



## **Anthony Darkstone Brook In Conversation With Tobias Beckwith**

Tobias Beckwith is an extremely erudite & remarkable man. Magician, Author, Philosopher, Lateral Thinker, Lecturer, Expert on Theatrical Arts and the Manager of the most Mystical & Influential Magical Entertainer in the business – Jeff McBride.

I've known Eugene Burger a goodly while. He and I arranged to have dinner in Vegas a few months ago. Eugene has many skills. One is creating the future. He brought along a few other people he thought it would be fun for me to meet. Dr. Larry Hass, Robert Neale and a Wizard called Tobias Beckwith.

A Wizard? Yes, and a very exceptional one, as will revealed during our conversation. Although, in relative terms, I have only known Tobias a short time , we have struck a chord of friendship that surpasses chronology.

To quote one of my favorite Poets and Mystics, Kahlil Gibran, “ And let there be no purpose in friendship save the deepening of the Spirit”.

Tobias and I delight in the Esoteric, the Mystical and our frequent visits to the realms beyond the obvious.

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**ADB:** Hello Tobias. Thank you for taking time from your busy schedule to chat a while. Let me begin by asking you about your friendship and indeed work association with Jeff McBride? Everyone on this Planet knows who Jeff is .....well, after Deep Space 9 maybe other Planets too!!! ...but let's converse about matters on this Planet ...you teamed up with Jeff some 20 years ago and apart from being his Manager, you also Produced many of his shows..... tell us a bit of how that all began ....

TB: Hi Tony. You are welcome. Always a pleasure conversing with you. Teaming up with Jeff started as you say back in 1986, when we started working on his first full evening show together. I became his Manager in 1988.

**ADB:** Over dinner in Vegas you told me that best move you made was leaving the world of Academia and moving into this world of showbiz, to be specific, Magic... obviously certain Universal laws were at work here, but from your personal perspective was the transformation an easy one or did it carry a feel of a leap into uncharted waters?

TB: At the time it was terrifying. I loved being a student, and then an instructor. The University atmosphere felt safe and easy. Facing the competitive world of New York theater was anything but..... I had real doubts about my abilities to compete on that level. Fortunately, they were soon dispelled, and I fell into work easily enough as Manager and associate producer for a number of projects. I had moved to New York ostensibly to finish up a Doctorate at NYU...but after 3 months working at The Fantasticks off-Broadway, I lost interest in academic theatre, and felt far more confident about my ability to work "in the real world." A few years later, when I started working with Jeff McBride, it was a bit of a dream come true, because in the world of magic I was able to use everything I'd been trained to do - directing, choreographing, designing set & lighting - in addition to the business management and production end of things.

I'm truly grateful to my time in the theatre, where I got to watch Hal Prince & Steven Sondheim put Sweeney Todd together, and Tom Jones, Word Baker and Harvey Schmidt revamp The Fantasticks for its 15th year anniversary. I'm delighted to have been able to rub elbows and work with many of the people who were personal heroes and role models when I was growing up -- but it was a relief when it was all over to be able to jump into a world where all my talents were valued, and which provided the opportunity to keep them all growing.

**ADB:** Seems like a logical progression given your background in Broadway Theater . You and I have chatted about Universal laws and it is truly Magical the way sometimes we are ushered into things and paths that we had never planned ...this applies to you in many ways does it not?

TB: : Yes it does. I've mentioned The Fantasticks & Sweeney Todd above. I was thrust into the world of management - the only part of theater I'd never studied -- one night when the former general manager for the show ran off with his new girl friend and the box office receipts to Arizona. The Producer offered me the job - I told him I had no experience, he told me it came with almost double the salary I was making in the box office, so I said yes...and proceeded to learn the job while doing it, by trying to organize the files, call up vendors to find out who they were and what we needed them for, calling Actor's Equity to ask what I was to do with all the blank forms I found...and on and on like that. Quite an adventure.

For Sweeney Todd I got to work as a Production Assistant for producers Richard Barr & Charles Woodward. Some of the "odd jobs" that fell to me were driving Angela Lansbury back and forth to the theatre, answering phones, and handling all the house seats for all the show's principals. This last was a real perk, because it meant I got to talk to Steve Sondheim, Hal Prince and the others almost daily.

Oh! Calcutta! was an even bigger learning experience, because, though the show was quite awful, Producer Norman Kean took a real liking to me and mentored me in the business of producing shows. He trusted me to help him negotiate all our contracts for licensing the show around the world, monitoring touring productions, computerizing our office (this was the early 80's and computers were a new thing on Broadway - we were the first theatre to sell tickets through Ticketmaster, which was a brand new company at that time. Norman would tell me: "You're going to make mistakes. I only ask that you make really big ones - and let me know the minute you realize its a mistake."

