

## The Silver Sceptre

The rising wand has been around for more than a couple of centuries. But master-originator George Blake modified the rising wand's working, and he developed a wonderful routine for it, which delights both children and adults. George Blake named his wand and routine The Silver Sceptre. The now well-known Silver Sceptre is a great comedy opener, and many children's entertainers currently use the item at the beginning of their act.

Although a dealer item, I have included the workings of the Silver Sceptre here since it is now virtually in the public domain as a gag wand. The Sceptre is basically a length of aluminium tubing with a ball at each end. A length of elastic runs through the length of tubing, with each end attached to a ball, see **Fig 4.2**.

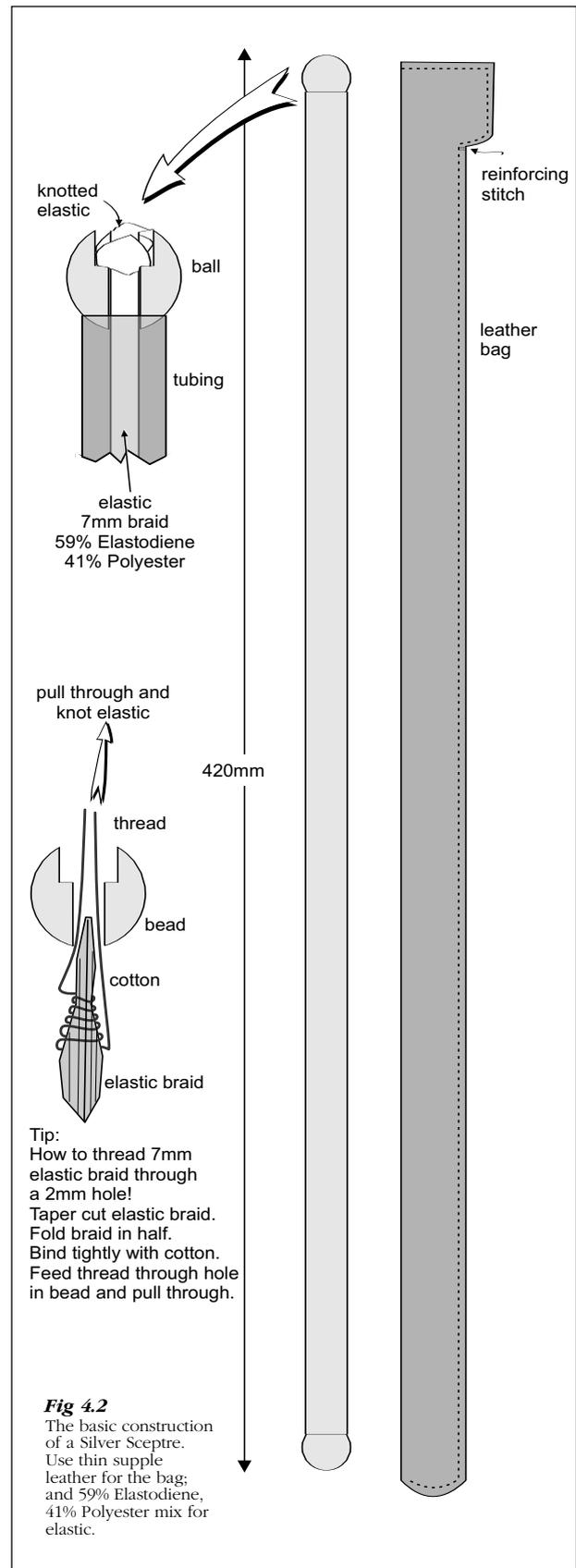
Unfortunately, some of the current rising wands sold under the name of Silver Sceptre are manufactured as cheaply as possible. Consequently, the quality suffers and the wands are nowhere near as good as George Blake's original. For a start, the bag that comes with it is made from cheap, thin plastic. The plastic bag not only impedes the smooth rise of the wand but doesn't last very long before the end splits apart. So, the first thing to do is replace the bag with one made from thin supple leather. There is no need for the snap popper, as it is never used.

