



# ILLUSIONISM

STAGE EFFECTS & ILLUSIONS  
FOR MENTALISTS

BY J C SUM

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# 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, Europe 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" and Magicana Magazine calls them "the most exciting & innovative illusion duo to come out of Asia".

In recent years, they have established themselves as one of the most innovative illusionists in the world with their original mega illusions such as reading 100 minds in 60 minutes, successfully predicting the national lottery and teleporting & vanishing people & cars over great distances.

More than 100 million people have seen J C & Ning's magic on television with appearances on over 25 programs internationally. They are also the first ever Singapore artistes to be booked to perform on the famed long-running TV show, *Le Plus Grand Cabaret du Monde*, that aired on 31 Dec 2011.

In 2012, J C & Ning were awarded the first ever "Patrons of Magic" award from the International Brotherhood of Magicians Ring 115 for their unparalleled contributions to the Singapore magic scene. 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 6 books on modern illusion designs & presentations for the magic community and the books have been sold in over 55 countries. J C & Ning also released a groundbreaking DVD set, "Behind the Illusions", that was an international best seller and received high positive reviews worldwide.

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

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Read his blog at: [www.backstagebusiness.wordpress.com](http://www.backstagebusiness.wordpress.com)

# INTRODUCTION

While most probably know me best as an illusionist and illusion designer, I have been performing a professional mentalism show in some form since 2002, although I have never marketed it as a mentalism show nor used the word “mentalism” unless talking to fellow magicians.

My partner, Ning & I currently perform a two-person mentalism show that features well-known mentalism plots and uses traditional mentalism techniques. But many routines also adopt unconventional methods, staging and presentational approaches, influenced from my illusion background. We have staged two mentalism-centric "mega stunts" that collectively garnered more than \$50,000 worth of PR with multiple media features and interviews for TV, newspapers, magazines, online and magic media. In the first stunt, we did a lottery prediction but what made it unique from any other lottery prediction done before was that we had an actual lottery ticket inside our prediction box along with a printed prediction. We also donated \$10,000 to a children's charity as a result of our correct prediction. In the second stunt staged in Jan 2012, we set an official world magic record for reading 100 minds in 60 minutes. The record was officiated by the Singapore Book of Records and the International Brotherhood of Magicians (HQ) and was also streamed live over the Internet.

I highlight these past experiences, which are all documented online, to reassure you that I have a track record in creating mentalism presentations and understand the pure side of mentalism. I hope you have peace of mind that the hard earned money that you invested in this book has been written by someone who has a decade long professional experience in mentalism specifically.

I should qualify right now that the material in this book was designed with the mainstream public, media and international show bookers in mind. As such, this book was written for magicians, illusionists, and mentalists targeting this specific market.

As an illusionist and show producer, I see the value (often the need) to play big, regardless of the style of magic show you do. Playing big can come in the form of scale of effects, personality, attire, props, cast, stage sets, lighting and music. In a professional stage show, audiences, show bookers, clients and TV producers expect and sometimes even demand production value. This in no way undermines the importance and necessity of personality, entertainment value and the core material of the performer. It is the complete package that is so often talked about in show business.

A good singer might have the best voice in the world but recording companies still know the importance of packaging, costuming, theatrical show production, dancers, stage sets, lighting and pyrotechnics to sell an album and concert experience. A mentalism or magic show is no different.

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While not suited for every show for every market, there is a huge market, especially in higher value shows like big corporate events and TV shows who generally favour spectacular “showy” acts with visual elements. Look at Uri Geller's franchise TV show that has run in different countries in recent years. It is a mentalism-centric show but a lot of production value is added to the acts to make them more spectacular, visually appealing and more commercial. For working performers, investing in scale and production value for your show can result in an increase in your asking fee; in turn increasing your commercial and brand value.

There are only a few stage illusions that have a mentalism presentation or utilize an illusion method or principle. Two that come to mind are Fred Culpitt's “Costume Trunk” illusion and the “Motley Man” illusion that Mark Wilson performed on Magic Circus. In Illusion Works 2, Rand Woodbury adopts a unique method for a prediction effect and David Copperfield's “Graffiti Wall” is an excellent example of dressing up a mass participation prediction routine.

There are quite a few stage mentalism routines that do play big. The most popular plot seems to be the roulette routines whether it is with rifles, handguns or with knives, spikes, nail guns and other dangerous objects. Chair tests, blindfold acts, two-person code acts, spirit cabinets, gypsy rope ties and routines that can involve a large number of people like the Zimmerman Prediction Chest or Don Wayne's "Dream Vision" also come to mind. Stage routines for mentalism can also be found in the published works of Lee Earle, Larry Becker, Max Maven, Ted Lesley, Steve Banachek, Richard Osterlind, Bob Cassidy, Al Koran, Maurice Fogel, Ted Annemann, Corinda and Andy Nyman to name some influential contributors to the mentalism knowledge base.

