

## 2007/Sept PAUL KIEVE - Publishing News

There is, spread out on a table in front of me, a large piece of blank paper - like a map, but one that's been printed in invisible ink - which neatly, and as if by magic, re-folds itself before my very eyes. "That," says award-winning magician Paul Kieve, "is my working model for the Marauders Map, which was the last shot in the film version of *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. It's probably been seen by more people than anything else I've ever done, or will do."

I'm with this man, for whom the impossible is an everyday occurrence and who's CV includes working in Las Vegas, Broadway and London's West End, as well as being the magic consultant to *The Guinness Book of Records*, because he's written a book. *Hocus Pocus - A Tale of Magnificent Magicians and their Amazing Feats*, is a neat trick for a man whose game plan never included writing fiction. Kieve got the idea, he says, when he was hired to work as a 'physical magic consultant' on the Potter movie and ended up teaching tricks to Daniel Radcliffe.

"Once I realised he was seriously into magic I wanted to really inspire him about the whole spectrum of possibilities, not just get him to learn a few tricks. Every time we did a session I'd take an old book from my collection, something with a story attached to it, talk about one of the old magicians and then we'd do something practical - tell and then show. Daniel got really absorbed in magic and took it up as a hobby, and as I was working with him I thought it wouldn't be a bad idea for a book."

Kieve's original plan had been to do more of a history of magic and tricks, but he soon realised the format had been done before and done well; something else, a new angle, was needed. "I had a synopsis, and an introduction from Daniel, but the idea just sat around for quite a while until it occurred to me that I could turn the book into something a lot less dry, which is where the notion of the posters came in."

The posters are in Kieve's house, in London's East End, which is part museum and library, part workshop, rehearsal space and archive. Here all available wallspace is given over to an astonishing collection of original

publicity material from the golden age of magic and illusion - a time when men like Harry Houdini and The Great Lafayette (who is supposed to have had a sign on his front door reading 'The more I see of men, the more I love my dog') were the legendary and undisputed stars of show business.

This house, the posters, and in many ways Kieve himself, as a matrix for the young protagonist, Paul, are the backdrop to the story of *Hocus Pocus*. Paul is an up-and-coming magician and one day, after a show, his posters come to life and we meet Alexander, The Man Who Knows, and David Devant as they and other of Paul's heroes materialise in front of him. Walking out of their brightly coloured stone litho prints they proceed to show Paul the kind of magic that used to happen when the crowds rolled up and Grand Illusionists produced spectacular extravaganzas, twice nightly.

That, for most authors, would be enough plot and content for one book, but Kieve really does love magic and loves teaching it, and so, woven into the story are the instructions on how to do some forty or more real tricks. You won't learn how to saw someone in half or levitate them, but, with practice, readers will no doubt be able to amaze their friends more than a little bit. "The idea was, I suppose, quite a natural one particularly because of where I live, which is near the Hackney Empire where people like Houdini used to play and where, when I was in the Zodiac Brothers, we were one of the first acts to play on a variety bill when it reopened. The whole thing just meshed together."

All the tricks that Kieve describes in the book - the vanishing animals, the sleight of hand, the smoke and the mirrors - actually did happen just down the road, but you could say that one of the biggest tricks he's managed to pull off is actually getting published, although having an introduction by Daniel Radcliffe as a card up your sleeve must have helped. "Actually, it was my agent, Sheila Ableman, who really badgered me and got me to do it and it was her drive that was a big factor in making this book happen. Without her I would never have got it together as I had so much other stuff going on - I've just been doing *Lord of the Rings*, in Toronto and in London. Bloomsbury were the obvious first stop for us and they were instantly interested."

With Kieve what you see - a knowledgeable, immensely enthusiastic entertainer - is, unlike so much in the world of magic, what you get and I wondered if *Hocus Pocus* was going to be a one-time-only performance, or a brand new part of his repertoire. "I really did enjoy doing it, I loved the fact that I could make things up, that I had the artistic freedom of just *describing* something and not then have to worry about how to make it happen. Normally it's very different, a writer will have said that an event occurs and I then have to work out how to make it happen on stage." Did he just dodge that question because he doesn't want to answer it? Kieve says that isn't so. "The truth is," he smiles, "I don't really know." Do I believe him, or is this merely another piece of stage misdirection? With a magician, who can ever tell?