

New England Magic Collectors Association












Welcome to NEMCA's newsletter. We aim to inform and entertain the Magic history/collecting community by assembling news, resources and articles of interest all in one convenient quarterly publication.

We ask you, our readers, to participate by sending content and questions for future publications to our editorial staff: newsletter@nemca.com

If you enjoy this newsletter, please share it. [Click to subscribe](#), its free!

- Scott Martell, Editor

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WELCOME FROM THE PRESIDENT

Hello and Welcome to Issue #2 of our, as yet, unnamed newsletter! We hope you read and enjoyed Issue #1. We promise to keep trying to make every issue better than the previous one.

In this issue, you will get an in-depth look into the “Millionaire’s Magician,” Steve Cohen and his new book *Max Malini: King of Magicians, Magician of Kings*. You will also learn a little about upcoming events, and more.

To make this effort an on-going success, we need your help. If there are magic and/or magic history events that you would like to inform our readers about, please send them along.

If there is a topic you would like to see presented, we are all ears. If you would like to contribute an article to a future issue, please let us know. If there is a person or topic that you are researching and would like help, this could be your forum.

Thanks for taking the time to read this and the rest of the newsletter. I hope that this becomes something you look forward to on a regular basis.

Regards,

Jim Zoldak

NEMCA President

NAME OUR NEWSLETTER

Our biggest, immediate need is for you to help us give this newsletter a name. Please submit your suggestions to us here at newsletter@nemca.com.

We will award the winning entry a collectible medallion and a choice of a *Yankee Magic Collector* from our store. Get your suggestions in quickly so that a decision can be made before our next newsletter comes out. As in any contest, the decisions of the judges are final and, in the case of duplicate winning entries, the one received earliest will be awarded.



UPCOMING EVENTS

NEMCA PRESENTS
**THE 2022
YANKEE
GATHERING**
NOVEMBER 3-5 | WESTBOROUGH, MA
WITH SPECIAL
GUEST OF HONOR
JIM STEINMEYER

*collecting history
since 1986*

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Registration Opens May 1, 2022

INTERVIEW WITH STEVE COHEN

By Scott Martell

On March 8, 2022, NEMCA conducted a lengthy interview with magician and author Steve Cohen. The discussion ranged from Steve's background and approach to magic, touching upon insights to research of old magic tricks for new audiences.

Naturally, the conversation delved into Steve's new massive book on Max Malini, describing in great detail the process from start to finish and the author's findings. The following interview was transcribed directly from that phone call for the benefit of our readers. Enjoy!



NEMCA: How did you get interested in magic?

SC: Just like most boys who are magicians now, I started when I was six years old. My uncle showed me some magic tricks. He performed a really nice Si Stebbins card routine with my aunt. I grew up in Westchester county, just north of Manhattan. When my uncle saw I was interested in magic he said I should go to Tannen's.

My dad took me to Tannen's magic shop, which opened up a whole world. The Tannen's catalogue became my Sears catalogue, I was enamored by the glamour of this world of magic. I started when I was six years old and haven't stopped since then, I'm 51 now.

NEMCA: When did you develop a tendency towards research and performing?

SC: In my high school years, I was a voracious reader. Magic was how I learned to read and write. Magic books were my textbooks. I did well in school, but I think that I learned all my vocabulary from magic books.

I had a pretty big library in my home growing up, magic books I picked up at various conventions. I was reading not only contemporary books that Richard Kaufman and Paul Harris were putting out, but I was also reading *Our Magic* by Maskelyn and Devant, I was reading Professor Hoffman books all throughout high school.

One of the earliest books my uncle gave me was Erdnase, so I had a copy of *Expert at the Card Table* when I was about eleven. I thought that was what card magic was and plowed through the book.

As far as the research goes, that came about more when I wanted to put on performances. I was thinking how can I do a show that doesn't have tricks that everyone else is doing?

The one way to do that is to look to the past. What are the tricks contemporary magicians don't want to spend time on? Well, those are the ones you have to reach for, and require more research.



Because my slant has always been - how can I entertain a modern audience, and not only that, but a very intelligent and wealthy audience, people who can have the best of everything - I need to be able to do something that they haven't seen yet. That's why I'm digging and digging, trying to find things hidden in the literature.

Early in my career, I remember a lady came to my show who was a corporate booker for *Ferragamo Shoes*, the Italian shoe company. She was interested in hiring me to do a performance for her company, and she watched my show. At the time I was doing some pretty generic tricks, things you often see other performers doing.

I was doing a popular Book Test, and other standards. After the show I asked her, do you want to proceed, book a date and discuss pricing? She said, "No I'm OK, but think I'll find someone else".

I said, I don't understand I thought you enjoyed the show? She responded by explaining, "Yes, I enjoyed the show, but I can find someone else who does the same type of act but cheaper."