**ADB:** Those empirical experiences helped hone many of the skills you use today. Your main activity is your Company, Tobias Beckwith, Inc.- The Best in Magical Artists & Creations of which you are President. Tell us a bit about that and share with us some of your current & future objectives.....

TB: The core of my business is currently (and has been for a number of years) the personal & business management of Jeff McBride & Marco Tempest. An interesting pairing, as Jeff takes magic back to its roots and his magic is heavily steeped in ritual and tradition, while Marco is doing more, I think, to drive magic into the future than anyone else on the planet. He has currently developed two Augmented Reality magic effects that are real mind blowers - and had them ready to show and perform before anyone else in the magic world had ever even heard of Augmented reality. He loves the challenges of large corporate theatre productions because they force him to create new ways of communicating for each and every show. Jeff, on the other hand, likes to describe himself as "more high touch than high tech." I love working with both of them, because they both really keep me on my toes. Two of the brightest people I know - and radically different personalities.

Beyond the Management end of things, I've been working with up and coming mental magician and anthropologist Paul Draper. He was one of Jeff's students, and that's how we met. I got to direct the first version of his mental magic show, and have helped him focus all of his many different talents under the guise of a purveyor of mental mysteries. It's been fun...and he's yet another really bright and fascinating guy.

I've also enjoyed writing my book "Beyond Deception," and doing several workshops based on extending what I teach in the book. Students perform pieces for directorial feedback as part of the workshops, and then we do game-like exercises based on theatre games and some other things I've developed. These are to help them expand their abilities as performers (I taught acting at the U.of Pittsburgh for several years), and to develop their own creative instincts. We should really call them 'playshops' instead of 'workshops,' I think, since we all have so much fun.

Finally...and this is one of the things you and I have been discussing at length, I'm working on a book tentatively entitled "Wizards' Ways," all about things I've learned in just over 20 years of living and working with wizards. I use the term to mean more than just performing magicians - though certainly Jeff, Marco, and our friend Eugene Burger qualify as wizards.

I'm more interested in studying people who use little known and understood powers to change themselves, other people and the world around them.

These include shamans, medicine men & women, witches, warlocks -- and people like Albert Einstein, Steve Jobs and the guys who created Google. These people have all worked on their own minds and ways of thinking and being so that they could bring new and wonderful things into our world.

**ADB:** Yes. Exactly. New & wonderful things being brought to the world ...maybe not always new but always wonderful. You also do that with your writing . You have a well-deserved reputation as an Author. Your first book on Magic was entitled, "BEYOND DECEPTION – The Theory & Practice of Creating Original Magic." It elevated the Art and indeed took it beyond the usual barriers. Please share with us the motivation that spurred the inspiration & indeed, also a brief overview of its content .....

TB2 : "Beyond Deception" is the first book of a series dedicated to the idea that magic is more than deceiving people, and offering techniques and ideas that magicians can use to create magic that is unique to themselves, entertaining, and powerfully effective in moving their audiences emotionally.

My motivation was initially to bring some of the really powerful techniques I had learned from my own teachers in acting, dance, and directing for the theatre to performing magicians.

Many of us come to magic first because we want to know how the tricks are done. Later on we learn to love being able to entertain others by fooling them...but not that many of us move beyond that into the realm of what I think of real magic. That's the ability to give our audience real magical experiences, with the same kind of emotional and intellectual depth as Broadway

theatre or the opera, or of great films and novels. I'm fortunate to work with a few magicians who DO understand this, and I'd really like to see more of them. The books and workshops are an effort to move more and more magicians into that direction.

**ADB:** You were kind enough to share with me that you are now working on another book about Wizards. The word conjures up various interpretations. You & I discussed this at some length. It is not just semantics, fictional or Druidic is it?

TB: No Tony, it is not just semantics. My use of the word "Wizard." I suppose it's mostly a personal preference and chosen partly because in the popular culture of today, it has some meaning, due to not only the Merlin / Druidic stories, but also the more recent Lord of the Rings and Harry Potter. I like it that it includes the word "wise," and so refers to wise men and women. However...it's intended to include quite a range of types: good & bad, sorcerers, seers, tricksters, priests, sages, many artists, inventors, etc. A kind of catch-all for those who use arcane knowledge and powers to be more effective in the world.

I have, for want of a better word, "ulterior" motives for the book: I look at it as a way to pique the interests of many who may not have considered that a wizard could be a real life, flesh and blood person, rather than a fictional character. I strongly believe that our world today needs more of us to begin taking on the responsibilities of real wizards. And so, the work done by real wizards becomes more important every day.