Secondly, the inferior models are supplied with low-grade elastic. Again, this not only hinders the smooth rise of the wand but the elastic will easily break (which will no doubt happen during an important show in front of hundreds of people). So, use elastic which is flat braid 6mm wide. The elastic to polyester ratio comes in all sorts.

The optimum combination for strength and elasticity is around 59% Elastodiene, 41% Polyester. This will give a generous stretch of approximately 3:1. The length of the elastic (in its non-stretched state) should be about 20 mm shorter than the length of the tubing. This will ensure that the ball on either end snaps back to the tubing, yet allows full stretch of the wand's length.

After threading the elastic, tie a single knot and pull it completely into the well of the ball. Cut off the surplus elastic and finish it with a dab of white rubber cement to prevent it from unravelling.

In recent years, dealers made the end balls of smaller diameter so that the wand looked of uniform thickness throughout its length. But this so-called 'improvement' actually obstructs the



## Don't Ring That Bell!

Don't Ring that Bell was inspired by an effect put out by Derek Lever of Blackpool about 35 years ago. Derek's version was a telephone ringer that worked on a timer. A few years later, my friend, Bob Gill, Swindon, suggested that the performer would have more command over the ringer if he had a remote control device. Consequently, I developed 'Don't Ring that Bell'. I added an extra bell to directly input a PA to accommodate the extra volume required in some noisy parties.

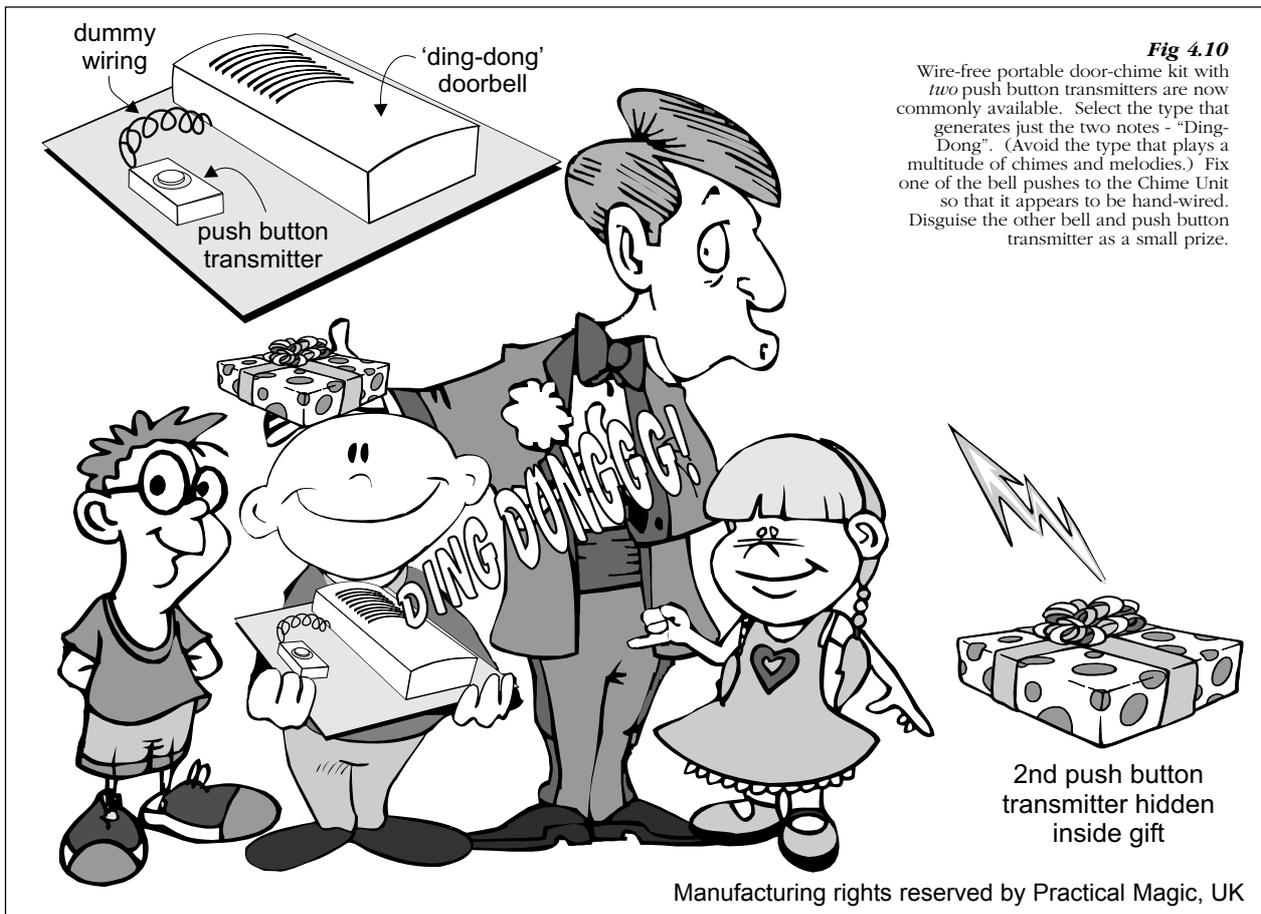
This is one of those great utility devices that has all the ingredients to enhance the comedy and pantomime of other effects, and it plays big. Basically, Don't Ring that Bell is just a doorbell with its push button wired to it. The performer requests that the child does NOT ring the bell until he says so. But, of course, the child apparently rings the bell, much to the performer's consternation and the audience's amusement. And that's it... err, well not really.

