



Anthony Darkstone Brook In Conversation With Harry Maurer

Harry Maurer is elegant, sophisticated & charming. Together with his Carol-Ann, his beautiful wife and stage partner, they bring to Magical Entertainment a style and Class that is uniquely their own. Based in Houston, Texas they perform at Corporate functions, major venues in Vegas and Atlantic City and on Cruise ships.

Harry knows about sartorial elegance. Always, well-groomed & impeccably dressed, he is the epitome of a World Class Performer. I first met Harry a few years ago when I was lecturing in Houston. He came up after my lecture, introduced himself and complimented me on my clothes. A fine compliment from someone who appreciates style.

We soon discovered that we had several mutual friends in common and together we have often had dinner at the home of Scott & Kathy Wells. We also had a delightful time at Cherie Kay's home when she threw a huge birthday party for me. Many Houston notables attended. Naturally, Harry & Carol-Ann were there too and a great time was had by all.

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**Front row: Cherie Kay, Tony Brook, Scott Wells
Back row: Carol Anne Maurer and Harry Maurer**

ADB: Hello Harry. Thanks for taking time out of your busy schedule to chat a while. I know you and Carol-Ann keep busy and indeed, you have performed at various prestigious venues in Vegas, Atlantic City and several other top-Class venues both in the US and abroad. You both are also highly experienced in working aboard Cruise Liners. Most of us know what it is like being on the road but working Cruises must mean a different mind-set. It must mean a whole new way of doing and organizing things.

HM: Hello Tony. My pleasure. As always, great spending time with you. I have always worked in so many venues – cruises, nightclubs, theaters and casinos in Las Vegas, Laughlin, Biloxi and Atlantic City (where our show was nominated for an “Atlantic City Entertainer of the Year Award”! I typically spend about half of my year on cruise ships. It’s funny how, years ago, cruise ship entertainment was looked down upon by fellow entertainers. But for me, I always looked at it as the “New Vaudeville” – great Broadway quality theaters where you perform for a prolonged period of time with the camaraderie of other entertainers – just like in the time of Vaudeville!

You are right though, working aboard cruise ships means you have to have a lot more organizational skills than you would probably need on land. Not just in planning the shows, but in arranging the freight and travel so that it goes flawlessly. For example, if you are working on land and are driving to a gig and you miss an exit on the road -- that’s not so bad, but when you miss a flight – you’re in trouble! By the time you catch up, the ship could be in a completely different country!

You also need good communication skills because your support staff – the lighting people, sound people and backstage crew are not your crew, so you have to have everything pre-planned and organized for them so you don’t waste their time! You also don’t have the luxury of “rehearsing” your show on the ships because the theater or showroom is used for so many different activities day and night.

Your rehearsals are meant at first to “tech” the show – getting the lighting and sound cues down pat, and later to clean up the cues – it is not the time or place for you to learn your act! (Although there may be times that you can find an hour late at night to go through things, but that is a luxury!)

ADB: I have several friends who work Cruise ships and I have a lot of admiration for them. Obviously, you can’t just run down to the nearest Magic store for extra Flash paper or another deck of Bikes. So, does that mean you have to structure the act or acts in a way that deals only with the barest of essentials or does that mean packing extra supplies ...just in case.....

HM: I don’t think packing a minimal show is a good idea on a cruise ship. You are hired to do the very best shows you can do and you should bring whatever you need to bring with you to achieve that goal.

On the one hand, you don’t want to carry hundreds of pounds of needless supplies and props you are not going to use! But you certainly want to make sure that you have the backups, spares parts and any supplies you need because it’s highly unlikely you are going to find what you are used to using in various ports around the world!

ADB: I see what you mean. Of course, if we have an act at the Tropicana or the Hilton or a daily show at a Club or Theater, the act runs every night and the audience changes. On board you have what is essentially a captive audience ...what adjustments, if any, do you have to make? Are you obliged contractually to come up with different acts? Or variations?