On a more personal level, I'd love the book to be the key to unlock certain aspects of my personality. I'd like to begin working as a speaker/ performer myself, both teaching and entertaining groups by performing my own (not yet created) Way of the Wizard talk/ show. It's the part of that process I find I can work on right now. An hour here, two hours there...with luck it will be roughly complete towards the end of March – all while I'm continuing to work to keep my clients busy and well-fed.

**ADB:** I for one and I am quite certain, others too, eagerly look forward to its publication. I am honored and flattered that you referred to me recently as a true Wizard. You were kind enough to make me privy to some of your thinking. Yes, it will be in the book, but meanwhile, can I persuade you to publicly share a pre-view of some of your thoughts?

TB: Well ..sure, some of the things on my mind that I can share in a sort of stream of conscious way are as follows :- Although I defined it a few moments ago, my current definition of what is a wizard is somewhat in flux. It's one of those words that everyone seems to have their own definition for.

Some ceremonial magicians are offended that I'd ever consider a trickster magician a wizard - they have their own narrower definition, and have worked very hard to make themselves fit that definition.

My definition is a bit wider, and would include people like Paramahansa Yogananda, and as I have already mentioned, Steve Jobs, and Albert Einstein. The closest I can come now to anything succinct in the way of defining what a real wizard is would be something like this: "A wizard is someone who accomplishes extraordinary things by unseen and often seeming unconnected actions."

I don't think all wizards are good. I don't think all wizards are bad. Wizards are wizards. Good ones. Bad ones. Adolf Hitler was a wizard of sorts. On the other hand, so was Mohandas Gandhi. So I suspect I'll upset a few folks who think of Dumbledore as the quintessential wizard and representative of good. I see it more like the idea of a king (who often had their own wizards) - it defines a role and way of wielding power - not the ultimate value of how that power is used.

**ADB:** Yes indeed. The power. The power to affect change, sometimes good, sometimes bad. Tobias, you are, with your remarkable ability, (i.e power) going beyond platitudes and the obvious, thus making people re-define their acceptance not only of perception but also the very process by which they perceive.

TB: Yes. That's it; exactly right. That is why the working title, which may well be its final title, is tentatively called "Wizards Ways." I realized that, as someone who has spent his entire career working in the performing arts and the past 20 years almost exclusively with magical performers, and as someone always fascinated by the link between performance, magic & the occult (which means "hidden"), I've learned a few things that may be of great use to people who are not primarily performers. The book is an attempt to create an entertaining way of getting some of this information across, and inspiring others to take it up and use it to transform the world in ways it needs to be transformed.

**ADB:** You and I have talked about this before, I certainly empathize with your view. It is too easy for some to refer to us as iconoclastic but my contention is that by being iconoclastic, we can stimulate thought and hence creativity and ultimately – much needed change...

TB: Yes Tony. Everything has to be tested and to some extent pulled apart. The process so far has been a little humbling – I keep discovering I know less than I thought I did and that in itself is exciting. I discover that there are levels upon levels of depth to lots of subjects I thought I know all about.

I've been fortunate to have many, many people share their own "wizard" stories with me, and a few friends who don't mind pulling apart everything I've written and questioning me on it -- which makes me think about it all, clarifying my thoughts more.

**ADB:** Yes. Clarity of thought. This is the ultimate goal of The Wizard. You told me that your book does not just put forth theory but actually carries examples of how to be effective as a Wizard.

TB: Yes. It contains Teaching Techniques. Part of my intention and purpose for writing this book is to provide readers with new tools they can use to transform themselves and their communities -- so once they've read a story where a wizard uses a particular power, I'll be teaching them how they can develop and use that power themselves.

A simple example that magicians will understand is the use of mnemonics to aid our memory, and several examples of how this can be used to amazing effect.

There are some amazing techniques out there that a wizard can use to influence others. Psychological levers like the use of reciprocity, priming and what we now call NLP are examples.

There are many methods for inducing trance, or entering into meditative states that allow us to communicate with our inner selves in ways that achieve amazing results. I'll be exploring some of these in the book and telling stories of some practical uses for them.

**ADB:** Stories. The telling of tales. Parables. What a great spell the power, cadence and very sound of words can have. Magical, real magic!

TB: I believe the best way to engage any kind of an audience is through stories. Dry prose explanations (like this one) are interesting if they spark a lively discussion - but it's hard to make them interesting for a reader, and easy for what they say to be misconstrued and not understood. Because of that, I'm trying to do as much of the book as possible as a series of stories.

Some of the stories will be the stories of real people. I'm fortunate to have several friends I would consider to be real wizards, and the book will include some stories about them.

In addition, I'll be pursuing some remarkable people I know of who are unquestionable real wizards. Steve Jobs, Dr. Hew Len are two that come to mind immediately.

There will be other stories that are pure fiction, designed to demonstrate a particular wizard power or way of learning things. I'm having fun with these.

