

MOFO GOES HOME

Penn: "Have you ever seen a night launch of a space shuttle?"
Tom the astronaut: "Not from the outside."

CHANGE OF ADDRESS REQUESTED

MOFO KNOWS
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MOFO KNOWS

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THE UNPLEASANT WORLD OF PENN & TELLER

The Evening Standard, 2 June 1993, London:

“A plague on LWT [London Weekend Television]...But recent events at the station’s South Bank studios suggest that Mammon may not hold complete sway in SE1. Disgruntled staff, judged too junior to benefit from the share scheme, are taking some satisfaction from a sudden rash of Biblical events.

First, there was an infestation of mice in the studios and now a plague of bluebottles. My man with the swatter and tin of repellent describes the scene in terrifying Hitchcockian detail: ‘Dead bodies are falling out of the air-conditioning...documents are covered with broken wings.’ LWT is quick to dampen the mood of superstitious hysteria. Apparently the flies are escaped props from a circus act starring New York magicians Penn & Teller. The bluebottles were allowed in on the strict understanding

that they would die after five hours, or about double the life expectancy of a BBC drama series.”

Yup, the Bad Boys of Magic are at it again, this time in the UK. The month of May was spent in London taping six half hour specials for Channel 4 Television. While trying to decide on a title for the series, the producers got as far as “The [blank] World of Penn & Teller.” After two weeks of deliberating on the appropriate word to fill in the [blank], Seamus Cassidy, the head of Channel 4 was approached. After watching Penn & Teller cut a snake in half, play with rat traps and snort beans through their sinus passages and out their eyes on other UK shows, Seamus immediately responded “Unpleasant!”

You’ll be able to see “The Unpleasant World of Penn & Teller” beginning Friday nights in January, 1994, assuming you are sitting in front of a TV in the United Kingdom.



Teller, Penn, Krasher & Robbie in London filming “The Unpleasant World Of Penn & Teller.”

I'LL TRY ANYTHING

As you know, having guest stars on your show is always a pain in the neck. First, you have to decide which guests you want, and then you have to contact them, and then you have to coordinate their schedules and availability with yours.

You start by sitting in a room and listing everyone in the world you can think of who might suit a particular bit. Then, you assign a staff person (in the case of "The Unpleasant World of Penn & Teller" that person was Meena Sud) the hateful job of calling, writing or faxing that desired star and his/her agent.

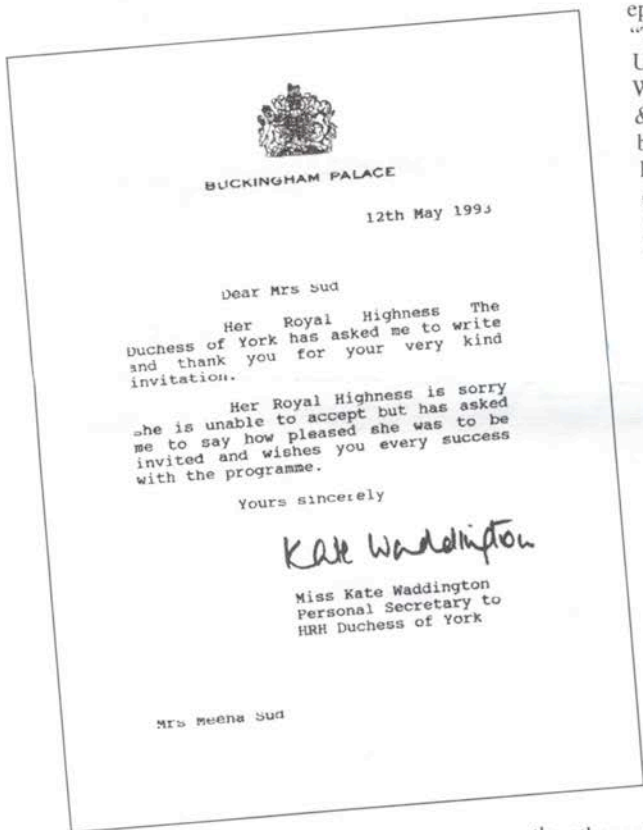
definitely interested, definitely available and definitely willing to ignore the work permit problem.

He's now on the "Mofo Knows" mailing list.

