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REMEMBERING REYNAUD IN LONDON AND PARIS

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October 1992 marked the centenary of the premiere of Emile Reynaud's *Pantomimes Lumineuses* at the Musée Grévin in Paris. Evolved from his beautiful optical toy the praxinoscope, Reynaud's *Théâtre Optique* was an elaborate device which projected, via a magic lantern at the rear of the screen, animated cartoon figures. These figures were superimposed over decors projected from a separate lantern. The most significant advance in the *Théâtre Optique* however was Reynaud's method of arranging his cartoon pictures on long, continuous bands which were moved between large spools, thus anticipating the motion picture film. The little pantomimes which Reynaud enacted with his cartoon figures might run as long as ten minutes each, and were

Ellis Pike as Emile



works show, and ran for several years, until they were finally eclipsed by the marvellous new cinematographe. The legend is that Reynaud, in despair at being abandoned by his public, broke up his finely crafted apparatus and dumped it by night into the Seine.

LONDON

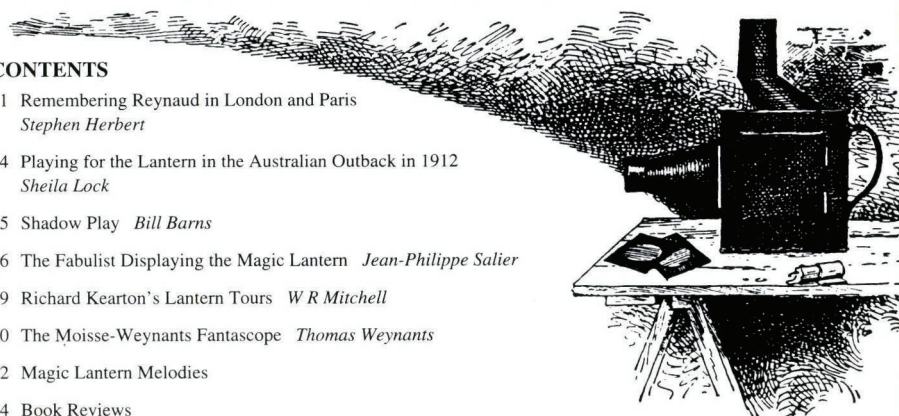
At the Museum of the Moving Image, Brian Coe and I decided to commemorate the Reynaud centenary by attempting to re-create one of the *Pantomimes Lumineuses*, using MOMI's replica of the Reynaud apparatus. We found a pianist to play Gaston Paulin's difficult music, a singer to perform Harlequin's serenade and an actor to play Monsieur Reynaud himself – respectively these were Stephen Horne, Drew Rhys-Williams and Ellis Pike. My own role initially was the hundred-hour task of sticking the transparency frames of MOMI's battered reproduction of the "Pauvre Pierrot" band (it was the second copy that had been worn out since the museum opened) on to a celluloid strip.

accompanied by special piano music composed by Gaston Paulin.

Reynaud's shows were presented in a small theatre at the Musée Grévin, the venerable Parisian wax-

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MOMI's replica of the Théâtre Optique was then moved into position behind the screen of the cinema.

On the evening of the show, Brian Coe provided an introductory lecture, whose visual illustrations included the touching moment from Pierre Levie's short film on Reynaud in which the inventor throws most of his picture bands into the Seine. Then the music began and the images of "Pauvre Pierrot" appeared on the screen. The spectral figures of Columbine, Harlequin and Pierrot acted out their pantomime; the piano and voice were accompanied by the sound of the picture band clicking backwards and forwards. For a few moments the audience were transported back to the Belle Epoque and Reynaud's magical Théâtre Optique.

At the end of the show, the screen rose slowly to reveal Monsieur Reynaud in the process of rewinding his picture band. Until that moment not all in the audience were convinced that they were seeing an actual performance of the Théâtre Optique, but believed rather that it was an illusion produced by a sound effects tape and a 16mm projector. Monsieur Reynaud made a curtain speech, and the audience (which included a contingent from the Magic Lantern Society) took

the opportunity to inspect the mechanism of the Théâtre Optique. We felt that MOMI had succeeded in modest but satisfying tribute to the master of the Pantomimes Lumineuses.

PARIS

With Mo Heard, the manager of MOMI's Actors' Company, I subsequently travelled to Paris for the Reynaud celebration at the Cinémathèque Française. We arrived at the Palais de Chaillot just in time for the show; and looking over the heads of the crowd saw the familiar animated characters of "Pauvre Pierrot" on the screen.

The animation artist Julien Pappé, who had produced the reproductions of the Reynaud picture bands, explained that he had painted each of the 500 images directly on to 70mm film strip. For extra strength he had used polyester-based film: the backwards and forwards movement of the film during a performance puts much more strain on the film than a continuous movement. MOMI's solution to the problem had been to use a plastic reinforcing strip between each picture.

The Cinémathèque's accompanying exhibition provided the opportunity to see the surviving original strips of "Pauvre Pierrot" and *Autour d'une*

cabine. In these, each image was painted on a small square of cellulose base, stapled between two belts of material that appeared to be rexine or leather. The torn cardboard mounts revealed metal reinforcing strips, with central perforations.