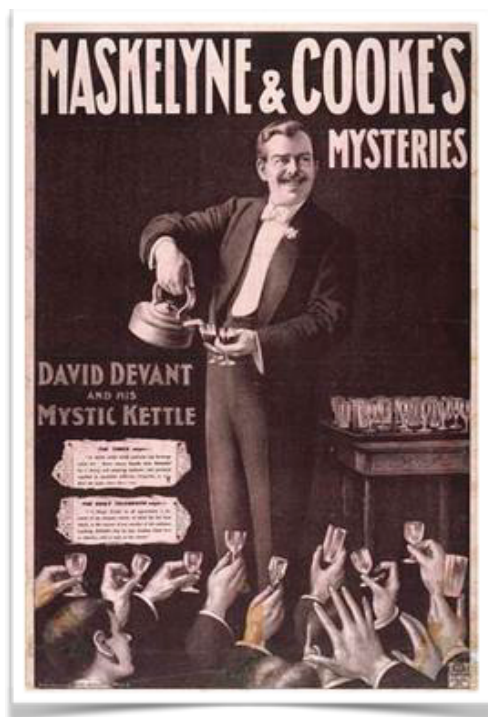
My response was, so you're shopping by price now. She said, "Yes, that's what I'm doing." I sort of lashed out and said, well I could buy a pair of shoes at Stride Rite or Hushpuppies, they're cheaper than *Ferragamo Shoes* and they'll still keep my feet from getting dirty on the floor. She responded, "Thanks a lot", and walked out.

That whole experience enlightened me because it made me realize you can't be doing the same thing other magicians are doing or else you become interchangeable.

You don't necessarily have to be the most original performer. You don't have to invent all of your own tricks, but you can be a great interpreter of magic that has come before and present it in a cohesive way that matches your character.

NEMCA: Even though your current act is set, do you still look at new tricks for the sake of reading, research, learning and study?

SC: My hobby is to continuously read and research, it's almost like hunting for The Grail. What's the trick that will put me over the top? Fortunately, I do the Any Drink Called For routine or Think A Drink and I have some great stories. I currently own David Devant's Tea Kettle.



I know you're a collector's organization, so you understand how that kettle is close to the Holy Grail. To first research and perform such an astounding trick, but then locate and ultimately own the actual prop used by a past master. It doesn't get much better than that.

That kettle passed from Devant to several people before Paul Daniels became its owner. From Paul it went to John Fisher and I obtained it from him.

I currently perform a version of The Hooker Rising Cards, it's not exactly the Hooker Rising Cards, but in many ways, it meets the visual aesthetics of that trick.

If you have enough tricks which are closers, then the show itself is a solid show. These are closers that also have not been seen for a long time, then it becomes a rather unique show. That's what we're aiming for.

NEMCA: Not to mention, those two tricks require effort to maintain and re-set for subsequent performances. I'm sure many magicians aren't willing to go the extra step in the preparation and work involved.

SC: That's true. Especially with Any Drink Called For, the reason I'm able to do that is the fact that I'm performing in my own venue every week. In other words, it's the same venue over and over again, opposed to going to people's homes or theaters and places where you don't necessarily have a dishwasher to clean all of your glasses, or having a whole bar worth of liquor which is also a requirement. If you're traveling from city to city, it's a highly impractical trick.

NEMCA: What was your evolution of discovering and developing Any Drink Called For?

SC: I remember as a kid reading about Any Drink Called for in Milbourne Christopher's *Illustrated History of Magic*. It described a trick where people poured different drinks out of the same vessel and this idea stuck in my head.

Then I remember going to the *Magic Circle* in London and saw a poster of Robert Heller performing that trick. What struck me was how it looked unique. Pouring different drinks out of one bottle looked good as a photograph or advertisement.

One of the things I'm always trying to do is create these visual images, so when people leave the show, they have something they can call back to. When I started performing the trick, I realized it doesn't just look different, but it actually added a whole different tenor to the show.

The entire concept of that routine is wish-fulfillment. The audience asks for something and you're able to deliver. It's similar to Henning Nelms' ham sandwich example in *Magic and Showmanship*.

You could actually close the show right there, but I place it about halfway into the act and build from there. It's a really fun trick to perform because it makes you feel like Harry Potter, a real wizard.

NEMCA: Without getting into secrets and methods, how much did you alter Devant's original method and develop your own handling for Any Drink Called For?

SC: I'd say my routine is about 99% different. Devant's kettle used small air holes similar to a Lota Bowl. His fingers were covering these holes as if playing the flute. He could never hand that kettle to another person and let them pour their own drink.

I believe in order to make this trick interesting you have to say to someone, "Think of your favorite drink, pick up the pot and pour it."



They're holding the kettle themselves. They're thinking of their favorite drink and they're pouring their favorite drink. Then they get to drink it in-front of everyone. That's impactful magic.

NEMCA: Was Malini's choice of performance venue, audience and style an inspiration to you as *Chamber Magic* was being developed?

SC: Partially yes, so my original inspiration for creating *Chamber Magic* was actually Johann Nepomuk Hofzinsler. I read about Hofzinsler's style while I was in my early twenties.

I read in an article that he tried performing on stage for several hundred people at some bath and spa town in Austria, but the people could not hear him from their seats because he did not have a commanding voice.

He had a thin voice and was performing intricate things that did not play to the back of a theater. He became discouraged that these people were disappointed with his act, so he thought, what can I do to play up my own strengths?

His strengths were that he was elegant, well spoken, intelligent, was able to circulate amongst high society due to his work within the government, and he had a nice aesthetic about the way he wanted to present his magic. These all appealed to me as well.

I realized he was performing for royalty and people of 19th Century Vienna. I was performing at the time in my early twenties in New York City, for modern day royalty – these hedge fund millionaires and billionaires.