He worked out very well, being a fine actor and, perhaps more importantly, having a good sense of humor. In



Penn & Teller teach Christopher Reeve the National (U.S.) Magic Trick.



one of the episodes of "The Unpleasant World of Penn & Teller," the boys go on location to an old church that has been dressed as the haven of a coven of witches, with goats, toads, pentacles, cheesy magic props, men in black-hooded robes, women in bondage and a virgin. Penn tells the home viewer that the location is the Magic Circle, the exclusive British magic club similar to our favorite Magic Castle. The guys bring in Chris, who claims to be eager to learn a magic trick. Once inside they hand him a live chicken and a dagger and tell him to slaughter it while denying Jesus. Mr. Reeve considers this a small sacrifice in order to learn the secrets of vanishing a hanky

Chris acted the scene with an innocently matter-of-fact attitude, which was charming and funny. Teller had made him nervous by telling him

the other actors Penn & Teller have worked with have always learned tricks easily, but Chris practiced the trick and pulled it off well.

During the filming, he asked Penn & Teller about magicians, and seemed really bummed to learn that the famous story of Houdini escaping from under a frozen river is just hype. (James Randi and Burt Sugar have proven that the river in question wasn't frozen on the alleged date, and Houdini was in another city at the time, anyway.) But after Chris had completed the filming of his segment, he told Penn & Teller they should never hesitate to call him again when they needed somebody to participate in one of their bits. "I'll try anything," he said, and the guys respected him even more.

For an English television series, Penn & Teller wanted only English guests. However, when Meena asked around she discovered that Johnny Depp is a fan of P&T, and was eager to appear on the show. So Ms. Sud went after Johnny.

That was when the pain in the neck reached its second degree. Johnny Depp wouldn't be able to obtain a work permit in the U.K. in time to fit into the series' shooting schedule. So the staff went back to sitting in a room and making The List.

Someone mentioned Christopher Reeve. He was already in London, attending the opening of the new "Planet Hollywood," the chain of restaurants co-owned by Sly Stallone, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Demi Moore and her husband. Meena called Mr. Reeve. He was

MOFO SEES

July 24:

Concord Hotel, The Catskills, Kiamesha Lake, NY

Sept. 24-26:

Reno Hilton, Ziegfield Theatre, Reno, NV

Sept. 30-Oct 6:

Bally's Las Vegas Casino Resort Las Vegas, NV

Oct. 7-9:

Scottsdale Center for the Arts, Scottsdale, AZ

Oct. 10:

McCallum Theatre, Palm Desert CA

Oct. 27:

Lyric Theatre, Baltimore MD

Oct. 28-31:

TropWorld Showroom, Atlantic City NJ

REQUIESCAT IN PACE

by Teller

When Helen Hayes (who died this past March 17) came to the West Side Arts and I was doing the Miser's Dream, I gave her the carnation. I had no choice. She sat there like the dowager empress of China with a big grin.



TOMMY

On April 29, Tommy opened at the St. James Theatre on Broadway. Penn & Teller were there. by Penn

There was a flailing to the original "Tommy." The music was played by people who were flailing around. The game they were talking about wasn't pinball, it was rock and roll. And rock and roll, the power of the youth movement was stronger than the pretentious story. It was so powerful, that these kids could do anything. They could be artists. They could do opera damn it!

People would call it opera, people would write it on album covers and on contracts and on posters and they would laugh at it, and make fun of it. But it was okay — they were still artists, they were self-conscious and aware artists. They would do an "Overture," just like grown-ups and then they would do an "Underture," so that when people laughed they could make sure that they had the first laugh. They knew it was stupid, but it was okay — regular opera was really stupid too, but it didn't know it.

They could be pretentious in the way that only innocent people can be pretentious. Real pretentious. "Deaf, Dumb and Blind" — that's really heavy. Really heavy. War. Two dads fighting in front of the son. One dies — really heavy. Mirrors. Dreams. "Sickness will surely take the mind, where minds can't usually go." And that's a good thing. All those hangovers and bad drugs, were for a purpose. We were being enlightened and no matter what was said, it was taken seriously. Pinball was a joke. The game of life. Rumor had it that it was only there because Pete knew that some important critic loved pinball and it might get it a better review.