HM: Well, just like a club or casino showroom on land, the audience onboard will change, but only after a week or two. That means that each time you are in front of that particular audience, you must have a completely different show! I have worked on ships for many years now and we now have three different, solid and proven 45-minute shows that we present each and every cruise. Getting to that level is very difficult – I know performers who have spent a lifetime putting together just one 45-minute show! When you have three shows, you need to balance your material so that each show is strong and each contains a good variety of material. Once that is done, you then have to plan the best order of your shows – which one would be a good “first” show for the audience to see you in? Which would be a good “second” show? And then, which

would be a good final show that will leave the audience -- not just liking you -- but remembering you!

ADB: How right you are Harry. Those are indeed the magic words. As Entertainers, we want the audiences to remember us and not the “tricks” or props. On land, when we finish the show, we pack and go home to switch off and chill out. I’ve been told that when you working on a Cruise Ship , you are always “on” even when you are not performing ...and so, have to stay in the Performer/Entertainer persona pretty much 24/7 whilst mingling with the passengers. Tell us a little bit about this aspect of Cruise work?

HM: Well..Yes & No. Each performer has his or her way. You’ve seen me offstage, and we have socialized together and I am rarely “on” when I am not performing. Offstage, I like to be a normal person and I enjoy interacting with people – and rarely do we talk about magic! We talk about hobbies, we talk about travel and we joke and have fun.

My wife, Carol-Ann and I are very fortunate to work on the 5 and 6 star cruise lines – the very “best of the best” -- and we often sail with interesting people: movie stars, former U.S. Presidents, politicians, sports figures, Kings, Queens and royalty! Maybe I’m wrong, but I think people like that tend to stay away from characters who are constantly “on” all the time! It’s just not my style!

However, I am certainly aware that we are on display as we walk around the ship and people observe us all the time, so we are conscious of how we are perceived by people.

ADB: The last time we met, Carol-Ann was telling me that she was in the process of putting together her own 10-minute act. I believe this was to provide a different flavor to the show and to also give you a breather to prepare for the next parts of the show? How’s that going?

HM: You’ve got a good memory! It’s really going well! I always wanted Carol-Ann to have more “meatier” routines in the show -- routines where she is the “star”, and since you and I last saw each other, we have added two extremely strong routines for her into the show and we have about three more on paper that we are working on. Ironically, none of them give me a chance to get offstage – but we’re working on it!

ADB: Good to know. Love to catch her performances sometime soon. Let’s talk a bit about your voice and presentation skills. You have been complimented many times on your flawless performances and your“ Game-Show” personality that you use as your main performing persona. You even have a routine that is called “You Bet Your Life” that’s a magic trick and a game show parody as well. Share with us a little background about that ...

HM: Well, you have to understand my style and theory of entertainment. I started performing in nightclubs as a magician when I was only 13 years old, so my stage personality started developing from a very early age! I didn’t want to invent a make-believe character and I didn’t want to copy someone else’s style. My character is the very best of who I am personally – but amplified!

When I was in college I studied theater at the Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University and one day in Theater History class I learned about “Comedia del Arte” performers and realized -- that is what I am!

A character in a “Comedia del Arte” play spends his entire lifetime studying just one character, and over the course of his lifetime he adds nuances that make the character better and better. Early on, I started out as a funny and “cocky” kid borderlining on being a “smart-ass” – which was pretty adorable when I was 15 or 16 years old, but then as I got older, it became a little caustic and I learned to tone down the cockiness and the character came across “warmer” – funny and likeable (...but I still borderline on being a smart-ass!).

On top of that, I’ve always had a distinctive voice – one that sounded like an announcer or game show host and I still often get kidded about it -- but it really is my voice,! So I developed

two routines in my show that capitalize on that – “You Bet Your Life” is one of them, and a “Borrowed Bill” routine is another.

ADB: You have continually received rave Press reviews and excellent Testimonials describing your shows as flexible, visual and memorable; obviously, these type of shows don't just happen overnight. They require meticulous planning and Creativity. How do you go about that process?