There was definitely some overlap and I asked myself, wouldn't it be great if I could create some kind of Salon like Hofzinsler's in New York City? That was my inspiration. I remember that Eureka moment while I was walking down the street.

The problem was I didn't really know how or where to do that. I thought, maybe I would start performing in people's homes and do these shows by invitation only.

The locations would change every week, but then I asked one very wealthy guy I knew if I could use his house for a show and he replied, "Absolutely not, I'm not letting strangers into my house."



Then I started going around looking for venues and I found one that looked very similar to a clipping I found in *The Sphinx Magazine* of Hofzinsler's Salon in Vienna. It was a private club in Mid-Town Manhattan called the *National Arts Club*.

This is a club for Performance, Visual, and Musical Artists. I asked the president of the club if he'd like to try a new show that worked hundreds of years ago in similar venues, and he agreed, so that was how I started *Chamber Magic*.

I stayed at the *National Arts Club* for three to four months and from there I moved the show to the *Waldorf Astoria Hotel* and stayed on for seventeen years. Recently I moved the show from the *Waldorf* to the

New York Palace and I've now performed the show over 6,000 times. It all started because of an interest in recreating Hofzinsler's Salon.

Now, granted I'm not performing Hofzinsler's act, his material or recreating his clothing and mannerisms. Rather, I'm using the concept of the Salon as a gathering place for like-minded people. A Salon dedicated specifically for a high-end, luxurious magic show.

NEMCA: Within that staging, you're setting the scene before they even sit down, and the show truly begins as they walk into the venue. The expectations and mindset of the audience is shaped by the surrounding elegance and history.

SC: It starts even before. People receive an email reminding them we require a dress code. They have to wear a jacket and tie, and the women must wear dresses and fancy attire. If not, they will be seated at the back of the room. So, there's incentive for people to dress up, and this is something you have to plan for.

The room is part of the experience and the audience members are part of the experience, dressing up adds to the overall aesthetic to create a unique magic show.

NEMCA: David P. Abbott hosted private shows in his own home, as did Dr. Hooker. Both took advantage of a controlled environment to create devastating magical effects. Do you also use your environment to your advantage when performing *Chamber Magic*?

SC: Definitely in terms of sight lines, making sure the angles are set to ensure any secrets will be maintained. Simply moving the front

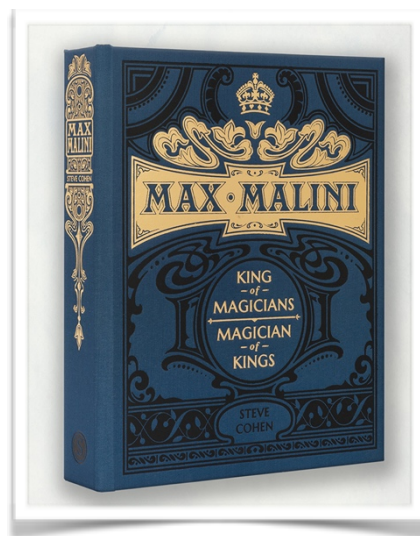
row back six inches could render a trick completely invisible to the audience.

Another technique I'm using is antique furniture. Although the age of the furniture is old, that often disarms the audience from thinking there might be a newer technology built within. The visuals are from another era, but the content is very modern and entertaining. We call it the demonstration of modern conjuring.

NEMCA: Let's move on to your newest project and labor of love. Why did you decide to write a book on Max Malini?

SC: The book was the furthest thing from my mind. I've been interested in Malini since I was 16 or 17 years old. I remember reading *Learned Pigs and Fireproof Women* by Ricky Jay, where he devoted a chapter to the last of the Mountebanks and Max Malini. That chapter really caught my attention.

I thought, so you're telling me there's an Eastern European Jew who traveled the world performing magic for the rich and famous? Count me in! Being a young Jewish closeup magician from New York, that sounded like a very appealing career.



Something about Malini himself, I felt a kinship. I started reading as much as I could, but there wasn't much accessible information. Over the years I started realizing some of the shows I was doing were in many of the same places Malini had performed.

Malini had performed for the Royal Family of Japan, and so had I while living in Japan. He and I both performed at the *Palace Royal* in Quebec City, and also the private clubs and hotels in Manhattan. I realized there was this overlap, almost as if I was living in his shadow.

Then I started performing some of his tricks including the Brick from the Hat, the Blindfolded Card Stab and Button Biting, and I realized although these tricks are being done again sixty to seventy years after Malini's death (1942), they proved to be solid magic that still held up. These were the tricks people talked about most after my shows; I realized I needed to learn more about this guy.

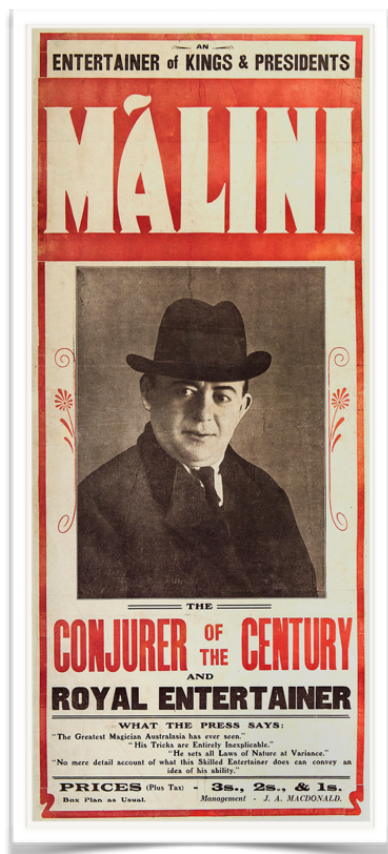
Anytime something related to Max Malini came up for auction I snatched it up. I probably have the largest collection of Max Malini memorabilia around. I know Copperfield has some really great items, and others I haven't been able to pick up, but much of what I have is included in the book.

