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Seeing and Hearing

A "SERMON"

BY

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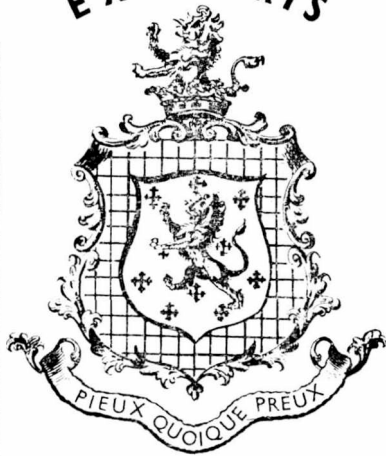
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Effects performed during Lecture :

UPLIFT	-	-	-	-	-	(Orrin-Hughes)
MIRACLE RIBBON	-	-	-	-	-	(Bagshawe-Robinson)
20 CARD TRICK						
MARKED CARD IN BALLOON	-	-	-	-	-	(Unique)

SEEING AND HEARING.

The appreciation of a magical act depends upon its appeal to the eyes and ears of the audience. These are the only two senses normally employed when witnessing any form of entertainment, and it follows that the greater the appeal which an act makes to those senses the more successful the act.

Reference to Dariel Fitzkee's "Showmanship for Magicians" discloses no less than thirty-nine separate "appeals" which a good magical act should possess. On examination, however, it will be found that nearly all these "appeals" depend originally upon their effect upon eye and ear. An act (and throughout this talk references to an act mean a magical act, although much of what I have to say may be applied equally well to other acts) is a living sound picture. To achieve perfection there must be a balanced combination of all the factors which go to make up the complete picture. These factors include:—

1. The performer.
2. Setting.
3. Apparatus.
4. Technique.
5. Acting and speech.
6. Music.
7. Production.

If all these factors form one harmonious whole, the effect is pleasing to the audience only. In the same way, many pictures are pleasing to the eye, but, every so often, a touch of genius converts a pleasing picture into one that is outstanding. So it may be with a magical act. The addition of some feature, unique to that act, may convert it from one that is merely successful to one that is outstanding and sought after. More will be said about this later in this talk. We must first attend to the business of building up an act to as near perfection as possible, and then we can sit back and decide in what direction to specialise to achieve that elusive "something" which stamps the really outstanding act.

Lest it be thought that time spent in the practice of anything but the technical side of magic (such as sleight of hand) is time wasted, consider for a moment the shows you have seen, the magicians and the variety acts, and even the

appearance of cinema usherettes, to take an example off-stage. You have seen good and bad performances, some well-dressed, others badly dressed. Which did you enjoy most? Those which were well dressed and presented in a neat, slick and efficient manner or those in which little attention was paid to appearance? Magic, by itself, is no more than a puzzle. Its performance tends to be a slow-drawn-out affair. In these days of speed, and impatient and radar-conscious intolerance of anything bordering on the impossible, it is more than ever necessary to clothe a magical presentation in a mantle of sensory appeal if it is to retain the attention of its beholders.

It may be argued that the average member of an audience is an unenlightened individual knowing and, perhaps, caring little about the technicalities of dramatic art. True — and that same person may be ignorant of the working of nearly all else that goes on around him, but he can still hold and express his opinions, and very often his opinion as to what is best is soundly, though ignorantly, based upon what is done or presented in accordance with the best principles applicable to it.

Study and practice, aimed at achieving perfection, will one day produce the result sought for. It may here be pointed out that the effect upon an audience of a badly arranged or presented act is far greater, in proportion, than the extent of the actual mistakes made. A setting may be perfect, with the exception of one small feature, such as a clashing colour of a piece of apparatus. As a result, the whole of the effect is lost, including that of the remainder of the setting which may otherwise leave nothing to be desired.

A jarring note such as this irritates an audience. Another fault to be avoided is bad or insufficient lighting. This is particularly unfortunate if it leaves the performer himself in shadow. To make an audience strain to hear or see what is happening on the stage is to prevent them relaxing and allowing their senses to be fully receptive to what is being presented to them.

Before discussing presentation in more detail it may be as well to consider one other general feature which is common to all forms of entertainment, namely, the importance of the personal side of the performance.

