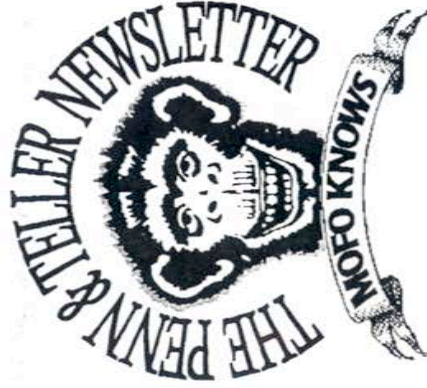


MofO Knows
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SEE PENN & TELLER'S SIN CITY SPECTACULAR
EVERY SUNDAY AND MONDAY NIGHT ON FX

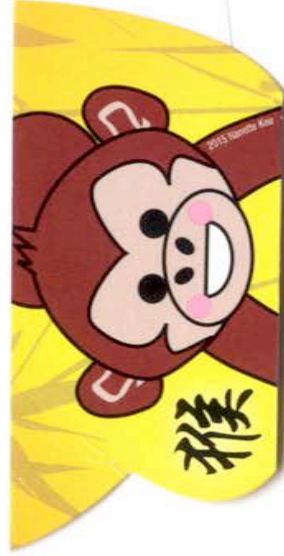
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Issue 31

January / April 1998

SPECIAL EAR-IN-REVIEW ISSUE



MOFO GOES HOME



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MOFO SEES

Thursday, December 31
PRIOR LAKE, MN
Celebrity Palace
Mystic Lake Casino
7:30 / 10:30 p.m.

Wednesday, January 27-
Wednesday, February 10
LAS VEGAS, NV
Hollywood Theater
MGM Grand Hotel / Casino
9 p.m.

Friday, February 12
PORTLAND, ME
Merrill Auditorium
8 p.m.

Saturday, February 13
CONCORD, NH
Capitol Theater
8 p.m.

Sunday, February 14
(Teller's birthday!)
BURLINGTON, VT
Flynn Theater
8 p.m.

Friday, February 19
STORRS, CT
University of Connecticut
8 p.m.

Saturday, February 20
STORRS, CT
University of Connecticut
8 p.m.

Tuesday, March 2
FORT WAYNE, IN
Scottish Rite Auditorium
8 p.m.

Wednesday, March 3
FORT WAYNE, IN
Scottish Rite Auditorium
8 p.m.

Friday, March 5
(Penn's birthday!)
GREENSBORO, NC
Carolina Theater
8 p.m.

Saturday, March 6
ATLANTA, GA
Georgia Institute of Technology
7 p.m. / 10 p.m.

Tuesday, March 9 -
Sunday, March 14
WASHINGTON, D.C.
Warner Theater

Tuesday, March 16-
Sunday, March 21
DETROIT, MI
Music Hall

Thursday, May 13-
Wednesday, May 26
LAS VEGAS, NV
Hollywood Theater
MGM Grand Hotel / Casino
9 p.m.

FOR MAXIMUM DISGUST,
READ TELLER'S INNER
ARTICLE FIRST

Just the Right Amount of Flinch

Teller's description of my ear surgery tells a lot, but, man, did he see it from a different point of view.

Right off the bat the nurses took my glasses, so I was sunk. I couldn't see the video camera's monitor. I couldn't recognize anyone in his or her scrubs. I think I kind of knew who Teller was, but that was it. I kept fighting to remember my lines (is this how Johnny Depp feels on a set?) and I tried to figure out what they were doing. I heard Teller say, "I think I can do it better than that," and I figured they were doing another take.

The doctor started sticking needles into my head. Man, that hurt. I mean, a kind of hurt that you just don't know. He told me he was going to cut my ear off, and I should tell him if I felt anything. He touched my ear and I felt it. I didn't think I could talk, but I said, "I can feel that." He said there were a couple of nerves that he hadn't got, but I would be okay. I knew he was cutting into my head. I was aware of the knife in my head. It felt like there was a thick

steak over my ear that he was cutting into. The part we often forget about surgery is the brute force. He really had to use all his strength to peel off my ear. I could hear the ripping of the flesh. Then he told me he was going to start drilling, and I should tell him if that hurt. Let me tell you, having someone drill into your head is LOUD. I mean, loud like you can't imagine. The vibration is like the worst dentistry you've ever had times 100. I could feel bits of bone hitting the places that weren't numb. Then the doctor monkeyed with the penny as I went in and out of sleep. I forced myself to stay awake while we were doing the take, but I was having a hard time. The doctor drilled some more. I wanted to hit him. I said, "Ow," and he said, "Get the needle," and then the needle really hurt as he stuck it in. The needle going in was bad, but then feeling him feeling around with the needle was worse. He was talking to me, but, without my glasses, I couldn't see, and with my good ear against the pillow it was hard to hear. I was also in this

