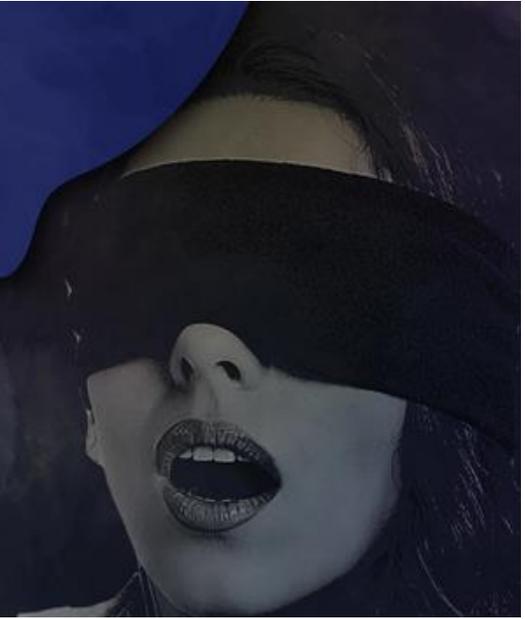


Want to Turn Your Audience Members into Mind Readers?

noun: serendipity

1. the occurrence and development of events by chance in a happy or beneficial way.

Effects where one audience member reads the mind of another spectator are among the most powerful and memorable. If you want to create a memory your audiences will remember for months, you need Serendipity.



Serendipity

Give Your Audience the Ability to Read Minds

By Cris Johnson

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INTRODUCTION

Thank you for purchasing Serendipity. This is a fun, easy routine that stuns audiences. I've used it for adults with great success and even jaded middle school children. This routine makes the volunteer a true star of the show. Plus there are no electronics, preshow, or expensive gimmicks to worry about. What could be better?

When you purchased this package, you received access to all the videos plus this PDF. While I generally prefer to learn magic or mentalism via video, I know many performers prefer reading. To be complete, I've put together this manuscript so you can learn in the style that appeals to you.

Plus, when I'm on video, I tend to ramble. If you want to learn this routine in a more streamlined fashion, this manuscript lets you do that without being subjected to my endless babbling.

Let's dive in!

EFFECT

Quick comment about gender and pronouns. Throughout this description, I refer to the performer as “he.” I refer to the volunteers as “she.” That’s because I’m writing this from my point of view and I’m male. And I usually call on women for this routine. Obviously, any person can perform this piece and any person can be called upon for volunteers, including gender-fluid or non-binary individuals. Just wanted to be clear I’m an all-inclusive kind of person.

Here’s a bare-bones description of the effect as seen by the audience:

Onstage the audience can see two large drawing pads set on easels.

The performer introduces the routine by talking briefly about the concept of serendipity. It’s the idea of coincidences, in a nutshell. To demonstrate, he asks an audience member to pass out small slips of paper along with small pencils to 10-12 audience members.

These audience members are instructed to jot down in a couple of words a physical object. Car, house, baseball, anything that springs to mind. While the slips are being completed, the performer invites two spectators onstage.

He explains that one will be the sender of a thought and the other will be the receiver. To the receiver, the performer explains that when it’s time, they will take a sharpie and just scribble all over the drawing pad in an exercise in free association. But to prevent any interference or distractions, they will be blindfolded.

The sender will select one of the slips from the audience and that’s the object they will draw on the other pad. The performer goes out into the audience and collects the folded slips in a large manila envelope. He invites the sender to pluck one slip out of the envelope and hold it.

Turning both drawing pads away from the audience, he blindfolds the receiver and hands her a marker. He asks the sender if the slip has something on it she can draw. After she confirms this, he hands her a marker and asks her to step behind her easel. The performer absentmindedly remembers the receiver’s pad has his scribbles on it, so he rushes over and tears that sheet off.

The performer takes center stage and tells both volunteers to begin drawing after his 3-2-1 countdown. He allows each to draw for several moments. He then steps over to the receiver, comments on her drawing, and asks her to sign her name at the bottom of the drawing. He asks the sender to do the same. He moves the easel out of the way of the receiver and helps her remove her blindfold.

Both ladies are asked to step forward for the big reveal. First, he spins the sender’s easel toward the audience, revealing her drawing: a Christmas tree. He then spins the receiver’s easel around. While her drawing is not a match, her random scribbling bears a startling resemblance to a Christmas tree, complete with a tree topper.

At this point, everything can be examined.