**ADB:** Fun. That's another key word. I think you rather liked my phrase, "Wizards love the mischief of laughter". By that I mean a good thing ..spreading joyous and positive things. Creating fun & laughter and sharing it is a very "Wizardry" thing to do ..... The art of magic is in the entertainment, it can be fun it can be serious but whatever it is, it must convey meaning or the performance is dry ..don't you agree?

TB: Yes Tony. I do. Jeff and others like him convey this in their performances. Stories are not just words. It is also movement. If you think about it, art is all about making choices. What story will I tell? What characters are in the story? What do they sound like? What will they wear? Will I mention the weather / setting / other characters in telling the story? Will my props be given characters? How fast or slow will I talk / move etc.? Will this be better with music in the background? If so, what music...the choices are endless. At the risk of repeating myself, Art is about making choices. Once you're aware of all the choices to be made, you can start making them...and thus building your own unique creation.

**ADB:** Unique Creation . Creativity. Now there's a word that is often misinterpreted. I know great emphasis is placed on being Creative but often people just really don't know what it really means or worse yet , how to start the process.... Share some of your thinking on this please .....

TB: How very true. I cannot summarize all my teachings on this but let me share some thoughts of this most important aspect.

I believe everyone is naturally creative. What child doesn't role play - whether it's playing cowboys and Indians, Knights in shining armor, or little girls having tea parties with their dolls?

What's more, we each essentially create our entire universe of experience at every moment - built on a relatively thin stream of data coming to us through the five senses. So everyone IS creative. We just need some tools to jump-start our creative process. That's what the book offers.

**ADB:** Jump-starting the process..cool! how does that work?

TB: There are so many techniques, and volume one really just scratches the surface. Things like creating a matrix with columns for like items: tricks you want to perform, favorite fictional characters, favorite hobbies outside magic, songs you love or hate, etc. Students fill the matrix with their own personal favorite things, and then we mix and match across columns. One student might come up with doing Card Warp as Arnold Schwarzenegger to Rap music while telling the story of the John & Yoko. Can you see that? It's amazing some of the things people come up with.

There are a lot of mind/ body exercises, also designed to help performers find new things in their performances. Just try taking a piece you already perform and trying it in different extreme ways. You might shout it once at the top of your lungs. Another time you might do it super slow motion, or super fast motion...I think you get the idea. If you actually try these things, you'll be amazed at the things you discover.

**ADB:** Can I term it as finding the Wizard within??? ....

TB: Yes absolutely, as I said before we are all Creative. One of the things I like to teach in my workshops - both the ones on creativity and the ones on how to build a strong business as a magician - is the power of having a strong purpose. I remember reading a book by Peter Brook when I was a student. I think it was "The Empty Space," on different varieties of theatrical experience.

One of his main points was that any true work of art starts with a purpose.

If you don't know what the show you're building is for, you have no basis for making any of the other decisions you must make when putting that show together. Once you DO have a purpose, then lots of the other choices just fall into place.

**ADB:** This applies to the business side of the show as well, doesn't it?

TB: Yes. This is true for a business, as well. Here's an example: If I'm a magician who wants to use his magic to help keep kids off drugs -- that's a pretty clear purpose. It will inform all of my decisions both about my show and about my business overall. I know who the show is for - kids at risk of becoming involved with drugs. I know the kind of things that those kids relate to - the kinds of dangers they might face that would lead them into the world of doing drugs. And so, I can make some pretty easy decisions about what kind to performance will get their attention. What kind of costume / character I might want to present them so they'll listen to me. What kind of music I'll have in the show.

I also know that I have to be able to sell the show to guidance counselors, youth group leaders and people like that...so I know that my marketing materials have to be.

I probably even know the kind of venues I'll play, and the kind of budget that might be available to pay me for my show...so I have the information I need to make a lot of the decisions that will make my business a success. All because I made one decision about the purpose for this show.

**ADB:** Will you have some effects in the book?

TB: Yes, there will be some magic tricks taught. They won't be there just for 'entertaining your friends," though. Each one taught will be used to demonstrate a wizard's principal - e.g. how our innate ability to recognize patterns allows us to be deceived -- and then a particular use will be demonstrated for that trick. For example, one might have a friend who is feeling under the weather and depressed. One might want to help this friend shift their outlook, and to do so one might take an ugly piece of stone or dirt and transform it into a crystal heart, which they would give to their friend - thus brightening their day and helping them forget about their troubles.

**ADB:** Wonderful. In the full and entire meaning of the word. Now that's what I call real magic. Tobias , you have given us much to ponder upon and indeed stimulated our thought process as well. As I said before, I am eagerly looking forward to the book. Your thoughts and insights are much appreciated and it was a delight having you as a Guest.

TB: Thank you Tony. Always a pleasure conversing with you.

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