HM: I'll be the first to tell you that although I have some original routines in my shows, I am not an innovator. I consider myself a developer of material and I search for routines that not only appeal to me magically, but routines that allow me to present them either with a funny twist or in a way that that particular routine has never been presented before.

For some reason, I am also not as prolific as I would like to be – probably because I am on the road constantly. It might surprise you to know that some of my newest and strongest routines have taken me up to two years to develop before I was able to put them onstage! But still, I manage to get about 10-15 minutes of good material into the show each year. I have one routine that I started working on nearly 20 years ago, but I couldn't finish it – it was missing something and I couldn't figure out what. I've learned that sometimes a routine needs a “gestation” period to develop, so I put it aside and years later, suddenly -- out of nowhere -- the solution came to me... and it made me laugh! That's how I know I have a funny routine or concept – it makes me laugh, and if it makes me laugh, 99.9% of the time it will make the audience laugh too!

ADB: That's a good yardstick to be guided byA well-known showbiz remark is , “ Dying is easy; comedy is hard”. I've known you for a while and we have often socialized together. Always impeccably dressed, you have an elegant, sartorial image and yet you manage to incorporate what has been described as “side-splitting hysterical” comedy. How do you blend the two facets?

HM: “Hysterically Classy” – that's how I look at it!I've always had a funny streak to me and although I don't think I could do standup comedy without using magic, comedy is surprisingly easy for me – partly because of my distinctive voice and because of a quick wit that was developed when, as a kid working in nightclubs, patrons would try to heckle me and I would top them with a zinger!

I think that's what I like most about live entertainment – working with an audience and taking whatever they are giving me and “playing” with it. Heck, I've even learned to get laughs when an audience member does nothing!

Tony, you will recall, when you and I first met, I immediately noticed your stage clothes and I complimented you on it – it looked great, well-tailored, fitted you well and fitted your character perfectly! I bring that up because, how a Magical performer dresses on-stage, is important. It must fit the character.

I worked with a comedian once – a real pro who had an impeccable tuxedo. It was not flashy in any way, but you couldn't help noticing it because it was made so well and fitted him so perfectly. I asked him about it and he sent me to his tailor who made a tuxedo for me -- mohair with a satin collar. It took 4 fittings and cost me over \$1,500 – and that was in the mid 1980's when I think you could buy a house at that time for about \$40,000. It was a lot of money for a tux!

ADB: Yes, back then it was a small fortune for a tux. However, I totally agree with you Harry. Stage clothes are important. This topic, as you and many of my Magical friends know, is a “hobby-horse” of mine. I keep beating the drum for a Magician to look like a Magician. But let me not get started on that !!!! I'll put my soap-box away....for now !! Tell me about the time one of the Rat Pack commented on your look

HM: Ah! Joey Bishop you mean. When I worked with Joey at Bally's Park Place in Atlantic City, I would walk onstage and he would quip, “You look like you fell off a wedding cake!” But as I

wore that tuxedo, stars in Atlantic City and Vegas would come up to me and say, "Hey, where did you get that tux?"

ADB: Of course, your Stage clothes are different now.

HM: Yes, my stage outfits now are different. They are still classy and well made, but not your typical black tuxedos with a bowtie. They are a little more contemporary.

ADB: Your elegance goes back to a remark that was made to you at 18 in New York

HM: Yes Tony , that's right. When I was 18, I was working at the New York Playboy Club where in a two year period of time I presented over 1300 shows! During that time, I would wear a tuxedo onstage, and offstage I would wear what I thought was a nice suit. The General Manager of the club eventually came up to me and said, "Harry, you look like a tourist!", and he gave me tips on where to shop, what to look for and how to dress well.

