

A FOREWORD BY KENTON

I didn't plan on this booklet ever being released. In fact, I didn't plan on this booklet at all...

One day a small revelation raced through my mind: a literal meaning of the phrase "My Act". This revelation lead to others, and so I decided to put what I was thinking about into writing.

I didn't know "why" I was writing all of these things down. It just felt like it might be a good idea, so I wrote. I had no idea where this writing might actually lead. Maybe one small essay stuck in the back of a book of tricks. "People would forgive me for that", I thought.

But something within me apparently had other "plans". Next thing I knew, several days a week, a new essay would get written. "What am I going to do with all THIS?" I wondered. But I kept on ranting about insights as they came to me. I still didn't know "why". It was just something I felt like doing - so I did.

As it turns out, this has become the companion piece to Wonder Words Volumes Two and Three. I never would have guessed that ahead of time. Now that it's finished, it makes all the sense in the world. Other people actually pointed this out to me first.

The essays in this booklet are like that too. When you've read them all and are finished reading, they somehow "make sense". I don't know exactly how, but they do work together in the end. Even this foreword it turns out is part of a complete circle. Once you get to the very end (and not before) read all of this again. You'll see then what I mean...

The title "Rants Into Raves" simply expresses that through my ranting essays, you may find practical principles to apply to your performances. When you DO apply these ideas, you'll understand why this booklet is called "Rants INTO RAVES". Audience responses dramatically change as you put these ideas into actual use.

So I hope that you will find as many beneficial insights in all of this, as I have found for myself. If not, I'll be surprised - but that's fine too. I really wrote all of this for myself, after all. I'd love it if what I have written helps you, of course. I always love that...

Strangely, I am relearning a long acknowledged truth: By being true to myself, I may in turn be inspiring others. Funny how that works.

But then there are essays in here on that as well...

ENJOY! Kenton/1998

RANTS INTO RAVES

RECIPROCITY

What the hell is “reciprocity”, and why should I even care about it?

“Reciprocity” is a word meaning essentially “you get back what you give”. It’s a bit more devious than that, however. Reciprocity is a rule stating that when you give something to someone, they feel naturally compelled to give back in return.

Notice that word “compelled”. In other words, you might say “Giving something to someone makes them feel guilty if they don’t give something back to you. They naturally feel like they owe you.” Psychologists claim that this is exactly what happens.

A old common example is the car salesman when he approaches a potential customer. He asks his customer if he would like a soft drink, water, etc. Then the salesman pulls his own money out of his pocket, goes to a machine, and buys the potential customer his choice of beverage. Why?

Because the salesman is a nice person? Perhaps. But sales people have long been aware of the rule of reciprocity. They understand that when a potential customer gets something FOR FREE from a salesperson, that same customer is far more likely to BUY from the salesperson who “was nice enough to get me a soda”.

Of course, those customers who are not aware of the reciprocity rule fall for this without thinking. At most they think “Gee, what a nice guy. I like him...” which is important factor in making a sale, after all.

Believe it or not, you are probably in “sales”. You may be coming from your heart, and being truthful to your audience - and you are still “selling” your unique point of view, feelings, and so forth. You might stop and consider how much we all try to “sell” ourselves everyday. We all tend to be “salespeople” - even if we think we are not...

That doesn’t mean you’re a “cold, calculating performer”. It’s just looking at some common realities in this world.

Too many performers in the art of Magic and Mentalism care mainly about their own egos, and “getting” not “giving”. But even here you can see where the rule of reciprocity can work for everyone involved.

Hopefully I don't have to "trick you" into being decent to your fellow human beings. But if I do, then consider the rule of reciprocity. If you want to GET applause, respect, genuine emotion, and so on from others, the rule of reciprocity says that the easiest way to get that is to GIVE it FIRST.

When you as a performer GIVE something to an audience that they want and or need, they will bust their behinds to make sure that you get these wonderful feelings BACK.

So even if you are entirely self-centered and egotistical, the rule of reciprocity applies to you too. Unless you don't even care about getting anything back from your audiences when you perform. But I haven't met anyone with an ego yet that feels THAT way, if they're being honest.

Of course if you genuinely care about people, using this rule will be even easier. It will likely be much more effective and natural appearing as well.

I bring this up now, so that you can keep this rule in mind as we go along on various tangents and tirades. So you can see how this rule of reciprocity can be of value to YOU - even if you're totally selfish.

Of course, I selfishly hope that you are not that selfish...

If you just apply and associate everything we'll be talking about with "reciprocity", I think you'll see why all of these considerations can be of extreme significance.

IF you apply them.

The "ACT":

We as performers are constantly referring to our "acts". We speak about our different "acts" as if they were an actual thing.

Usually we mean - at best, a bunch of routines placed into some sort of sequence, that lasts a certain period of time. We take this for granted that an "act" means exactly this. But does it?

We throw the word "act" around like we are completely and totally aware of it's meaning and true significance.

If that is true, then what follows will be obvious to you and you will have no qualms whatsoever about the concepts to follow.

If it isn't true, and we have for the most part been blowing smoke in front of our own eyes, then what follows might be rather eye-opening. It might also sting a little. But light sometimes stings after you've been in darkness long enough.

Here then is an examination of the word "act". See what it reveals about ourselves and what we actually do in our "acts".

An action or act is the result of something. An act is the effect of a cause. "Cause and effect" implies that there is always a cause before the act itself. Before any "act" there is a reason for that act.

"The act" is a portrayal of your own inner beliefs and motivations. "The act" is an act of being. An "act" is an action that outwardly portrays that which you cherish or believe inwardly.

An "act" then, like all action, is the expression of your own secret ideals or inner motivations.

You don't have to "make" your act be this way. Any act or action is already exactly this.

As the act of "making love" is an outward physical expression of the principle of "love" or "hormones", so is your "act" an outward physical expression of who and what you are, and who and what you are really about.

You may not think that your "act" is this way, but all acts are a result of some inner cause.