blue tent. It was very surreal and I was very helpless. I had no power. My head was opened up to the world. I kept thinking, "Man, if for some reason this Novocaine fails and I come wide awake from the Demerol, can I handle the pain?" The doctor hit places and the pain shot through me and my body tensed and I thought, "I have to flinch enough so that he knows it hurts but not enough to jar his hand. This is important: just the right amount of flinch, and no more."

At some point, Teller and the crew left, then the doctor cut off the front of my ear lobe. He pried the hole in my head open wider. And then the operation was over. The doctor said if I ever decided to use drugs, I'd be a cheap date: they had given me only enough Demerol for a 120-pound woman. I had a big bandage on the left side of my head. I got dressed, and then everyone helped me out to the car. For weeks afterward I had to stuff my ear with Vaseline when I wanted to wash my hair. But, hey, we got a great bit for our show. —Penn.

While Jon the videotape editor and I were editing the Coin out of Penn's Ear bit, Jon and I watched over and over and over again as Penn's doctor pulled with all his force while snipping and slicing through the cables that hold Penn's ear in place. Nature had put that sucker on tight. Oh, my. Oh, my dear goodness. Oh. Oh. Both Jon and I got woozy while watching. We had to take frequent breaks. Penn's ear was looking red, ragged, and then that kind of fleshy, gray-brown that smells of death. Jon and I had to make the edited version of the bit a very delicate balance of jokes and voice-over to keep viewers from turning off their TVs and running, screaming, into the streets. If we succeeded, people who see the bit will never, never stop laughing, and will never, never forget it. —Teller.

How to Play with Your Partner

This past October 26, Penn went in for part two of his ear surgery. Ear Surgery Part One removed a cholesteatoma that had threatened Penn's hearing and brain. That surgery left him deaf in his left ear. Ear Surgery Part Two was done to restore the hearing in his ear by replacing the hearing bones with little pieces of plastic.

This is an important and delicate operation, but our desperation for material for our *Sin City Spectacular* knows no bounds. So, about two weeks before the second surgery, I suggested we try and turn it into a bit for our show. The logical plot for the bit seemed to be "Object Found in an Impossible Location," said impossible location being IN PENN'S HEAD, with the object being found when the doctor slices Penn's skin and folds back his outer ear. I thought it might be a sweet show of partnership for me to be doing a trick to amuse Penn (who was to be under only local anaesthetic) and lighten the stress of surgery by doing either a Signed Card in Head or a Reproduced Coin

or would we like to use his copper-jacketed bullet? With him, we planned the bit beat by beat, then Jamy Ian Swiss went off to buy magic gimmicks for us, Brad and Michael got video preparations going, and Penn got some rest. Penn had to go in early for exams and prepping, and Jamy, Colman de Kay (one of our writers), and I were to arrive by 1 p.m.

When Jamy, Colman, and I got there, the camera crew was in the lobby, producer Michael (in blue scrubs) had scouted the location, and Penn was waiting in a private room on the sixth floor of St. Vincent's Hospital in L. A. There was a cross on the wall of Penn's room, but the cross was glued down, so we couldn't invert it. And then in walked the hospital's P.R. guy.

"Now, this all happened rather suddenly," he said, "and, frankly..."—we braced for him to tell us that our stunt was cancelled—"...frankly we'd like to see the hospital get some publicity out of this. Whatever it would take—we realize this is all pretty expensive, and we're

We rehearsed and rehearsed until the hospital personnel cleared the room to sterilize the area. An orderly wheeled Penn, comatose with a VERY small dose of Demerol, to the pre-op room. The doctor chatted with us as he scrubbed up. He told us he planned to patter about how impossible he thought it would be for me to send a coin into Penn's skull. Jamy and I suggested that the funnier style would be for the doctor to be matter-of-fact and understated, narrating the appearance of the coin as if he had happened to find a mildly uncommon configuration of cartilage. The doctor understood.

