND HERMIONE:

[Throughout the show follow Magician’s lead as you assist him. Be at his fingertips, handing him items as he needs them and retrieving items from him when he has completed an effect. Each time you step in and step back give a sleight curtsy dip. When Magician is performing an effect, unless you are called to help, stand out of his way].

MAGICIAN:

[Move to each illusion as you perform each. Short bow after each illusion is performed].

TOP HAT WITH RABBIT, WALSH CANE, GLOVES TO FLOWERS,
MANDRAKE CAPE WINE TO GLASS, MILK PITCHER

MAGICIAN:

[Remove top hat with right hand, reveals that it is empty, flatten it, pop it open, reveal that it is still empty then proceed to remove a bunny from the hat via secret breast pocket pouch. Present the hat to Madeline and the bunny to Hermione. Tap walking stick on stage. Then release it that it might dance on the floor. Dance with cane. Toss it up collapsing it revealing a large red silk. Place the scarf around Hermione’s neck, drawing her close for a nice gentlemanly kiss on the cheek. Remove white gloves, one finger at a time. Then close gloves together producing flowers, present flowers to Madeline. Place cane on pedestal table stage right. Move to the pedestal table stage left on which a wine bottle and empty wine glass sit. Remove cape, raising it in front of the table. When the cape is lowered the glass is full of wine.
Raise the glass to lips and drinks. Show satisfaction.

Move to pedestal table, stage right to the folded newspaper, and Milk Pitcher. Make a scene out of making the newspaper into a paper funnel.

Indicate the milk pitcher, giving it great regard. With the funnel in left hand, dip down to lift up the pitcher in right hand. As dip down to retrieve the pitcher secretly scoop flower blossoms into the funnel. The load is now secured on a headless nail behind the pedestal portion of the table. With the loaded funnel in left hand, proceed to pretend to fill the funnel with milk from pitcher. Hand off half empty pitcher to Madeline. Then stir funnel with wand. Take funnel to apron of the stage, carefully toss the contents (flower blossoms) over the heads of the folks in the first row. Give Assistants time to clear away illusions and Crewmen to clear away the two pedestal tables.]

KELLER, THURSTON PORTION OF THE SHOW

SILK CYLINDERS

MAGICIAN:

[Walk down stage to get to know audience. Join the audience in laughing about the reaction of the folks, who jumped up when the flower blossoms came cascading down on them].

Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to our show.

BILL:

[Talk under breath intended for the people around you to hear].

Yeh magic man, your wife didn’t nag you into coming!
MAGICIAN:

[You don’t hear Bill].

This evening for your pleasure we have gathered some of the finest illusions of magic, as well as wonders from around the world.

Let us begin by looking at a mystery which the world of science refuses to admit that it exists.

Behold the miracle of teleportation, the ability to move from one place to another.

Ohh the scientists know how it is done, but they just won’t tell you.

They pretend that it’s impossible but, my friends, it can be done!

In fact this very evening we have it here on our stage..

[Display two red cylinders with glasses underneath with each holding a blue silk inside.

Under each insert is a weighted yellow silk].

The secret lies right here in this ruby cylinder.

[Indicate cylinder stage right.]

There they are two cylinders. In this cylinder over here a crystal tumbler stands with a blue silk positioned inside.

Now through telepathic power I will lift this very tumbler and the silk it contains will be transported through the air to this second cylinder [indicate cylinder stage left]. I warn you, however, that this process happens very closely, so you must watch very carefully.

[With intensity pretend tumbler and silk have been transported to the other cylinder.

Remove stage left cylinder revealing second tumbler and blue silk in place.]
And there you see it safely transported. Isn’t science wonderful? I’m sure that these amazing cylinders will be in your stores by Christmas time.

[Repeat back and forth becoming more impressed with yourself with each passing. By now it’s becoming quite evident to the audience that there are actually two tumblers, two cylinders and two blue silks].

BILL:

Humph, some hot shot magician. It’s a cheap trick there’s two glasses under those tubes.

MAGICIAN:

[Try to ignore Bill.]

The science of tele-transportation right here tonight.

BILL:

[Rudely interrupt a little louder]

I said that there are two glasses with blue hankieeeees!

MAGICIAN:

[Address Bill].

You might be right, Sir, that would be a way of doing it. But if I did it that way well then this could never happen.

[With a flourish lift both cylinders reveal two identical tumblers filled with large yellow silks. Bow with the two cylinders in hands. Hand them to Hermione.]
ASTRO SPHERES

MAGICIAN:

In the heavens above us, beyond this earthly realm lies the vastness of space. Out there the planets revolve around the sun. Planets like great leviathans in the deep sea of outer space move with a strange rhythm. Their movement is steady, orderly. At times, however, some mysterious cosmic force causes them to shift in their orbits around the sun. At times a mysterious conjunction takes place bring these giants in alignment with one another. Since the earliest times wizards and sorceress alike have peered out into space trying to discover what mysterious force causes such giants to shift and change in their orbits through space. Some say that the great seer Melanthius in his observatory on the island of Kaskah was able to discover the secret. It is believed that Melanthius actually recreate the mysterious force in his laboratory which caused a fraction of a shift of the planets Mars and Neptune. This evening, for your illumination, I have brought at great expense, for this evening’s show only, devices used by the great Melanthius to demonstrate his power over the distant planets. For this demonstration Melanthius chose to use colored balls and a simple laboratory beaker. Along with the beaker I shall use this chest decorated with the symbol of the court magician, the jester. Why a Jester you might ask. It’s because great wizards, such as Melanthius often sought to fool anyone who attempted to meddle their ancient secrets. The sign of the jester was the device which Melanthius used for his chicanery.

