

# THE DISAPPEARING WOMAN Adelaide Herrmann

Transcript of *What'sHerName* Podcast [Episode 8](#)

[00:00] [theme music]

**Olivia Meikle:** All right, Katie. Picture a magician.

**Katie Nelson:** Okay.

**Olivia Meikle:** What does a magician look like?

**Katie Nelson:** He's tall and lanky. He's wearing a top hat, obviously. He's got some kind of cool curly mustache, a black suit. Maybe he's got a cape.

**Olivia Meikle:** Hmm. Interestingly, you immediately said *he*, right?

**Katie Nelson:** [laughingly] Yes.

**Olivia Meikle:** A magician is a *man*.

**Katie Nelson:** [laughs] Right. He is.

**Olivia Meikle:** Today we are going to talk about Adelaide Herrmann. She was one of the most famous magicians in American and European history.

**Katie Nelson:** *She*?

**Olivia Meikle:** *She*! And you've never heard of her?

**Katie Nelson:** No, I have never heard of her.

**Olivia Meikle:** And yet, she was as famous as Houdini in her day.

**Katie Nelson:** Wow.

**Olivia Meikle:** She was incredibly influential in the world of illusions and stage magic...

**Katie Nelson:** She was a *magician*, not the assistant - you're saying she was the main act?

**Olivia Meikle:** Actually, she started as an assistant - to her husband, [Alexander Herrmann](#), the great Herrmann. She was one of the most famous touring magicians of Magic's Golden Age. And then after her death, she inexplicably *disappears*.

[theme music]

**Katie Nelson:** I'm Katie Nelson

**Olivia Meikle:** And I'm Olivia Meikle

**Katie Nelson:** And this is *What'sHerName*

**Olivia Meikle:** Fascinating women you've never heard of.

[theme music]

**Olivia Meikle:** So to learn more, I talked to [Paul Draper](#)!

**Paul Draper:** Hi there. I'm [Paul Draper](#). I'm a cultural anthropologist, but also a full-time traveling magician, mentalist and entertainer, performed all over America and Europe, and I'm excited to sit down and talk with you!

**Olivia Meikle:** I was really excited to get to talk to Paul Draper about this, since the insights that a working magician can give into her life are totally different than anything that a historian can give.

**Katie Nelson:** That's cool. And plus, probably a lot of people listening have [seen him on TV](#).

**Olivia Meikle:** Yeah. You've seen him on TV, on the History Channel's Houdini documentary, on *Home and Family*, on *Pawn Stars*. Or you may have seen him perform in Vegas, or at the Magic Castle...

**Katie Nelson:** Awesome.

**Olivia Meikle:** So - Adelaide Herrmann was born in 1853 in London. Her father was a Belgian immigrant, and she trained as a dancer as a child. She moved to New York, intending to marry an American actor... a specific American actor, not just 'an American actor.'

**Katie Nelson:** [laughs] Okay.

**Olivia Meikle:** She's engaged to an American actor, and she's moving to New York to marry him. And she meets Alexander Herrmann, and marries him instead. He is already a well-established magician. He and [his brother](#) were extremely famous as The Great Herrmann. Both of them. [laughter] People know they're not the same person, but they're sort of interchangeable, right? So while one brother is in Europe, the other brother is in the US, and then they'll switch. And in fact, the person that you described as 'what a magician looks like,' with the cape and the top hat...

**Katie Nelson:** With the cape and the... okay, yeah?

**Olivia Meikle:** *That* is Alexander Herrmann.

**Katie Nelson:** Oh!

**Paul Draper:** That is the 'Herrmann look,' right? And so that's how famous they were, that in New York, when Alexander Herrmann died, the New York newspapers said "magic itself has died." Thousands showed up.

**Olivia Meikle:** So they get married in 1875. And actually the mayor of New York performed their wedding.

**Katie Nelson:** Ooh, high class.

**Olivia Meikle:** She begins working as his assistant. She's a dancer, and so she's performing, entertaining, distracting, you know... She doesn't seem to have been a traditional assistant. She is much more of a co-magician.

[05:45] **Paul Draper:** It's not like some man crafted her to be the variety act, you know? It was her, completely in and of herself.