Any act you make in the world is a response based on your own personal beliefs and experiences. Therefore, your "act" simply does reflect something about yourself. You can't help it. The question is does your "act" reflect a statement or purpose, like all the other actions do in your life? The next question is do you like the statement or purpose your act is making?

If your "act" isn't doing this, then what is your "act" or action really about? If it's not the truth about you, then who is it true for and why is that more important to you than being true to yourself?

You must "act" out what you are about. That's what an act does anyway, like it or not.

Think about what acts you make upon the world. Then think about what "acts" you perform. Is there a difference? Why?

Are your "acts" speaking louder than your words? Do your acts properly reflect your own unique gifts and perspectives about the world?

Or does your "act" betray your truth - whatever that happens to be? If your "act" betrays you, are you truly happy about that?

Ask yourself "Is my act an act of betrayal or an act of portrayal?"

Then ask "What does this say about me?" Ask yourself "What does this say about my own comfort with who and what I really am as well as who I represent myself as, and what I do?"

Ask yourself "Do I really want my "act" to conflict with my honest evaluation of my real self?" Then ask "Is it honestly and truly fine with me that I betray myself in front of others?"

Ask yourself "Is it really alright with me that I betray myself solely for the sake of money?" How about betraying yourself for the sake of "fame" or recognition?

How about betraying yourself so that people will "like you" and you can then feel "all right" about yourself? Can you really feel better about yourself by betraying yourself?

Is it truly OK for you to betray yourself with your actions or "act"? Is it honestly all right within you? If you think so, stand in front of a mirror and say this to yourself out loud:

"It's just fine with me that I betray myself with my act and my actions. It's really great that I will betray myself for money, glory, fame and the possibility of being liked by someone else. It's more important to be loved by others than by myself, that's why it's a good thing for me to betray myself."

If you think this is a joke, it isn't.

Face yourself in a mirror and say all of that to your own face. Why? Because you are doing this anyway if your act doesn't portray who you are.

Finally, ask yourself this question: "If I dare to answer these questions, will my "act" remain the same?" Then ask yourself "If I think about all of this and do something about it, will my act be the same as everyone else's act?"

Well, will it?

Your "act" is a physical action. All human action is based on an inner cause. If you have an action - any action - there is a cause behind it.

What is the cause behind your act? There is one. You might not like what that cause is right now. Fortunately you can change that. Discover honestly what the "cause" - the real cause is - behind your "act".

Once you find that cause, remember you can always change it. You cannot however change something you refuse to acknowledge to yourself even exists.

If your act right now is a betrayal, then examine it closely. It's time to get really honest with yourself. After that, you can begin to change your act into an act of portrayal instead.

Is your act an act of self discovery? Is your act an act of ridicule? Is your act an act of embarrassment? Is your act an act of deceit upon people for money? Is your act an act of incompetence?

No act is "meaningless". There is a secret cause behind every "act".

Is your act an act of comedy? Why? What is the cause inside yourself that motivates you to perform "comedy actions"?

Is your act an act of magic? Why? What is the cause inside of you that makes you do acts of "magic". What do you mean by "magic"? What is that?

Do you mean your acts of magic are caused by a need to impress others? Such an "act" is an outer act of egotism and an inner act of self doubt. Ask yourself if there are real magicians anywhere, did they get to be that way because they inwardly doubt themselves? What do you mean by "magic"?

If you mean my act is an act of tricks, then what is your inner motivation? Is it the same inner motivation as a dog or a prostitute when they do "tricks"? Are you certain the inner motivation is all that different?

Do you have a magic act because you believe in real magic and you are trying to live a life based on the ancient principles of the philosophy known as magic? Do your acts of magic reflect this?

Or are you acting as if you were that way, but don't really believe it? If you are only acting then what is the cause of this act?

"Acting" is a description of someone taking on various actions. "Acting" isn't a cover-all-the-bases-type of excuse. "Acting" is an act or series of acts. What then is the cause?

Do you do acts of mentalism? Why? What is the cause behind these acts? What is "mentalism"? Do you mean the principle of Mentalism found in the earliest forms of "Hermetics"? Hermes was a "Magician". Is this what you mean? Historically, "Mentalism" is a subset of "Magic". What do you mean when you use the ancient term "Mentalism"? Why? That isn't what "mentalism" means to you?

No? Then what do you mean when you use this term from Hermetic philosophy? Do you mean "mental tricks"? If your act is an act of mental tricks, what is the difference between you and trying to figure out a complicated equation of mathematics? What is the difference between you and a con? What is the difference between you and someone who is "acting"? What is the cause that motivates your action?

Are acts of mentalism the same thing as mental torture? Or is it more like psychological manipulation? If so, who benefits by this? What motivates that?

No one is suggesting that you are really intending to do any of these things. No one is saying that this is what you are truly doing. The point is what do you mean by doing? Why are you doing it? What is the cause behind the act?

What is your intention? What causes this intention? Are you acting the way you intend to act? Why or why not? What can you do about it? Will you do what you can do about these things?

Perhaps you view all of this as a matter of "semantics". But even "semantics" means "words, symbols or actions " that "evoke meaning".

So what do you mean to communicate with your "Act"? If your answer is "nothing" then your ultimate endurance will be "nothing". Those whom we consider "famous" in the long run have been extremely aware that all of their "acts" meant something.

You may disagree with the "meanings" involved in such famous "acts". But please note that such acts had meanings.

Does yours?

Don't "over think" what you are doing right now. Just stop for a moment and think - period. Avoid the temptation to "justify" or "excuse". If you cannot be "real" to yourself, then why should anyone "really" relate to YOU?

In any form of entertainment, those whose names have endured have been either overtly or privately involved in acts and beliefs of meaning. Often this even has to do with "esoteric" or "real magic" beliefs. But you need to go with your OWN beliefs. ACT on that.

So, what exactly are you, and what do you mean to symbolize by your act or acts?

Don't be a phony about this. Your act is telling on you anyway. Be sure your tricks and your "act" match up with the words you say. Make certain all of this matches your own inner CAUSE. Then remember, "ACTions speak louder than words".

