Kirk Charles' MANUAL of RESTAURANT MAGIC

Conjurers' Press

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FOREWORD

by Eugene Burger

Since its publication in 1981, I have continually recommended Kirk Charles' *Tips on Table Hopping* as simply the very best book (with the worst title!) that has yet been written on the subject of restaurant magic. This new edition with additions, changes, new thinking and ideas, and (thanks to the Conjurers' Press) a new design, is even better than the original. In fact, if you are contemplating this type of work — or if you are interested simply in learning more about it — then this is the *one* book that you really *must* read.

Kirk Charles is a successful restaurant-based magician presently living in Seattle. The great value of Kirk's book is that it is based, not upon armchair theories, but upon his own personal *experience*. More than that, Kirk has reflected upon his experience and he is able to share these reflections with us.

Kirk understands, furthermore, contrary to much contemporary magical thinking, that restaurant magic is *not* easy to do. It requires real magical skill, great and genuine interest in other people, real physical stamina, and great tact. If this last requirement should surprise you, I suggest that you read the twenty-five situations that Kirk describes in the Appendix to this book. I must tell you that, over the past ten years, almost every one of these awful situations has happened to *me* as well! Perhaps these sorts of situations simply "come with the territory," but they underscore the basic point: being successful in restaurant work definitely is not as easy as many armchair magicians seem to imagine. Real success in this field, I would say, has less to do with what specific tricks the performer happens to be doing, and more to do with exactly *how well he is able to respond* when thrust into one or more of these twenty-five dreary situations.

Another reason that I think this book is quite wonderful is that Kirk has raised the important *questions*. To these questions

he has given his own answers — and, even better, his reasons for these answers. Needless to say, I (or another restaurant magician) might give very different answers to these same questions. Just as Kirk's answers work for him, our answers might equally work for us. This is not to say, then, that Kirk's answers are "wrong" and another's are "right." The magical task here, the path before me, is less to find out what is "objectively" right or wrong, and more to discover for myself what is right or wrong, good or bad, for me. And you must find out what is good or bad, what magically works and what doesn't work, for you.

If we understand this, it becomes clear that Kirk's writing is not so much "giving advice" for the reader to follow mindlessly, as it is professional autobiography. Here we have a successful professional entertainer telling himself (and us!) what he has found that works best for him. In doing this, he has helped us all by clearly showing us the path and by raising the important questions that need to be answered if we are to have success upon it.

Chicago; August, 1987

INTRODUCING

My first professional restaurant performance was in 1976. At that time there was very little information on the subject of restaurant magic. The majority of my solutions to problems I encountered had to come from experience.

I kept hoping someone would write a practical text on the subject. The few things that were published simply didn't answer the questions I had. I also became aware that there were other people who were starting to work in restaurants. They too had questions and there was no source for them to turn to. So in 1981 I wrote and published *Tips on Table-Hopping*.

The response to that work was very gratifying, not because it was brilliantly written (it wasn't), but because it was needed. Over the years, many people have told me they have read it and a few even admit putting the information to use.

The only major criticisms I received concerned the production of the piece, and the use of the term "table-hopping." To answer those objections, and to revise and expand the original text, I offer the present edition. By the way, I make no apology for originally using the expression "table-hopping;" but currently, the term is considered passé. So, in an attempt to be contemporary, I defer to the magically hip.

The major reason for revising this work is to share with you the experience of six additional years of restaurant performance. I have learned some new things, refined a few things, and changed some of my ideas about others, all of which I believe have made me a better entertainer.

The size of this edition is nearly twice that of the first. There are a few additions I am particularly pleased with, but my favorite is *Appendix I*: "THE TEST." With this I have attempted

to give the uninitiated examples of real situations that have, can, and will occur, so that they will not be tempted to perform until they are fully prepared to deal with real conditions.

As before, it is assumed that the primary style is roving performance as opposed to working in one spot. With the possible exception of magic bartenders, the commercial use of close-up magicians working at a fixed location in a restaurant is unusual. Most bar and restaurant managers want the performers to wander from table to table. The appeal of this manner of working is that the customers can stay where they are and still be intimately entertained.

It is also assumed that the performer will stand as he works, rather than sit at the tables. The major reason to remain standing is that it allows the magician to be far more flexible. Sitting down at the table commits you to staying there and makes it awkward to leave quickly, should you need or desire to do so. Also, there is an implication of familiarity which might offend the clientele or bother the management. To most people, if you are sitting down, you are relaxing and not working. So, I—and most everyone else who has written on this subject, with the notable exceptions of Ben Harris and Barry Govan — suggest that you stand.

In writing this text, I am drawing from my experience. Because of this, the tone will often be highly personal and somewhat opinionated. I am not offering an apology for this, but rather alerting the reader to the fact. I do believe that the information available here, although biased at times to fit my own style and personality, is highly adaptable.

It is my aim that anyone can take this material and used in only a few changes to fit his or her own circumstants of performance needs.

PREPARING

It is surprising to me how many writers on magic, when talking about performing professionally, introduce the phrase, "First, you must have a good act..." but never explain what a good act is or how to achieve it.

