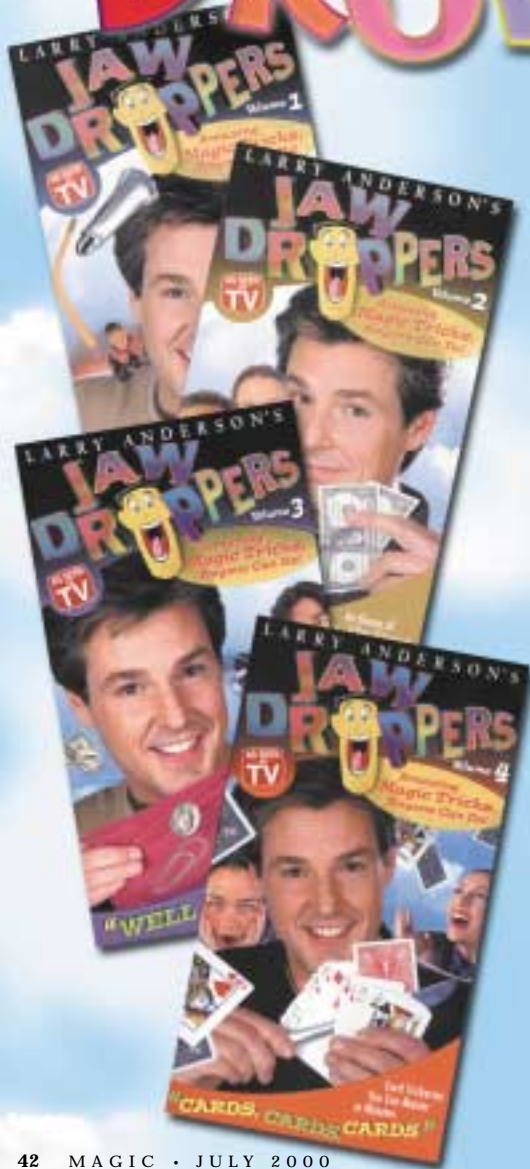


JAW DROPPERS



By JOHN MOEHRING

"Wowww!" "How'd you do that?" "No way!" The infomercial pops onto the screen with over a dozen quick-cut audience reactions. "Come on, man!" "Oh, my God!" "That gives me the heebie jeebies..."

Déjà vu? Get the feeling you've been there, seen the very same slap-happy, shrieking, laughing, obviously dumbfounded folks who appeared on one or the other of David Blaine's street magic specials? As a matter of fact, less than five minutes into the half-hour video pitch for *JawDroppers*, its creator, Larry Anderson, says: "Street magic has become very hot lately. Well, it's nothing more than 'jawdroppers,' just pure, simple magic taken to the streets." For the next 24 razzle-dazzle infomercial minutes, witness how tricks from Larry's new video series have the power to amaze the masses on street corners, in bars, from table to table in restaurants, and even at your workplace. A voice-over announcer explains: "This is eye-popping, traffic-stopping, jaw-dropping magic that anyone can do... anytime and anywhere."

For \$59.90 (or two easy credit-card charges of \$29.95), plus shipping and handling, you get the four-volume set (over seven hours) of videotapes. "It's a sensational how-to collection of over 80 of the greatest *JawDroppers* ever assembled! Fun to watch and even more fun to perform!" The announcer's voice seems to escalate an octave, as he gets into a CTA. "That's the Call to Action," Anderson clarifies, "the commercial within the infomercial that eats up seven-and-a-half minutes of your airtime." The announcer wraps the first one by advising, "If you order within the next 30 minutes, included is the astonishing Svengali Deck, an amazing trick deck that practically works itself. You won't believe it till you get your own hands on it! So, order now. And, remember, *Jawdroppers* are so easy they're guaranteed to work for you... or your money back!"

