

Ex Libris by Joaquin Ayala, Ph.D.

Hello folks and welcome to the Ex Libris article for August 2017! By now we are already through a good chunk of summer and the school season will be starting soon. Kids will be getting back into the flow of lessons and remembering (or not) the things they had forgotten from years past. One of the effects that I perform often in my shows is exactly that - A lesson in and of itself and it comes from the books (yes, plural!) that we will focus on this month: ***The Books of Wonder*** by **Tommy Wonder** and **Stephen Minch**.

The Books of Wonder were published 1996 as a two-volume hardbound set with a combined 676 pages and were written by Tommy Wonder and Stephen Minch (to my faithful readers that name should be familiar to you by now) and published by Hermetic Books (owned by Mr. Minch). The books are illustrated with drawings by Kelly Lyles. **Tommy Wonder** was the stage name of **Josef Jacobus Maria Bemelman** (a.k.a. **Jos Bema**), who was born in Holland, 1953 and died in 2006. Tommy is held in very high regard by the magical community for his original thinking, his performance theory and philosophy and for his hard-hitting original magic.

The Books of Wonder are just chock full of fantastic material, and I do not just mean effects. In all practical sense, in fact, the best parts of the book are not the effects but rather the essays in between them. Tommy leaves no stone unturned in these books as he covers everything from changing the definition and thinking on “misdirection” to the best ways to practice any sort of magic, dealing with nerves, introductions in restaurants and walkaround situations and gaining confidence. There are essays about acting and how one should act, performing failure effects (i.e. magician in trouble-type) properly, creating emotion, setting the audience up and even the very limitations of theory, among many other essays. That is all just Volume 1!

Volume 2 is just as densely packed with ideas, thoughts and essays on whether you should sit or stand during performances, the essence of close-up, the various things that may go wrong in any type of magic and how to go about fixing them or finding solutions to problems, the [perceived] difference between amateur and professional magicians, how to dress, act (read: behave), what to say and how to say it and why, an essay on applause and audience sensitivity and more. The one that really stands out is his discussion on the *Too Perfect Theory** which should be researched by every performing magician, whether they subscribe to the theory or not.

Simply reading these books for the theory, ideas and thoughts alone will make you a better performer if you take the time to apply what you learn to your own work. As with anything, certain things may not work well for you, but Tommy presented his points in a broad enough manner that anyone would be hard-pressed to say they would not work for themselves. That aside, these books also contain a treasure trove of punishing magic effects (as far as the minds of the audience are concerned) when they are given the study and practice that they deserve. A few examples among the many are the effects he became very well known for: **The Watch in Nest of Boxes** (three methods are given), **Ambitious Card with Card to Box**, **The Two-Cup**

Routine and his most famous effect, **The Ring, The Watch and the Wallet**. He describes his way of making a **Zombie** gimmick, which makes the effect better because it makes all motion much more economical. He describes every little detail of each effect to the nth degree, some of which is rather complicated but very doable. An example of simplistic complication: His special table needed for Method 3 of the *Watch in Nest of Boxes*. The method and working of the effect itself is very simple indeed, and ingenious for that matter; it is complicated in the fact that there are many moving parts (but not really) that one must manufacture or have made for you out of metal and then put together in a specific way. Make sense?

Two of my personal favorites are **The Tamed Card** which is his version of the **Frank Garcia Wild Card**, which *REALLY* fools magicians that know how that effect works as they see too many backs of playing cards in play. Tommy went even further (almost obsessively further) with this one in that if you perform this at a table and have a spectator that follows you around, they will see no repeat card values for four whole performances of the effect, *and*, if you perform the handling to the letter, it is self-resetting for each performance! The other favorite is his **Elizabeth III** (which evolved into **Elizabeth IV** on the *Visions of Wonder* videos by **L&L Publishing**). An audience member is given a chance to guess one of two unknown face-down cards in a clear envelope on the table and they are offered a cash prize if they *fail* to guess either of them. They always succeed and when the stars align, they might even guess both cards!

Well, that is all for this month folks! Be sure to check these books out – they can be a little hard to find as they have been long out of print and go for hundreds of dollars in the used and collector markets. However, there are copies that pop up for sale often enough that are very close to the original price. If you have never read these books you owe it to yourself to seek them out, and if you have read them (and still have them!) you owe it to yourself to crack them open again and rediscover the wonders within (pun intended, thank you)! – **JMA**

*Check out the free e-book called *Magic in Mind* by **Joshua Jay** which is available from Vanishing Inc. Magic at www.vanishingincmagic.com