

Women in Magic

Interview with Tiffany Allen

By Micheline Mehanna

Tiffany Allen will present her number "The Georgia Wonder" at the stage gala of the 55th French Congress of Illusion, FFAP 2022, in Poitiers. We had the chance to see this act, for the first time in Europe, at Magica Dour, in Belgium, on April 2, 2022 and to interview her for the Revue de la Prestidigitation.

Tiffany Allen allows us to discover the "Georgia Wonder" phenomenon with these women who lived at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, in Georgia, and who traveled the United States and Europe with their act. By resurrecting a variant of this number, Tiffany Allen, takes us back in time, and defies the laws of physics.

With a number like "The Georgia Wonder," Tiffany could only be a feminist. Her first experience in a magic club could make you smile if the situation had changed significantly! At 14, she already wanted to join a magic club, but... they didn't accept women. She joined another, made up entirely of men, the youngest of whom was 75 years old. One of the magicians present in this club was even 101 years old. Years later, she met a woman her age, Hannah Wagster, a magician, who helped her a lot.

Before coming to France, Tiffany Allen worked in a unique place that combined magic and painting, "The Magic Canvas", in South Carolina. A studio where you can sip and paint, drink a glass of wine and watch a magic show. Everyone is welcome and no skills are required to feel the magic of creativity. This place provides painting lessons but also magic lessons for children, and offers magic shows on weekends.

This place was created by Janet Robinson and her husband Scott, who is a magician. They designed this place for their son with autism. Autistic children or children with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) are welcomed in this place and also work there. This space has the particularity of including everyone. Children paint or do magic. Tiffany gave lessons to these children whom she used to call "my kids".

The story of the meeting of Tiffany Allen and Boris Wild is worthy of a fairy tale. They met at the TRICS magic convention organized by the "Sleight Club" which is a closed group where an audition is required to enter, Tiffany specifies. She was to perform her number of "Princess Tiff" in another venue and had planned to return to the Convention to see Boris again. She was dressed like a princess and didn't have time to change, especially since one of her heels ripped off her spare outfit... They passed each other and Boris said: "Oh my Princess! ". They talked all night,

and we know the rest! I doubt very much with these few lines that I have restored the romanticism of this moment and its magic, but I am counting on Tiffany to tell the story to whoever dares to ask her...

The birth of the number "The Georgia Wonder" is also extraordinary. Tiffany is asthmatic and she explains that she even almost died. She was hospitalized for a long time and she couldn't do anything. It is in this context that she hears about the "Georgia Wonder". She started researching from her hospital bed and she found these incredible stories. In addition, she realized that almost no one had since taken over this number. It was therefore a real opportunity for her to revive this number which had not been performed since 1890.

Tiffany has never lived in Georgia. She made a kind of pilgrimage there and it was very moving. She cried thinking of all those women who changed the world. These women who staged this number were very young. They were from Georgia and had the same stage name. It is not known exactly how many women have been "Georgia Wonder". At that time, it was difficult for women to accomplish such feats. Women were dependent on their husbands. Some men have put on "The Georgia Wonder" but when it's a man performing that number, it's not as impressive. It's obviously much more impressive when it comes to a woman. The three Georgia Wonder, Mattie Lee Price, Annie Abbott and Lulu Hurst lived close to each other and were rivals.

Tiffany Allen has always wanted to be a magician. She figured she could do magic too and didn't need to be a magician's assistant. Some magicians tried to discourage her from doing this job because she was a woman. She did not disassemble and even wanted to prove to them that she could be better than them.

When the first musical notes that accompany the end of his number are heard, with "Badass Woman" by Meghan Trainor, we say to ourselves that indeed it will now be necessary to count in France with Tiffany Allen, the most French of American magicians. We can only wish him a great career in France and in Europe. Readers of the *Revue de la Prestidigitation* will have the opportunity and the chance to see this issue at the Poitiers Congress between October 27 and 30, 2022. We can only be happy, in this section, *Les Magiciennes*, to count a new magician in France...

Georgia Wonder or Georgia Magnet? What to say?