Look at a picture of an empty village street. Now look at another picture of a village street with the village people in

it, and notice the added interest in the second picture. Compare a number of portrait photographs — see how some of them draw your attention while others do not call for a second glance. Look around the people you know and consider their personalities—how one person, by his mere presence, can instil a feeling of happiness and enjoyment into an erstwhile lifeless congregation of individuals.

Since any form of living entertainment, by whatever medium it is presented, is no more than a demonstration of the performer's personality, it follows that all the other factors involved must be subservient and must be combined in such a way that they help to emphasise, and not to overshadow, the performer.

The Performer.

It will be recalled that the performer was the first factor in the list given at the beginning. It goes without saying that he must be clean, tidy and well-dressed. His clothes must be immaculate, up-to-date and appropriate to the occasion. The performer must know how to move about the stage, how to make gestures, and—most important of all—how to stand still. None of this can be taught in a mere lecture—it requires many months, not to say years, of study and training. A course of dramatic art or a year or two with a dramatic society are a necessary and valuable way of obtaining a grounding in this branch of stage-craft.

Apparatus.

The fact that apparatus must be well made, clean and attractive is commonly accepted but rarely practised. From the point of view of the audience the colour and the shape of the apparatus is all-important. A Chinese setting demands the appropriate decorations which would, however, look completely out of place if handled by an evening dress performer in a slick cabaret act. Too much, far too much apparatus is turned out by the score, not always too well finished and decorated with colours whose ghastliness is not decreased by its uniformity.

While the audience may appreciate the *look* of the apparatus, the performer's interest is mainly in the workmanship and the quality of its mechanism. A faulty piece of apparatus needs so much attention that it is bound to distract the performer from his efforts at presenting the effect. Besides, it

is liable to go wrong at the most inconvenient moments, or, by emitting a loud and unmuffled knock or squeak at the least opportune moment, may offer the audience an obvious hint of matters which the magical purist may feel should be preserved from the ken of the uninitiated in the magical art.

Before using a piece of apparatus test it over and over again. See that it is noiseless and that there is no possibility of breakage of threads or wires. The operation or secret mechanism must be carried out without the possibility of attracting the attention of the audience to anything other than that which they are meant to see. To achieve this perfection in workmanship allied to perfection in technique, to which reference is later made, should combine to give that confidence which the successful performer must so largely possess.

A point to remember about apparatus is that its colour scheme should be designed to attract the audience's attention where it is wanted. For example, in the effect known as "Uplift," the apparatus consists of three blocks and a covering cylinder. The blocks are stacked, a red one on the bottom and the two neutral coloured ones above. The cylinder is also a neutral colour. Since the effect concerns the red block, it is painted a brighter and more attractive colour than the cover and the other two blocks. By this means the attention of the audience is attracted to the red block and they are not confused as they would be were all the apparatus painted with vivid colours.

Setting.

The setting and layout of the stage must be attractive and convenient from the performer's angle. Props must be placed so as to be ready and in the right place when they are wanted. It should be unnecessary to make repeated journeys to pick up or place down apparatus required for each effect. On the other hand, the performer should not remain static the whole time—he may perform one effect centre stage, another one by his table, the next with a couple of volunteer assistants seated one on each side of the stage. In drama, this procedure finds its counterpart in "grouping," whereby the performers are stationed in various parts of the stage to vary the setting and to emphasise the action and words of the play.

A setting which may be attractive at the commencement of an act may be completely upset before the performance is half done, and, at the end, the stage may present the appearance of a junk heap, littered with disembowelled production boxes, spring and feather goods in wide variety and a representative and probably embarrassing assortment of silk flags and unwound paper coils. Imagine the impression created upon the eyes and ears of the audience as they dutifully applaud a magician taking his last bow, half obscured by the debris. Check the setting at each stage — there must be a place for the apparatus about to be used, so that it will not interfere with the effects preceding it. There must also be a place for its disposal after it has fulfilled its function. Ample table space or the use of an assistant are two ways in which this can be achieved. A colourful waste-bin can hold small props and other items after use.

