

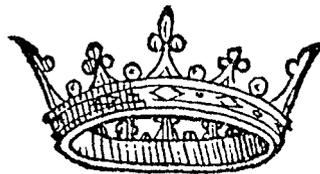
*The Arctology of
Vanni Bossi*

*A Chronicle of Marvels
Designed to bring
Pleasure to every
Knight &
Lady.*

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Vanni Bossi: A Foreword and an Appreciation

ROBERTO GIOBBI

SEVEN YEARS have passed, as I write, since Vanni left us. He departed on the Sixth of December, 2008. When I received the gloomy news from his son Stefano, it was totally unexpected, for me and for all of us who thought we were his close friends. He had left us without saying a word about the illness he had suffered for several years. At first I was speechless, then angry with him, and then incredibly sad.

Stephen Minch, in a letter to me, wrote: “How can we explain how a rather shy man can, within just a few hours, endear himself to you and instill a high level of respect as well? That is the case with me, and I think it was with others. I doubt I spent a total of three hours total with Vanni, but that was enough to make me regret his early death more deeply than I did some friends I’d known for years.”

Now, after more than seven years, and after losing a few more friends, I think I understand him better.

VANNI, THE FRIEND

I have just read through Stephen’s book about Vanni, and I can attest to the effectiveness of his creations: original magic, solidly constructed, certain to have a high impact on any lay audience, and on connoisseurs as well.

How do I know?

I consider myself highly privileged and most fortunate to have been very close to Vanni. Our friendship began when I was in my early twenties—we were introduced by our friend Aurelio Paviato—and it lasted until his untimely exit. That’s an affectionate bond of more than thirty years with one of the most distinguished characters in magic I’ve ever known.

During that time he showed me practically all of his discoveries. He carefully shared their details with me, and he almost invariably gave me any gimmicks required as well. What I call the “Vanni Box” is one of my most prized possessions. It contains most of these items, which he either made for himself and for a limited number of friends, or which he sold at his lectures around the world.

When I read the descriptions in this book and looked at the beautiful illustrations, they combine to capture the technical details as well as the person. I could hear Vanni’s voice, speaking a polished Italian with an extensive vocabulary, the sign of a well-educated man. But I was even more pleased to discover a few tricks and techniques I had never seen him do.

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I don't want to diminish the pleasure of discovery as you read, by pointing out specific items, and I wouldn't know where to start. Instead I'll leave you to enter on your own a gold mine of miraculous creations.

VANNI, THE MAN AND HIS WORK

Vanni Bossi deserves a biography of his own, but we have neither the space, nor do we wish to keep you much longer from enjoying the gifts ahead. Let me then say just a few more things about my dear friend Vanni: If it weren't a cliché, I would call Vanni a Renaissance Man *par excellence*. When thinking of him, Miguel de Unamuno's quote comes to mind: "I like outward simplicity that hides great complexity."

Here was the quietest, humblest person you could imagine, but beneath this exterior was a sophisticated being, a humanist in the true European tradition, with an affinity for all those disciplines that have formed our civilization in general and the *Italianità* in particular. When he performed his magic, Vanni was an Italian gentleman of the traditional school. As a creator of tricks, sleights and gimmicks, he was unconventional and original. As a scholar of magic and its related arts, he curated an enormous private library, perhaps the most complete collection extant of magic books and magazines in Italian.

Many top professionals of the time were his close friends. When it came to finding practical and elegant solutions to their magic problems, they relied on his vast knowledge and creativity, and they trusted him to construct the precision gimmicks they required. Fred Kaps, as an example, had several of his gimmicks and props made by Vanni, including the glass for Ring on Glass, the leather box for his take on Hennig's Folded Card to Box, and the giant Chinese coin for his famous coin routine. Once he asked me if I'd be interested in purchasing a set of Linking Rings he was about to make. He manufactured only three sets, one for himself, one for Aurelio and one for me. To this day I haven't seen a finer set of Linking Rings.

