

REVIEWS OF THE MAGICAL LIFE OF MARSHALL BRODIEN

From *M-U-M*, November 2007

“More than a magical life”

A review by Mac King

I just finished reading the new biography of Marshall Brodien and I have a new idol. Who wouldn't idolize a fellow who, in the course of his lifetime, has been a magic shop demonstrator, 10 in 1 magician, sideshow barker, sofa salesman, sword swallower, fire eater, close-up magician, bar magician, alligator and kangaroo hauler, tent show illusionist, husband, father, hypnotist, army soldier, escape artist, nightclub magician, banquet entertainer, *Bozo's Circus* regular, emcee, ice-skater, Emmy award winner, police officer, nightclub owner, darling of the mob, trade show performer, restaurant owner, TV talk show guest, Magic Castle award winner, clown, TV pitchman, and Pied Piper to masses of kids lured in by that captivating catchphrase, “Magic is easy, once you know the secret.”

Before reading this book I really only knew Marshall as the last thing on this list. To me (and, I bet, most of you), he was the fellow who, by revolutionizing the selling of tricks to the public, started millions on the happy road to magic as a hobby. I was vaguely aware that he'd made some appearances on the Bozo TV show, but that was really the extent of my knowledge of his history. I was amazed to read of all the twists and turns his career has taken, and astounded to learn that not only has he had a very successful career as a stage hypnotist, but that up until 1994 he was still performing two or three times a week on the Bozo show as Wizzo the Wizard.

Along the extraordinary journey outlined with wry wit by author John Moehring, we encounter Ray Kroc, Dorny, Mickey the Mook, Jay Marshall, Jackie The Lackey, Senator Crandall, Hedy Jo Star, Bill Cosby, Siegfried & Roy, Hugh Hefner, Karl the Bomber, Mike Douglas, Lance Burton, and many other colorful characters. This is real show business. And that's truly what this book is about. This is Marshall's public life; there are no intimate details of his personal life here. His marriages, divorce, and the birth of his children are mentioned, but not elaborated on in any way.

Disclosure: In the past I've had a number of Easter dinners at author John Moehring's home and he's been to my house for Thanksgiving a few times, so you can probably surmise that we're friends. Plus, he's the editor of this magazine. So to show my unbiased fairness I feel I should come up with something negative about this book. There is one tiny thing: the cost. I believe the \$35 retail price tag on a paperback book will really hurt sales. That's it though, that's my only gripe. Others might argue that there's some sensationalism going on here, and I'm guessing there is; perhaps not every show was a sold-out hit, but this isn't an investigative work. I assume it's

meant to be a good read, so a tiny bit of exaggeration and hyperbole here and there seems completely appropriate.

Beware, reading this book might just make you feel like it's a smart move to drop out of high school and pursue your dream of magic celebrity. Be careful though, it turns out it's not so easy. Not everything Marshall touched turned to gold; not every venture he undertook made money. There were ups and downs all along the way, but he seized opportunities when they presented themselves, worked his butt off, and his persistence and determination certainly paid off. And I'll bet if you asked him, he'd say it *was* easy, because it wasn't work, it was an adventure.

In addition to Marshall's fascinating life in showbiz, this 263-page trade paperback includes a number of outstanding photos and an index. If you're interested in magic's intriguing personalities I unquestionably recommend this book. Great stuff.

Mac King's review of The Magical Life of Marshall Brodien appeared in the October 2007 issue of M-U-M, the monthly magazine of the Society of American Magicians, and is reprinted here with permission of the S.A.M. For more information about the S.A.M., the oldest and most prestigious magical society in the world, visit www.magicsam.com.

From *MAGIC*, November 2007
The Magical Life of Marshall Brodien
Reviewed by Michael Claxton

I wouldn't be writing this review if it were not for Marshall Brodien. Instead, I might be living a normal life, happily oblivious to the magic-crazed lunacy that now consumes me. If only I hadn't gotten those darn TV Magic Cards as a child. If only I hadn't ordered the Marshall Brodien Catalog and worn out its pages with wishful study. If only I hadn't been lured by the promise that "most magic tricks are easy... once you know the secret."

The fact that my story is so common only testifies to the incredible influence one Chicago magician has had on several generations of would-be conjurors. No less a magic superstar than Lance Burton, and countless other less-famous magicians, have been infected with incurable legerdemania by the greatest magic pitchmen since A.C. Gilbert.

But if you only know Marshall Brodien from the TV commercials and Svengali decks, and even if you also recognize him as Wizzo the Wizard from the Bozo Show, you still only know part of this man's fascinating story. Now, John Moehring has written an absorbing account of a truly magical life.

This book begins with Brodien's apprenticeship as a magic demonstrator at the Treasure Chest in Chicago in the 1940s and traces a career that has snowballed from a combination of a natural stage presence, keen entrepreneurial spirit, and some amazing breaks along the way. His diverse adventures have brought him into contact with legendary advertising executives, noted fellow magicians, eccentric carny veterans, beloved TV icons, and even a few notorious mobsters.

Brodien is a gifted storyteller, and those who know him have no doubt been dazzled and amused by anecdotes of his wide-ranging career. But even if you have heard about the gangster who once pulled a gun on him in order to find out the secret of the Vanishing Birdcage, or the sexy carnival showgirl who nearly had Marshall under her spell until he discovered the truth about her slightly deep voice, on the gas station attendant who was spooked by an alligator in Marshall's trunk, there is a lifetime of further delightful stories here. I laughed out loud repeatedly while reading this volume.

In his diverse career, Brodien has worked as a carnival barker, a nightclub hypnotist, an army magician, a trade-show illusionist, a children's show wizard, a fire-eater, an ice-show emcee, a TV pitchman, a restaurant owner, a producer, and even a chauffeur for a feisty kangaroo. As a performer at the Magic Lounge in Cicero in the '50s, or a hypnotist at the posh Cairo Supper Club in the '60s, he was already becoming a Chicago institution. But thirty years, and nearly 3,000 shows, as Wizzo on the Bozo show made his institutionalization complete. While snobbish critics sometimes panned the lowbrow antics of Bozo and friends, the fact that there was a seven-year

waiting list for studio audience tickets suggests that, with its intended audience, the Bozo show was a four-decade hit.

In this thorough biography, we not only see the triumphs and failures of Brodien's busy 73 years so far, but we also get access to the motivational philosophy behind his success. Drawing upon a timeline started by Mary Dole Brodien, Moehring paints an engrossing tale. Fifty-seven photographs from the magician's archives provide visual evidence for any who may think some of the stories told here are too good to be true. If I had to offer one minor complaint, I feel that this book deserved to be in a hardback. Otherwise, I can only say, "Thank you!" to Marshall Brodien for getting me hooked early and thus sparing me from that worst of fates, a normal life.

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