One final point. An audience must be able to follow the plot of an effect easily, clearly and without distraction. The apparatus in use should be set boldly against a neutral background and not perched insecurely on the edge of a table already overloaded with apparatus against which its outline can barely be discerned. Ideally, only those props in use at the time should be on the stage. The stage performer may be able to manage this, but you and I, doing the after-dinner show for the staff of the local jam factory, must keep all our props on one table. In that case we must either hold the props in our hands, or use a second table, or, perhaps, change our programme.

Technical Ability.

No degree less than perfection is permissible for the performer who accepts professional engagements. This is not necessarily to say that every performer who accepts a fee must be a master of every trick and of every sleight of hand move. Certainly he must be in a position to perform all the tricks he does to perfection, and this may require a greater or lesser degree of skill. If he is an enthusiast, he will also know how to perform some sleights, and he will know something of the history of magic and of its past and present masters. Compare the pianist who practises scales and other exercises. Until perfection in technique is attained, neither magician nor pianist can obtain a satisfactory effect; to have to concentrate upon manipulative procedure is to detract

from the all-important aspect of presentation without which no effect can be made worthy of public performance. Technique must be second nature—as natural to the magician as changing gear is to the experienced motorist.

Some performers regard sleight of hand as unnecessary when such excellent effects (from the box office point of view) can be obtained by far simpler means. My answer is that the so-called simpler means can on occasion go wrong, and at such times the ability to perform a simple sleight can be of the greatest use in avoiding disaster. Mastery of sleights gives confidence, extends one's repertoire and adds to one's skill. By all means ignore it if you will, but master it if you would really understand magic.

Acting and Speech.

These two aspects of the one subject require more than a few words to do them justice. I shall, therefore, attempt no more than to indicate one or two points and to emphasise that acting is the all-important element which gives life and individuality to a magical entertainment. Strange then, that it receives such scant attention. If the acting came first and the magic afterwards we might perhaps see more good magicians.

We act in everyday life. That is to say, we involuntarily reflect our thoughts in our expressions, and in our gestures and tonal variations. Watch and listen to two people talking in an hotel lounge. Even without hearing their speech you can often tell from their expressions the nature of their discussion. Now look at the magician on the stage. He stands there immobile as he recites, parrot-like, the patter he has learned but does not understand, let alone believe. He shuffles back and forth, occasionally jerking a finger in an undecided attempt to indicate, dramatically, the whereabouts of the apparatus that is about to feature in his next illusion.

Everything on the stage must be emphasised and done on a grander scale than in real life. Gestures must be full-blown. Movement must be purposeful. Speech must be clear and audible, and tone must vary to convey the right expression.

If you are telling a story in connection with an effect, act and speak in such a way either as if you believe the story to be true, so as to make the audience believe it as well, or as

if you know it's not true but it's a good story all the same. Do not repeat it in that monotonous fairy tale style so often attempted. It serves no purpose save to insult the intelligence of the audience by assuming that such a puny narrative is worthy of their attention.

Music.

A lesson in the use of music in the production of a magical act can be learnt from a visit to a cinema or by listening to a play on the radio. Notice how the opening bars introduce the right atmosphere, and how sometimes a musical accompaniment to the action on the screen heightens its comedy or dramatic effect. The music plays two main parts—it creates the atmosphere and it points the action. A magician can select a suitable introductory number and for some of his effects he may find that a few bars of suitable music can help to build up a climax. Frank Boynett uses it very effectively in the razor blade effect. As he puts the blades into his mouth there is a waltz tune—in go the blades, followed by the thread and finally the water—all in dumb show and still with the musical background. Then, as the threaded blades are reproduced, the music gets faster and breaks into a quick fox-trot, getting louder and louder until the last blade is produced. The increase in tempo and volume excites the audience and almost forces them into loud applause at the conclusion of the effect.

Quite a different effect is obtained by Eric Williams in his routine with the Brandino canary vanishing box. He uses the box to vanish and reproduce a silk, and occasionally taps the box in time with the music, producing a fine comedy effect.

It is not suggested that every trick should have an elaborate musical accompaniment. The point would be lost by over-doing it, but to introduce it occasionally is to bring out the highlights of one's performance. If music is used, see that you carry copies of every part that is wanted, clean, untorn and clearly cued, so that the pianist or orchestra will have no difficulty in providing you with the effects you desire.

