

Housekeeping?

Okay, so what do I mean by housekeeping? Have you ever watched a performer and thought for some reason that they could do better but couldn't quite put your finger on it? The performance was okay and the magic was strong but there was just something...

Have you ever thought that a performer looked lost or didn't seem to have their finger on the ball (no pun intended) even though they were competent as magicians?

If so then there is a chance that you are probably relating subconsciously to bad housekeeping.

What I mean by bad housekeeping is the way in which objects and props are arranged and placed during a routine, whether that means cups, balls and wands on a table or balls and final loads in the pockets.

While we may not consciously recognise a performer constantly re-adjusting a cup and a ball on the table in readiness for their next sleight or move, our subconscious picks up on it as "a feeling."

This, I believe, has a direct affect on how confident the performer is perceived to be...

Confidence

"That feeling" is perceived by an audience as a lack of confidence, either in the material, self confidence or their ability to perform (or possibly all three.) Of course the performer may be very confident indeed and road testing some new material, however the blocking should at least be worked on before giving new material an outing.

A quick search on the net reveals many performers searching pockets for final loads, shifting props about because they did not set them down in the correct position for the next part of the routine and passing things from hand to hand in order to carry on.

It seems that there is some congruence missing, a lack of familiarity...

Familiarity

When I examine and think about things like this, I often wonder... "Am I being over critical here?" Well, I've given this a lot of thought and I don't believe I am, I truly believe that it matters.

I spent roughly twice as long blocking out my cups and balls routine and giving motivation to the moves and an internal dialogue (both of which I will briefly cover later on) than I actually did working out the actual routine itself, and with good reason.

If I touch a cup, ball or wand once and place it down in the perfect position after it is used and I don't ever have to fiddle or re-adjust anything then I am projecting the correct attitude and the magic appears to just happen.

Projection

The last thing I want is an audience feeling sorry for me as a performer, or even emphasizing with

me or my situation. I want them to be entertained and I want them to be lost in the magic and I truly believe that they get lost in the magic when I do and because I project that to them.

The best way for me to be lost in the moment, the magic, is to not have to worry about where things are, what comes next or is the load in the right pocket? Only then can I project magic instead of confusion and that is done because I have worked on my blocking.

Blocking

If you have ever worked with a professional dancer you will know that they can hit any spot on the stage at any time asked because they know exactly what they are doing at any given time and, just as any pro will walk the stage and count how many paces it is to their table, to the wings, the treads etc. you must know where every object is to be positioned perfectly during the whole of your routine.

For instance I changed the whole final sequence of my own cups and balls routine because it meant that I would have had to place a cup towards the leading edge of the table and then bring it backwards towards the back edge of the table for a final load.

It was not only incongruent but illogical and telling and meant that I would have placed the cup down, only to pick it up, move it backwards and then place it towards the front of the table again.

Sure, with misdirection the audience might not have noticed but something in their subconscious would have caught it.

As it happens I now have the whole routine blocked out so that every object is placed down where it needs to be, the hands don't cross the body and nothing is passed from hand to hand in order to facilitate the routine.

Items are placed down and left until they are needed again and everything has a reason...

Reasoning

Reasoning, motivation and an internal dialogue are important to me as a performer and I hope it shows in what I do. For instance, I mentioned the final sequence above, well I changed that by rolling the cup back to reveal a ball had vanished.

After the cup rolls back it stays where it is, at the rear edge of the table ready for the final load, however the motivation (and therefore internal dialogue) for it is to show a ball under the cup, not to load a larger one.

Mirroring

A quick point on mirroring when performing the cups and balls as I believe it relates to blocking. It is well known that it is preferable for the clean hand to mirror the dirty hand when palming because it doesn't alert the subconscious to the difference in the hands.

I have been playing with this theory for a while now and I have been applying it to cups also. I feel (and it is only personal opinion) that it also works very well when loading cups.

For instance, in the sequence I used as a demonstration where I roll a cup back and leave it at the

edge of the table in preparation for a final load, I also do the same with the cup I am not loading and the symmetry created really seems to help make the final load psychologically invisible.

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