One of my favorite stories is that she wanted him to perform an effect that's known today as The Sands of Egypt or Sands of the Desert. Where the magician takes a bowl of water, the water, as he spins his hands in the water becomes black. A handful of blue sand is thrown into the water, a handful of yellow sand, a handful of red sand thrown in... the water is mixed and mixed and mixed. And then the magician can reach in and produce a hand of dry red sand, a hand of dry blue, and reach in, a hand of dry yellow sand.

Now today, you can buy this in most toy stores [laughter] but then? Then it was exceptional. She loved this effect, still performed by many magicians today, and wanted him to perform it, which he did once. It's written in the journals that he performed it one time and it didn't work, and he came out with a handful of mushy mixed colored sand, turned and glared at her off in the distance, and never did it again. [laughter]

But she did have the artistic power, right, to have him try new illusions, to do new things early on in their career. She had been an artist *before* him. So it's not like he was the sum total of her training and ability and passion and desire. This is something she brought with her into the act and then carried on with afterwards.

**Olivia Meikle:** They tour all over the US and Europe. They're performing in every famous theater. They're having a wildly successful career... and he dies. He has a heart attack on the train, and dies.

**Katie Nelson:** Wow.

**Olivia Meikle:** When Alexander dies, Adelaide has almost nothing.

**Katie Nelson:** Oh!

**Olivia Meikle:** They have spent extravagantly. They own the yacht. They have a private train, car houses full of artifacts, and no money.

She knows that the Herrmann name is really, really valuable, and so she is trying to find a way to keep the act going. She recruits one of Alexander's nephews to take over the show. He's... not great. He's like, The *Pretty Good* Herrmann... [laughter]

**Paul Draper:** This nephew then decides he doesn't need her. He's going to go off and do his own show. Which he ended up doing and, and that show - because he wasn't as great - shrunk and shrunk. But she eventually said, "No, I will be the star of this show."

**Olivia Meikle:** She knows that she's not gonna be taken seriously. She's a woman, she's a former assistant. If she really wants to be successful in this, she's gonna have to prove to everyone that she *really is* as good as her husband was. So the very first show she stages, she is performing a trick that she had spent most of her life trying to convince her husband *not* to do.

**Paul Draper:** The Bullet Catch!

**Olivia Meikle:** Yeah, I read about that, that she begs him to stop, and then *immediately* turns around and does it

**Paul Draper:** Immediately does it within one month of his death. And what a sensational piece. I mean, [Penn and Teller](#) perform this twice nightly in Vegas right now, but they are pointing the guns at each other.

**Olivia Meikle:** Right.

**Paul Draper:** And they both catch one bullet. Purportedly, Adelaide Herrmann had six militiamen in whatever town she went to take up rifles and point them at her. Many magicians have *died* performing this actually quite dangerous

**Olivia Meikle:** legitimately dangerous trick

**Paul Draper:** *legitimately* dangerous illusion.

[music]

**Olivia Meikle [to Katie]:** *Now* we're really cynical about stage magic, and we just kind of assume that everything that's happening up there is a fake - not just a trick, but a *fake*. And so we're not concerned, right? We're never concerned that he's actually gonna die when he buries himself alive...

**Katie Nelson:** Yeah.

**Olivia Meikle:** There are different ways to do the Bullet Catch, but all of them are life-threatening. And she not only does it, she catches *six* bullets on stage.

**Katie Nelson:** Well, I guess that's what you have to do if you're gonna win everybody over, do the hardest, scariest trick

**Olivia Meikle:** Exactly

**Katie Nelson:** Wow

**Olivia Meikle:** Yeah. If you're a woman in the literal boys club

**Katie Nelson:** Yeah

**Olivia Meikle:** You have to prove that you can do the most dangerous, the most difficult trick.

**Katie Nelson:** Wow.

**Paul Draper:** This is a constant problem: how difficult it is for a woman to *become* a magician. How difficult it is for her to *stay* in the world of magic. Only 8% of performance magicians are women, even today.

**Olivia Meikle:** Even today! The sole function of women on stage is to literally 'sexually distract' the audience.

**Paul Draper:** And to be attacked. Cut her in half, sliced it to pieces, put swords through her, and then resurrect her and have her be oh, so grateful!