Dick Zimmerman once wrote, "Great singers, actors and dancers do not perform everything that strikes their fancy or is offered to them. They search for the *best* material. Magicians should do likewise." While there are some basic similarities in all forms of magical entertainment, the ideal material for restaurant magic is somewhat different than the ideal material for other kinds of magic.

Many of the attributes of good restaurant-magic are practical in nature. The following list constitutes the best material for this type of performance.

- 1. Simple and direct
- 2. Inoffensive
- 3. Easy to carry
- 4. Durable or inexpensive
- 5. Instant or re-setable
- 6. Angle proof
- Workable on any surface or on no surface
- 8. Highly visible

SIMPLE AND DIRECT

The ideal material should be "simple and direct." Actually, I believe this to be true of all magic no matter where you are performing it, but this is particularly true of restaurant magic. One must realize that a high percentage of your audience will be drinking. This is not to say that they will be totally inebriated; in fact, drunks are the very people to avoid working for, unless you are masochistic. But it seems to be true that the easier the effect is to understand, the more effective it will be. Highly cerebral or complex effects will fail with these kinds of audiences, because they won't understand what happened.

Actually, no matter how simple and basic the effect, there will always be a few people who won't understand what has happened. On one occasion I was performing a routine with sponge balls. I handed one ball to a woman and then placed the remaining ball in my hand. My ball disappeared and when she opened her hand she now had two balls. She looked at her hand, then at me and said, "I don't get it." I explained carefully that my ball had vanished from my hand and reappeared in hers. She said, "I still don't get it." It is hoped you will encounter very few people of this sort, but you should be prepared for the possibility.

A trick that proceeds in a straight-line fashion to the climax is best. One should keep the number of digressions to a minimum. Productions and vanishes are rather obvious effects, but penetrations, for example, are more subtle and may need to be verbally pointed up. The more visual and immediate the effect is, the better it is.

Good standard effects like the sponge balls or color-changing knife or Chop cup are the sort of thing that work well in this situation. Many card tricks are good, but, for heaven's sake, avoid dealing and counting tricks or tricks that rely on complicated instructions to be followed by the spectator.

It is preferable that the material is not merely a one-shot trick, but rather a routine with a series of mini-climaxes leading to the big one. The pacing of the routine should be brisk. This does not mean that the execution of the magic should be rushed, but it should flow. There should be no dead spots. The slower procedures should be strengthened with amusing patter or bits of business.

INOFFENSIVE

The next important consideration is whether the effect and its presentation are offensive. Here is a test question: "Would you perform the Ding Dong for a Cub-Scout Blue and Gold Dinner?" If the answer is yes, give yourself minus ten points on the good-taste meter. For those who don't know what the Ding Dong is, suffice it to say that it is a sponge replica of a part of the male anatomy rarely seen in public places without police arrest. I am sure there are times when X-rated magic can be performed and enjoyed. For me this is in the privacy of my own home behind closed doors with the curtains drawn.

Seriously, I have seen this kind of material worked by other performers in places like singles bars and stag smokers and it has been successful. The key to deciding whether to do blue material is sensitivity to the audience and the performer's own confidence in the material. If the performer is comfortable with the material and if the audience is comfortable with it, then more than likely it is appropriate. The important thing is that the performer learn to read the audience and to know what is acceptable to them.

Blue material is not the only thing that some people find in bad taste. Religious, racist, sexist, and even political material can all be questionable in certain circumstances. Again the key is sensitivity and common sense. One must watch the audience and see how they react to what is being said and done. Some things are obvious; for example, Polish jokes may not be appreciated at a Sons of Poland banquet.

Many comics use the "test joke" technique. They try out a joke or a one-liner and wait for the response. Assuming the joke has proven funny in the past for various audiences, the response will tell the comic whether to proceed with that kind of material for the present audience. Magicians can adapt this same technique to their presentations.

In restaurants, particularly in the dining area, effects using the mouth are not appropriate. On the other hand, this sort of thing may go over very well in the bar, where people are not eating. Tricks with food should also be approached with caution. Adults with children may very well not want their kids to see this sort of thing, because it may encourage bad tablemanners.

Some people will find card tricks offensive, because cards are the "devil's playthings." In fact, there are some religious groups that feel magic of any sort is taboo. If your audience starts making the sign of the cross and sprinkling you with holy water, it is probably time to move to another table.

Obviously, there are no hard and fast rules here. What works for one entertainer may not work for another. What one considers to be safe material, may not be safe for another individual. The only real guideline is to use common sense, sensitivity and good taste.

EASY TO CARRY

The first two elements, simplicity and inoffensiveness, are valid considerations for all styles of magical entertainment. But there are practical considerations which apply more specifically to restaurant work.

The first of these is how easily carried the effect is. The first thing you must decide is whether to work out of your pockets or to carry a case.

I have noticed that beginners have an affinity for carrying close-up cases stuffed with tricks. There are usually more tricks in the case than they could possibly use in a three to four hour period. Actually, the number of effects needed is small. Keep in mind that the running time for each show is rarely more than fifteen minutes; so it is easy to limit the number of effects you will need. Also, the routines will be repeated many times during an engagement — there is no need to do an entirely different show for each table. For these reasons I have chosen to work out of my pockets.