For a silent act, of course, even greater use has to be made of a musical background, but the same principles can be applied. Choose music appropriate to the effects and occasionally build it up in the way just described. Do not fall

into the trap of asking for "just a slow, steady waltz, please!" The result will be a dull "one — two — three" which will slowly but surely lull your audience into a welcome sleep. Vary the tempo and rhythm, and time the music and the magic so that they dovetail, thus avoiding the necessity for the pianist to trail off and do his best to modulate into the next number whenever you start on a new effect.

One last word on the subject of music—please don't have a musical accompaniment to your patter. Either music or speech, but not both.

Production.

I make no apology for leaving the question of production to the end. I do so because it is easily the most important part of the show. Try this test on the next magician you see; take away his props and let him go through the show without them, and see what it looks like. If he is properly produced, it should still be a pleasure to see him on the stage. If he is not—the result will be a futile fumbling and meandering, both aimless and meaningless.

Production (or presentation, call it what you will) means no more than presenting something to the audience—drawing their attention to a trick, leading them through its various stages, emphasising certain points, glossing over other points (misdirection) and finally bringing them to the climax. It is, in effect, focussing their eyes and ears (and their minds) upon your act, stage by stage, and ensuring that the act appears to them as a satisfying whole.

The subject is too vast to be dealt with in detail, but it is proposed to deal with three particular aspects, which I feel demand the most, and receive the least, attention. These are:—

1. The opening of the act.
2. The closing of the act.
3. Analysing the plot of an effect.

The Opening of the Act.

Most of the audience will probably never have seen or heard of you before. To them you are no more than a name in the programme (a name that they will probably forget quite soon). Your first appearance is therefore all-important. In those first few moments after the curtain goes up on your act the audience receive their first impression of you. They

look you up and down, decide if you have a good appearance, if your voice is pleasant and if your manner appeals to them. Once safely past these tests, the performer can go ahead with his act.

First impressions are, therefore, all important. The question of dress and appearance has already been dealt with. Now as to the actual entrance. Come on the stage looking as if you are pleased to be there and look at the audience as if you are pleased to see them and are grateful to them for staying to see your act. This may sound silly, but just think of those performers who appear on the stage with not a glance at the auditorium. They never make contact with the audience. You must establish that friendly relationship without delay. Don't be supercilious—just friendly, and you will soon notice the friendly reaction.

Give the audience time to take in your appearance. Enter and stand still for a moment. Let them size you up and get accustomed to seeing you.

The next point is your opening remarks. These serve a very useful purpose in enabling the audience to attune their ears to your voice. When you hear a new voice on the stage, screen or radio, it sometimes takes a moment or two to get used to it—particularly if it has an unusual intonation. Your first few words, then, act as a tuning signal. The actual speech may be trivial—that does not matter—it serves its purpose. In any case, a clever gag would be completely lost were it introduced so early in the act.

If you speak quickly, start slowly and then speed up as your audience get used to your voice. Above all, speak up and look up.

By now, you have introduced yourself and you can start your first effect. A simple effect, please. Start gently, and don't strain the audience. Remember they may have just heard a very good singer and they are still thinking about her. You have to coax their minds back to earth, to your earth; if you go about it the wrong way, you may do no more than antagonise the audience who will wish you anywhere and the singer back in your place. You have also to realise that singing and magic appeal to the senses in different ways, and the audience have to adjust their eyes and ears to your type of entertainment before they can properly appreciate it.

The Closing of the Act.

The end of the act is even more important than the beginning. Firstly, the end should not be too far away from the beginning, particularly in mental magic. Its importance, however, lies in the fact that the impression the audience carry away is the last impression they have of you and it is largely a visual impression.

Your setting should be as artistic and neat at the end as it is at the beginning—with an absence of the litter normally associated with a magical act. You, yourself, should finish up as you began, standing before the audience as the central figure. Avoid the type of finish where you are left holding a large botania in one hand and a jazz-coloured cylinder in the other, playing peek-a-boo among the feather flowers. Get rid of any encumbrances and stand apart, uncamouflaged and still looking smart, neat and at ease.