First, purchase two identical sets of 'Wire-free portable door-chime' kits, and ensure they operate

on the same frequency. Select the type that generates just the old fashioned two notes: Ding-Dong. Whatever you do, do not use one of the many versions on the market that plays a multitude of chimes and melodies that continue for more than a couple of seconds. Also choose the type that has a small size push button, as some of the push button transmitters are far too large and actually look like a transmitter. A quick search on eBay will reveal there are dozens of suitable wireless doorbells, and at a very low price.

Use clear acrylic to construct a rectangular panel of approximately 13cm x 15cm. Attach a ding dong receiver and its bell push alongside each other on the panel. Connect a piece of curly wire from the bell push to the ding dong receiver unit. The curly wire has nothing to do with the unit's working, but makes it appear to be a hand-wired chime unit, see **Fig 4.10**.

Now on to the second door-chime unit. Disguise the other bell push transmitter as a small prize. I gift wrap mine in decorative paper with a ribbon bow. Secretly mark where the actual transmitter button is located under the wrapping so that you can easily



## The Funny Washing Machine

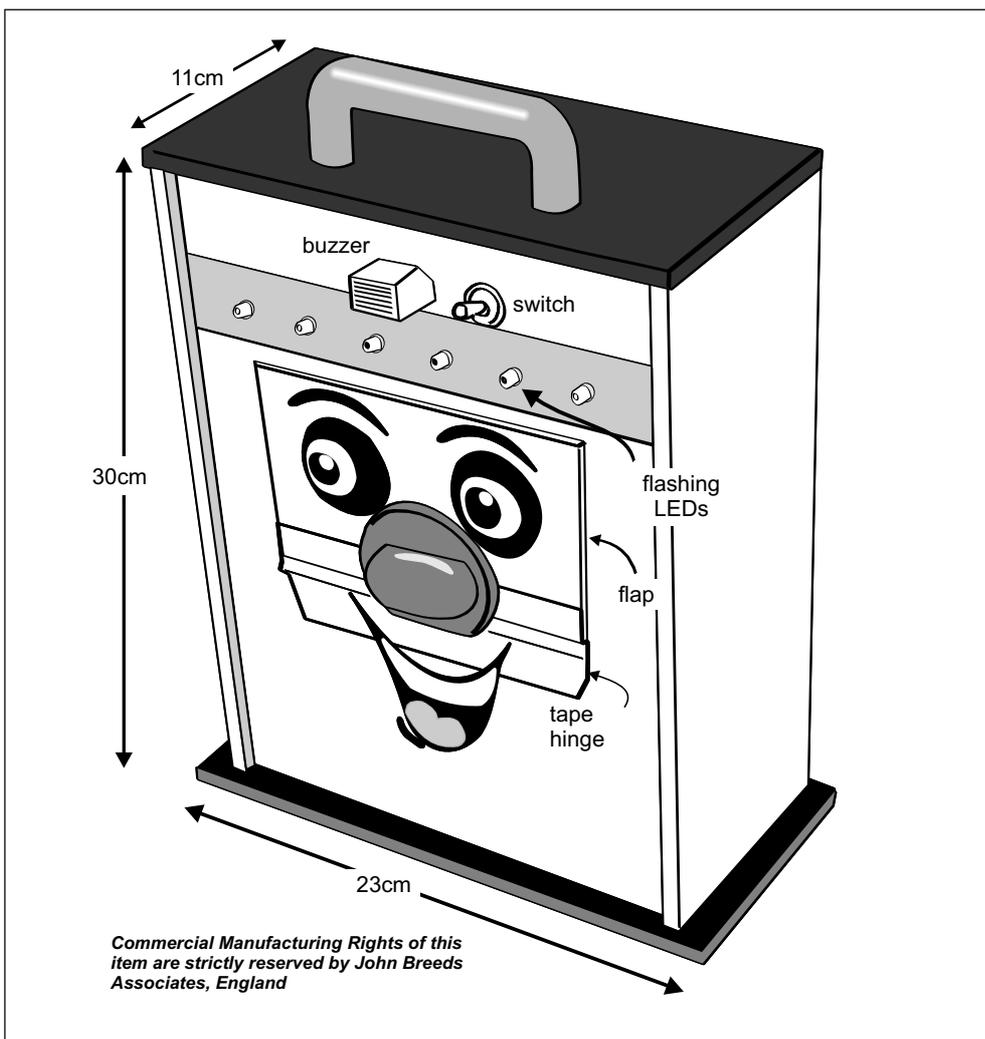
I have performed this particular version of the Washing Machine 1000s of times. It's one of my favourite effects as everyone has so much fun. The basic caper is that two children help the magician to wash his smelly socks. Along the way, the socks get bigger, smaller, mutilated, and coloured. The two helpers make the socks like new at the end.