Orderlies wheeled Penn into the operating room, and isolated his ear with a sterile blue tent, out of which he could only peek. While we made our final video preparations, the doctor anaesthetized Penn's ear. He warned Penn that it would sting and burn, and little exclamations of "Wow!" from Penn suggested he was finding the pain very entertaining and refreshing. We then began to shoot: first the coin selection, then the autoclaving, then me

too bad, and a couple of times Penn winced a bit and said, "Okay, that hurts." And then the doc injected more anaesthetic from a huge needle.

I have to admit I didn't stare right into the maw of the surgery. I suspected that fainting in the middle of a videotaping would cause a ruckus, so I kept my eyes on the peripherals: the table of drills, knives, and clamps; the suction tube the doc put in to get the blood out of his way so he could continue working; and the shards of Penn's discarded flesh and bone. When Penn, doped as he was, shivered in pain, I did, too. After all, I'm connected with this big, outspoken, flat-footed genius by a ligament of history as strong as the conjoined liver of Chang-Eng.

At the doctor's big moment,



behind (and I do mean BEHIND) Ear trick.

I assumed there wasn't a chance in hell that we'd get to do the bit. No surgeon would risk his reputation by allowing a magic trick to be done in his operating room, and no hospital would permit it. Still, we had nothing to lose but Penn's life and/or hearing, so we asked.

Penn's doctor saw no reason not to do the trick. He pointed out that whatever we hid in Penn's head would have to be autoclaved first, and a playing card can't hold up in the autoclave. So, cards were out, and coins were in. This, we thought, was fine, as we'd now be doing our own version of the classic Grandfather's Coin-behind-the-Ear trick.

Penn's doc got a videotape of a typical version of the operation and showed the tape to us in my hotel room in L. A. Michael, a producer of *Sin City Spectacular*, and Brad, the director, came and watched the video— Well, Brad watched; Michael kept his face turned toward the wall. The doctor was full of ideas for patter and staging. Would we want to use his souvenir gold coin, since gold is not discolored by an autoclave,

willing to throw in some money to cover costs—we'd like to see St. Vincent's mentioned prominently in connection with your performance."

We said we'd ask the cameraman to shoot an establishing shot of the hospital, and we'd work it into Penn's patter. Mr. P.R. was very relieved. He thanked us and went away.

Jamy, Colman, and I left Penn, and we went to the operating-room corridor. We donned blue surgical outfits, complete with booties and headcovers, and worked out the details of how we would make the coin vanish. Meanwhile, director Brad had laid out the sequence where the coin is autoclaved and brought to the operating table. The operating room's video camera normally records a medium shot of the surgery, while a second video feed comes from the microscope through which the doctor watches as he does the delicate internal surgery. We added to that a hand-held camera with a wide-angle lens to show Penn's face and me.



donning my sterile gloves. Next,



I vanished the coin. Jamy and Colman, watching the monitor, said the vanish looked perfect. Then the doctor went to work cutting. He sliced neatly around the back of Penn's ear. Now, I'm going to tell you a little secret, and I don't want you to spread it around: The doctor sneaked the coin into Penn's ear. But, as the doctor started to do his part, he said, "Hm. A penny's bigger than I'd thought. Grinding bit, please." Noticing my appalled expression, he said, "Oh, don't worry. I'm not grinding just to make room for the penny. I need the space for the plastic pieces we're putting in later." He began grinding, telling Penn it would be loud. I watched as little bits of Penn's skull sprayed out. Penn mumbled, "Rock 'n' roll. Turn it up...." The doctor had told Penn to sound off if the pain became

the revelation of the coin, he did his profession proud. As he looked through the microscope at his fingers manipulating Penn's flesh, the doctor narrated, "This patient had his first surgery a year ago, and we need to ascertain that we have successfully removed the problem and there is no regrowth. We'll lift his ear and.... Hm.... What is this?... This looks like a penny. Suction, please! Hm.... Retractor.... Yes, it's a penny. A nineteen-ninety-six D. Let's see if it's real. We'll turn it over and look for a tiny Abraham Lincoln among the columns on the Lincoln Memorial. Uh-huh. There he is. Would you take this, please?" He handed it to the nurse, who handed it to me. I showed it to Penn, who smiled in Demeroled amazement. The doctor said, "Is this your coin?"

At that point, I waved goodbye and started to depart, wishing the doctor well on the important part of the operation. A nurse hurriedly asked me what I wanted her to do with the penny. I said I was sure Penn wanted it as a souvenir. She said she would wash off the blood. I stopped her.

After all, that's what partners are for. —Teller.

