

The Double Life Of William Robinson Aka Chung Ling Soo The Marvelous Chinese



The Glorious Deception: The Double Life of William Robinson, aka Chung Ling Soo, the Marvelous Chinese

Conjuror by Jim Steinmeyer

★★★★☆ 4.5 out of 5

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William Ellsworth Robinson (April 2, 1861 – March 23, 1918) was an American magician and illusionist who achieved international fame under the stage name Chung Ling Soo. His elaborate stage persona, which included a flowing silk robe, a long black queue, and a shaved head, was inspired by Chinese culture. Soo became one of the most celebrated magicians of his time, performing sold-out shows around the world.

Early Life and Career

Robinson was born in New York City to Irish immigrant parents. He began his career as a magician at the age of 16, performing under the name Chung Ling Soo. He quickly gained a reputation for his innovative illusions and his ability to create a sense of mystery and wonder on stage. In 1898, he made his debut on the American vaudeville circuit, where he quickly became a star.

International Acclaim

Soo's popularity soon spread beyond the United States. In 1900, he toured Europe, where he was greeted with critical acclaim. He performed before royalty and heads of state, including King Edward VII of England and Emperor Wilhelm II of Germany. Soo's fame reached its peak in the early 1900s, when he headlined shows at the Palace Theatre in London and the Hippodrome Theatre in New York City.

The Double Life

Behind the facade of Chung Ling Soo, William Robinson led a double life. He maintained the illusion that he was a Chinese man, even off stage. He spoke with a Chinese accent and wore traditional Chinese clothing. He also adopted the mannerisms and customs of Chinese culture.

Robinson's double life was a source of both fascination and controversy. Some people believed that he was truly Chinese, while others suspected that he was an American imposter. Robinson himself never revealed the truth about his origins.

Mysterious Death

On March 23, 1918, Chung Ling Soo died during a performance at the Wood Green Empire Theatre in London. During his signature bullet catch illusion, a bullet fired from a rifle unexpectedly struck him in the chest. Soo was pronounced dead at the scene.

The circumstances surrounding Soo's death remain a mystery to this day. Some believe that it was a tragic accident, while others suspect that he was murdered. The truth may never be known.

Legacy

Chung Ling Soo was one of the most celebrated magicians of his time. His innovative illusions and his ability to create a sense of mystery and wonder on stage continue to inspire magicians and performers today. His double life remains a source of fascination and controversy, and his death remains one of the most enduring mysteries in the history of magic.

William Robinson, the man behind the enigmatic stage persona Chung Ling Soo, was a true master of illusion. He captivated audiences worldwide with his elaborate stage shows and his ability to create a sense of mystery and wonder. His double life, his mysterious death, and his enduring legacy all contribute to the fascinating story of this iconic magician.



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