**Olivia Meikle:** Right? And still perfectly unmarked.

**Paul Draper:** And still perfectly unmarked, unharmed, it's... it's a very strange cycle of abuse, the average illusion show. Now 'sawing a woman in half' in America actually came from a real story of someone killing a woman, cutting her in half that way.

**Olivia Meikle:** What!?

**Paul Draper:** You know I, I don't do any of that in my show - but it has been the sort of core of American magicians, certainly since [PT Selbit](#) and, you know, in this time period.

**Katie Nelson:** Creepy!

**Olivia Meikle:** Isn't it horrifying? I had never thought about it before.

**Katie Nelson:** Uh huh.

**Paul Draper:** Most magic is written with a male magician in mind, and a male's 'standard clothing,' right? A tuxedo has a lot of pockets in it, and a lot of places to hide things. And so, does a woman need to dress in a tuxedo to perform? Well, if she's not going to dress in a tuxedo, then she *on her own*, needs to step away from hundreds of years of magic, and come up with her own methods! I mean, think about how much more difficult that is than a man who can put on a tuxedo and just copy the act that's been published for him.

**Olivia Meikle:** As Paul Draper points out, that can lead to wildly creative acts. Many women magicians performing now are pushing the boundaries of magic really fast and really far, because they're forced to reinvent everything.

**Paul Draper:** There's a great magician in London by the name of [Sophie Evans](#), I believe she's moved recently to Las Vegas. In Sweden, [Malin Nillson](#) - wonderful. In San Francisco, a female magician and juggler and performer with the last name Banner. In Las Vegas, [Luna Shimada](#), [Jen Kramer](#), [Ariann Black](#)... I'm just, off the top of my head here, uh... Tight now performing in [The Illusionists](#), just finished on Broadway, is [The Clairvoyants](#), a husband and wife act. [The Evasons](#), [Mark Kalin and Jinger](#), [Kyle and Mistie Knight](#). One of the librarians of the Magic Castle, Lisa [Cousins], she has her own show of historical magic.

It is so difficult, just as it is also difficult for African-American magicians. It has been very dominated by caucasian male magicians - though it has been very open to Jewish magicians, right? David Copperfield, Houdini, myself, all Jewish, right? But it has been kind of a closed circuit of secrets that has been hard to penetrate.

**Olivia Meikle:** I really love that she didn't just get sucked into, 'Okay, now I'm going to be *Alexander Herrmann - Girl Version*.' She said, 'If I have to be a magician, I'm gonna be *my* kind of magician.'

**Paul Draper:** Even though the Herrmann name was one that filled seats, she was an accomplished performer in her own right. Otherwise, how do you perform until you're in your late seventies, you know, on major stages - unless you are a person who is delighting audiences?

**Olivia Meikle:** The ‘wow factor’ of her shows are through the roof. She's doing unbelievable shows, and she's also leveraging all of this other experience she has as a dancer, as an entertainer - you know, as an assistant, you're uniquely attuned to what makes the audience enjoy this show. Because most of what an audience enjoys in a magic show is not the magic, and as the person who's been ‘the distractor,’ I think she's probably pretty uniquely tuned into everything else that goes into a big stage show.

**Katie Nelson:** How did she dress? Did she wear a top hat and a cape and a suit?

**Olivia Meikle:** No! She wore really fabulous gowns, and she continues dancing, while doing the magic as well. She's maintaining both roles.

**Katie Nelson:** Cool.

**Paul Draper:** She was billed in vaudeville as The Queen of Magic, right. Her show was called ‘Magic, Grace and Music.’ She had a show, the Noah's Ark Show - she had all these animals and she produced two of each. Two ducks, two doves, two lions, two tigers. The lions and tigers were actually dogs in head pieces. [laughter] Lighting was different...

We know that she performed The Cremation, where she would be put in a box, lit on fire and all that would be left would be bones. And then she'd reappear.

She danced in the show for a very long time, and she made all the dancers vanish and - and in a puff of smoke, Satan appeared on stage... I mean, she was performing illusions that major illusionists and magicians are *still* performing in their shows today.