I noticed that the screen image at the Cinémathèque shows had slightly less flicker than we had experienced at MOMI. M. Pappé pointed out that their machine had 44 mirrors on the central drum, while MOMI's had only 36, which clearly explained the subtly different effect. (It is not easy to determine, from contemporary engravings, exactly how many mirrors the original apparatus used.)

At the official opening, Pierre Tchernia, a long-time admirer of Reynaud, introduced a number of the inventor's descendants, including his granddaughter, who spoke about her grandfather's achievements. Two film sequences were shown. The first was from Roger Leenhardt's 1946 "Naissance du cinéma", in which Emile's son André, costumed to resemble his father, re-enacted a performance of the Théâtre Optique on a replica machine: the black and white film went briefly into colour for the re-created projection of "Autour d'une cabine". The second sequence was unedited material by Pierre Braquemond, who had supervised the reconstruction of the Cinémathèque's Théâtre Optique, but who had sadly died earlier in the year.

From the Palais de Chaillot, four vintage buses took the guests to the Musée Grévin, with its original 19th-century frontage. Here there were problems, with far more guests than seats; and Mo and I lacked the special pass that spirited the privileged past the stubborn doorman. As we battled, we consoled ourselves that we were re-creating the spirit of the original poster for the Lumière Cinématographe, which shows an eager crowd jostling with a gendarme. After twenty minutes we had practically given up, when the intrepid Pierre Levie, who had somehow forced his way to the front of the crowd, forcefully informed the doorman that we had come all the way from London for the show. The doorman was unimpressed, but slackened his resolve sufficiently for us to duck under his arm, assisted by a hard push from some unidentified well-wisher behind.

This was the very theatre where Emile Reynaud had shown his Pantomimes Lumineuses exactly a century before. The painted fire curtain was decorated with an original design by Jules Chéret, with a procession of Commedia dell'arte characters. In the front row sat the Reynaud family.

The entertainment was a delightful collection of songs and comic dialogues from the Belle Epoque, culminating in a performance of the Serpentine Dance made famous by Loïe Fuller and commemorated in various interpretations for the Edison Kinetoscope and the Cinématographe. On this occasion the mistress of the great mass of swirling and billowing skirts was the dancer Brygida Ochaim. The Reynaud contribution was a film projection of "Autour d'une cabine", a sweetly risqué scene about a seaside flirtation. The celebration concluded with a reception where Pierre and Madame Levie introduced us to Dominique Auzel, the French-Canadian author of an important new book *Emile Reynaud et l'image s'anime*. Extensively illustrated, largely in colour, the valuable and hitherto little-known information in the book includes material from the rare early work *La Vérité sur l'invention de la projection animée*, by Maurice Noverre.

PARIS AGAIN

When I returned to Paris later in the autumn for further study of the Reynaud exhibition, my companion was Lester Smith, Programmes Officer of the Magic Lantern Society. The Cinémathèque had assembled a fine collection of rare artefacts and documents relating to Reynaud's life and optical inventions, some of which had been shown in the Cinémathèque's legendary 1946 Reynaud exhibition. They included rarely-seen glass plates

The Cinémathèque's team responsible for the recreation of Reynaud's presentations



CENTENAIRE DU THÉÂTRE OPTIQUE
D'ÉMILE REYNAUD

LA CINÉMATHEQUE FRANÇAISE
MUSÉE DU CINÉMA

LE MUSÉE GRÉVIN

sont heureux de vous convier le

LUNDI 26 OCTOBRE 1992

*à la soirée de célébration
de la première projection publique
du*

THÉÂTRE OPTIQUE
D'ÉMILE REYNAUD

qui eut lieu au Musée Grévin en 1892.

En présence des petits-enfants de l'inventeur

*Invitation valable pour deux personnes
R. S.V.P. avant le 12 octobre 1992*

for the projection praxinoscope, Reynaud's Stereocinema viewer, loaned by the Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers, and rare steam- and electrically-driven praxinoscopes. The public could turn handles to operate models of the thaumatrope, zoetrope and praxinoscope, and watch a video recording of the late M. Braquemond discussing the reconstruction of the Théâtre Optique. At regular intervals there were shows of "Pauvre Pierrot" and "Autour d'une cabine", skilfully performed by Konstantin Udala. The noisy delight of a party of school-children at the antics of the bathers in "Autour d'une cabine" showed that Reynaud's spirit could still enthral audiences.

The souvenir stall was full of temptations, offering copies of the handsome poster, a set of eight special postcards, two different enamel badges ("les pins") and, most desirable, a replica of the charming little monograph produced for the 1946 Reynaud exhibition, with tipped-in colour illustrations of frames from the praxinoscope and *Pantomimes Lumineuses*.

