

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 them gluing them together into a single performance with different spectators isn't artistic - it's just irritating.)

Recommended - Unexpected Wonders Post



Jim Coles writes an intelligent and insightful blog, unlike the spittle you're currently reading. I found the following article on e-book pricing particularly well

done.

Unexpected Wonders: Magic E-Book Pricing.

Take care!



Al Capone's Vault - The Magic Version



For those either too old or too young to remember, Al Capone's Vault was a TV Special aired in 1986, hosted by Geraldo Rivera. Here's the promo:

The two hour special was greatly hyped as potentially revealing great riches or bodies on live television. This included the presence of a medical examiner should bodies be found and agents from the Internal Revenue Service to collect any of Capone's money that may be discovered. When the vault was finally opened the only things found inside were dirt and several empty bottles including one Geraldo claimed was for moonshine bathtub gin. Despite the ending the special became the most-watched syndicated television special with an estimated audience of 30,000,000. " Wikipedia

Does this sound more than a little like the hype surrounding so many magic tricks and the pre-release comments on the Cafe approach that number it seems. This was brought to mind while reading the massive thread on a new product called Linked. At this point I'm not sure whether Linked isn't just an elaborate

scam â€“ it really smells, but thatâ€™s not my point here. I began thinking about over-hyped products that really stunk.

Iâ€™m not talking about just bad, Iâ€™m talking about wallpaper peeling â€“ gas mask required stinkers. Remember this:

*For centuries rumours have blossomed: tales of gurus, shamans, mystics and the secret powers of the mysterious “Third Eye” have fascinated the populous. But, can the myth’s reality actually be demonstrated? Now, **Ben Harris** brings this fantastic mystery to lifeâ€”creating a unique, freaky and visually-arresting effectâ€”one slick enough for even the most savvy of today’s street-wise performers.*

HOLE IN THE HEAD has been one of the artâ€™s most closely guarded secrets of recent timesâ€”it has fooled, amused and delighted some of magicâ€™s biggest names. Using no mirrors or reflective devices and no stooges, **HOLE IN THE HEAD** is a radical and visual NEW PLOTâ€”an exciting piece of street-theatre that simply **MUST** be experienced live! Whatâ€™s more, itâ€™s 100% practical! This is a one personâ€”do anywhereâ€”illusion.

*In effect, the performer gathers a crowd around himself in a brightly lit, sunny spot. Discussing the amazing legend, he offers to open his own “Third Eye” allowing the sun to shine right through his head. As this would be too dangerous to observe directly, he suggests that everyone focus attention on his shadow. After some concerted effort, a small blob of light appears in the centre of his shadow head. Amazingly, this blob of light then grows larger at his command. To prove that it is no mere optical illusion and that the light does indeed pass through his head, a spectator is asked to wave her hand behind the performerâ€™s cranium. Incredibly, when she does this, the actions are reciprocated in the shadow headâ€”her fingers are clearly visible in the shadow hole! **THE CONCLUSION IS INESCAPABLEâ€”THE SUN IS INDEED SHINING STRAIGHT THROUGH A HOLE IN THE PERFORMER’S HEAD!** The process is now reversed and the hole slowly closed. **YOU CAN PERFORM THIS STUNNER VIRTUALLY ANYWHERE THE SUN SHINES.** Complete with bonus handlings and clever ideas by Paul Harris and Michael Weber. **YOU CAN EVEN OPEN A SPECTATOR’S OWN “THIRD EYE”!***

“Bravo! Mind expanding magic, in every sense of the word!”

- MICHAEL AMMAR

"The rumors are true: Ben Harris does have a hole in his head. And it's surrounded by a brain filled with clever ideas, of which this one is delight."

- Max Maven

â€œTruly a wonderful thing... a totally original breakthrough plot.â€œ

- PAUL HARRIS

â€œ...situational, astonishing and a devilishly clever piece of magic â€œthe best effect Iâ€™ve seen in a long time!â€œ

- JOSHUA JAY

â€œSomething thatâ€™s never been done before using a method thatâ€™s never been used before â€œvery cool!â€œ

- RICHARD KAUFMAN

â€œFooled me... you could probably start a religion with this!"

- GARY KOSNITZKY

"Just remarkable, I love it!â€œ

- RICHARD OSTERLIND

Open your â€œThird Eyeâ€œ and let the sun shine through!

Certainly something that ranks right up there with the classic *Silver Shifter*.

Nominations are now open for the all time winner. Either comment here or I can be reached at intenselymagic@gmail.com

Take care.....



