

Jeff McBride brings style, intelligence to his magic act

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With the exception of a weekend gig at Trump Plaza a couple of years ago, master illusionist Jeff McBride has not spent any time in Atlantic City since 2001. Suffice it to say, it's we fans of the veteran wizard who have gotten the crummy end of that deal.

That's because McBride, whose new program, "Magic at the Edge," runs Thursday through Sunday through Sept. 2 at Trump Marina, has always been among the very best magicians who have earned Atlantic City gaming hall paychecks.

As "Magic at the Edge" clearly illustrates, McBride's brilliance remains intact. Foremost among his considerable talents is his ability to be cerebral and arty, yet totally accessible to audience members of all ages.

Rather than try to impress with a series of tricks built around huge mechanical devices, McBride earns his ooohs and ahhs with a program of small illusions that generally fall into the "close-up" category. And, as you may have guessed, he flawlessly executes each and every one of them.

But what sets McBride apart from most of his hocus-pocusing brethren is his presentation. Drawing heavily from Japanese Kabuki theater, and smartly incorporating sound and lighting into his individual pieces, McBride creates a world of mystery and fantasy that takes his show to a level most magicians simply can't achieve.

Suffice it to say that all of his more than two-dozen illusions baffle and entertain. And while he has plenty of new looks, he has wisely retained a few that are still downright wondrous some two decades after he introduced them to Atlantic City.

One is the delightful bit in which he conjures coins from various parts of the body of a young boy recruited from the audience (opening night, his mini-assistant proved to be quite entertaining in his own right, which added to the segment's fun).

Another is his signature routine (a most inadequate word here), which has him changing a series of Kabuki-style masks in the blink of an eye. The sequence also includes him erasing one mask's face with a handkerchief, only to have it appear embedded on the cloth.



And then there is the illusion in which McBride keeps re-filling two metal bowls with water, despite the lack of a visible source of said H₂O. It is a unique and startling illusion that's made even better by the use of sound effects to suggest drops of water splashing into the bowls from above.

Among his other tricks are a too-cool turn during which playing cards appear out of thin air at a ridiculously high rate of speed, and an amazing display of memory.

For the latter, McBride distributes to audience members random pages torn from the current copy of Time magazine. He then perfectly describes -- in ridiculously minute detail -- the content of the pages.

Adding to the fun are some show-opening rope tricks by Jordan Wright, and a Houdini-inspired strait-jacket escape by McBride's bride, Abigail.

Oh yeah -- just because McBride bids the audience good night from the stage, it doesn't mean the show has ended. He simply moves to the concourse outside the Shell, where he continues his memory exhibition and meets and greets fans.

That the cost of a ticket to see "Magic at the Edge" is a mere \$25 makes it that much more special. For this is one production that can truly be described as cheap at twice the price.

Show times are 8 p.m. Thursday and Friday; 7 and 9:30 p.m. Saturday, and 7 p.m. Sunday. For tickets and information, call (800) 777-8477, or go to www.trumpmarina.com. For more on McBride, go to www.mcbridemagic.com.