HISTORY

I love drawing duplications! They are among my most favorite effects in magic or mentalism. As primarily a children's performer, I didn't have much opportunity to do much mentalism over the last 10-15 years. And when I did, it was usually to perform "Murder By Magic," my one-person murder mystery for corporate audiences. And presently that show does not need a drawing duplication.

So my experiences using a drawing duplication have been limited to my occasional corporate holiday gig. And in those situations, I used Bob Cassidy's Fourth Dimensional Telepathy, which uses a drawing duplication as the climax.

But I still studied other routines. Most of the drawing duplications I've seen involve a deck of picture cards. The spectator picks a card, and the performer reproduces the drawing. Those are not my cup of tea.

I prefer it when the drawing duplication is apparently a completely free choice and that's what the audience experiences with Serendipity.

I also love routines where it appears the audience member is the one reading minds or demonstrating some other fantastical ability. Until I developed this routine, I didn't have much luck with such effects. I structured Banachek's PK Touches method into such a routine. I had a few card effects that fit the bill. But a drawing duplication where an audience member did the deed? I had only seen one such effect: Simpatico.

Simpatico is the brainchild of Brian Brushwood. Among other releases, Brian has produced what I feel is the best book test on the market. I had been aware of Simpatico for years, but was less than thrilled with the method, after learning it in Brian's Penguin lecture. Because I was so fascinated with the effect, I bought the Simpatico kit from Brian, knowing in advance how it worked.

When I received the kit, I found the equipment supplied to be completely unworkable. I found that I literally could not accomplish the effect with what I received. The supplied equipment was of an absolutely low quality. I'd have to completely rework the routine from the ground up.

Rather than replace all the Simpatico materials after paying \$400 for an effect that included a method I did not love, I changed gears. After being inspired by Harry Anderson's Penguin lecture, I looked at Sympatico's shortcomings and proceeded to solve each problem.

The other major source of inspiration for this routine comes from a book by Penn & Teller. In it, they detailed a routine where an audience member scribbled on an upside-down drawing pad held horizontally to reproduce a thought from another spectator. The routine involved the performer switching in a 'dead' pen or marker, one that's drained of its ink or dried out.

I loved the idea but hated the overall blocking and handling. But the idea of that dried-out marker stuck with me for years. I had it in my notes, hoping one-day inspiration would strike. Using this methodology in Serendipity meant I didn't have to use electronics of any kind like in Simpatico.

I also disliked Brian's routine, specifically how the reproduced drawing looks. In Brian's routine, the receiver draws a star, triangle, and square, that when compared to the Christmas tree, looks vaguely enough to be considered a match.

To me, that's just too clever. I developed the idea of free association and the receiver's scribbles looking enough like the thought-of object to be considered a clear hit. To be fair, I'm not a big proponent of the 'too perfect' theory in most cases. But in Serendipity, I feel that if the receiver's random scribbles wind up looking like a perfect Christmas tree at the end, it reeks of something very suspicious.

Finally, I disliked Brian's overall method that allows the blindfolded spectator to reproduce something that resembles the thought-of object. In his Penguin lecture, Brian states this has never been an issue for him. And maybe that's true in his experience. But I'd hardly say the blindfolded spectator would be all that amazed. In my work, I prefer everyone to be amazed, including the volunteers.

I also want to thank Cody Fisher for his assistance. Before I started performing Serendipity, I called Cody and asked him for his thoughts on the routine. He loved it and offered several ideas. Some of these ideas will be discussed in the Alternate Ideas section. But one of his ideas made it into the core routine I now perform.

In Simpatico, the audience is shown large cards with possible drawing ideas printed on them. The sender selects a drawing and that's what they reproduce on their drawing pad. Cody's idea was to solicit suggestions from the audience in the form of billets, making the impossibility of the routine even more.

Cody also suggested a powerful psychological ploy near the end of the routine which throws off discerning audience members. This makes backtracking the method next to impossible.

I can't even stress how thrilled I am with the routine in its present form.

Let's get into an overview of the secret.

SECRET

In its most basic form, the receiver scribbles with a dried-out marker. When I blindfold them and tear away the paper that I scribbled on to demonstrate, the pre-drawn scribbled Christmas Tree is already there.

The legit slips the audience members draw are switched for a collection of slips that all say Christmas Tree on them. The sender picks one of the force slips and draws her tree. The sender scribbles, unaware that she's not drawing anything. At the end of the routine, I switch the receiver's dried-out marker in an off moment for another live one so she can sign her name.

At the end, everything is clean.

Best of all, nobody is the wiser.