[Lift up and display the box and tube showing it to be harmless].
With such dark devices such as this, the great wizard discovered that he could drop colored spheres into the cylinder in a certain order. This order followed the order of planets in orbit in deep space.

*Call out colors as they enter the cylinder*.

Simple? Yes! Perfectly safe? Perhaps?

Once a ball entered the cylinder things began to happen to it. The more balls entering the cylinder the stranger things became. Things in Melanthius’ laboratory happened; unusual thing happened as the colored balls changed position.

*Repeat several times*.

Humph it seems that this one little ball is causing an awful lot of trouble in the cylinder. We might say that it just doesn’t play well with others. I am afraid that it just must go.

Melanthius worried about what was taking place in the cylinder so he decided to use the powers of the magic chest, such as this one to remove the problem sphere. In fact he did it just like this. Then everyone was quite happy.

The Astro Spheres.

*Take bow, hand to Madeline*.

SILK CHANGE BAG

MAGICIAN:

Stories are told of wise kings who ruled the lands to the west. One particular story which I discovered which was quite popular in England was of a king and his lovely young daughter. The king and his subjects all loved the young princess. Whatever she wanted folks tried give to her. Everyone in the kingdom knew that she found special joy in bright colored things. On one particular year at the time of the young princesses’
birthday she said that she would like very much to have lovely colored scarves. Within weeks of the happy day, bales and boxes of the finest scarves of the land began to arrive at the palace. All scarves were colorful but none of them had the brilliant hues that the king wanted for his young daughter. So he sought out the advice of the castle mage. After hearing about the kings problem the castle Merlin said, “Your Majesty, what you require here are scarves with the bright vivid colors which are only found in nature.” And with that king and his magician went down into the earth at the royal gem mines. Wonderful jewels were then placed in the Merlin’s net. Then to finish the Merlin went out into the Royal Gardens to capture some of the many butterflies from the garden. He was gathering bright vivid colors which are only found in nature the jewels of the earth and the butterflies of the garden. Then with a wave of his wand the magician caused the net to overflow with the finest of silks.

[Wave wand, pass it over then begin pulling out silks].

The Magic Butterfly Net.

[Bow then hand net to Hermione].

FOX SWORD BOX

CREW:  Enter stage left

[Wheel in the Fox Box, Sword, and Fox in cage then leave stage].

MAGICIAN:

[Walk down to the apron to speak directly to the audience].

Because in this next act I will be using a wild animal I would like to ask you, all of you, to be perfectly still. For your own sake, and the sake of the person next to you, please do
not make any sudden moves. Wild animals are unpredictable sometimes in the middle of an illusion they will suddenly bolt from the stage into the audience.

BILL:

Please! Wild animals! It’s probably a little pussy cat. I’d like to see it come over here.

BARB:

Oh Bill, shut up. Just watch the show.

MAGICIAN:

[You don’t hear Bill].

I will now be placing a wild and dangerous animal in a box before you and change it before your very eyes.

[Carefully remove fox from the chest carrying fox in his arms. The fox moves naturally about in your arms.]

This is my dear pet Beauregard. He is an American red fox and has been performing in my show for around three years now in fact he has become quite a trooper. In fact when he knows that he is going to perform he gets all excited, his bushy tail wags and he jumps into his little carrier. He really is quite a performer.

[As speak Beauregard’s actions tell a different story.]

In magic when we work with wild animals we often need to calm them down. For this we rely on hypnotism. Most animals can be hypnotized quite easily. In fact after a number of times even an animal like Beauregard will go under quite quickly. Please allow me to demonstrate.

[Dramatically move to hypnotize the fox which suddenly goes stiff].

Ahh Beauregard is now deep in a hypnotic trance.
[Snap fingers and pass hands over fox’s eyes].

Now I will place him securely in this magic chamber.

[Place fox in box showing all sides to the audience].

Now I am going to. . .

[Lift up sword moving toward apron of the stage addressing the front two rows of audience.]

You folks in the front row down there might want to cover up for this illusion. It can get a little messy in fact a lot of splattering of blood often hits the front row.

[Place box with fox on a table near the front. Make several passes at the box].

MADELINE:

[Look shocked can see what is about to happen. Grab the box cover interrupting sliding the shield in place (secretly dropping the black plate in place hiding the fox)].

MAGICIAN:

Thank you, Madeline, now lets see where was I oh yes.

[Whirl the sword about then gliding it in place. Then wave wand in the air].

Presto, Beauregard has changed!

[Remove cover, take box around to show that it is empty].

Ladies and Gentlemen Beauregard is no longer with us.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Beauregard the amazing vanishing fox.”

[Bow].

SVEN:

[Come to Magician with rolling table to take Fox Box away].
MAGICIAN:

[Bow, hand box to Sven].

SVEN:

[Wheel table off stage].

MISER’S DREAM

HERMIONE:

[As Magician begins his patter about money become interested. Your interest becomes obvious as Magician begins plucking coins out of the air].

MAGICIAN:

[Come forward to table holding Miser’s Dream silver bucket].

Gold, Silver, Platinum the stuff which dreams are made. The thought of such great wealth has grasped many of us. Many a man or woman has dreamt the dream of catching precious coins in a bucket such as this . . .

[Pick up bucket and begin working the bucket].

When the bills come in, what person hasn’t dreamed about well just reaching out and plucking coins out of the air like this . . .

[Begin catching coins and dropping them into the bucket].

This is a dream of Midas and many a miser..

MADELINE:

[Come forward bring a tray].

MAGICIAN:

[Pour out coins onto tray].

The Miser’s Dream.
[Bow holding bucket. Hand tray to Madeline].

