



OFF THE CUFF



JAM ES EXLEY

MAGIC FUSS

Ben Seidman's Sleight of Hand

BY NICK OLIG

With a beguiling knack for sleight of hand, Ben Seidman has spent years honing the craft of magic. He arrived on his self-described "unusual career path" in his early 20s and makes his living enchanting fans at colleges, theaters, on cruise ships and on the Travel Channel's *Magic Outlaws*.

What inspired you to become a magician?

When I was child something impossible happened. A strange man pulled a coin out of my mother's ear. That might sound overly simplistic but it had a profound effect on me. I didn't know what that feeling was, but I knew I wanted more of it.

How important is it to come up with innovative tricks you can call your own?

Well, people like cover bands, and there's nothing wrong with that. But I never want to be remembered as something like a cover band. There's a big difference between doing a trick and creating a moment of magic. Sharing a real moment of magic has heart, so the content must come from within. Recently a girl approached me and said she cried three times during my performance because she was so moved. The three moments she spoke of took years to dream up and bring to life. I can only imagine that my love of sharing these specific pieces came through.

It's understood that the physical elements of magic shouldn't be outlined to the layperson, but can you explain the psychological elements that make magic exciting?

There are great articles that detail the brain's response to magic and hallucinations. When you see something that you intellectually understand is impossible, your response to that stimulus is a unique kind of pleasure. A good magic routine brings with it a narrative that can pull you in just as a good book or movie would.

In your personal life, is it sometimes challenging to earn someone's trust since you're so deft at deceiving others?

Fortunately, not too often—if so, let's just call it an occupational hazard. Deceiving people is integral to my job, but it's in a very specific context. Once I put the microphone back in the stand and walk off the stage, it all turns off like a light switch. Deceiving a lot of intelligent adults outside of a performance would feel incredibly disingenuous. That's not how I want to live my life. I try to use my powers for good and let people make up their own minds.

On the pop-culture front, the character G.O.B. from the series "Arrested Development" is a vain and hapless magician. Do magicians typically have a sense of humor about these parodies?

"Arrested Development" is probably the best-written comedy of our time! Perhaps I love the character G.O.B. because I've seen dozens of illusionists who perform with big toys and dress like crazy people. That's a real stereotype, and I'm happy to shatter that stereotype by performing a show that is strong and funny in a non-ironic way.

Where can people behold your sleight of hand expertise?

Clips of my specials on *Magic Outlaws* can be seen at benseidman.com. But magic is best when watched live. Check the site to see where I'm performing or inquire about a booking.