

Ex Libris by Joaquin Ayala, Ph.D.

Hello folks and welcome to the Ex Libris article for October 2017! The kids are all back in school, the fall season is upon us in the northern hemisphere and that can only mean one thing: Halloween is right around the corner! This also happens to be *the* Magic Month for magicians and is also the time when “spooky” magic comes about. This month I thought I would do a double feature, two books which fit the seasonal theme, both by the same author: *Spirit Theater* and *Strange Ceremonies* by the late, great **Eugene Burger**.

Spirit Theater was a seminal book in its own right – it was the first book on that subject in magic. It was originally supposed to be published by Magic Inc. in Chicago but it was held over for several years until it was taken over and published by Kaufman & Greenberg. This book was also the first book published by **Richard Kaufman** that was written by another author. It was first published as a 192-page hardcover book in 1986, written by Eugene Burger, illustrated and edited by Richard Kaufman. The first edition came with a neat extra item: an Eva-Tone Sound Sheet (remember those?!) which contained the script for two items in the book – *The Dollhouse of Millie Riggs* and *The Fox Sisters*.

Spirit Theater only has six effects inside, however, its aim was to introduce spirit-type magic to magicians with a clear understanding of its background, origins and related fields and above all, *what* spirit magic really is. The book focuses on the various aspects of spirit magic, such as séances, creating a character for this type of magic, setting the mood for performances and how to make your spirit shows better by building them intelligently. It also discusses performing this type of magic in a close-up situation. The real gems in this book are the interviews with noted bizzarist, **Tony Andruzzi (Masklyn ye Mage)**, an essay discussion with Eugene himself and a discussion about séance presentations with mentalist **Max Maven**. It includes an excellent annotated bibliography of resources on the subjects covered in this book as well as covering explorations into the allied fields of this genre.

The second book in focus this month is *Strange Ceremonies*. This book is a 105-page hardcover published in 1991 by Kaufman & Greenberg, illustrated by **Richard Kaufman** and written by Eugene Burger and Richard Kaufman. This tome has a slightly different feel to it as it covers more about the history of bizarre magick and its place in our little corner of the world. There are some fantastic bizarre pieces, very theatrical in nature, which perfectly illustrate this point. The focus is really on the history or bizarre and strange ceremonies throughout history as they may be related to magic and magicians. Eugene talks about blood and fear, sawing women into pieces, the metaphysics of magic and other historic aspects of these odd ceremonies. Why did/do they exist? Where did this all come from? What is Bizarre Magick? The section of effects from **Jay Inglee** are all very good, but particularly intriguing and insightful are the profiles of the magicians who are all very much tied to this genre of the art, including **Tony Andruzzi** (Masklyn ye Mage), **Hiawatha** (a GREAT storytelling magician), **Imam** (Imam Hossain, from Bangladesh), **Penn & Teller** (believe it or not), **Max Maven** and **Jeff McBride**.

If you are in the mood for some not-so-normal magic books to read and want to get in the mood for the season, these books will most certainly fill that need for you in a most satisfying way. If you want to learn some deeper and frankly very interesting history behind the odd-ball things that we magicians do today, *Strange Ceremonies* would be a better fit. Both are a great introduction to the Bizarre Magick genre if you have ever had an interest in it or find it fascinating. Happy Haunting folks and have a great fall and Halloween season! – **J.M.A.**