I do a comedy act and I don't understand it when I work in comedy clubs why comedians feel that they have to dress "sloppy" to be funny, but that is the culture of comedy clubs. I think many of them would do better and go further if they looked better onstage. I'm not saying they should wear a tuxedo at a comedy club, but like Nevil Maskelyne taught in "The Performance of Magic" and Robert Houdin exemplified, I believe that you need to dress a "little better" than your audience. I unfortunately see the same thing in magic with magicians who style themselves after David Blaine and Chris Angel. I don't think David or Chris tried to forge a new magical dress code, I think their original concept was to be an ordinary person doing extraordinary things. To a degree, that works, but not onstage!

ADB: Absolutely, no argument from me on that. As I mentioned earlier, I don't want to get on my soap -box but I strongly feel that it is important for an audience to see us in the role of a Magician. Well, let's move on to your Corporate work. You do a lot of Corporate & Trade show work. Although, from time to time, you may use the same effects...the "audiences" are different. To be successful at both Stage, Cruise and Trade shows requires skills that are different...how do you make the adjustments ?

HM: I think because all of the routines that I present developed from my personality, they are universal and I am limited only by the environment. Cruise Ships and stage shows allow me to do the most since I can be more theatrical and can create a mood with lighting and music. But as the environment changes, a performer starts getting more limited when they present corporate entertainment in a ballroom or banquet hall, so in those venues, the material has to be strong enough to hold its own without the benefit of perfect lighting and sound.

You need to adjust your show to the venue -- I wouldn't try to do the Metamorphosis in a tiny room and I wouldn't swallow Razor Blades at a corporate dinner show -- they are just not appropriate routines for the environment.

Stage and cruise ships are similar theatrical environments, but Trade shows are a completely different story. They consist of very long days where your goal is to draw attention to the booth and to the product with a series of quick, fun, attention-getting shows.

ADB: How do you make the necessary decisions to put in or take out effects in a show and/or venue?

HM: Fortunately, the roots of everything I do from performing in nightclubs and casino to working on cruise ships and even trade show work started from my experiences as a close-up magician.

In High School and College, I spent about 6 years performing in restaurants on weekends going from table to table for six hours a day entertaining people.

It is there that I learned what makes people laugh, how people react to things, how to interact with people, how to use audience participation properly and effectively, how to select material and structure a performance -- and more! That's what I pull from when I work Trade Shows.

I honestly think that performing close-up magic in restaurants is something that every magician should do at some point in their career.

Jeff McBride has a wonderful expression called “flight-time” -- meaning time spent in front of an actual audience. Learning the rudiments of the tricks and being able to do the moves flawlessly is one thing, but being able to perform the routine over and over for a live audiences 50 times or more in one day is invaluable! That is where you learn how to take a trick and make it into a routine, and once you do that, you’ve learned how to be more than a magician – you’ve learned how to be an entertainer! On a cruise ship, it can be two weeks or more before you get to present that same show again. Unless you are performing two shows a night in a Las Vegas style production show, performing onstage is so sporadic that it takes so much longer to advance as an entertainer because you don’t have the luxury of “flight-time” that you can get by performing close-up magic.

ADB: At the risk of sounding repetitive, this is exactly what the greats like Eugene Burger & Jon Racherbaumer have been stating for decades. I don’t mean to condense their teachings but this is the fundamental question all Magicians need to ask , “ What do I want my magic to be?”. There are Tricksters of various degrees and then there are Magical Entertainers. Apart from what you’ve just said what would you add to point up & coming Magical Entertainers in the right direction?

HM: Simply this: Analyze your personality and use the strongest elements of it to establish your performing character. In that way, you will always be unique and will never be a “copy” of someone else. Keep performing and gaining that crucial “flight time” and keep a journal and do an honest assessment in writing after each of your shows adding ideas, lines and improvements so that you can make each performance better than the one before.

And here is my biggest tip...The easiest way to improve a show is by removing the weakest element. If you have ten tricks in your show and you removed the weakest routine, without adding anything else, you have just improved your show by 10 percent!

ADB: Harry, that is just great insight and excellent advice. As always, it has been great hanging out with you. I truly enjoy your company and thanks for taking the time to converse.

HM: Like-wise Tony. Always nice seeing you. You are very welcome. It has been a real pleasure.

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