

**LIGHTS.**  **ACTION.**



# Q & A

## with Penn

*Interviewed  
by Kristine McKenzie*

Penn Jillette, the taller, more talkative half of comedy magic duo Penn & Teller, performs in their show six nights a week at the Rio Hotel and Casino.

When he's not busy entertaining Vegas audiences, he also finds time in his busy schedule to work with Teller on the Emmy-nominated Showtime television show "Penn & Teller: Bulls--t!," which aims to debunk urban legends and popular fads, and to host the NBC game show "Identity," in which contestants must guess the identity of people based only on their looks.

Besides being an illusionist and television host, Jillette is also the author of the books "Sock" (a novel in which the narrator is a sock monkey) and "How to Cheat

Your Friends at Poker: The Wisdom of Dickie Richard."

He has acted in numerous television shows and films, hosted his own radio show and he co-produced and co-directed "The Aristocrats," a documentary film tracing the life of a dirty joke known as The Aristocrats.

With a resume like that, Jillette can truly be called one of Vegas' most versatile performers.

**On your TV show "Identity" contestants have to guess the identities of people based on their appearance. Have you ever masqueraded as someone else? Has anyone ever mistaken you for someone else?**

Mark Volman of the Turtles and Meatloaf...big guys with long hair. At 6'6" and knocking on three bucks, I'm automatically considered to be security. Whenever I'm backstage with celebrities, I'm the body guard. I was once in a room with Mick Jagger, he just assumed I was the person assigned to protect him and told me to get him to the door when he wanted to leave. Keith Richards knew I was the guy from Penn & Teller - he would have won on "Identity."

**You often have one of your fingernails painted red. What color/brand of nail polish do you use? Is there a significance to the nail being painted?**

Essie "Jelly Apple Red." "It means I shot a reporter for asking personal questions" is the answer I often give. It's really a joke with my mom. When I first started juggling and doing magic, my mom told me that people were looking at my hands so I should make sure my fingernails looked nice. In order to mock her, I put nail polish on my left ring finger (my nicest finger). It was just to make fun of mom. She was disgusted and said "Oh Penn!" It turned into a tribute to my mom. She died in 2000, so it seems unlikely you'll ever see me without it. The pinky ring on my right hand was my dad's and the nail polish on my left hand is a joke with my mom. I don't need anything to remember them by, but I like having something to remember them by.

**Name any magician, living or dead, who you would like to work with and explain why.**

James "The Amazing" Randi. I've read a lot about Houdini and I guess it would be cooler to work with a magician who was dead (although in that case I'd probably pick Black Herman, Sun Ra was named after him), but Randi is still with us. When I was 18, Teller and I met Randi and he taught us that magic could be presented in a way that was pro-science. He taught us to lie on stage as a way to tell the truth in life. Randi created the heart of Penn & Teller. We'd do anything with him.

**There is some audience interaction in your show. Have you ever had an awful audience member up on stage with you and how did you handle it?**

It's so much rarer than you would ever believe. Most people are good and want things to go well. We never make anyone look foolish in any way. We treat people well, and they act in kind. That being said, we've had tens of thousands of audience members on stage. Once in a while someone is drunk or crazy or both. When it first happened, we tried to do something clever. Now, well, we just smile, get them a big round of applause, invite them to sit back down and get someone else. The replacements are always our best guests.

**How do you come up with new material for your show?**

Backwards from other magicians. The standard way magicians work is to find a cool trick and then think of a presentation. We do that once in a while, but the best tricks we have, we picture what we want to say on stage and then figure out how to do it.

**You've lived in Vegas a long time. What's your best insider Vegas tip for someone who is coming to visit?**

Come early to our show to see the Mike Jones Duo play jazz piano and bass and go see Mac King do his afternoon magic show at Harrah's.

**What's your perfect night out in Vegas?**

A great dinner with my wife (we finally have so many good restaurants in Vegas, lots of them, and they're open later than the ones in L.A.), and then a movie with buttered popcorn and then meet some friends at Starbucks and make jokes over decaf.

**You used to work as a magician on Broadway. How did you go from Broadway to Vegas and which do you like better?**

Well, you know - you can't beat NYC. I loved leaving the show and then hanging out all night and making jokes with my friends over dinner at 4 a.m. I loved all the other shows to see and walking around the city. But, the nutty thing is, our investors gave us 100 percent complete artistic control on Broadway, and we still have more artistic control here in Vegas. It's our "Penn & Teller Theater." None of our bosses has ever made the slightest comment about our show. We've been treated great throughout our careers, but never better than at the Rio. We do whatever the hell we want, and we sure have gotten way nuttier in Vegas. I have great parking here in Vegas, but I got to walk to work through NYC to get to Broadway. That's hard to beat.