The first idea I had was doing an annotated Vernon/Ganson book, similar to what Vernon did to Erdnase and the *Revelations* book. Then I realized first of all, I'd have to contact the original publisher and ask for permission, that would be a nightmare.

I realized, although it's a harder project, I could write an entirely new book from scratch and anything that had been previously described, I could then describe it in more detail based on my own first-hand experiences.

NEMCA: Harry Stanley Published the Lewis Ganson book on Malini utilizing the recordings of Dai Vernon's experiences. Did you have access to those recordings while writing the book?

SC: No, I don't have the recordings, I've seen the original transcripts. Most of my collecting revolves around the advertising material, I have a lot of Malini brochures that haven't been seen, autograph materials, business cards, illustrations, and tons and tons of newspaper articles.



Those materials are what actually inspired me to start writing, because I have a lot of contemporary articles about Malini and these painted an incredible picture from a layman's view. What is this guy all about, who was this mysterious figure that captured the public's attention?

Magicians are actually quite easily deceived because we hear one line of description and we extrapolate and say he must have only done one thing in his life. Everyone seems to think Malini didn't perform on large stages.

The common understanding had been that Malini only performed in peoples living rooms and private homes for five, ten or twenty people. He was performing for 400 people in large theaters his entire career. He had one show where he performed for 2,000 people!

NEMCA: His material was not large-scale illusions by any means, Malini was performing essentially close-up magic on stage.

SC: Right. It was close-up on the stage. Much like his contemporary Nate Leipzig, he would invite an audience of let's say six people on-

stage with him and he'd have three people on one side and three people on the other side seated with him, and he would perform his close-up magic for those six people. Their reactions were what played to the rest of the crowd.

Another thing he'd do was walk off the stage, and he was only 5 feet 2 inches, so it was difficult for people to see what was going on. It was worth your while to pay the extra money and get the front row seats or in the aisle to actually see the show.

Malini would walk off stage into the aisle and perform the Egg Bag and perform various tricks like throwing a shot glass of whiskey into the air and making it vanish.

The fact is because he was so small, when his arm went down to wind up for this pitch of throwing the whiskey glass into the air, you simply couldn't see where his arm was. He was throwing the glass of whiskey into his pocket.

NEMCA: You mentioned finding insight into Malini from non-magic related periodicals and newspapers, would you say the majority of your new findings came from these publicly available resources?

SC: When the Vernon/Ganson book was put out by Harry Stanley, it was 1962 – the internet did not exist and Malini had been dead for twenty years. That book was mostly guesswork and conjecture.

Of course, there was some help from people like Charlie Miller because he knew Malini much better than Vernon did, so the majority of accurate information was most likely shared by Charlie Miller. Vernon was just guessing in most cases about the methodology.

In the ensuing years since 1962 to the present, the internet was invented, and we then have access to newspaper clippings from all over the world. In most cases you have to pay to utilize the archives for research.

The Library of Congress has great free access to their database. That was my starting point, going through the Library of Congress searching for every iteration of Malini's name in newspapers from all over the country.

Then I realized Malini was performing all over the world, he basically traveled the world eight times in his life. This was during a time when people could only travel such distances by ships or trains.

So why am I limiting my search to only the United States? It's foolish, I should look at Newspapers from Japan, Russia, China and Australia. I found British, Hebrew and Yiddish Newspapers and realized this is going to be a much larger project than I ever could have imagined.

NEMCA: You became an investigative reporter.

SC: Remember this is all taking place during the Pandemic, which is why I had time to do this, because my shows were off. If the pandemic had not occurred my 550-page book about Malini would never had been written.

It was probably a perfect storm of opportunity and desire. I started throwing money at this project, meaning I was then buying access to all these different newspaper sources around the world, and in some cases having the newspapers translated from their original source language into English.

For example, I had some Yiddish and Hebrew newspapers translated, I personally translated the Japanese newspapers into English because I speak and read Japanese fluently.

I took all of these newspaper articles and using Optical Character Recognition (OCR) scanning technology, attempted to place this information into a database. The issue was so many of the documents were so badly degraded, scans were not accurate. The only way I could possibly use the data was if I hand-typed every article over again, which I did for thousands of newspaper articles.

That meant I then had a searchable text of every iteration of Malini in newspapers from the 1890s through 1942, his final day. After transcribing thousands of newspaper articles, the keyboard on my computer was pounded so hard the keys were falling off. I had to buy a new computer because of this.

I became ridiculously obsessed, I was kind of in a fugue state morning, noon and night. To be honest I was pretty depressed from not being able to perform. The only way I could make heads or tails of my mental health was to pour my attention into this project.

Once I finally finished transcribing these articles, I used that data to create a timeline of every live show for the public that Malini ever performed. At the end of my book is a grid of every show of Malini that I could find.

