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FOREWORD

I first met J C Sum in Bangladesh in 2005 and more recently was fortunate enough to work with him and his team on a project. Throughout this period we have maintained contact through correspondence.

J C and his beautiful partner and superb magician, Ning, make a formidable illusion team. They owe a great deal of their success to being equal partners on every aspect of their business and show. They both have strong personalities, are great thinkers, are superb magicians and do amazing contemporary illusions that are simply mind blowing.

They have been able to distinguish themselves in the competitive illusion field by presenting a number of original illusion designs that have reinvigorated familiar plots. Simply search out clips of “Crystal Metamorphosis” and “Revolution”. Watch these, be fooled, and then delve into this terrific book for descriptions.

It is rare that illusionists will share the wealth of knowledge and insight that J C does in this book. For those who wish to use illusions in their work this book is simply invaluable. As a designer of original illusions for years, I understand the process of bringing an illusion from an idea, to working concept to physical form and finally to performance on stage. It is a long, sometimes difficult, yet gratifying journey.

“Urban Illusions” is a much-needed collection of modern illusions for today’s audiences and J C provides an essential new voice in the area of illusion design. Study the designs, the thought behind the designs, the motivations behind the presentations and add powerful pieces to your show repertoire.

Franz Harary
May 2011

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Based in Singapore, J C Sum is one of the top professional illusionists in Asia and is a world-class designer of original illusions and mega illusions. As an international performer, J C has staged over 3000 shows across Asia Pacific as well as in the Middle East, France and the US.

Along with his partner, 'Magic Babe' Ning, they are acknowledged as "Singapore's celebrity magic duo" (Channel News Asia). The Straits Times regards them as "Asia's most famous illusionists". Magicseen Magazine recognizes them as "truly one of the world's leading illusion acts".

J C & Ning are well known for their innovative illusions such as teleporting and vanishing people & cars over great distances as well as setting a world magic record and successfully predicting the national 4D lottery. From 2008 - 2009, they starred in "Ultimate Magic", Singapore's first daily magic attraction that ran for 13 months. In 2011, they also starred in their own one-hour 3D TV magic special.

In 2009, J C was awarded a Merlin Award for "Most Original Illusionist of the Year" by the International Magicians Society. He is also a recipient of a 'Master of Magic' award from the International Festival of Magic (Bangladesh) and the winner of two International Brotherhood of Magicians (U.S.A) 'Linking Ring' magic awards.

J C is widely regarded as one of the most prolific illusion designers in the world. He has designed over 75 original illusions for his shows and special events throughout Asia. He has written 3 books on modern illusion designs & presentations for the magic community and the books have been sold in over 35 countries.

Besides magic, J C enjoys reading, watching movies, playing pool, cooking and customizing "Transformers" toys.

For more info, visit: www.jcsum.com

Read his blog at: www.backstagebusiness.wordpress.com

INTRODUCTION

Although I have written 4 books on illusions since 2004, "Urban Illusions" (first published in Jan 2009) is my first book that has been made widely available to the main magic community. Previously, all my books were only available direct from myself. However, through the efforts of Tim Trono, Patrick Wolford and Kathy Carini from Murphy Magic Supplies, this book is now available through magic dealers worldwide.

The price has also been adjusted to be more accessible for illusion enthusiasts and magicians looking to add scale to their show. Out of respect for those who purchased the original book from me directly at a higher price, "The Impossible Teleportation" mega illusion (50-storey Teleportation) is not included in this edition of the book.

With the explosion of magic on TV, especially "street magic", the mainstream audience's overall expectation on magicians & illusionists has increased substantially. While some may argue that TV magicians have created unrealistic expectations on magicians but these TV magicians have also propelled the art forward in mainstream pop culture consciousness. And, isn't magic "unrealistic" to begin with? While I've designed a number of illusions just for TV to take advantage of the medium, I personally do feel the majority of an illusionist's material should be performable for a live audience, even if it is a different method, as long as the perceived effect is close to what is seen on TV.

"Urban Illusions" is a collection of 10 prototyped or audience-tested stage illusions that can be performed live and would be considered fresh and contemporary for the new generation. The designs in this book are reflective of global entertainments trends that in turn influence the current evolution of magic. Illusionists do need to update themselves with not just illusion methods and techniques but also modern design, building methods and materials. The thinking behind the presentations of illusions and image must change to remain relevant and on the cutting edge.

This book is not for the beginner illusionist. Due to the nature of the illusions and building complexity for several of them, I have to assume the reader is fairly familiar with standard illusion as well as utilities such as a "Deceptive Base". I also assume you have basic understanding of illusion building and assembly or have a builder who can assist in that technical area.

A lot of the props are built from wood, aluminum, stainless steel and acrylic (plexi-glass). This means you will have to have a full workshop to build some of these illusions. Alternatively, do what I do and source for vendors who can fabricate different parts and assemble the illusion yourself. Honestly, this is what I consider the most cost effective and productive way to build an illusion but you will require careful planning, detailed plans & instructions.

Here are some general building guidelines:

- Where possible, instead of ¼" or 3/8" ply wood, I tend to use 13mm honeycomb aluminum. The advantage is that it is lighter than wood, does not warp, absorb moisture, is waterproof and has a longer lifespan. The disadvantage is that it is much more expensive, can dent and all edges must be filed, sanded and capped with aluminum C-channel for safety as the edges can be very sharp.

URBAN ILLUSIONS

- I use 2.5mm thick aluminum or stainless steel sheet for the bottom of bases. This keeps the base lightweight, yet strong and allows for “give” when loaded.
- I use at least ½” diameter bolts where possible. While this does add weight to the prop, it secures the prop together much better and looks nicer.