When I say that I'm doing the "Georgia Wonder" number, people always seem to ask, "Do you mean Georgia Magnet?". And conversely, if I say I'm doing the Georgia Magnet number, people ask me if it's the same thing as Georgia Wonder. It's really funny because whatever I say, it's never the right wording.

There is no longer any difference between the two names and they have become synonymous. Originally, The Georgia Wonder was a person and The Georgia Magnet, the postulate. Then, Annie Abbott, started playing the role of “The Little Georgia Magnet”. Over time, the names have become interchangeable. For me, “The Georgia Wonder” refers to both my act and my character, and it does every time I use those terms. Since I don't use a magnetic story line, I found it suited me better. And let's be honest, who doesn't want to be a *Wonder Woman* ?

Who were the “Georgia Wonders”? Can you tell us about Mattie Lee Price, Annie Abbott and the most famous of the three, Lulu Hurst?

At the height of its popularity, "The Georgia Wonder" was played by many young women, some of whom even used the aliases of people more famous than themselves. The best known were Mattie Lee Price, Annie Abbott and Lulu Hurst, the most famous of the three. Many books and articles have been written about these three women. We don't know much about them outside of the scene.

My research over the past ten years has allowed me to have an overview, far from being exhaustive, of the life of each of these women. I have not put an end to this research and other discoveries are still possible. Many before me have looked into this issue, and for my part, I will continue to search, compile, and run this issue until I can no longer! I hope that at that time, the baton will be taken over by another artist, as passionate as I am about this number but also about its history, its performers and its heritage.

Mattie Lee Price

Although she performed the shortest time, Mattie Lee Price, is considered one of the most impressive of the "Georgia Wonders". Her father has been her manager in other shows and she has been able to work with her husband. When she divorced, her number lost quality. She remarried, and her new husband became her new assistant but he wasn't as good as the previous one and she quickly retired from performing.

Mattie Lee Price used several stage names: "The Mysterious Gaza", "The Georgia Magnetic Girl", "The Georgia Electric Girl". She was also one of two artists from Georgia to tour Europe.

Annie Abbott

From her real name Dixie Haygood , Annie Abbott began performing after seeing Lulu Hurst, the original Georgia Wonder, perform the number. She played the role of "The Little Georgia Magnet" because she was smaller in stature and therefore more impressive than Lulu. The other “Georgia Wonders” played “The Lift”, and it was Annie Abbott who made it famous. She passed on the power to her young son and used it in public. Her husband was murdered when she was just 17, leaving her alone to support herself. She moved to Europe, where she performed, and

where she proved to be very talented in marketing. She worked for one of the most famous brands of the time. She claimed her powers were giving her unbearable headaches and she needed a cure. She thus became the face of a firm of analgesics. We don't know when she stopped performing because many other women performed under her name.

Lulu Hurst

Lulu Hurst is, without a doubt, the most famous of the “Georgia Wonders”. This was the original Georgia Wonder. She made this number, during her short career, one of the most famous in the world. She only performed for two years before canceling her European tour. She married her manager and had a son. During these two years of career, she earned more than a million dollars. This is equivalent today to around thirty million dollars earned in the space of two years. A few years later, she published her autobiography which details, on the one hand, her meteoric rise and, on the other hand, the construction of her act. It is even said that she created her own publishing house to publish her book. Which in itself is a feat . It's not trivial for a woman to publish her own book in the late 1800s. She had an undeniable talent for self-publicity, which enraged famous magicians of the time. She was able to fill large theaters, which they were incapable of. After the publication of her autobiography, Lulu Hurst retired from show business and devoted herself to her family.

A few years ago, I wanted to take a trip, a sort of pilgrimage to Lulu's grave, to pay homage to her and say thank you. As I placed a rose on her modest grave, I couldn't help but feel that where and how she was buried was a tribute to her life. She was surrounded by her husband and children. His grave was indistinguishable from the others and it took me several minutes to find it. Her grave seemed to align with her own values, what she valued in life. Looking closer, I could still see that "The Georgia Wonder" still lived in her. After her marriage, she had changed her name to Lula Hurst Atkinson, but on her tombstone was inscribed “Lulu Hurst”. It's as if she wanted to go back to basics. She is and always will be Lulu Hurst.