Charlatan, liar, cheat, thief


The Amazing Randi was truly amazing, nay, amazingly amazing, in his performance at Kresge Auditorium Monday night. James Randi astounded the audience with beautifully executed feats of prestidigitation, while candidly recounting his adventures and investigations into the paranormal. Topics ranged from Uri Geller to cattle mutilation, and all through the three-and-a-half-hour performance Randi managed to maintain a very high level of wit, humor, showmanship, and intelligence.

Randi, author of three books on magic and the paranormal — The Magic of Uri Geller, Houdini: His Life & Art, and Flim-Flam! The Truth about Unicorns, Parapsychology, & Other Delusions, stated that although the paranormal may well exist, he has not been shown any evidence to support it: "There is not one repeatable experiment in parapsychology. There has not been one good experiment in parapsychology in all of its 120 years... It's not a science."

Beginning his talk with the memorable words, "I'm a charlatan, a liar, a cheat and thief," Randi proceeded to make disparaging remarks concerning the factual content of The National Enquirer, the prowess of so-called earthquake predictors, the existence of Sante Claus ("I've been waiting by the chimney for 23 years"), and Tamara Rand, who predicted the attempts on President Reagan's life an entire day after it occurred.

Randi, 52, has strong opinions about many things. About his break with Omni magazine he stated: "Omni has gone to the paranormal; that's where the money is." After recounting the story of a man who, upon seeing Randi perform a mystifying card trick announced that it must have been a true paranormal event and not a trick, Randi proclaimed that that is "... the arrogance of the scientist; if I don't understand it, no one understands it."

The tricks Randi performed during his talk included the key bending, spoon bending, and wristwatch resetting feats made famous by Uri Geller, who claims to have special powers. Randi, who claims not to have special powers, performed them brilliantly, and even told the secret to the wristwatch trick. The Amazing Randi also performed, with great finesse, some fairly standard mentalist tricks, and told of the trickery and mechanics behind some famous paranormal hoaxes. Happy to admit that all magic he has seen or performed is a sham, Randi said "No Virginia, there is no real magic."

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