

GO!CALENDAR



For The Pantagraph

Mentalists Jeff and Tessa Evason return to Illinois State University this Friday.

Hip mentalists put you in a different mindframe

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By Dan Craft

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Jeff and Tessa Evason are not your father's Amazing Kreskin.

For obvious starters, this popular mentalist duo is a married couple, not a solo act.

In addition, they're not anywhere near as, um, well, how do we put this diplomatically ... "square" as the bespectacled, polyester-favoring Kreskin (whose real name, by the way, is the decidedly non-hip George Joseph Kresge Jr.).

But Jeff and Tessa Evason, returning by popular demand to Illinois State University this weekend (8 p.m. Friday, Braden Auditorium) are definitely fans of your father's Amazing Kreskin.

And true believers, too.

In a joint interview, the Evansons say they both admire the Canadian mentalist who forged the somewhat ambiguous tradition of denying any psychic or supernatural powers.

(Or, smile if you call him a "mind reader.")

"His personal style probably caused people to think he was credible," notes Tessa. "He seemed to present it from a more scientific perspective. That was unique — I'd never been exposed to anybody like him.

The Evansons, who share Kreskin's Canadian roots and who drew a crowd of 700 to their first ISU show a year ago, similarly forgo the claim of any magical powers.

"We entertain with demonstrations of ESP and the paranormal, but we're not here to promote magic or witchcraft or anything like that," insists Jeff. "We show what we're doing, and we don't make any claims; we let the audience decide."

It's the best way, the couple says, of keeping the audience at ease and on their side, all the better for the Evansons to wow then when Tessa does, in fact, produce a tidbit of information from the life of an audience member that just ... can't ... be ... coincidence.

"If I make the claim we have any pow-

At a glance

What: Mentalists Jeff and Tessa Evason

When: 8 p.m. Friday

Where: Illinois State University Braden Auditorium

Cost: General, \$3 or three non-perishable food items; ISU students, free

Information: www.evason.com

ers, the audience will internalize it so that there are those who believe or don't believe," says Jeff. "If I say Tessa has incredible psychic abilities, right away people translate that into, say, Miss Cleo the telephone psychic on TV (referring to the famously investigated and debunked psychic hotline diva). We want to stay way from that.

By describing their act in less threatening terms like "intuition" and "body language," the Evansons say the likelihood of segregating the audience from the outset is minimized.

The approach, which also incorporates comedy relief and other showmanship, has earned them dates at everything from theaters to casinos to cruises to corporate events to TV. In the latter realm, the couple have been proclaimed "the finest act of its kind in the world" by NBC's "World's Greatest Magic V," while the Discovery Channel has billed them as "a new generation of mentalists."

Siegfried & Roy, no less, have tagged the Evansons as their favorite Vegas act, while the Psychic Entertainer's Association handed them their Performers of the Year Award.

The couple crossed paths more than 20 years ago at a Canadian beauty pageant, where Tessa was a runway model and Jeff was a radio personality acting as the host. An immediate point in common was the fact that Tessa grew up in the Caribbean and Jeff's family vacationed

there when he was a boy.

With that cultural point in common, they were able to share other interests — Jeff's hobby of magic and Tessa's natural-born "intuitive ability," something she discovered she possessed as a child and developed with a group of her girlfriends as a way to help in their school studies.

In terms of Evansons' stage act, Jeff plays the host and emcee, just like he did for Tessa's fashion show all those years ago, while Tessa takes center stage as (says Jeff) "the star."

To disarm the audience, they start things off on a low key with, says Tessa, "a demonstration of the capabilities of the mind." The word "psychic," she adds, is never uttered.

Eventually Tessa dons the blindfold and Jeff starts working the audience, microphone in hand, as she begins with simple matters involving names of relatives, jewelry being worn and other personal data. Then they begin to work their way up the ladder of "intuition" into the kind of major revelations that leave the subject dumbstruck.

Part of the couple's ballyhoo is that they have a standing offer of \$25,000 (with the cash in reserve) to anybody who can prove that any kind of gimmick was used (wireless microphones, video cameras, prior acquaintance with audience members, etc.).

"There's nothing we can say to make an audience believe otherwise, but at least we can say if you prove anything, we'll pay you \$25,000," he says. "We could make it \$100,000, and it wouldn't make any difference."

Though the Evansons dance around the subject of where true psychic power is at play in their lives, they both agree that Tessa's intuition extends beyond the mere "feminine intuition" of cliché renown.

"We've been doing this long enough and working with people long enough for us to know that Tessa's intuitive levels reach beyond what's normal," says Jeff. "We're working on a whole different level."