

THE GENII SESSION

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ROLF ANDRA MAGIC WITH A SMILE

TODAY I WOULD LIKE to offer a first in my column by presenting to you a German wizard who had a great influence on me as a young aspiring magician. It is meant as a little homage to a man whom most of my readers will have never heard of, but who led a magical life that I believe will be inspiring to all of us. From time to time, I believe, such things matter as much as new techniques, tricks, and theories, as they allow us to access that part in ourselves which is the true motivation behind what we are doing.

EARLY MEMORIES

Rolf Andra (1907-1998) was one of the most prominent German performers and authors of the 20th century. I still vividly remember my many encounters with this charismatic artist who was so influential and important for magic in German speaking Europe in the second half of the last century.

At age 16 I became a member of the Magic Circle in my home town Basel. As far as I know, only Ron Wohl, a couple of decades earlier, and I were ever admitted that young, and the Magic Circle of Switzerland had to authorize an exception from their otherwise strict rules. The meetings took place twice a month in the beautiful little back room of a restaurant in the historical center. In

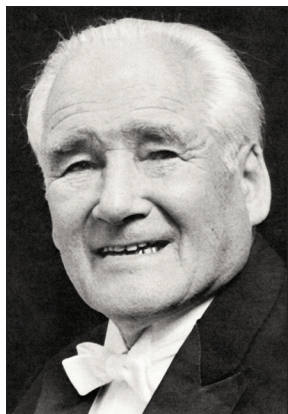
those days I hardly missed a meeting, the appointed day being "sacred." Club life at that time was very active. I well remember the then president Max Bühler (Cherry Maxim), who officially and formally opened every meeting with the latest news from the world of circus, cabaret, and magic—without the Internet, at that time the only way such news reached you was by phone, letter, or magazine. He then proceeded to open the magic part of the evening by always performing three tricks. And then everybody rattled off some magic, one after the other, and I thought it all won-

derful, good or bad, as long as it was some kind of trick, technique, principle, or presentation that I didn't know. And in the midst of this active flock was Rolf Andra, and he surmounted them all. One of the remarkable things, for instance, was that he performed at every meeting he attended, without exception. However, he didn't just present one or two tricks, like most of us, but a full program of at least 20 minutes; most of the time he actually filled the complete second half of the meeting single-handedly! His performances at the meetings were the sensation and the climax, and I will never forget them.

A GENTLEMAN MAGICIAN

If the term existed in our specialty, I would call Rolf Andra a "general practitioner" because he did everything except animals and big boxes. His real name was Josef Fuchs and he was born in 1907 in Hegne, Germany, on the shores of beautiful Lake Constance. Starting in the 1950s, he spent half the time in his parental home in Hegne and the other half in Basel, where he lived with his cousin whom we all knew by the name of Fräulein Schiess. And he had a quality that some of the really big names I've met in magic lack: he loved magic for its own sake, not for the money, not for the applause, nor for the fame it brought him, but because it is so intelligent, so profound, so complex, so difficult, and so clever. I think I can truthfully say that he was the first to teach me this "nobleness of the heart" by example, and for this I will be eternally grateful to him.

Ascanio once said that the good magician needs three qualities: "Manos, cabeza, y sonrisa" ("hands, head, and smile"). Rolf Andra had all of this, plus that indefinable thing called charisma. Even if I didn't know what this meant, I could define it by means of Rolf Andra's person: You call somebody charismatic who has a deep-rooted passion for something, possesses enormous knowledge about it, displays superior skill, has a far above average competence in this chosen field, and then lives it with great joy for himself and the others. Rolf Andra was blessed with all of



these characteristics, and many more that cannot be put into words. He actually billed himself as “Rolf Andra—Der lächelnde Magier” (“The Smiling Magician”).