HERMIONE:

[Curtsy to audience, come to Magician wishing to take bucket away. As come near leer at bucket anxious to get hands of gold and bucket].

MADELINE AND MAGICIAN:

[Confused by the way in which Hermione leers at bucket, shrug.]

HERMIONE:

[Take bucket center stage right. Then try to hide your greed for coins. Begin trying to pluck coins out of air but come up empty handed].

MADELINE AND MAGICIAN:

[Watch Hermione in disbelief.]

MAGICIAN:

[Clear throat.]

HERMIONE:

[Suddenly notice Magician and Madeline. Look sheepish.]

MADELINE:

[Stamp foot and gestures for Hermione to get back with the show].

MAGICIAN:

[Watch Hermione shaking head in mused disbelief.]

CARD WHEEL WITH FORCED DECK

MAGICIAN:

[Approach the apron, stage right. As pass table holding deck of card, picks up deck. Shuffle cards casually as approaches apron.]
Out in the Wild West many an argument took place over a card table. Cards, 52 little past boards, four suits of mystery, even the royalty are all here in these cards, kings and queens and at anytime in a deck of cards mischievous naves as well as other cards might show up. In a game of cards, who knows what cards you might find in your hand?

Now for your enjoyment, I bring to you the rage of the West a game which is currently being performed in the saloons of Abilene, Tombstone, and Dodge City. For your pleasure I now present The Amazing Card Wheel.

For this illusion I shall require the assistance of a volunteer from the audience.

Ahh there you are. Madeline, will you help this gentleman up on our stage?"

MADELINE:

[Come down stage to help the volunteer up the stage right].

MAGICIAN:

[Greet the volunteer escorting him to down center stage].

What is your name, Sir?

VOLUNTEER:

[ Gives name ].

MAGICIAN:

Nice to meet you, (name). Now, (name) we have never met. Is that correct?

VOLUNTEER:

[ Respond ].

MAGICIAN:

Thank you. Now, (name), I have a deck of cards. In fact it is the same brand of poker deck which is currently popular at the Longbranch Saloon in Dodge City. (Name), I
would like for you to pick a card and then show it to the audience. Be careful not to let me know which card you have selected.

VOLUNTEER:

[Do as directed].

MAGICIAN:

Now, (name) put your card back into the deck.

ANGUS:

[While the attention of the audience is on Magician and Volunteer delivers the wheel to Magician, then retire to side curtain].

MAGICIAN:

[Pick up gambler’s hat from Center Table].

Thank you, Angus. I shall now take this deck of 52 cards and toss them into this gamblers hat.

[Toss cards into hat and shake it lightly].

That should do nicely.

[Aside to the audience].

By the way this particular splendid gamblers chapeau up until Saturday night belonged to the famous Dandy Jim Buckley, but now he won’t need it.

In a rip roaring poker game he drew six aces to a gentle mans Colt 45.

MAGICIAN AND CAST:

[Bow heads in mourning].
MAGICIAN:

From the 52 cards in my chapeau I shall endeavor to find the very card which you selected.

[Turn to wheel and give it a spin].

For this I shall make use of the Wheel also from the Longbranch Saloon in Dodge. I have this fine wheel on loan from a Mr. John Holiday who sort of borrowed it for this evening’s performance.

[Spin the wheel stopping at the chosen card].

Your card, Sir, is the (selected card) I believe.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Amazing Card Wheel.”

[Bow inviting Volunteer to take a bow as well].

Let us give a big hand to our Volunteer (name).

Thank you, Sir.

HERMIONE:

[Oozing charm approach Volunteer to help him down the stage left steps. In helping him, slide a signed scaling card into his pocket. Then return to the stage by the stage left steps].

DIM LIGHTS

CREMATION HEAD

HERMIONE AND MADELINE:

[Solemnly, silently come forward flanking the Magician].
MAGICIAN:

While on safari on darkest Africa, I happened upon the thick jungle area known only as the Escarpment. In this mysterious land strange things happen. The beasts who prowl the Escarpment are particularly ferocious and often grow to gigantic proportions. Everything which lives there is a killer. While in the Escarpment I happened to meet one of the local witchdoctors. After much bartering he allowed me to borrow a special incantation chest. For your illumination I have brought that chest with me this evening to demonstrate its great power.

[Jauntily snap fingers].

SVEN AND ANGUS:

[With great dignity and fear wheel the chest forward].

MAGICIAN:

[Revolve table giving chest due respect].

This chest has been used by the witchdoctors of the jungle for many years to shrink heads of their enemies. The way in which it works is the chest is placed snuggly over the head of a captured enemy warrior. Then a powerful juju incantation is spoken. Then, my friends, the powerful magic is drawn up from the earth to enter the chest and magic happens. The prisoner quits struggling. He becomes strangely quiet. Then when the chest is opened the only thing left of the man’s head is a wee small shrunken head. Some say that with the right witchdoctor the magic can be reversed. I would hope so wouldn’t you?

[Open chest to reveal a shrunken head. Turn to Madeline].

I thought that I asked you to take out the empties?
MADELINE:

[Look sheepish. Come forward to receive the shrunken head. Take it away off stage].

MAGICIAN:

[Look positive. Carry closed chest to apron down center stage.]

Well now let’s see what this little chest can do. Shall we? To really see what the Head Chest can do, I shall require the services of a volunteer. Come now. Don’t be afraid. Anyone just anyone here, anyone who wishes to loose a little weight between the ears. I am told that it’s great for migraine headaches. A little off of the top? Just anyone. Oh don’t worry I am sure that I well I ah remember exactly the way in which the witchdoctor did it. To show you that I have faith in the chest, I shall volunteer to put on the head chest myself.

SVEN:

[Bring a straight back chair center stage then exit returning with a bucket of water. Place this by chair then exit].

