

MADAM SENYAH

Ladies and Gentlemen, allow me to introduce myself. My name is Madam Senyah! I like to make a very dramatic entrance, swinging upside down, high above my audience, as they hold their breath in amazement.



When I was not on the flying trapeze and the right way up, I was actually Mrs Elizabeth Haynes but I even turned my name upside down. Well, backwards to be more accurate – you see? I do think Senyah is so very much more exotic and exciting than Haynes, don't you?

WHAT IS YOUR SURNAME SPELT BACKWARDS?

My husband (Mr Haynes/Monsieur Senyah - obviously!) and I performed some of the most death-defying acrobatic feats ever seen in Wilton's, and all over the country, in fact. Such was my skill and elegance upon the trapeze, ropes and tightrope that word spread far and wide. Unfortunately, lots of other flighty young ladies who fancied themselves as *Acrobatic Artistes* started stealing my name and posing as me!

{ CAN THIS HAPPEN NOW? }

Well, I ask you, How dare they? I had to stand very firm and insist that I was '*the only legitimate female gymnast in the world*'.

To be honest, just between you and me, I wasn't really the only one and some of the others started doing contortion tricks to grab all the attention, so I had to work even harder to make sure I was the very best, not to mention the most graceful and tasteful.

CAN YOU FIND OUT WHAT CONTORTION IS?

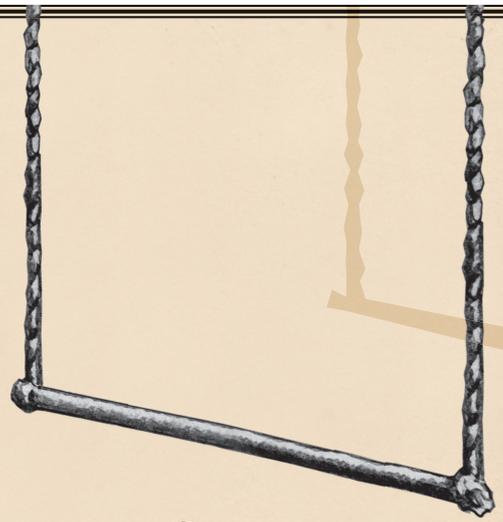
I'll never forget the magical night I performed at John Wilton's retirement celebration in 1868. I was top of the bill and felt on top of the world as I gazed down on the audience and the thousands of sparkling lights and mirrors.

It all went a bit downhill after that and, when I couldn't manage the trapeze act any more, I went back to doing what I learned when I was a little girl. You see, I grew up in a touring circus and my sister and I used to train and perform with animals, especially the beautiful horses. I loved working with animals so I had a little act with my lovely dogs.

DO ANIMALS STILL APPEAR IN CIRCUSES? WHY NOT?

I was very ill as I got older, so I couldn't work any more and I ended my life in the Lambeth workhouse infirmary. **WHAT WAS A WORKHOUSE?** But I never forgot how exciting it felt to be flying high in my glamorous, glittering costume and my happy memories kept me going to the end.

MADAM SENYAH



{ 'THE ONLY LEGITIMATE FEMALE GYMNAST IN THE WORLD',
'THE WITCH OF THE AIR',
'THE BEAUTIFUL CRETAN' }



ONE OF THE MOST THRILLING ACTS TO PERFORM AT WILTON'S IN THE 1860S WAS MONSIEUR AND MADAME SENYAH (Elizabeth and Samuel Haynes)



Madame Senyah was born Phoebe Frost, into a family of circus artists, in Carlisle in 1842. Phoebe and her sister Sarah were both animal trainers who performed with horses in the early 1860s.



In 1866 Phoebe married Samuel Haynes, a strong-man act and trapeze artist. They used the name Haynes spelt backwards to create the stage name of Senyah, and worked as a double act in Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Wakefield and other northern towns.



THEY ARRIVED IN LONDON IN 1868, AND WERE VERY SUCCESSFUL, performing all over London in most of the larger halls during the spring and summer, and at Wilton's in the autumn of that year for John Wilton's final season. The highlight of their act was 'THE LEAP FOR LIFE', where Madame Senyah would swing on ropes with rings from the balcony across the hall and leap onto a trapeze bar held high above the stage by Monsieur Senyah, who was hanging upside down from another trapeze.