That grid then became the basis, almost like reverse engineering. Now that I had that grid, when I started writing the biography for the book, I was able to refer back to the timeline. Everything suddenly made sense, for example if he was leaving for Shanghai to go to Vancouver, I could see the timeline matches up with my grid.

NEMCA: How did you use these resources to uncover Malini's methods or re-examine previously explained tricks?

SC: The timeline didn't necessarily assist with that. The book itself is a partial biography, but it's even more of a technical book that teaches pretty much every trick that Malini ever performed that I could find.

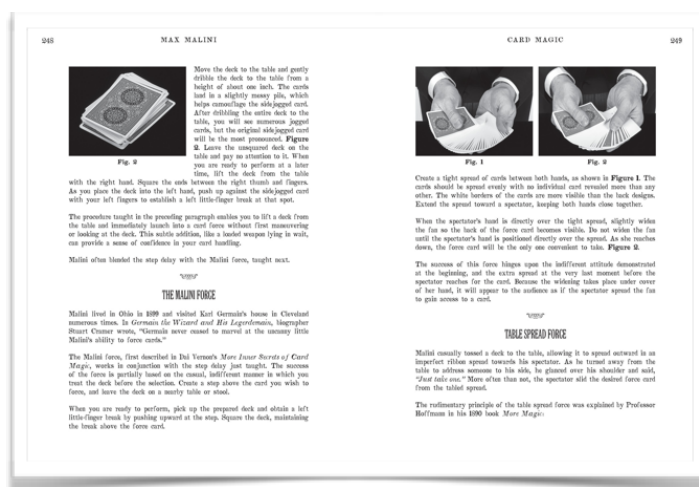
There are 95 tricks in the book - Tricks he performed close-up, a section on his card magic, a very lengthy description of his stage shows and every trick and method.

I wanted to make this book a living artifact. These are not just tricks that took place once upon a time, but they're living breathing tricks that can still be performed today.

I used my knowledge of late 19th and early 20th century magic literature, and the methods that were available to Malini at that time.

I often looked at what Magic books were available to him and realized much of his material was based on Edwin Sachs' *Sleight of Hand*, because Malini was infatuated by Alexander Herrmann.

Most of Alexander Herrmann's material was based in Sachs' book which then became a guidebook to Malini. Of course, you have Professor Hoffman books and *Modern Magic*, which also had methods



that were viable and matched up with the effects Malini had performed.

Essentially, I'm reading descriptions of tricks as recorded by observant newspaper reporters and then matching it up to what resources were available to Malini in his day. To take it a step further, I then went out and performed these tricks for modern audiences and refined them to make sure that the details were accurate. So now you can basically go out and perform much of Malini's material based on the descriptions I've provided in the book.

NEMCA: How did Malini's legacy endure after his death through these larger-than-life stories?

SC: I have two chapters in the book, which tell tons of stories people haven't heard yet. Some of course you have, like the classic story of when he stabbed the card on a Louis XIV table, but there were many more which haven't been heard before.

Malini had a knack for figuring out ways to capture people's interest and attention. These stories were bold, brash ways he would take advantage of people or plan things out in advance, to make an effect appear impromptu but was really a long con.

I'll give you a good example, one-time Malini was in a London hotel room and noticed the reporter interviewing him was wearing a hat with a long unique hatpin in it.

Malini took the hatpin from this reporter's hat and vanished it, the Reporter replied, "The trick was very nice, but was he going to give it

back?” Malini replied, “Oh well who needs another hat pin? We should wrap up this interview anyway.”



They then go downstairs, just as they’re walking out of the hotel, a taxicab pulls up and Malini tells the reporter, “Stop! Open up that taxi’s passenger door and look in the back seat.” Sure enough, stuck in the cushion of that back seat was that reporter’s hat pin. There’s no method for this effect in the book.

NEMCA: One of my favorite stories involves Malini causing a card to vanish and reappear inside the lining of a prominent person’s suit jacket. Apparently, Malini went to great lengths to create a miracle by locating this gentlemen’s tailor I suppose.

SC: You’re talking to the second guy who also performed that trick, inspired by Malini. The funny thing is Malini did not invent that, it was also described in Edwin Sach’s book *Sleight of Hand*.

The Trick was called the *Missing Link*. Basically, it’s the classic idea of tearing up a card, having a spectator hold onto one corner, vanishing the remaining pieces and having those pieces reappear restored someplace impossible. That was Malini’s M.O. – that was his go-to trick for his entire career.

Sometimes the card ended up inside of a flowerpot on the second floor of someone’s house. Sometimes inside of a dictionary in some-

one's library or bookshelf, or behind the pendulum of a grandfather clock. All pre-planted by him obviously.

With the card in the jacket-lining story, he was fortunate to be in a dry-cleaning shop in Washington D.C. where he saw a Senator's Jacket identified by the Senator's nametag on the bag.

So, he said I will be performing for that Senator next week and asked to sew the card into the jacket's lining. That's how the story goes but there's no evidence of him ever performing it. We know he set it up, but not if he ever pulled it off. If not there's a card still in this guy's jacket.

I was very fortunate while working with a tailor in a very famous store on Madison Avenue. They were holding a sweepstakes, one of the prizes being tickets to my *Chamber Magic* show in New York City.

The other sweepstakes prize included dinner at a nearby restaurant and a free new suit for the winner. I'm thinking, "Wait a minute, I have access to the guy's jacket before he comes to the show!" Of course, I sewed a card into the jacket's lining.

