



# STAGE MAGIC TECHNIQUE



by David Bamberg (*Fu-Manchu*)

It was my good fortune to have known most, and worked with some, of the world's greatest magicians during my fifty odd years in the theater, and for over thirty-five of these years I produced several spectacles of my own in Latin America.

Many of the illusions and principles used by my father and myself have never been described in print, and some of them were discarded and forgotten. As the last of the oldest and longest "dynasty" of magicians the world has known, I feel that these fine illusions along with the hitherto unpublished secrets of my father, Okito, and some of my own creations, should be passed on for the benefit of future magicians.

In his book *Okito On Magic*, published in 1952, my father explained a great many of his inventions, but suppressed the really great tricks that made his act world famous. I believe his reason for not revealing these classics was a gesture to me as I was then using this material in my own show.

Okito's original Mat Trick, The Multiple (or Triple) Production, his ingenious development of The Duck Vanish, his marvelous release for the giant

Water Bowl Production, and above all, his masterpiece, The Floating Ball were never fully explained in detail. These stage mysteries put Okito in the class of the greatest magician-inventors of all time, and it is only just that he should be credited with these outstanding contributions to magic.

Although my father and I generally agreed as to the merits of a trick, we had widely different outlooks on presentation. Okito was a skilled craftsman with a passion for detail, and was a master in the construction of ingenious mechanical devices. But I did not inherit my father's mechanical ability and skill. I lean more towards the presentation of a magical effect as a vital part of a purely theatrical production. Sometimes this forced me to relegate the trick or illusion to second place, giving preference to the plot. Okito, the purist, could not abide this practice, and our differences of opinion stemmed mainly from this recourse.

But it may be that I had more foresight of the troubles that lay ahead for the theater and I think my position was justified when, in 1961, in spite of the overpowering competition of television, my magical

revue "Satan's Daughter" broke records in Buenos Aires with a nine-month run that placed it fifth in that year's ratings, sandwiched between George Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman* and the musical *My Fair Lady*. This may, in the United States where the full evening magic show has for long been a thing of the past, be something that is difficult to believe.

The fundamental idea of my shows was to provide greater versatility for the basic principles of stage illusions and tricks by the use of novel sketches or plots which presented constant use and interchangeability. This application of "theater" to magical illusions was first tried successfully by J. N. Maskelyne in his Egyptian Hall in London in the 1890's. Years later Dante, the Danish-American magician, used some clever sketches in his full-evening show.

There are really very few basic principles for stage illusions, although there are many variations of the more popular ones. Most of them have been seen so often, however, that their mystery value is gone and only a novel plot woven around them can bring back their former value to the theater.

In later years, conditions in show business have changed tremendously. In the life of the full-evening magic show, which spanned the industrial revolution to the beginning of the Space Age, nothing can be compared to the advent of television and its tremendous impact. Together with steadily rising salaries and expenses, increasing upkeep, transportation difficulties (in Latin-America) and the closing down of variety halls, the big magic show has almost been brought to a standstill. But I am firmly convinced that all the great stage effects will have new fields open to them in Revue, the Musical Comedy, the legitimate stage-play and in World Fairs and other big spectacles, where these splendid and truly magical illusions can be presented for the delight and bafflement of both present and future generations.

There is a maxim in the theater which states that every ten years a good story is new. This means, of course, that every ten years a new generation of children becomes adolescent and so a fresh public is available. A new generation usually hails the older devices as something novel, and therein lies hope for the future of magic. [Note: This seems particularly true at present in the United States where, particularly among the younger people, there is a wide fascination of things Victorian, where "decorator" stores are stocked with Victoriana and other replicas of the past and the book-stores are well stocked with volumes illustrating things.]

This does not infer that the future of magic lies

in using the old tricks with the often strange-looking apparatus in the old way, but that creative magicians are needed who can lean on past tradition to create new and individual effects or presentations.

Along with painting and music, magic is one of the oldest of arts. In ancient times magic seemed to be the greatest power on earth and for centuries people feared it and fought it. Later, in the mechanical age, when steam and electricity were novelties, magicians used these little-known forces to present magic in a pseudo-scientific guise, and were highly successful. In the "Golden Age" of magic it was presented as pure entertainment and became so popular that the magician was often the most highly paid head-liner on the bill, while the more ambitious presented full-evening shows, many making small fortunes.

