**Biography of Jean Eugène Robert-Houdin**

Robert was born on December 7, 1805 in Blois, France. His father - Prosper Robert - was one of the best watchmaking masters in the city. Prosper used his unique talent and incredible diligence to provide his family with a dignified existence. All his life he dreamed of his children becoming the truly respected members of a society.

When Jean became 11 years old, at the behest of his father, he went to a school at the University of Orléans, which was located in 35 miles away from his city. At the age of 18, Jean successfully completed his studies and returned to Blois. His father wanted him to become a lawyer, but Robert himself was more attracted by the work of a watchmaker.

An excellent handwriting helped Jean to obtain a clerk's place in the office of the local solicitor. However, instead of studying law, Robert spent time tinkering with mechanical devices. When he lost his job, he finally managed to confess to his father about the dreams of becoming a watchmaker. By that time, Prosper had already retired, so Jean became an apprentice to his cousin who was engaged in a family shop. However, due to the talent, pretty quickly Robert managed to become an independent watchmaker.

At 1820-s, Jean managed to save money for a two-volume book on the clock subject called: “Traité de l'horlogerie”, by Ferdinand Berthoud. In the bookshop, however, he was mistakenly given a two-volume of “Scientific Amusements”, which was about the art of showing tricks. Jean did not return the books - curiosity prevailed. Very soon he realized that he had found his new vocation. Volumes contained no revelations regarding the art of illusion, but the interest awakened by them made Robert to start his independent research. Jean went to a local magician and began taking lessons. Maous, a magician from Blois, taught the guy a number of very useful things - in particular, juggling. The inherent dexterity and accuracy of Robert after regular exercises developed even more.

Magic for a long time remained only a hobby of Jean, because he earned his living as a watchmaker. After a while, Robert moved to the Tours. There Jean became an amateur actor in a troupe. Later he managed to hone his professional skills even more by showing tricks at high society parties. It was on one of these performances when he got acquainted with Joséphae Cecile Houdin, a daughter of a Parisian watchmaker -Jacques François Houdin. Joseph and Jean were married on July 8, 1830, after which a young conjurer added her surname to his last name.

When they moved to Paris, Jean got a job in a father-in-law's shop. Jacques Francois was one of the last watchmakers of the “old school” style, whose clocks were exclusively handmade. The son-in-law's love for fine mechanics pleased him very much. Robert-Houdin began creating new types of mechanical toys, such as singing birds and miniature rope-walkers. One of his best creations was a machine that knew how to write and draw. Even King Louis Philippe got interested in Jean’s inventions. But he did not abandon magic. On the contrary, on one of the streets of Paris he accidentally found a shop for magicians. There he acquired a number of very useful connections and many interesting tricks.

In 1843, after a long illness, the wife of Robert-Houdin died, leaving three children for their father’s guardianship. Trying to at least partially relieve this situation, Jean married again. His second wife soon took the whole household into her own hands.

The magician continued to perform at private parties and designing sophisticated devices for advanced tricks. At that time he had a dream of his own theater, which became true by the assistance of Count de l'Escalopier, who hired the magician for a series of parties and paid 15000 francs for it. Robert-Houdin rented several rooms at the royal palace and converted them into a theater.

The first performance was given on July 3, 1845 and was unsuccessful. Staying on the very verge of a nervous breakdown, magician closed the theater. Only after one of his acquaintances encouragement, he managed to resume performances.

Gradually, Jean got used to the stage. Critics began to devote more and more positive reviews. His mechanical toys were compared to the creations of real legends of the world of tricks like Philippe and Bosco. Unfortunately, the theater's income was very unstable. However, Robert did not lose hope and gradually managed to win the interest of the whole city. His renovated theater was illuminated with electricity and could boast with a number of cunning mechanical devices.

After retiring from a career of a magician, Jean decided to become an inventor, as his experiments with electricity were much ahead of his time.

In 1856, Louis-Napoleon asked Robert to go to Algeria to assist in pacifying local wild tribes. The conjurer brilliantly coped with the task and then gave his last performance in Marseille and returned home to Saint-Gervais.

On August 6, 1870, Jean learned that his son was mortally wounded in the Battle of Worth. The death of his son had a vastly bad impact on the sorcerer’s health. On June 13, 1871, Jean Eugène Robert-Houdin passed away.

T. Interval, “Jean Eugène Robert-Houdin,” Find A Grave. [Online]. Available: [https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/76979292/jean-eug%C3%A8ne-robert-houdin#](https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/76979292/jean-eug%C3%A8ne-robert-houdin). [Accessed: 15 Dec. 2017]

Biography.com Editors. "Jean-Eugène Robert-Houdin Biography.com," The Biography.com website, Published by A&E Television Networks, March 26, 2012. [Online]. Available: <https://www.biography.com/people/robert-houdin-9344559>. [Accessed: 15 Dec. 2017]

**Biography of Anderson John Henry**

John Henry Anderson was born on July 14, 1814 in Craigmile, Aberdeen, Scotland, in the family of a farmer. His mother was Mary Robertson. He orphaned early and from 1824 had to work as a blacksmith assistant.