The first time I saw this effect it was known as 'Chinese Washing'. It comprised a top loading tub with a rotary ratchet that made the noise of the machinery! In the base of the box were four trapdoor compartments. These held the four changes. Supreme Magic in the UK put out a superbly made version. But it didn't fit my requirements, namely: i) children no longer recognise top loader washing machines; ii) it was far too big, heavy and cumbersome; iii) the working didn't lend itself to a child putting his hand in the box and taking out the socks.

Ron Gilbert was a dealer and inventor from Bournemouth, UK. Ron was a kind, unselfish gentleman who would willingly help anyone. We often chatted and discussed ideas, particularly about all the 'new' stuff on the market that was in fact based on very old principles. Ron suggested the idea of a front loader washing machine, **Fig 4.24**. Four tin cans taped around a central spindle form the chambers. A handle at the rear causes the cans to rotate by 90° for each change, illustrated in **Fig 4.25**.

As far as I know, Ron Gilbert did not put this 'front loader' idea into mass production because of a couple of technical hitches. In his lecture notes he suggested 'PAL Meat for Dogs' cans for the load chambers, and a handle at the rear. But I know for a fact that this does not work smoothly! Firstly, the cans are the wrong shape at their aperture (the socks snag against the edge of the machine's fascia).

Secondly, the handle idea at the rear is too risky –



**Fig 4.24**  
The design of this washing machine allows a child to put in and take out the socks without any fear of the load chambers rotating.

Another feature is that it actually looks like a modern front loading machine – much better than the old Chinese washer top loader type!