The popular figure of a magician at the time of writing is the specialist: the man who does a short act, usually under close-up or intimate conditions, or who had either an original style of pure manipulation, or in the case of stage and cabaret, a thematic approach, or the deliberately sensational. Marvin Roy with his electric tricks is a fine example of the former, and the duo, Siegfried and Roy the latter.

The historical wheel of show-business indicates that it moves in cycles. Vaudeville started in the old beer-garden with an act or two to entertain the patrons. After a time these acts became so popular that vaudeville theaters were opened where one could enjoy this talent without having drink as the main attraction.

Silent movies and radio made enormous inroads on the habits of theater-goers, but it was the talking pictures that killed vaudeville, and when it was destroyed with it went the great training-ground of the magician. Most of the great stage illusions were the direct result of, and were inspired by, the fierce competition among illusionists. With the passing of vaudeville a large audience also disappeared.

Later, cabarets and night clubs mushroomed, and now we are largely back where we started, with people sitting at tables and drinking while they watch the acts. The cycle is complete.

Television not only drove the nails into the coffin of the defunct vaudeville, but also gave the same punishment to the movies that they had given to vaudeville. For magic in general, television has been particularly bad. Television gave magic three hard body-blows:

1. Television is *free* entertainment with financial resources to present the finest talent in the world in

shows that sometimes cost hundreds of thousands of dollars.

2. Electronic magical effects surpass anything that can be done of a stage.

3. Magicians, with their limited repertoire quickly burn themselves out in a medium that reaches millions of people in a single showing.

In a letter to me Orson Welles says in part, "... don't consider television—it's not only bad for magic in general, but bad for magicians." I fully agree with Orson that the future lot of the magician on television does not appear to be a happy one.

[*Note:* There is a difference of opinion on this matter, particularly in England, where many aver that television has not been altogether bad for magic, and that, on the contrary, people see magic and become interested in it; people who would not otherwise have seen a magician apart perhaps from local amateurs. And unfortunately many of these are so bad compared with the professional that magic is not enhanced by their performances. On the other hand, television has given a strong showing to magic in England and men like Chan Canasta, the late Al Koran and Robert Harbin have done regular weekly series of half-hour shows showing magic to people in areas where there are no theaters, cabarets or concert-halls. Currently David Nixon is still running weekly magic shows after many years, and is proving a top-rated show. It is true that magicians "burn up" material, but this only serves to stimulate new ideas and new approaches, and these are necessary if magic is to progress.]

Happily there is still a great world audience that likes magic and is prepared to pay to see it performed. Perhaps the packed theaters for a six-month run is a thing of the past, but there is always the intimate theater with a seating capacity of one or two hundred which are popular today. Magic is an intimate art and a good solid evening of entertainment using small illusions and sound stage tricks with routines geared to an intelligent audience could be a good money-maker. If this can be done then it will be an ironic completion of the cycle again, for that is where the full-evening magic show started—in the tiny theater of Robert-Houdin in Paris more than a hundred years ago.

But for magic to survive, dignity and mystery must be brought back to it. The wise-cracking, shirt-sleeved gagster must go in order to convince the audience that magic is a skilful art and not an easy to do joke that anyone can do without practice. The curse of commercialism, which makes it an easy mat-

ter to obtain the secrets of the finest tricks, is partly to blame. Magic is a secret profession and no one should disagree with me when I say that it was at its highest when its vital secrets were difficult to learn and virtually unknown to the public.

There are pessimists who claim that modern science has killed all interest in magic. They will say that if modern science can send men in a space ship to the moon, who wants to see a guy float a little ball around a stage? I differ from this viewpoint inasmuch as I am sure that the Floating Ball as done by Okito would intrigue and fascinate the very engineers who designed and built the rocket, and because of their specialized training they would enjoy it all the more. Did you know that Einstein was once baffled by the little toy bird that repeatedly dips his beak into a glass of water? At its best, magic is human and artful, not abstract and theoretical.