Quick Review - Jim Steinmeyer's Bunko

From the web site:



BUNKO

Jim's new shortchange effect is a remarkable close-up routine. The effect is tremendous, writes Richard Kaufman. Bunko is a perfect example of close up magic theater. An intriguing story draws the spectators in and then wallops them with magic. Twenty dollars in change (five singles, three fives) changes to \$19, then \$14, back to \$20... And at the end, the sucker ends up with just thirteen dollars. The routine is ingeniously arranged without any sleight of hand at all. A beautiful set of instructions, written by Richard Kaufman and illustrated with 48 full color photos, explain the routine in detail. Just eight bills. No folding, palming, flaps, switches or false-count sleights. The colorful, specially printed bills enhance the effect... Or perform it with real bills, as the instructions explain.

\$25 Postpaid

As I have said repeatedly, reviews are only worthwhile after a substantial time period has passed. Has the product / DVD stood the test of time - is it something you still use - how does it play in the real world? This is just a 1st impression. Something to help you in making a reasonably informed buying decision.

Personally, I don't think declining magic club membership is the result of fellow magi opting to attend a MENSA meeting rather than the monthly Mystic Poobahs gathering. I'm rather sure Jim Steinmeyer has that option, though. His stuff just screams GENIUS, no matter what it is. His *Conjuring Anthology* is the most important book of the last five years - maybe longer.

Bunko is a short change routine that is different than any I've ever see. and, get

this, no steals, flaps or false counts AND you are clean at the end. It comes with phony bills, which are fine, but I think most will want to construct everything from real bills. This will cost you \$26 plus the cost of laminating, so the total cost is not insignificant.

The instructions are written by Richard Kaufman and make it possible to learn the routine in short order. Even the suggested presentations are well above the norm.

Well worth your consideration.

Take care.....



Theory11 Followup

Well, Digital Dissolve arrived - well packed and promptly shipped.

I'm not going to take much time here - just the salient points:

- It IS Steve Dusheck's trick - the variations are totally derivative from my perspective
- The DVD is amateur hour in production and content - at least the opening logo was mercifully quick
- This is not Jamie Schoolcraft's best work
- It's a good trick - always has been
- An OK product at an OK price - did not come from an advanced civilization as implied

and.....

I didn't get laid!

Take care.....



Hold Your Nose

Generally, I only post reviews for two categories - *Good to Great* and *Unimaginably Bad*. In all honesty, I try to concentrate on the former as they do the most good for everyone. I like good magic and like telling you about it.

However, once in a while there comes along a product so unimaginably bad that I must write about it. Products that require ENORMOUS BALLS to ask money for them. I'm talking about world class, pants ripping kajonies. Could you have actually produced and sold *Silver Shifter*, for instance?



In a way, I admire these people. I would never, never in a thousand years, dreamed you could sell bottled water, \$5 coffee or \$50 rubber coins. Thus, I am doomed to a life of poverty - so be it!

Magicians are the easiest of consumers. I'm constantly amazed at the number of discussions on the Cafe which revolve around someone defending shoddy treatment, poor shipping or total non-delivery of promised product. The reasons given by the various vendors are invariably pathetic. Their defenders, and there are many, seem unfazed by the jobbing. I stand constantly amazed.

In my old blog I wrote a post titled *F*** me, I'm A Magician*. It received more comments than anything I ever wrote. Even there the defenders could be found.

The travesty I'm referring to in this review is a 2 DVD set called *The Sankey Sanders Sessions*. I honestly don't know how old these are and am not interested enough to find out. The cover says it was shot in 2002. If I can save 1 person from buying this, then it is worth it.

As far as I can tell, one of these guys got a video camera for Christmas and started filming each other doing a bunch (21) of mediocre tricks. At some point

one of them must have said *think we can sell these tapes*. After the laughter died down they must have decided - why not - they've seen worse stuff sold. (That's true, but barely).

Remember what I said above about having industrial grade balls - they took one DVD worth of material and put it on 2 DVDs! It appears they spent the greater part of 15 minutes editing and slapping together a menu.

Both of these guys can do better. Sanders is a likable and capable magician. Some of his earlier stuff has been overpriced, but it least it was decent.

Jay Sankey has gradually tarnished a fine and deserved reputation. His early stuff was brilliantly creative and items like *Mr. Clean Coins Across* and *Paperclipped* are modern classics and seminal points for many other tricks. His recent output has been, in a word, pathetic. I expect him to start spitting in a napkin and selling it next. Apparently he has a following that will buy it.

Any good points? Actually the physical production is top notch and you get 2 DVD holders which you can use for other DVDs - that way you can recover 50¢ of the money you spent.

I recall an old story about a farmer that gradually replaced his horse's food with more and more saw dust. The horse never complained, but one day the horse died. These guys should remember this.

Take care.....