In 1830 he joined a troupe of the wandering theater as an ancillary worker and left with them on a tour. Gradually, he mastered acting skills and began to take part in performances. While trying to show tricks he understood that magic is his calling.

Soon Anderson buys necessary props and begins his independent performances as an illusionist. In 1837, inspired by success, he created a great illusion program and, under the pseudonym "The Great Caledonian Conjuror", toured the whole country. Presumably, in these years, he begins to show his trick "Rabbit in a Hat", where he combined an illusionary performance with an actor's play on stage.

In 1840 he decides to move his performances to the theater hall. For this purpose Anderson opens a special "New Strand Theatre" in London. He changes his stage name to “The Great Wizard of the North” and invents his own equipment to give unprecedented performances. Anderson believed that the main thing in the performance is entertainment. If the viewer was not satisfied by John's performance, the numbers were immediately replaced with more interesting ones. Although the conjurer did not invent tricks himself, his artistic play contributed much to the popularization of the art of the illusion.

In 1842, Anderson married Hannah Longherst of Aberdeen. The following year, John Henry Jr. was born. In 1845, Anderson's mistress gave birth to Philip, but died during the parturition. Anderson accepted the child and supported him until the end of his days. He had two more daughters, Alice and Elena, and also a son Oscar. All of his children, his wife and both lovers actively participated in the performances.

Another Anderson’s Theater was opened in Glasgow in 1845. Only four months after the opening, the theater burned to the ground. The financial losses were significant, but thanks to the insurance and the help of his friends, Anderson was able to begin preparations for a new performance at London's Covent Garden Theater. The premiere took place in 1846. A year later he visited Europe. He gave performances in Hamburg, Stockholm and St. Petersburg.

In 1849 Anderson returned to London to give a special performance to Queen Victoria. That was the time when Anderson discovered that he has a competitor - Jean Eugène Robert-Houdin - a French illusionist. In 1851 he makes three-year tours to America, Canada, Australia and the Hawaiian Islands. There, for the first time, he shows his trick "Catching the bullet."

In 1854, John decided to leave the stage and give a farewell performance in his homeland in Aberdeen. The success was so great that it changed all Anderson's plans. He continues to give many successful performances, slowly transforming into a denunciator of spiritism. In a new show he uses his daughters to create all sorts of "mysterious" effects.

On March 5, 1856 rented building of the royal theater Covent Garden suddenly was caught on fire. It was Anderson’s second time in his career when he lost all his fortune and became a bankrupt.

After a short break, in 1859 he begins a new world tour, and in 1862 his son John Henry Jr., goes on his separate illusive tour. Anderson took the incident very seriously and spent many years at odds with his son.

In 1864, Anderson returned to England. Things were not going well and debts were growing. He took his last major tour in 1866.

On February 5, 1874, in Darlington, Durham, United Kingdom, John Henry Anderson passed away. His body was transported to his homeland in Scotland, where he was buried next to his mother in the cemetery of St Nicholas in Aberdeen.

The famous illusionist Harry Houdini visited the grave of John Henry Anderson in 1909 and found it in utter desolation. Houdini always revered Anderson and considered him as an inspiration and even established a special fund for the maintenance and care for the last resort of the “Great Wizard of the North”.

D. O’Connor, “John Henry Anderson,” Magic Tricks For Kids,October 20, 2015. [Online]. Available: <http://magictricksforkids.org/history-of-magic-john-henry-anderson/>. [Accessed: 20 Dec. 2017]

Lenathehyena's Blog. “The Great Wizard of the North: the original rabbit out of a hat man,” Lenathehyena's Blog,May 8, 2012. [Online]. Available: <https://lenathehyena.wordpress.com/tag/john-henry-anderson/>. [Accessed: 20 Dec. 2017]

**The Biography of Harry Houdini**

Harry Houdini, was born as Ehrich Weiss in Budapest, Hungary, on March 24, 1874. He was the fourth boy in a family of Mayer Samuel Weiss and Cecilia Steiner. They were earning money by providing rabbinical lawyer services and making soap. When he was four years old his family moved to the United States, where they lived in Wisconsin. At the age of ten, he was showing tricks in public places, using cards. When Erie was 13, the family moved to New York City. There, at the age of 18, he assigned himself a pseudonym Houdini. This name was not chosen in honor of the French magician, <a href="">Jean Robert Houdin</a>, whose last name had a similar pronunciation. Name Harry was added later.