Thank the audience by smiling and bowing to them. Really bow and take time over it; look at the audience and smile your thanks for their applause. Say "thank you" to the pianist or band leader, and don't forget the people in the circle, or gallery. There is nothing to be ashamed of or embarrassed about in bowing to an audience. If it is not done properly the performer looks a fool, but, if he does it well, he gains even more applause. If you have your own assistants, include them in your first bow but take the next one by yourself. Never lose sight of the fact that you must be the central figure, first, last and nearly all the time.

If the function is a dinner and you are on a small platform and have to take your table off with you, see that your props are either all on the table, or in a hat or box nearby. When you have finished take your bow and then go off with your table. Don't grab your table immediately you finish the last trick and then attempt to bow holding it in front of you. Nothing looks worse.

The Production of an Effect.

A magical effect is rather like a three-act play. In a play the first act introduces the characters, shows their relation to each other and suggests the plot or sets the problem. Act two develops the plot or the problem, and by the end of that act the situation has become somewhat complicated. Finally, in act three, everything works out all right at the end. Not only is the climax or solution reached in the last few moments

of the play but, at the same time, all the characters are accounted for and all the loose ends tied up. The secret of a successful play (apart from its popular appeal) is that everything leads up to the climax, and—once the climax is reached—there is nothing further to be said. No anti-climactic action or dialogue is required to dispose of a point previously unexplained.

To plan the production of a magical effect, treat it like a play and divide it into three acts:—

1. Introduce the apparatus and explain what you are about to do.
2. Go through the preliminary stages of the effect.
3. Make the final moves and bring about the climax.

Most magical effects depend upon one situation (we will call it situation A) being changed into another situation (B) without the audience seeing it happen. The audience, to appreciate the change, must first of all be aware of the state of affairs in situation A before they can appreciate the change into situation B. For example, if I show a silk in a box on my left and pass it into an erstwhile empty box on my right, it is magic. But, unless I make it clear to the audience in the first place that the silk really is in the box on the left and that the other box is empty, they will not be in a position to appreciate the change.

Here, then, is a way to produce the effect, using the example of the three-act play. Introduce the characters, the boxes and the silk. Shew both the boxes to be empty. Place one on your left and the other on your right—as far apart as possible. Keep near the box on the left and pick up the silk. To emphasise the relationship of the silk and the boxes, the silk may be the same colour as the box on the left, say, green and the other box, say, yellow. Drop the green silk in the green box and tip it out again.

Now we run into act two. Replace the silk in the green box and command it to pass to the yellow box. Go to the yellow box and find it empty. The silk is still in the green box, from which it is tipped out. Notice that the silk is tipped out of the box, not taken out. Repeat the command, this time holding the green box. Again no success—tip out the silk again.

At last we come to act three—the final effect. Back goes the silk into the green box; the yellow box is still empty. Holding the green box, command the silk to pass over to the yellow one. Upturn the green box and nothing falls out. Put it down and go to the yellow box from which the silk is tipped out. Climax.

Notice how the repetition emphasises to the audience what is supposed to happen. The tipping process is a simple way of demonstrating emptiness or fulness according to whether or not anything emerges during the process, thus saving a lot of hand waving and wand rattling to prove that the box is so empty that it cannot possibly be examined.

This is a very simple example, but it does, I think, serve to illustrate one or two elementary principles in the production of an effect. Many simple tricks become complicated because performers will not take the trouble to analyse the plot into its constituent parts and then present the trick to the audience in such a way that they can follow it clearly and can understand what has happened after it is all over.

Before concluding this brief reference to production I should like to emphasise the importance of avoiding an anti-climax. One more example may help to illustrate the point. Assume the performance of the Twenty Card Trick wherein two packets of ten cards are each placed in an envelope, and two cards, selected from one packet, pass to the other packet. The climax in this effect is when the two named cards appear in the second envelope. A mistake frequently made in the presentation of this effect is for the performer to open the second envelope first to demonstrate that the two selected cards have arrived (making twelve cards in all) and then to shew that there are only eight cards in the other envelope, none of which is the selected card. The climax is completely ruined by the unnecessary "verification" of what is already obvious. To obtain the full effect it is better to proceed in the following more logical manner.