The winner was a Harvard University Professor. I saw from backstage the gentleman seated before the show and he was wearing the jacket. I felt like Max Malini in that moment. This was the ultimate one-ahead, having loaded a card in this guy's jacket a week prior to the show and he had no idea.

The card was not loose inside the jacket either, it was literally sewn into the lining with stitching running through it. This made the removal of the card all the more impressive. Of course, the gentleman was objecting saying that the jacket was very expensive as I cut out

the card. When the card was revealed it received gasps and almost screams of “No Way” – it was a real moment.

In our history books we tend to focus on where the entertainers performed, how they traveled and with who, what they were like, but it can become very dry. We might not think about the secrets they fostered. My focus was to do both, my book goes into detail about Malini’s life, but also goes deep into his methods. That’s kind of unique.

NEMCA: Most of these stories were passed down by word of mouth, but I recall the Ganson/Vernon book mentioned Malini had recorded his own autobiography. What’s the current status of those documents?

SC: In the previous Malini book, there’s mention of a manuscript that was apparently an autobiography, I was unable to locate it but have a good idea where it might be.

I gave up that hunt, however, one thing to keep in mind, Malini was barely literate and a horrible speaker/writer of English. If there was a manuscript written by Malini, there’s a good chance it’s not legible or really hard to read.

At one point someone said that manuscript should be serialized, but seriously edited. Let’s assume that information is lost. What I was able to find was the recording of Max Malini’s son, Ozzie, talking at the *Mulholland Library Conference* (later known as the *Los Angeles History Conference*) in 1989.

Ozzie Malini was invited as a guest to speak about his father. I transcribed that entire talk, and Ozzie was a sensational speaker. He was articulate, funny, incredibly detailed and very engaging. All the sto-

ries Max would have told about himself, were undoubtedly shared and then told by his son in that speech.

Max and Ozzie traveled around the world together as documented through my research. His son saw it all and told the stories better than Max could have. Whether those manuscripts Max wrote exist or not, I believe we have something better, and I included all this in the book. I have not been in touch with the Malini family about this book at all. I'm interested in seeing what their reaction is to the book.

NEMCA: You made mention of Malini performing the Card Stab on a Louis XIV table, are you aware if any of these original tables bearing Malini's puncture wounds have come up for auction or any that are owned in private collections?

SC: I actually tried to track one down. As a matter of fact, I've actually performed this trick on antique tables, all it does is make very small marks. You're not stabbing so deep into the table that it leaves this massive gouge. For the final stab the knife does go in far enough to remain upright as the table is tipped to display the final card.

The brilliant idea developed by Sam Berland was to use a wooden cutting board for the surface while presenting the Card Stab, that way you can stab as deep or as hard as you like. As long as the knife is impaled in-line with the grain, the knife will go into the wood and remain upright without tipping over. This is probably the best solution to date as most households, bars and restaurants have a wooden cutting board on-hand.

NEMCA: That's a wonderful solution, avoiding the awkward moment of ruining someone's table while also traveling with less props.

SC: One of the things I learned from this research is that Malini traveled really light. He almost had no props. The heaviest things he carried were his scrapbooks, that had all clippings used to promote himself when he came to a new city.

He'd walk into some fancy hotel or private club with his very large press-books and would show the management his personal letters from Presidents, the King of England, various Crowned heads of Europe and Newspapers from all over the world, touting the Miracles of Malini.

He'd use these documents as social proof and ask to perform at their hotel next Thursday and if they would give him the room. These managers would be overwhelmed by the scrapbooks, which turned out to be Malini's bread and butter more so than his tricks.

Typically, they would agree, and this was how he was able to travel and perform from one town to the next. The props themselves were usually about \$2 worth of equipment you could find around your house.

He'd find lemons in the kitchen, glasses covered with newspaper for his cups and balls. No Paul Fox cups needed. All of that was irrelevant to Malini's aesthetic. The idea was to travel with virtually nothing, yet still put on a great show.

There's another story about a Malini trick that was described in the Vernon/Ganson book, the Bill in the Egg or Lemon Trick. It's described as using a Card Wand, (a wand with a plunger and lever slid by your thumb to load a bill into an object) or a Billet Knife.

Bobby Torkova had a conversation with Ozzie Malini, asking him what his father would bring to a show? Ozzie said, "He would literally carry nothing. Max would get the cards at the venue and he acquired the lemons and eggs from the kitchen or local store."

So, Bobby asked, "Well what about that Card Wand he used to load the egg with?" Ozzie Malini replied, "Vernon didn't know anything about my father's methods." (He said this within earshot of Vernon who happened to be at the same conference.)

Ozzie went on describing to Torkova what the actual method was, using a butter knife. Malini simply adhered or tied the bill behind the edge of an ordinary butter knife to commence the load, so he never needed a gimmick.

NEMCA: What was your experience working with Gabe and Squash publishing? Was there judicious editing that left out a good amount of content even though the book is almost 600 pages?

SC: There's another 200 pages that didn't get used, but most of the images and content were duplicate newspaper articles. My aim was to be complete, but the fact is no one is going to write another Malini book right away. If they do I want to read it! The majority of content is there, so we paired down and eliminated content close enough for duplication.

