

i/m in Bug Tussle



It was one week ago today that I returned from Tennessee and the Winter Carnival of Magic in Pigeon Forge. I've gone off and on for over 30 (damn!) years. I always have a good time and I think this is one of the best local conventions in the country. The members of the local club should be very proud of the job they do. This year was not a good time for me to go, but I really wanted to see David Williamson. In my book, he's the best foole in the business (to use an old George Carlin bit).

Scot at Scot's Magical Mystery Tour has already done a better job than I could ever hope to do of reviewing the convention. Make sure you read it. I'm doing the usual i/m brain dump of impressions, likes, dislikes and opinions.

The location - When I first started to go to the Winter Carnival, it was held in Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge was a general store, a Super 8 and a golf course - then came Dollywood and everything changed. Today it is a tourist trap of the first order. Thankfully, the Carnival is held in the off season and the constant onslaught is slightly mitigated.

Please understand I was born and raised a redneck and I consider these *my peeps*, but it is Bug Tussle - a place Jeff Foxworthy goes for material. You can make change in the offering plate and no one pays any attention. Restaurant service is friendly and lame. They just pay no attention to detail. To get a glass of water you need to go outside and use the hose, I guess. Many, many restaurants are attached to gas stations - write your own material.

Prices are relatively reasonable for food and lodging and the \$95 registration fee for the convention is a bargain. A couple of the guys checking people in were rather dickish I thought, but I guess it's not one of the glamour jobs for the

volunteers.

The actual theater where the convention was held was adequate. It could hold over 1,000 people and there were two large screens to view close-up. The camera work was horrific. The pictures on the screen were low resolution. I don't know whether this was due to the amateur camera or whether the equipment was just out dated. One need only to compare those screens to the crisp output at Terry Evanswood's show to see the difference. All in all, it was OK.

The dealers room was too small and left little room to session. That's a shame, because David Williamson and Charlie Frye made themselves available throughout the convention, but the physical limitations made it difficult to take advantage of their generosity.

The contests - I always look forward to the contests. Milton Berle said many times - *there's no place to be bad anymore*. Well, this is a place! At the last contest I attended, it was impossible to tell whether most of the stage acts were trying to be Carl Ballantine or were just B-A-D. There was only one act that fell into that category at the Winter Carnival and, in general, I thought most of the acts showed promise and preparation. As a matter of fact, the best magic of the entire convention was performed by the winner of the stage competition. A classic magic act from Las Vegas - very well done. Unfortunately, I don't have his name.

As always, close-up at a convention is difficult whether lectures, professional or contests. I thought most of the contestants adapted their acts pretty well and *close-up* becomes *parlor*.

There seemed to be an inordinate amount of time violations by the contestants - I'm not sure why. As far as I could tell, that was only a deduction and not fatal - I prefer the latter.

I think the judging at all of these contests needs to be revised. All too often, the winners perform some sort of cutesy act where the magic is secondary and often just plain crummy. It is a ***magic*** contest after all!

One word of advice to the teenagers performing. Reconsider your material and make sure it is age appropriate. There were two acts, in particular, that I thought

suffered because they tried to do material that just seemed out of place for someone in their teens. It a shame to waste those chops fellers. Give it some thought.

The lectures - I went to all of them and picked up something from most everybody. Some of the lectures walked on hawking stuff and kept selling their shit throughout the entire lecture. I'll be damned if they'll get a nickel from me. I know that's the way you make a living, but be a little subtle and don't price lecture notes like they are the *Dead Sea Scrolls*.

I wish **David Williamson** was a little less clown and a little more magician. He's one of the world's best close up magicians and, personally, I would like to see more of that side of him.

Charlie Frye - I think most of the attendees would say he was the star of the convention. As usual, at a magic convention, it's the non-magic act that receives the accolades. Charlie's classic juggling act was just great. He was frequently seen mingling and magishing with the attendees. His lecture was OK, but he did something that I think is inexcusable - a *performance only* routine to close the lecture. Charlie Frye certainly doesn't owe any of us the workings of his prize routine, but he does owe us lecture material during a lecture. I saw Alain Nu pull this same thing several years ago. After sitting through a lecture that was totally pedestrian, he finally performed something worth doing - his spoon bending - which he didn't explain. Shoddy!

Daryl - If you've been into a magic for a month or so, you've probably run into Daryl. If not, give him a call, I'm sure he'll come and perform in your living room. A nice guy with great chops. An asset to any convention.

Tom Burgoon - basically a dealer demo, but I've seen worse.

Steve Beam - Pleasant enough.

The All Star Stage Show - The performers:

David Williamson, MC - Not the best use of his talents, but always fun.

Fielding West - I had never seen Fielding work and was pleasantly surprised. I was not impressed with his DVDs and was expecting the worst. A good choice for an opening act. His years of experience was apparent. I understand he broke his foot shortly before appearing. If so, it was a gritty performance.

Tom Burgoon - Again, an act that showed a lot of polish and exceeded my expectations - to use a trite expression.

Charlie Frye and Company - As mentioned elsewhere, he stole the show.

The Mirror Images - Let's get right to this - whoever booked them should never, ever again be allowed to recommend, let alone book, a single act. Without a doubt, the worst act ever to appear on a professional stage. I heard a couple of apologists suggest they had an off night. Believe me, Sir Lawrence Olivier would have died with those lines and Stephen King, himself, couldn't convey the sheer horror of the performance. There was no mystery, humor or entertainment in their act. You get the point - it was AWFUL!

Terry Evanswood - Thursday night all attendees were invited to Terry Evanswood's illusion show, *Magic Beyond Belief*. Terry had been laboring in Pigeon Forge for over 10 years, primarily doing a day time show (at the theater where the convention was held). Last year he opened in his own magic theater. One of the money guys in town has backed the enterprise and has spent over 1.5 million dollars, to date, renovating the theater. A tremendous tribute to Terry.

The show itself owes much to David Copperfield, but what modern full evening show doesn't? It's a little bit saccharin in spots for my taste, but the magic is good - very good. Terry shows real sleight of hand ability in addition to the obligatory dancing around while the boxes do stuff. He's a genuinely nice, hard working guy and deserves the success.

My only complaint (of course there is one) is they try to sell you something from the minute you get out of the car - a picture with the mascot - a picture with the tiger - concessions in the theater - DVDs - even the warm up act hawked a stupid flea rope trick. About the only thing left was taking pictures in the inadequate two holer they had for a John.

Conclusion - I had a good time. To the credit of the organizers, everything was right on schedule - a true rarity. They made a good choice of acts.

Oh, I forgot to add that the dealers were excellent. It's no surprise that magic retailing is a tough way to make a living these days. All of the dealers were very accommodating and willing to fairly evaluate what they were selling. Unfortunately, the Internet has made the *what's new* factor virtually nonexistent.

There was a single VERY unfortunate incident. We thought there was a young, blind magician competing in the close up and stage competitions. He had our admiration for sheer determination. The whole thing was a scam - I'm not sure to what end. This clown should be banned from all future magic conventions. If it were up to me, he would be banned from the human race. There can be NO excuse for this. Period.