MAGICIAN:

[Take seat. Then proceed to go into a trance].

MADELINE:

[With fear and ceremony place the Chest on Magician’s head. Close the front door. Secretly closing inside doors to protect Magician’s face].

HERMIONE:

[Ritualistically lift a small torch from an African ceremonial trencher. Then ignite torch. Give it time to burn bright and the audience to wonder what is going to happen next. With almost evil intent slide it into hole in chest].
MADELINE:

[Let torch to burn then open doors revealing head missing. Only the torch is seen in the center of the chest].

HERMIONE:

[Remove torch and drop it into bucket of water. Let it hiss in water for effect].

MADELINE AND HERMIONE:

[Clap hands as smile at audience].

MAGICIAN:

[Come out of trance and remove head chest. Stand and bow].

ANGUS:

[Come and remove chair, chest and water bucket. Exit].

CURTAINS CLOSE

CREWMEN:

[Behind closed curtain begin changing set for Act Two].

MAGICIAN, MADELINE AND HERMIONE:

[Move through closed curtain to stand in front of it. Stand before curtain on the apron].

MADELINE AND HERMIONE:

[Flank Magician].

MADELINE:

[Hold the two rope tricks ready for when they are needed].
PERSONAL MAGIC PORTION

LINKING ROPES

MAGICIAN:
The Conjurors of India have given us many fine illusions. Many of these native magicians perform with the ropes. These masters of legerdemain do wondrous things with simple cotton ropes like these.

[Show Linking Ropes].

In their hands three strong ropes can be used to perform many wonders.

[Tie three ropes slowly. As do this reveal that they are indeed quite strong. Then pass the ropes through each linking all three together. Bow with ropes handing them to Madeline].

MADELINE:

[Receive them but do not take them away].

TRANSCARDIA

When I began doing magic I asked my friends just what sort of magic should I do. They all said “Card Tricks! Everyone loves card tricks.” So I asked for suggestions. Folks began telling me about an ancient magician who used a card tray like this one.

HERMIONE:

[Hand Magician Transcardia].
MAGICIAN:

[Take Transcardia from Hermione].

Behold, a card tray holding two face cards.”

[Perform as explain the effect].

In the Transcardia one card is placed in one side and another card is placed in the other. Then with a touch of magic the cards mysteriously change sides.

I began doing this trick of the ancient magician long ago and it was really quite popular. But then my friends began to say that I wasn’t doing it right. There was something that he did that I wasn’t doing. Well I wanted to know if this were true so I began looking for the ancient magician. My search took me all around the world. To rundown theatres, to honky-tonk dives. Then at last I found him at the top of the great Himalayan Mountains at a McDonald’s restaurant having a Big Mack attack. I asked him about the card trick. The ancient magician looked at me and then said, “I heard that you are doing my old trick but you are doing it wrong. You try to fool the audience be flipping the tray back and forth so that they forget which card is which.” So I then asked him how he did it. The ancient magician only said, “I use real magic. Behold I place one card in one side and a different in the other side. Then I allow my magic to flow through my wand into the tray causing the cards to change sides back and forth like so.” I was so amazed that I ask him how it was done. But he replied, “That is my own trick and only God and I know how it’s really done. After I die no one else will ever know.” But now he’s dead and I never did find out how he did it. So if you find out please tell me because I am very confused. [Show confusion as bow handing the Transcardia to Hermione].
HERMIONE:

[Receive Transcardia. Exit stage left use side curtain as Madeline exits stage right].

MADELINE:

[Exit stage right as Hermione exits to side of curtain, stage left].

SCALING CARDS

MAGician:

[Work the apron].

It has been a tradition among magicians to thank their audiences, by scaling cards at them during intermission. The tradition goes back the famous Herrmann Brothers Carl and Alexander Herrmann. It is performed like this . . .

[Begin scaling cards to all areas of the house].

We thank you one and all for coming this evening. There is much more magic right here on this stage after intermission. So go out and become refreshed. After intermission we will enter into the magic of the mysterious East. Please remain in your seats until we release you for intermission.

[Bow and exit trough the center opening in the curtain]

HEAD USHER:

[Come bouncing up the stage left aisle to front of the house. Climb stairs stage left. Move to center stage at apron. Give pitch].

Ladies and gentlemen, ladies and gentlemen, please avail yourselves of the fine beverages and confections in the lobby.

[Hold up boxes of toffee].
In these little treasure chests, which for this performance only we are selling in the lobby, you will find the finest salt water taffies. These are the same fine confections which you might enjoy if you visited the board walk at Atlantic City. And yet as tasty as these taffies are, there is one more thing. In each and every box there is a prize, a souvenir selected for this show alone. In each box you will find a collectable card just like the ones scaled into the audience by the Magician. And Ladies and Gentlemen, there is more. As if that weren’t enough there is much more. For this show only there in one of these little boxes an extra treat. How many of you when you came to the theatre noticed a black deluxe Rolls Royce Silver Ghost parked out front. Well for the lucky person who finds that special ticket, if you go up to the uniformed chauffeur and present it to him he will drive you to the nearest Pink Penguin Ice Cream Saloon for a late night treat. That is if Hermione remembered to put the ticket in one of the boxes. Enjoy your intermission and then return for the Second Act of our Caravan of Magic.

[Bow out, backing up the aisle to the lobby]
MADELINE: AND HERMIONE:  *Enter together from both sides of stage.*

MADELINE:  *Enters stage left.*

HERMIONE:  *Enters stage right.*

MADELINE AND HERMIONE:

*Move to center stage to opening in flat*.

MADELINE:

*Pick up gong and strike it to summon the Magician*.

