

# Ben On Tour

David Ben, Canadian conjuror, chose Chatham, Ontario, to unveil the wonders he is taking to 15 communities in the province during October. He played to full houses in the Kiwanis Theatre here on Oct. 1-2. The show was called simply, "The Conjuror". The magic was elegant.

For 90 non-stop minutes he gave what amounted to a one-man show of enchanting miracles and entertaining chatter. He purported to be a conjuror of 1909 working on the stage of St. George's Hall, London, England, a legendary venue in the annuals of magic.

The script, written by him and Patrick Watson, could have been corny but was not. It hit exactly right. Nostalgia, wit, prestidigitation mixed in perfect proportions. The audience loved it.

Ben got more out of such standards of legerdemain as the Egg Bag and Chinese Linking Rings than most magicians believe possible. He treated them as though they were fresh new bafflers, which in his hands they were.

His presentation of Sawing in Half hearkened back to the original Selbit version where the victim was strapped in, with two audience volunteers (not plants) tugging on ropes that held the head and feet in place. Vivisection was, of course, the result, and, if you can believe it, great merriment in the process.

His handling of Okito's Floating Ball was as poetic as his Bill in the Cigarette was amusing.

His Blooming Rose Bush drew gasps. He cut off the blossoms and tossed them to ladies in the audience. The blooms were real.

There were many other effects, some of them old-timers unfamiliar to today's audiences, and all seemed big.

Magician Ben travels with a crew and company consisting of Julie Eng, company mgr; John Stephenson, technical director; Kenneth Delaney, actor in the Sawing Cameo; and Suleyman Fattah, who, as Onstage assistant, adds a solid dimension. He is clad, as befits the supposed time period, in Chinese robe, headgear and pigtail.

The show was directed by Patrick Watson, designed by William Schmuck, with lighting by Bonnie Beecher and costumes by Kelly Wolf.

Parallel Theatrical Productions, Inc. provided general management and technical management. Its proprietors are Allan De Luca and David Arnold.

One of the marks of a first class magician is the closeness of his rapport with the audience. In many magic shows, the audience is that gang of bodies out there in the dark. Not to David Ben.

Rarely do you find a magician who can create as delightfully intimate an atmosphere as he can. You feel he is talking directly to you. When he disappears from the Spirit Cabinet, therefore, you not only wonder where he went, you are genuinely concerned.

A consummate professional, a superb sleight-of-hand man, David Ben delivers something more precious than magic tricks. He conjures up the warmth that is all too often missing in entertainment today, and sends his audience home with memories of a rich and rewarding time in the theatre.