



## **Anthony Darkstone Brook In Conversation With Valerie**

During the course of my duties as the Competitors Host at FISM 2000 I met a lot, and I mean a lot of magicians. Amongst the very best were Valerie and her husband Gilles. Tempus Fugit! That was over a decade ago. Since then, we have become good family friends. We have kept in touch and often hung out together at magic conventions in various parts of Europe and the US. Over the years, we shared a great many fun times together but one of the more memorable ones was in New Orleans with our mutual friend and FISM Grand Prix winner Norbert Ferré.

Valerie is a very accomplished magical performer and a very well respected International Entertainer. She has accumulated an impressive list of International awards, which also include such coveted ones as The Silver Wand in Monte Carlo and The Grand Prix Sarmoti in Las Vegas.

I personally love the way her mind works as I greatly admire her capacity for lateral thinking. She is the originator and The Queen of many astonishing quick-change effects and ideas.

Although he is a skilled Magician in his own right, her husband Gilles remains in the background but is continuously hard at work both on and off stage with the myriad of tasks and logistics that go a long way towards her incredible and delightful performances.



**ADB** : Bonjour Valerie. Thank-you for taking the time to converse a while. It has been a while since we have had an opportunity to converse.

**V** : Bonjour Tony. It is always a great pleasure to spend time with you. Yes, indeed. It has been a while; although I know that you and Gilles speak to each other quite often and he keeps you up to date on all our news.

**ADB** : Yes that's right ; he and I try to make time to keep in touch. I love his sense of humor and we are always kidding each other. Anyway, let's get back to you. You live in Paris, France and almost everyone refers to you as the Lady magician from France. That is true... but you actually got started in Switzerland. Share some of those early years with us...

**V** : Well, this may come as a surprise to many people but when I was a little girl I didn't have the usual dreams that most little girls have... mine was a bit unusual... I wanted to become a Master Carpenter & Cabinet Builder. I loved tools and had more fun spending time in hardware stores than in fashion stores. I just loved to fix things and build things. Little did I know then that those skills would become so useful to me when it came to creating my own props.

**ADB** : I heard from someone (and I won't say who) 😊 that even today you would rather get a new electric tool than a bouquet of roses !!!!

**V** : Hmmm ! I wonder who told you that 😊... Well, in a way that is true... I have a lot of tools in my workshop but I still enjoy browsing in hardware stores... and oh ! By the way, I am also a very feminine lady and am also happy to receive a bouquet of roses !!!

**ADB** : Yes indeed, you are a very feminine lady as anyone who has seen you both on and off stage can testify... and I shall consider it my duty to inform you know who 😊 that more bouquets of roses are in order 😊... Speaking of roses and bouquets... I know that you & Gilles have been together for many years and my family and I, together with our other mutual friends, know how devoted you are to each other and that you both have a wonderful relationship. A very Magical relationship in every sense of the word. As I said, you two have been together for a long while but you only decided to formalize your relationship a few years back. I know that day in April 2004 was very special to both of you. It was a great day. Share some of that day with us...

**V** : Yes it was very special and not just because it was our wedding day. It was special because of all the wonderful people that were there that day. Also the location. It was very special. ....the "Musée de la Magie" of Georges Proust located in the oldest part of Paris. It's kind of a tiny place for a party but we managed to have a seated dinner for some 66 guests made up of family and friends.

Gilles's very best friend Christian Fechner and Tommy Wonder were there. It's so wonderful to recall them coming especially for us knowing they were already fighting against their terrible illnesses. Gaetan Bloom, Jean Merlin, Bernard Bilis, Veronique Ross, Henri Mayol, Pierre Mayer and many other dear magician friends.

What a cast! But for once, we didn't want any "magic" at the tables. We didn't want to hear "what about showing us a trick ?". The great thing of that evening was the "Casino time" with a real big Roulette table and two Blackjack tables where everyone has had a great time. Yes Tony; as you said , a very special and memorable day.

