

October 26, 1977

Dear Topper:

I couldn't agree with you more: it's much too long since we last saw each other. This, however, is entirely the fault of the Swedes. If they had voted more sensibly on the issue of whether or not to join the Common Market I would be paying regular visits to Stockholm.

Actually, I'm not travelling as much this year as previously even within the Community, as our office has been reduced from 3 people to 2. As a result, it's not only harder to get away whenever one wants, I also now handle a fair piece of our press relations as well as the sorts of things that kept me on the road a good bit of the time during the past 3 years. I spent a few days in Luxembourg last month, and don't expect to get out of Brussels again until Christmas when we will make our annual visit to London (even that will be shorter this year, since Alexandra is in first grade now and can only be away for the school vacation period). I do expect to get back to London again in February, and to Paris at about the same time, but only for short visits.

I've never yet made it to a British IBM Ring convention, as they always hold them in mid-September, just when things start getting really busy here after the summer hiatus and when it's most difficult to get away. I can't remember whether I've written you since getting back from our home leave in the US this summer - penalty of being a lousy correspondent; but then I can't remember much of anything else these days, either - so you may or may not know that I did manage to attend the big IBM do in Washington in July. Believe it or not, it was the first American convention I'd been to since about 1955. As conventions go it wasn't nearly as good as the magazine reviews would lead you to believe - they never are, are they? - but there were some good acts, and I personally had a marvellous time as I finally got to meet and know personally a lot of people with whom I had corresponded over the years and/or whose writings I knew, and who perhaps knew me in the same way, but whom I'd never actually seen before. Including some who weren't even on the scene when I was still active in the US - and if that isn't a sign of encroaching antiquity I don't know what is! I ~~waited~~ spent a lot of time with Trevor Lewis, who is a good friend and a marvellous performer; also got to know Phil Goldstein and Phil Willmarth quite well - both very creative guys who do a good bit of writing. I heartily recommend any of Goldstein's mentalism books to you if you're after really fresh presentations. Willmarth, in addition to other things, will succeed Paul

Swinford as editor of the Parades in the Linking Ring in January. You may have met him when you were in Chicago.

I did a lecture at Magic Inc. the end of July, too. It was well attended and I had the impression it was well received, though I haven't seen any mentions of it anywhere yet. Jay - who paid me the compliment of saying he liked one item well enough to use it himself - also said the same thing you've told me (and others) - i.e. that I put too much emphasis on how to present the stuff, that all most of the people at a lecture want are a lot of tricks with quick explanations, that few if any will actually take my points and put them to use, etc. I know it's right, but I guess it's just not my nature (maybe I'd book more lectures if it were). I care about striving for the most perfect possible presentation of a trick, both technically and theatrically, and I feel there are already thousands of tricks available to work on, and equally many thousands of magicians whose performances reflect the approach to lectures that I just can't force myself into.

I envy you all your time with Vernon. I've seen him perform and heard him lecture quite a few times in years past, but always at a distance. I still consider him to be the most important magician of the 20th century, bar none, and probably one of the five or six most important of all time; which is really a remarkable achievement when you consider that he must still be virtually totally unknown to the public generally.

As to what's new. I've been working gradually on putting together a somewhat more elaborate stage act, particularly with the thought of adding a sequence of liquid effects and silks to the rope and giant card stuff I've been ~~doing~~ relying on for stand-up for some time now. Toward this end, I've managed to acquire some of the old Anverdi plastic liquid apparatus, including a couple of the Tres Glas trays and glasses, two versions of the Wonder Bottle - still looking hard for a Crazy Bottle, in case you ever come across one - and a Ring Glass. Am almost becoming a collector of Anverdiana despite myself. Am also doing the Clear Anti-Gravity effect - the suspension of 3 glasses from a piece of clear plastic, with pulling silks out of the glasses and various other lovely bits that make it a really eye-appealing routine. The whole thing is in one of Ganson's books. I really like the trick, and funnily enough I got into it virtually by accident. One of the American dealers I buy old books and sometimes props from sent me the gimmick as a present along with a recent order, as a kind thought of saying thanks for past business. The trick suits my way of working perfectly.

