

Candid Conversation With

TAN CHOON TEE

John Teo

JOHN: Even though you have not been with Ring 115 at its inception, you certainly have been with the Ring for a very long time, having been President of the Ring twice. What do you consider as your most memorable event of Ring 115?

TEE: It was the trip made by about 12 of our members, including our then-President, The Great Wong to the IBM convention at Hawaii in 1983. It was the first and only time that IBM had their convention outside of continental USA. It was also the first time all of us had been to an IBM convention. It was at this convention that The Great Wong got to perform his unique Linking Ring routine to international magicians.

JOHN: What was the major difference between the Ring, then and now?

TEE: One major difference was the way we conducted our meetings. In the early years, there were about a dozen of us. We met every month at a member's home. Each of us got a chance to host the meeting on a rotational basis. The host provided us with refreshments. Occasionally, our wives would accompany us; they would gather, usually in the kitchen, while we men talked about magic elsewhere in the house. The meetings usually ran from about 8.OOPM till midnight. If there was a visiting magician, we would stay well into 2.OOAM or 3.OOAM.

JOHN: When was the transition from meeting in a member's home to meeting in a public place?

TEE: I started to organize magic classes in the early 1970's. On average, we would have about 6 to 10 students graduating and then joining our Ring. Some of our graduates included Chia Hearn Jiang, Wong Fook Choy and the late-Tan Bah Chee. Eventually, the membership grew and this made it unfeasible to meet at a member's home. Thus, we began meeting at Community Centres and other public places.

JOHN: I understand there was a magic publication back then?

TEE: Yes, it was initially called THE MALAYAN MAGICIANS, and it eventually became known as THE SINGAPORE SORCERORS. I was editor then. In fact, I did more work for the Ring in the area of Ring Secretary and Editor than when I was the President.

JOHN: I understand also that you are a great inventor of magic effects, had a couple of books published and have won many awards. Can you elaborate?

TEE: I had 2 books published by Micky Hades Publications. They were entitled TAN CHOON TEE ON MENTALISM and VARIATIONS ON 2-CARD CLASSICS. I contributed several One-Man Parades in The Linking Ring magazine. My first 2 - parades in 1964 and 1973 won the 2nd prize each. My third One Man Parade in 1983 won "The Best Trick in Hocus Pocus Parade". That effect was called POOR MAN'S MONEY MACHINE. My latest One-Man Parade was in

October 1999. That did not win any award. There could have been one more parade between this one and my third parade that also did not win any award. I can remember the first 3 Parades clearly because I had the trophies with the year of award inscribed on them.

JOHN: You also contributed to numerous international publications and was made honorary member of some magic associations?

TEE: I contributed to publications such as GEN. NEW PENTAGRAM, MAGIGRAM, MAGICANA and others. I was made honorary member of the now defunct Hawaii Society of Magicians, and the Malacca Magic Circle.

JOHN: How do you get inspiration to create such wonderful magic effects?

TEE: By reading books on magic. Often, my mind will think of alternative methods of accomplishing the same trick, and in the process, a totally new effect will emerge.

JOHN: What was the most memorable event in your magic life so far?

TEE: In 1969, I went to the United Kingdom for an advanced management course. There, I spent almost every weekend working out magic with famous British and Scottish magicians such as Francis Haxton, Peter Warlock, John Potter, Baynard Grimshaw, Oliver Mackenzie, Johnny Neptune, Eddie Joseph, William Stickland, Lewis Ganson and others. I also performed at the British Ring Picnic in Cheltenham, and the Irish Magic Convention in Bray. Those were the most memorable periods in my magic life.

JOHN: Many of us have our own story of getting involved in magic. I am curious as to how you got interested in magic?

TEE: I had just begun working when I noticed an advertisement on magic tricks in a British magazine called "Tid-Bits". A friend and I started to order magic from England. Soon, I was performing at an annual event for the Boys Brigade- I was performing surrounded. A British army officer saw me and invited me to perform for his daughter. I was paid \$10- it was a big amount of money at that time, and it was my first paid show. At that same show, a British magician saw me and encouraged me to join a local magic society. I began to look around and eventually found IBM Ring 115.

JOHN: Did you perform professionally?

TEE: My only paid professional performance was when Singapore Airlines engaged me to perform in a posh Chinese restaurant in Oman in Saudi Arabia. Singapore Airlines was on an aggressive international marketing campaign then. I performed under the name of THE AMAZING MR T. There were 2 performances everyday for 2 weeks. I remember an interesting incident. One day, the brother of the Sultan of Oman came with his family and friends. They were put in an exclusive "location" where they were physically "cut-off" from the other diners and yet able to watch my performance without any obstruction. I was specifically told not to involve him or any of his guests in my magic performance. When I was doing the Ring in Nest of Boxes trick, I asked for the loan of a ring. A lady came up to offer me her ring. The Sultan's brother stopped her and gave me his ring instead. It was a beautiful ring

with the royal insignia of 2 kris (Malay wavy stiletto) crossing each other. I vanished his ring in a glass of water and caused it to reappear in the innermost transparent box in a nest of several boxes. He must have liked the effect very much because he came up and gave me a nice hug when he took back his ring. It was an experience I shall never forget as a magician.

JOHN: We are certainly proud that you put Singapore on the international magic scene.

TEE: I can also see that many of our young members are indeed very talented and they have won awards and recognition internationally, too.

JOHN: What advice would you give to our members?

TEE: For those who have done well in magic, I will say to them, "Well done!" and "Keep up the good work!" for they not only promote what good magic is all about, they are also a source of encouragement to others to practise hard and strive to achieve excellence in magic.

JOHN: That is very practical advice. Thank you very much for taking part in this interview.

TEE: You are most welcomed!

Tan Choon Tee

Our Advisor and Past President. Having established himself as a prolific creator of magical effects in numerous magical literature, Choon Tee has done us proud over the years.

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