However, finding mentalism stage routines that are both large-scale and visual is more difficult. The routines in this book were designed to meet both these criteria. I wanted mentalism routines that have both large-scale production value and visual elements. I'm happy to say that all the routines in the book satisfy both criteria except for "Psychometric Touch" (which still plays big).

As students of the art, it is essential to be knowledgeable in all aspects of magic (mentalism being just one aspect). This allows you to apply techniques, methods and approaches from one genre of magic to another. Mentalists generally shy away from large props or props that do not look like regular items that can be found around the home or office. I think there is room to include more "props" in a mentalism show beyond the seemingly obligatory envelopes, books, clipboards, writing pads, flip charts and pieces of paper or card. I hope this book will help bridge mentalists' knowledge of mentalism techniques with stage/ magic & illusion techniques & prop design.

More often than not, an “out of the ordinary” prop can be completely accepted by the audience if its presence is motivated or justified. It is about giving context for its use in a routine. For example, in my "Paycheck" routine, the large locked glass box is not a normal looking item but in the context of the presentation where the mentalist is hosting a magic game show, it makes perfect sense. The same goes for the giant

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glass box used in "Fashion Statement" that is viewed as a see-through container to keep a prediction in full view of the audience throughout the routine. The same thinking was applied to "Visible Jumbo Deck" where a wooden box is used to contain an "Invisible Deck". I also employed illusion design techniques to improve on an existing mentalism utility that is used in "Unseen Forces" and "Shatter".

I should stress that I'm not advocating that a whole mentalism show be made up of this type of material. That would compromise the integrity of a mentalism show in my opinion. However, if you add one or two of these routines to complement your existing show, I'm sure you will be able to see how your show will play much bigger and have a positive perception of scale, of course assuming the show environment is suited for a bigger scale show.

In addition, in an ironic way, these large-scale routines can actually psychologically strengthen the "pure" mentalism routines in your show and ultimately elevate your show as a whole in the eyes of the audience. Not only is the show seen as a big-scale show, it has content that completely astounds the audience with seemingly "prop-less" effects. This is similar to the juxtaposition of close-up magic segments on video screens with illusion numbers in large illusion shows.

I know there will still be a percentage of mentalists who will not like this material and may even be offended that the purity of mentalism effects is "ruined" by elements of magic, visual elements and production value as they feel it demeans the effect and presentation of mentalism. To these individuals: I respect the point of view of believing that mentalism should only be performed with minimal props, ordinary items and presented with psychological premises to make routines believable. However, that is not the only way mentalism can be presented. If it makes you feel better, you can label the material in this book as mental magic or mental illusions.

If you are a mentalist, magician or illusionist always exploring new ideas, approaches and alternative perspectives, you will likely find value in this material.

I would like to highlight that the script and patter provided in the "Performance & Presentation" should be taken as broad guidelines only. Scripting, choice of words, pauses and tone are essential in the presentation of good mentalism and it is no different for these routines!

Enjoy "Illusionism"!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Conner". The signature is stylized with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mar 2012

# FIRST IMPRESSIONS

## A Powerful Opening Prediction Revelation for Stage

### EFFECT

A large tall framework with a cloth covering the center is seen on stage. It measures about 8ft high by 6 fit wide. The mentalist enters the stage and greets the audience. He explains to the audience that he has a prediction on stage concerning the thoughts of someone in the audience. He proceeds to read the thoughts of different audience members, and then speaks directly to the CEO/ VIP of the event.

He states that the CEO/ VIP actually has a movie at the back of his mind, even though he watched it a long time ago. The mentalist highlights that the CEO/ VIP has not told anyone about the movie and no one came to him before the show to tell him to think of a specific movie. The CEO/ VIP confirms everything to be true. The mentalist asks the CEO/ VIP to name the movie that he was thinking of for the first time. The CEO/ VIP calls out "Star Wars".

A music track plays in the background and the mentalist calls attention to the covered framework on stage. With a dramatic gesture, pyrotechnics erupt from the base and top of the framework and the cloth drops to the floor revealing a giant reproduction of the "Star Wars" poster! The mentalist strikes a pose in sync with the dynamic ending of the music to accept his applause, and then starts the show proper.

### INTRODUCTION

Openers for mentalism shows are not easy especially for large stage shows. As a general rule, an opener needs to be attention-getting, is short in duration, sets the tone and communicates to the audience what the show is about.

Regular magic & illusion shows can use silent acts performed to music as openers but it is very hard for mentalists to open with a silent act. For one, there are very few silent acts in mentalism but more importantly, there is a need to establish a premise, context and plot for a mentalism routine to make sense to the audience, let alone be effective.

This routine fulfils all the requirements of a good opener but will not work for every show. It will be most effective for larger shows with a large stage and sizable audience. It is an effect where size does matter. If the size of the revelation is too small, the visual effect will be lost and it will not have the same impact. The prediction image should literally dwarf you on stage to achieve a really visual spectacular effect.