When the cards have been passed, show that the first envelope has surrendered its correct burden. Then open the second envelope and check, first of all, that there are twelve cards. There are? Good! Finally, show that the two extra cards are those selected. Climax!

At this point I must leave this fascinating topic, well aware that there is much more to be said and that the generalities I have discussed may be so sweeping as to invite an avalanche

of questions and criticism. I do feel, however, that the general principles, as described above, can be applied to most magic, and with little adaptation to every magical effect and act.

Patter.

Most performers use patter. That is to say they accompany their demonstrations of trickery with a spate of verbiage which is usually as dull as it is unnecessary. Just as the magic must attract the eye, the patter must attract the ear. Patter must add something to the presentation of an effect— if it does not do this it must be a distraction and often it is better to leave it out. Attractive and interesting patter, on the other hand, plays a large part in ensuring the success of a magical act.

There are several different types of patter, among which are:—

- (a) Descriptive, such as would be used in a mental act, or for an effect such as the Clock Dial where it is essential to explain to the audience what is to be done.
- (b) Misdirection. An apparent “ explanation ” may be made in order to provide a reason for the use of some move which is essential for the execution of an effect but is otherwise illogical.
- (c) Dramatic Effect, or the provision of verbal emphasis.
- (d) Narrative. A story, true or imaginative, built around an effect.
- (e) Comedy. This may range from the introduction of a few gags to a complete comedy patter routine in which the magic is a secondary feature.

If a performer decides to use patter, he should first of all decide upon what style suits him best. This is not an easy task. If the act is performed in character, then the patter must be in keeping with the character portrayed. A straight performer, however, may adopt one of a number of styles. If he likes tricks which are suitable for the narrative style of patter, he should write the stories carefully and in an interesting manner. Whatever style is chosen it must fit the performer, who must feel “ at home ” with the style. If it

is straight and serious, see that it is well written, grammatical and interesting.

If you have a natural flair for comedy, exploit it. But remember that the man who has no sense of comedy but tries to be funny is just boring. On the other hand, the man who tries to be serious has an equally difficult job if he is to avoid being laughed at.

Perhaps the easiest way for the beginner is just to be pleasant, and to say what comes naturally. In any case, it is early days to worry about patter—the first essential is to be able to stand and walk on the stage and perform the magic. As soon as he feels at home, a beginner should try introducing different styles of patter into his act and to attempt to assess the amount of success each achieves. This is easier than it sounds for the performer who can “feel” an audience.

Once having found your style, stick to it. Study it and develop it. You will find it very helpful if you can arrange to record your patter and then listen to a replay. Hearing patter alone, and not as an accompaniment to an act, reveals its faults—faults which often pass unnoticed when the attention of the audience is occupied in looking at the effects being performed.

Reference has been made to patter being used for emphasis. This introduces another point which deserves attention. It must be remembered that the two senses we are dealing with are continuously receptive to all that reaches them, but the signals they receive (in the form of light and sound waves) may not always reach the final stage of interpretation and understanding. For example, if one's attention is absorbed on some form of work it is quite possible to fail to hear a remark passed by an onlooker. On the other hand, if both the senses are receiving their own different versions of the same thing happening, such as occurs when one sees and hears a door slam, the impression gained by one sense emphasises that gained by the other.

In passing it may be remarked that sight usually takes precedence over sound when receiving signals—thus, if a person sees something happen, he gains a stronger impression than if he had only been told about it, or a visual scene may distract a person's attention from a lecture, whereas a sound, unless very abnormal, is less likely to detract from a visual scene.

The reason for this stress upon the comparative sensitiveness of the eye and the ear is to make the point that, unless the patter is emphasising a movement which is taking place at the same time, important patter should not take place at the same time as an important move. As an example, to emphasise that three cards only are dealt on to a table, the cards are dealt slowly and deliberately, counting one, two, three. Here sight and sound unite to emphasise a point.

The removal of a silk from one tube to another may be an important move and it might, therefore, be carried out in silence. If the performer cracked a gag at the same time half the audience would be listening to the gag and fail to notice the transfer of the silk, and the other half would see the move and not see the gag. In both cases half the effect is lost. The safest principle to work on is to use no patter or only unimportant patter when the move is important and to speak important patter only when the action on the stage is comparatively unimportant.