There are other reasons working out of the pockets seems preferable to me. I think that the image of someone working without carrying a case is more magical. To the audience it looks as if you are working impromptu and in a spontaneous fashion. Most laymen seem to think that a real magician wouldn't need to carry all that stuff — he would just do magic. It is this perception that keeps me from using a close-up mat. Also I like working with a minimum of props, because it forces me to be flexible and creative. The less you carry, the more you rely on the environment to supply the objects you perform with. To me this enhances the magical image.

If you decide to work only from your pockets, make sure you don't stuff them with unnecessary items. Also, you must know exactly where everything is, so that you don't look like an absent-minded professor with a case of the hives. Working in this manner requires good planning. In *The Art of Close-Up Magic, Volume One*, Lewis Ganson wrote, "The meticulous Nate Leipzig laid out all his pocket tricks, in set order, on a table, each night before he retired to bed. In the morning they went back into the same pockets and so were always at hand."

Manual of Restaurant Magic

The more difficult the trick is to carry, the less desirable it is. Also a trick requiring lots of items is less desirable than one requiring very few. The more effects that a certain object allows you to do, the more desirable it becomes. That is probably the main reason that card and coin tricks are so popular. The more effects the prop does, the less you need other props.

If you decide to work with a case, here are some things you should consider. The interior of the case should be so designed that all items are easily accessible. Cluttered cases are more a hindrance than a help. Various compartments and pockets will alleviate this problem.

The lid of the case should be hinged in such a way that it will stand open and act as a shield that blocks the audience's view of the interior.

More than once I have seen magicians who were careless in this respect. Their cases were poorly designed so anyone who wanted to could peek inside. In one particular instance the performer left his case open, leaving in plain view countless packs of cards and several gaffed coins. The only person who should be able to see inside your case is you.

Finally, the case should be attractive. To quote Ganson again, from the same source, "Their appearance [close-up cases] will have an important bearing on the first impression gained by the spectators — an expensive looking article, in good taste puts a seal of quality on the act."

If you are carrying a case, obviously you can carry more than someone who is working out of his pockets, and therefore expand your repertoire. In packing for the engagement, take only the material you know you will use. Ganson said, "We urge that the container is not allowed to become cluttered with a lot of objects that are not going to be used." One reason for this

is to keep the props accessible; another reason is to leave space for replacements.

Replacements are essential. Regardless of whether you are working out of the pockets or out of a case, you will need to provide room for back-ups.

Let's assume you are carrying only one pack of cards and, early in the evening, someone spills a pina colada on it. The cards are now wet and sticky. There go all your wonderful card routines for the rest of the evening. Of course, you could get someone to run to the nearest drug store and buy you another pack, if there is some place open — and if there is anyone who can take a break — and if you like packs of cards with little puppy dogs on the back, and if....

Have back-ups for things easily lost or damaged. Cards seem to be the most vulnerable, mainly because of the amount of food and drink in a restaurant setting. Sponge balls are easily lost. (Some people will toss the balls when surprised by their appearance.) They also can get sticky if they land in the wrong spot. Ropes tend to diminish in size the more they are "restored." An adaptation of Murphy's Law states, "Anything that rolls on the table will roll off the table."

Of course, one could carry this precaution beyond the limits of rationality. The important thing is to use common sense in one's judgment of the number of the replacements to carry.

I work with two back-up systems. I carry some on my body. Those are the things which are the likeliest to need replacement. In my case these would be sponge balls and cards. In a satchel, which is either in my car or stored somewhere in the restaurant, I have more back-ups and occasionally extra tricks — particularly if I am working a long evening. In case I run out of immediate back-ups, which does happen, I have more to fall

MINUME OF TURNOL MILE

back on in the satchel. This may sound overly cautious, but it has saved my job more than once.

I realize that I have digressed; but the necessity of back-ups is an important consideration that affects the easy-to-carry aspect of choosing material.

DURABILITY AND EXPENSE

Directly related to the above is the fourth attribute of good restaurant tricks; that the props should be either highly durable or inexpensively replaced. One must realize that each prop will be used countless times; so it is far better if the item will hold up to much abuse. Those items, like cards, which do not have a long life expectancy, should at least be fairly cheap to replace. If you want to use priceless collector's props, that's up to you, of course; but generally I think it inadvisable.

RE-SETABILITY

As just mentioned, you will perform any given trick many times during an evening. For this reason it is best to use effects that either immediately re-set or have no re-set at all. An example of a trick that immediately re-sets would be a four ace routine in which the only preparation would be to stack the top four cards. At the end of the routine the four aces are put back on top of the deck and the trick is re-set. Another example would be a sponge-ball routine, in which the only preparation is having one ball in each jacket-pocket. An example of a trick requiring no re-set would be any card trick using an unprepared deck.

Should you omit a really strong effect, because it requires involved preparation? Not necessarily, so long as you limit the number of times it is performed. You should save items of

limited use for special tables, like the manager's friends or the big tippers.

If there is some re-set involved, can it be done in the open, or does it need to be done in seclusion? It is generally better if it can be done in the open. One wants to avoid running into a dark corner, away from the audience, after finishing each table, to re-set. There are two reasons for this. The first is simply the amount of time involved. The management will probably get a little irritated with a performer who spends a lot of time away from the tables. Secondly, the audience will begin to notice that the magician keeps disappearing to "do something" after each table. It won't take them long to suspect that what the magician is doing is preparing his tricks. This suspicion will deprive them of the feeling of spontaneity. Also, once they are suspicious it is far more difficult to fool them.