And putting this together is a lot cheaper than a \$400 routine with poorly-made props.

Next, I'll cover what you need to put Serendipity together, along with links, photos, and more.

WHAT YOU NEED

To perform Serendipity as I do, you'll need the following:

Two foldable easel stands. I got mine from Amazon. [LINK HERE](#).

A package of 3x5" index cards. You'll need 5 or 6 for the force billets and another 5 or 6 for each performance. I prefer unlined for aesthetics, but if you happen to have lined ones floating around your home or office, they will work just fine. [LINK HERE](#).

Two 6X9" manilla envelopes. You can also go bigger if you like. [LINK HERE](#).

A box of golf pencils. I use these because they are inexpensive, and I don't have to worry about them drying out while people are trying to write with them. And I don't have to worry about collecting them again at the end of the show. [LINK HERE](#).

Two 18X24" artists' drawing pads. Try to get the ones with the thickest paper possible. For parlor situations, feel free to go smaller. [LINK HERE](#).

Double-sided Scotch tape. [LINK HERE](#).

Three thick Sharpie markers. The thicker the better, so the drawings really 'pop' from the stage. [LINK HERE](#).

Black Duct Tape. This is for securing the pads to the easels, an idea I credit to Brian Brushwood. [LINK HERE](#).

One blindfold. Any kind of sleeping mask will do. It should be easy for the spectator to put on and take off. For a while, I was using the Simpatico blindfold, but it has to be tied at the back of the volunteer's head. For long-haired women, this can sometimes result in tangled or pulled hair. Case in point...on one of the live performances with this package, you may hear me apologize to the long-haired woman as I tie the blindfold. [LINK HERE](#).

That's it! No magic site gimmicks are needed. Now let's cover the preparation and setup.

SET UP

To prepare, you need to gimmick one of your 6X9" envelopes. Trim off one 'wall' or panel of the duplicate envelope. Trim this panel so it easily slides into the other envelope. Voila! You've now created a simple switching envelope.

Next, take your 3X5" index cards and cut them in half along the longer side. When you finish, you'll have a collection of 3X2.5" billets. Fold each one into quarters. Next, take 10-12 of these billets and print CHRISTMAS TREE with one of the golf pencils. I refold these and drop them into one side of the gimmick envelope. It's not important which side you pick, as long as you remember which side has the force slips when it's time for the sender to reach in and pick one.

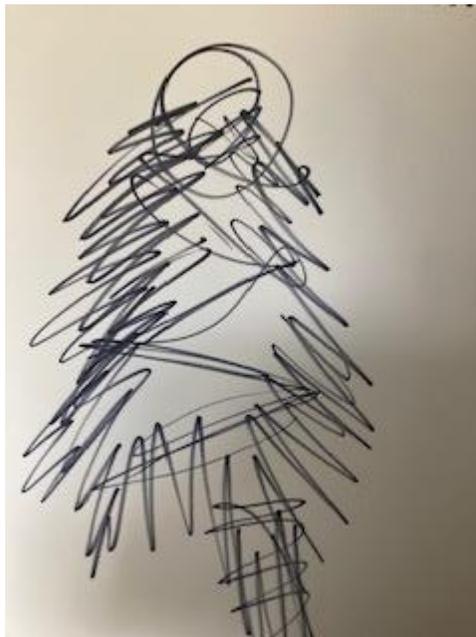
Take the other 10-12 billets, add 10-12 of the golf pencils, and stick those somewhere you can reach them easily during the show.

On one of your drawing pads, tape together the two top pages. That's what the double-sided Scotch tape is for.

I've found that even with the thickest paper, a Sharpie drawing can still be faintly seen with only one piece of paper on top of it. So I use two. The tape ensures that when I tear away the sheet, it looks to the audience like I'm simply tearing away one sheet. Places pieces of the double-sided tape on the second sheet down, along the perimeter. Then place the top sheet onto the taped paper. Make sure everything lines up. Then I like to dog-ear one end of this double sheet to make it even easier to grab in the heat of the action.

On the sheet below this double sheet, you're going to draw your force drawing. (Yes, I just realized I'm switching between "I" and "You." It's okay.)

Draw your tree like the drawing below:



As you can see, it looks really haphazard and when your audience and when your receiver sees it, they can totally 'buy into' the idea they scribbled this while blindfolded.

And the reason I chose a Christmas tree? It wasn't to blatantly rip off Simpatico. I chose a tree because the scribbling nature of the procedure lends itself to a crazy drawing of a tree. Feel free and experiment to see what else you can come up with.