MAGICIAN:

*Enter through opening in flat. Walk toward front of stage, indicate each of two assistants*.

I am Ben Rha Sokurah, your Conjuror. Welcome to my parlor of many delights. Here arranged before you are the wonders of the mysterious Far East. Allow me to demonstrate.

**FANS; COLLAPSIBLE & CONFETTI STORM**

MAGICIAN:

*As speak move down center. Carry fan in folds of coat to snap it open as approach apron. Fan it back and forth lightly as speak. As describe demonstrate jester with fan*.

Since days of great antiquity the Chinese Fan has had many uses. Men and women alike carry fans to give secret messages to others in the street. For instance a maiden might
reveal that she is giving her heart to a young man by fluttering the fan over her heart. A woman can use such a fan to attract a lover. A man can use the fan to communicate whether or not he is ready to conduct business. Very useful these fans, are they not? Ahh but there are also darker uses for a fan, as well. An assassin, appearing out of the shadows can use a fan to hide a deadly weapon.

[Reveal hidden dagger].

This evening, I bring for your pleasure, one of the Imperial Fans of the Palace of the Emperor. Such fans of these are quite rare. They are unique and beyond price. Tonight with the assistance of one of a young lady in our audience, we will discover the power of such fans. I will ask one of my assistants to now enter the audience to find a suitable volunteer.

MADELINE:

[Begin going down stage left looking for a young girl to aid the Magician. Find youngster and escort her up stage left. On way up find out child’s name].

Oh most honorable Master, this is, (child’s name).

MAGICIAN:

Thank you Madeline. (Name) welcome to the show. Thank you for helping me. I like to get to know those who help me on stage so I would like to ask you a few questions. Is that okay with you?

VOLUNTEER:

[Answer questions].
MAGICIAN:

(Name) where are you from?

VOLUNTEER:

(Answer).

MAGICIAN:

Have you ever seen a magician before?

VOLUNTEER:

(Answer)

MAGICIAN:

Are you married?

VOLUNTEER:

(Giggles then answers).

HERMIONE:

[Bring a small fan for the Volunteer].

MAGICIAN:

[Snap open the fan then fans self].

I have a fan, which w can use to demonstrate its power.

[Fold it then place it in her hands. Help her with a few sweeps].

MADELINE:

[With great respect bring forth the collapsible fan folded].
MAGICIAN:

[Take fan, open it, then give dignified sweep].

This fan, (name) is very old. It is believed that it was used on the Great Wall to tell of the coming of the great Genghis Khan. (Name), I would like for you to do everything I do with my fan with this fan here..

VOLUNTEER:

[Responds].

MAGICIAN:

[Begin with simple moves coaxing Volunteer to follow along. Then get complicated, absurd. The object is to loose her].

Humph, why don’t we do it this way? Because I can see that you are a most remarkable young lady I shall let you use this very rare Ancient Imperial Fan, and I’ll use the little one which you were using. Is that okay with you?

VOLUNTEER:

[Responds].

[Exchange fans with Volunteer].

Now, (name), using the really rare, really, really expensive, one of a kind, Imperial Fan to copy what I will do with your rather modest fan.

VOLUNTEER:

(Will begin but soon the fan will collapse. She and audience will react).

MAGICIAN:

[As before start easy, but get complicated. Get so obsessed you do not notice that in her hands the big fan has fallen apart. Wait for the laughter from the audience. Look over
and do double take. Take it like you might a dead bird. Stare sadly as it swings back and forth from your fingertips. Act dumbfounded. Try to revive it. Then rise up to full power. Befriend the Volunteer.

Please do not to fear, (name), all can be made right.

[Wave wand then let hands pass over the fan. Open fan reveal it to be whole again.
Do fine flourishes. Do ritual blessing of Volunteer with fan].

HERMIONE:
[Come to take Volunteer back down into audience].

MADELINE:
[Come forward to respectfully remove fan].

MAGICIAN:
Thank you, (name), for being a most excellent volunteer and helping me please accept this your own fan.

[Remove it from folds of robes and present it to her].

Let us have a nice round of applause for (name).

HERMIONE:

Escort Volunteer back to her seat via stage right steps, and then return to stage by the same steps.

MAGICIAN:

Some of the finest fans come from the mountainous region of China. It is said that these fans are so powerful that the conjurors can use them to even change the weather. Such fans can produce snow flurries on the warmest days of spring. Please allow me to demonstrate.
ANGUS:
(Wheels to center stage table with Confetti Fan setting in its holder. Exit to side of stage).

SET-UP
[On magic rolling table is a big red fan open mounted on an ornamental box. Beside it are a clear glass of water and four squares of colored tissue paper. Behind open fan is a hollow egg filled with confetti].

MAGICIAN:
[Display the tissue papers then tear them into shreds. Roll up the paper into a ball. Place the ball into the water glass. Remove wet ball in right finger tips. Squeeze until it is dry. Make a pass transferring the ball to left hand. As reach for fan secretly drop ball of wadded up tissue into box. Lift fan and wave it. As wave it, drop to one knee dramatically. Crush egg container behind the fan causing the confetti to form a snow storm. Bow with fan open like a wing in hand.)

ARABIAN TENT ILLUSION

HERMIONE:
[Hide in collapsed Arabian Tent Illusion].

MAGICIAN:
[Perform the illusion as tell story].

