



Chung Ling Soo

Born: *William Ellsworth Robinson*, April 16, 1861, in **Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, U.S.**

Died: March 23, 1918 in **London, England** at age 56

◆ How He Became a Magician

Robinson started performing **magic as a teenager** after being inspired by stage magic shows in the U.S.

He performed initially under his own name in the United States before adopting the **Chung Ling Soo** persona — a Chinese magician — to capitalize on the Western fascination with exotic “Oriental” stage magic.

He **perfected the illusion of being a Chinese performer**, never breaking character in public and claiming to speak only Chinese on stage, while he was actually American.

◆ Influences

- Influenced by **Alexander Herrmann** (Herrmann the Great) and other late 19th-century stage magicians.
- He admired **European and American theatrical magic**, especially illusions that could impress audiences with exotic flair.
- He studied and adapted existing tricks while adding flair, stage persona, and theatrical showmanship to create his unique act



CHUNG LING SOO.
(Mr. Wm. G. Robinson.)

◆ What Type of Magic He Did

Stage illusions and theatrical magic, particularly visual and large-scale effects.

Known for **vanishing and appearing tricks, levitations, and the “bullet catch”** — the trick that ultimately caused his death.

Famous for adopting an exotic persona to enhance the mystique of his illusions, performing in **full Chinese costume and makeup**, and blending sleight-of-hand with large-scale spectacle.

◆ Performance Career Span

- Began performing professionally in the **1880s** in the U.S. under his own name.
- Adopted the **Chung Ling Soo persona around 1898** and continued performing internationally for about **20 years**.
- **Career span:** c. 1880s–1918

◆ How he Died

- Chung Ling Soo **died on March 23, 1918**, in London.
- He was performing the **“bullet catch” illusion**, during which a misfired gun fatally wounded him on stage.
- His death was shocking because he maintained his persona and secrecy until the end; the audience reportedly believed the accident was part of the act.



Signature Tricks, Illusions & Show Elements

1. *The Bullet Catch*

- His most famous and ultimately fatal trick.
- Involved “catching” a bullet fired from a gun in his teeth or hand — done in full theatrical style to appear lethal.
- Became one of the most daring illusions of his career and a signature stunt for dramatic effect.

2. *Vanishing and Appearing Effects*

- Included large-scale stage illusions where assistants, objects, or props **vanished and reappeared** in seemingly impossible locations.
- Often incorporated exotic props to reinforce his Chinese persona.

3. *Levitation and Floating Objects*

- Performed illusions in which people or objects appeared to **float or hover**, sometimes enhanced with oriental-themed stage decoration.

4. *Transformations and Quick Changes*

- Classic theatrical illusions involving the **transformation of one object or person into another**, timed with dramatic gestures and costume changes.



Signature Tricks, Illusions & Show Elements

5. *Sword Swallowing / Exotic Stunts*

- Occasionally incorporated **stunts and dangerous feats** in line with his “Chinese magician” stage persona, adding to the mystique and suspense.

6. *Large-Scale Stage Spectacle*

- His shows often included **full theatrical staging, elaborate scenery, and assistant routines**, combining traditional conjuring with dramatic storytelling.
- Emphasized **visual grandeur** over sleight-of-hand tricks, creating a cinematic feel on the stage for audiences.

Chung Ling Soo’s act was a masterful combination of **theatrical illusion, danger, and exoticized stage persona**, making him one of the most famous magicians of his era — until his tragic death during the bullet catch stunt in 1918.