Take one of the Sharpies and remove the cap, letting it sit out. You'll probably have to let it sit out for days! I was stunned at how long it took to dry it out. And even if I accidentally put the cap back on, that sucker will sort of come back to life and start drawing again. So I leave my designated Sharpie uncapped all the time.

(Yes, mentalists reading this may be screaming at me right now that there are easier ways to prep a marker like this. If so, great. You do you.)

Once my marker is sufficiently dried out, I draw a ring around the marker to identify it as my gimmick marker. It looks like this:



As you can see, that ain't subtle. I don't want to take any chances of giving the blindfolded volunteer the wrong one. Besides, it's a stage routine, and who really studies a marker? If Magic Square performers can hide their number grid on a marker, then a simple ring around the barrel of a Sharpie will never be noticed.

That's it! Your gimmicks are prepared. Next, I'll walk you through setting up at the gig.

AT THE GIG

At the gig, you'll want to set up your two easels on either side of the stage. I like to leave the drawing side facing the audience. That way, I'm set to demonstrate the scribbling I want the volunteer to do. And the audience can see this, too.

Use the black tape to secure the easels to the pads. It should look like this:



If it looks unsightly to you, don't worry, each pad's cover will fold back over the easel, obscuring the DIY duct tape job you've done. Full credit: I learned how to do this from Brushwood's *Simpatico*.

You'll want to situate the easels so that when the pre-drawn scribble-tree is uncovered, the sender on the other side of the stage can't see it. You'll also want to check your sight lines so the first row of your audience to the extreme right or left can't see it either. It only takes a few moments to check this.

If your sight lines are bad, you can do what I did in the second performance video. In this venue, I had a table of ladies seated at a table to my immediate left. They are out of camera range, but they were there for the entire show. And the organizer refused to allow me to move the audience. So rather than have my two volunteers draw their drawings at the same time, I had the receiver draw hers first. Then I had the sender draw hers with her pad facing the audience. I couldn't use my normal blocking without the sender seeing the secret, so I modified it.

That's why I included this particular performance – to show you a less-than-ideal performance that slayed the audience!

Have your gimmicked envelope along with the blindfold, golf pencils, and blank billets easily available. I perform out of either a Lefler table or a briefcase, depending on the show. Many

mentalists work out of catalog cases or small suitcases. You'll have to adapt to what works for you.

I wear a jacket during my shows, so I stick one of the ungimmicked markers along with the dried-out marker in my left front jacket pocket. In my right front jacket pocket, I have the third marker and it is unprepared. This is the one that will allow me to perform a quick switch and have the receiver sign her name at the bottom of her drawing.

If you don't wear a jacket, you can put the markers in your front pants pockets.

Now let's turn to a run-through of the routine.

ROUTINE RUN-THROUGH

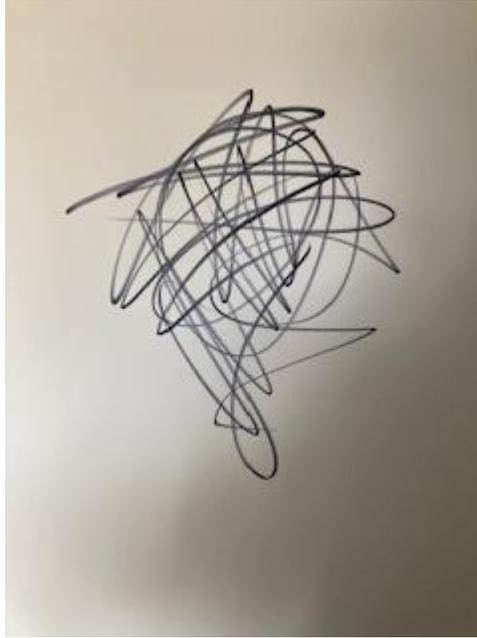
For this run-through, I'm going to reproduce my original description of the effect from the beginning of this manuscript. I'll then add pertinent actions or secret moves within that description **in red**.

Onstage the audience can see two large drawing pads set on easels. **Remember to check your sight lines when setting up.**

The performer introduces the routine by talking briefly about the concept of serendipity. It's the idea of coincidences, in a nutshell. To demonstrate, he asks an audience member to pass out small slips of paper along with small pencils to 10-12 audience members. **In some performances, I give the volunteer the blank billets in a little clear baggie and the pencils in another. Other times, like for school shows, I just hand the kid everything in their hand. Some performers might wonder why you're having slips distributed one way but collecting them in a new way, namely the envelope. Trust me, that's "magician's guilt." No one cares.**

These audience members are instructed to jot down in a couple of words a physical object. Car, house, baseball, anything that springs to mind. While the slips are being completed, the performer invites two spectators onstage.

