

I think I'll just play with the box



One of the funnest (yeah, I know - just trying to sound like the street types that permeate every DVD) things I ever did was attend a convention where Paul Harris was the headline attraction. Not only was he the featured act and lecturer, but if you were lucky enough to register early and had \$25 (a big deal then) you had a small group session with Paul. He was a charming host and willingly helped everyone. I was a fan before the convention and that experience only served to reinforce and magnify my appreciation of the man and his work. This was well before Paul went away to contemplate. I continue to be a huge fan to this date and his 3 volume set of his writings is my most valuable magic possession.

After a number of months I finally got around to viewing all of the his DVD set, *True Astonishments*. The Café has nearly 70,000 views and well over 1000 posts on this DVD set. Not surprisingly, the majority of the comments there had nothing but good to great things to say. As a matter of fact, I can't honestly recall a negative comment. This may be the first.

I am not writing this easily. Like many others, some of my most pleasant magical moments were spent with Paul's books. Even though they were production nightmares in the comb bound format, the content was just plain fun. Don't get me wrong, there were plenty, and I do mean plenty, of misses in those books. There were also the beginnings of some of today's most popular and varied tricks. Like many other authors with voluminous output e.g. Sankey, Osterlind, Lorayne, Ammar etc. most of the good stuff occurs in the early writings and the quality tends to peter out as more books and DVDs are produced. Maybe they should be more like Alexander the Great and despair over no more worlds to conquer rather than issuing substandard crap. I fully expect Harry Lorayne's next book to be nothing but pictures of him admiring himself in the mirror.

True Astonishments comes in a cleverly designed wooden box and is an absolute

artistic success - at least externally. The actual content on the DVD is, at best, derivative and, at worst, just plain bad. Paul introduces the DVDs talking about the long delay between the announcement and the actual issuance of the product. I can't help but believe that in his heart he knew there wasn't a lot there.

Many of the effects are performed by Bro something or other. I believe he had something to do with Criss Angel. His performances are *competent*. That's the best I can say. I personally like Wayne Houchen and he is, by far, the best of the presenters. The rest of them, to be kind, are terrible. The soundless teaching sessions are okay - that is if you want to learn any of this stuff.

I would assume most magicians plunking down 300 bucks for this set assumed they were getting Paul Harris. He was a wonderful performer. Too bad we don't get to see him in action. Fortunately, I guess, there really isn't 9 DVDs worth of material here, so the agony doesn't last as long as you might expect.

Every effect has the cleverly spelled *Phoote Notes* link which cuts to Paul playing Grizzly Adams somewhere in the Northwest woods. He's as likable as always and, I guess, the comments are worthwhile. I must say, though, that the definition of *polishing a turd* in an earlier post applies in most every case.

Paul, you can do better. I've seen it.

(Note to the production crew - cutting different performances into small pieces and then gluing them together into a single performance with different spectators isn't artistic - it's just irritating.)