Just something to think about...

WHY WE "BUY" OTHER'S "ACTS", AND WHY WE BUY ANYTHING PERIOD!

There are a lot of books and training seminars that attempt to teach you how to "trick" people into making a sale, or to buy what it is you do. Some of these things even have some value.

But many of these methods shy away from the one SINGLE most important reason we "buy" ANYTHING. Numerous studies have now proven that we generally BUY based on FEELINGS - NOT "Intellect".

If in some way, our FEELINGS can be related to a product or service, THEN we tend to buy that product or service.

AFTER we have these feelings, we might be moved to "rationalize" our decision to purchase something.

So consider how you are selling your "act". Is your act indirectly associated with positive feelings to the potential customer? How? Are these things REALLY FEELINGS?

For example, can you feel "mind reading"? Or is that feeling really "I feel inadequate compared to that Performer"? OR is this feeling "I can use my mind to be better too"? STOP. THINK. FEEL. Is "Using my mind to be better too" a feeling?

That depends on the presentation. This might really feel like “I have control and confidence in my life now” to an audience member. People can feel when they feel “confident”. They might well even feel “being in control”. Or such feelings might feel like “security”, to some people.

There is a “catch”. People can feel negative things as well. Many sales techniques are based on the concept of selling a feeling of FEAR.

Again, numerous studies have shown that while “fear” is an easy feeling to induce in others, it has to be constantly reinforced to keep that feeling working. Think of a fun house where a monster jumps out and perhaps you even scream - but then laugh out loud, mere seconds later.

Positive feelings on the other hand, may take a bit more time to “sink in”, but once they do - they tend to stay present over the long haul. Your life may be in complete shambles, for instance - but if you were told you were “a good kid at heart” - there will always be a part of you that says “I’m not a bad person”.

Other studies show that you can literally change and affect people deeply by either fear OR positive input. Again, the fear has to be reinforced often, or it subsides. The changes don’t stay otherwise. Positive input on the other hand, DOES tend to stay. Positive reinforcement and positive changes DO seem to remain far longer. They definitely stay when these positive feelings are associated with either a symbol of these feelings, or when these feelings can be associated to a daily experience.

So what does all of this mean to you as a performer? To begin, consider how you can relate feelings to your effects, your personality and your marketing materials.

Remember too, that feelings that are hinted at - or more indirectly associated - will slip by any “conscious defenses” that someone might have. Indirect is usually far more effective than being “preachy” and “obvious”.

Keep in mind that positive feelings tend to be more effective than negative ones in the long haul. Use fear if all you care about is a “quick buck” and a short term career. Generate positive feelings in others if you want to influence people in a lasting way, and build a long term career. Of course this has to be your own choice.

Recall that these feelings need to be attached, or will naturally become attached, to a symbol of some kind. This might mean you can associate a positive, empowering feeling to a souvenir or “give-away” item. You will see me do this in “Miracle With Five Bills” on the Desert Brainstorm Series by A-1 Multimedia.

Just as important, if not even more so, is the concept that you as a performer can be a symbol of feelings for others. If you question this, stop, think and feel again...

Think of your personal favorite “celebrity” in any field of entertainment. Now consider what you feel about them. Consider how you feel when you think about this person. Focus in on your feelings.

Do you have feelings of “love” or the idea of “being loved”? Do you feel “warm” or “cold” inside? Do you feel more “powerful”? Do you feel more “hope”? Do you feel more “caring”? How about a feeling of “relief”, “confidence”, “deep wisdom” or “sense of belonging”?

These are just a very few examples of things you may feel. You might feel passion, and on and on and on.

Perhaps you have never stopped to consider how your favorite performers bring up feelings inside you. Perhaps you have considered this, but didn't understand what it means to you, as a performer.

As a performer, creating feelings is a major key. The tricks are minor. If you take minor tricks and relate them to great feelings, then the tricks can become major effects. Take a really good effect, and add feelings that others can relate to, and you may well have a monster on your hands.

Magicians far too often focus on their props. Props don't have feelings. You can bang them around and everything, and they won't stand up for themselves. Props don't care. So why should your audience?

I know, magicians like to point out that they get applause, make people laugh, and “kill” other people. Fine. I've found that being “fooled” can either be a feeling of inadequacy, or a feeling of hope depending on the presentation.

Care to guess how often people feel “hope” over “inadequacy” when they watch most magicians perform?

Mentalists are not all that different usually - sad to say. The feelings they generate are often inadequacy or incompetence amongst their audience members. Such performances seem to be saying “Hey, look at what I can do! You can't!”. A lot like many magic acts.

At most, Mentalists tend to use what amounts to an indirect scolding: “You are all capable of this too.” As an audience member, I tend to think “Then if I am capable, what's wrong with me? Am I just lazy? No, I'm probably just too ignorant. Maybe stupid would be a better word...”. You see where this can go...

However if these same effects were more about everyday feelings that we all share, then there could be an immediate common bond between audience and performers. “Picking an item off a restaurant menu”, “Choosing an item from a shopping list”, “naming a number between 1 and 50” are rarely emotional events. Stress of being a “volunteer” is a feeling. It’s just not one many people want to hang on to for very long.

There are situations where these events can be emotional of course. But rarely does a mentalist these days build such a “bridge” to those all important feelings.

Not that this is difficult to do. You might say “I remember my first date. I took my girlfriend out to a restaurant that I liked. I hoped she would like it as well. Taste is a very personal thing you know. Often times a person’s taste can tell you a lot about them - and even how compatible that person might be with another ...”

Now you’ve linked up a menu choice effect with “love”, “excitement”, “expectation”, “hope” and a little “first date” nervousness. Not to mention first date memories, dating dreams and wishes, favorite atmospheres in restaurants, etc. that also provide other feelings.

Notice in this example I did not say “Do you remember your first date? Do you recall going out to eat? How awkward that was? How scared you were? And yet you still had hopes, didn’t you?”.

