

# STANDUP CARD MAGIC



ROBERTO GIOBBI

CARD MAGIC FOR PARLOR AND STAGE

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Roberto Giobbi

*Photos by*  
Barbara Giobbi-Ebnöther  
*with the assistance of*  
Miro A. Giobbi

*Translated by*  
Dave Shepherd

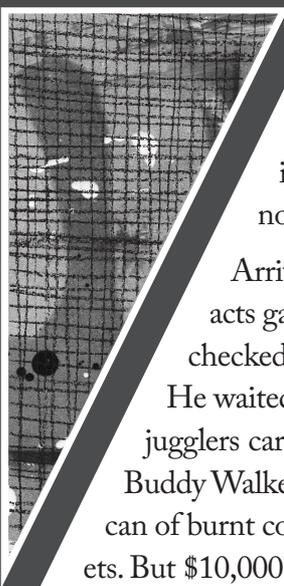


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Photo: Blue Hat Studio, Chicago

# Nothing but a Deck of Cards!



LET'S GO BACK—NOT TOO far back. This story takes place in the early fall of 1928. Vaudeville was at its height, and theaters featured all-star acts, plus a good movie. (Whoever heard of bank night or free dishes in these good old days?)

Our scene is Seattle, Washington. Playing the Pantages Circuit was considered a very good meal ticket. This particular show closed on Saturday night and was to open on Monday in a neighboring city, about a three-hundred-mile, overnight train ride from Seattle. On this bill the acts included Buddy Walker, who did a comedy act in black face; Pierlot and Schofield, capable jugglers; Harry Blackstone, Sr., and his illusions; Bram and Renee, a dance team; and last but not least, Hills and Robbins, a comedy duo.

Arriving in town early Monday morning, the disheveled acts gathered their belongings, took off for a nearby hotel and checked in for more shut-eye. All but one act, Harry Blackstone. He waited for his freight to arrive. The other acts were lucky: The jugglers carried their dumbbells, Indian clubs, etc., in one suitcase; Buddy Walker carried his broken-down licorice stick, straw hat and a can of burnt cork; the other acts carried their props in their vest pockets. But \$10,000 worth of illusions couldn't be shrugged off.

Blackstone fretted and sweated. No freight train had pulled in. Since it was getting close to show time, he left word at the freight office, hurried over to the theater and used imaginary props during the early rehearsal.

Then, with fingers crossed, Harry called the freight office, but the illusions had still not arrived. The other acts shared Harry's concern, for without his big effects Harry would be dead—or would he? After all, he was a magician! Time for the afternoon matinee came—the first act—then the next act—now it was time for Harry to make his appearance. The rest of the acts gathered in the wings to see how Harry Blackstone was going to get out of this jam.

Blackstone made his entrance, produced an ordinary deck of cards and carried on with the fifty-two pasteboards, achieving beautiful effects with his card-fan productions, back- and front-palming with the deck, vanishing the cards and producing them from all parts of his body. Asking for volunteers from the audience, he performed several sensational card tricks with an unusual climax.

Twenty minutes flew by and the act was over. The ovation was deafening, and the rest of the acts, along with the stagehands, enthusiastically applauded him too, as he took his bow. The props did not arrive until the next day, so Harry repeated the same show at the evening performance.

Talk about showmanship and ability! Here was a performer who had a \$10,000 investment in apparatus, yet was able to captivate a packed theater with a 35¢ deck of ordinary cards!

# Introduction

Sometimes everything turns out fine.

For many years I debated with myself on whether or not this book should be called *Card College, Volume 6*. I will spare you the particulars. Maybe someday in an interview I will explain why.

For decades I have been collecting material, writing down ideas and studying the topic of how to perform card magic while standing in a parlor situation or on a small stage. This is an area for which some material certainly exists, scattered throughout the literature of magic, but there is no single work that systematically deals with the topic. I knew that I wanted to—needed to—write such a book one day.

And then in June 2013, out of the clear blue sky, Sven Bolliger, also known as Sven Spacey, president of the Magic Ring of Switzerland, asked whether I had any ideas for a gift on the occasion of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the MRS. I answered that, unfortunately, I could no longer do anything other than perform magic and write magic books. So he gave me the go-ahead to write a book as a gift. This volume is the result.

Yes, sometimes everything really does turn out fine.

## ON THE NATURE OF THIS BOOK

This text deals with how to stand before a small or large group of people and successfully perform magic with playing cards. Robert Parrish writes in his book *Words about Wizards*: “Drawing-room conjuring is the chamber music of magic.” That fits.

In Victorian England such a magician was called a “drawing-room entertainer” or a “parlor conjurer”. The French call him a *magicien de salon*, the Italians a *prestigiatore da salotto*, the Spanish a *mago de salón*, and German speakers have called him for centuries a *Salonzauberer*. For our purposes we will refer to him as a standup magician or standup conjurer. Everyone seems to know intuitively what the term means.

In this book we will systematically examine what this fascinating genre consists of: what techniques, principles and tricks, in theory and practice, go into making a magician a standup magician.