**ADB** : Speaking of special days, as I mentioned in my introduction, you have won many prestigious awards.

**V** : Yes Tony, I am very pleased and honored to say that I have. When I started, I wanted to gain a reputation as a magician, I wanted that to happen quickly and so I thought it would be best to compete in contests. For more than 10 years, I participated to most of contests in Europe, and of course mostly in Switzerland and France. Some of them are : 1996 & 1998, 1<sup>st</sup> prize French Contest. 1999, Silver Wand in Monte Carlo and 1<sup>st</sup> prize Swiss Anneaux Magiques.

**ADB** : Of course, they are all great awards and very special to you but I remember you telling me that receiving the Sarmoti in Vegas was very thrilling. Please share some of that moment with us...

**V** : Well, Tony as you know it is a very rare honor and privilege to be even considered for the Sarmoti, let alone be awarded it... all my awards, as you have rightly said, are special but the Sarmoti has a significance because it is from Las Vegas. I know that you and I have many friends there and it is a very special place with its own Magical feeling. To be presented with such an award in such a place and by two Las Vegas legends is just, quite frankly, extremely overwhelming.

So thank you for asking I shall be pleased to share with you some of my memories of that day. Can you imagine me been selected to perform my act in 2001... Such a fantastic day, and then being awarded. Then back-stage being congratulated by Siegfried & Roy, Penn & Teller, Lance Burton, Lynette Chappell, Gay Blackstone, Irene Larsen, Just totally Wow!..... like in a dream. Norbert Ferré was there too and got the Creativity Award. He is such a great artist.

**ADB** : Yes. He most certainly is..... I know . We have all shared some fun times together. But there's a funny story about driving and the FISM Grand Prix....

**V** : Ah ! Yes! very funny y... July 2003, coming from Marseille where he lives, he stayed at my house before driving together to FISM in Holland. On the way there , I told him "Careful, if you don't become World Champion and get the Grand Prix, I am not driving you back. You get your own car and chauffeur!" Well as you know he won The Grand Prix ...and after a lot of good-natured kidding ...and yes before you ask, we did drive him back !

**ADB** : He! He! Going back to the Sarmoti Award in Vegas. I had a wonderful conversation over lunch one day with my dear pal Walter Blaney about his winning the award as well. Just as soon as you enter his home you can't miss it. It's right there on the wall. When I hosted my Talk Show at the TAOM 2008 in Fort Worth he and I talked about that.

So in a way, I can understand how important that the Sarmoti award is to those of you who have been awarded it. Anyway, changing the subject slightly, do you remember that at the time you told me that that you were not even sure about going to Vegas... funny how things turn out... or is it Magic?

**V** : Yes I remember. And yes, it is funny how things turn out and it is magic. I want to say right here and now how very honored and privileged I feel being a recipient of this prestigious award. It is even more special today because of the fact that Siegfried & Roy being heavily associated with that award. We all know of the tragedy, and so as the award won't be presented anymore... well, not like it used to be... it makes me very grateful and honored that I have one. I am also very happy that I am a lady magician in an area of show-business that is generally not very full of lady magicians. We have to work sometimes 100% harder to be successful in Magic. So the award has an even deeper meaning. In my home also, it's right there on the wall in a special place..

**ADB** : Yes Indeed a wonderful achievement. Your remark about Lady Magicians. That is very true. However, I am delighted to say that all of that is changing... a bit too slowly... but it is changing... thanks to your efforts and indeed the efforts of all my lady Magician friends. Back in the day, the wonderful Celeste Evans opened many doors and over the last decade, ladies such as you, Ariann Black, Luna Shimada, Juliana Chen... well there's a lot of great names... I can't name them all but all of you have been a tremendous inspiration to many of today's lady magicians and the young ones who follow.

**V** : Yes Tony. I like to think that I have in a small way helped to contribute towards pushing back the barriers so that young girls can aspire towards becoming world class magicians... or even taking up Magic as a hobby. This is the reason I travel the world presenting my lecture.