This could be far too obvious and much, much too direct. People tend to take many such direct statements as “trying to pull heart strings” and “just being overly sentimental” or “schmaltzy”. I use these negative words and phrases here, because I have found critics who have used them in reviews of several magic shows. The same holds true for mentalism of course.

Like I said in Wonder Words Volume Two, you had better be able to honestly relate to the situation you are describing - personally. Those hundreds of thousands of subconscious cues are a factor, after all...

Just remember this simple little rule: We buy things based on feelings.

If you want to get people to buy your act via your promotional materials, hint at the feelings they get by booking you.

If you want people to buy your show when they see it, indirectly suggest feelings people can relate to in your performances.

If you wish to have people buy into your personality, become a genuine personality that suggests certain feelings that others desire to feel as well.

And if you wish to become somewhat of a “celebrity”, add in this notion of feelings - and the performer as a symbol of these feelings - to the following:

CELEBRITY STATUS

Often you can learn a lot and get great insights by thinking about words, and their LITERAL meaning. “The Act” is one such example.

Now let’s consider a LITERAL meaning of what being a “celebrity” is all about...

We have all sorts of different kinds of celebrities, of course. Some are in entertainment, some are in sports, some are spiritual leaders, some are said to be “famous” just “for being famous”.

So what is it that all these people have in common that makes them “celebrities”? One answer at least is hinted at within the word “celebrity” itself.

Literally, a “celebrity” is celebrated. A celebrity is simply a person that is celebrated for one reason or another. And here lies a very important clue! People who are deemed “celebrities” are celebrated people. Obvious? You bet!

But what CAUSES people to become celebrated? Think for a moment now. What is it within **your** favorite celebrities that causes you to celebrate them?

Is it their physical appearance or beauty? That’s long been ONE thing that had traditionally been celebrated. Is it what they do or have done? Quite possibly. But then you have to consider the REASON that CAUSES these accomplishments to matter to you at all. Lots of people do things, but that doesn’t mean they are “celebrities”.

Let’s get back to the basics. A celebrity is someone we CELEBRATE. Could it be that we CELEBRATE such people, BECAUSE THEY CELEBRATE SOMETHING IN US?!!!

Now THERE’S a WILD THOUGHT! What if people we called “celebrities” were “celebrated” because THEY CELEBRATE something within each member of their AUDIENCE?

How many people can YOU think of who are “celebrities” because of what they have done for others, how they inspire others, how they create DEEP FEELINGS within others, how they BRING OUT that something within OTHERS that OTHER PEOPLE would secretly like to CELEBRATE about themselves?

Notice I said perhaps “SECRETLY” would like to celebrate about themselves. That MIGHT mean that an audience member doesn’t feel all that attractive, etc., but being INSPIRED by someone who is attractive creates a secret celebration - a celebration that they too might wish to be more like that! Or that they might like to meet and fall in love with someone like this celebrity.

Now, physical beauty is not something all of us can always take advantage of naturally. We use costuming, hair styles, make-up and so forth to “create a sense of physical beauty”. Remember it’s the IDEA that audiences celebrate - whether or not this is ACTUAL daily “truth” so to speak.

I’m sure some of you have witnessed a famous person or two - without make-up and proper costuming - and said to yourself “Gee, without all that stuff, they don’t look so great...” - but that doesn’t necessarily change how much you think of them as a CELEBRITY. You may quite well continue to CELEBRATE the IDEA they are reminding you about...

So, consider what you are doing in your performances that might CAUSE people to CELEBRATE YOU. Most people won’t celebrate a great pass, because they don’t know what it is, and they shouldn’t see it anyway if you do it so well!

Think too about what you might celebrate in others, which in turn might well cause others to “celebrate” YOU...

If you have EVER had a desire to become a “celebrity” - even in a smaller way - I honestly believe these ideas to be the shortest course, and the quickest path, on how you can actually become one - at least to some valuable degree.

Once you know what a “celebrity” is in this LITERAL sense, then you can take the proper steps to have reasons to BE “celebrated”.

You might just be celebrating that “bratty kid” within each of us. Or you might find a HIGHER, more often CELEBRATED road, of CELEBRATING THE POTENTIAL GREATNESS WITHIN OTHERS. Or not. Your choices are yours to make of course. And so is your celebrity status. IF you choose that.

Perhaps you have been expecting even more, given my name and what you paid for this booklet. Well, I have two things to say to you ...

ASSOCIATIONS and EXPECTATIONS

People generally "project" an outcome to any given situation in advance. The magician will find the selected card, is a common instance of this principle. "Outs on Purpose" is an example of this. Most "surprises" are actually based on the audience projecting an outcome that doesn't turn out the way they "expected" (projected).

Obviously "sucker tricks" are the lowest common version of this principle. But so are many other well known routines. "Reverse Matrix" is one simple example. The coins end up back in their original position, much to the surprise of the audience.

Most mentalism loses a true "climax" because the "imagined end" by the audience that the prediction will be correct is exactly what happens in the mentalist's performance. It isn't so much that the "surprise factor" is gone, but rather that the audience must assume (project) that the mentalist will be correct. If he were to be wrong, certainly he wouldn't be much of a "mentalist".

The audience projections therefore are hardly unwarranted. It is only natural that the audience makes such projections of outcomes. This can be to the performer's benefit. It can also be a detriment since "amazement" and "wonder" are truly born from the realms of new discovery and unexpected outcomes.

So what do you do? PROJECT along with your audience. Figure out for yourself the "projected outcome". THEN you can take advantage of this assumption.

There are certain assumptions and associations you can pretty much bet on. If you are a "magician" and advertise yourself as such, what are your audiences likely to expect? What will they tend to associate a "magician" with?

Associations about magic and magicians have created a world of trouble. These associations link up everyone from a someone's Uncle who does the Twenty One Card Trick, to the biggest names in the business.

Some people really feel like they "hate" magic based on previous experiences. Such people naturally associate such experiences with the word "magician".

