

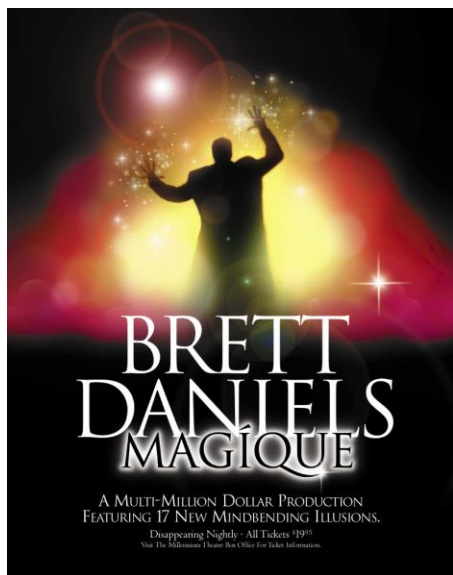
## Brett Daniels: Progress Report

Reported by Steve Bryant

Marvels near Memphis: **Brett Daniels' Magique** premieres with 17 new illusions

Brett Daniels launched a full evening magic show, Brett Daniels: Magic & Beyond, at Mandalay Bay's Gold Strike Casino Resort in Mississippi. Then and now, Brett is the only full-time headliner in the nation's third-largest casino complex, located just south of Memphis. In consideration of his repeat audiences, Brett has arranged with Mandalay Bay to develop a new edition of the show each year. The first of these, and a substantial one, is called **Magique**, which opened in February boasting "17 new mind-bending illusions."

The first change I noticed on revisiting Brett's Millennium Theatre were two large, circular TV screens flanking the stage, video ports if you will, with pre-show footage of antiquated space ships, a la Flash Gordon. The video ports would be used later, along with a large screen on stage, to project Brett's close-up magic.



To introduce 17 new illusions into a show, you have to make a lot of room, and therefore what has been eliminated is as significant a change as what has been added. Gone are such Daniels standards as his Visible Sawing, Disembodied, Interlude, and Table of Death. Brett's "in one" pieces such as the Newspaper Tear, Linking Rings, Notepad Card Rise, and his exquisite Billiard Ball routine have vanished. The Marilyn Monroe illusion and the Floating Ball to Floating Girl to Asrah illusion that introduced Brett to many of us on the World's Greatest Magic specials are no longer in the show. If you perceive that you have already missed some important moments in live magic, you are correct.

Still in the show are Brett's Atlas Fire Globe production of a girl (and its smaller counterpart as a Zombie,) a comedic Guillotine segment, a Jailhouse Rock number in which an incarcerated Brett switches places with an offensive policeman, a lightning-fast Lamborghini production, and Shredded (in which a girl's head is removed and the rest of her body sliced up like bread.) The work with the girl's boxed (and very alive) head sliding along the base of the illusion is quite baffling. Brett initially established himself in show business with an act featuring large birds, and his bird routines still constitute true highlights of the show.



New features include a mid-stage vanish of a girl in a cape, Sword Suspension, Walking Through a Girl, Origami with some very nice work on the reproduction of the girl, and Card on the Seat. Brett gets a strong reaction from Sands of the Desert, opening the effect by turning "wine" (a yellow liquid) into "water ... " (an inky black liquid) " ... from the Mississippi River" (big laugh.) There is a spectacular motorcycle vanish and reproduction, the latter being the transformation of a modernistic wire frame version of the bike into the real thing. There is a completely new Metamorphosis, in which each facet of the box is characterized by its whirling blades, rendering passage foolhardy if not impossible. The most talked-about new illusion in the show is Brett's levitation. It begins normally enough (though quite sexily) with the levitation of a girl, who is holding a scarf, including the requisite hoop work. Suddenly she rises to a terrific height, against a black backdrop. The backdrop raises to show- no means of support (no forklift), and then descends. From her elevated position, the girl drops her scarf. Brett retrieves it and then soars himself to the top of the theater to return it to her. He descends and walks forward to applause, in only jeans and a tee shirt, nothing that suggests a hookup.

The televised close-up segment is entirely new, beginning with a one-card-at-a-time Wild Card (very Ascanioish) and segueing, for the gamblers in the audience, to RollOver Aces. Brett concludes the segment with a beautifully executed and daringly traditional rendition of Vernon's Cups and Balls.



Brett's supporting cast aids the show enormously. His dancers constitute the sexiest chorus line in magic, which Brett acknowledges in various humorous asides and in one feature number with the girls and a gentleman used in the guillotine trick.

The dramatic highlight of the show, performed on weekends only, is Brett's Water Torture Escape. The illusion creates considerable tension, partly because Brett succeeds in making the effect look dangerous, and partly because the costuming shows off Brett's rather commercial physical attributes. I am convinced that the young ladies attending the show with me held their breath throughout the entire piece.

Brett's closer, in both his old show and new, is "Flight," an illusion sequence that climaxes in the between-your-eyes production of a Navy fighter jet. In Magique, Brett has nicely expanded the sequence, opening with Brett himself penetrating through the whirling blades of a large jet turbine engine. That illusion concludes with Brett's reappearance in the audience. Next, in a Top Gun moment, Brett vanishes from the (DeKolta chair) seat of a jet fighter cockpit. The reappearance is new. A vertical wooden box on legs is wheeled on stage. From the ceiling, a GI Joe scale action figure descends on a parachute, entering the top of the box. With appropriate timing, Brett's now human-scale legs crash through the bottom of the box, the door opens, and Brett emerges. The audience, rising to applaud Brett for a great show and still ogling the dancers in their military fatigues, is sufficiently misdirected to be completely surprised by the appearance of the fighter jet.



It's a grand, ambitious show, with unique magical moments, many on the large scale of Water Torture Escape, Dual Levitation, or jet production. But, as Lance Burton has correctly learned on his TV specials, it's often the smaller moments that count. One of my young companions, describing the show to someone else a couple of weeks later said, "He was so good. He had someone take a card, and he tossed the deck into the air. Then this bird came swooping down from the back of the theater, and it caught the [selected] card in its beak!" And she was right. It is a great magical moment, and a defining one. Like Siegfried and Roy's work with their cats, it's something you will see nowhere else, and one of many moments that counsel a visit to the Memphis area, not just once, but annually.