[music]

[15:30] **Olivia Meikle:** So at this time, Adelaide Herrmann is also debunking mediums and Spiritualists, both with Alexander before his death, and then throughout her solo career. This is the height of the [Spiritualism](#) craze, and they're

**Katie Nelson:** ...and they're, like, exposing their tricks and their lies?

**Olivia Meikle:** Exactly. They felt pretty strongly that it was really unethical, that tricking people into believing that they're really talking to their dead family members is an entirely different thing than entertainment, and people knowing that they're being tricked.

**Katie Nelson:** Hmm.

[music]

**Paul Draper:** It is our job to a public good. That these people are being conned and duped and abused by magicians of bad desires, right? And we have to reveal some of our secrets.

That's the bad thing about magic. All magic tricks play upon several basic flaws in the way that we as human beings perceive reality. So unless we evolve in some very different way very quickly [laughter], there are a limited number of magic tricks.

**Olivia Meikle:** Right.

**Paul Draper:** We have to understand - in this time period, Spiritualism was the fastest growing religion in the world! It was taking America by storm. Ten percent of Americans claimed that their religion was Spiritualism. Even Abraham Lincoln's wife, Mary Todd Lincoln, held seances in the White House after her son had died.

Alfred Russell Wallace, the co-creator of the theory of Evolution with Darwin, was an avid believer in Spiritualism. So it was this mix of the new science and religion of Spiritualism - as we move from an agricultural society to an industrial society, as we had these huge, massive deaths after the Civil War... it is The Thing.

Houdini, famously, went around debunking Spiritualists, but so did Adelaide Herrmann. At this time, most of the Spiritualist [mediums](#) in America were women. This is a place where, due to the Victorian sensibilities of the woman being 'more in tune with her emotional self,' 'more able to be possessed by demons,' 'more susceptible to the powers of darkness' - it gave them sort of a stepping stone to say, 'I am being possessed by The Other, and able to speak for...' Many of the women mediums gathered thousands and thousands of fans.

**Olivia Meikle:** So that gives them this, like - here's this access that they have, to this whole new field... librarian and medium. [laughter]

**Katie Nelson:** Which would you choose?

**Olivia Meikle:** Uh, medium. [laughs] No. I *actually am* a librarian, I would choose librarian. [laughter]

**Katie Nelson:** I would choose medium! I think that would be really fun to be a medium, especially if you could convince yourself, like so many of them must have, that you're helping these people.

**Olivia Meikle:** Right?

**Katie Nelson:** You're making them feel better! You're bringing them comfort.

**Olivia Meikle:** Yeah.

**Katie Nelson:** That just sounds like fun to me.

**Olivia Meikle:** I think it would've been a blast... I don't think ethically I could have brought myself to do it. [pause] Maybe I could've been a non-profit medium? [laughter]

[music]

**Paul Draper:** It was an interest of Adelaide Herrmann to debunk these Spiritualists, and to show that they were using magic tricks. Because she had a background in [Escapology](#), and so much of Spiritualism is, 'There's no way I could ring the bell! I was locked in chains!' She was able to show that they were getting in and out of these chains during the bell, and that they were using magical tricks, in order to take people's money and minds.

**Katie Nelson:** Oh wow. That's amazing! I always just pictured it like... the table is levitating, and they magically know stuff that they wouldn't normally know...

**Olivia Meikle:** Right.



**Katie Nelson:** But they're like, physically making stuff happen?

**Olivia Meikle:** Yeah.

**Katie Nelson:** That no, no human could have done?

**Olivia Meikle:** Right. Exactly. And there is that, right, 'The table is levitating, but *I* was tied to the chair!' But you *weren't* anymore!

**Katie Nelson:** Yeah.

**Olivia Meikle:** Most of these women were really accomplished Escapologists.

**Katie Nelson:** Wow, that's awesome.

**Olivia Meikle:** Especially, Adelaide Herrmann specifically, was really well trained... The Crematorium - she's escaping from this coffin that's on fire, she is an expert at Escapology. And so she knows *exactly* how these mediums are getting out of these chains, and they're revealing those things - at great detriment to her own career.