Others hear "magician" and they immediately expect doves and big boxes. I even had an agent say to me once, "But you're a magician. What do you mean you don't do that kind of stuff?!"...

Now you can of course redefine yourself, and label your act as something else. This can be very beneficial. There is a huge “catch” here however. You have to find a label that is unique while still having a label people can understand and relate to.

You might change “magician” into “Professional Deceiver”, but who wants to pay someone to purposely deceive them? The associations with “deceiver” aren’t all that positive.

There are no easy answers here. It’s all a matter of personal choice, your own honest beliefs, and understanding possible associations.

As you may know, I am called a “Wizard”. There are good and negative associations to this. I will agree when someone says “Like a magician?” then add “Yes, but Wizards do things a little differently...” and then tell them about what I do.

Now before everyone tries to jump on the bandwagon of “being a Wizard too”, let me remind you that this title comes from some very specific training and life choices. It follows my real internal views and life. It is true for me. It isn’t just a “better label”.

Let me tell you about another type of association here. As a “Wizard”, I felt that perhaps the title would allow me to be different than the typical magician right from the start. That seems logical doesn’t it? Doesn’t “the name says it all” apply?

But to make such an assumption is to forget about the associations people naturally make. At most, the vast majority of audience’s associate a “Wizard” to “an unusual magician”. Notice “magician” is still a predominant association.

So I (re)learned in time that we must first meet people’s natural associations. If I began a show doing something with cards, ropes, and the like - this “fit” the audience’s expected associations.

Only after fulfilling these associated expectations could I slowly lead them to my real style of magic. “Pacing and Leading” as I hinted at in Wonder Words...

If you begin your show with meeting an audience’s private associations and expectations, then you can begin to move them along ahead on your unique ride.

Now you might argue that there are plenty of “outrageous” acts in other art forms, and they don’t do this at all. In truth, many such acts do precisely this and then quickly “turn the tables”. The other factor is that most of these acts have first been associated with outrageous performances. That is why certain people have come to see them in the first place.

If you don't have the publicity that allows everyone in your audience to know in advance what to "expect", they're going to fall back on their other, more likely, associations. If you doubt me, try it out for yourself. I'm just trying to save you from learning the hard way.

If you need more proof, then consider how Jeff McBride, Penn and Teller and other unique acts begin, or at least originally began, their own shows. They first met common and predictable associations, and then moved on...

What is true of magicians is of course true of mentalists. In fact, it can be funny to watch normal people twist up their faces when you say "I'm a Mentalist". What can they associate that with?

Sure, you have a lot of associations to that word. But regular folks have no where near the same type of exposure to that label as you do.

They have been exposed to "Psychics". They have heard about "Fortune Telling". Is that what you mean? They understand the idea of "ESP", even if they don't believe in it. They understand "psychology" and "perception" and "mind reading". But "Mentalist"?! Often such lay people can perceive the "root word" - MENTAL - but that's about it. And God knows how many different ways there are to be "mental"!

What associations do you think drive people to see a mentalism show? Consider this as well. Do you meet their preconceived associations? Do you deliver the "message" that many who come to such shows want to hear? Or do you make fun of the associations they have come to have you "reinforce"?

You don't have to figure any of this out right away. You do need to allow these truths to begin to roll around inside your minds until you just discover how these things can be used to your advantage.

Don't "over think". That's intellectualizing, and you'll get brain cramps besides. Just allow these ideas to plant the required seeds for thought that will eventually grow the kind of name and act you want as you meet the expectations of others in a unique and comfortable way...

You will notice of course that everything we have been talking about concerns associations. You cannot be a "celebrity" unless you are "associated" with something. Your act, if it be unique and valuable, needs to be associated to you and your beliefs.

People buy things based on feelings because they associate a product or service to those feelings. If you feel as a performer you are more a "service" than a "product", how are you serving others?

In your own marketing materials, why do you think you need “big names” in your client list? Companies and Renown Clients associate you with greatness. They help potential clients associate themselves to such important people and successes. Potential clients look to see if there is reliability, safety, status, and the like by associating your clients with your act. There are feelings associated with such words and ideas.

The more you consider how hidden associations can make or break you, the more likely you are to do something to make yourself more successful. Just “freely associate”, and see what hidden things come to your mind. Then consider how to use this in your act, your appearance, your promo, even your title.

The ART of Magic ? (and mentalism too for that matter)

The great violinist Isaac Stern teaches a very important lesson to students everywhere. He purports that there is MAGIC in music - WHEN what is being played HAS FEELING or MEANING communicated in that playing.

Stern says he will quit performing “NOT when I can no longer play ‘PROPERLY’, but when I fail to play BEAUTIFULLY...”.

There is a lesson here for all of us too. One of a handful of things that the legends and great artists of any time tend to have in common is simply this: They play “BEAUTIFULLY”. They SHARE FEELINGS and MEANING with their audiences. To DO this, is to create - and to share - “MAGIC”.

So, doesn’t it seem odd that the art of performing “magic” rarely has such feelings and meanings associated with it? Is it any wonder that even when “performance magic” is at it’s highest peak, the public still sees magic as “just tricks” and NOT “GREAT ART”?

Our usual attempt at creating meaning and feelings - at BEST - tends to be about “story telling”. Not that telling stories is “bad”. Stories can be wonderful... IF those stories also invoke REAL FEELINGS.

Another way we as so-called “artists” of magic try to deal with such things is by “weaving a plot”. Plots are fine too. But most magic plots sink to the level of a third rate novel or a very low budget “B Movie”. You know: Boy wants girl. Boy impresses girl. Boy gets girl. THE END.

Oh goody. What a novel story that is. Try to pitch THAT plot to a movie studio and see what happens... How original is THAT script idea?

The problem with most magic plots isn’t that the plots are lousy - if there even IS a “plot”. The more serious problem is a lack of SUBTEXT or “deeper meaning” underlying the obvious plot being presented.

Rarely are our performances reflective of any REAL feelings - other than the most obvious "surface" ones.