The more intelligent people are, the more they enjoy good magic. It is logical to suppose that the coming generations will be more intelligent than we are and one day our children are going to accomplish things beyond our belief or understanding. I venture to predict that they will make a great audience for a clever, subtle and creative magician.

Magical techniques and conventions change with time. If my grandfather, who was one of the top-flight card men of his time, could see a modern "cardician" at his best, he would be startled out of his wits. The modern technique developed slowly as audiences became more and more sophisticated, and this holds true for all show business, including stage magic. In the last years, for example, motion pictures designed for television have substituted the convention of the direct cut for the dissolve to indicate a time-lapse. For a man who had not seen a movie in twenty years, this would be confusing and the film would be incomprehensible to him. But the artist discovers new conventions which allow his audience to enjoy and appreciate the old principles. This is true in art, literature and music; and it is true in magic.

How can I convey my feelings towards magic? Robert Benchley once said, "The great thing is to have a story to tell. Then write it the way you lived it. Write it with your heart." I'll try to do that.

To me magic is a magic word. This may sound like Gertrude Stein, but it serves to express the love, the emotion, the enthusiasm and the ecstatic thrill that magic has for me when I perform or see my colleagues perform good magic. Despite the fact that I am a professional magician, deep down at heart I



am still an amateur as I do magic for the love of it and can never understand the mentality of certain professionals who made a fortune with magic, but who actually despised it and had no qualms in saying so.

I am grateful to magic for the happiness, success and fortune I made with it and for the opportunity it gave me to travel, and above all, to be my own boss, which is something to be profoundly thankful for.

As an Anglo-American, my youth was divided between the two great magic centers of the world: England and the United States. I was in a fortunate position to study first hand as a spectator, and later as an assistant, some of the leading magicians and mentalists of the day. As the last direct descendant of six generations of conjurers, magic is my birthright. I have been steeped in magic lore for as long as I can remember, and magic has been my whole life.

In magic, theory, no matter how sound it may seem on paper, should never be passed off as a tested illusion. A great many of the theoretical illusions explained in magical magazines are unworkable on the stage. It may come as a surprise to some that even the explanation of Amac's "Find the Lady" illusion in "Greater Magic," and also Nixon's version of the "Floating Ball" are technically wrong and utterly impractical.

I have learned the hard way—by practical experience. Some of my own efforts were failures although much money and time was spent on them, as in the case of my Robot Illusion which was technically perfect but had no audience appeal and so was an artistic failure. I got a good panning from the press for my pains, but when one reaches the top with a big show, such press criticism is to be expected. Many times they are right, as when *La Prensa*, Argentina's leading daily newspaper, gave me a panning when I opened with the "Death Chair:" the critic said in part, "... the show is confusing, overwritten and boring in places. The plot is ingenious but needs a big pair of scissors." And so it went, but at least it was a constructive criticism and his opinion was right. I did a fast job of rewriting. I cut the script to the bone, slashed away all the superfluous material and substituted good magic for bad dialogue and cracker-barrel philosophy. I changed the last act around and put in a new finish which was far more spectacular. This saved the show, which then ran for five months to capacity houses. That same critic then wrote another piece about the show which was a rave.

This is the sort of criticism that magic needs. As a rule, there is entirely too much tolerance for magicians, and they take advantage of it. If a magical production is heavily advertised, with all the Hollywood superlatives, then it becomes fair game for critical sniping. There is a prevalent and mistaken idea that a line of girls, flashy scenery and costumes and special lighting effects are sufficient to cover up a poor and unsound magical base. Just try it in any big town and see how far you get. A sound understanding of basic principles and the art of misdirection is the real base of any magic show.

Of course, there are many other factors besides technical know-how for the successful presentation of a magic show. Skill, personality, acting ability, character and crowd psychology all play important roles, and if you have not already done so, I would advise that you read Dariel Fitzkee's trilogy (*Showmanship for Magicians*, *Magic by Misdirection* and *The Trick Brain*), Maskelyne and Devant's *Our Magic* and some of the earlier John Mulholland books. [Note: Henning Nelms' *Magic and Showmanship*, published by Dover since the writing of this article, would also prove of value.]