**Katie Nelson:** I had no idea. It actually kind of makes me respect them more, because it means they had to practice

**Olivia Meikle:** Oh yeah.

**Katie Nelson:** over and over and over and over again to be able to pull it off.

**Olivia Meikle:** Yeah.

**Katie Nelson:** That's kind of cool.

**Olivia Meikle:** They were really clever magicians!

**Katie Nelson:** Wow.

**Olivia Meikle:** They debunked some pretty famous, pretty big-deal mediums. Some are graceful, 'yes, you caught me,' and some are pretty angry.

**Katie Nelson:** So maybe Alexander Herrmann *didn't* have a heart attack!

**Olivia Meikle:** [laughter] Oh!

**Katie Nelson:** What if it's some vengeful medium who put a curse on him, or sent an evil spirit

**Olivia Meikle:** Yeah

**Katie Nelson:** to wipe him out!

**Olivia Meikle:** Well... the ones they debunked *couldn't* send vengeful spirits...

**Katie Nelson:** Oh, good point. [laughter]



**Paul Draper:** [Arthur Conan Doyle](#), the author of the Sherlock Holmes books, was the ‘Saint Paul of Spiritualism,’ saying that his wife had real natural powers. He even argued with Houdini - that Houdini was using Spiritualism powers to dematerialize and rematerialize outside of boxes. [laughter]

**Olivia Meikle:** Imagine what an *impossible* situation this puts Houdini in. What is, what is the answer to this? ‘No, I know *exactly* how I’m escaping from the water tank...’ He can’t challenge that statement, but - he seems to have been convinced that Houdini *thought* he was using tricks, but really he was *actually* a medium.

**Katie Nelson:** Okay?

**Olivia Meikle:** And that he was misunderstanding what *he himself* was doing. I... I can’t understand.

**Katie Nelson:** I don’t understand. [laughter]

**Olivia Meikle:** Yeah I don’t understand. But, as an Arthur Conan Doyle nerd, as you know [laughter] - if he said it, he *believed* that Houdini was doing this. Which is much *more* confusing.

[possible ad break]

[22:00] **Olivia Meikle:** And now, for something completely different! [laughter] I have a question for you, Katie. When you were a kid, what did you wanna be when you grew up?

**Katie Nelson:** Um, I think I wanted to be a writer or maybe a teacher. I kind of went back and forth between those two. [pause] Oh wait, I forgot, then I really wanted to be a photojournalist.

**Olivia Meikle:** I remember that!

**Katie Nelson:** Yeah, I was obsessed. I had all these, like, National Geographic photo books and, and I got a fancy camera for Christmas. My first year of college. My very first class I signed up for was a photography class. But I was on the waitlist, and back then, you go to class on the first day and you go up to the professor and you say, ‘Will you please sign me into your class?’ and then they sign a form. And I did that, and the professor said no.

And I never signed up for a photography class ever again. [sad noises] I guess I - it wasn’t like, out of spite or anything, I just got distracted. I found so many other passions and loves that I just never bothered taking another photography class. So it’s kind of weird, like - now that you have inspired my reflection - my life trajectory really changed a lot because that professor didn’t wanna sign me into his class.

**Olivia Meikle:** I was anticipating the payoff of that story being, ‘and I was too introverted to go and ask the teacher. So it never happened.’

**Katie Nelson:** Oh [laughs] that’s a highly likely scenario.

**Olivia Meikle:** That’s actually really perfect though, because what I wanna talk about is how often we talk about our lives *as if you can plan*. ‘Make a plan for your life and follow that

plan, and that's how your life is gonna be.' And I don't know *anyone* who made a plan for their life and that's how their life went. Do you know anyone?

**Katie Nelson:** No! I think the life I have now, I never would've dared plan. And so had I like, planned my life and stuck to it, I wouldn't have dared to dream big. I would've planned something practical and achievable, or something like that. Yeah. I'm glad I didn't plan!

**Olivia Meikle:** You feel like you have to plan *reasonably*. Yeah.

That's really interesting you saying that because I have realized that I often used your life as sort of a reference point, about how you can just *own* your life, and... this is a weird conversation to have on a podcast [laughter], but like, I really admire the way that you and Marc have just said, 'We want these things in our life, and we're gonna get them, and we're gonna get them in ways that are very unconventional, and that other people might think are

**Katie Nelson:** Impossible.

**Olivia Meikle:** impossible, or irresponsible. And yet

**Katie Nelson:** Wait, are you calling me irresponsible?

**Olivia Meikle:** No! [laughter] And that's what... that's, that's my point. You said, 'I wanna spend months every year in Europe.' And you do.

