

KINO LORBER



DECEPTIVE PRACTICE: The Mysteries and Mentors of Ricky Jay

a documentary film produced and directed
by Molly Bernstein and Alan Edelstein

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SYNOPSIS

What happens when documentary filmmakers – whose mission is to probe, explore, reveal – take as their subject one of the world’s greatest living magicians, whose life and art are basically off limits to probing, exploration, and revelation? More than a decade in the making, *Deceptive Practice: The Mysteries and Mentors of Ricky Jay* is the captivating result of this curious conundrum: a mesmerizing journey into the world of modern magic and the small circle of eccentric geniuses who mastered it.

At its center is the multitalented Ricky Jay, a world-renowned magician, author, historian and actor (often a mischievous presence in the films of David Mamet and Paul Thomas Anderson) — and a performer who regularly provokes astonishment from even the most jaded audiences. In his extraordinary—and extraordinarily popular—one-man shows *Ricky Jay and his 52 Assistants* and *Ricky Jay: On the Stem*, he proved himself to be the contemporary embodiment of an elite lineage, offering audiences not only exhilarating entertainment, but also a rare glimpse of a secret, lost world.

Told largely in Ricky’s own inimitable voice, *Deceptive Practice* traces the story of his achievement, from his early apprenticeship, beginning at age 4, with his grandfather Max Katz, an accomplished amateur magician, as well as Al Flosso, Slydini, Cardini, Francis Carlyle, and Roy Benson, all of whom were among the best magicians of the 20th century. Above all it celebrates the remarkable lives of Ricky’s two primary mentors of his young adulthood, Dai Vernon and Charlie Miller. Of the latter, Ricky recalls: “For Charlie a good evening could be asking you to do the same shuffle 16,000 times ... It was just endless the variations and the craziness, but it was often as close to pure joy as anything I can imagine.” The film weaves together stunning performance footage from his one-man shows and classic TV appearances, and also includes friends and collaborators such as Steve Martin (who joins him in a hilarious turn on a '70s vintage Dinah Shore TV show) and David Mamet, who says of Ricky: “He’s devoted to that theater that he alone sees. He has the ideal of magic in his mind to which he’s devoted his life: to teaching it, to performing it, to perfecting it, to researching it.”

By the end of the film, viewers not only have a deep appreciation for the arduous and arcane demands of the magician’s craft, but also for the use of language and storytelling central to the art. And of where this ancient tradition is headed, that shall remain a mystery ...

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LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

RICKY JAY

sleight-of-hand artist, author, historian, actor

WINSTON SIMONE

manager

DAVID MAMET

writer and director

PERSI DIACONIS

professor of statistics & mathematics, Stanford University
magician

SUZIE MACKENZIE

journalist, *The Guardian*

MICHAEL WEBER

magician

FRED NEUMANN

martial artist

deputy sheriff (ret.) Los Angeles County Sheriff's Dept.

MAIN CREDITS

Molly Bernstein, Producer/Director/Editor

Alan Edelstein, Producer/Co-director

Alicia Sams and Philip Dolin, Producers

Ronald Guttman, Executive Producer

Edward Marritz, Ben Wolf, Camera

Olivier & Clare Manchon, original music

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ABOUT RICKY JAY

While Ricky Jay has long been considered one of the world's great sleight of hand artists, his career is further distinguished by the remarkable variety of his accomplishments as an author, actor, historian, and consultant.

His one man shows *Ricky Jay & His 52 Assistants*; *Ricky Jay: On the Stem*; and *Ricky Jay: A Rogue's Gallery*, all directed by David Mamet, were award winning critical and commercial theatrical events.

As an actor Mr. Jay has been seen in David Mamet's films: *House of Games*, *Homicide*, *Things Change*, *Spanish Prisoner*, *State and Main*, and *Heist*. He has appeared in many other movies including *Boogie Nights*, *Magnolia*, *Last Days*, *Tomorrow Never Dies*, *The Prestige*, *Red Belt* and *The Great Buck Howard*. On television he has hosted numerous programs and appeared regularly on the series *Deadwood*, *The Unit*, and *Flash Forward*.

His consulting company, Deceptive Practices, has supplied "Arcane Knowledge on a Need to Know Basis" for more than a score of films including *Forrest Gump*, *The Illusionist*, and *Oceans 13*.

He is the author of *Learned Pigs & Fireproof Women*, and *Jay's Journal of Anomalies*, both *New York Times* "Notable Books." Among his other works are *Dice: Deception, Fate and Rotten Luck*; *Extraordinary Exhibitions*; and most recently *Celebrations of Curious Characters*. He has defined the terms of his profession for the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and the *Cambridge Guide to American Theater*.

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FILMMAKERS BIOS

MOLLY BERNSTEIN (Producer/Director)

Molly Bernstein has written and directed documentary profiles of leading figures in the arts, including Bernardo Bertolucci, Estelle Parsons, John Sayles and others for the Sundance Channel and AMC. She has also worked extensively as an editor on documentary films including the 2009 Emmy and Peabody Award winning **Jerome Robbins: Something to Dance About**, featured on the PBS series American Masters. Other editing credits include **Witness to the Twentieth Century**, an historical series written by Elaine May, and **Liberty**, a PBS series on the American Revolution produced by Middlemarch Films. Molly has recently made numerous short films with Particle Productions about contemporary artists for the James Cohan Gallery, and about art collectors in Beijing, Shanghai, Tokyo, Los Angeles and San Francisco for the VIP Art Fair and Christie's. She has an MFA in film from Columbia University.

ALAN EDELSTEIN (Producer/Co-Director)

Alan Edelstein received an Academy Award nomination for his documentary short **The Wizard of Strings**, a profile of the 1920's string instrumentalist and vaudeville star Roy Smeck. He has worked as a writer and producer for Nowak Associates, Great Projects Film Company, and Sundance Channel, among others. A journalist as well as filmmaker, he has written on arts and culture for publications including *The New York Times*, the *Forward*, and *Transition*, a Harvard University publication.

ALICIA SAMS (Producer)

Alicia is a series producer/director of **ARAB AMERICAN STORIES**, a 13-episode public television series for broadcast in 2012. She is also developing the feature film **PEACE LIKE A RIVER**, based on Leif Enger's best-selling novel, at Warner Bros., and **CATCH THE MOON**, a comedy set in Gaza to be directed by Sameh Zoabi. She was producer/director (with Amy Rice) of the Emmy-Award winning film **BY THE PEOPLE: THE ELECTION OF BARACK OBAMA**, a behind-the-scenes look at the journey of Barack Obama and his campaign staff that premiered on HBO in 2009. Also in 2009, Alicia was executive producer of Cherien Dabis' award-winning debut feature **AMREEKA**. Among the independent documentaries she has produced are: **TOOTS**, **GRATEFUL DAWG**, and **OFF THE MENU: THE LAST DAYS OF CHASEN'S**.

PHILIP DOLIN (Producer)

Through his company Particle Productions, Philip has produced and directed dozens of short films about art and artists (including Bill Viola, Roxy Paine, and Beatriz Milhazes), performers, teachers and leaders — for Columbia University, James Cohan Gallery, the VIP Art Fair, Christie's, PBS and others. He directed a feature film called **B MOVIE**, starring James Urbaniak and Missy Yager, and produced over 50 hip-hop music videos for renowned artists including Salt-n-Pepa, Kid 'n Play, MC Lyte, Chubb Rock and Monie Love. He has an MFA in film from Columbia University and was a Fulbright Scholar in South America.