And people laughed, it's just a sick joke, a deaf, dumb, blind kid that could play pinball. Impossible, just a gag, how would he see the ball to time the

sound like the Moody Blues. So they got all the sounds out of a band, twisting the instruments that they'd broken to pieces before. Keith didn't use a ride cymbal, he played like a timpani anyway. And Roger couldn't do different voices but he loved the rock and roll and he would just sing all the parts in his voice. All the parts that had to be there to tell the big important story. And John, he'd play the French horn and in "Pinball Wizard" he would play the most important single bass note in popular music. He was a whole bombastic symphony with just one note. An important note, a really important note. They were singing about pinball and it was really important. People were taking them seriously. It was about a deaf, dumb, blind kid who becomes a religious figure and they were just dumb kids who were superstars and who felt like they were becoming religious figures.

And Keith, the drummer, the drummer who never played ride cymbals, the drummer who always thought he was the whole band. The drummer they were uncomfortable with because they knew he was going to die before he got old. He would sing the creep parts, the child molester parts, the huckster parts, and it would be a truly crazy person singing those imaginary crazy parts.

And the leader of the band, the intellectual, the lead guitarist, the composer, he would be the narrator and when he sang "Pinball Wizard" maybe his voice did lack some power but we never knew it. We never knew it because we were going crazy over his guitar playing and his jumping around. And he didn't jump around because it was sexy, he jumped around because he had too. He was too emotional, too full of ideas and power to stay still. It wasn't an act.

And during this serious story — self-conscious, self-aware — but serious, the mother is talking to the son that she has forced to be deaf, dumb and blind by screaming "You didn't hear it, you didn't see it, you never heard it, not a word of it, you won't say nothing to no one." She's screaming to her son that hasn't spoken or seen or heard and she's about to do something violent — she's about to break the mirror. It's heavy, really heavy, no kidding around. And Roger, as the mother, sings, "You don't answer my call with even a nod or a wink but you gaze at your own reflection — ALRIGHT!" He screams "ALRIGHT!" Not because the character would say "Alright" but because the music, the rock and roll, the beat, tells him he has to say "Alright." I don't think Pete wrote it in. Peter, most likely, didn't tell him to say, "Alright." Roger got no credit for writing on Tommy. His name isn't on the Broadway Playbill. But, I'm betting he wrote "Alright!" And when he sings "Christmas," this time as the father, he sings "And Tommy doesn't know what day it is — NO!" And he screams "NO." He Daltry-screams

"YEAH." A rock star would scream that in front of a rock band. Because pinball was a metaphor for life, and it was also a metaphor for rock and roll.

What if a stupid-assed game like pinball became the backbone for a religion? Wouldn't that be goofy? And pinball is also rock and roll. What if rock and roll became serious enough to be an opera? A goofy opera, but an opera.

And what if it became serious enough to be on Broadway? Really on Broadway with an opening night with tuxedos and — Broadway, not rock and roll — but Broadway money — how goofy would that be?

The guitar player in the pit was okay loud and really really good. Peter was torturing the sounds out of the guitar and this guy just hit the notes every time and he had a conductor and WE NEVER SAW HIM PLAYING GUITAR! NEVER! We didn't even know what he looked like. We didn't know how he wore his hair. We didn't know if we wanted to look like him. He was in the pit. He had the guitar, the machine — the pinball machine that made all the followers of "Tommy" go to see him and you couldn't see him. Was he doing windmills? Was he dancing? Was he out of control? I don't know, you couldn't see him. He had a conductor.

And the actors, the musical comedy actors brought up on rock and roll, listening to rock and roll as a career. The real woman, playing the mother in her pain — she acted. She acted the mother's pain and she didn't ad-lib "Alright," and the Father with his practiced English accent (Roger tried to hide his), didn't ad-lib "NO" or "Yeah." I guess they couldn't use it because Roger had written it and he didn't get credit.

The guy who played Uncle Ernie gave a wonderful performance as a drunk and he got all the laughs. Keith was really a drunk. He died from being a drunk. If you left him alone with your kids it would be a really bad idea.

Roger was a rock star, a confused rock star, a rock star who became a rock star just as we were finding out what a rock star really was.

Pete Townsend was a "genius" and he was smart and intellectual and when he commented on the action he was commenting on the action. He had really dropped acid.

And the set was beautiful and there was multimedia stuff that I hadn't seen before, live wireless cameras on stage. It was really beautiful. And the costumes were beautiful. And the Acid Queen was a really, no kidding, African-American woman with a trained English accent and perfect sloppy garters and, in the Broadway version, the Dad took Tommy away before he took acid. He didn't feed his kid acid to get him to twitch.