PROLIFIC AUTHOR

I hope I’m not overlooking anyone else when I say that Rolf Andra—along with maybe Jochen Zmeck—was the most productive magic author of his time in the German culture. He published mostly in magazines, but also had several books, monographs, and booklets to his credit. At the end of this short essay you will find a bibliography of his works that are in my library and it covers his most important written contributions. He used to type his articles on an old typewriter, using up to five sheets of paper, each with a carbon paper between it to get one original and four carbon copies. I consider myself very lucky to have hundreds of his “original copies” (letters, articles, private trick descriptions, translations, etc.).

Over a period of several decades—from the 1940s until the 1990s—practically every dealer or club magazine in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland had contributions from him, some of them in almost every issue. In periodicals alone he must have published over 1,000 items. In one of his letters to his friend Dr. Weyenet, a dentist by profession and an inspired amateur of the Swiss Magic Circle, he occasionally complained, “I have no originals,” meaning he was not an inventor. His articles were in fact based mostly on the work of others, but he always had a little clever touch in method or presentation, and he also popularized ideas by some of his less famous but talented friends, most of them amateurs, such as Max Giebe. In those days, when good information was hard to come by, this was received like water in the desert.

He was even granted a little world-wide fame when in the 1950s his trick “Extra Sensory Perception” was marketed by Harry Stanley, at that time one of the most important international dealers (we owe him and Lewis Ganson for the wonderful books on Vernon, Slydini, Leipzig, Malini, and Endfield). All of Andra’s written offerings, his innumerable performances, and his willingness to help fellow magicians with his vast knowledge and experience at all times contributed considerably to a betterment of magic in German speaking Europe during his life.

THE OLD IS NEW

Concerning the topicality of Rolf Andra’s card magic, let me tell you a story: A few years ago I made a rare visit to the Magic Club of Basel, the *Zauberring Basel*. This is the club that was so close to his heart and for which he had done so much. I had studied and practiced a routine from his booklet *Eine Kartenroutine am Tisch* (“A Card Routine at the Table”), originally published in 1977. I tried to perform everything exactly as Andra had described it, including the presentation and text. This little program lasted about 30 minutes and was enthusiastically received, even by the younger generation and the professionals in the club. The reason might be, in my opinion, that practically all the tricks are as effective today as they were in his time—you merely need to adapt the pacing and the

presentation slightly. In order to prove my statement, I’m going to describe the last trick in the booklet, and hope that Rolf Andra would have approved.

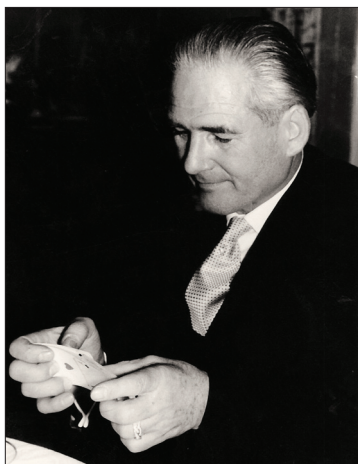
A TRIPLE PREDICTION

Take a deck which has been shuffled and cut by the spectator and ribbon spread it face up on the table. In the process, remember the top card, e.g., the Queen of Diamonds. If you push the top few cards together a bit as soon as you’ve glimpsed it, it won’t be seen.

Take a small notepad (a Post-It Note pad is fine) and a short pencil because this makes it more difficult for the spectators to “pencil read” you.

Without letting anyone see it, write “Queen of Diamonds” on the top sheet of the block, tear it off, and fold it twice. On the outside write three as a Roman numeral: three strokes “III,” but make your action appear as if the pencil made only one stroke. (RG: To do this, make two strokes one next to the other, then stop and look at your pencil as if it didn’t write. Press the top button a few times, as if the lead had not come out properly, or blow on the tip if using a ballpoint pen as if the ink had blotted, then just make one stroke next to the other two, saying something like, “That’s it—one.”) Put the billet into the card case previously





shown empty. Now ask the first spectator to spontaneously pull out any card from the face-up spread and to place it in front of him—let's assume this to be the Ace of Clubs. Smile and nod your head, as if he had done exactly what you just predicted on the first billet.

Turn to a second spectator and ask him to merely think of any card he sees in the spread—this precludes him accidentally thinking of the Queen of Diamonds which you've previously hidden.