Our next illusion comes to us from the mysterious Middle East. Lands where the fierce sirocco winds move the dunes about and the death lives beyond the shadows. In this land, out in the desert, there are wadies in which wise men will never go. Here among the mysterious shifting sands, whole caravans have been swallowed up, lost forever. But
what happens out there? Out in the darkness? What causes such things to happen? Very few wise men will even try to guess. Some people believe that these areas are inhabited by the spirits known as the Efreets of the Jinn, what you call Genies. Tonight I will demonstrate what took place in one of these sand dunes, near the Oasis of Kajar in the Arabian Desert, not long ago. The Caliph of Baghdad was searching for one of his caravans which had become lost in the desert. This was important because you see his youngest daughter was traveling with that particular caravan. Of the Caravan of fifty Camels, seventy trained fighters, and a dozen merchants and their tents were lost only one tent was found in the desert. But to his great joy in that tent his daughter was found nice and safe.

/Form tent from sides and ends of a tent. Pass rod over assembled tent. Tent will shake. Tent will open.\]

HERMIONE:

/Rise coyly from tent.\]

MAGICIAN:

/Help Hermione out of tent.\]

Ladies and Gentlemen, the mysterious and always lovely Hermione. Hermione is brought to us by The Amazing Arabian Tent Illusion. /Bow.\]

MADELINE AND HERMIONE:

/Clear away illusion.\]
MADELINE AND HERMOINE:

[During the next group of illusions remove each illusion after it is used. Do not restock tables until after the three illusions have been performed].

MAGICIAN:

The Temple Screen, the Dove Pan, and the Linking Rings are often enigmas whose secrets are as old as the Han Dynasty. For your pleasure I shall now present these three most puzzling of illusions of the Far East.

[Perform Temple Screen Illusion pantomime style].

DOUBLE DOVE PAN

MAGICIAN:

[Come to center stage carrying the Dove Pan].

MADELINE AND HERMIONE:

[Flank him carrying trays with three elements needed for illusion].

HERMOINE:

[Carry tray with three bowls containing colored sand, and water empty jug].

MADELINE:

[Carry tray holding torch and match box].

MAGICIAN:

Early Chinese sorcerers believed that all of life was constructed of four elements: earth, fire, air, and water. They reasoned that objects which were light, like a feather, were made of air. Heavy objects, such as an anvil, were made of earth and so forth. From this they began to wonder if perhaps, they could use magic to change these four elements
around. This evening on this stage we shall combine the elements earth, water, and fire in this simple silver vessel to produce the element air.

Because it wouldn’t be very exciting to produce air we shall substitute a creature of the air silk scarves.

[Indicate Dove Pan].

For the Element Earth, which we have imported rich soil from several mountain ranges, for water we will be using a blend of waters from several rivers.

MAGICIAN:

[Secretly drop flash paper in pan. Pour purple and green powders poured into Dove Pan Base #].

For earth we pour soil from Mount Tokachi of Japan and soil from Mount Tai Shau of China into this crucible.

[Pantomime pouring water in pan].

For the element water we shall bring water from the Yangtze River. To this we add the third element fire.

[Ignite with torch. Close lid over pan and fire. Lift lid revealing silks and place it over on table secretly gliding it over the second load.]

Most honorable audience, I will now tell you a secret about magic. There is always more.

[Bring forward the closed Dove Pan, lift cover revealing colorful flowers].

Yes, there is always more.
MADELINE AND HERMIONE:

[Remove Dove Pan and trays].

BILL:

[Speak in hushed tones to those around him].

How about the bull this magician is trying to pull on us?

BARB:

SSHH be quiet! Give it a rest, Bill. I want to see this without your funny remarks.

BILL: [Voice low].

We all know how he’s doing his tricks. I’ve gotta check this out. If I wanted to I could see how they are really done.

BARB:

Don’t you dare!

[Speak too loud by mistake. When audience looks become embarrassed].

BILL:

[Sit back in seat defeated and sullen.]

Well Okay, but I could . . . if I wanted to.

ANGUS AND SVEN:

[Come forward to the apron to look around the audience to see if there is a problem].

MAGICIAN, MADELINE, AND HERMIONE:

[Stop what doing. Not sure if there is a problem out in the audience].
MAGICIAN:
[Look around audience to spot troublemaker. Seeing none reassuringly calm the two assistants].

IMPERIAL RICE BOWLS

MAGICIAN:
[Move to table holding Rice Bowls].

In the mountains of the Khinjan Range the people still recall a great rice famine. To feed his subjects the Emperor sent his finest magician a conjuror named Yakuza. Everywhere Yakuza the Amazing traveled, through every village, he would call the people to come before him and bring what little rice they had.

[Perform illusion as tell the story].
And each time in each village Yakuza would multiply their rice so that all might enjoy the pleasure of full bellies. “The Emperor’s Rice Bowls.”

[Bow].

LINKING RINGS

MAGICIAN:
[Slowly perform illusion in pantomime. Then bow silently].

CHINESE STICKS

MAGICIAN:
[Begin performing Chinese Sticks in pantomime].

MADELINE:
[Go to help him. Say something in his ear behind cupped hands].
MAGICIAN:

[Reply quietly].

BILL:

[Take opportunity to leave seat to move toward steps. Don’t get very far].

BARB:

[Grab Bill by arm tugging him back to seat. Painfully embarrassed keep head down].

BILL:

Aww I wouldn’t have done nothing. But I do know how it’s done and I’ll show you.

HEAD USHER:

[Come down to Bill. Get down on haunches on knees to stay out of sight in aisle so as to avoid a scene].

Sir, if you can’t settle down I am afraid that I’m going to have to ask you to leave.

Do you understand me?

BILL:

[Embarrassed but still belligerent].

Okay sure, yeh sure.

BARB:

[Cover face. Speak down to seats.]

Ohh, Bill, this is so embarrassing.