One very important thing that apparently the people who run show business have forgotten, or do not care to know about, is that *people have not changed—show-business has*. The general public likes *good* magic as much as any other branch of show business.

Had you been able to come backstage with me, or with any other big magical production, you would have discovered many strange things in the world of the theater. You would discover that in spite of sick feelings and nervous tension, opening night will go smoothly if you have rehearsed it well. It is the *second* night you have to watch out for. The nervous tension has gone and one gets overconfident and slack, and everything that can possibly go wrong goes wrong. After your opening night you may have a fit of depression, a tremendous let-down. Do not let this worry you; it quickly passes.

During tough rehearsals you may be mean to people, do spiteful and childish things, and most likely be unfair to those who least deserve it. Everyone yaps at everyone and life is extremely tense & difficult. But after a successful opening everything will be forgotten and you will fall on each other's necks with vows of lifelong friendship. This is all a part of show-business—you will love it. The greatest reward the theater can offer is the audience's acceptance of something *you* have created, and this sweet music of applause amply repays you for all previous grief.

*Stage-Magic Technique versus Motion-Picture Technique*

The other night, on a late television show, they showed an old Laurel and Hardy comedy which co-starred Dante with his full-evening show. This picture is a perfect example of stage versus screen magic.

From the strictly slapstick viewpoint, the film is probably one of the weakest ever made by Laurel, who was to my mind one of the great comedians of all time and on a level with Chaplin. However, in this particular film, the story seemed to have been thrown together with Laurel badly overplaying his scenes and overmugging in his long and drawn-out crying sequence. However, the interesting part of the film, from a magician's point of view, is the example of how unconvincing stage magic can be when shown on the screen. The contrast between real stage magic and movie magic is startling.

The opening of Dante's show in the film is camera trickery at its best. It is not too improbable, and Dante's sudden appearance on a bare stage in a flash of fire and a cloud of smoke, is very effective, but is spoiled by the sudden appearance of a girl assistant by his side which is obvious camera trickery. It is an example of the old Hollywood tendency to gild the lily and not know where to stop.

Then Dante goes into his Azrah illusion exactly as he did it on the stage, and the contrast with the faked opening is deadly. In order to do away with any idea of camera trickery, they shot the whole sequence without a cut, and from the magician's standpoint we must be grateful for it gives us an opportunity to see Dante perform this illusion beautifully lighted and filmed under ideal conditions.

Dante, a poor actor but with an imposing personality, hypnotizes a girl. She is then placed on the usual levitation table which, in this picture, stood before a black spider-web background that made the table seem thinner than it was, and this is a strong point in its favor.

Then comes one of those ghastly moments in the presentation of stage illusions which I have fought all my life. A white sheet, stretched out by Dante and an assistant, is held for at least ten seconds in front of the girl: an obvious give-away that something is secretly going on behind the sheet. A camera cut at this point, however brief would have been an improvement and would not have given any impression of camera trickery. But I suppose the producers wanted to emphasize that no camera trickery was taking place, and thereby defeated their own purpose

as it was obvious that some other sort of skullduggery was going on.

Compare with this the Orson Welles sequence in the film *Casino Royale* where he plays the part of a magician seated at a gaming-table. He proved that when a trained actor plays the part of a magician, he can be more impressive than most full-time professional magicians. Actually Orson did nothing, but he did it beautifully. His presentation of the Azrah levitation in this film, performed under the impossible conditions of a gambling salon, is most convincing due to the judicious cutting, in which no doubt Orson lent a hand. He employed cutting for misdirection with amazing results. In the same film Orson's "Flags of All Nations" was a superb swindle, but the timing and cutting was so beautifully done that one is convinced that he does the trick exactly as it would be done on a stage.

Like all magicians I had the same problem that Dante experienced in the film with both my sofa illusion and the De Kolta Chair Vanish. These illusions called for some sort of distraction to break the necessary stalling. In the sofa illusion it was solved when the comedian of the show rushed over and tried to pull away the cloth to have a good look at the girl, but was violently ejected. This appeared to be over quickly, but this fast distraction was sufficient for the girl to make her get-away, and the stalling was logically accounted for.