Now to refer to two terms which are so frequently used in connection with patter and as frequently misunderstood—pointing and timing. The meanings of these words are:

Pointing—to emphasise the point of a joke or remark.

Timing—to say the right thing at the right time.

Both these effects are brought about by speed, intonation and the correct use of words. This last point is the one most frequently overlooked. Perhaps it had better be dealt with first. It is obvious that the better the choice of words, the better the effect. It is, after all, only in this respect that one writer differs from another. Words must be chosen so that they convey, not only the literal meaning that they possess, but the atmosphere and tempo of a performance. The use of long words and pedantic phraseology would be completely out of place in an act of quick-fire comedy and gagging, but might be quite suitable for, say, a mentalist. The sound of words must also be considered and the phraseology used should be such as rolls easily off the tongue, avoiding phrases and words which are likely to cause the performer to hesitate or stutter.

This all applies to straight-forward patter, but it applies even more strongly to comedy and gags. The success of a funny story in a gag depends upon the "pay off" or tag line. There is first of all a build-up and then the "tag." This "tag" must be short, sharp and snappy, and it must

all be delivered before it is drowned by the laughter of the audience. It must trip off the tongue with no hesitation and it must be clearly and distinctly enunciated because there is no opportunity to correct a slip, and a pause or hesitation may ruin the whole effect. For these reasons, the choice of words for the tag line of a joke or a gag is of supreme importance, and the success or otherwise of the joke may depend upon it.

Speed and intonation cannot be taught, but can be learned by listening to comedians on the stage and radio and noticing how they speak the pay off lines to their gags. The speed must be just right—certainly not too fast, or the audience will not catch the line. Remember, too, that in the case of gags the gag line is often quite the opposite from what the audience is led to expect. This makes it all the more essential to enunciate the words clearly, distinctly and rhythmically so that they are fully understood.

In normal conversation it is usually possible to anticipate what a person is going to say to the extent of his next few words or the completion of a phrase. Very often speakers do not even bother to complete what they are saying, but yet they are understood. This may be all right so far as normal everyday conversation is concerned. Because a gag normally relies for its humour upon a distortion of a well-known phrase or upon an unexpected interpretation of a well-known word, phrase or question, it is of the utmost importance that proper emphasis be given to the distortion.

To point a phrase involves leading the attention of the audience in a certain direction and preparing their minds for what is to come. We have discussed the subject, as related to the performance of magic, but now we have to consider its application to patter.

You will remember the old-fashioned cross-talk comedians who used to repeat, over and over again, the opening phrases of their jokes. For instance, you can imagine this:

- A. Why does a chicken cross the road?
- B. You want to know why a chicken crosses the road?
- A. Yes.
- B. I don't know.
- A. Then I'll tell you.
- B. All right! Tell me! Why does a chicken cross the road?
- A. To get to the other side!

Think, too, of the jokes you hear nowadays. How often is there a triple repetition of the opening phrase? Baldly stated, as above, the idea seems childish, but there is a very sound reason for doing it—namely, to emphasise the “pay off.” The question is firmly implanted in the minds of the audience so that they are immediately aware of the meaning of the gag line when it comes.

The last point which has to be mentioned is that of timing. This is something else which can only be learned by experience. It means no more than saying the right thing in the right way at the right time. The right thing is the thing the audience will most appreciate; the right way means the best form of words calculated to produce the effect desired spoken in the right way to make them understood. The right time is the time when the audience are in the best frame of mind to appreciate them.

Obviously, the first thing to remember is that you must be heard. If the audience are laughing and applauding, keep quiet. If you have been serious, don't suddenly make a gag and expect a laugh. You will not get it. The audience, being in a serious frame of mind, will not be receptive to humour; you must first of all lead into it. Get the audience used to your style and type of performance before you go all out with the “punch” material.