Christine Petitpeau of the Cinémathèque directed us to the house at 58 rue Rodier where Reynaud had lived with his mother, and set up a workshop to produce his optical devices. A plaque on the building now reads:

Ici vécut Emile REYNAUD
1846-1918
Pionnier du cinéma
et du dessin animé

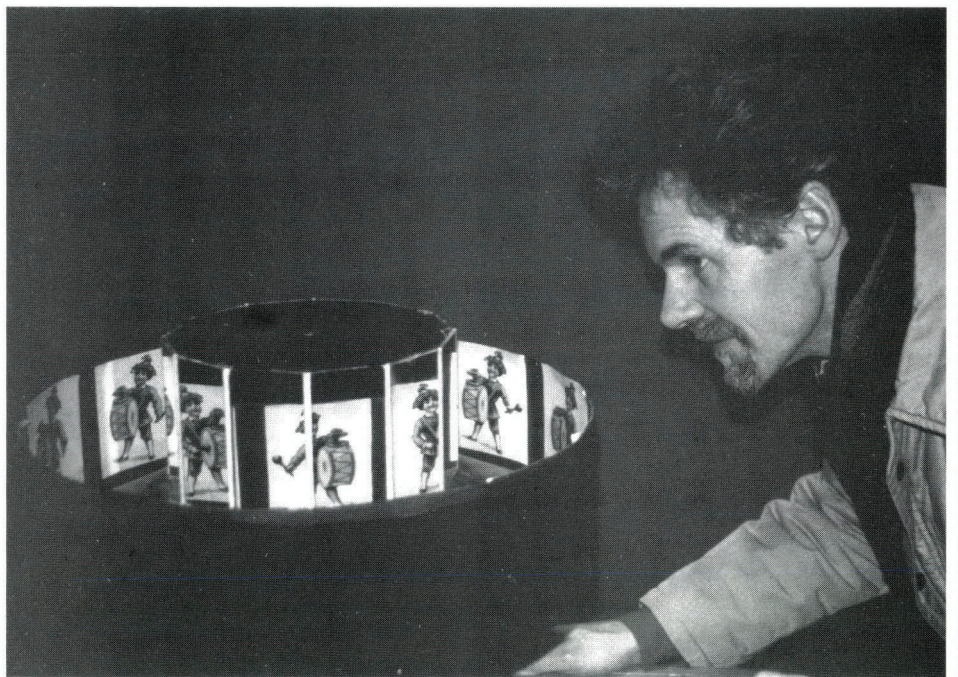
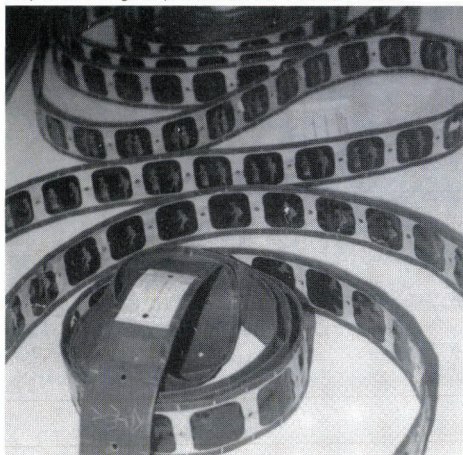
(Here lived Emile REYNAUD 1846-1918; pioneer of the cinema and of animation.)

It was not difficult in this quiet Paris street to forget the parked cars and step back in imagination to a time when young Emile may have sat in the little park, absorbed in the problems of his magical mirror drum.

The final stop of our Reynaud pilgrimage was a visit to the Musée Grévin's new exhibition at the Forum des Halles. Here the twenty-one waxwork scenes illustrating "La Belle Epoque, Paris 1900" include a set-piece of the Théâtre Optique. Georges Méliès, Auguste and Louis Lumière and Gabriel Thomas, manager of the Musée Grévin in the 1890s, cluster round, while an animated Reynaud projects a short sequence from "Pauvre Pierrot" to the accompaniment of a strident version of Gaston Paulin's music. This is ingeniously accomplished. Since it would have been impossible to keep repeating the sequence using a replica picture band, 44 transparencies are mounted in the apertures of the drum, which are just enough to give a good impression of the effect. (An illustration on page 112 of *Magie Lumineuse* shows this apparatus with the modern mechanism, normally concealed, exposed.)

This centenary pilgrimage had been exciting, and very satisfying. Generations to come will continue to appreciate Reynaud's contribution to the evolution of motion picture and the animated cartoon, for there is potent poetry in his enchanting images.

Reynaud's original picture band, "Pauvre Pierrot"



MLS Programme Officer, Lester Smith, and praxinoscope at the Cinémathèque

Émile Reynaud

CENTENAIRE DU THÉÂTRE OPTIQUE
1892 - 1992

EXPOSITION - SPECTACLE

Cinémathèque française
MUSÉE DU CINÉMA

28 octobre - 28 décembre 1992

PALAIS DE CHAILLOT
7, avenue Albert-de-Mun 75116 Paris

Avec le concours
des Archives de Film
du Centre National
de la Cinématographie

Éducation
Culture

CELEBRATIONS
N
ANNIVERSAIRES

Autour d'une cabine, Emile Reynaud, 1895.