In the case of the De Kolta chair, the comedian stood up just at the moment the sheet was brought up in front of him and he demanded his hat, giving him time to release the chair trap and get into position for his fast get-away. When the hat was slapped on to his now sheet-covered head, it got a good laugh because he looked like a ghost wearing a Derby hat. These two examples show how it is possible to cover necessary stalling, and a little serious thought will show ways to do this with any effect that has an awkward moment of stalling, whether it be in a stage illusion, a small effect or even at the close-up table.

However, back to the Dante film sequence. Dante, for some reason, disdained any such misdirection and the result on the picture (and on the stage) was nerve-racking to a fellow magician. The guiding of the two supporting threads on the dummy clips was done by Dante with his back to the camera under the pretense of adjusting the sheet, but again it was the case of the layman suspecting that something was being done, although he may have had no idea what was taking place. Dante could just as well have had an assistant to this vital work covered by Dante's body as he



turned to address the audience. Apart from these weaknesses the levitation itself was clean, and the finale of snatching away the sheet for the vanish was excellent.

I think a camera-tricked version of the levitation would have had greater effect if well done as the Orsen Welles version. In the Laurel and Hardy film, some of the later tricked sequences such as the appearing and vanishing in telephone booths, and in the Indian Rope Trick, although too long, were beautifully done.

Another illusion spoiled in the film was the Sword Cabinet. The shots of Hardy inside the box with the swords passing by him and one going into his ear, were unconvincing and unfunny. In contrast to this is the stage presentation of the Sword Cabinet as it was used in the musical comedy *Carnival*, where it had a charming theatrical effect and was one of the high spots of the show. The proof of the value of a good stage illusion in a carefully worked-out plot by a sound author was seen in this presentation, and by my way of thinking much of the future of magic could lie in this direction.

I would like to mention at this point that the so-called "improved" version of the Sword Cabinet with the mirror principle to show the box empty, is the silliest illusion in the world. What is the sense in wasting time filling a cabinet with swords if that box is shown empty? It is a sad fact that all the big stage illusionists produced a "stinker" or two at some point in their career. I have done it myself, but one has to have the courage to recognize the illusion is a failure and to chop it up for firewood.

I learned early in my career, after the debacle of the Robot and the Haunted Bed, to go easy and perhaps I became overly cautious, going to extremes before presenting a new illusion in my show. But in the end it paid off, and all my previewing and planning was, at least, a great saving on my nerves.

In the construction of an original illusion, I found the following to be of some use:

1. Inspiration. An original idea for a new effect.
2. The application of all known principles to achieve the desired effect.
3. Practical construction. An impressive, but light, strong and easily dismantled illusion which can be packed in as small a space as possible. Sometimes this breaking down of the illusion leads to more complicated mechanical problems, especially with illusions that depended upon a mechanism that is better left in a single working part.
4. The correct materials, or if unobtainable, the

right kind of substitutes. For example: the advantage of canvas-covered plywood over sheet aluminum which has the advantage of lightness and is easy to work with but is easily dented and paint chips off easily. "Scrimmed" plywood, that is, plywood with cloth glued over it, will stand much rougher handling, is easy to repair, takes a matt paint beautifully and will never chip. In some cases plastic materials can be used, but in the long run I have found them not dependable for stage use.

5. Has the projected illusion of novel variation? A new twist, switch or gimmick? Do you think it would have audience appeal? Have you the ability of seeing the effect from an audience point of view and not being misled because a novel *method* appeals to you?

6. Will it fit in with the balance of the show? What is its value? Does it have mystery value, box office, comedy, pantomime, surprise, "flash" or any other value?

When an illusion has been designed, built, rehearsed and presented, any of the following things may happen:

1. It is a solid hit from the first night. (Very unusual!)
2. The prop is basically sound, but some change is needed in the presentation or the plot.
3. It looked good on paper but not on the stage.
4. You ask yourself if all this work and expense for a three-minute stage effect was worth it.
5. The illusion is hopeless. Throw it out and don't waste any more time on it. Or sell it to some hopeful who is sure he can make a success of it.
6. Do not be surprised if he does!