HEAD USHER:

[Wait to see if there is a problem. With scow on face return to lobby].
MAGICIAN:

*[Perform illusion as describe it].*

Ladies and Gentlemen, throughout the universe there is a law of nature that for everything there is an opposite. In Chinese philosophy for the yin there is the opposite a yang. We have two bright yellow sticks. Each stick has a black tassel cord running freely through it. When a cord is pulled on one end the other tassel rises. Yin and yang. Up and down.

BILL:

Yin! Yang! That cord is running at the bottom from one into the other. Everyone knows that.

MAGICIAN:

*[Move forward toward Bill. Now you know who is making such a ruckus in the audience].*

BILL:

*[Cowardly sink back down into seat embarrassed but still a hot head].*

BARB:

*[Slip deeper down in seat].

Oh, Bill.

MAGICIAN:

*[Perform rest of the illusion].

Well if it were true the solution would be to cut the sticks apart.

The problem with this solution is no matter what you do there is always one poor tassel still hanging below. The only way to solve this problem is to pull it up with use of a
Dragon Hair. The Dragon Hair is indeed very rare but luckily Magicians generally have such a hair handy for times such as these. The Baffling Chinese Sticks.

[Bow, cross sticks across chest].

ZOMBIE BOX

MAGICIAN:

[Come forward carrying Zombie Box].

Silver, gold, steel, copper, bronze all have different unique properties making them valuable in our world. The ancient mystics tell us of another metal which existed long before those other metals. It is the metal brozium. Some believe that the universe was once made of brozium. Here in this small treasure chest I have a nugget of brozium which has been formed into a sphere. For your pleasure I now present the very rare metal which was here when the world began. For the following illusion brozium is used because it has a most wonderful unusual power

[Present the illusion]

The Brozium Sphere.

[Bow holding box].

LOTTA JAR

MAGICIAN:

Some of the most perilous areas on the face of the earth are the desert regions. Even the most experienced caravan leaders can meet their death there under the hot unrelenting sun. One of the few to survive was the caravan leader Achim the Fox. No matter how many times Achim journeyed to and from Merikesh he never ran low on water. Here for your scrutiny I present Achim’s Water Jar. They say that whenever he would begin
venturing out on the desert he would bring the jar full of water. But then after it ran out
Achim would lift the jar to heaven imploring Allah to bless his unworthy servant with life
sustaining rain and then Allah who loves His faithful servants granted Achim water.
Each time they ran low of water Achem would raise the silver vessel to heaven and it
would fill again with rain.

[Bow].
The Silver Water Jar of Achim.

EGYPTIAN WATER SUSPENSION

MAGICIAN:

[Perform as described].

Of the four elements: earth, fire, water, and air water is perhaps the most unpredictable.
The early Alchemists dreamed of having power over the elements especially power over
water. Just imagine the power to take a box and then fill it to the brim with water. Then
for but a minute suspend that water in the box until through your power you could
collapse the box making the water disappear altogether. But as wise as they were those
early sorcerers were they never ever figured it out. Who could do such a thing as that? It
is indeed puzzlement.

[Don’t bow but rather go off scratching head].

BUNNY BOX

SVEN AND ANGUS:

[As last illusion is being competed load live rabbit in Bunny Box. Begin rolling bunny
box toward front of stage, as you draw close to center of stage the wheel of the table
sticks causing box to jolt slightly. Look perturbed].
SVEN:

[Go down close to floor to check castor].

ANGUS:

[Watch from standing position steadying the table and box].

MADELINE AND HERMIONE:

[Move close to box with backs to stage left apron and what is taking place with Bill in the audience].

MAGICIAN:

[Come over to take charge of the box and send rest of cast back to their places].

BILL:

[Take opportunity to quietly but roughly slip up steps stage left and slide under the curtain to get lost behind curtain. Hide behind curtain position with feet sticking out from under curtain].

BARB:

[Frantic slip down in seat. Reassure those around you that you have no idea what got into him and how embarrassed you are].

AUDIENCE MEMBERS:

[May try to shout to Magician or go back to tell the Head Usher what Bill has done.]

MAGICIAN AND HEAD USHER:

[If this happens play dumb appearing as if don’t understand the fuss but want the show to go on].
SVEN, ANGUS, MADELINE, AND HERMOINE:

[Fix caster return to places.)

BILL:

[Once things settle down get ready to bump curtain and slide shoes out near where Bunny Box Illusion is being performed].

MAGICIAN:

[Perform illusion as you describe it. Revolve box around counter clockwise slowly moving it in area of left stage center near where Bill is hiding trying, to get a good look of how the illusion is being performed].

Ladies and Gentlemen, I now bring to you, at great expense, an artifact on loan from the Cairo Museum Ancient Egyptian Collection. This marvelous chest was discovered in the tomb of the Pharaoh Cheops the Second. Cheops like other pharaohs was greatly concerned that as he entered into the next world he might get lonely. To help him in his last days of his earthly life his servant the High Priest of Archom arranged to have this very box created. With this box the royal pet, a certain bunny rabbit named Kayfa, would be able to go to and fro into the next world visiting his master the Pharaoh. This very box has been in my study for quite some time now. I keep forgetting to send it back to the museum. Lately I have noticed a rather strange phenomena taking place. My servants and I have noticed that on certain nights, when things are quiet we hear a strange scratching sounds coming from this box. This evening we are going to try a few incantations to see if the box is really empty. First I will check to see if the box is empty. Next I will begin making the proper signs over the box. At last I will draw the likeness of a bunny on this slate. We will see if we might be able to summon Kayfa to come to us
across time from the next world. As I turn the box around life as old as the Great
Pyramids again begin to flow through this ancient chest. And now we have before us
from his latest romp in the Land of the Dead the Pharaoh’s favorite the bunny Kayfa

[Remove rabbit showing it off to the audience].

BILL:

[Suddenly move curtains].