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## REFERENCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

In all my written works, I have gone to great pains to cite sources conscientiously. Likewise, in this work all creators of small and large ideas are listed to the best of my knowledge. This time I have chosen a less scholarly form of citation, one that is more reader-friendly. Within the text, the author, his work and its source are given; but the detailed bibliographic citations are located in the appendix. In this way, reading is never interrupted, but fundamental information is made available. For the same reason, I have completely dispensed with footnotes and have tried to integrate all references into the text in an easily understandable form. I was probably unconsciously inspired by Switzerland's Jean Neuhaus, whom some call the inventor of the chocolate candy. In his work as a pharmacist, he always wrapped bitter pills for children inside a chocolate coating, thus making them more enjoyable to eat. After a while, Neuhaus began to leave out the pill, and people were happy to eat just the chocolate. That's how I would like this book to be seen.

When one has written fifteen magic books, as I have, a certain amount of self-referencing is hard to avoid. This is a tightrope that every author must walk. The problem reminds me of a saying I once heard about punctuality: "Someone who arrives late is inconsiderate, someone who arrives early is anxious, and someone who arrives punctually is neurotic about time!" No matter what you do, someone will think it is wrong. That will probably also be the case with this book.

Most of the techniques, principles and theories presented here have already been described in at least one of my books. Many of them are in the five volumes of *Card College*, which describe the basic principles. Thus, they do not need to be brought into every book anew. To make your searching easier, I will point you to the appropriate passages in *Card College*. I do this because it is what I would appreciate as a reader. If this does not work for you, I will be happy to send you a personally inscribed second copy with all references removed, free of charge and postpaid. (Note: This last sentence was written on April 1.)

## LEFT-RIGHT

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As always, explanations are given from the point of view of a right-handed performer, who holds the deck in left-hand dealing position, with the right hand assuming the task of cutting. Of course, left-handers and half-hearted right-handers are cordially welcome, and are invited, to re-think their stance.

## A FINAL DETAIL ABOUT DETAIL

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle once had Sherlock Holmes say, “Watson, details are by far the most important thing!” I do not want to spend a lot of time holding forth on why this book once again consists of very detailed descriptions. Let us just say, “I can’t do it any other way.” Moreover, I would frustrate myself if I did not do things in the way I consider correct.

But I would like to say one thing on the subject: A properly detailed description is not one that simply lists a lot of “practical” points and gives a lot of “tips”, but rather one that opens previously invisible windows and doors to other problems and dimensions. Sometimes I illuminate the newly discovered room in greater detail, which leads the study of the trick to an adjoining space before continuing the main tour. At other times, I simply name a concept that the interested reader will have to research if he wishes.

But no matter which way it may happen, after decades of studying the principles behind learning and teaching, as a learner and as a teacher I have come to the view that those books that contain this wonderful kaleidoscope of detail, both within the field and outside it, are what I consider to be good books.

And I always want just one thing: to write a “good book”. It is only in recent years that it dawned on me what a good book actually is, no matter whether it is a novel or non-fiction. (And this was after I had written almost a dozen books myself!) A good book is one that transcends its pure entertainment and informational value; one that offers more than just what is necessary at the moment; that is, one that not only gives away fish but also keeps returning to the topic of fishing, because it seeks to teach the reader how to fish.

Dr. Ronald Wohl, a true friend and mentor, pointed out to me two additional criteria of a “good book”. We were talking about cookbooks at the time and, in my opinion, cookbooks have much in common with magic books, just as gastronomy has numerous parallels with magic.

These criteria are: first, references and an associated bibliography; second, additional commentary by the author that is separate from the main text. Intuitively, in my very first publications in the 1980s I took this into account. I was astonished then to note that both of these criteria are practically nonexistent in the great classics of magic literature: for example, in Scot, Ozanam, Guyot, Ponsin, Hofzinsler via Fischer, Robert-Houdin, Sachs, Conradi, Roterberg and Erdnase. And even in the classic works of the twentieth century, with

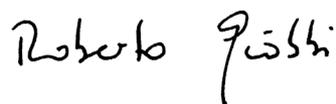
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authors such as Tarbell, Hilliard, Downs, Hugard and Braue, up to the writings of Ganson and many others, one finds little or nothing of this sort.

These are, of course, excellent works nevertheless; indispensable milestones of conjuring literature, without question. But a book that offers didactic assistance because it matters to the author how the reader learns, a book that points again and again to life and to other disciplines, a book that comments on originators and sources—this is a book that illustrates the cultural-historical context of the magic trick, of the magician and of magic in general. This is a mark of respect to our field in artistic and scientific terms, and one that does not merely reflect the attitude of the author. It also rubs off on the reader, who becomes aware of certain contexts that were previously not apparent to him, at least in this degree. All this contributes to a better appreciation of magic and ultimately to a more complete interpretation of it. A good book makes the reader better than he was before.

We cannot expect the general public, having no clue as to the enormous complexity of magic, to grant magic the higher status we would wish, as long as we who practice magic are not aware of it ourselves. This is a vicious circle. But where better can we begin than by conveying magical knowledge through the medium of a good magic book? I hope I have succeeded in writing such a book.

I wish you much joy in reading and much success.



Roberto Giobbi  
June 2016