In spite of the most careful planning and construction, there is always room for improvement as the evolution of all the great standard illusions has proved. In the case of a radically new apparatus, I have found it to be of great value to first build a mock-up. We usually constructed a first model from packing-case wood hammered together. This gave us a better idea of design, and above all helped us to discover any obvious mistakes. Only when we were perfectly satisfied did we start to spend money and time to make a final model, and even then we often found room for improvement. There was, in fact, no end to it, and even when we thought we had the perfect illusion, someone is likely to come along with a better idea. This seems true particularly of "Sawing a Woman in Two," which has had more changes and improvements than any other illusion of which I know.

*The Old and the New Style in Magic*

In the Fiftieth Anniversary Issue of the "Sphinx" (March 1951) I wrote an article entitled "... For the Angels" which had for its background the theme "Magic is Dead." I have been hearing this dismal dirge all my life, and no doubt my forefathers heard it before I did. It is true that the full-evening show and the brilliant vaudeville acts of highly competitive magician-inventors have fallen on lean times, but that does not mean that magic is dead, nor even very ill. It just means that magic has changed its style to confront a massive and radical change in show business.

It is axiomatic that no matter how ingenious or spectacular a trick or stage illusion, it was always the artiste who held pride of place, and a great trick in the hands of a great artiste was the pinnacle of magic. In magic, art begins when technique ends.

My father expressed it well to George Johnstone, and I would like to quote Mr. Johnstone from a very touching obituary he wrote of Okito in *The Tops* of August 1963.

"Theo (Okito) knew us through both phases of our professional life. We knew he liked the old silent flower and silk act, but nothing was ever said of our new satirical comedy act. One night when driving him home, I did not come out directly and ask, but said, 'Boy! We sure killed 'em tonight, eh, Theo?' He shrugged and his eyes twinkled as he said 'What can I say?—at least you were trying.' Determined to get a straight answer, I followed with 'Come on, Theo, get serious.' He did. 'You have a family to feed. This act is very commercial; you must give the public what it wants. I did it my way in my day. You are doing it your way in your day. More power to you.' This gentle soul was deep beyond depth."

There it is in a nutshell, and I do not think I can improve on that.

You have often read, or heard it said, that there are no great masters of magic today like those from the "golden age" of Maskelyne, De Kolta and others like them. I disagree. Hofzinsler was great in his day, but is today's Dai Vernon any less great? Can we not compare Channing Pollack at his best with any that have gone before? Do you think Charles Bertram was any better than John Mulholland? To my mind, a modern ten-minutes streamlined act is on an artistic level with the biggest full-evening show. To see how things change in the theater, let us look at one of Howard Thurston's "show requirements." In the section "Electric Department" we read, "Reds and whites in foots and borders. Replace blues with

whites. NO BLUES USED NO SIDE LIGHTS USED One man on electric." In other words, at that time (1928) for a full-evening magic show they used only reds and whites without spots or sidelighting of any kind. Today any amateur show would insist on proper side and spot lighting in various colors, and a modern full-night show can be so beautifully "painted" with light that it enhances the show one hundred percent. I may add that proper lighting comes under the heading of "art."

It would be well for the student of magic to read carefully Chapter Eleven of Maskelyne and Devant's *Our Magic: The Three Degrees of Art*. It states, in part, the following "... the man who has gained a knowledge of the broad principles which constitute the foundation of the art side of magic, must necessarily possess a great advantage. He knows the reason why each effect he has already produced has been successful. He can follow the manner in which each of his previous devices has operated in influencing the mind of the spectators. Similarly, from his knowledge of basic principles, he will be able to deduce the proper manner of presentation and the probable effect of any new concept. The same principles which govern what he has already done also govern what he is about to do. Therefore, being acquainted with the 'why' of the matter, he is not afflicted by doubts concerning the 'how.' The man not only knows his business; he understands it. He knows the technique and understands the art.

"As to the great value, and the *commercial* value of the understanding, we think there can exist no possible doubt. From the time of Aristotle to the present date, the consensus of authorities has decided that all art is based upon imitation. There is a kind of art which imitates things imagined by the artist. There is another kind of art that imitates things that actually exist. And there is a third kind which imitates neither imagined things nor things that exist; but merely imitates the imitations of others. These three varieties may, respectively, be described as High Art, Normal Art and False Art.