**ADB** : I'm glad you brought that up. I was going to ask you about the lecture. So now is as good a time as any... so let's talk a bit about that... Everywhere you have given that lecture you have received rave reviews. Tom Vorjohan, writing in The Linking Ring, described you as a "crowd stunner"... he went on to praise you highly and appreciated your work ; he added : "it was obvious that she had studied and made personal method changes to the art of costume changes".

After your lecture in Blackpool in 2008, comments in Genii were :- " Unbelievable know how on the subject... Everything you could want to know and more. A highlight of the day". So Valerie , we are all ears, tell us everything about this lecture of yours. How it came about and, of course, without revealing any of the secrets, tell us what you demonstrate in your lecture and why every Magician should attend... even if they are not interested in "quick-change".

**V** : Oh my ! Tony, that might just take too long...

**ADB** : No, No , s'il vous plait, please take all the time you need. Tell us how it got started, how you developed the idea, well... everything. I'm asking because I happen to personally think that your lecture is not just about the secrets of Quick-Change but a Master Class in the performance of Magic. I am quite happy to state publicly that every Magic Club should experience your 60 minutes of the pure joy of knowledgeable Magic... so, now over to you...we are anxious to hear.

**V** : Well, as you say Tony, my lecture is not just about Quick-Change, although as you know it does focus quite a bit on many of the secrets behind quick-change. It is not just theory, I actually show items from my Award winning act. I demonstrate everything not only from the audience perspective but more importantly how it looks and functions from a "back-stage " perspective. My lecture is more or less 3 hours for Magic Clubs and an hour at Main Conventions

**ADB** : Valerie, please excuse me for interrupting you but I need to ask you if the lecture is aimed at just those who are interested in performing & learning about Quick-Change ?

**V** : Actually Tony, I am glad you asked that because it is something that people may think. The answer is No; most definitely not ! My lecture focuses on Quick-Change but I actually show how beneficial it can be to incorporate an element of Quick-Change into any magic act. This was my main reason for putting together a lecture of this nature.

Quite often, after my lecture, many magicians come up to me and say that although they were not really interested in Quick-Change they attended anyway out of curiosity but that they happy came because they also unexpectedly learnt a great deal as a result.

There is so much available nowadays on Quick-Change and not all of is relevant to producing or performing good magic. Just changing one dress for another or one tie for another can technically be called Quick-Change but the question we need to ask is if it really magical from an audience's perspective... I think not. Do you recall we had quite a few conversations about this and the Entertainment value of Magic ?

**ADB** : Yes indeed I do ! My own performances, writings and lectures emphasize this point. As I have often said : " Anyone can do a trick but not everyone can create Magic". So absolutely and completely I agree with you and would go as far as to say that your lecture not only demonstrates this but teaches participants how to achieve it in a very practical way. But please continue. Tell us how the idea of your lecture got started and how you decided what to include in the lecture content...

**V** : Christian Fechner and Gilles have been friends for more than 40 years... I first met Christian in 1999. He helped me a lot to finalize my act I performed at FISM 2000. He is the one who first suggested to me that I should have my own lecture on Quick Change. He said : "If you don't do it, someone else will do it. So, be the first one, you have so much to say and share your experience with magicians." I listened to him, and I am pleased that the lecture

has enjoyed a great deal of success for quite a few years . Christian was such a bright man, we miss him. Thanks Christian.

**ADB** : What an interesting way to put together a lecture. As you know this is a free-flowing conversation without a script and so we weave our way in and out of different topics... so, let me take you back to the early days. I mean the really early days when you were starting out and a chance happening got you into seriously thinking about performing Magic...