**Katie Nelson:** Yeah. Yeah! And you don't have to take the path... if you were planning that, you'd say, 'I wanna spend months in Europe every year, therefore I need an extremely high paying job'

**Olivia Meikle:** Right.

**Katie Nelson:** 'I have to sacrifice so much of my daily life to do something that I hate'

**Olivia Meikle:** And then never have time to go to Europe.

**Katie Nelson:** Exactly. Yeah, I couldn't agree with you more.

**Olivia Meikle:** So... what does all this have to do with anything? [laughter]

I think that Adelaide Herrmann's life is the perfect example of a different way of thinking about this. I think that we vastly underestimate the power of innovation and adaptation that happens when life just throws something at you, and you *have* to change.

**Katie Nelson:** Huh. I love that.

**Olivia Meikle:** If she's gonna survive, she *has* to be outstanding, and so she just *is*.

**Katie Nelson:** Wow.

**Olivia Meikle:** You know, we often heap a lot of praise on people who we see as single-mindedly pursuing a dream. And we miss the incredible innovations that happen by people who have greatness thrust upon them.

**Katie Nelson:** [00:25:00] Yeah. Or as a Taoist philosopher would call it, the [Wu Wei](#).

**Olivia Meikle:** Exactly.

**Katie Nelson:** Going with the flow, it imagines you're in a river and it's flowing - you could doggedly pursue something upriver that you already decided you wanted to get to, or you just look at what's around you, assess the situation, and decide you want something downstream.

**Olivia Meikle:** Yeah. And I think this is an interesting contrast to [Mary Lou Williams \[What'sHerName Episode 7\]](#), right? From our last season - that she would *die* if she did not get to do this thing that was important to her. And so she *did* spend her life 'swimming upstream.' And eventually landed, maybe, in a place that she felt good about. But Adelaide Herrmann says, 'Okay, the nephew is a wash... I guess it's me!'

All those innovations that she comes up with are very interesting, because she could also have just said, 'Fine, I will be another Herrmann brother.' And she doesn't. She says, 'No, I'm gonna be *me* and do this act, and I'm gonna be *amazing* so that people have to take me seriously. *And* I will not give up the part of this job that I love.' Because her dream from a young girl was to be a dancer. And so she continues to dance in her own show. And maybe because this is something that she's just dropped into, she feels free to say, 'I will be the magician, I will also dance in my own show, because that's what *I* love, and I will continue to do it.'

**Katie Nelson:** She's already breaking the rules, so why not just construct the life she really wants?

**Olivia Meikle:** Exactly.

**Katie Nelson:** I love that.

**Olivia Meikle:** I mean, she did this for *so long*. She continues this solo magic career for thirty years! That's not something you do if you're just trying to feed yourself.

**Katie Nelson:** I really like her.

[music]

[00:28:50] **Olivia Meikle:** It's also interesting to me how this podcast came to exist. Both of us feel this really strong passion for bringing to light these people who have been ignored by our popular culture- but we couldn't have decided ten years ago that we were gonna do a podcast. [laughter] So much of how people's lives turn out is catching that wave at the right moment.

**Katie Nelson:** Personally, I feel like the art of living is in seeing and catching waves as they arrive.

**Olivia Meikle:** Oh, I totally agree.

**Katie Nelson:** It seems like if there is a secret to happiness, it's the ability to perceive all the waves that are rushing by around you all the time. And she consciously chose which waves would really make her the happiest. Which ones she really wanted, rather than just, like, letting whatever the nearest wave was pick her up.

**Olivia Meikle:** Okay, but then how do we explain this: she was wildly popular, and yet her ultimate trick is disappearing, at her death. She's wiped out of the historic memory.

**Katie Nelson:** Hmm. Why? Why did everybody forget?

**Olivia Meikle:** Yeah, I was really baffled by that. How could this happen, that this really famous person just is erased?

**Paul Draper:** She doesn't completely cease to exist. When we go to the [Magic Circle](#) or [Magic Castle](#), there tends to be a poster of her, when she was young, and performing as an assistant. She gets sort of wrapped into the whole story of the Herrmann dynasty.

