



onal with an audience of thousands may be their cleverest talent," and the *Hollywood Reporter* review lead off by stating, "Performing a mixture of greatest hits and new routines, these magic deconstructionists put on a wildly entertaining show." But being New York, there is always a dissenting opinion — the *New York Daily News* referred to the production as "often being abra-ca-drab-ra." *Penn & Teller on Broadway* features Penn Jillette and Teller, along with their usual Las Vegas show cohorts Mike Jones, Georgie Bernaschek. Tickets for the 95-minute show range from \$47 to \$147.

## Thresholds

Human sensory perception lets us experience our world, yet at the same time can distort our awareness so that not everyone feels or observes the same occurrences in the same way. Differing perceptions of the same events can create a lifetime of exploration for scientists, and for magicians.

Jeanette Andrews' interactive show, *Thresholds*, both explains and confounds. Demonstrating scientific principles and referencing artistic excursions, Andrews merges fact and fantasy while leading the audience through doorways both literal and figurative, the performance taking place while moving from room to room in a home. Touch in the basement, sight in the living room, taste in the kitchen, smell in a billiard room, and hearing in an upstairs lounge — the five senses are explored individually, and after each one, a participant receives a key that unlocks the next room and the next sense.

The props for scientific experiments are distributed to everyone. A demonstration of the blind spot in the human eye results in a disappearing dot on a piece of paper; a single tone is perceived by different audience members as ascending or descending; a packet of spices provides two distinct scents, yet the smell of one disappears when next sniffed. These oddities of the natural world enhance the mysteries of conjuring: classics such as the



Jeanette Andrews performing *Thresholds* in Florida.



*Thresholds* at the Pleasant Home Museum.



PHOTO: NICHI HEDRICK

physical and mental effects, predictions, and the creation of a scent that was merely thought of by the spectators.

The idea of having an audience travel throughout a performance space to experience different aspects of a show is not new. One of the best known examples is *Tamara*, John Krizanc's 1981 play in which audience members gathered for an opening reception, then chose which household characters to follow as they moved about and interacted with one another. And magician David Parr has performed Halloween shows in historic mansions and museums around Chicago, with the audience moving from one room to the next, and David presenting a different mystery in each room. However, this was not the inspiration for Jeanette's show.

Andrews first conceived of *Thresholds* while an Artist in Residence at the Escape to Create program in Seaside, Florida, where she was accepted to participate as one of five fine and performing artists from around the country. She spent a month in Seaside in early 2014 studying immersive magic for each of the senses.

Upon returning home to the Chicago area, the Pleasant Home Museum in Oak Park, Illinois commissioned her to make the show a reality. When asked if she could make the performance "site specific," Jeanette realized the dark, heavy feeling of the tiny interconnected rooms in the historic house were well suited for the show. Debuting there last April, all the scheduled shows were oversold, as was an added performance that was squeezed into the museum's schedule.

Jeanette had returned to Florida for the summer 2014 season at the Seaside Repertory Theatre, further brainstorming the upcoming interactive sensory show while maintaining a busy schedule of workshops and performances of her then-current show, *Perception*. When she was again booked at Seaside for the 2015 season, the Rep staff heard what she had done with *Thresholds* and found a suitable mansion to stage the production nearby on July 10, in addition to her regular shows at the theater. Logistics of viewing and moving from room to room limited the *Thresholds* audience capac-



PHOTO: JOE KREML

ity to thirty in Chicago and just twenty in Florida. The latter necessitated stylistic changes in the show, as the house was much more open and modern than the Chicago property.

Ideas and effects for the shows were researched through many hours on the invaluable Ask Alexander database, and Andrews credits several friends and colleagues for continual advice and assistance. She cites Luciano Ristori, a Fermilab physicist and avid magic enthusiast, as her "main collaborator and sounding board" for ideas. In the past six months, she has also been consulting with Simon Aronson. "Luciano and I have similar sensibilities," she says. "We really think alike. Simon has a contrasting style, and that contributed greatly."

The show allows audiences to not only see magic, but to experience their surroundings with altered senses — not only the five methods of perception, but senses of wonder, mystery, and shared human experience.

*Thresholds* will next be presented on September 6 at East of Eden Retreat & Spa in Santa Rosa Beach, Florida, where the production will again be tailored to the surroundings, moving audiences across physical and mental boundaries.