The whole show was about rock and roll. Clearly about a generation and it's love for rock and

people that did it and younger.

I felt I was part of the Who's generation even though I was only 14. I listened over and over. I memorized it and used to sing all the words over the sound of the lawnmower while I was mowing Mr. Kramer's lawn for five dollars. I even "taught" a class in my school on "Tommy," an English class on symbolism. How's that for pretentious? I was part of the whole thing.

At the end of the real "Tommy," Tommy is deserted. He's not back with his family. It's rousing and it's sad at the same time but most important it's bombastic. It's a child's view of opera. Roger could have been singing with a hat with horns and his hair in braids.

"Listening to you

I get the music

Gazing at you

I get the heat (heat) [Pete in the background just yelled "heat"

twice - he was too excited]

Following you

I climb the mountain

I get excitement at your feet"

Everyone in the audience was on their feet and I don't even know how many noticed that the ending was changed. I, however, taught a class in the damn thing so I knew every word that was different. I knew every word. Every single word. I knew where all the "Alrights" and "Yeahs" were supposed to be and I really missed them. The guitar was distorted but they had decided how tortured they wanted it.

The ending wasn't as stupid or bombastic. The "greasers" that were hanging around Tommy when he was playing pinball had "greaser" haircuts exactly like Vegas shows have "greaser" Elvis wigs.

Everything was beautiful and no one missed a note and the performances were all dead on. The pinball machine burst into flame. They used a "Girl to Gorilla" half-silvered mirror rig to turn really young Tommy into less young Tommy and it was a really really expensive nice one. Well built. Tommy had wires on him and flew across stage like David Copperfield or Mary Martin.

The Who, when they played it live (and I think they only did it a couple of times) had no special effects. But they had their instruments and they had a real bass player, and a real drunk and a real rock star and a real guy who thought he was really doing opera and he thought it was a little funny and they were really inventing and pushing their kind of rock and roll.

They weren't doing a classic.

And I went on opening night.

And I talked to Geraldo.

And I talked to HBO

And I talked to CNN

flippers? But maybe he really could. Maybe if you weren't so damn distracted you could feel the ball and you could play even better.

And the flailing. The sounds. They wanted to sound like a big symphony but they didn't want to

NEW SUITS

The boys wanted a new look. Or, at least, a better look.

Denise Walch is a freelance stylist in New York City. Her basic job is making people look better by guiding their choices. She can help select a personal wardrobe or costumes for performances.

Most people don't realize that the suits Penn & Teller wear for their performances are Penn & Teller's costumes. Neil Patrick Harris, for example, doesn't wear a stethoscope and white lab coat when he's off-camera, and Penn & Teller leave their suits behind just as soon as the last fan leaves the lobby or the last camera shuts off. The suits become the responsibility of the wardrobe handler, and Penn & Teller don comfortable clothing.

Penn, Teller, and Denise sat in a room and listed every style of men's clothing that appealed to each of them. Teller was interested in an English, dapper look. He also thought this might be a perfect chance to see how he would look and feel in a legendary Italian suit. Or, he added, if he wanted to be patriotic, he'd like to wear a suit made by whoever makes the President's suits.

Denise contacted her informants in the fashion industry, and learned that fulfilling Teller's third desire could also fulfill his second: Bill Clinton's suits were made by Canali, the Italian haberdasher with an office on West 57th Street in Manhattan.

So Penn, Teller, and Denise went to Canali. "Nothing else they tried fit like Canali," says Denise.

Teller liked what he tried, as did Penn, once the sales staff had enlarged its thinking to encompass Penn's volume. (Penn wears a 60XL, according to the Italians, while Teller is twelve sizes smaller, and slimmer in the shoulders.)

The new costumes had their American debut on "Late Night with David Letterman" on June 16. You probably noticed that, although the boys' costumes still look similar, Penn & Teller's individual tastes are emphasized.

"NO." And in a live performance (maybe it's Woodstock) in the same place in the song, he screams "YEAH." "Yeah" or "No" mean the exact same thing in this context. The characters in the opera wouldn't scream "Alright" and "NO" and

Teller, for example, now wears a vest as Penn always has, but Teller's coat is single-breasted, while Penn's is double. Their new pants have pleats, but, contrary to the psychology of fashion, the tall guy has no cuffs (so the cuffs won't interfere with his boots), while the shorter guy has cuffs. Penn's preference for boots continues, but his cowboy boots have been replaced by red, pointed-toed Beatles boots with black seams. Teller spruces up his image with black-and-white "spectators," dapper shoes that, says Denise, "people probably initially mistake for 1920s gangster-wear. But on Teller that's cool."