Maybe I'll create a Malini website one day to showcase these illustrations that might not have been high enough resolution for the book. Malini doing toothpaste and Real Estate advertising for example. It has to be an engaging book while maintaining thoroughness, there's a balance.

Working with Gabe was great, he has an eye for history obviously, and he also has access to many images of items they've sold in their auctions over the years. Many of the Malini items were already pre-photographed and digitized. Overall, Gabe has a great reputation and I saw why first-hand while working with him on this book.

When I was in Chicago, Gabe and I decided to go to Malini's grave. We drove out there and had to really hunt to find it because Malini doesn't have a gravestone. He was buried in an unmarked grave next to his first wife who died when he was much younger.

There's a grave for his wife, then a blank empty space because there's no headstone and then a grave for somebody else. After we eventually found Malini's resting place, Gabe and I took a picture using a brick and hat as his gravestone.

NEMCA: What do you believe was Malini's best trick he performed?

SC: So, it's funny because many magicians would assume it's the Egg Bag since his name is now synonymous with the trick. In actuality, the Egg Bag was virtually never mentioned in the mainstream media.

Although he did perform the Egg Bag, it didn't stand out enough for reporters to mention it. The one mention might have been only a single aspect of that routine where he produced the egg from a man's beard. The vanish and reappearance in the bag was lost amongst the other highlights.

There were three tricks which were most commonly mentioned, one was the Brick from the Hat, another was the Blindfolded Card Stab, and the last one was Button Biting. When the Button Biting trick was

added to his repertoire, it garnered more press than any other trick he performed by far.

You have to remember, Malini was this aggressive, brash 19-year-old kid when he performed that. Also, he was only 5 foot 2 inches, so when he went for a man's jacket, the button was almost at his eye level.

That trick probably opened more doors for him than anything else. There was a famous story of Malini biting off the button of a U.S. Senator in the halls of the U.S. Capitol. In-fact, he had performed the Button Biting in Washington D.C. for Mark Hanna, a Senator from Ohio.

Hanna said to Malini, "That was great can you show it to me again?" Malini replied, "No I won't do it again." Hanna says, "Well I really want to see it again, tell me where you're staying." The next day Malini received an invitation to visit and perform at the White House in front of President McKinley in the oval office.

While in England he also performed the Button Biting for Prime Minister Balfour. That then led him to perform for the Prince of Wales, ultimately leading to a performance for the King of England. That one trick, the Button Biting, literally opened more doors for him than any other. He performed it throughout his entire career.



NEMCA: What's the story behind the book's delay in shipping?

SC: The printing company was going to print it in Hong Kong. The problem is there are Chinese censors that look at the content of every book being produced from that region.

Parts of the biographical chapter discussed Malini's travels through China and Asia around World War I and leading into World War II. We had some content, maps and images of flags in the book that the Chinese censors flagged, and they refused to print the book unless we removed it.

I wasn't going to change the book simply because the Chinese Government doesn't agree with the content, so we explored other options for printing. We ended up producing the book in Singapore instead.

That was not too much of an issue, but because of the back-up of ports on the West Coast of the United States, the shipping company decided not to go the obvious route which was Singapore to L.A.

Instead, the ship went the long way around the World, from Singapore underneath Sri Lanka and India, through the Suez Canal, across the Mediterranean Sea, out the Strait of Gibraltar, across the Atlantic Ocean and tomorrow is landing in New York. Malini traveled the world eight times, this book's journey is his ninth and final trip.

NEMCA: What are your concluding thoughts about the project and your book now that it's on the way to readers?

SC: This is the book I wish I had when learning magic. It's hard for me to imagine it actually exists knowing the difficulty that came along with the process and also my mental state at the time during COVID.

Now I see what a wealth of material is being offered, one could believe there might just be a career within its pages waiting for a future magician to extract.

I believe this Malini book could be a classic. It's about a classic figure, with classic magic and I wrote it to the best of my ability. I'm really proud of the book and I think it does justice to the importance of Malini as a figure which had not been explored to its fullest extent up until now.



To learn more about Steve Cohen visit: chambermagic.com

Steve Cohen's book, *Max Malini: King of Magicians, Magician of Kings* can be purchased directly from the publisher - squashpublishing.com

Do your part for magic history ...

*The Yankee
Magic Collector 20*

... through preservation and documentation.

Requesting submissions for the November 2022 issue

For more information, please contact editor
Andrew Pinard at ymceditor@absomagic.com.

www.nemca.com/yankee-collector/

VOLUNTEER SURVEY

We hope you have participated in and enjoyed the long history of events that NEMCA has produced for the magic history and collecting community over the years. Several examples are...

- 18 Yankee Gathering Conferences
- Many meetings for our membership
- Guest Speakers and Picnics
- Published 19 *Yankee Magic Collector* journals
- Hosted two virtual Gatherings
- Introduced this quarterly newsletter

To keep these events and publications coming, we need help.

As a non-profit magic collecting and history community, we have a number of interesting jobs with which we could use assistance. These jobs include helping in the production of *The Yankee Magic Collector* journal; assisting with virtual and in-person Yankee Gatherings; and a variety of technical/creative jobs.

If you have an interest in becoming an active participant in the activities of NEMCA, please fill out the form below as completely as possible. Thank you for taking the time to read this and, hopefully, to respond to the survey below.

TAKE the SURVEY

PAST EVENTS

The Spring 2022 Business Meeting video is now available online.

