

Houdini Convention Review

Well, as I mentioned in a prior post, I attended the Houdini Club of Wisconsin annual convention over the Labor Day weekend. This gathering has been held for over 60 years and rotates throughout the state, I understand. Next years convention will be in Osh Kosh.

This years convention was held at the Madisonville Marriott. I really can't imagine a better spot for a small convention. The hotel was joined to the convention center where the events were held. Registration was \$119 and the room rate was \$99. I don't see how anyone felt screwed. It was a good deal.

Please don't take anything I'm about to say as a criticism of the club or the organizers. It's not. It is, however, an indictment on old farts like me that have allowed magic to morph into a hobby that is no longer attractive to young people. Just look around any of the local clubs and in most cases, anyone under 60 is in the junior section. I'll leave it to smarter people than me to determine why this has happened. I certainly don't have the answers.

Let's start with the contests. They had Close-Up, Stage and Escapes. I'm assuming the escape category is because we were in Houdiniland. If I recall correctly, there were 8 close-up contestants, 4 in the escape category and 3 vied for the stage title. Actually, there were only 2 for stage and they convinced one of the locals to appear at the last minute.

I have no intention to embarrass anyone here, so I'm going to make my comments generic and not even mention the category. A couple of the acts were so bad, that we couldn't tell if they were being played for laughs or not. We tried to be a good audience, but if you laugh and it was straight that would be the worst of all responses. Presentation and framing were in very short supply. I'm not a believer in the *presentation above all* school. I will always maintain that first and foremost the magic must be good - there must be a surprise or mystery element - if you want to be a magician and not a prop comic.

Having said that, you still must present the routine to your audience so that they understand the effect and the setup. This was frequently missing. I'm sure we've all seen a card trick end with - *and now the deck is blue* and we never realized it was red! I chose that since no one did a color changing deck routine at the

convention.

Close-Up is very difficult at a small convention. With flat seating and the table at ground level, table work is just about impossible. I think clubs would be better off with a parlor category if better close-up conditions aren't available.

The convention center had a nice stage for the two public shows. Again, the seats were on flat ground, but the stage was high enough to mitigate some of the problems. The show on the first night suffered from a missing act. Oscar Munoz, the undeniable star of the convention, was delayed by the airline and then they lost his luggage - I hate flying. The young man that served as MC and performer did an admirable job in holding it together.

Oscar was there for the second night and things ran smoother as they always do. This was an excellent magic show by any measure. Duplication was at a minimum, the MC was professional and very funny and Oscar certainly lived up to his billing and reputation. I was glad I came.

The close-up show was somewhat of a disappointment. The venue didn't help. We were divided into 4 groups and the performers rotated. Again, we were on a flat surface and some of the performers worked way too much to the front row and on the table. Just like the close-up contest, the performers need to think of this as a parlor atmosphere. They're pros and should be prepared for this situation. The effects that I could see, were actually pretty good.

The lectures, were OK. I did enjoy Bob Coleman's Balloon lecture and Oscar gave quite a nice performance. To me, only these were memorable, but other attendees may well have found the other lectures more useful than I did. No real bow wows here from my perspective.

Oh, the dealers - what a moribund place that was. I think the Internet has totally sucked the life out of them. It's a shame, but it's the world we live in. This used to be the center of a good convention - not anymore.

One other thing I noticed - I believe I only saw ONE impromptu trick performed by an attendee. If there were any "sessions" going on they were in a private room. I really miss that.

I had a good time, but where are the young people? Please come back!

Drivel & Drool

I see the blogmaster at MagiCentric is unhappy that Stephen F. Youell chose to make all of the content from the ill fated Cogitations available on the Internet for a month are so. I can't understand that. Just a few days ago he was telling us that those complaining were nonpaying "bastards", I believe he called us, and that 99.9% of the subscribers were happy, happy, happy. Look at all the things you have to be happy for Mr Blogman:

- You got everything you wanted and expected
- It's better to have tried and failed than never to have tried
- *Real life happens*
- You got your moneysworth MANY times over - and you got it earlier than the rest of the world
- There are still a few critics, but those people aren't worth considering because they weren't members.(Gee, I wonder who said that?!)
- You got tons of email from Mr. Youell, apprising you of the status of Cogitations each step of the way

...and there are more. Just too many blessings to count.

Hopefully, this is my last post on this mess, but I can't promise. I read on Genii, this morning, that he should apologize. No shit! This has been my point from the very beginning. It appears he is totally incapable of taking ANY responsibility for the troubles of this venture. Unfortunately, the sycophants that get their kicks from smelling the jocks of name and semi-name magicians do a disservice to everyone with their irrational defenses.