

## Intriguing ‘Deceptive Practice: The Mysteries and Mentors of Ricky Jay’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on June 4, 2013 - 12:39pm

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Ricky Jay is a fascinating character. He went from a staple of late night TV on shows like “Dinah Shore” and “The Tonight Show” to a notable collaborator with David Mamet, co-starring in most of his films, to an author and performer on Broadway. The man is one of the true living masters of his chosen art form – magic. As one might imagine, getting behind the curtain of this particular wizard proves difficult for “Deceptive Practice: The Mysteries and Mentors of Ricky Jay” but the film about him remains an entertaining bio-doc regardless of the fact that the bio portion really only stays within its subject’s profession.

We get to know Ricky Jay in “Deceptive Practice” but learn almost nothing about “Ricky Potash,” the man who would change his name and become as influential a magician as nearly any of the 20th century. Ricky Jay has always and will always just exude cool confidence in what he does. So many magicians and magic acts come with an obvious desire to please. “Look at me! Look at my trick!” Jay never conveys that desperation. He’s more of the school of the old-fashioned bon vivant who would travel the world and bring sleight of hand learned along the way back to the royalty he served. There’s something infinitely relatable in that he seems like the kind of guy you could meet in a bar and something very performer-like about Jay at the same time.



Deceptive Practice

*Photo credit: Kino Lorber*

How did Ricky Potash become Ricky Jay? He loved the form of magic from a very young age and has a natural confidence on stage. The documentary spends a lot of time detailing the relationships with other magicians that inspired Jay, after the subject points out that it’s always

the one-on-one teaching dynamics that will do more for a budding performer than anything they could read in a book. With an impressive amount of archival footage, we see the classic magicians who inspired and sometimes even taught Jay how to be a performer – “The Mentors of Ricky Jay.” And the film wraps around nicely to show us a decades-long relationship that Jay has with a younger magician, passing not the specific tricks of the trade per se but the disciplines needed to become a master.

Why does Ricky Jay do what he does other than mere fascination with magic? That may be it. He seems to thoroughly enjoy the spotlight in performances on late night TV (and you really must see a spectacular bit with Steve Martin that the filmmakers pulled from the archive) but he doesn't strike me as the kind of guy who's in it for fame. I do wish “Deceptive Practice” tried to dig a bit deeper into Jay's family background and personal interests. How did he go from magic to acting to writing to even dabbling in music? He just did. Maybe that's all the answer we need but it doesn't make for that satisfactory of a film.

I wonder if “Deceptive Practice” might have been more effective as an hour-long TV special. The theatrical running time implies a bit more insight into its subject matter than the film provides. Having said that, I still like the movie and think Ricky Jay is such a fascinating dude that even a movie that doesn't get too far beyond his stage persona is worth watching. And there's something arguably even more intriguing about a film like this one in that it's so clearly being authored by its subject. Ricky Jay only lets you see what he wants you to see when he's on stage. Doesn't it make sense that a film about him would be similarly elusive? And sometimes even magical?

*“Deceptive Practice: The Mysteries and Mentors of Ricky Jay” opens at the Music Box in Chicago on June 7, 2013.*



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