The handful of acts that are considered "magical ARTISTS" have BOTH FEELINGS and "below the surface" MEANING involved in their presentations. They don't "bash their audience's over the head" with their meaning. The deeper meaning is often hinted at or SUGGESTED.

Other acts might work often because they are "selling sex". They will likely go down in magical history as "The Guy with the Hot Looking Babe" or "The fastest version of a standard trick". Hurrah. You can bet that the public will have long forgotten them, while we're around reminiscing about such performances...

A few acts may be noted for their funny antics. These acts too may work plenty. In the end, they will, at best, be considered "great comedians" who did magic tricks - and the public will have moved on, while our sheltered little community praises the likes of those "funny few".

You might be thinking, "But wait a minute! I know of acts that are funny or who are sexy and have endured in the public for years..." Perhaps. Maybe they are one of a very few that will be truly remembered fondly.

If they have indeed reached such a place of status in the hearts and minds of the public, you will be able to see where they have added in "subtext", deeper "hinted at" meanings, and roused more than the typical, surface, EMOTION.

Stop and really examine these acts. See for yourself in what ways these acts have sneaked in meaning, unusual feelings and implied ideas.

I recall Eugene Burger saying that "An act of nothing but story telling could become REALLY boring". He is right. If an act is nothing but "preachy" tales or "stories about obvious surface meanings and emotions", such an act could be very boring indeed. And entertainment usually has to have some sort of action involved in it, to keep our minds busy while the messages sink in...

We are performers after all, not preachers. If we are truly ARTISTS, we invoke an atmosphere of feelings, not build an obvious "church" at which to worship.

Still we cannot continue to ignore a fact more than obvious to most other forms of true ART: That REAL artists MOVE people. Real artists TOUCH people in SOME way. Real artists SUGGEST something deeper than the obvious surface facts, that can be easily described with the five senses.

And many REAL artists DO have "fans" that feel like seeing or hearing their favorite artist IS a feeling much like "going to MY kind of church"! Many artists DO have "followers who worship them", even when an artist wishes they were NOT some sort of "idol".

Real artists suggest something deeper than what's on the surface. If this were NOT the case, then a painting would just be colored oil on canvas, shaped to look like a house, or a person or a tree. But that's not how the public perceives "great art" is it?

If it were all about "superlative technique" then a whole lot of artists wouldn't be starving. They'd be famous. But ultimately, while the public might admire "great method", what they care about MOST is how an artist MAKES THEM FEEL.

Which brings up another fond trap that magicians like to fall into. Magicians say things such as "I make people laugh" and "I create wonder". If that alone were enough to be considered "art", we would have a great many more REAL artists in magic, wouldn't we?

But let's be honest. Does the public TRULY consider magic a LEGITIMATE ART FORM? If you ask them this in just that way, they may feel forced into saying "OK, sure". But ask a lay person to list the five most acknowledged forms of art - performance or otherwise - and even if you expand the list to TEN forms of art, magic isn't even likely to be considered. And "mentalism" won't fare any better.

Are we to be so arrogant as to ignore what makes other performance arts "performance ART"? Is it really just about what Fitzkee said: More flash, more "entertainment principles"? Have a PLOT, even if this is only a standard SURFACE plot?

History shows that the great legends, the great artists that endure in the public memory are linked to FEELINGS and DEEP MEANINGS - even if the public "can't put into words" WHAT they "feel" or WHAT that artist's vision "means". Great art becomes a personal, internal affair. The great artists know this. They know these experiences are not aroused simply by paint, meaningless sounds, or cocky attitudes.

Famed musician Yo Yo Ma has said "Sharing is a much better way of communicating than proving or showing off."

Again from the mouths of great artists in other realms, we find another important clue to success. Few would ever dare debate the skill of Yo Yo Ma. But is this what he says is most valuable - skill?

If we wish to communicate with an audience, gain rapport, and move others, then we have another clear answer. It is important to share not prove - share not "show off".

Doesn't that seem about the exact OPPOSITE of what most magical and mental performers generally do? Don't we worry about whether or not our tricks will fool others badly - and therefore "prove" our validity? Are not most magical and mental performances primarily about "showing off" our skills?

Few of us are ever going to be as talented and precisely skilled as Yo Yo Ma is with his instrument. Some will be that precise. Yet it has been stated that such things are not enough. Such perfection does not mean true success or wide celebrity.

But if we work with the skills we DO honestly have, and then use these skills to COMMUNICATE by SHARING ourselves, this may well catapult us into a higher realm of acknowledgment.

At least this is one of the constant comments of the Great Artists throughout history.

What if our tricks were not about showing off or trying to prove ourselves? What if our art was simply a tool we used to express ourselves and our beliefs? Wouldn't that be SHARING instead of PROVING?

What if our effects were simply examples we used to SHARE our own unique life EXPERIENCE? Wouldn't that be sharing instead of showing off?

Think about any other art form that the mainstream public universally acknowledges as ART. Is it the tools of that art that primarily make an artist famous? Or is it the way an artist expresses himself through those tools that create his celebrity and rapport with audiences?

Perhaps it is time that magical artists stop dodging the real issues at stake within legitimate art forms. If all other art forms are about sharing and expressing a unique point of view based on individual experiences and varied personality traits, then what makes us think that magic and mentalism are exempt from these long held standards?

Or is this one of the main reasons why only a few in our art have become celebrated, while the rest grumble about why they are not? How can we expect to be treated as artists when we refuse to adhere to the principles and laws of art?

I know, anyone can buy a trick and become a "magician", even an apparent "mentalists". But practically anyone can also learn to play chopsticks on the piano. People will applaud this accomplishment too. Such a person in time may even hire himself out as a pianist. Or a person may paint a painting, and even sell a few, but that doesn't make him an artist. Tricks don't make magicians or mentalists "artists" either.

What we can begin to uniquely communicate WITH and THROUGH any art form is what makes us artists. It is the meaning and expression with the tool - not the tool itself - that creates ART.