Denise stayed with the boys while they outfitted themselves from toe to neck, and saw to it that their selections were practical as well as flattering. "I wanted them to get clothes that would wear well and wash easily. After all, they do expose themselves to a lot of blood." Penn got two extra pairs of pants, while Teller, who's been accused of throwing himself in the path of oncoming blood, got four extra pairs of pants to make life easier for wardrobe personnel.

In the past, Penn & Teller wore \$3 neckties that were no loss if they became stained or destroyed. But now, as they become international mess-makers, the boys wear ties that cost \$12.50 each for Teller's and \$15.00 each for Penn's. Penn's cost more because his "crossword puzzle sort of squares" pattern is red-and-white, while Teller's squares are black-and-white. Three dozen were bought for Penn, and five dozen for Teller — he, after all, tends to get bloodier and to get his ties caught in animal traps.

"I have no idea who bought their undies," says Denise, "but I did what I could for the boys, and I loved them. It was really fun to work with them, and I'd do it again. Teller is such a gentleman and so soft-spoken, which was a surprise, because you have no idea what he's going to sound like when he finally talks. And Penn— Well, Penn, of course, is Penn."

The next time you speak to the boys, say, "Nice threads," but keep in mind that what you're admiring are only costumes.

roll. "Tommy" was a really pretensions important story about a deaf, dumb and blind kid and it WAS rock and roll. It may have been a little about rock and roll, but it also was rock and roll. It was on the charts. It was listened to by people the age of the

And I talked to ET.

And I met Roger Daltrey and my hair was a little longer than his.

And the 14 year old boy was happy.



CHISELS HITTING CONCRETE by Teller

Our unpleasant world will have six episodes, to appear on national tv in Britain. Each episode will have 24 minutes of performance, mostly in a studio, but also in and about London. The studio will be set as the ruins of a large warehouse/loft, with the Hay-Roob, an emblem we have started to use often, blasted out of the back wall of the set.



THE HAY-ROOB: THE FULL STORY
IN THE NEXT MOFO KNOWS

At selected times, the letters of our name will emerge and make the Hay-Roob's meaning clear. The piece removed from the back wall also, from time to time, flies in on chains, but just to make it more interesting, the chains are attached to nothing.

We'll perform our own theme song, a dissonant, thirty-second ditty by Gary Stockdale (it sounds like ragtime written by Stravinsky), on piano and electric bass, accompanied by a

recorded rhythm track consisting of chisels hitting concrete.

You won't see the show on tv in America, but it may be available in a year or so on home video, but don't be too worried that you're missing a lot of new stuff. Most of the bits we are doing are things we created for American tv: the Water Tank (which we will do with John Cleese selecting the card, then ignoring a dying Teller); the Cage of Rats on Teller's Head card trick; the Sawing the Dummy Teller in half we did on Letterman; the Scleral Shells, where the selected card ends up written on my eyeballs (we'll do the trick for Brit tv comedy star Dawn French); the Hand-Stab, where for a change Penn gets hurt, as well as the Iron Comedian, where Penn gets strapped into a torture device and gets tortured every time a joke he tells bombs (the great Limey comedian Alexei Sayle will show how real, high-quality standup looks, then pass judgement on Penn's performance, while Teller administers the punishment.) The English actress Fiona Fullerton, well known in America for her appearance with James Bond in a hot tub in *A View to a Kill* will get her bosom showered with cream in a restaurant by way of demonstrating the practicality of "How to Poke Your Eye Out with a Fork" from *How to Play with Your Food*. We'll also destroy and transmit into a fish the heirloom watch of actor Stephen Fry (whom you'll see later this year on American tv, playing Oscar Wilde in a western.).

We'll also be introducing a new bit: the Chipper Shredder (involving a cute little bunny rabbit and a gas-powered garden grinder), and revamping a few choice bits from "Penn & Teller Go Public", including Looks Simple, Doesn't It (intricate sleight of hand used to simulate commonplace reality), and the Newscaster Card Trick with an actual well-known British tv newscaster giving the punch line.

It's quite a thrill to do some of these long-forgotten bits again, and to have the chance to stage them more elegantly than the originals. Nothing beats meddling with your own material.