Briefly look into his eyes, and then write "Ace of Clubs" on the second billet, which you again fold twice. On its outer side write "I" (the Roman numeral for 1) but make it appear as if you are writing "II." In order to create this illusion, simply make a stroke in the air followed by a real stroke. All of this must of course be done so that nobody sees what you are writing.

Place this billet into the card case to join the first. Only now does the second spectator take his card from the spread and place it in front of him—let's say this is the Ten of Spades. A little pretended happiness about the fact that the spectator has thought of precisely this card makes the effect more believable.

Turn to the third and last spectator and write down "Ten of Spades" for him on a third billet. Fold it twice and on the outside write "II" but make it look like you've written "III" to your audience, again with a stroke in the air as explained above to make it deceptive. Place the billet into the card case with the other two.

Take the deck and give it an Overhand Shuffle, shuffling off the top and the bottom cards singly in the first shuffle action, and then shuffling off. This will bring the initially glimpsed Queen of Diamonds to second from the bottom. Do a false cut. The third spectator shall determine his card by chance. Have several spectators call out a small number, but he decides which one to take, e.g., five.

Hold the deck in position for the Glide, apparently inadvertently flashing the bottom card, then place four cards from the bottom face up on the table, obviously gliding and retaining the second card from the bottom. The fifth card will be the Queen of Diamonds—take it and place it face down in front of the third spectator.

Let a spectator take the billets out of the box and place them according to the number on them in front of the respective assistants. The first two billets are opened and it is seen that your predictions are correct. Then the third billet is opened and its contents read aloud, "Queen of Diamonds". The face-down card is slowly turned over—it is indeed the Queen of Diamonds!

COMMENTS BY RG

- Rather than writing the full names of the cards, use their symbols. So instead of writing "Queen of Diamonds" write Q♦, but don't write QD. This makes the recognition of the prediction more immediate and is also helpful in case you

have a spectator who has difficulties reading (for whatever reason) or who doesn't speak English as his native language.

- As for the presentation, it should look as if you know the card *before* the spectator thinks of and selects it. This can be made even clearer if you place the card case, into which you have just put the prediction billet, right in front of the spectator *before* he takes the card from the spread. Whether you want to call this intuitive precognition, or the ability to influence a spectator's decision, and the writing of the prediction just a recording of this fact, remains a question of interpretation. It will certainly be to the advantage of every performance if he or she is clear about *what the phenomena and ultimately the effect is* they want to demonstrate.

- The writing of the "wrong numbers" is easy if you just imagine for which spectator each prediction is written. The first billet is for the third spectator, therefore "III" is written; the second billet is for the first spectator, therefore "I" is written; the third billet is for the second spectator, therefore you write "II." Simply imagine a loop that starts at three and ends at one.

- Ron Wohl, friend and mentor of many years, tells me that "Extra Sensory Perception" was inspired by Hen Fetsch's trick "Symbologic," which was much *en vogue* in Basel at that time. Andra and Wohl worked out an improved variation on it, and when Wohl went to London in 1956 to see Harry Stanley, he showed him their trick. Stanley asked to market it, and so it was done under Rolf Andra's name and titled "Extra Sensory Perception."

This trick is an excellent example of the kind of magic Rolf Andra liked and performed, as it is linear and memorable (the definition of classic magic), the method is ingenious and simple, but still complex enough not to be transparent (glimpse, one-ahead principle, miscalling, false shuffle, false cut, and forcing), and last but not least it is fascinating, baffling, and entertaining. Performed with virtuosity and sincerity—and Rolf Andra had that even at an advanced age—there are few effects better than this for a lay audience. Different, yes, but hardly better.

SMALL (AND PROBABLY INCOMPLETE) BIBLIOGRAPHY:

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(I still have a few copies of Rolf Andra's booklet *Eine Kartenroutine am Tisch* in mint condition, for collectors and aficionados of German magic literature. To receive a copy for \$25, postpaid to anywhere in the world, send me an email at gjobbi@bluewin.ch and I'll send you a PayPal link.) •