While we are on the question of humorous patter, I would like to say a few words about impromptu remarks. If you are a serious performer, your patter should be repeated, word for word, in the way that an actor speaks his part in a straight play—that is, not parrot-like but according to the intention of the script. If you are lighter in style, you may permit yourself to make what are apparently impromptu remarks on things that happen during the show. Babies crying, late-comers and that type of thing can be remarked upon. For this purpose, store up a few suitable comments and introduce them as the occasion demands. Whatever you say, do not be unkind nor too personal—make sure that those to whom the remarks are addressed appreciate them as well as the rest of the audience and do not take offence.

Consideration of what has just been said draws one to the obvious conclusion that it is futile to attempt to teach the practice of patter other than by actual demonstration, but perhaps I have indicated one or two aspects of the subject

and also the directions in which the seeker for more knowledge and experience may focus his attention.

This is not the first time that an attempt has been made to show how a magical act should be produced. Pens, far abler than mine, have performed the task and Dariel Fitzkee has written a treatise which represents what is undoubtedly the most exhaustive treatment of the subject to date. But all the major treatises have one fault in common—they restrict their attention to the performer who always has a fully equipped stage, music and lighting and as many tables and assistants as he desires. There is a complete disregard for the type of show which you and I most commonly have to perform—the dinner or cabaret with no special lighting, no curtains, an inattentive audience and all the other disadvantages of which we are only too well aware. How can these principles be applied in those circumstances? The answer is quite simple. Adapt the show to the circumstances. Choose effects which can be handled with the audience nearly all round—things that are easily set-up and require little table space.

A frequent difficulty is that of getting one's table on to the platform (if any). Get it as near as possible—it can often be placed just at the side. When you are announced, hop on the platform and perform a couple of effects which you have carried on with you. Then get your table and set it beside you. As each effect is ended place the props in an opera hat.

Perhaps the worst part of a dinner show is the absence of a platform or that the one provided is too small and too low. As a result the audience seated far away can see little or nothing. If you are using props on the table, use a table with an extending pedestal so that it can be raised and so increase the visibility for those at a distance.

Whatever the type of show in which you are called upon to take part, study your programme with a view to selecting effects suitable for the audience and suitable for you under the conditions with which you have to contend. This will enable you to avoid the cramping effect encountered if you

find you have to restrict your method of presenting an effect because of the proximity of a mirror or because of difficulties with angles.

In conclusion I would repeat that, in my view, dramatic training is of greater importance than magical technique—since it can stand alone whereas magical technique must be supported by dramatic presentation before it becomes entertainment. Many lectures have been given on presentation, and books and articles dealing with the subject are available in great quantity. No doubt they are read, but more than reading is required. Study an article on the subject and take from it one point. Then see if that point applies to you. If it does, put it into practice and see the effect it has on you and your act.

Then take another point and give it the same treatment. In time you will find that the standard of your performance has improved out of all recognition.

There is just one last point on which I would like to speak. Earlier in this lecture reference was made to the qualities of an outstanding act. What is it that stamps one performer as being unique? It must be more than a well-planned and presented act. It is a quality possessed by the performer which becomes a part of him; at the same time it is something which no other performer can successfully imitate. It may be an effect (consider De Courcy's canary through mirror and De Bière's egg bag) or it may be a style (such as that of Brian McCarthy). Whatever it is, it must be the most outstanding feature of the performance — something which comes quite naturally, interests the audience and makes them want to be entertained by the performer. This elusive quality can be obtained, it is suggested, only by such careful study and planning of an act as to pave the way for the introduction and development of whatever latent ideas and capabilities the performer may possess. In an attempt to achieve brilliance many performers attempt too much; they devise complicated routines and introduce an ill assortment of visual and verbal comedy material. No really successful performer

does that. He relies upon simplicity—upon doing just enough, but doing it superlatively well. In this way, the performer gives himself a chance to achieve his goal.

Your Hon. Reporter was away on holiday in the Hebrides, so was unable to report the foregoing lecture. However, Mr. Geoffrey Robinson has written out his talk in detail and our sincere thanks are due to him.

The Chairman for the evening — Mr. Jack Forsyth, M.I.M.C.—was unfortunately unable to be present owing to illness, and his place was taken by Mr. J. Esler, M.I.M.C.

An interesting discussion took place at the end of the lecture, and a very hearty vote of thanks was accorded to Mr. Robinson for his most thoughtful and instructive “sermon.”

GEORGE MCINTYRE.

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