



The Incomparable Vonetta

Born: *Winifred Etta Thompson* (also known by several stage names including **Etta Ion**, **Etta Paul**, and others) on **August 14, 1878** in **North Yorkshire, England**.

Died: **June 30, 1964** at age 85.

◆ **How She Became a Magician**

Vonetta began in performing arts **as a vocalist and specialty dancer in British pantomime** and music hall shows in the early 1900s.

She married theatrical impresario **Thomas Monaghan** (sometimes credited as T. Vincent Paul), who became her assistant and producer. In **1906 she debuted her own magic act**, billed theatrically as “*Von-Etta, La Mystère Indescriptible*,” and later simply as **Vonetta** — blending illusion, dance, and quick-change artistry

◆ **Influences**

- There’s no detailed record of specific mentors for Vonetta, but her style was shaped by the **British music hall and variety tradition**, and she drew from the era’s theatrical illusion culture.
- Her act blended **sleight of hand, stage illusion, dance, and quick changes**, reflecting influences from both magic and theatrical performance styles of the early 20th century.



◆ What Type of Magic She Did

Vonetta was known as one of the **world's early female stage illusionists**, billed proudly as "*The World's Only Lady Illusionist*" and later as "*Scotland's Only Lady Magician*." Her performances included:

- **Macabre/levitation box illusion:** a floating coffin or box that moved through the air with her inside before revealing a surprise.
- **Quick change acts** with up to **24 costume changes in a few minutes**, blended with dance and theatricality.
- A variety of stage illusions such as **Smoke Vase, Rice Bowls, Twentieth Century Silks**, and trunk/casket illusions involving assistants and escapes.
- Later productions that included **dance, electrical effects, and scenic spectacle** as well as traditional illusions.

Her show blended **illusion, dance, quick-change artistry, and theatrical spectacle**, making her act stand out in the early 1900s music-hall and theatre circuits.

◆ Performance Career Span

- **Active touring:** Vonetta toured widely on the British stage and in Europe from **about 1906 until 1914**, when the outbreak of **World War I ended her main touring career**.
- **Post-war activity:** After the war she opened a dance studio and pursued other pursuits (including a 1918 silent film role), and she occasionally returned to magic and variety performance under different names into the **1920s and early 1930s**.

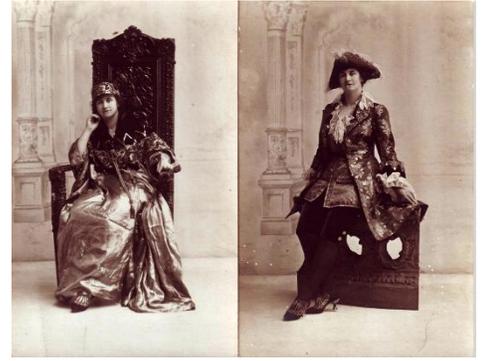
Her primary stage illusionist career spanned roughly 1906–1914, with occasional later performances



◆ **How She Died**

Vonetta died on June 30, 1964 at the age of 85; she had lived long past her performing years and continued to be remembered within magician and conjuring circles.

Vonetta was one of the most successful early female stage magicians, notable for her theatrical illusions and quick-change artistry at a time when few women headlined magic shows. She was honored as an Honorary Member of the Scottish Conjurers' Association in 1924, a rare distinction for a woman in her era.



Signature Tricks, Illusions & Show Elements

1. *Floating Coffin / Levitation Box*

- Vonetta's signature and most dramatic illusion.
- She would **enter a coffin or large box**, which then appeared to **float and move in midair**, often spinning or rising before revealing her or an assistant inside.
- This was considered extremely daring and visually thrilling for early 1900s audiences.

2. *Quick-Change Costume Acts*

- Vonetta was famous for performing **rapid costume changes** — sometimes up to **24 transformations in just a few minutes**, often combined with dance and theatrical gestures.
- These quick-change effects were integrated into her illusion routines for a seamless, magical spectacle.

3. *Smoke Vase / Vanishing Objects*

- Classic conjuring and visual illusions adapted to her theatrical style.
- Objects would **appear, disappear, or transform** amidst smoke, mirrors, or flowing silk, creating a dramatic magical effect.

4. *Rice Bowls & Silks*

- Part of her stage repertoire of sleight-of-hand and visual flourishes.
- Bowls of rice or flowing silks would **magically vanish, reappear, or multiply**, adding color and spectacle to her performance



Signature Tricks, Illusions & Show Elements

5. Trunk / Casket Transformations

- She used **trunks or caskets for assistants or herself**, performing disappearances, transformations, and surprise appearances.
- These illusions combined **traditional conjuring with theatrical staging**, enhanced by her dance movements.

6. Electrical and Stage Spectacle Effects

- Later in her career, Vonetta incorporated **electric lighting, flash effects, and moving scenery** to augment her illusions.
- This helped her shows feel modern, technological, and visually striking for audiences of the 1910s.

These acts highlight how Vonetta combined **illusion, dance, theatrical staging, and technical creativity**, paving the way for future female magicians to headline major magic productions.