Life in New York was not easy. His father died early, leaving them without a breadwinner. It was necessary to work to feed the family. Harry worked as a blacksmith assistant, where learnt an important future skill of lock picking, as an acrobat in the circus and, at the same time, was engaged by his hobby - magic and tricks. Due to the money shortage, education was an inadmissible luxury, so mother was teaching children how to read and write.

As aforementioned earlier, even at the age of ten Harry was able to attract attention of the public. He performed with his brother in the ensemble called "The Houdini Brothers". The earnings from the successful performances allowed them to feed the whole family. Inspired by the success, boys continued to give concerts around the city and, after growing up a bit, began to travel around the nearby towns. Their posters hung around the whole city. But to hold and amaze the audience young magician was always up for new and interesting tricks.

At one of the concerts an incident that has become a golden ticket to the big stage occurred. One day, while conducting a show in one small town, a local policeman took an illusionist for a wanted thief. He came on a stage and put on the handcuffs on Harry. In less than 5 minutes, the handcuffs were removed, and the guard of order apologized for the inconvenience. Soon a focus with handcuffs became the main part of the show. Moreover, unlike all other handcuff performances, Harry practiced it with handcuffs given by the crowd. In 1899, Martin Beck, an entertainment manager, saw a huge potential in the magician and his tricks. Trips to different cities in Europe began soon.

The show was also spiced by the local police, which was arresting an illusionist and even shutting him in a prison. However, he was able to escape from anywhere, which helped him to become the highest paid artist in the realm of American magicians.

Nevertheless, an aging process has no mercy, so as the time passed, it became increasingly difficult for Harry to do his tricks, which several times have even led him to the hospital. In 1910 he started a movie career. For his roles Harry received fabulous amounts of money and there are still some rumors that his salary was twice as big as the president's. While being a wealthy man, Houdini still continued to count every cent, afraid to die in poverty as his father. Also he sacrificed huge sums to the old, poor and orphaned. His wife was Bess Houdini.

The death of the great magician came unexpectedly. One day some students entered his dressing room. They asked the magician whether he can really withstand kicks to the stomach and not feel pain. Houdini mechanically nodded and one of the guys crashed down a series of strikes on the magician’s stomach. As a result, Houdini’s appendicitis ruptured. Medicine these days was far from modern and Houdini died of peritonitis on the October 31, 1926 in Detroit, Michigan, America at the age of 52.

J. Cox, “The life of Harry Houdini,” Wild About Harry, January 3, 2011. [Online]. Available: [http://www.wildabouthoudini.com/p/houdini-biography.html](http://www.wildabouthoudini.com/p/houdini-biography.html%20). [Accessed: 18 Nov. 2017]

**Biography of Carl Ballantine**

Mr. Ballantine is familiar to the audiences as a comic actor, especially after starring on the television series “McHale’s Navy” in 1962. He wasn’t a great magician, but a combination of comedy and magic worked well — when a trick went flat, his joke about it got laughs. Precisely this mix of genres influenced many newcomers of the realm and made him memorable.

He was born as Meyer Kessler in Chicago on September 27, 1917. His passion towards magic started from a barber who came to the family apartment to cut his hair and showed some magic tricks to a boy. As a young magician who actually could perform tricks, Meyer was helping to support his family. At the time when his tricks were based just on the playing cards, he was Carl Sharp. The name Ballantine he stole from a brand of Scotch.

By the age of 18, Ballantine had moved to New York City. There he performed in clubs and on television shows, including “The Ed Sullivan Show” and “The Steve Allen Show.” He moved to Los Angeles when got the role on “McHale’s Navy.”

Onstage he was a rapid-fire jokester, all his actions have been commented in a funny way, as the rope ends that refused to rejoin, the rabbits that refused to appear from a hat, the bodies that refused to levitate on command.

He starred in several movies, one of which was “The Cosby Show,” where he appeared as the entertainerat a children’s birthday party. He even made one appearance on Broadway.

Ballantine’s first marriage ended in divorce. The second time he married to Ceil Cabot, a cabaret singer and actress. They lived together for 46 years, until her death in 2000. He had two daughters, whom Mr. Ballantine, an inveterate horse player, named for his favorite racetracks: Saratoga Ballantine, of Hollywood, and Molly Caliente Ballantine, of Pacific Palisades, Calif.

The famous magician passed away while sleeping at the age of 92 in 2009.

B. Weber, "Carl Ballantine, Slapstick Magician, Dies at 92," The New York Times, November 11, 2009. [Online]. Available: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/11/arts/television/11ballantine.html.> [Accessed: 17 Nov. 2017]

**Biography of Harry Blackstone Jr.**

Harry Blackstone was born on June 30, 1934 in a small town in Michigan. From the very beginning he was surrounded by an atmosphere of magic and celebration. Harry Jr. got his pseudonym in honor of his father – Harry Blackstone.

