

'Skilled Magic'

Jeff McBride pushes the envelope with his 'Magic at the Edge' show

By ROBERT DiGIACOMO For At The Shore, (609) 272-7017

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The Harry Potter phenomenon has proven an audience-building boon for veteran purveyors of magic like Jeff Bride.

“There's a huge interest not only in magic, but in its mystical aspects and in learning magic,” says McBride, who stars in “Magic at the Edge,” running through Sept. 2 at Trump Marina.

“That's the whole thrust of the Harry Potter books — the life lessons people learn through studying and using magic. Adults are equally as fascinated with the whole magic phenomenon as the young adults.”

For his new show, McBride plans a mix of classic and new illusions, “street magic” performed among the audience before each show, and his signature, sleight-of-hand card tricks.

Also appearing are McBride's wife, Abbi, whose maneuvers include trying to beat Houdini's record in escaping from a straitjacket; master magician (and McBride's own teacher) Eugene Berger and McBride protege Jordan Wright.

“One of the things I'm trying to explore is how I gain inspiration from unusual sources — from the exotic Kabuki theater of Asia to the techno tribal Burning Man festival, I'm going to the edges of art and performance and bringing it all back,” he says, adding: “The show pushes the envelope, but it is a family show.”

While the performance will include special effects, it's mainly a showcase for what McBride — who set a Guinness world record for sleight of hand magic — calls “skilled magic.”

“I've been pushing the envelope of my skills — I don't rely on equipment or big boxes to do my magic,” says McBride, who can manipulate up to 120 cards a minute. “I do a very, very high touch, skilled magic.”

“Most magicians will close with a giant extravaganza. I close my show with a tour-de-force of sleight of hand card mastery.”

At the same time, McBride hopes to avoid the overdone staples of the genre, such as making a woman (in this case, his wife) disappear.

“We try to avoid any cliches or any kinds of images or references to people saying, 'I've seen that,’” he says. “We try to push the edge, especially when we come back to a market where we're very well known.”

To further keep the proceedings fresh, McBride plans an interactive “street magic” pre-show, starting one hour before curtain time; during this time, magicians will wander through The Shell to chat with the audience and perform tricks.

The pre-show, which will feature McBride's own teacher, Berger (whom McBride calls “our Dumbledore,” in reference to the “Harry Potter” character), reflects his commitment to furthering the craft. McBride also will be teaching master classes, for which participants must apply in advance, during his Atlantic City stay.

“Magic is a living history — not all secrets are in books,” he says. “As Eugene says, real secrets are passed from teachers to students in whispers — they're not broadcast.”

For McBride, this sharing of information — rather than performing a series of tricks — is the real inspiration behind “Magic at the Edge.”

“There's this enduring fascination with what we call 'state of the heart' magic — storytelling and the storyteller,” McBride says. “The magician, the shaman, has always been the storyteller, telling their extraordinary tales and giving people a sense of mystery and wonder.”