



The Great Dante

Born: Harry August Jensen on October 3, 1883 in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Died: June 15, 1955 in Northridge, California, U.S. at age 71.

◆ How He Became a Magician

Harry Jansen's interest in performance and magic began in childhood after his family moved to the United States when he was six. He later started working with magic props and building equipment, which led him to performing.

At **age 16 he made his stage debut** under magician Charles Wagner and then toured for several years as **The Great Jansen**.

◆ Influences

Jansen was influenced early on by prominent magicians of his era — especially **Howard Thurston**, the leading stage magician of the early 20th century, who recognized Jansen's talent and hired him in **1922**. It was Thurston who gave him the **stage name "Dante"** (after an earlier magician named Dante the Great, Oscar Eliason).

Watching great magicians and touring with seasoned performers shaped his style and presentation.



◆ What Type of Magic He Did

Dante the Magician was a **classic stage illusionist and showman** whose repertoire included:

- **Large-scale theatrical illusions** with elaborate props and scenery.
- Using the catchphrase “**Sim Sala Bim!**” as his stage trademark during performances.
- Touring internationally and performing in **vaudeville, theatre, film, and early television**, blending spectacle, precision, and showmanship rather than just simple sleight-of-hand.

Throughout his career he was known for presenting illusions that were impressive and visually striking, often adapted or reimagined classics given his own signature style.

◆ Performance Career Span

- Jansen *began performing on stage around age 16* (circa **1899–1900**) under the name “Great Jansen.”
- He adopted the name **Dante the Magician** in **1922** when he joined Howard Thurston’s company.
- Dante continued performing **through the 1920s, 1930s, and into the late 1940s** as the headliner of his own shows and in varied entertainment mediums.
- His career spanned **about five decades** — from roughly **1899 until his retirement in the late 1940s**.

◆ How He Died

Harry August Jansen (**Dante the Magician**) **died of a heart attack on June 15, 1955** at his ranch in Northridge, California, at age 71.



Signature Tricks, Illusions & Show Elements

1. *Sim Sala Bim*

Dante's **trademark magic words** — three nonsense syllables he often used onstage as a kind of magical incantation and acknowledgment of applause. It became *his defining catchphrase* and even the title of his big Broadway revue show.

2. *The Sim Sala Bim Revue / Broadway Show*

Rather than just a trick, this was his major production — a full-scale illusion revue that included **sleight-of-hand, dramatic illusions, spectacle acts, mysterious cabinets, levitation, disappearing people, and even livestock appearing from nowhere.**

3. *Vanishing Horse Illusion*

Considered one of Dante's *biggest illusions*, this was a large-scale presentation in which a horse and rider seemingly vanished before the audience's eyes — one of the most ambitious illusions he ever presented in collaboration with Howard Thurston.

4. *Disappearing / Transformed Figures*

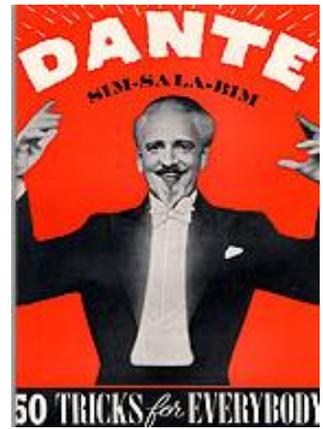
Dante's show featured effects where objects or people **transformed or vanished** — such as turning a dummy into a woman or making assistants disappear from cabinets.

5. *Mystery of the Bottomless Barrel*

Part of his theatrical stage repertoire, this involved a barrel with both ends covered by paper — yet when opened, it yielded surprising quantities of props or objects that seemingly shouldn't fit.

6. *Mystery of the Mysterious Globe*

Another specialty from his revue shows, this involved an eerie levitation or animated globe effect that contributed to the grand theatrical feel of his performances.



Signature Tricks, Illusions & Show Elements

7. Sawing a Woman in Half (The Great Divide)

Dante's version of this classic illusion became a *crowd-pleasing finale* in many of his stage shows, with suspense built through his patter and precise execution.

8. Live Animals, Birds & Novelty Acts

His shows frequently included **live ducks, pigeons, fish, or other animals** as part of illusions, adding spectacle and variety to the performances.

9. Large Company & Production Scale

Dante's presentations weren't solo tricks but *full theatrical productions* with **25–40 performers, elaborate props, scenic staging, music, and choreography**, making each show more like a magic musical revue than a simple conjuring act.

These elements show how Dante evolved magic from smaller prestidigitation into **big, theatrical illusion entertainment** — blending classic illusions with showmanship, spectacle, and an unforgettable stage persona.