

LEVANTE

(aka *Levant* / *The Great Levante* / *Les Cole* / *Magician Cole*)

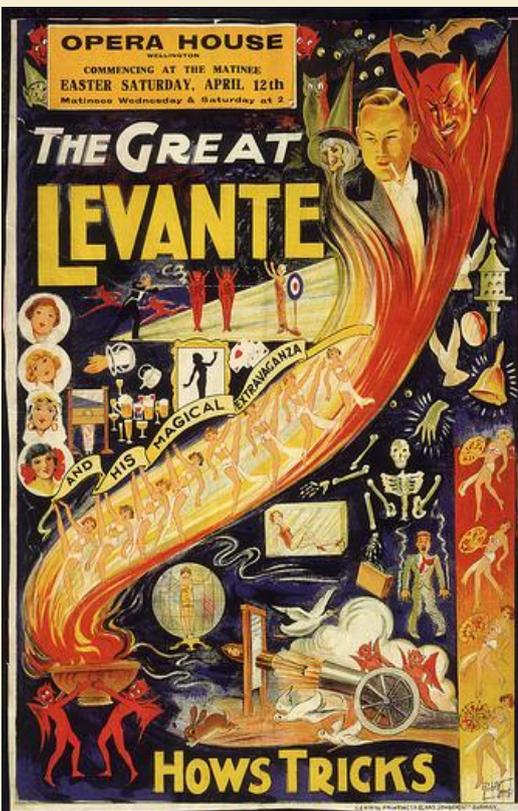
Magician. Regarded as one of the world's greatest magicians, Les Cole began learning magic in his early teens before touring an escapology act as Levante. In 1927 he and his wife and daughter left Australia to tour the east and Europe before moving to Great Britain where he gradually expanded his show into a revue extravaganza. He returned to Australia in 1940 and continued touring until the late 1950s.

Australia's most famous magician, Leslie George Cole was born on 5 March 1892 at Alexandria, Sydney. He began learning magic in his early teens and at 17 became the protégé of showman Tom Selwyn (who gave him the stage name "Levant"). By age 20 he was touring an escapology act around the Antipodian variety circuits billed as Levante. Although turned down for military service the army engaged him to tour military propaganda films and to lecture prospective recruits. After the war he briefly worked as Les Cole (aka Magician Cole) before returning to the majestic sounding "Levante" (and later as "The Great Levante").

Cole and his wife and young daughter toured the Antipodes until 1927, and then over the next five or six years he honed his act while playing extensively throughout the East and Europe. He arrived in the UK in 1933 and over the next four years gradually expanded his show before presenting the revue extravaganza *How's Tricks* in 1937. Possibly the first show to devote itself to the magical arts, the 40-strong company included comedians, chorus girls and animals. The show was notable for its rich costuming, clever comedy magic sketches, and Cole's personality, particularly with smaller effects such as the "Thumb Tie," the "Egg Bag," and his big publicity-puller the "Inexhaustible Kettle" (Blackmore, n. pag.) Levante's trunk trick was awarded the 1935 "Mystery of Mysteries" title by the Institute of Magicians (London), while the Inner Magic Circle awarded him its gold star.



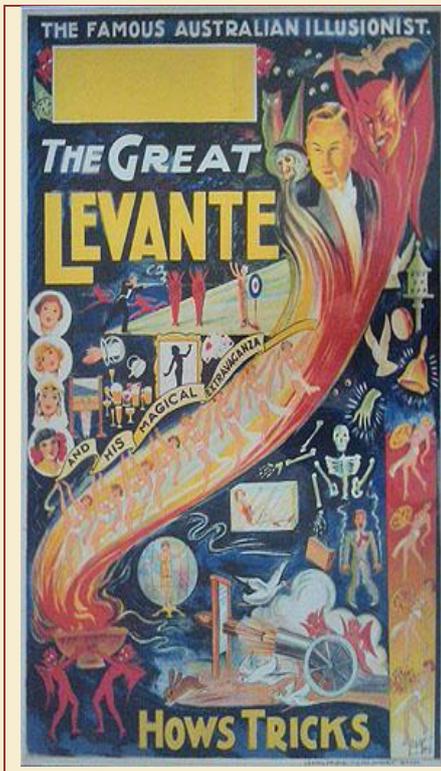
Source: State Library of Victoria



Source: Crazy Tricks

In 1939 the International Brotherhood of Magicians named him the world's #1 magician. He returned to Australia the following, a situation forced upon him due to the outbreak of war, and the subsequent closure of many theatres. After arriving home he toured *How's Tricks* around Australia and New Zealand to excellent business. As a publicity stunt for the Melbourne season he leapt from the princess Bridge in to the Yarra River, fully shackled. This was a higher jump than Houdini, who had performed a similar stunt off the Queens Bridge in 1910. During the war he also entertained troops and afterwards toured for nine months each year through until the late 1950s. From 1948 he toured a cut down version of *How's Tricks* under canvas (with the tent holding some 1,200 people). He returned to Britain in 1954 to play a series shorts seasons around the country, and over the next decade or so made several brief trips back there. During the 1960s and 1970s, however, he mostly toured regional Australia. Cole retired in 1977, and died on 20 January the following year. In an article published in the *Magical Past Times* website, Kent Blackmore says of the Australian magician:

By the 1970s, the world recognized that Levante was one of the last great touring magicians, and in honour of his amazing life in magic, he was awarded both the Performing Fellowship and the Masters Fellowship by the Academy of Magical Arts. Levante died in 1978. The world lost a supremely talented magician, a clever but unpretentious man, an adventurer who had done everything that there was to be done in the world of entertainment and who, largely through the force of his personality, had won the hearts and minds of audiences all over the world (n. pag.).



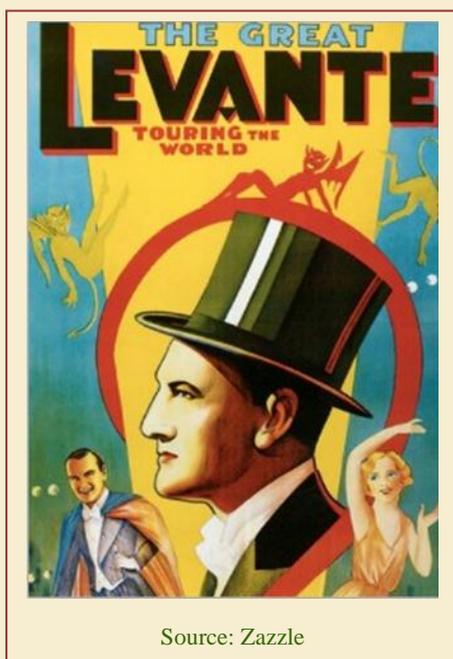
Sources:
 Above: State Library of Victoria
 Left: Richard Neylon: Rare Books in the Arts and Sciences.
 Right: Josef Lebovic Gallery

FURTHER REFERENCE

Bridges, Nancy. *Curtain Call* (1980), v. pag.
 Kent Blackmore, *Levante, His Life No Illusion*, Sydney: Mike Caveney's Magic Words, 1997.
 --- "Levante: His Life No Illusion." *Magical Past Times*. (sighted 13/07.2012
 Ritchie, John. "[Cole, Leslie George \(Les\) \(1892-1978\)](#)." ABD: 13 (1993), n. pag.

See also:

- P:** 24 Feb. (1954), n. pag.
- PXP:** 22 Jan. (1976).
- DT:** 21 Jan. (1978).
- SS:** 21 Jan. (1978).
- SMH:** 24 Jan. (1978), n. pag.



Source: Zazzle

Source: Vintage New Zealand Posters.

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