



An Evening with Matthew Johnson at the Bradford Magic Circle

When the committee booked a lecture from a Close up magician, a Stage performer, a children's entertainer, a juggler, a balloon twister and a comedian you might have expected quite a crowd to turn up to lecture to us. Instead all we got was one man Matthew Johnson from Vancouver, Canada. What an all round entertainer and excellent lecturer he turned out to be. Originally from the UK and a former member of the Sheffield Magic Group, he moved to Vancouver several years ago and now lives there with his wife and two children. He is a full time entertainer, making his living from all the above talents.

He opened the evening by taking a photo of the audience, saying that the folks back home would never believe that so many would turn up for one of his lectures. He went on to describe his 'table.' This was nothing more than a metal case bolted onto a stand. He told us that the lid was strong enough to be a table for CU magic or that he could attach various signs to it if the case lid was open depending what he was performing at the time. He demonstrated by attaching various signs to the lid with Velcro 'Children's Entertainer, Magician, etc., etc. His entire act for the booking could be accommodated in the case. He was keen to not to spend too much money when cheap serviceable items would do.

On this theme he showed us his first routine using nothing more than a clown's prop flower, three sponge balls and a large sponge ball. From these simple props he entertained us for a good four minutes. He said that it was not the amount of money that you spend on tricks that is important. It's the entertainment value of what props and bits and pieces you can find and weave into a routine.

Next came a card trick. He took a card from the pack and 'stuck' it back outwards to his forehead as a prediction. He then asked Darren to pick a card from the pack by calling stop while Matthew riffled them. Darren showed it to everyone. Then Matthew showed Darren all the cards in the pack and asked him if he saw his card. Of course Darren couldn't see it. Matthew then revealed that the card stuck to his forehead right from start was the card Darren had picked. A simple trick using a simple force and a duplicate card and what was more important easily re-set when table-hopping. This was another point

that Matthew made, it is important to use tricks that are easy to reset when table hopping as you can't disappear into a corner and start organizing cards between tables.

A disappearing card case routine was next on the menu. These were his own design that he not only demonstrated, but had on sale too. They were excellent props printed on blue Bicycle stock. After years of tweaking Matthew finally came up with an excellent prop using magnets instead of glue or sticky tape, many of these were bought by the members during the interval.

The next item was the linking ring routine which Matthew had cleverly set to music. He explained that he thought that music and choreography could breathe new life into old routines. This was certainly borne out by the routine he presented. He explained that he times the routine first, say it last 3minutes 20seconds. He then goes to the local record shop or record library and looks for some music that lasts about the same time. After picking several suitable pieces that suit his style he brings them home and tries his routine to them. Sooner or later you will find one that will almost fit the routine with musical stings that emphasize actions in your routine. With a bit of tweaking this then is the one to use. The important thing to remember is to perfect your routine first, then get the music to suit. Having a piece of music that you like and trying to fit a routine to it doesn't really work.

In the same vein Matthew showed us the old moving spot card (one on one side four on the other, turn it over three on the other side, six on the other etc, well you know what I mean). Matthew said that this was a tired old trick, which most magicians had long since dumped because it was only a matter of moving spots about. He had written a short verse about his introduction to magic and the first trick he ever bought, the moving spot card. The story told of how the chap in the magic shop demonstrated it. This little verse really bought the trick to life, it ceased to become a matter of just moving spots about and turning the card over, it gave a reason for moving the spots about, and became a very entertaining routine.

The first half was bought to close with a demonstration of a couple of tricks that he had for sale. During the tea interval his table was busy with members eager to ask questions and buy the tricks that Matthew had on offer.

Time was getting on and we launched into a great second half!

Steve Gore was able to raise a blister on Matthew's finger with a trick called Voodoo simply by touching a laminated card. Matthew had this trick on sale so not much of an explanation was forthcoming.

Ross helped with the next trick by putting his finger on one of six face up cards. Matthew's prediction, the only card face up in a face down deck, proved to be the same as Ross had chosen. Matthew went on to show us that he had in fact all 6 predictions hidden about the card case, the jokers, and the rest of the pack, so as you would expect it didn't matter which card Ross picked.

One of the highlights of the evening was when Steve Gore helped with the children's magic by taking the part of a five-year old boy. Great play was made of asking silly questions like "Why has Bugs Bunny got big ears?" Answer – "Because he's a rabbit!!" A very entertaining children's routine using nothing more than a couple of silks and a changing bag. Once again illustrating it is not the props that impress, more the entertainment that can be derived from older props that you may already have.

Matthew showed us a couple of card effects, one using a selected card which apparently penetrated a borrowed £10 note, the other effect a simple way of finding and displaying the four aces. Both these were on sale during the evening.

It was by now 10:30pm but no one was leaving. Matthew was really in his stride and his energy and enthusiasm were really infectious. His final trick he called 'Sawing a Lady in Half in Miniature'. Using nothing more than a playing card and a blunt table knife Matthew apparently let Steve Gore push the knife right through his finger and the card. Of course a certain amount of finger bending behind the card took place but the effect looked really good especially when the knife was twisted and the sound of the card tearing sounded very much like bone crunching.

The meeting finally closed at 10:45 with every one agreeing that it had been a superb lecture. Matthews closed by thanking the membership for being such a good audience and saying that if any members were ever in Vancouver they could look him up for a cup of tea.

Just great! Remember you heard it here first!

Peter Wright – Bradford Magic Circle