Practicality is kind of a hallmark of my illusion designs. The illusions detailed are not for the solo performer but also do not require a large illusion crew. Most illusions can be performed with just your assistant and you. For the bigger illusions, you will require one or two more stage hands depending on how you want to present it.

Besides learning the techniques and methodologies of illusions, I think it is essential to know who are the trailblazing illusionists in the world and to study their work and contributions to the illusion landscape, past, present and future. With the Internet now, there is no excuse for a lack of reference material.

At the top of the list has to be David Copperfield for making illusions look so good for the last 30+ years. He is the single biggest influence for a lot of illusionists performing today, myself included. His body of work is second to none and he has given us the most beautifully crafted illusion presentations in the history of magic. As of this writing, Criss Angel is the current face of magic with his MindFreak TV show, “Believe” stage show in Las Vegas and worldwide following. He took advantage of the revolution that David Blaine created with his “Street Magic” TV specials and has used multiple mediums to push his illusions (or “demonstrations” as he calls them) and brand.

The highly respected older guard has their legacies firmly intact. The late-Doug Henning, Mark Wilson, Harry Blackstone Jr, Siegfried & Roy, The Pendragons and Lance Burton have all shaped the current look of contemporary illusions. The current crop of established professionals who have helped keep illusions advancing and relevant in mainstream entertainment include Luis de Matos, Ayala, Hans Klok, Murray Hatfield, Ed Alonzo, Nathan Burton, Jan Roven, Dani Lary, Greg Frewin, Brett Daniels, Kevin James, Peter Marvey, Rick Thomas, Anthony Reed, Franz Harary and Mark Kalin & Jinger among others.

They have paved the way for the new generation of illusionists such as David Davinci, Michael Grasso, Dan Sperris, Yunke, Ryan Joyce, Sam Powers, Reza and Jason Bishop to name a few. Oh, ‘Magic Babe’ Ning and some guy have done some cool things too!

As with any book, different illusions will appeal to different people, but I hope the effects, principles and methods used in my “urban illusions” will inspire you to develop stage effects for the new generation!

This body of work would not have been possible without the inspiration provided by the following individuals; David Copperfield, Jim Steinmeyer, Paul Osborne, Rand Woodbury, Bill Smith, John Gaughan, Franz Harary, Andrew Mayne, Alan Wakeling, Andre Kole, George Kimery, Darwin Ortiz and Max Maven. They have all inspired and educated me through their thinking, writing, performance and craftsmanship. For that, I am greatly indebted to each and every one of them.

Finally, thanks, of course, to Ning for being the perfect partner. One reason our illusions look good when we perform them is because she is the one presenting them with me.

J C Sum
May 2011

SEVEN BY HALF V2.0

A divided lady illusion reinvented & improved

Effect:

A girl enters a vertical trapezium-shaped cabinet whose position is depicted by a graphic on the front of the cabinet. Six large stainless steel guillotine-shaped blades (examinable) are inserted into the cabinet from front through the back, dividing the cabinet into seven sections. Each section is too small for the girl to hide and the blades run the entire width of the cabinet.

To top it off, the entire top half of the cabinet is tilted 90 degrees to its side, effectively dividing the cabinet into half. The cabinet is restored and the blades are removed. The doors are opened to reveal the girl unharmed!

Introduction:

In 2005, I designed the first version of 'Seven by Half' that was my original design for a 'blade & box' illusion. The illusion was designed for the working performer. It was self-contained, lightweight, packed small, played big and could be performed completely surrounded. Jack Murray (Dream Illusions) built the first prop and he did an excellent job in fabricating the illusion and applying his building expertise to the project.

The sword/ blade box is a time-tested plot that is strong, audience-tested and relatively angle-proof. The only 'problem' if you can call it that, with the presentation is that there is no kick or specific climax to the illusion. You simply put in the swords and then take them out all over again.

That is why good presentations of illusions like Harbin 'Zig Zag Girl' and its evolved cousin, Gunther Punchinger's 'Mini Kub Zag', are much more popular and generally better received by audiences than a standard sword/ blade box or 'Geometrick-style illusion. There is a definite 'punch-line' to the illusion; after the blades are in and the prop is 'zagged'. This gives clear indication to the audience to applaud.

My motivation for creating 'Seven by Half' was to create a new look and overall illusion presentation for an existing plot. The whole idea was NOT to merely transplant an illusion method/ look to another box. I designed 'Seven by Half' as an equal alternative for illusionists looking for a 'new' practical illusion and an enhancement to a blade box illusion. I also wanted the method to be fresh. While the contributing methods for hiding the girl cannot be called new by any extent of the imagination, the original design of the prop along with other elements eliminate the perception of any conventional hiding place for the girl.

The effectiveness behind the deception of 'Seven by Half' is due to the simplicity of the effect and prop design. It is very straightforward in terms of the look of the prop - a cabinet with six slots to receive 6 blades that can be split into half. To the audience, the insertion of the blades is already a fooler. The dividing of the cabinet by flipping it on its side is a definite kicker/ applause moment in the performance of the illusion.

The prop design is specific and intended. For example, the support arm is both functional and aesthetic. It starts off as a shelf/ holder for the 6 blades and then later serves as the support for the upper half of the cabinet when it is flipped over. The curved design of the support arm with circle cutouts and circle on the exterior graphics are juxtaposed with the straight edges of the cabinet and blades to create visual contrast. It gives texture to the prop design and an interesting look without making it look too 'boxy'.

The V2.0 of this illusion features a brand new design so it looks much more stylish and modern. Many have noted that the prop reminds them of Jim Steinmeyer's Modern Art. This was not intended but I can see the resemblance because of the front graphic on the cabinet.

Method & Requirements:

The prop must be custom built and Fig 1 shows the Front View of the finished prop with blades in place.

FIG 1

FRONT VIEW – Overview of Prop

