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All ages, that's the trick

Sleek, smart entertainment Hankerchief takes on a personality

[RICHARD OUZOUNIAN](#)
THEATRE CRITIC

The Conjuror



By David Ben & Patrick Watson. Directed by Patrick Watson. Until Jan. 5 at the Isabel Bader Theatre, 93 Charles St. **416-872-1111**.

The man is magic; that's all you need to know.

David Ben opened his new version of *The Conjuror* at the Isabel Bader Theatre last night and minute for minute, it's probably the sleekest, smartest, most appealing family entertainment you'll find this holiday season.

Ben is not just a master of illusion, he's a superbly skilled showman as well and he has designed *The Conjuror* in a way that will delight all audience members, regardless of age.

Whether he is sawing people in half or performing miracles of prestidigitation with coloured sands, he holds children of all ages in rapt attention. But what makes it an added delight for the parents is that the connecting patter is witty and urbane.

Ben and his partner in crime, Patrick Watson, have constructed a vehicle as light and as deft as the handkerchief that Ben mysteriously manipulates until it takes on a near-human personality.

The conceit that we are watching a conjuror from the early years of the last century still works marvellously, aided by William Schmuck's deftly witty set with its gaggle of giggling devils, Bonnie Beecher's transcendently moody lighting and the seductive soundscape composed by John Lang. Who put it all together?

Elementary, my dear Watson.

Ben makes skilful use of audience members of all types, treating them gently with his sly charm. His secret is to treat the children as adults and the adults as children; it works beautifully and it lets us all



TANNIS TOOHEY/TORONTO STAR
David Ben, *The Conjuror* illusionist and magician, performs "The Sands Of The Desert" trick at the Isabel Bader Theatre.

feel like we're an integral part of the experience.

This is a show that doesn't condescend to its audience, or try to overwhelm it with Vegas glitter. It assumes we're there to see some spectacular magic, brought to us by an urbane practitioner in a sophisticated setting.

Ben at his best defies description. You'll just have to see him for yourself, which I suggest that you do as soon as possible.

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