The fifth thing to consider, then, when looking for good material is minimal re-set. As a general rule, the less preparation, the better.

ANGLES

How angle proof is the effect? This is the next practical consideration. More than likely you will find yourself working in every situation imaginable. There will be times when you are jammed between two people at the table. There will be other times when you have plenty of room. Many times people will be behind you. Often there will be people to your extreme sides. Some restaurants have balconies, in which case you have to worry about overhead angles as well as side angles. I have even had to confront the problem of working on mirrored surfaces, which allowed people to see up into my hands. This is, of course, an extreme example, but the point is you must be prepared for almost anything. (By the way, the solution to working on a mirrored table is to do the "dirty work" off the

table and the revelations and climaxes on the table.) I feel that if the effect is not generally angle proof there is no reason to do it.

SURFACES

On the subject of working surfaces — another factor to consider in appraising material — one should realize that they will range from porous wood to slick glass to nothing at all. To alleviate this problem and to have a consistent performing surface, many magicians choose to use a mat. Another reason performers use a mat is that it acts as a focused area, a miniature stage. Barry Govan, in his book Close Up Magic: Restaurant Style, contends that the use of a mat will also deter individuals from touching the props at the wrong time.

It is my choice, however, not to use a mat. First, it is an additional item to carry; second, I don't want to rearrange the table setting; third, I think it reduces the sense of spontaneity; and fourth, I rarely experience a problem with people grabbing the props at the wrong moment. The material I use must be workable on any surface with or without a table cloth.

Again, as in many other matters, the decision to work with or without a mat is a personal choice. If you are new to this kind of work and you get a secure feeling from your pad, by all means use it. You can always grow out of this need, and eventually work without one.

There will be occasions when no surface is available, and still you will be expected to entertain. It is a good idea to have tricks that can be executed under these circumstances. Items that are worked entirely in the magician's hands (for example, the cut-and-restored rope), or items that are worked in someone else's hands, are solutions to this problem.

Related to this is the thought that it is wise to have several effects which culminate in the spectator's hands. This circumvents the problem of surfaces, while introducing the element of the spectator's personal involvement. Because the public assumes that it is nearly impossible to do magic under these circumstances, these kinds of tricks contribute to the performer's reputation and popularity. I would suggest that eighty-five to ninety percent of the illusions presented should involve the customers' hands. Look at your current material. Is it possible to re-work it so that it can be operated in either the spectator's hands or with the spectator touching it in some manner? If it can be arranged, do so. You will be surprised at how much this will add to the impact of the effect.

A moment ago I was tempted to cite the copper/silver transposition as an example of magic worked in a spectator's hand; but I didn't for one simple reason. This wonderful trick is often not understood because the colors of the coins are not observable in dim light. This brings me to the final factor that one should think about when choosing material.

VISIBILITY

Many restaurants and bars achieve atmosphere by turning down the lights. This obviously makes it difficult to see things. Therefore, the best material is the most visible material. The bigger and more clearly seen the props are, the better they are. Tricks in which sound plays an important part (for example, certain coin tricks) are definitely good ones to have. Effects in which light is created, as in certain tricks with matches, are also good.

There is, of course, another solution to this problem: carry a flashlight — and I know some performers who do. Personally, I don't want to lug one around. So I use objects that are easily seen, heard, or felt. And I would probably use tricks that involve taste and smell, if I knew any.

The acquisition of magic effects is a never-ending process. As time goes by, certain tricks will be added and others dropped. Certain stunts will be reserved for special situations. Others will become stock items that are used constantly. Ultimately, your own experience will relegate what is good and what is not. The purpose of giving guidelines for the selection of material is to help those with limited experience in this area.

THE ACT

Once the proper material is acquired, the next step is to build an act. Here, the word "act" might be somewhat misleading. The usual concept of an act is that of a complete set of integrated routines, each routine successively building upon the last and leading to ever stronger climaxes. In dealing with restaurant magic, however, it is not essential that all the routines are unified. Because the running time may vary in length from three minutes to fifteen minutes, it is probably a better idea to have routines that are complete in themselves and independent from other routines. Therefore, in this situation an act refers simply to having a number of routines.

Once the routines are worked out the next step is to practice and polish them. Work on the presentation. The more amusing and entertaining it is, the better it is. Jason Randal, in his *Magic For Professionals*, suggests having a variety of patter lines, so the material always sounds fresh.

Work on all the things that can go wrong. Concentrate on outs. Think of ways to improve the material. Find ways of repeating the effect using different methods. In other words, make the material the best you possibly can.

PROMOTING

Even though you may have a solid commercial act, that in itself is not enough to get you hired. Before you can go anywhere you will need certain promotional items.

Probably the most basic promotional items are photos. You will need photographs in your promotional scrapbook, you will need them for brochure material, and if you want a lobby board, you will need them for this as well.

YOUR APPEARANCE

Before you get photos you will need to decide what image you want to promote. You must make a careful decision about how you want to look. Good photographs and promotional material are not cheap, so consider carefully the image you want to project before you spend the money. I know from personal experience that much frustration can be avoided if these things are carefully planned.