"Pictures painted by great masters are frequently reproduced by students, and are facsimiles of the original pictures from which they were copied, yet nobody could possibly regard these copies as works of true art.

"As in painting, so also in magic. To produce a magical effect of original conception is a work of High Art. It imitates the exercise of magical powers by the means and in a manner conceived by the artist who produced it. To reproduce a magical effect, ex-

actly as already conceived and executed by an artist in magic, *is false art*. It merely imitates the original imitation as a painting copied from another painting. Any weakling may be taught how to do that kind of thing; and, having learned his lesson, may earn an income equivalent to the value of a weakling's work.

"Yet, in spite of the truth of the foregoing statements, many of those who practice magic, either as a means of livelihood or as an intellectual recreation, appear to be entirely ignorant of the very existence of facts such as those we have reviewed. In all probability, those men would feel highly offended were any doubts cast upon their claim to be regarded as artists. Yet, in all they do, they prove themselves to just be mechanics. They can do just what somebody else has done, and nothing more. Such men are not artists. They cannot be; since, in all their works, the only kind of art displayed is the false art.

"The future of our art lies with the Normal Artist. Upon him depends the ultimate development of magic. If he is not true to his art, the false artist will in the end reign supreme. In such circumstances magic must relinquish all hope of attaining a position among the fine arts. It must be relegated to the position of a mechanical art—an *inferior* mechanical art, less than the circus juggler because in manipulative skill the magician is hopelessly outclassed by the juggler. The magician can only take a higher place by realizing that he has to depend upon his brains for success, rather than his hands."

Magic is an art that will last as long as show-business lives, and there will be magicians in the future greater than any magician of the past. But of necessity these men will be great artistes first, and great magicians second.

Of all the great magicians of the past, the only one that still lives firmly in the mind of the American public is Houdini. And it was Houdini himself, with his keen perception of the value of publicity, who created the myth. He did what Hollywood did when it created the "star" system. They knew the average audience has to have its heroes and heroines, so they changed the name of an actor to a star who existed in a nebulous Californian firmament, and then inflated this myth with tremendous publicity.

With the exception of Houdini, the American public knows nothing and cares less about any magician. Only rarely do I see a magician on television (compared with the frequency of other forms of entertainment), and once in a while there is a story with a plot based on magic or a magician. There it ends. On the other hand the "Western" with its usu-

ally stuffy morality and its casual violence is mostly a rickety structure of falsehoods about "life" substituted for a real environment, and yet is still, after all these years, among the most popular types of shows on the air. What has happened to magic in all the jumble of "canned" entertainment?

Magic is essentially a personal-contact form of entertainment, and is thereby handicapped by the camera, but there is plenty of room for it with the right man in other forms of entertainment.

It seems that in the United States today, magic is held together by the numerous clubs which are visited periodically by the best men in the field. Then, after an inspiring lecture the average amateur polishes up his props and is fired by a new enthusiasm. As long as this keeps up there will always be a strong nucleus that will step forward and prevent magic from disappearing altogether.

There appears to be a wide misconception in the minds of the public that magic is for kids to watch. [Note: The growing success of the Magic Castle in Hollywood, and McGoon's Magic Cellar in San Francisco, together with big public shows like the "It's Magic" shows at the Ebell Theater in Los Angeles, and the public shows at Conventions, indicate that this attitude is diminishing.] To test whether this was true or not, one of the authors made an experiment of his own. He wrote a lecture-magic conference with a short history of magic and performed a dozen of the best magic tricks and mental experiments known to date. He tried this approach for a "high-brow" audience of professional men. The result was astounding. When he finished they applauded for a full five minutes. The interest they showed and the questions they asked proved what a powerful medium magic really is in the adult entertainment world.

So we come to the final question. Is magic dead, or is someone, and that includes the so-called magicians who foist badly presented magic on an audience with no understanding of what constitutes entertainment, trying to kill it? Forget the big myth of a fast buck and big money on television and strike out in other fields. There are plenty of new fields waiting around for the man who will search them out—they will not come to you. You perhaps won't make it so fast, but you will end up by making more—and with fewer ulcers.