

"Magic 1400 - 1950"

Truly a Collectable
Also a Readable

"Magic 1400-1950" Ed. Noel Daniel

Reviewed by Joel A. Moskowitz, MD

Taschen, the adventurous publishing house, are the publishers of "The Big Penis Book" and "The Big Book of Breasts". This German publishers, accustomed to mega books has gone extreme with "Magic, 1400-1950". It comes as a huge multilingual edition (English, French, German). I challenge readers albeit they may be competent in how to levitate to read this tome in bed. It is 11.4 x 17.3 inches, hardcover, 650 pages and will break any normal ten foot shelf one might care to put it on. The Editor, Noel Daniel, has Ricky Jay as contributing author.



Ricky Jay is a magic scholar/historian as well as a deft card mechanic. The trio of contributors also includes magic family luminaries two other expert authorities on the magical arts: Jim Steinmeyer and Mike Caveney - a power house of magic knowledge. Ms. Daniel has guided another XL sized collection relating to the "The Circus 1870-1950". "The Circus" covers a shorter time span. Magicians often were part of the circus extravaganza.

One might ask why both books stop at the 1950s, six decades ago. Readers of this review, do you have a clue? What technological development occurred? See below for the logical answer.

Regardless, the volume relating to Magic has 500 years of treasures to enjoy. Documenting the evolution of magic as a performing art, Ms. Daniels and her collaborators have assembled engravings, vintage posters, handbills and photographs. Included as well are reproductions of works of Caravaggio and Hermonyus Bosch - where the magic theme is portrayed by reknown artists.

Herrmann The Great, Thurston, Keller, The Great Jansen, Dante, Nicola, The Great Raymond, Blackstone, Theo Bamberg, Chang, Chefflo, Richiardi Jr., and of course, Houdini are some of the supreme conjurers whose illustrations and stories appear in this very fine book.

"Awesome" is a much overused superlative. It is, however, most appropriate for this publication. It is all too often that magic ephemera are described as predicted to be a "collectable". This art compendium most certainly deserves that description.

As a physician, exercise is a recommended component

of a healthy lifestyle. Hefting this 16 pounds is one way to tax your muscles and it will also stimulate your mind. The finger flickers who are only interested in the latest card or coin maneuver, will have little interest. But those who cherish the history of magic will be thrilled by what they learn and see.

Did you know the generic magic phrase of today "Hocus Pocus" was once the name of an English magician from the early 1600s: William Vincent. Mr. Vincent is said to have used magic artifice in nefarious ways at the card table. Playwright Ben Jonson used the term in several of his productions. Then there is the anonymous "Hocus Pocus Junior" which came on the scene in early 1600s and explained magic secrets. A priest of the Catholic church suggested that Hoc est enim Corpus meum ("For this is my word" the incantation uttered by the priest as the wafer transforms to the body of Christ) somehow related to the chant "Hocus Pocus"

used by street magicians aka abracadabra and was in some way anti-Catholic! The inference was that those who used such phrases were at best irreligious, irreverent and blasphemous.

Mike Caveney "From Black Magic to Stage Magic" postulates that the sorcery of yesteryear, exciting wonder, ironically transformed to the new modern magic: science. I am reminded of a book about Doug Henning who when he performed before Inuits in the North were discouragingly not much amazed by his illusions. He learned that they were already sated with the wonders of the sky the rain, the creatures who shared their environment, simple stage tricks were no match. The trickery employed by pagan priests to mesmerize their flock frequently depended on simple mechanical deceptions. With the advent of education, the populace increasingly familiar with the miracles of science were no longer deceived by mystical flim flam. A new level of enchantment evolved. In that sense, the art of magic continues to provide a service to mankind by (1) making it clear that even when no special powers of a wizard are employed, audiences will be moved to gaping in wonderment; (2) Magic gives the audience an opportunity to see the impossible as once they did as a very young child (3) Illusions stimulate the interested observer to imagine how the amazements are created (4) The wizardry alerts those who are prone to be gullible, that it is only a trick after all.

The romance of the history of magic is yours for \$200.00 (and likely an enormous shipping charge) but it is worth it; My prescription is a most positive recommendation: S/5 Rx Rx Rx. Rx Rx Why 1400 to 1950? Editor Noel Daniel made the prudent judgement that with the advent of television the magical arts changed significantly. Hence stopping the collection and narrative at 1950 makes sense.

NPE