Several months before I got my first major restaurant job I had photos taken. At the time of this photo session the image I was promoting was that of a contemporary wizard — or so I thought. At that time I had shoulder-length hair. I believed this accentuated the image of a modern sorcerer. But to the public I looked like a hippie. (I should mention, by the way, that I was not opposed to getting a haircut. Rather my thinking was that I might as well use my appearance, an appearance that, to me, suggested a present-day wizard.) I used these photographs as the basis for my promotional material. I spent the time and money without really assessing how the public viewed me. I assumed that I had transcended the faddish look and that when people saw me, they did so in the same way I saw myself.



It wasn't until my first interview that I began to have doubts about my image. The owner of the establishment, which was a dinner theater, hinted that I might need a haircut. I asked him if he wanted me to get one. He said no, but that I would have to wear it in a pony tail, due to public health regulations. I agreed to do so.

I was lucky; in spite of my questionable looks, I got the job. I worked six days a week and was paid on the same scale as a professional actor. On top of that, I was retained there a long time. This success convinced me that my image worked well.

After this job, I left restaurant work for a while and did mostly children's shows and comedy magic. Everyone seemed to accept my image. I was still using the same promotional material that I used at the dinner theater.

There was another aspect of this image that I haven't explained. Instead of using a full name, I used a character name: The Wiz. I thought this was clever and original. (This was before I became aware that a musical-comedy show of the same name had been produced.) An unforeseen problem with this name arose: It was the only name that appeared in my promotional material and, consequently, in the press I received. So anyone who wanted to use this name could, since no other name was connected with it. In other words, it wasn't "Kirk Charles as The Wiz;" it was just "The Wiz."

Eventually, because of these problems I decided to drop The Wiz and use a full name; but this, of course, meant changing all my promotional items. On top of this, most of the newspaper clippings I had in my pressbook did not do me much good, unless I explained, "I used to be The Wiz." Trying to spend as little money as possible, I used the same photographs.

I then decided to move to L.A. Not long after this I had a rude awakening. I was told that my physical image wasn't the sort of thing that people liked any longer. I looked like a hippie and that was passé. I got a haircut. I looked radically different. This meant that I had to have new pictures taken and new promotional material printed.

It is possible that all or at least some of this could have been avoided. Iam relating this little saga so that others might benefit from it and not repeat the same kinds of mistakes. The thing to consider is whether your look restricts you to working only certain kinds of places and for certain kinds of audiences. If it does, it is my belief that it is a definite disadvantage. Why create obstacles for yourself?

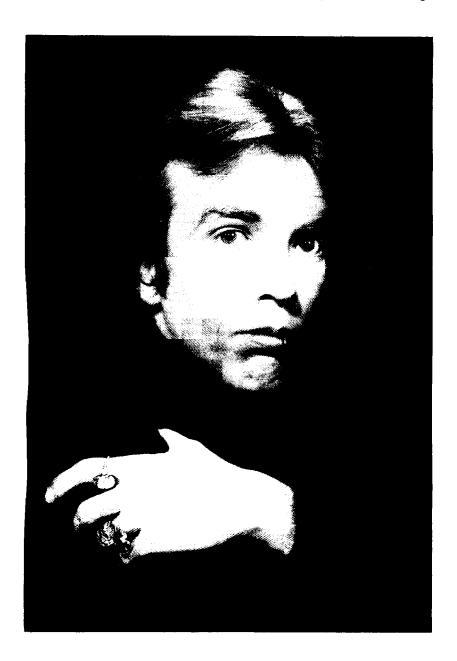
I think, as a rule, you should ask yourself, "Is this the look and name I want for the next five years?" Not until you are positive about that should you proceed to spend the time and money on photos and promotional material.

On the other hand, if you have photographs, how current are they? Do the pictures show an eighteen-year-old kid, when in fact you are now thirty-six and beginning to bald? If this is the case you should consider updating the pictures.

It is a good idea when getting photographs to try and keep them somewhat universal. By this I mean, don't let the pictures restrict you to only one type of magical performance, particularly if you have a wide range of styles and intend to do more than just restaurant work. Also, to cut down on the promotional costs, keep the written material general as well.

THE PHOTO SESSION

What should you wear to the photo session? This is up to the individual; but, in keeping with my thesis of universality, I



would suggest something that is attractive and neutral in appearance. A good looking, conservative, dark suit will do well for men; for women, something of the same nature might be considered. One does not want to date the photo by wearing something trendy that will be out of fashion in six weeks. The basic idea here is to try and use the pictures and all promotional material for as long as possible.

It is important to hire a good photographer. Just because your kid sister is taking a course in photo journalism at the community college, this does not mean she should do the pictures. It amazes me how many performers — and this includes actors, singers, and comics — try to keep their budget down by getting a friend or relative to photograph them. Usually the photos look cheap and amateurish. You must realize that there are times when the first impression a potential booker will have of you is your picture. A photo of you in Uncle Fred's recreation room, holding a deck of cards and trying to look like Channing Pollock, may diminish your chances of being hired.

John Booth wrote in Forging Ahead in Magic, "Very often the only visible evidence of the calibre of an act which the agent can show the prospective buyer is in the set of photographs the act has given him. It is a sales necessity to have the best pictures you can afford. It may mean the difference between getting a job, or not. An inferior act with better pictures might conceivably beat you to it."