When it comes to the marketing of magic, Larry is no newcomer. "I started pitching Svengali Decks at the Minnesota State Fair when I was 13." It wasn't long before he joined the IBM and was performing professionally all over the Minneapolis/St. Paul area. In 1970, when Mark Wilson came to town to promote his Pillsbury-sponsored *Magic Circus*, 18-year-old Anderson was hired to assist. "We hit it off famously. Mark and Nani had big plans for MW Productions and said if I ever wanted to join them, just give them a call." Larry enrolled at the University of Minnesota and began studies in television production. "But after a year of college, I said this is not for me." He gave Mark the call, then headed for Hollywood.

The next three years with Mark Wilson provided Anderson with opportunities he couldn't have dreamed of. Paramount Television had engaged Mark as the technical advisor for *The Magician* starring Bill



Bixby. Larry attended production meetings with Mark and worked with the scriptwriters, coming up with unusual ways to incorporate magic effects into the storylines. "My job was to be on the set each day, teaching Bill how to perform the tricks. In addition, I worked with the directors to suggest camera angles and help set up shots without cuts, making the magic more credible on television." Larry even had to get his Screen Actors Guild card, as he appeared in over half of the 23 episodes of *The Magician*.

Anderson helped with the development of numerous Mark Wilson-produced amusement-park shows across the nation. He continued to gain credits as a TV magic consultant, working with celebrities such as Peter Falk, John Denver, Lily Tomlin, and Dick Van Dyke. In 1975, when MW Productions was technically advising for the Australian production of *The Magic Show*, Larry was dispatched to rehearse the illusions built by John Gaughan. However, when the show opened Larry was offered the Doug Henning lead role. A call from Down Under advised Mark that the decision had been made to pursue a new career in front of the footlights. But that's another story...

Backtracking to 1971, when Larry first arrived in Los Angeles to work for the burgeoning MW Productions, he was given the formidable responsibility of being production coordinator for the *Mark Wilson Course in Magic*. "It was Mark's brainchild," Larry remembers, "something he always wanted to do — publish a comprehensive course that had lots of pictures, with a piece of text to fit each

and every picture. Fortunately, I understood this vision and helped Mark realize it." Larry supervised the shooting of the 50,000 photographs that were eventually transformed to the 2,000 line drawings used in the 472-page book. In the Preface to the *Course*, Mark tells readers: "Larry's assignment, with the assistance of Don Wayne, was to coordinate all the

From concept to completion, the *JawDroppers* project, including the production of the infomercial, took eight months. It all started in late June of 1999, when Larry did some impromptu magic on the set of another infomercial. "I was working as a spokesperson for this new product, and as I frequently do during downtime on the set, whether it be a



Almost 30 years ago, rising television star Bill Bixby [left] watches intently as Larry and Mark Wilson show how *The Magician* would make magic happen on television.

gameshow or a sitcom, I did some tricks for the cast and crew." The president of the production company filming the infomercial liked what he saw, and he told Larry they ought to do something with the teaching of magic. "I had often thought about developing a website or even a Marshall Brodien-type video with a two-minute infomercial, but never had the resources or really the time and energy to devote to it. So it was this moment that provided the impetus and eventually the financial investors to do something."

The videotape product was originally planned to be called *JawDroppers 101*, making a play on the academic use of "101" as a beginners course number. The four volumes were to have 101 tricks explained. "But that was just too many. About 82 tricks were all we could get on the four tapes." More importantly, the thinking changed about the tutorial aspect of the series. They were now to be a collection of performances. If you liked any one or two of the tricks, you could learn how to do just those tricks, as the detailed explanations were right there. "We were *not* trying to sell tapes to turn people into magicians. It's not a course. We just wanted to give them some simple pocket tricks they could pick out and learn."

written material and photography, as well as make his own valuable contributions to the creative writing and rewriting — all essential to the overall result."

When asked if his experience with the *Mark Wilson Course* had become helpful, and truly valuable, when it came to the production of *JawDroppers*, Larry answered in the affirmative. "Mind you that was almost 30 years ago, but in many ways the answer is yes. What that early work did was give me utmost confidence that I could write and teach magic."