He explains that one will be the sender of a thought and the other will be the receiver. To the receiver, the performer explains that when it's time, they will take a sharpie and just scribble all over the drawing pad in an exercise in free association. **I reach inside my left jacket pocket and take out both markers. I take both out because I don't want to just take out one and run the risk of taking the dried-out marker and then having to go back into my pocket and grab the one that still writes. So I grab both and then uncap the 'live' marker to demonstrate the scribbling. When I do this, I make my scribbling look like a complete mess. But my style of scribbling is similar to my pre-drawn tree—lots of spiky motions as I scribble. Here's an example:**



After I finish, I recap the marker and dump both back in my left jacket pocket. But to prevent any interference or distractions, they will be blindfolded.

The sender will select one of the slips from the audience and that's the object they will draw on the other pad. The performer goes out into the audience and collects the folded slips in a large manila envelope. Be sure to simply hold the envelope in such a way that the slips go into the side where there are no other gimmicks. Another note: you may notice the envelope is bulky due to the prepared billets already in the envelope. No one will notice. You're moving about the audience, collecting billets, and bantering. Besides, you've got the opening of the envelope buckled open to allow folks to easily drop their slips in the envelope. This buckling helps hide the bulk. Returning to the stage, he invites the sender to pluck one slip out of the envelope and hold it. As you return to the stage, casually stick your hand in the envelope to make access to the Christmas billets easily accessible. Tell her to avert her gaze as she reaches in. She takes a billet, and now you can casually toss the envelope aside. Now any 'bulk' will be seen as a result of the audience billets you just collected.

Turning both drawing pads away from the audience, he blindfolds the receiver and hands her a marker. Once again, I reach inside my left jacket pocket and bring out both markers. I hand her the dried-out marker as I uncap it for her. He asks the sender if the slip has something on it she can draw. After she confirms this, he hands her a marker and asks her to step behind her easel. I hand the sender the remaining 'live' marker still in my hand. The performer absentmindedly remembers the receiver's pad has his scribbles on it, so he rushes over and tears that sheet off.

COMMENTARY: This requires a touch of acting. It should seem to your audience that you forgot to tear off the sheet previously. I apologize, utter under my breath that I forgot, etc. Underplay this. It's not a moment.

Just walk over to the easel, take the dogeared corner and tear off the double sheet of paper and casually toss it on the floor.

The performer takes center stage and tells both volunteers to begin drawing after his 3-2-1 countdown. He allows each to draw for several moments. He then steps over to the receiver, comments on her drawing, and asks her to sign her name at the bottom of the drawing. During this, I stand profile to the audience, with my right side toward the back of the stage. I casually take her dried-out marker and cap it. Then I put it in my right-side front jacket pocket and exchange it for the live one that's in there. I then hand her the live marker. I choose to play it like the idea of signing the drawing just came to me. Don't think of it as a 'switch,' more of an afterthought. No one is paying any attention to the markers because the audience isn't aware that anything magical has happened yet.

He asks the sender to do the same and sign her drawing too. He moves the easel out of the way of the receiver and helps her remove her blindfold. In my performance video at the middle school. You'll see I lead the still-blindfolded teacher away from the easel. I did this because I didn't want her to see her drawing and spoil the ending when she learns the target object was a Christmas tree. Leading her away while blindfolded was awkward for her. I no longer do this. Instead, I move the easel out of her sight line after she's signed the pad. Then I help her remove the blindfold. Much easier on her.

In the performance for the adult group, I had no choice because of the blocking issues I faced. When the audience saw the sender's Christmas tree, the receiver reacted in shock that her scribbling was so dead-on. It's not the order I wanted for the reveal, but as you can see, the effect on the audience was still incredible.

Both ladies are asked to step forward for the big reveal. First, he spins the sender's easel toward the audience, revealing her drawing: a Christmas tree. He then spins the receiver's easel around. While her drawing is not a match, her random scribbling bears a startling resemblance to a Christmas tree, complete with a tree topper.

At this point, everything can be examined. I include this last line because I know some performers are concerned about it. And in truth, occasionally after a show, I will still have adults want to snoop at my stuff a little. With Serendipity, there's nothing to find!

