

THE THEATER LOOP ENTERTAINMENT

‘Happy Hour,’ magic by phone: Chicago magicians devise ways to appear in your quarantine

By DOUG GEORGE
CHICAGO TRIBUNE | APR 01, 2020 | 1:10 PM

Chicago magician Dennis Watkins’ long-running solo show “Magic Parlour” at the Palmer House Hilton was billed as an intimate evening of live, close-up magic — the problems with that right now being the “intimate, live,” and “close-up” parts.

In its place, voila! **“The Magic Parlour Happy Hour,”** a free Facebook Live feed launching 6 p.m. Thursdays on the [“Magic Parlour’s” Facebook](#) page.

When his live show disappeared some two weeks ago, along with all other magic shows in Chicago, Watkins says he went into a funk. Stuck at home, not performing, with an empty calendar and sleepless nights. “So one night at I think it was about 1:30 a.m., I just went down to my workshop,” he says “I pulled out a deck of cards. And I just started working, and that did wonders for my spirits.”

The online show he created will draw mostly from the Encore Room, an improvisational late-night set Watkins did after “Magic Parlour’s” late shows, with a simple table, some close-up magic and guests from the main show who wanted to hang around — very interactive, a lot of contributions from the audience, which Watkins says he hopes to replicate on the social media platform.

“The Encore Room set used to be my favorite part of the night,” he says. “It’s part performance, part Q&A, and that can work online too, if hopefully we can keep those questions away from just ‘how does it work?’”

[\[Most read\] Coronavirus in Illinois updates: 986 known new COVID-19 cases and 42 more deaths, bringing state total to 6,980 known infections and 141 deaths »](#)

The close-up illusions will all be via computer screens, which robs them of a little of that “before your very eyes” dazzle, which Watkins says he is working to compensate. “Of course, people can pick a card from anywhere in the world,” he says. It’s the two-feet-away engagement he has to try to recreate with a low-tech home set.

Mentalism will be another element of the show, something he says he had previously worked out for a corporate event at General Mills in Minneapolis that also looped in company employees watching overseas. “So there will be some mind reading over the airwaves.”



Illusionist Jeanette Andrews typically does all-sensory shows; her mental sleight-of-hand is now via telephone. (Jeanette Andrews / HANDOUT)

“Magic by Telephone” is illusionist Jeanette Andrews going an entirely different route. No screens, no social media, just pick up a phone and call 855-296-2442 (or 855-BY-MAGIC).

The title, she says, is a homage to a 1969 exhibit at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago titled “Art by telephone,” in which artists upended the notion of art as a visual medium. Andrews had previously done a show **“Thresholds” at the MCA**

that was presented in 2016 alongside the exhibition “Surrealism: The Conjured Life.” Her shows have typically been site-specific, all-sensory immersions — another was at the atmospheric Pleasant Home mansion in Oak Park — so creating something for video didn’t suit her.

“Telephone” callers are greeted by her voice and an invitation to guide themselves through a trick using simple objects they might have around the house — a dictionary, a deck of cards or just their hands and imaginations.

“This built off an idea I actually had several years ago,” Andrews says, when she began playing around with virtual phone systems typically used by small businesses; she created this show from the Talkroute platform. There’s no live element to the experience, it’s all her pre-recorded voice, but Chicagoans can call in any time for free. “Its meant to look and feel a lot like magic tricks in their own heads.”

Elsewhere for Chicago magic fans, the popular [Chicago Magic Lounge](#) has been posting on its Facebook page a steady supply of videos. Anyone who contributes to its “Help Keep the Magic Alive” fundraiser will be given access to stream a 45-minute family show by Danny Orleans. A recent post about teaching yourself magic is introduced with a video display of dexterity with a deck of playing cards — it served mostly to remind this reporter he could never learn this stuff at home, no matter how long this quarantine might last.

dgeorge@chicagotribune.com

To read full article: tinyurl.com/Tribune4-1