Learn about our accomplishments in the last year, new volunteer opportunities, and the ongoing planning for Yankee Gathering 2022.

In addition, members can replay the entire meeting on the Members page of the NEMCA website. Enjoy our guest speaker Paul Voodini as he discusses Victorian Spiritualism. Paul is a full time working mentalist from England, specializing in the areas of séance, tarot card reading and the paranormal.



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Michelle Ainsworth

As the third year of Michelle's NEMCA membership approaches this June, her contributions to the magic collecting and history community have proven numerous and insightful.

Her most recent article submission to the *Yankee Magic Collector*, Issue #19, pg. 59 is titled, *Peter Samelson's PaperWork - Finally Recorded on Paper*. In this account Michelle gives readers a detailed first-hand reconstruction of Peter Samelson's one-man show, *PaperWork*.



She is currently researching magic in science magazines for *Yankee Magic Collector* #20. This fall, we look forward to Michelle's guest appearance at the 2022 Yankee Gathering where she will give a talk on *Programs of Temporary Magic Exhibitions*.

As described in her *PaperWork* article, Michelle's passion for history was inspired by an elementary school field trip to see a Houdini documentary. Michelle enjoys collecting advertising and publicity material. Her greatest interest is learning about museums and gallery exhibits. She reviews magic history books for *Skeptic* magazine and also collects magic on 20th century pop culture, performing fakirs, and illusionists.

Interested in Joining NEMCA? If you have a sincere interest in magic history or collecting, please join us! [Membership Application Here](#)

MAGIC COLLECTORS EXPO 2022

Reviewed by Jim Zoldak

Bill Smith organized his third Magic Collectors Expo on April 13-16, 2022. After conferences in Minneapolis and Las Vegas, this one was held at the Sheraton Austin in Austin, Texas. It is a city with great food, nightlife, entertainment, and unique attractions. Two such unique attractions, especially for the magic enthusiasts, were featured on the first day.

Wednesday afternoon led off with a trip to the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas. There we were treated to a great talk by the Cline Curator of Theatre and Performing Arts, Eric Colleary.

He whetted our appetites for the eye candy to come. The talk was followed by a tour of a display of a very small sample of the items in the collection. The collection is rich in material about Houdini and material that Houdini collected about other magicians.



There were posters seldom, if ever, seen. There were many examples of correspondence between Houdini and other key performers of his time. Also, on display was a first edition, *Discoverie of Witchcraft* and a rare catalog from the De Vere magic shop. The Center is open to the public for research purposes.

Also on Wednesday, we were treated to a dinner and show at Esther's Follies. This is an Austin institution for the last 45+ years. It is a rollicking, fast-paced show with skits, songs, and magic all done

in the spirit of comedy and out-right fun. The jokes were all topical and no current political figures or celebrities escaped unscathed.

Thursday started with a series of lectures dealing with magic in Texas, Doug Henning and Al Flosso. Interviews with Cathy Daniel (wife of the late John Daniel) and Roy Anderson (producer and star of Esther's Follies) were also a part of the day's schedule. The day concluded with a video of the highlights of "Stars of Magic for Hunger in Africa" narrated by Lance Burton and Fielding West.

Friday returned to the ballroom for talks dealing with the topics of "Dorny" Dornfield, the P&L blooming rose bush, Ken Brooke, The Great Jester and Max Malini.

The session ended with an unannounced treat. Randy Pitchford displayed his latest acquisition (besides the Magic Castle). He introduced "Little Ricky," the automaton that Ricky Jay used in his off-broadway show "Ricky Jay and his 52 Assistants".



Randy purchased it at the recent Bonham's auction of the Ricky Jay estate for a price upwards of \$200,000. The evening ended with a magic show featuring local Texas magicians.

All in all, the 3 days were well structured and executed. The talks and events were great but the thing that stood out most for me was the chance to get together with fellow collectors in person for the first time in 3 years. The next expo is scheduled for Cleveland, Ohio in 2023. If you get the chance to go, I strongly suggest that you do. Contact Bill Smith at www.magiccollectorexpo.com for details.

CLASSIFIED ADS

- **Ray Ricard:** Interested in books, pamphlets and catalogs on magic, gambling and ventriloquism prior to 1876. rricard264@aol.com
- **Steve Lerner:** Looking for gambling items and equipment, especially info on old dice-makers. WTB, Crooked/gaffed carnival games. stvlrnr@gmail.com
- **Loren Pankratz:** Wanted: Uncommon early twentieth century books and pamphlets on hypnosis. loren.pankratz@comcast.net
- **Jim Zoldak:** Looking for rare/uncommon *Mysto* magic sets or 19th/early 20th century European magic sets. Please contact me with details and pictures. jzoldak@aol.com
- **Doc Rogers:** Is offering a pdf list of magic books for sale. Contact him to request a file. rogersmagic50@gmail.com
- **Michael Mayo:** Looking for books with a John Brown Cook book-plate, photos of John Brown Cook. 1880-1930 Magician programs from Boston theaters. cityside.mm@gmail.com
- **Michelle Ainsworth:** Seeking information (or ephemera) related to displays or exhibits of magic memorabilia in museums, galleries, etc, anywhere, any size. magicwriter1898@gmail.com



*Submit your "WANTS" and "FOR SALE" items to newsletter@nemca.com