**V** : Tony, I think you mean back in Geneva when I fixed an illusion box. Well, I used to follow around a friend who performed illusions and was always curious as to how they worked. He never revealed the secrets. However, one day just before a show an illusion box broke. As chance, luck, fate, well whatever you want to call it, I was there and offered to repair it right away. My friend was quite taken aback as he didn't know about my handywoman skills !!! Well, the show must go on and after much hesitation on his part, he reluctantly agreed. It took a few minutes but I fixed it.

After that, it was relatively easy for me to figure out the workings of the other props. I became a sort of PropMaster !!! Soon afterwards, he took me to meet the members of The Geneva Magic Club. The President at that time was Jean Garance.

Apart from my love affair with tools and all kinds of handy-work including carpet laying and upholstery, I had a passion for the stage and all things theatrical. I was part of an amateur theater group. I also sang in a Rock Group.

So from the moment I "discovered" Magic , I thought Wow ! Why not put all my experience and skills together and perform Magic. And so Voila ! From then until now, all that I do is merge my passions and create Magic.

**ADB** : Wonderful! How very fortunate that you were able to fuse all those elements together to create unique Magical Entertainment.

**V** : Yes Tony, I am indeed fortunate.

**ADB** : You spoke earlier about the Magic Club in Geneva. Tell us a little bit about your "audition" for the Club.

**V** : Back then as you said Tony, a person had to audition before being accepted as a Member of the Club. I had to give a mini-performance and so I "invented" some unusual effects using some unusual items as props. As I didn't know very much about existing magic effects or the secret methodology I actually made everything from scratch and truly invented my effects. It was only later that I found out that similar effects already existed.

**ADB** : Yes, I know what you mean. Many of us have had similar experiences. As most of us know, because Lennart Green didn't have any contact with the world of Magic or other Magicians for many years, he actually came up with interesting ideas and moves. So there is a lot to be said in favor of working in a kind of non- conventional unknowing environment on one's own. It is a great spur to creativity. In my view, I really think it doesn't matter if we come up with something that is already in existence ; what is of paramount importance is that we came up with it and actually thought of a way of doing it and thus it doesn't matter if someone else had thought of it before. This is what you did right ?

**V** : Yes Tony. Very much so. I used ping-pong balls that I painted. I cut them and made shells. I used a plastic bucket that I adapted. I used a set of sugar tongs to produce a blooming flower at my fingertips. Isolation tubes for electrical wiring were painted and stacked for my rendering of what I discovered later was known as " Rollers Excelsior" !!!!!

Oh ! Mon Dieu ! If only I knew how much easier it would have been just going out and buying the already made props !!! ☺ ☺ But seriously Tony, knowing what I know now, I still, I suppose, would not have traded that experience. It was very hard work but it was also a

useful lesson and I learnt many things that would stand me in good stead for the rest of my professional life.

**ADB :** In my introduction I referred to you as a Lateral Thinker. As I happen to be very fond of Lateral Thinking myself, I have come to admire and respect all those who possess this ability. It is also more than that. On another level, it is an acquired skill. In English we have a saying, "Necessity is the Mother of invention".

**V :** Yes Tony. I think that very much applies to me. There was so much I didn't know and so I had to think of ways to meet my needs. I took whatever experience and knowledge I had from my other areas and adapted them to create the Magic I needed. Nowadays, it is a very natural process with me. I just find ways to come up with the results I need. My extensive background with tools, upholstery, furniture repair, woodworking, fabric etc....., etc..., just automatically comes into play.

**ADB :** Would I be right in saying that it helped lead you to your raincoat vanish ?

**V :** Absolutely, I can tell you that because of that background, my signature piece of vanishing my raincoat came about. It is obvious when you know how it is done, but please follow my sequence of logic. I come on in a raincoat and umbrella and the raincoat has to vanish in a blink of an eye. But where ? And how ?

Well, Tony, you know how and so do those who have attended my lecture and so you will see that the solution is the result of my combination of lateral thinking and background. Having said that I can tell you that it took many years to perfect the effect and to reach the standard that it is today. Well, you know how the creative process works. A lot of trial and error and of course as often happens in Magic, just when you think you got it another idea comes to mind to develop things further.

