

Ex Libris by Joaquin Ayala, Ph.D.

Hello folks – Happy New Year and welcome to the first Ex Libris article for 2021! I sincerely hope this year brings all of your hopes and dreams into reality!

As I always do with this review article in January I am going “back to the basics” again, this time with a classic effect in magic – *The Cups & Balls*. We will be looking at *The Complete Cups & Balls* by **Michael Ammar**. This is a 167-page, large format hardcover book, with dust jacket, published in 1998 by **L&L Publishing**. **Hannah Ammar** took the wonderful photographs which illustrate the book.

Allow me to begin this by stating that the word ‘complete’ in the title does not mean that this book is the “be-all, end-all” encyclopedic book on the Cups & Balls – it is not. The word is appropriate because this book *does* teach you everything you need to know to learn about the Cups & Balls and performing them, from beginner all the way to advanced stages.

At the beginning of this book Michael does not really describe the differences between cup designs, but merely states that he uses what are now considered as *the standard* of high-quality cup sets – Paul Fox cups. He does however talk about important things that previous writers on the subject neglected – the terms by which we refer to the various parts of the cups, i.e. the shoulder, the bead, the mouth, the bottom, the top, etc. He also applies this to the requisite techniques used. All of this is necessary terminology if an effective course is to be given on the Cups & Balls!

The layout of this book is rather interesting because it can impart the feeling of watching a video, almost, because the photos are supplemented by annotations of graphics, which serve to highlight particular details in the photos, as well as digital highlighting to tie/link text to a specific photo. It really helps to clarify a lot, especially where minute details of moves might be hard to describe in words alone.

This book is broken up into a mishmash of parts and sections, rather than “chapters”, perse. In terms of learning progress, it is laid out in chronological order, and it begins by defining the fundamental props, the terminology (definitions), Part 1 is divided into four sections, each teaching a fundamental skill (Acting, Timing, Routining, Misdirection) and the techniques that fall under those categories.

Part 2 deals with various routining elements such as openings, body sequences (the different parts that make up the “middle” portion(s) of a

Cups & Balls routine), endings, standing vs. sitting, etc. It moves on to discuss and teach final loads and loading techniques, followed by the description of the classic Dai Vernon Cups & Balls routine, the Ammar Stand-Up routine and the final section is a full of advice on the effect, all from other notable performers such as **Tommy Wonder, Eric DeCamps, Shankar Junior, David Williamson, Johnny Thompson, Paul Gertner**, and more. It is kind of like reading mini essays – very informative!

The very last bit in the book is a description of the [**Alphonse**] **Delaporte** Cups & Balls Table – a custom table used for performing the Cups & Balls. From this description it would be easy to build the table yourself if you are handy with tools and woodworking, or it would be easy enough to have it made for you.

Well, there you have it! If you have ever wanted to learn more on this classic of magic and study it in depth, I would very highly recommend this book, as well as its companion videos, also made by L&L Publishing – *The Complete Cups & Balls Volume 1 & 2*, starring Michael Ammar as your teacher and which also include some really fun and interesting interviews with magician, magic historian, and Cups & Balls authority, **Bob Read** (who was previously featured in an article from July 2018).

Join me again next month and until then, go work on those New Years Resolutions! –J.M.A.