**Olivia Meikle:** When she performed longer...

**Paul Draper:** She performed longer!

**Olivia Meikle:** than either of them.

**Paul Draper:** Yes.

**Katie Nelson:** Her story seems like this is prime fodder for a film. I'm really shocked that someone has not made a movie, starring, probably, Scarlet Johansen or something.

**Paul Draper:** Right, right. [laughs]

**Katie Nelson:** They should be making this movie.

**Olivia Meikle:** So actually - the day before this episode launches, Paul Draper sent me photos of an incredible [bronze bust](#) that was sculpted by Joey Orosco and art directed by Mike Elizalde. And it's part of Elizalde's collection called The Masters of the Golden Age of Magic, and the collection is on permanent loan at the Magic Castle. So at least in this way, Adelaide Herrmann is finally joining the illustrious company that she belongs in.

[00:31:30] **Paul Draper:** Another reason why there may not be a lot about Adelaide Herrmann is - so much of magic museums, magic rec-reations is 'This is the water torture trunk that was owned by Houdini. These are the playbills and the ephemera and the posters of Alexander and Carter. Here are the material remnants' - and as a historian, a collector, I have a need to promote the individual, in order to up the value of the object.

**Katie Nelson:** [laughs] Ah, that's marvelous. Ha. That's a wonderful form of historical memory, to do it so that your stuff is worth more... I love that.

**Olivia Meikle:** Right. There's, there's the financial motivation. Which is really effective. [pause] Okay, but so why isn't anyone invested in her memorabilia?

**Katie Nelson:** Yeah, it seems like her memorabilia would be special and unusual?

**Olivia Meikle:** In 1926, her warehouse burns down.

**Katie Nelson:** Nooooo!

**Olivia Meikle:** All of her stage sets, all of her costumes, all of her animals.

**Katie Nelson:** [gasps] Nooooo! Burned to death?!

**Olivia Meikle:** Everything.

**Paul Draper:** In her seventies, she had a terrible fire, an accident, that destroyed all of her illusions. Killed almost 60 of her trained animals. She was able to save one cat, named Magic, I believe, and one dog that she used to dress as a lion or tiger.

**Olivia Meikle:** She had these incredible sets - and it's all gone. Which means there's no memorabilia for anyone to collect. There's no financial incentive for anyone to care about her, and so no one does. She disappears.

**Katie Nelson:** So, that was the end of her career then?

**Olivia Meikle:** Actually, that's the cool part.

**Paul Draper:** She then in her seventies, rebuilt and started again.

**Olivia Meikle:** She launches a new show in her late seventies!

**Katie Nelson:** Really?!

**Olivia Meikle:** She's performing up until a few months before she dies. To, still, great acclaim!

**Katie Nelson:** Oh, that's awesome.

**Paul Draper:** She died at the age of 79 of pneumonia, and is buried along with her husband at the Woodlawn Cemetery in New York.

At the end of Adelaide's life, they found in her room the silver cigarette case that her husband had been holding as he died in the train car, and the tattered cigarette that he had been trying to lift to his lips. She kept that forever. I think they were a couple that was truly a love match.

Adelaide Herrmann was compiling notes, playbills posters to write her memoirs, and to write a book. But that book was never written and was never published. Recently, [Margaret Steele wrote a book](#) on her, so there is starting to be more out there. Please, listeners, if you are passionate about this, *please* research and write something. Keep her alive. And I would love a copy of whatever you create.

[music]

**Credits:** Huge thanks to our guest Paul Draper, researcher London Reynolds, and Mike Elizalde of Spectral Motion. If you'd like to learn more about Adelaide Herrmann, we have amazing pictures, links, and more on our website [whatshernamepodcast.com](http://whatshernamepodcast.com). You can also follow us on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, where we post lots of photos each week. Music for this episode was provided by Peak Duo, Amanda Setlock Wilson Mai Ma Sagura, Jeff Kuo, Jeremy Dias, Maria Jeffers, and the College Conservatory of Music at the University of Cincinnati. Our theme song was composed and performed by Daniel Foster Smith. This episode was edited by Olivia Meikle, and *What'sHerName* is produced by Olivia Meikle and Katie Nelson.