



Joshua Jay

EDITORS' NOTE Joshua Jay (vanishingincmagic.com) is an internationally recognized magician and author. He is the bestselling author of *MAGIC: The Complete Course* and several other titles. Jay has performed and lectured in over 100 countries and helped design illusions for *Game of Thrones*. He has headlined at the Magic Castle in Hollywood and recently appeared on *The Tonight Show* with Jimmy Fallon. Jay fooled Penn & Teller on their hit show, *Fool Us*. Jay consulted with the U.S. Postal Service on the magic postage stamp series released in the summer of 2018. He is currently starring in his own immersive, off-Broadway magic show called *Six Impossible Things*, which is now in its fourth sold-out extension.

How did you become a magician?

My dad was a dentist, but he would do magic between seeing patients and just to practice for enjoyment. He would use magic to calm his patients down. He showed me a trick, and it was truly, to get touchy-feely, like the stars aligned. I think magic found me. I really feel like magic just made sense to me. When I see magic, I understand it intuitively. I love watching it, I love trying to figure it out, I love it when I can't figure it out, I love working on new material, I love performing it, I love talking shop about it – it's the great passion of my life.

Will you discuss your process in creating magic?

First, when you have a passion like I do, the passion has to be the lens through which you see the world. Magic is how I see everything. When I see an interesting light fixture on that wall over there, I'm wondering if I could get a borrowed ring inside that light bulb. When I see an interesting piece of art that looks 3D but is 2D, I'm wondering if I could do a trick where I pull an element out of the artwork. Everywhere I go, every interaction, it's through the lens of magic.

Second, I am a top-down creator. I start with the dream. I want to borrow a credit card and make it appear in a frozen block of ice. It's a trick from my show that had never been done before. I had no idea how to do it. I had to look up the

The Lens of Magic

An Interview with Joshua Jay, Magician and Co-Founder, Vanishing Inc. Magic

science of freezing things and what chemicals freeze at what temperatures. We've got to look at sleight-of-hand and if a credit card can be bent. Can it be palmed? Can it be secretly moved from one place to another? We've got to look at the comic elements of making somebody's credit card disappear as well as the security elements. All those things take many months and hundreds of shows, but now one of the standouts of my show is putting a borrowed credit card into a frozen block of ice.

Can magic be taught or is it something you are born with?

That's a great question. I don't know the answer to that. I teach other magicians. I hold clinics for other magicians, and sometimes I think this is so great, I've got an 80-year-old man and a 16-year-old kid and they're all learning together, and what binds us all is magic.

What is interesting is how magic is the great equalizer. For many years, up until he died, Ace Greenberg would have me and a few other magicians come to his house for jam sessions. It was such a beautiful thing to look around the table and have Ace Greenberg, one of the most successful and influential businessmen in the world, sitting across from a guy who drove a taxi who was one of the great sleight-of-hand artists in New York, and me, who had just graduated from university and was new to the city, all as equals, jamming. It was beautiful because each one of us was probably 30 years apart and economically, we were a million miles apart, but intellectually, and our passion, was totally aligned.

What interested you in doing the off-Broadway show?

When I do shows, I come out afterwards, meet people, take pictures, and often have tricks in my pocket to do close-up things for people as a way to just say thanks. My observation was that so much of the time, people would say, we really enjoyed your show, but what you just did close-up, that's the most incredible thing I've ever seen. My analysis was that proximity plays a huge role in the enjoyment of magic. Being a part of the trick, being a foot away instead of a balcony away, had a lot to do with people's enjoyment. So here I am as my career gets better and better, I'm playing bigger and bigger theaters, and I'm getting further and further away from the audience. I wondered if there may be a scenario in which

I did the opposite of what anybody else would do and go down to 20 people per show and give everybody the experience of helping a magician and seeing magic right up close.

I went to escape room spaces and I worked with some people in that space on how to rethink the magic experience. We wanted to see how intimate we could make a magic show, how far we could push the story-telling elements, to where there are no microphones, no special lighting – it is truly intimate. The press has embraced it and the show sold out months in advance. We don't let people come back to see the show a second time since I wanted to embrace the element of surprise.



Joshua Jay teaching magic at a seminar

Do you still enjoy doing the big shows in big theatres?

What I enjoy now is anything that takes me outside my normal routine. I have a stage show that I have honed over 10 years. Yes, if I get the call, and the situation's right, and the contract is right and the money is right, I'll go do that show on a Vegas stage like I have a million times before. I'll go to the Magic Castle, I'll go to Australia, Japan – I've been to 117 countries doing that show. It can be done in all languages. But that's a day at the office for me. It might be an escape for a couple in Kansas City, but for me, it's just another day at the office. But when I get a call, like at Harvard, and they want me to speak to students on my creative process, that's fun.

When I get a chance to talk to somebody like you, that's fun. It's different. When I get a chance to do my show off-Broadway that is a totally different show than anybody's ever attempted, that's a challenge, and that's the kind of stuff that moves me now. ●