ALTERNATE IDEAS

When I first began developing this routine, my original goal was to match Simpatico as much as possible. With that product, you receive a gimmicked deck of cards to force the desired object. As I said, in my kit, this deck doesn't do its job. I'm not going to reveal it here but suffice it to say it's a classic gimmicked deck method everyone reading this would be familiar with.

My first idea was to simply use a one-way forcing deck. If you dislike the idea of going into the audience to have them fill out slips, a one-way forcing deck is an easy and fast solution to streamline the run time of the routine.

Get some large index cards. 5x7" works well. Write down several drawing ideas like BOOK, Library CAR, PET, etc. on several cards, with one idea per card. That's what the audience sees. Turn those cards face down. On another stack of cards, write CHRISTMAS TREE on each card. Place these cards facedown on top of the other stack.

During the performance, hold the deck face up facing the audience. Run through several of the random words, commenting on a few. Turn the deck face down and square up the deck. Spread the top half of the facedown deck (the force cards) toward the sender. Let her pick one. Voila! She is now holding a card that says CHRISTMAS TREE.

My other routine idea, before I decided to add the dried marker and hidden drawing, came from an old Docc Hilford book. In it, he outlines a billet routine that ends with a volunteer (playing the role of a captured spy) apparently getting zapped by electricity! During the routine, at the right moment, the volunteer leaps to their feet, apparently in response to the "psychic volts of electricity."

To accomplish this, Docc used an Out to Lunch stack of cards. He'd show the rubber-banded stack to the audience and then slip off the first faceup card, which said "WHEN I TOUCH MY NOSE, JUMP OUT OF THIS CHAIR." Thus, the spectator was cued.

If you're not familiar with the Out to Lunch principle, here's a simple way to do it. Take an index card and cut it in half. Write your cueing message to the specter on the lower half of a full index card. Something like, "DRAW A CHRISTMAS TREE." Short and sweet.

Near the top of the card, draw a hypnotic spiral, star, or any kind of esoteric symbol.

Place this card on top of the stack., Take your half card and lay it over the message, making sure it completely covers your cueing message to the spectator. Wrap a rubber band around the stack, holding everything in place.

During the show, tell the receiver you're going to hypnotize her to receive the thought-of drawing. All they have to do is stare at this symbol. Show the stack with your symbol to the audience. As you turn the stack away from the audience, grab the card with the message on it and side it out from under the rubber band. Show it to your spectator. Look them in the eye and ask them if they understand.

To be honest, I never used either of the two methods above. I like Cody Fisher's idea of the added layer of impossibility by having the spectator get drawing ideas from the audience. So I never used the one-way deck idea. And I hate cueing effects because I'm worried the spectator will blab later.

But I included those alternate ideas for your consideration.

Here's another way to switch out the collected billets: Use David Regal's wonderful Crystal Billet Box! I love it and plan on using it for most performances of Serendipity. The see-through nature and ease of switching make this a no-brainer.

Or you can use the switching method or prop of your choosing.

But I focused on my simple gimmicked envelope because I really wanted to market this routine as no 'magic store props' were needed. Ultimately the choice is yours.

Cody Fisher also contributed a brilliant idea to consider. He told me to use a three-way Devil's Hank. Some have two hidden pockets. Cody's idea was to put the force billets in one compartment. Then in the second compartment, add a collection of billets that are each completely illegible.

During the routine, you'd collect the audience slips in the handkerchief. As you turn to the sender to make her choice, switch to the compartment that has the illegible billets in it. When it's discovered that she can't read it, you grumble a bit and switch to the Christmas tree compartment and let her choose again.

It's a lovely idea that reinforces the thought that the slips really did come from the audience.

As a final 'brain bomb,' Cody suggested to me that after the sender selects one of the Christmas billets, casually dump the legitimate audience slips on your table or even the stage floor. That way, if anyone pokes around, they'll see they really are random billets!

Ultimately, I don't use any of those ideas. Cody's idea was to use the Devil's Hank as a pocket square, so it looks like part of your ensemble.

I think it's a great idea, but I don't wear a suit to my performances, so the hank really doesn't fit me. But I think it's a fantastic addition to Serendipity.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Well, that's everything I have to say about this routine. For me, it's been a fantastic solution to a plot I've been in love with for years.

As I promised in my marketing, there are no truly new methods in this. But what you have is a fantastic routine that will work for you, surefire, every time. And you won't have to worry about any electronics failing or the spectator blabbing the secret after the show.

Enjoy this, have fun with it, and let me know of your success!

--Cris

P.S. Any questions, email me at crisjohnsoninfo@verizon.net