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CPYRGHT

Geller a fake, says ex-manager

Yasha Katz, who brought Uri Geller to England, admits he helped Geller trick the press and public

James Randi
is a member of the
Inner Magic Circle,
London, and author of
*The Magic of
Uri Geller* (Ballantine).

Since Uri Geller first challenged scientists five years ago, he has been widely branded as a fraud and equally widely hailed as a miracle worker. Last week, for the first time, someone from inside the Geller organisation has provided an answer. Yasha Katz, Geller's manager when he first came to Britain in 1973, admitted on RAI-TV, Rome, on Saturday, that he helped Geller cheat.

When Geller was still in Israel, Katz signed an agreement to manage Geller outside the US for a percentage of Geller's income. He now says Geller never paid him and sent him packing after Geller really got rolling in the US. Bitter and angry, Katz finally told his story.

At first, he said, he believed in Geller. Even after he became aware that Geller at least sometimes used tricks, Geller continued to perform for him as if it were all real. Eventually, however, Geller announced to Katz that he would have to act as a confederate by sitting in the audience and signalling to the stage. Katz realised that it was because Shipi Shtrang (Geller's main assistant in these matters) was not there on that occasion. He was given the gesture code, which was done by the position of his cigarette (pointed up to designate the colour "blue", down for "green", etc) and the hand signals as well. He served in this way many times at public performances, and Geller presented it as genuine ESP.

Katz observed that Geller took notes, assisted by Shipi, of the licence-numbers of cars driven by members of the audience as they arrived. He was able to reveal these details to the spectators as if he obtained them by ESP. Once, Katz watched Geller take down a description and plate-number of a special-model Porsche, and he waited to see if Geller would use the information at the press conference being held. He did.

Geller took Katz entirely into the fold when he stationed him at the door of the theatre to note details about seating and possessions of certain people. Thus, Geller could tell a lady that she had some sort of object in her purse, and identify her by the seat number. All of this was relayed to Geller backstage just before the show started.

Flying spoons

In Paris, while Geller was being interviewed by a reporter for *L'Express*, Katz was instructed to throw a spoon in the air to hit the ceiling, to create the effect of a "teleportation". The reporter was impressed, and wrote it up as a miracle. Frequently, says Katz, he saw Geller throw objects from behind his back, over his shoulder, unnoticed, to create the "teleportation" effect.

Geller and Katz visited the wife of a well known entertainer in Hollywood. She offered Geller a piece of heirloom jewellery, a valuable "fork" used in family ceremonies at her home. Katz reports he saw Geller snap it in both hands while she was not looking, and he presented it as a psycho-kinetic effect.

In London, at a hotel, Geller was trying to impress a publisher who was attempting to pry him away from Doubleday, with whom he had signed for the publication of Dr Puharich's book *Uri*. Geller arranged a subterfuge with Yasha. When Geller got up and left to go to his room and leave Katz and the visitor to talk alone, Katz was to call Geller back. He placed it on the floor so that the conversation

extracted a number of personal details from the visitor and repeated them close to the active telephone. Geller came bursting into the room and repeated the conversation which he pretended had come to him by telepathy. The publisher was very impressed.

One of Geller's standard tricks, recreating a drawing, done in several ways. Sometimes, Katz noted that Geller would simply pretend to write down a guess of what the subject was thinking, then when the subject made the drawing, Geller would quickly sketch an approximate surreptitiously and show it as a previously-made impression. Geller always showed great excitement and satisfaction at the results. At other times, Katz actually had help when Geller found he could not see through a heavy envelope used to conceal a drawing. For a TV programme in San Francisco, Geller instructed Katz to secretly open the envelope while Geller distracted the staff at the far side of the studio. Katz did so, and told Geller just before he went on the air.

In Palm Beach, Florida, Katz first saw Geller sneak to lenscap off a "sealed" camera lens to create a "psychic photo effect."

When Geller was due to appear in Birmingham, who arrived backstage that the front row was packed with magicians. Geller, said Katz, turned white, and refused to go onto the stage. He begged Katz and Werner Schmidt, the impressario, to tell the reporters, management and audience that there had been a bomb scare. Katz was appalled a little later to learn that he was being blamed for the cancellation, and that Geller was saying that he wanted to perform, but Katz would not allow it. The show was cancelled.

While they were in Italy, Katz had a bad scare. Together he and Geller visited a jewellery shop to price expensive watches. They left without buying. Moments after they had rounded the corner, Geller exclaimed that a "teleportation" had taken place; a new wristwatch was on his arm. Said Katz, "I knew he had stolen it".

Although he now says he was brainwashed, it is curious how simple the tricks were that Geller used to convince Katz. Two remained complete mysteries until I interviewed him for RAI-TV. One involved the "teleportation" of heavy potted-plant holder that he claimed had been found outside the apartment he shared with Geller, when Katz returned from buying a newspaper. He said that it would have been impossible for Geller to have lifted this, since he took the two of them to replace it inside the apartment again. The same planter was there in his apartment with him in Tel Aviv, and against his protestations, I easily lifted it. A couple of plants, moved the planter several feet, and the extra pots back. He dropped his claims on the mat at that point.

He went on to describe an event which he had forgotten having told me about several years before in New York and I was astonished to hear how much the story I gained in that time. It involved a theatre chair arm-rest that he claimed had been "levitated" and allowed to fall into a puddle. He had the arm-rest with him there, and asserted that after he'd lifted it from the puddle, it had been bone dry! I poured a glass of water over it right before him and showed him that the vinyl plastic arm-rest was just as dry then as it had been when the Geller miracle took place.

As the Geller myth finally disintegrates, Geller's followers are left with a few questions. Living in Mexico. And Geller believers? No doubt they too, have moved on to other miracle workers.