It might come as a surprise to some to learn that magic was never Vanni's profession. His was the owner of a shop that manufactured and sold medals and trophies. As a magician, he was what I would call an inspired amateur.

His original training was in chemistry, but he also had keen interests in various manual crafts. For instance, he was an expert bookbinder and had a thorough knowledge of fireworks. All this resulted in the creation and manufacture of the most unusual and exquisite items. For a short period he and David Costi ran a magic business that produced some remarkable tricks, props and videos.

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However, business and marketing were not among Vanni's accomplishments, which is why outside of Italy his name was not as well known as he deserved. Through his association with Richard Bloch, who for some years organized the World Magic Seminar in Las Vegas, Vanni visited the USA several times and was invariably a hit when he lectured and performed.

Whenever he had a new lecture, he called me up, and I would invite him to my home in Basel, Switzerland, where he would stay for a few days and deliver the lecture to the Zauber-ring Basel, our local magic club. I was often among the first to appreciate his original effects and methods, and this remains an unforgettable part of my magic life.

VANNI, THE COLLECTOR AND SCHOLAR

Along with similar tastes in magic, Vanni and I shared interests in gastronomy, wine and cigars. These were the perfect ingredients, as you can imagine, for many day-long sessions of intellectual, artistic and epicurean pleasures.

My family originally comes from the Piedmont region. On returning from my yearly visits to my uncles and aunts there, I would invariably stop at Vanni's shop in Castellanza, which was an easy exit from the motorway to Basel. Whenever I arrived, he would show me his latest magical discoveries; then we went for an extended (Italian!) lunch. We usually spent the afternoon at his home in Legnano, where he lived in a comfortable villa with Piera, his attractive and charming wife, and Stefano, his son who is now a successful engineer. At that time, he stored his extensive (and expensive) library at his home. We would spend hours going through his latest acquisitions, which he expertly restored, using complex techniques that always left me wondering.

He possessed practically every important book of magic, from the beginning of printing to modern times, in many languages, but above all in Italian. He also knew what was in them, how to place their contents in the evolution of magical ideas and who invented what. He was one of the most educated and well-informed people in magic I've ever met.

VANNI, THE ITALIAN STAR

Vanni gained some public recognition through an early book he authored on parapsychology—another of his many interests—which sold very well. And he was occasionally invited to perform on television. But it was in the world of Italian magicians that Vanni was famous.

He was close friends with all the important magicians of his time; Silvan, Binarelli and Alexander, to mention just a few. His lectures, convention appearances and literary output were held in the highest esteem. For many years he served as president of the Milan magic club and as editor of *Ars Magica*, a journal that dealt with the history and culture of magic. It is also through his research and initiative that important books lost in the dust of obscurity

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were brought to the attention of historians of conjuring; books by important authors such as Galasso and Cardano. His hand-bound volumes will always have a special place in my library, which hosts quite a few titles I bought from Vanni—not an easy accomplishment, as he was very selective not only with whom he shared his magic, but also who received his duplicate books. When he departed, he left a void that to this day no one has been able to fill.

VANNI, HIS MAGIC IN THESE PAGES

In this book Stephen Minch presents to you the work of an individual who is on my very short list of geniuses in magic. Those who knew him will peruse it and be reminded of the genteel man and complex practitioner of conjuring he was. Those who didn't know him will discover a multifaceted and versatile talent, which was hidden behind an unpretentious yet brilliant mind.

I promise that both types of reader may expect a few most pleasant surprises, for Vanni, being the reserved and private person he was, never told everything to everyone. You are in for a treat, and I look eagerly forward to receiving the finished book, as it will enable me to session with him, as we did so many times at his home and mine.



Thank you, Vanni, for many years of inspiring friendship; and, for the readers of this book, thank you for allowing us a glimpse into your manifold genius.

Muttenz, February 2016