Are magic and mentalism true forms of ART then? You decide. But don't argue for your own ability to remain stuck with the common herd. If you think that magic and mentalism are NOT truly art forms yet, what can you do to change that?

Simple questions. The answers likely quite profound... IF you dare to ask them.

A WRAP UP

Allen Zingg is an amazing thinker, and I'm happy to say a good friend of mine. Allen has written a wonderful book on the process of creativity in magic and mentalism entitled "Inspiration: Acts of Creativity".

In this book Allen wrote a most telling paragraph, that I'd like to share with you concerning all of this.

Referring to an effect Allen created and describes in his book, Allen writes "For me a lovely little interlude, not great magic, but CHARMING MAGIC of another MORE IMPORTANT KIND - in building your relationship with your audience."

When I first read this I thought "That's EXACTLY it! This one little paragraph sums up the reality of the art of performing at it's highest!"

Why? First Allen admits that this effect is NOT "great magic". In other words, the TRICK isn't the most impressive fooler in the world. Now that kind of thing makes the common magician cringe... many mentalists too!

So why does Allen even perform this effect? The great revelation follows when he states "But charming magic of a MORE IMPORTANT KIND...". What could possibly be MORE important than "fooling your audience"!?

This Allen answers as well: "BUILDING a RELATIONSHIP with your audience".

That's right. Having a RELATIONSHIP with your audience is more important than the tricks you do! Startling? To many I'm sure. But consider this...

ANY great performing art DEMANDS that there BE a RELATIONSHIP between the ART and its AUDIENCE. Celebrities literally GO TO THE BANK on this. We wouldn't have great art or great artists IF WE DIDN'T FEEL SOME KIND OF CONNECTION TO THEM.

In short, take away a personal experience or relationship from any art form, and you DO NOT HAVE “an ART form”. You may have a “product”, but it isn’t ART.

“You can’t have ART without HEART” says one phrase, and loads of folks love to debate about that. Of course this is just an INTELLECTUAL debate. A twisting of one mind against itself or someone else’s mind. Still, history shows that the great art and artists HAD to have “heart”. We wouldn’t even REMEMBER these people if we didn’t FEEL a PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP with them, in SOME way.

So is it any wonder most normal folks don’t list “magic” or “mentalism” as a major influence when they mention “ART” and “Art HISTORY”? Too much in the magical/mental fields are about the performers EGO - the performer’s relationship with HIMSELF, and his grandiose imaginings about his OWN “power”. Such performers only USE their audience to reinforce their demented self-absorption.

These performers say things like “I need to USE someone for this next experiment...” OK maybe they THINK that’s not “what they mean”, but that IS what is SAID. And sometimes our words betray our best THINKING... I should know. I once said this too.

I’m not going to get all “out there” about this. The fact of the matter is, this is intensely PRACTICAL stuff. If you want your audiences to RESPOND to you more, you HAVE TO have a RELATIONSHIP with them. Otherwise, what are they supposed to RESPOND to? Your TRICKS? Is it any wonder that most people still feel “magic is all about TRICKS” then??!!! Is it any wonder that self-described “intellectuals” are SKEPTICAL about “mentalism”?

We need to begin to take responsibility for why magic and mentalism is viewed the way that it is. At the very least, we need to FACE UP to the logical reasons WHY we don’t usually make the same IMPACT on an audience that singers, musicians, authors, poets, paintings, movies, and practically everything and everyone else in the arts DO.

So here’s your first “CLUE”: Building a relationship with your audience is MORE important than the tricks you do. Really. Just check out any ACKNOWLEDGED form of the arts. See for yourself.

The second idea hinted at here is THIS... It follows Allen’s other comments. Allen concludes by saying “The added bonus is that the vanish is NOT TELEGRAPHED BECAUSE of the PRESENTATION”.

This is a MAJOR concept that only the VERY BEST know to be a FACT.

This is SUCH a big deal, that a few years ago I gave my student J. Tank a piece of paper with a few words on it. I told him to stick it in his wallet, and read it silently from time to time. Especially in front of other magicians at magic meetings. I told Tank however that he couldn't show or say to anyone what was written on that paper.

When others inquired what Tank was reading, Tank was to say "It's a huge secret that Kenton wrote, and I need to remind myself of it from time to time. It changes EVERYTHING..." but THEN he was to REFUSE to tell anyone WHAT that secret was, or what it meant.

For those of you who were left wondering, and for those who are just curious now, here is EXACTLY what I gave to Tank:

"MEANING is the GREATEST MISDIRECTION there is."

That's it. But it does change EVERYTHING when you apply it to your performances.

I cannot begin to tell you how many of the "greats" in magic I have seen do something very obvious and bold - time and time again. I have even trained my mind to follow and recall such events.

But the lesson of MEANING as misdirection finally sunk in one night - as I was watching one of my favorite magical artists. He was doing his usual act, which I'd seen more than a couple of times...

I saw some really bold "steals" that night. I told myself to remember this for analysis later on. "Just remember this so you can mention it to him later" I thought to myself. But my mind - being the wonderful thing that it is - responded BACK to me with "Kenton, that's NOT the POINT. It's the MEANING that you relate to with this guy. Don't you really care more about what his actions MEAN emotionally?"

And IMMEDIATELY I thought "Well of COURSE. That's why I LOVE this person's act..." The RESULT of all this was, later on I either just couldn't recall, or just didn't CARE to recall, the bold moves I'd observed. My brain said "It doesn't matter - it's not the REAL POINT" so I quickly "forgot "...

Remember, I had spent a fair amount of intellectual effort to RECALL these types of things PURPOSELY. Still, the meaning meant more to me than the "trick" or "move", so I just blocked that out from my experience entirely. So did the rest of the audience.

And I'd still walk a million miles to see this guy, if I knew it was my only chance to see him.

So as you go along, remember this simple little secret: "MEANING is the GREATEST MISDIRECTION there is!"...

And recall too how your RELATIONSHIP to your audience matters MORE than your "tricks".

