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WHERE MAGIC AND TECHNOLOGY MEET

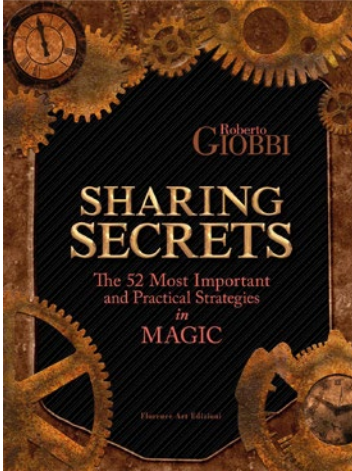
**ROBERTO  
GIOBBI**

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# PRODUCT REVIEW

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**Sharing Secrets: The 52 Most Important and Practical Strategies in Magic**  
By Roberto Giobbi  
Price: €59.00 (approx \$72.00 USD)  
Pre-Publication Offer: [www.RobertoGiobbi.com](http://www.RobertoGiobbi.com)

## REVIEW BY MICHAEL CLOSE

I think the easiest way to explain the importance of Robert Giobbi's new book, *Sharing Secrets*, is with a musical analogy. So, here we go.

Almost thirty years ago, in *Workers 3*, I mentioned Wendy Carlos, who was a pioneer in bringing electronic music to a wider audience. In the liner notes to her 1992 CD, *Switched-On Bach 2000*, Carlos explained her process, and in a footnote mentioned her three laws. The first of these (slightly paraphrased) is this: "Every parameter you *can* control you *must* control." What, exactly, does this mean?

When performing a piece of music, all musicians, regardless of instrument, must be aware of certain parameters that are normally indicated by the composer in the score. These include timbre (the sound quality of the note produced), dynamics (how loudly or softly the note is produced), articulation (staccato, legato, etc.), phrasing, expression (for example, vibrato), and many others. If these parameters are ignored, the music will sound mechanical and be devoid of emotion.

Through training, an instrumentalist learns how to incorporate all these parameters into his or her performance. For someone creating electronic music with a synthesizer, the challenge is discovering how to manipulate each of the above parameters using the mechanisms built into the device. This (like mastering any instrument) is a time-consuming process.

But (and here's the really important point), a musician can't just "set" a parameter and walk away. All the above musical parameters vary from note to note over time. If you have the ability to control a parameter, then you must control it constantly, over the length of the piece of music.

All endeavors that strive to achieve the level of "art" have their own set of parameters; these parameters help the practitioners elevate their crafts beyond being mere technical displays. Enlightened magicians have this same goal, but they have heretofore been hampered by the fact that information about magical parameters is scattered throughout the literature; they go by a variety of names (if, indeed, they have even been



given a name).

Happily, with the publication of *Sharing Secrets*, fifty-two of the parameters of magic have been assembled in one place, codified, and have been given names that can be shared among practitioners, thereby generating discussion and providing further exploration. This is a giant leap forward.

So, what exactly are these parameters we're talking about? Some have been passed down under the category "good advice," like Al Baker's suggestion, "Don't run if you're not being chased," Dai Vernon's (originally Dr. Elliott's) admonition, "Be natural," and the often-stated, "A large action covers a smaller action." Some have been passed down as "magic theory," for example, Ascanio's In-transit Actions and Rick Johnsson's Too Perfect Theory. And others, as you'll discover when you read Giobbi's book, have not been given names before: the "Look Ma No Hands" Theory and The Waiter's Theory.

If you haven't guessed already, *Sharing Secrets: The 52 Most Important and Practical Strategies in Magic* is a magic theory book, but it is unlike any magic theory book you have ever read. Let's discuss the reasons why this book is so different.

First is the physical layout of the book. Each of the strategies is presented on a two-page spread. The left-hand page explains the strategy; the right-hand page provides examples of how to apply it. Also on the left-hand page is information about who identified (named) the strategy, when the concept was published, a bit of additional insight, related theories in the book, and additional sources.

Second is Giobbi's organizational technique. The fifty-two strategies are presented alphabetically. The initial paragraph defines the topic, as in Actions of Confirmation, the first of the fifty-two: "An *Action of Confirmation* belongs to a category of action that, by its harmless nature, confirms the innocence of a *preceding* trick-action, both actions having the same Gestalt." Following this definition is more information, which clarifies the definition.

The third point that elevates this book above other theory books is the addition of practical examples showing how the strategy can be applied. Here is where most "magic theory" books fall short. To paraphrase Alex Elmsley, most theory books contain "cures" without explaining what the "disease" is. This is absolutely not the case with *Sharing Secrets*. In many cases you will be able to apply the theoretical information almost immediately. (For example, see the handling of the Double Undercut on page 63.) I think Alex Elmsley would have loved this book.

How do you tackle a book packed with so much information? Without a plan, it would be easy to be overwhelmed. Fortunately, Giobbi offers a strategy for learning and internalizing the theories:

"First, make a list of those theoretical concepts you want to learn: 'Pauses,' 'In-transit Actions,' 'Prologue and Epilogue,' the 'Waiter's Theory,' 'Management,' the 'The Eye,' etc.

"Second, choose a trick that you have already mastered technically and that you have performed a few times.

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“Third, for several days, practice this trick while *concentrating solely on the theoretical concept you chose*; if you wanted to learn how to use pauses, for instance, pay attention only to the pauses in your text, gestures, movements, etc., as you run through the sleight or trick.

“Suddenly, you will become aware of the concept and how to apply it to the physical procedures of the trick. If you repeat this for some time – some will take longer, some will take less time to assimilate – what you now learn will be retained not merely as knowledge, but will be instilled in you as a skill, and you will be able to apply it automatically to every other trick you practice from now on.”

My suggestion is to pick only one strategy at a time; if you try to learn several at the same time, you will probably only confuse and frustrate yourself. To give you a head start, I suggest you read and study “Degrees of Freedom,” a concept put forth by Ronald Wohl (page 36). This one is relatively easy to apply, and will immediately elevate your card magic.

Here’s the bottom line: Robert Giobbi’s *Sharing Secrets* is the magic theory book we’ve all needed. As we’ve come to expect with Roberto’s publications, the information is organized efficiently, presented with clarity, and accompanied with useful applications. If your goal is to be a better magician, it should be in your library. I give it my highest recommendation. ★



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