

ALLAKA-BIOS



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MARK WILSON

James Mark Wilson began his magical career as a teenage magic demonstrator at Douglas MagicLand in Dallas. He majored in marketing and advertising at SMU and during his college years performed magic professionally for the Morton Foods Company. With his wife and partner Nani Darnell Wilson, he created *Time for Magic*, a local television magic series that became a huge hit in Dallas and eventually expanded to several other cities. Ready to make the leap to a larger market in 1957, he first sold 3M on sponsoring a syndicated trial TV series, *Magic Circus*, and when that did not secure a network slot, began seeking a national sponsor for a new series. The contract for *The Magic Land of Allakazam* was issued just ten weeks before the show first went on the air on October 1, 1960.

NANI DARNELL WILSON

Born Nancy Louise, she took the name Nani Darnell while touring the country as a professional dancer in top shows, nightclubs and hotels. She became a stewardess for American Airlines for a period before meeting Mark Wilson at a New Year's party in 1953. They were married shortly thereafter, but only after Mark had to give up magic as a career (just long enough to procure a marriage license). Nani also designed and

created the *Allakazam* wardrobe for all of the cast and designed many of the magical effects using cloth materials. Her form-fitting tail-coat, revealing her delightful dancer's legs, and her sunny, inviting smile caused many a young male viewer to develop a fateful crush on her.

BEV BERGERON

It's rather remarkable that such an outgoing and effusive performer would make his national debut playing the role of the voiceless yet expressive Rebo the Clown, but Bev Bergeron did exactly that! Bev received his graduate degree in magic touring with the *Willard the Wizard* tent show. He worked with Mark and Nani Wilson throughout the 50s and 60s, not only on-camera as Rebo, but also creatively, behind the scenes, devising copious amounts of material for *Allakazam*. As a solo performer, Bev has toured the country and the Far East, and for over 15 years starred in the Golden Horseshoe Revue at Disney World in Orlando, not to mention thousands of corporate shows and appearances.

MIKE WILSON

Born in 1954, Mike Wilson served on *Allakazam* as the young magician with whom youthful audience members could identify; it wasn't until years later that he expressed a certain distaste for

on-camera performing, frankly preferring a role with the production team behind the camera. Mike's major life achievements came after *Allakazam* (Pilot's License, BA in psychology, Masters degree in Chinese Language and International Trade).

ROBERT TOWNER

Robert Harlan Towner, sometimes known as "Torchy," gained a depth of magical knowledge as a solo performer in California, toured with Willard the Wizard, and later joined The Great Virgil on a five-year world tour. Mark and Nani Wilson, while seeking to build the *Allakazam* creative team, met Bob, a skilled craftsman, at Owen Magic where he was working with Carl Owen and John Daniel. An accomplished actor and a clown, trained by Chuck Burnes, he also toured with Ringling Bros. Circus during their final season under the Big Top. Bob Towner frequently appeared on-camera in various guises on *Allakazam*, and was credited as magic coordinator, a title he retained on many Mark Wilson Productions, including the *Magic Circus* specials in the 1970s.

ROBERT FENTON

A veteran of WWII, Bob Fenton spent a period of time as a bodyguard attached to General George S. Patton before returning to civilian life. His expertise

in magic was cultivated on tour with Mandrake the Magician, Harry Blackstone Sr., and The Great Virgil. Brought into the *Allakazam* fold by Bob Towner from San Francisco, Fenton was filled with nervous energy, and used to spend time wasted at traffic signals by reading. His great gift was his uncanny ability to locate bizarre materials to use in building the special magic apparatus used on *Allakazam*. With Bob Towner, Bob Fenton received credit as magic coordinator.

JACKIE JOSEPH

One of two perky girl assistants featured on *Allakazam* personally hired by Nani Darnell, Jackie appeared in Roger Corman's cult classic *Little Shop of Horrors* with Dick Miller and Jack Nicholson. She had a wide-ranging career in television after finishing her stint on *Allakazam*, appearing frequently in guest star roles on such programs as *The Andy Griffith Show*, *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, *Gomer Pyle*, *USMC* and others. She is a longtime columnist for the local Toluca Lake newspaper *The Toluca Times*.

LYNN BARTON

The other perky girl assistant on *Allakazam*, who continued in television work briefly following her participation in the landmark series and then left show business. Both female assistants,

according to Nani Darnell, had to have a dance background and move well, had to learn quickly, fit a certain height requirement, and most importantly, they couldn't be blondes.

CHUCK BURNES

One of the last great clowns of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Chuck essayed the role of the kindly old toymaker, Christopher Periwinkle, in the final 13 episodes of *Allakazam*. Following the series, he became the Entertainment Supervisor at Disneyland for seven years, and then Manager of Special Events at Knott's Berry Farm for 17 years. Currently, he and wife Bambi's Periwinkle Productions (an homage to his *Allakazam* character) produce family-oriented magic and variety shows throughout Southern California.

JACK ANDERSON

Jack was the original organist for the Wilson's Dallas TV series *Time for Magic*, and was called out west when *Allakazam* was preparing to go on the air. Jack did not compose the bouncy theme song for the series; that came from the Leo Burnett Agency. However, as Music Director, he led the three-piece combo (organ, drums, and occasional brass or woodwind instrument) that underscored the magical happen-

ings from a separate, soundproof studio away from the *Allakazam* set. No score was ever composed; Jack and his musicians ad-libbed the musical accompaniment.

ANDREW SIDARIS

Andy Sidaris was the director of the Wilson's first television ventures in Texas, *Time for Magic* and *Mark Wilson's Magic Club*. Andy moved to California in the late 50s, and immediately upon receiving his Kellogg's contract, Mark Wilson engaged him as director of *Allakazam* over coffee on the Sunset Strip. Later, Andy became the Emmy-winning director of *ABC'S Wide World of Sports* and *ABC Monday Night Football*.

CARL OWEN

Born in 1889, Carl Owen started as an illusion builder with Floyed Thayer at Thayer's Magic in Los Angeles, later purchasing the manufacturing side of the business and partnering with his brother H. Emmett Owen in the Owen Brothers Magic Company in 1933. Mark Wilson was familiar with Owen Magic as a manufacturer used by leading professionals around the world, and knew he would need a constant supplier for the many illusions planned for the *Allakazam* series. Today, Owen's fine illusions are also treasured as fine works of art and displayed by proud collectors everywhere.