Then again we have what I suppose we can call lucky accidents. We are busy doing one thing and by chance something else happens and a completely new idea comes about.

**ADB :** Yes indeed. The method you use is pure genius. I was totally blown away when I saw you do it for the first time... and I was in the wings !!!!! I love all your work but for me the absolute highlight is your levitation... totally original and of course pure genius again in the way you constructed the prop. I am very privileged that you kindly shared the secret with me. Because I know the secret, it actually increases my admiration for the entire illusion. You may remember, I wrote an article way back entitled "The French Girl's Legs" .

**V :** Thank you Tony. You are very kind. And yes thank you for that article. I enjoyed it very much. And yes, as I was saying earlier, the whole "Legs" illusion idea came about because I was working on some sewing in front of a mirror and accidentally pricked myself with the needle, my leg shot up, I saw the reflection and Voila ! a new idea was born.

**ADB :** You are very welcome. I enjoyed writing that article. I have been privileged to know some great illusion builders in my time and I have to tell you, in fact I already have a while back, well... never mind... it is worth saying again... ☺ the methodology and concept is that you use for the umbrella and the "legs"... well, quite frankly... is pure genius. And I am pleased to say that many of the more knowledgeable Magicians also agree with me about your work.

As you know, last year, we sadly lost a good friend of ours, Ali Bongo. He and I often chatted about different aspects of Magic. The last time I saw him we were in Scotland together and over breakfast with Shirley Ray (Past President of The IBM British Ring 25) and Pat Page ( also sadly, he too has passed) we spent a long while listening to him talk full of admiration for you and your prop making skills. High praise indeed from one such as him.

**V :** Yes dear Ali was a very kind and gracious man. We who knew him will miss him greatly. You know we were with him when he first took ill in Paris. A wonderful man.

**ADB** : Yes he was. A sad loss. Let's turn to another mutual friend, Norbert Ferré. Do you recall the fun time we all had in New Orleans?

**V** : Yes indeed I do. You, Norbert, Gilles, me, your wife and son. I still smile when I recall dear Norbert finding his shrimp too spicy and you squirting lemon juice all over his plate.

**ADB** : Yes it was after the S.A.M convention at the Fairmont Hotel. We were at a party at Gary & Fay Hughes house. That's a story for another time. Afterwards, we all decided to all head out to dinner. On the way back, we stopped at a couple of bars and at one in particular Norbert started an impromptu act with a lit cigarette which blew the bartender away. You then joined in with some amazing Close-Up card Magic. My son, Gilles and I followed. That was an amazing time and no one in the bar knew who we were and they got a wonderful show from World Class talent for FREE! Like I said your Close-Up Magic was amazing!

**V** : I remember that well. It was a very wonderful evening. I actually love performing Close-Up Magic but mostly everyone knows me for my stage work. But, I am happy to tell you that I equally comfortable performing intimate Close –Up Magic as I am on stage. Nowadays, how do you say it ? ! “ A gig's a gig!” We all have to work twice..hmmm ! may be three times as hard doing different kinds of Magic.

**ADB** : Yes that's true. You have traveled pretty much everywhere and head-lined at most of the major conventions. One in particular in India involved you using your legs in a different way, running from snakes !!! Share some of that story with us ....

**V** : Well, Tony as you say I was booked for a Convention in Trivendrum, South India. The magic there by Indian magicians was acceptable but the most amazing Magic came from a very old Street magician. All 500 participants were outside, sitting on the ground. Of course, as the only European, blond woman, in pants there, they asked me to come and sit in the very middle of the circle. Then he started the show. The Great Street magician started making all manner of things appear very close to me, from his mouth, real snakes, scorpions and so on; I was so scared, I had to run away, so everybody was laughing... except me!!!!.