To find a good photographer, talk to other performers and ask them who they used. When interviewing the potential photographer, ask to look at his or her portfolio, ask about the number of shots taken and the number of prints, and ask about the length of the session. Take your time and shop around for the right person to do the job. You will be glad you did.

Have pictures taken in a studio. It is the most controlled environment and the best one for this kind of work. Outdoor locations usually do not look as good. Live-action photos are the most difficult to do well.

It is wise to have some idea of what you want, and these thoughts should be communicated to the photographer. But it is just as sensible to listen to the photographer's ideas as well. Try original poses and lighting ideas. It's probably a good idea to stay away from trick photography or duplicate images.

A friend of mine, who is a comedian, has a nice photograph in which there are two images of himself. In one part of the picture he seems to be telling a story and in the other part he is laughing. This seems like a clever idea; but on more than one occasion, bookers have been distressed when they realized they had not hired a twin comedy-team. Also, the double-image pose is a cliché. I would suggest not using such a worn-out photographic trick.

It is probably a good idea not to have a photo taken of yourself doing some impossible trick that can only be photographed and not performed in real life. For the same reason, it might be wise to photograph only props that you actually use.

While on the subject of props, you might want to stay away from the traditional things like cards, cups and balls, wands and doves. There are thousands of good and bad pictures of magicians using these same objects. Think up something new and fresh.

You will need at least one good portrait (or head) shot, and it is best for this to be done on a light background. In fact, it is suggested that all the photos have a light background, for these are easier to print. Dark backgrounds cause problems when printed in newspapers and brochures. Again, I am speaking

from personal experience. Dark background shots with theatrical underlighting look great, but are not easy to reproduce in printed material.

You will probably want three different prints, one portrait shot and two action shots. Make sure you have a magical element in the action pictures; you want to suggest what it is you do. (Realize that to the public a man with balls between his fingers could be a juggler or an anatomical wonder. It does not connote magic. The idea is to create a mysterious or magical impression.) You should have more than one photo for publicity purposes. It's wise to have a variety of pictures to offer the press.

By the way, do not ask the photographer for additional copies of the prints. He will charge you for each and his costs are usually high. You will save a lot of money if you take the original prints to a discount photo-reproduction house.

At some point after you have these pictures, you might want to consider live-action photos. Or perhaps a newspaper will want to do a story on you and want live-action shots.

Since magic is based on causal relationships, it is difficult to photograph the event. The best way to depict something amazing happening is to photograph the reactions of the spectators. What you want is a picture that not only shows you clearly, but also the reaction of the audience.

Have the photographer watch you perform at a few tables. This way he knows what to expect and when the climaxes occur. Then have him photograph the spectators and you at the time of the effect's climax. This way the surprise and wonderment on the faces of the audience members will be captured.

Photographs of this sort are a wonderful testimonial of how effective close-up magic can be. These pictures can be excellent sales tools.

THE PRESS BOOK

The two major uses of photographs are as sales tools for potential bookers and as press-book items. The press book is the most important tool in the sales interview. This one thing can sell your idea to a restaurant manager. The more professional it looks, the better you look.

Essentially, a press book is nothing more than a glorified scrapbook. It consists mainly of the best clippings, the best pictures and the best recommendations you can supply. The emphasis is on press clippings and photos. You will not want more than two or three letters of recommendation. If you have no clippings, you will have to use more letters of recommendation and more pictures. Of course, as you get press clippings you will want to use them instead.

Buy an attractive ring-binder or photo holder. You will also need several clear plastic inserts to hold the eight-by-tens and press clippings. In clippings that are not solely about you, underline or highlight the parts that feature you. Make sure that everything is neat and attractive.

BUSINESS CARDS

Besides the press book and photos, you will need a business card. The business card you use should get as much attention as the photographs.

In Thirteen Steps to Mentalism Tony Corinda said, "Choose a good quality card — and have the printer use what style of type you think looks neat. Most important of all, get the wording right on the card. The basic essentials are your name, address, telephone number and profession. Sometimes it is enough to have your name and profession only, but in any case, avoid the common mistake of over-wording on a visiting card."

MARCH 26. 1986 - OUEEN ANNE NEWS

Magician finds more than rabbits in his hat

by Mary Kelley

Pulling an Easter bunny out of a hat is just one of the many tricks Kirk Charles has up his sleeve.

The talented Oueen Anne magician has brought many moments rich with intrigue to Seattleites. In trade circles, he's become well-known and popular.

In fact, his harried work schedule has kept him hopping from trade shows to lectures to nightclub acts.

THE DEMAND for magic roots itself in a basic love of the unexpected, explained

"There's a certain fascination in all of us for what we don't understand."

For a brief time, the deft trickster alters his audience's reality - and they truly believe in maric.

The reward translates simply to,"it makes people's says Charles.

However, many years of study were required for what appears to be his ease of manipulation. The story of his career almost resembles a fairy tale.

It all began - just like The Wizard of Oz, - in Kansas, where the youngster checked out library books on magic.

Later, he studied speech with an emphasis on drama at Kansas State University.

But the real stirrings of his trade began in 1972 while

working at the Seattle Repertory Theatre as an assistant production manager

Fellow touring actors encouraged his career pursuits.

