



# MASTER OF MAGIC

## An Interview With The Great Levante



(By PHYLLIS McDONAGH)

**T**O some the Great Levante might prove a disappointment. For example, he doesn't wear a beard or false cuffs—or a Magi's flowing cape. When I interviewed him in his dressing-room at the theatre he was dressed informally in a brown lounge suit, and looked the unassuming, friendly sort of person he appears behind the footlights.

At his feet lay a dog. Not an ordinary dog. His size and magnificence made me gasp. Grock is a bull mastiff, three feet in height, weighs 8 stone and polishes off three pounds of meat a day. Grock is a man's dog—a one-man dog, although—with a bored indifference—he did allow me to caress his great, tawny head.

Even after 30 years in the show business, Levante still doesn't quite know how he ever managed to become what he is to-day—one of the four leading magicians in the world. You see, he was not born in the theatre. He didn't spend his babyhood days in a stage basket. He is the son of a farmer and of a strict Scottish mother, and the theatre, in his early days, was a closed door to him.

"Perhaps one of your ancestors was a master showman?" I suggested.

"Perhaps," he laughed. "I'll never know. Anyway, despite my environment, when I was still very young I began to take an interest in the world of magic. Then things began to shape themselves when I gave an exhibition of magic at a Sunday School concert. Finally, when I was eighteen, despaired of by my

parents, I took up the profession in earnest. That was 30 years ago—and I'm still going—still keen on my job—"

### The Indian Rope Trick

Levante has travelled in all parts of the world. He has watched the magic of the East and the West, and he has drawn his own conclusions.

"I think the European magician can take the tricks of the Orient and fool the Eastern wizards at their own game. Indian magicians are, I think, the poorest, and the Chinese, perhaps, the cleverest.

"The Indian Rope Trick? It is, in itself, an illusion. It does not exist. I spent 20 months scouring India for some evidence of it—but without success. The shrewd natives will never actually deny this legendary trick. When asked by eager tourists to have the Rope Trick performed, the native will say: 'Alas, man who performs Rope Trick went back to Hills last week.' And he continues to stay in his hills."

Levante does not like showy parlour tricks. Fifty per cent. of his illusions are original. The magician to-day, he says, must be a craftsman—and a psychologist. The old technique won't do. If an old-time magician made his appearance to-day, the audience would walk out. The old patter and tricks have been replaced by intelligent showmanship.

### Reserve of Ideas

"It must be hard work," I said, "always seeking out new illusions—keeping at least one pace ahead."

"Well, that's part of our job," he replied. "Upstairs I have what we call 'The Glory Hole.' It contains all the written ideas that pour in to us from amateur magicians all over the globe. We get quite a lot of material from their experiments. All we want is the idea. Our experience qualifies us to work out the means of exploiting it."

The Great Levante's most prized illusion is his famous Trunk Trick. The Magic Circle of London presented him with a certificate admitting that the trick had completely baffled them—despite the fact that they had spent four hours examining the "props." Levante has offered £1000 to anyone who can unravel the trick.

"I first got the idea from watching Houdini at work," he explained, "and straightway went ahead with my own experiment. I believe the trunk-maker and myself are the only people living who know the secret of this trick. Even my daughter Esme, who assists me, does not know how it is performed."

With a company of twenty-eight players, and 40 tons of stage gear, Levante left London six months ago on this present tour. With his wife and daughter, he made an adventurous trip out on a cargo ship. They came under torpedo fire in a convoy, and were later machine-gunned by a German dive bomber.

The call boy popped his head in the door.

"Five minutes!"

With my thumbnail sketch tucked into a mental pocket, I took leave of the great Levante. Grock, with a lazy thump of his tail, waved me on my way.

### READING TIME : SIX MINUTES (Continued from previous page)

ingly at several choice bowls of goldfish when suddenly an idea came to him. Then he stopped and thought. No, anything but that. And then he thought again. Yes, I'll do it. No sacrifice is too great if it will make Isobel happy.

The upshot was that he persuaded the manager of the shop to exchange six of his best goldfish for Chub (who had a good pedigree, and was really worth much more than six goldfish.)

Now, it seems that Isobel had also been thinking, I simply must get Jimmy that collar and chain. However can I find enough money. She thought and thought, and one day, as she was looking in the window of an antique shop, an idea came to her. Then she stopped and thought. No, I couldn't possibly do that. Then she thought again. Yes, I'll do it, no sacrifice is too great if it will make Jimmy happy.

So without letting Jimmy know, she sold her beautiful goldfish bowl for a

lot less than it was worth, and bought a nice collar and chain for Chub.

I hope that by this time you can hear the whip cracking in the tail of this story.

You can imagine what happened on Christmas morning when they each produced their big surprise. She wept a little and said, "Oh, darling isn't it pathetic?" And he patted her shoulder, and said gruffly, "Never mind, darling, we still have each other." And then they looked in each other's eyes and disappeared from circulation.

Which is the end of the story, except that a cheque for five pounds from Jimmy's uncle turned up later in the day, and they bought back both Chub and the goldfish bowl. A few months later, the eventuality for which they had been saving so hard, turned up, too, so now they have a complete household you you might say.

As I wish to be strictly honest about this story, I should add that the events I have described are entirely imaginary, and none of the characters bear any resemblance to living persons. Also that O. Henry thought of the idea first.

IT'S MARVELLOUS  
TO **HEAR**  
AGAIN!



**Western Electric**  
ORTHO-TECHNIC  
**HEARING AID**

You, too, can enjoy the living world of sound again with the aid of Western Electric Audiphone. Based on advanced hearing aid design this scientifically-perfected product enables you to hear easily and clearly. You can even join in group conversations with ease and comfort, and can hear at greater distances. Neat, compact, inconspicuous and dependable. A demonstration places you under no obligation. Our Hearing Aid Consultant will gladly give you a free Audiometric Test.

This is the Western Electric Audiphone—sensitive, full-range, natural tone. The smallest fitting is the ear-piece—easily concealed.

DISTRIBUTORS:—

**"Beag's"**

**FOR THROAT & VOICE**

Get Quick Relief with

**LIXOIDS**

9<sup>D</sup> A TIN AT CHEMISTS