## The Professor's Daydream

I'm not a fan of stand alone, tell-a-story type tricks, especially the flat pack card ones each with a picture to represent the hutch, the carrot, or the mouse, etc. For me, the criteria for kids' tricks is that i) they must be funny and, ii) they must involve helpers wherever possible. The Professor's Nightmare (or Equally Unequal Ropes as it's sometimes called) is a wonderful piece of magic but lacks being funny and doesn't involve helpers. In other words, for spectators it becomes an astonishing puzzle rather than entertaining theatre.

The normal routine is very well known but, for the record, it comprises three pieces of rope: short, medium and long. The magician tells a story about, say, spaghetti, three worms or even three little bears. He then proceeds with some jiggery pokery with the ends of the rope behind his left hand and then, between each hand, stretches the short, medium and long pieces of rope to equal lengths. After this amazing feat he returns the three pieces of rope to short, medium and long. End of trick – a brilliant effect but little entertainment!

### Overview

In this routine for kids, The Professor's Daydream, it's very funny; it involves two helpers; there's more magic going on; and the kids take the credit for the magic that happens, **Fig 4.43**. Another aspect of this routine is that the kids get to hold the ropes much of the time, thus eliminating any dubious moves or extra apparatus. In its very basic form, the The Professor's Daydream entails:-

- i) inviting up two helpers, say, Tom and Mary.
- ii) showing three equal length ropes.
- iii) one child causing one piece of rope to change to short in the other child's hands.
- iii) then that kid causing another piece of rope to change to long in the other child's hands.
- iv) together, the two kids themselves stretching the three long, medium and short lengths back to medium whilst pulling on the ends.
- v) the magician knotting the three pieces together, thus making one long length of rope (with two knots showing).
- vi) the two helpers causing the knots to disappear, so that it becomes one long length of rope.

**Fig 4.43**

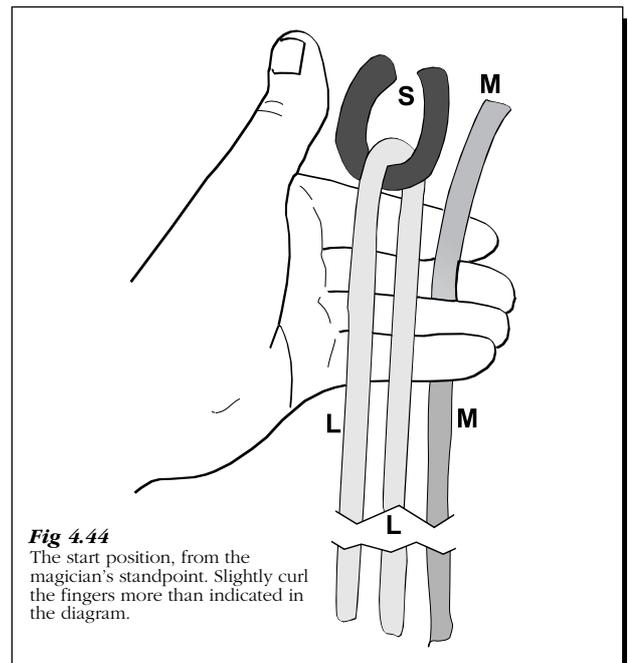
The Professor's Daydream with helpers.



### The Drag Count

Before explaining the routine, it's crucial to be able to count the ropes the correct way. I've mentioned elsewhere that the 'taking' hand does the moving whereas the 'providing' hand remains stationary. This basic principle applies in all magic... whether in close-up, e.g. the Elmsley or Hamman count with cards or a sponge ball routine. Even with big stage magic, the supplier stays still while the taker moves. I'm really emphasising this simple point because so many people botch up the three ropes count when they allow both hands to move, usually in opposite directions, or even up and down.

Here's the basis for a very convincing count, exactly as taught to me by my good friend, IBM close-up winner, Bob Gill, and the legendary Ken Brooke.



**Fig 4.44**

The start position, from the magician's standpoint. Slightly curl the fingers more than indicated in the diagram.