He took the suggestion seriously. And, for the last 10 years, Charles has made his living solely by relying on his nimble fingers and quick wit.

"There's a lot more than doing tricks," reminds the magician, who professes to having an endless repertoire of acts, including more than a thousand card tricks.

MAGIC depends on psychology, he said.

In addition to the study of illusion, Charles said, "I'm

Magician Kirk Charles:

(Cont. from page 1)

always reading how people are responding and how to keep their interest."

Capturing people's attention, then, actually means an intense act of juggling talent and a fine-tuned sense of audience reaction.

Charles' performances generally involve some props usually ordinary items such as eggs, scarves, cards, balls and rope. And he probably owns the most extensive collection of tuxedos on Queen Anne, including some in red, blue, white and basic black.

But, for the most part, he stands alone. "I am my own product," said Charles. "It was strange at first, but now feels comfortable.

Several organizations cater to his profession. The Queen Anne magician is currently a member of the Tacoma chapter of the International Brotherhood of Magicians. which requires sponsorship and auditions

His success is reflected in

several past performances at the California Academy of Magical Arts, the "Magic Castle," which is a nightclub oriented toward the trade.

In addition to tricks of illusion, Charles has developed 'mentalist" skills, probably best typified by Kreskin-type abilities.

He won't elaborate on his technique, of course, but demonstrated it recently by asking a woman a set of questions, including favorite vegetable, fish, and geometric shape.

Her own recorded answer amazingly matched his.

Magic? Telepathy? Trick? It's hard to say, and that's part of the fascination.

"I don't want to fool peo ple or trick people," said Charles, "I want to entertain them and play with

HE CONFESSES to his own structured and reasoned personality, which 'probably" lays the foundation for his discipline and into presentable steps.

Yet, he laughed and said.



seen Anne magician Kirk Charles makes magic at Ray's Downtown through next month.

remarked on seeing a fellow magician's new act, "I love it when I don't know what's happening."

'It's great to lose yourself ability to break down magic and get away from the into presentable steps.

routine of knowing," he

Charles is performing on Wednesday and Friday evenings from 6 to 8 p.m. in the dining room at Ray's Downtown Restaurant.

Remember, he's a tough act to miss.

The cleaner and more direct the copy on the card, the better it is. Try to avoid this sort of thing:

"PROFESSOR X, MASTER MAGICIAN AND ENTERTAINER,
HUMORIST, AFTER DINNER SPEAKER, MIND READER,
SUPER MENTALIST, PALMIST, ALSO NOVELTY MUSICAL ACT
AND CHILDREN'S PARTIES A SPECIALTY."

(This is the actual wording on a business card that was reprinted in *The Jinx*.)

I would also suggest staying away from stock logos like bunny rabbits, wands, and card fans. These logos have been overworked.

Try to create a business card that people will want to keep. This can be done in many ways. You might use an oversized card, or a card with an unusual color, or a card with an unusual texture. You might try a clever line or unique drawing. Some magicians have cards with optical illusions. Others have cards that involve tricks of some sort. For more ideas, you might want to check any volume of *The Jinx* or Ernie Heldman's *Cards That Mean Business*.

SELLING

Initially, all you need are the photos, the cards, and the press book. Later you might want to make up a brochure, but I feel there is no reason to do this until you have some press releases you can quote.

Once you have the basic promotional tools listed above, the next step is to make a list of the places you will approach. The first thing you must decide is the kind of restaurant you would like to work in. Some people prefer to try family restaurants. If this is your interest, then this is the sort of place you should approach. (By the way, two excellent books on this market are Bruce Posgate's *Table Hopping* and Brodahl and Hudson's *Coffee, Tea, or Magic?*)

Some performers prefer singles bars or discos. Others like hotels and country clubs. I know one magician who does well working just taverns. My preference is for dinner theaters and dinner clubs, places that already have some kind of entertainment.

As a rule, avoid restaurants that want a fast-turnover crowd. Also, it is probably wise to avoid places that are tremendously successful or, at the other extreme, barely surviving. Ideally, what you are looking for is a place that has good business, but could do better business; for your sales pitch will be centered around improving business.

You might also want to consider the size of the place. I would say the bigger the better. This allows you more freedom of movement and selection of audience.

In southern California and other metropolitan areas, there are a number of restaurants and night spots that have magic

themes and hire magicians. Should you work in a location of this sort? This is a decision you will have to make. For some people this is a good way to get started. You do not have to worry about convincing the place to try magic. The customers are ready for magical entertainment. You will also be able to learn by watching other magicians perform. In my experience this kind of location has one large drawback: the pay is not very good. In fact, some places may pay nothing at all and expect you to make your income entirely from tips. For an experienced restaurant worker, it is probably better to explore "virgin" territory.

After you have compiled a list of potential restaurants, the next step is to make your sales pitch. Cashing in with Close Up by Scott Hollingsworth is a book (unfortunately now out of print) that deals mainly with booking restaurant magic. Hollingsworth recommends "cold calling." This means showing up for an interview with no advance warning. This approach is also favored by Charles Greene and Al Ulman, Jr.