As a baby, Harry took part in the show of his dad. As the time passed, he was allowed to be his assistant, and later on to take an active part in the activities of his father. Together they came up with new tricks and improved old ones.

Harry Blackstone studied at the art school in Redlands Valley. Now this institution is named after him. During his studies Harry devoted a lot of time to exact sciences. After all, quite often the art of illusions is tightly connected with the laws of physics and precise mathematical calculations.

After graduating from school Harry began performing with his father. Their performances have always been successful because many tricks seemed impossible and even mystical. Harry also developed several sets for beginner illusionists, which were met positively. Many of today's magicians have begun their careers with them.

At a more mature age, Harry Blackstone began working on TV. In 1979 he starred in the film "Mandrake" and the legendary series "Santa Barbara". In 1989 Harry played a wizard in the series "The Super Show Super Mario Brothers." Harry was a good actor, and his characters were unusual and interesting. In addition to concerts and shootings in various talk shows and TV series, Harry Blackstone worked as a writer.

In 1976 the book "There's One Born Every Minute" was published. It was very popular with readers. In 1992 he published a work called "My Life As A Magician". He also republished his father's book “Secrets of Magic”. In 1995, together with Charles Reynolds and Regina Reynolds, he published a book “The Blackstone Book of Magic and Illusion,” in which he revealed many secrets and mysteries of his magic performances.

The last years of life he spent in Redlands Valley, California. He died on May 14, 1997 in his estate. The cause of death was cancer.

B. Bearak, "Harry Blackstone Jr., 62, Master of the Magic Arts, Dies," The New York Times, May 16 , 1997. [Online]. Available: <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/05/16/arts/harry-blackstone-jr-62-master-of-the-magic-arts-dies.html>. [Accessed: 17 Nov. 2017]

Interval Magic, “Harry Blackstone Jr. Born 79 Years Ago Today,” Interval Magic, June 30, 2017. Available: <https://intervalmagic.wordpress.com/2013/06/30/harry-blackstone-jr-born-79-years-ago-today/>. [Accessed: 20 Nov. 2017]

**Biography of Doug Henning**

Doug Henning was born in Fort Garry, Manitoba. There he began to be interested in magic tricks. It all has started from a TV show, where Doug saw a girl flying. Inspired by action, he had an undeniable desire to comprehend its magical secrets. This everlasting love of Doug to the flights could be seen on the stage - in his performances someone always floats above the earth. Later, studying transcendental meditation, Henning was most interested in the flights of yoga followers as a form of levitation.

Being a "hungry for knowledge" boy, Doug read all the sources somehow related to the theme of magic available to him. At the university he wrote a thesis on the hypnotism - a matter directly related to the world of magic.

Doug always dressed simply. For instance, when he first came up the stage, audience might have thought that he is a lost worker. His costume consisted of blue jeans and a T-shirt, and was complemented by long, shoulder-length hair. However, young illusionist conquered the audience with his charm and wit, loudly welcoming everyone at the beginning of the performance with: "Hello, people!"

His first setting in the Broadway style was made in cooperation with Ivan Reitman (later famous for his work in the animated series "Ghostbusters") and a composer Howard Shore. Doug called it “Enchanted.” Show premiered on December 26, 1973, after which the play has continued for a whole year. It consisted of magical illusions, integrated into a free storyline. During the two-hour performance, Henning "pierced" the assistant with neon light, impaled himself with knives, strung a man to a tip of the saber and turned an assistant into a tiger. In addition to such "large-scale" illusions, Henning showed card tricks and read minds from a distance. The costumes of actors were not luxurious and the show itself was not perfect: a weak script and amateur actors. But in spite of anything, the magic of Doug Henning created a lively and cheerful performance.

However, a significant role in the success played the place of presentation itself. A premiere of “Enchanted” took place in the "Royal Alexander" theater, owned by Ed Mervish, a wealthy Canadian entrepreneur. Bright and elegant style of the hall decoration was ideal for a magic show. For the show in New York, the performance was renamed into a "Magic show". There were 1900 performances held at the "Court Theater" and Henning's show was at a fifth place in the list of the most popular Broadway performances of the seventies.

Overall, the most famous Doug’s trick was the “Zigzag focus”, in which the woman was placed into a transparent box similar with a telephone booth, and then cut into three parts. For a better effect, the middle part of the "dismemberment" was pushed aside.

In the early eighties Doug Henning quit magic. He died on February 7, 2000.

Biography.com Editors. " Doug Henning Biography.com," The Biography.com website, Published by A&E Television Networks, April 2, 2014. [Online]. Available: <https://www.biography.com/people/doug-henning-9542367>. [Accessed: 17 Nov. 2017]

"Doug Henning," Magicpedia, 2017. [Online]. Available: <http://www.geniimagazine.com/magicpedia/Doug_Henning.> [Accessed: 17 Nov. 2017]