MAGICIAN:

[Suddenly notice curtains moving because Bill is behind them].

HERMIONE:

[Come forward to take bunny away].

MADELINE:

[Notice the curtains. Look to Magician].

MAGICIAN:

[Obviously upset but cool. Give Madeline nod toward curtains then turn toward closing
up box].

MADELINE:

[Casually float toward curtain, rear back then gives a roundhouse belt to bulge in
curtain].

BILL:

Uhhhh, owwwwfff!

[Pratt fall to floor let legs and feet be exposed to audience from under curtain].
BARB:

[Bury head in hand].

Ohh no…

SVEN AND ANGUS:

[Go behind stage].

SOUND:

[Sound of something big being pulled along the floor is heard].

MADELINE:

[Take away box on table].

IMPERIAL DRAGON PAGODA

MAGICIAN:

[Perform illusion as you describe it].

East and West have two very different cultures. This perhaps best seen in the way that both cultures view that magnificent creature known as the dragon. In the West the dragon is feared. It is spoken of as having a long pointed tail, long bat like wings, and breathing fire. Oh yes it is remembered for having an appetite for knights on horseback and fair maidens. Dragons are not very well liked. The dragons in the East, however, are seen as great benevolent creatures. They are wise and friends to all. The dragons in the East are quite colorful and fly but they do not have wings. Such wondrous creatures often live in deserted pagodas and caves. Dragon, like the jay and raven are scavengers filling their lairs with all sorts of treasures. They are especially drawn to collecting the giant pearls, which are only found in the deepest parts of the sea. For your pleasure this evening I now present the Dragon’s Pagoda. In this simple pagoda, long time empty, a
great dragon came to live. Because he loved all things beautiful he soon began to fill it
with wonderful treasures.

[Describe each item produced].

The Dragon of the East.

[Bow].

FLOATING PRINCESS KARNAC

MAGICIAN:

[As speak the Hermione will come forward from stage left].

HERMIONE:

[Enter stage left].

MAGICIAN:

For your pleasure I now bring to you the ancient art of levitation. It is still remembered
how during the reign of Darias the Benevolent his daughter the Princess Karnac lay quite
ill with the fever. The fever was so severe that all who beheld her thought that it had
been brought on by some wicked force. At last when all hope was gone for healing the
King sent for the great Persian Mystic Garish to see if he could help the young Princess.
There in the Royal Throne Room Garnish summoned his flying carpet to heal the
Princess. There resting upon the carpet the Princess Karnac rose that she might be healed
of the powers which haunted her life. Tonight I bring to you a recreation of the levitation
of Princess Karnac.

SVEN AND ANGUS:

[Come forward and assist].
MAGICIAN:

I would ask that everyone in this room remain silent, and that no one leave his or her seat during the performance of this very difficult illusion. The ability to levitate is a cherished skill practiced by very few conjurors. And now from the palace of Shandra my servant now comes to assist in the levitation. Before I begin it is important that the subject be perfectly relaxed. For this I shall place her under a trance.

[Turn to Hermione].

HERMIONE:

[Face Magician, relaxed].

MAGICIAN:

[Go through motions of hypnotizing her].

MADELINE:

[Move to stand behind her].

HERMIONE:

[Slowly close eyes, go limp fall into Madeline’s arms, remain rigid].

ANGUS AND SVEN:

[Place Hermione on levitation table then withdraw to side of stage].

MAGICIAN:

Ladies and Gentlemen…

[Remove slowly the sword legs which hold up the table].

I present for your illumination the floating Princess of Shandra.

[Allow Hermione to float then prepare to cover her with a cloth].
MADELINE:

[Assist Magician covering up Hermione].

HERMIONE:

[During this slip out back of cloth and lay flat on stage under covers laying there].

LIGHTING:

[Go to blue gel to bathe stage in blue light]

MAGICIAN:

[Move to back to show covered Hermione, actually a cardboard cut out which gives shape to cloth indicating that she is still there].

Ladies and Gentlemen, there are many amazing things which you will see in your lifetime but nothing as amazing as this.

[Whip cloth away revealing that Hermione has disappeared].

The amazing Princess Karnac of Shandra.

[Bow].

Ladies and Gentlemen, honored audience on behalf of myself and our entire cast I thank you for being a most excellent audience.

CURTAIN CLOSES

CURTAIN CALL

TECH CREW:

[Come forward. Move down stairs to bow in front of the apron].
LOBBY CREW:

[Bounce down aisles from back of house to front to join Crew in front of apron on the floor. Turn facing audience, take bow. Then move back against apron].

SVEN AND ANGUS:

[Come from side curtains. Move down steps to join others in front of the apron].

MADELINE AND HERMOINE:

[Come from the side curtains to center stage and bow].

MAGICIAN:

[Come from flat entranceway to down center. Take bow].

MAGICIAN AND REST OF CAST AND CREW:

Second bow. Stop suddenly. Turn to Madeline].

MAGICIAN:

Hmmm somehow, Madeline, I feel that we’ve forgotten someone.

MADELINE AND HERMOINE:

[Suddenly remember who. Go to stage left curtains and put hand out].

BILL:

[Come bounding out quite pleased. Move to center stage].

BARB:

[Come to steps stage left to go up on stage].

MAGICIAN:

[Go to steps stage left to escort Barb up].

BILL AND BARB:

[Join hands. Take bow together].
COMPLETE CAST AND CREW:

[Bow].

MAGICIAN:

[Step to center apron leaning toward audience].

On the behalf of myself, the crew and cast we thank you for joining us for a night of prestidigitation. We loved entertaining you. It is my pleasure to now join you here right down front for a little visit, to talk about stage magic.”

CURTAINS CLOSE