Just these TWO things alone can entirely revolutionize your act, your audience's responses, and the fate of magic and mentalism itself as "art"... I know that sounds really dramatic. But fortunately or unfortunately, these ARE REALISTIC FACTS.

So as important as these factors are to your long term success, there's good reason to explore for yourself the amazing ways you can put these ideas to work for you. The same ways that are still being used TODAY by those rare FEW we think of as "true artists"...

To come full circle then, I wish to quote another artist of great standing. These few words, while written in a different time, still say more than the words he wrote on the page.

Don't get caught up in the "strange language" you read. See instead how everything we have been speaking about: Art; Meaning; Genius; YOUR act; Feelings; and more, are all laid bare as to their importance in your act and your life.

If you wish to understand the Great Artists, and LEARN from them, then listen not just to them - but through them. You will discover many treasures as you adopt this attitude.

So here is a small piece by Ralph Waldo Emerson. It doesn't matter one bit whether or not you "like this kind of stuff". Just read, think, feel and listen through the words on the page. Then see if our friend Mr. Emerson has not indeed passed along one of the truly great gifts about art and performing along to us...

"To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men, - that is genius. Speak your latent conviction and it shall be the universal sense; for the inmost in due time becomes the outmost, and our first thought is rendered back to us by the trumpets of the Last Judgment."

"Familiar as the voice of the mind is to each, the highest merits we ascribe to Moses, Plato and Milton is that they set naught books and traditions, and spoke not what men, but what they thought."

"A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within, more than the luster of the firmament of bards and sages."

“Yet he dismisses without notice his thought, because it is his. In every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts; they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty.”

“Great works of art have no more affecting lesson for us than this. They teach us to abide by our spontaneous impression with good-natured inflexibility then most when the whole cry of voices is on the other side.”

“Else tomorrow a stranger will say with masterly good sense precisely what we have thought and felt all the time, and we shall be forced to take with shame our own opinion from another.”

That’s what all the “ranting” has really been about. If you can allow yourself to see this, then you are far ahead of the game. If you take it just one small step further and begin to apply these concepts to your own work - even just a little bit at first - you’ll KNOW the sincere reason behind these “rants”.

To begin to perform along the lines I’ve been ranting about, will ultimately lead you to discover why I have titled this “Rants INTO RAVES”. You can intellectualize all you want about what’s been said here. But put these principles into practice, and the debate - for you - will be over.

You will KNOW.

Believe that “what is true for you in your private heart is true for all” people. This is the way of True Art. This is the way of Real Genius. Neither I nor Emerson have been alone in saying these universal things. When you “have eyes open to see” you will find these truths everywhere.

Teach yourself to become unafraid of speaking your “inmost” ideas and feelings, and you will be able to tap into people “universally”. Keep fair watch for your own “flashes” of that “gleam of light” in your mind and heart. Don’t be swayed by all those others who say “Stay over here, with everyone else”. Sometimes there IS safety in numbers. Other times this safety is pure poison.

Forget what all of those before you have said, if that will keep you true to your own sense of self and expression. Ignore those things that are not true for you. If you will BE just who you are at any given moment - honestly you - you will be perceived a genius, in your own unique way.

Sharing this part of “Rants” with a few respected friends brought several parting comments on all of this. I will share those with you next.

First, here is what TONY RAZZANO (Anthony Rose) had to say:

Emerson should be required reading for all of us. In his essay on self reliance (1858), He said, ".... but do your thing and I shall know you." Emphasis on YOUR. IF we all do our "own thing", our magic will be that much better. Don't worry about the approval from other magicians, follow your heart.

Emerson in that same essay said, "Whosoever would be a man MUST be a nonconformist." (emphasis mine). We would probably do well to follow Emerson's advice.

Thank you Tony! Then there is this response to Tony and me from our friend JOE LANTIERE :

True words, Brother Tony.

But first, I believe it was Thricegreates Hermes who once said ... you must "KNOW THYSELF". You must know who and what you are, and what you want in order to "be yourself." This requires LOTS of "soul searching"... not an easy task.

Alchemically speaking, this involves evoking your true self from within, changing the "LEAD" of copying someone else to the "GOLD" of being an original YOU.

Thank you Joe! I hope those reading these comments are beginning to understand that it doesn't matter one wit what your background is, or what your own personal traditions are - the truth and principles are always the same...

And finally here is one of my favorite mottos that I personally keep in mind - to sum up this whole thing quite quickly. When I'm ever in doubt, this simple little phrase snaps me back into a more honest reality. I am happy to say that I have permission to share it. It comes from singer/songwriter Stevie Nicks' e-mail person, GINNY KAMANO. Ginny puts it this way:

~Never be less than you are in your heart~

Some may find this phrase "vague", but after all the ranting you should understand it's more profound meaning. I have stated this phrase to people who have no clue about all we have been speaking about. And I've seen years literally melt off of people's faces when I have spoken it. It's like the most obvious answer in the world has finally hit them. It's often quite magical. I hope it strikes a chord with you too.

If you don't get all of this yet, keep following the path of attempting to perform ART, and in due time - YOU WILL.

If any of us have helped you to get back to what you secretly know is true deep inside yourself, then we have done nothing but return you to the original genius you have always had.

And when others say to us that we may have helped them do such things, then it is we who feel truly blessed. That's a fact. Perhaps someday you will do the same...

I can say nothing more, or rant further into the trenches within your own self. It must be your choice now to continue down such pathways - or not. Even this choice will be an expression. Even this decision will reveal your own secret genius.

But I can tell you this: Not even you will know where you lead yourself. And that my friends is the real secret behind "magic"...

I hope you have enjoyed taking this journey with me. You might like to read the forward again now. It can help making everything "click" into place. You may even choose to read this booklet all over again. I know that I have found more insights each time I reconsider these essays myself. Perhaps you will too.

I thank you for your continued support, and for your OWN unique genius and way of performing. I can't wait until you let it shine for everyone else!

See you out there then...

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