Another amusing story. During the Indian convention, I said that I'd like to see some working elephants as I had seen on TV in a program about working elephants in the forests. They said they would take me. I think it must have been a language misunderstanding. After an hour's drive we ended up at a local zoo! There was a poor lonely solitary elephant. I was embarrassed, but to be polite I said, “Oh ! that's an elephant ! It's so big !”... I suppose they must have thought ..What a dumb blonde Swiss girl!!!!

**ADB** : That's funny! But also very scary I bet. The scorpions and snakes I mean ..not the elephant!!! Like I said, you have performed pretty much all over the world and at Major Conventions and in Vegas and at The Castle. Recently, as you know, I was talking to another good mutual friend of ours, Norm Nielsen and he told me that he has done with traveling and likes the comfort of his home. Do you see yourself doing more traveling because of the lectures or are you doing less ?

**V** : Gilles and I enjoy the comfort of our own home in Paris and it is true we have done a lot of traveling in the past; Europe and the USA. In 2005, the IBM convention in Reno act + lecture, what a great time. And then the Magic Castle for a week, act + lecture, what a beautiful memory and even performing one week in Kevin James' show. I have also performed in India as said, China many times & in Japan where I, two years ago did shows and 26 lectures all around the country, wonderful time. We are still quite happy to travel to wherever we are invited. I am especially interested in doing more lectures and already have some dates lined up in the US for later this year. If anyone is interested, and our schedule permits, please contact Gilles who handles the schedules and I will be very pleased to lecture for any Club or Convention that would invite us.

**ADB** : I've already mentioned your lateral thinking abilities. Your original one-person Sub-Trunk effect, your unique “back to the audience” manipulation effects and so much more

makes your performances quite compelling to watch and of course, quite naturally very Entertaining. I was personally delighted when you shared some unique ideas with Dan Garret & myself when we Hosted "World Class Magic". It was so very nice to see an effect designed specifically for Lady Magicians. A wonderful example of your original thinking. Do you have any ideas that you are working on at present that you will debut shortly ? I heard somewhere that there a Color Changing Glove effect in process.

**V :** It's already on the market. I came out with that idea some years ago in my precedent act. It featured Color changing gloves and now I demonstrate them in my lecture along with many new ideas that use my special magnets made especially for me as they have to be sewn. That's why even close-up magicians can take ideas from my lecture.

**ADB :** Besides your act and lecture, what else do you do if you have time left (magically speaking of course) ?

**V :** I have been asked to work and make special quick-change for theater plays, musical comedies, movies, the chorus of well known singer, circus new magic acts, etc... I still have a lot to do, even working on a new act and a new lecture that should be ready for next October.

**ADB :** What do you think of this new type of quick-change ? I am thinking of those dancing couples...

**V :** In my opinion, the Duo Sudarchikov (the "parents" of Quick-Change), act created in 1950, has been the very best of its kind. Their way of dancing and "quick-changing" was fantastic. To-day, especially, dancers from Eastern countries, want to compete to show as many different costumes they can change... I personally don't see where the Magic is in that . For me the only Quick Change Artist to-day is my close friend Arturo Brachetti. Such an Artist!

For me, a quick-change has to be a surprise for the audience; when hoops are laying all along a stage, and picked up to effect a change, I don't see the element of surprise there, nothing magical. The audience is expecting it!  
The only thing they don't know is what the color of the next dress will be . Technically, it is a quick -change but I repeat, it is not a surprise and therefore not magical.

**ADB :** As we come near to the end of our conversation, I must ask you to please share some words of advice to all up & coming Magicians and in particular any words of encouragement to young Lady Magicians.

**V :** Nothing particular except that to succeed at anything requires dedication, discipline and lots of hard work. If any young lady Magician wants some advice, I'll be glad to help and share my some 25 years of experience.

**ADB :** Merci, Valerie. As always, a very great pleasure. Thank you so very much for all that you do.

**V :** Tony, you are very welcome. The pleasure is all mine and please know that Gilles & I always have a special bottle of Bordeaux ready & waiting for you.

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