

Magical moments at the Trop: Illusionist Brett Daniels leaves the crowd asking, 'How did he do that?'

By KEVIN CLAPP, Staff Writer | Posted: Tuesday, July 27, 2010



ATLANTIC CITY - The quote, which plays before Brett Daniels takes to the Tropicana Casino and Resort's Showroom stage, comes from the John Travolta movie "Swordfish." The saying describes how Harry Houdini used to make an elephant disappear while a packed house sat and watched.

"How did he do it? Classic misdirection," the voiceover says. "What the eye sees and the ear hears, the mind believes."

The sound bite is an appropriate opening salvo for a crowd-pleasing show that will make you ask, "*how did he do that*," more than once during the hour or so magician Daniels is on stage.

Our first glimpse of Daniels finds him floating in air, the magician descending to the stage and walking forward to commence a show that alternates between big set pieces and smaller, more intimate tricks.

Scarves, a handful of iron rings and a deck of cards are his best friends, Daniels nimbly manipulating them to the amazement of an appreciative, if smallish, audience during Friday's show. "Magic & Beyond" continues six days per week through Sept. 1.

An early highlight has the illusionist turning multicolored scarves into birds, a white cockatoo emerging to circle above the audience. Blue and gold scarves became a parrot. The coolest trick saw Daniels making two macaws from one.

Just as captivating is his work with a deck of cards. At one point, he sits at a small table with a deck, an assistant filming his hands with a camera that transmits his every move to an overhead screen. Lightning quick, he manipulates the cards, plucking coins from thin air and moving them around the tabletop with ease.

Daniels is the perfect master of ceremonies for his show, a seasoned illusionist who has played rooms around the world. He possesses an easy charm and good humor, often popping into the audience to pluck a volunteer to participate in the next trick or illusion. A young boy came up to take part in the mystery of the silver-rings routine, linking six steel rings together or passing one through the others.

Taking a section of newspaper at one point, Daniels tore it to shreds, wadded it up into a cylinder, then unfurled it to reveal the same section of paper, reformed. Then he offered to show it to someone in the audience - "Sir, would you like to take a look at that?" - before playfully yanking it back and tossing it off stage to the crowd's delight.

Of the larger set pieces, among the most impressive is a jet-turbine illusion that finds Daniels being sucked through a working turbine only to reappear seconds later at the rear of the audience. Another fun one is a tribute to Marilyn Monroe, with Daniels "conjuring" the Hollywood legend from a portrait hanging above the stage before making her vanish.

The best part? This is a family show through and through. The audience of a few hundred was littered with kids as young as infants, and parents didn't have to worry about what they would see, with the exception of a few barely-there costumes on the show's four dancers (each from New Jersey and Philadelphia), and a few suggestive moves.

By the time Daniels concludes his show with an elaborate routine that involves turning a metal frame into a real motorcycle, then transporting it from point A on the stage to point B - an enclave above and to the left of the audience - you're wishing he's got a few more tricks up his sleeves.

Cynics can spend all the time they want scoffing, trying to figure out how Daniels levitates this or conjures that. But why bother? Just sit back and enjoy.

Let your eyes see. And your ears hear. And your mind believe. Early in the show, Daniels says it's his first time in Atlantic City since the late '90s. Here's hoping the magician's next visit sees him reappearing much sooner than that.