Madame Senyah described herself as 'the only legitimate female gymnast in the world', which wasn't strictly true. There were others, but female trapeze acts were rare enough to be considered a novelty. Many people thought that it wasn't suitable, safe or even possible for women to work on the tightrope or trapeze. All the reviews of Senyah's act describe her as **STRONG, SKILLED AND VERY GOOD-LOOKING, AND THIS IS BACKED UP BY PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORDS.**

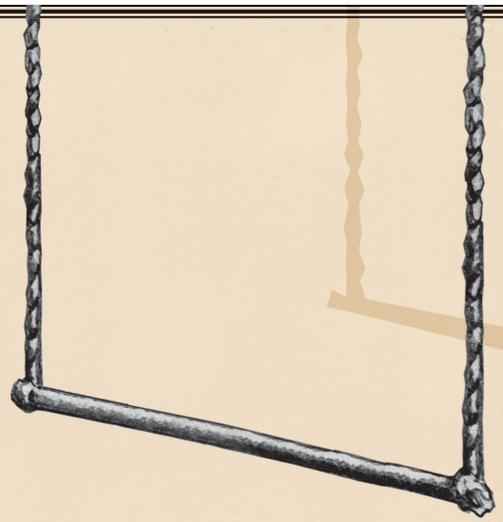


By 1869 the Senyahs, now spelling their name Senyeh, were working in the first of many US circuses, where they performed "**the double leap for life**", both landing on the trapeze at the same time. Around this time, the Senyahs' marriage may have ended. It's not clear exactly when, as there's no record of a divorce, but there is a report that **PHOEBE FROST AKA MADAME SENYAH MARRIED JOHN CONKIN ANOTHER STRONG-MAN AND HUMAN CANON-BALL IN 1872.**



By 1876, Madame Senyah was back in England, with Jean Pasta, Jenny Hill's husband, as her catcher. When she was no longer able to work on the trapeze, Madame Senyah returned to animal training and performed with dogs. Her final years were marred by illness, and it was reported that another music hall performer, Vesta Victoria, was paying the rent for Senyah's room in Kennington. Senyah died in Lambeth workhouse infirmary in 1910, the name recorded on the death certificate was Elizabeth Frost.

MADAM SENYAH



MADAME SENYAH WAS BORN IN CARLISLE IN 1842 INTO A FAMILY OF CIRCUS ARTISTS.

HER REAL NAME WAS PHOEBE FROST.

SHE BEGAN HER CAREER AS AN ANIMAL TRAINER and performed with horses in the early 1860s.

IN 1866 SHE MARRIED SAMUEL HAYNES who performed as a strong-man act and **TRAPEZE ARTIST.**

THEY WORKED AS A DOUBLE ACT AND USED THE NAME HAYNES SPELT BACKWARDS to create the stage-name Senyah, and she used the name Elizabeth instead of Phoebe.

THEY ARRIVED IN LONDON IN 1868 where they were very successful. They performed at John Wilton's retirement concert in the same year.

THE HIGHLIGHT OF THEIR ACT WAS MADAME SENYAH'S "LEAP FOR LIFE" from the balcony to a trapeze above the stage.

MADAME SENYAH DESCRIBED HERSELF AS 'THE ONLY LEGITIMATE FEMALE GYMNAST IN THE WORLD'.

AS WELL AS BEING A BRILLIANT ATHLETE, SHE WAS VERY GOOD-LOOKING, described as a stunning brunette. She was also called **'THE BEAUTIFUL CRETAN'** because she performed in a classical, Greek-style tunic.

By 1869 the Senyahs (now spelt Senyeh) **WERE WORKING IN CIRCUSES IN AMERICA.**

OTHER PERFORMERS COPIED THE SENYAH'S ACT AND USED MADAME SENYAH'S NAME.

THE SENYAHS' MARRIAGE DID NOT LAST, and by 1876 Madame Senyah was back in the UK.

When she was too old for the flying trapeze, **SHE TRAINED AND PERFORMED WITH DOGS.**

AS SHE GREW OLDER, SHE WAS ILL FOR A LONG TIME.

SHE DIED IN A WORKHOUSE HOSPITAL IN 1910.
THE NAME RECORDED ON HER DEATH CERTIFICATE WAS ELIZABETH FROST.