

*A Second Sight*, October – December 2016



*A Second Sight* was performed at Rockboro Primary School's Halloween celebration in 2016 and at the annual Masonic widows' Christmas luncheon at the Masonic Hall in Cork, Ireland. In this performance, I claimed to give genuine demonstrations of telepathy with my (then) eight-year-old daughter Lulu Raven. In this performance, I adhered to the *mise en scène* of the second sight, just as Jean Eugene Robert-Houdin had done in Paris in 1846 with his young son, Emile.

In 1868, in *Secrets of Prestidigitation and Magic*, Robert-Houdin writes, '...what would my son's pretended power of divination have been without the *mise en scène* of the "second sight?" What special marvel would have been found in the "aerial suspension" without the pretended application of ether?'<sup>1</sup> Regarding the staging of Robert-Houdin's performances, historian Barry Wiley writes, 'after brief introductory remarks on the mysteries of the human mind, Robert-Houdin seated his blindfolded son on a stool centred on an otherwise empty stage,'<sup>2</sup> Robert-Houdin, himself, described the staging slightly differently writing that Émile, 'carried an ottoman to the front of the stage, and placed on a neighbouring table a slate, some chalk, a pack of cards, and a bandage.'<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Robert-Houdin, Jean Eugene. *Memoirs of Robert-Houdin*. 1860. Trans. Lascelles Wraxall. 1858. p.81.

<sup>2</sup> Wiley, Barry H. *The Thought Reader Craze*. 2012. p. 174.

<sup>3</sup> Robert-Houdin, Jean Eugene. *Memoirs of Robert-Houdin*. 1860. Trans. Lascelles Wraxall. 1858. p. xiv.

According to Harry Houdini's inflammatory expose, *The Unmasking of Robert-Houdin*, the staging of *La Seconde Vue* evolved in the following years and Robert-Houdin began to conduct the act, or portions of the act, without speaking.<sup>4</sup> He would at times 'ring a small mystic bell as if to aide his son in concentrating...'<sup>5</sup>



*Jean-Eugene Robert-Houdin and his son Émile presenting 'La Seconde Vue'*

In *A Second Sight*, we included similar staging elements including the bell, slate, pack of cards, stool, and blindfold referenced by Robert-Houdin in his memoirs.<sup>6</sup> Like Robert-Houdin, the finale of our act was presented in silence with the exception of the ringing of the small bell. *A Second Sight* featured many of the same effects as *Unfathomable*, albeit accomplished with simplified techniques. Lulu and I wore leopard print for the Halloween performance – echoing *Meet the Deans* – and for the Masonic Widow's luncheon – echoing *Unfathomable* – I wore my double-breasted pinstripe suit and Lulu wore a party dress.

As I had previously done in *Visions and Revisions*, I began the performance with recognizable cultural references in an attempt to legitimize the performance. *A Second Sight* began with a brief introduction relating the traditional Celtic second sight to modern parapsychological phenomena such as telepathy, extra-sensory perception, and the sixth sense. I also discussed my family lineage as it allegedly relates to these Celtic traditions, asserting that Lulu was the latest in a long line of *seers*, extending at least to my great-great-great grandmother from Tipperary. This performance

---

<sup>4</sup> Houdini, Harry. *The Unmasking of Robert-Houdin*. 1908. p. 205.

<sup>5</sup> Wiley, Barry H. *The Thought Reader Craze*. 2012. p. 175.

<sup>6</sup> Robert-Houdin, Jean Eugene. *Memoirs of Robert-Houdin*. 1860. Trans. Lascelles Wraxall. 1858. p. xiv.

was presented without disclaimers, as a genuine demonstration of psychic abilities.\* In this way, *A Second Sight* both reprised *Visions and Revisions*, and foreshadowed my subsequently developed one-man show, *Eddie Dean, Telepathy Rockstar: Smells Like Dean Spirit*.

Once again – as in all of my two-person performances – it is impossible to avoid discussing issues of gender, patriarchy, and power which surface in all performances of second sight. In *A Second Sight*, these issues were particularly present, as the act of blindfolding a child is inevitably disconcerting. The image of a blindfolded child, alone on a stage, can be similarly troubling. From one perspective, it is evident that second sight acts are inseparable from the trope of the disempowered female/child, as object, who is both overshadowed and *exhibited* by the male presence on the stage. Historically, this male presence, in almost all cases, took credit for mentoring or discovering the so-called “witch” on stage. I gradually became aware of the depth and complexity of these issues throughout the course of my praxis. I have done my best to invert, subvert, or at the very least avoid, the more sinister elements of these tropes. I always approach such performances as *partnerships*, and attempt to be aware of, and avoid, any overt or symbolic acts of chauvinism, objectification, or domination over my partners.

Naturally, I take the lead role in my performances. It is, after all, my own area of research and expertise. However, I am also aware that if I were not a male, it would be statistically unlikely for mentalism or psychic arts to *be* my area of expertise since very few open-eye mentalists are female. There is very little that I can do to rectify this imbalance, short of sensitively and intelligently creating performances of mentalism which are informed by the unique insights afforded me through my research. In my next performance, I attempted to deepen my experience and understanding of subjectification, by offering myself as an object to be stripped, blindfolded, and tested, in a series of laboratory experiments as part of an ongoing performance which I “codenamed” *Project Viola Ten*.

---

\* In reality, of course, we depended on conventional methods of deception and artifice.

### **Works Cited:**

Houdini, Harry. *The Unmasking of Robert-Houdin*. The Publishers Printing Co. 1908. Print.

Robert-Houdin, Jean Eugene. *Memoirs of Robert-Houdin: Ambassador, Author, and Conjuror*.  
Trans. Lascelles Wraxall. Chapman and Hall. 1859. Print.

Wiley, Barry. *The Thought Reader Craze: Victorian Science at the Enchanted Boundary*.  
McFarland & Company, Inc. 2012. Print.

### **Image:**

Robert-Houdin, Jean Eugene. 'La Seconde Vue.' Musée de la Magie. *Maisondelamagie.fr*. Web.  
10 Oct 2019.