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Bro. LESLIE GEORGE COLE (1892-1978).

Pix/People reported on 22nd January 1976 that magic was making a dramatic comeback on world stages and that Australia had at that time one of the greatest of them all, The Great Levante, at 84 years¹ of age still weaving magic designed to surprise and amaze audiences.

Les was born on 5th March 1892 at Alexandria in Sydney and his parents moved to Wangaratta in Victoria where he commenced work driving a baker's cart. Melbourne soon beckoned and at 17 he became a barman and billiard marker at The Vine Hotel, Richmond.

After some coaching and encouragement from a showman, Tom Selwyn, who suggested the name "The Great Levante" Les embarked on a long and successful professional career in magic in 1912 after playing in repertory and between silent films for two years. This work only really earned Les very small money.

He commenced tours around Australia playing at Luna Park in Melbourne and at White City in Sydney before touring Queensland. During World War 1 he toured extensively in Queensland which was a pretty rough life with poor rewards and sleeping out and at times very difficult audiences. When Les saw Harry Houdini in action on an Australian tour he became fascinated his work. Les then went home and learned to escape from chains and padlocks while submerged in a bath and then progressed to the local swimming pool where people thought he was quite mad. Training and perfection were always to be the trade marks of his work as a magician.

Les also worked with war propaganda and recruiting causes during the war and in 1919 he married Gladys Costin. With their only child, Esme, born in 1921 they continued touring in Western Australia performing from Broome to Birdsville. During these tours his stooges were shearers and bullockies all anxious to discover his tricks but The Great Levante was too clever for them. They were travelling in a Dodge bus that was especially designed and built in Perth from Western Australian jarra.

From 1912 to 1927 he spent 15 years touring city and country in Australia perfecting his craft and showmanship. During this time he also spent time in New Zealand, the Pacific Islands and some Asian Countries.

The family then set off on a world tour in 1927. For the next thirteen years the family of three toured England, Asia, Malaya, Japan and India until 1940. During this period he built up a large and spectacular show, his wife and daughter being sawn in half many times over. He was pulling rabbits from hats and producing golf balls from all respectable parts of peoples' bodies. His shows were particularly lavish and he was also a very suave and distinguished figure on stage.