Despite the 60-odd dealers at the IBM in Washington, there wasn't all that much all that interesting. A couple new

illusions for those who do illusions - and one sign of the times, despite all the dour economic news pouring over us, is that there seem to be more younger magicians doing the Zig-Zag these days than using a thumb tip; in fact, I suspect there are probably more who know how to do the Zig-Zag than know how to use a TT. For that matter, when's the last time you used a thumb tip - as anything else than a vanisher for another thumb tip, I mean? Funny how fashions in gimmicks come and go. Despite the availability of those really good tips from Latin America, as well as many others, you almost never see anyone actually using gone any more. Twenty years ago you never saw anyone doing close up without using one. By contrast, twenty years ago you almost never saw anyone using trick coins. Nowadays you almost never see anyone using real ones. Of course, the dealers may have something to do with this. Trick coins cost a lot more than thumb tips. Maybe we should go into business selling "expanded shell thumbs." Could also provide a "locking model for \$20 more - i.e. if your thumb is medium, we send you a small TT; if large, a medium; if small, a thumble. Available in silver, brass and copper finishes to suit all races, creeds and ethnic origins. Have I given you a new finishing patter for your cig in hank in thumb tip in thumb tip vanish - i.e. do the trick, get the laugh on showing the tip empty, then do pitchman routine. selling trick. All yours.

Someone in the States is also putting out very good cloth stuff now, attractive materials beautifully designed and sewn. I got a couple devils hanks - best I've ever seen - and a couple color changing bags - the ones that keep changing every time they are turned inside out. They're like yours - large and black bordered (and I'll never forgive you for not telling me at the time that your "little old Englishman" tucked away in the hills who made yours was George Blake, as I subsequently learned it must have been).

Over the summer, too, I worked out the ultimate version of my giant recurring card routine. It's like the one in my book, except that the odd card has a different colored back as well as face and the last card changes into something totally different. I'm doing it in my lectures and my own shows, but saving publication for another book ~~xxx~~ some day.

Lot of magic being done on the streets and in the parks of New York these days. Some good, some lousy, as you'd expect. Also saw one (lousy) girl juggler on Fifth Avenue and even a vent busking in Washington Square Park - the big park with the arch down in Greenwich Village. He was very good, and delighted Alexandra by taking her on his other knee so she could talk to the dummy.

Have also been trying to teach myself some vent lately. Have been struggling along with help from a very good taped course

by Bob Neller, whom I've never seen but who, to judge from the tape, must be one of the all-time great vent technicians. It's an uphill thight, gut Iung deterngnined to krephaail in the thace oth the dithiculties.

On tapes generally, I got the one of the Ramsey Reunion and didn't think much of it - half a reel of Pap Page (or Tat Tage as we vents call him) asking people if they liked it is not my idea of my fairish amount of money's worth. However, I will take your recommendation and get the Vernon and Seabrooke tapes. As for Berglas, David stayed with us for a week when he played Grona Lund, and I can't imagine he has anything to say I haven't heard at least three times - which is not to put him down; just to say that he is a loquacious gent and we had many long-into-the-night talks.

I think you're missing a good bet with the new presentation of the Chinese act. You ought to do it as a Chinaman dressed up in an old-style European outfit - sort of Charlie Chanish. (Can you believe I don't even charge for this wonderful stuff I'm giving you?)

And of course I'll be delighted to write something about you to go with the Genii stuff (that will fix Larsen; he'll have someone his readers have never heard of writing about someone else his readers have never heard of). For that, however, I will charge you. My fee will be copies of the old fotos you mentioned of yourself and parents in vaudeville days. Send along the bio data and stand back. By the way, if you're going to brag about having your picture taken with General Eisenhower, you might at least spell his name right. If it were spelled your way - Eisenhauer - we would probably have lost the war in Europe. Come to think of it, each time I change some more of my diving dollars, I begin to think we did.

Love to Inga and Jessica from all of us. Keep practicing your juggling and some day you may be as good as the young fellow I saw in an old movie on TV last night called "The Old Fashioned Way" - chap called Felds or Folds or Fields or something like that.

Kepp your balls in the air.

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