Eugene Burger mentions, in his *The Secret of Restaurant Magic*, an alternative to cold calling — referral. Obviously, this is the better way to go, because you have to "sell" less. The potential buyer already knows of you and is willing to consider buying your services.

Jason Randal offers another possible approach: to get a job working in the restaurant as a wait person or a host, and then perform magic in addition to your job duties. If things go well, eventually, you can work just as an entertainer. I wouldn't recommend this approach. I think that the transition between restaurant employee and full-time magician would be very difficult. I am not saying that you shouldn't mix magic with other employment, but being a bartender who does card tricks is different from being a magician who does card tricks. I would prefer to be a magician.

The final approach in a non-referral situation is to establish contact before showing up. Posgate recommends either a letter of introduction or a phone call. Brodahl and Hudson recommend phoning for an appointment.

My preference is to get a referral. It doesn't have to be the restaurant-owner's mother; it can be a friend, or an employee, or a customer who likes me and likes my work — someone who is willing to be a reference.

If someone gives you a lead, by all means follow it up, unless you don't want to work there.

If a referral isn't possible, and that is sometimes the case, then I will call and make an appointment to meet whoever makes the decisions about entertainment or promotions. Sometimes, I will send a letter and a brochure in addition to the phone call. I don't like cold calling, basically because I think it is pushy. I want the manager to know that I am polite enough and professional enough to ask for an appointment. This also saves time; if they are not interested in meeting with me, I haven't wasted their time or mine.

Most sources tend to agree that it is best not to reveal many details until the actual interview.

To get the interview, most the authors above use a teaser line of this sort: "I have a business proposition that I think you will find interesting..." or "I have a promotional idea that I would like to talk to you about..." or "I have a unique entertainment concept that might help your business."

The person you want the interview with is the person who is in charge. The titles vary from place to place: owner, entertainment director, manager, and High Muckety-Muck.

Manual of Restaurant Magic

By the way, the best time to make an appointment (or drop in, if you prefer to cold call) is usually between 2 p.m. and 5 p.m. on a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday. That is a general rule; there are exceptions. It is best to call ahead and find out when the person in charge is there. Cold calling, without at least finding out what time to go, is foolish.

Hollingsworth suggests having planned a definite, even a memorized, sales pitch. Anyone who has been in an interview situation is aware of the fact that the more prepared one is to answer questions and make suggestions, the more confident one tends to be. It is for this reason that I recommend you give much thought to what you are going to say, and plan well the answers for possible questions and/or objections you can expect to get.

First you will need to explain who you are and what you do. This is where the press book is used. If you have good photos taken while working, by all means show them. All items that help to define your identity, your work, and your professionalism are necessary.

The next step is to elucidate the benefits of having table magic in a restaurant. The following is a list of things that a restaurant magician can provide:

- 1. Personalized entertainment (especially good for special celebrations, like anniversaries and birth-days)
- 2. Unique entertainment
- 3. A cover for delays in seating or delays in the kitchen
- 4. A way of attracting return customers
- 5. A way of attracting publicity

- A way of delaying the customers from leaving (desired in some places, undesired in others)
- A way of stimulating conversation between strangers (a definite plus in singles bars)

Really, you have all the advantages of most forms of entercainment, with the added advantage of no special setup or staging, which means that what you are offering is more economical.

You must be prepared to answer these questions:

"How much do you charge?"

"How often do you work?"

"How long do you work per table?"

"Do you need any special setup?"

And "What do you wear?"

Each individual will have to decide for himself how to respond to these questions. There are no hard and fast answers, particularly in the areas of fee, schedule, running time, and dress. However, there are certain guidelines I can offer.

THE FEE

Invariably, the first thing the potential buyer wants to know is the cost of the entertainer's services. There are several different financial arrangements from which to choose. With some of these arrangements, the house guarantees a set amount. With others the house guarantees nothing. I have listed the various kinds of arrangements, even though my personal preference is one in which the house hires me to work for a set fee

for a set period of time. I am listing the other kinds of arrangements so you can see what other approaches can be used.

The most common situation is one in which the performer works strictly for tips and the house pays him or her nothing. Sometimes the restaurant will offer free meals and drinks, or at least a discount on food and drink. I do not think you should work for tips alone, unless you are a total beginner or a really superb hustler. For the beginner, the reward is not so much a financial one as it is experiential. For the superb hustler, the reward is totally financial. Personally, I think this type of arrangement demeans the magical profession and I hope you will not work this way. A good performer should be worthy of a guarantee.

The next possibility is related to the above situation, but here the payment is not in tips. Each table the magician entertains is charged a set fee by the entertainer. The house pays the performer nothing and is not financially responsible to him.

This arrangement requires careful planning and most often the use of table tents. Printed on the tent are the performer's name, the type of entertainment offered, and the fee. Sometimes there will be an additional line of this sort: "Please tell your waiter if you would like to see Mr. Wonderful." This is the sort of situation Scott Hollingsworth recommends in his book, Cashing in with Close Up. Besides the table tents, he also recommends the use of a lobby board. The purpose of this is to alert the customers to the performer's presence.

Frankly, I have never tried this approach and know of no magicians who have. I have met fortune tellers and palmists who work this way. The general consensus seems to be that the best places for this style of working are expensive restaurants.

I have used table tents as a form of publicity, to let people know that I am there on certain nights. I usually have my phone