

# British Theatre Guide

News, reviews, features and podcast on theatre across the UK

## This is Not a Magic Show

Vincent Gambini

Camden People's Theatre

24–28 May 2016

Do you believe in magic? Well, you shouldn't: it's illusion, magicians are liars and *This is Not a Magic Show* most certainly is one. It seems that magician Vincent Gambini is going to show his audience how it is done.

"It begins with a man sitting at a table. He looks down at his hands and he begins to rotate them ..."  
That's what he tells us and that's what he does and that's how it goes on. He tells us what he is doing and does it but is what we are seeing really happening or is it all illusion?

To start with this isn't Vincent Gambini. If you do a web search you'll discover that that's the lawyer leading character in *My Cousin Vinny*, a 1990s US movie. Explore a little further and you may discover performance artist and writer Augusto Carrieri, he's Gambini—but he's not an actor pretending to be a magician. As a teenager, Carrieri / Gambini was already winning prizes in international magic competitions and in 2001 became a member of the Magic Circle.

Paradoxically, Vincent Gambini is the real thing. A master of digital dexterity, whether handling coins or playing cards, even at touching distance, he does the apparently impossible.

Carrieri gives his diffident Gambini apparent total openness, admitting that things in his patter are pure invention; he'd never allow such situations in real life. But then, perhaps that's not true either.

He was asked, he tells us, to do something different from his usual opener at this theatre and was stumped for what to do so twice rang the Magic Circle's hotline and got advice from Derren and David, doing duty shifts when he called. Should we believe him?

With comic timing as carefully contrived as his magic movement, this is an accomplished performer. He exploits the old technique of letting you guess what's going to happen then finding a way to cap it, introduces a favourite fish, the red herring in his pocket.

Neuroscientists and magicians have been collaborating to explore cognition through the way that magicians exploit the way the brain works. Gambini presents a neuromagic example, but to astound us rather than inform us.

He builds up to what he's decided will be his grand finale and sees it fall flat, but it focuses attention on the true achievement of his magic.

Gambini has no glamorous assistant, no flashy effects, and no musical build-up. It is all in those hands. "I'm not a sorcerer," he tells us; he didn't go to Hogwarts but he's a skilled performer and a fine magician.

**Reviewer:** [Howard Loxton](#)