

that his widow and/or children continued to exhibit the collection for a few years, before finally disposing of it piecemeal. Other showmen such as Herr Schmidt and the famous fairground conjurer Gellini Gyngell are known to have been interested in similar fields of endeavour at the time of his death, and some of the automata named in their subsequent bills do bear a passing resemblance to Philipsthal items.

EPITAPH

So what is to be said of Paul de Philipsthal as we imagine ourselves standing by his graveside in some unknown cemetery? Was he truly the originator of the phantasmagoria? Perhaps, with others. Did he invent 'dissolving views'? Perhaps, with others. Certainly he was one of the most important figures both in the development and popularisation of lantern entertainment, and without his vested interest perhaps London's most popular tourist attraction might never have been established in Baker Street. (Marie Tussaud finally set down roots there in 1834.) Of his early life we still know too little. My hunch is that he was well-born and linked in some way to one of the two Philipsthal districts in Hessen or the Brandenburg area of Berlin, and that through his infatuation for the new sciences he found much favour at court. His adoption of the French sounding alias 'Philidor' is not surprising: the German court at this time was embarrassingly Francophile – the King refusing to countenance any other language.

Did Philidor/Philipsthal flee from Paris to England after his little bit of bother there in 1793? Possibly.

Are the gaps in his career down to illness, foreign engagements, or simply a failure, as yet, to uncover the right information?

And where lie his bones? In Wakefield, Berlin, Bath? Maybe he simply dissolved back into the mysterious ether.

APPENDIX

Selected excerpts from the booklet 'Origin, History and Explanation of the Ergascope etc. ...', sold at Schirmer & Scholl's performances at the Lyceum, London, in 1805.

ACT THE THIRD ... will open with the several foreign and English IMITATIONS of the PHANTASMAGORIA, Phantascopia, &c. as shown by Messrs Philipsthal, Bienvenu, Robertson, Olivier, Gabriel and others as will be fully explained to the Spectators.

After this, Messrs SCHIRMER and SCHOLL will produce their own ORIGINAL INVENTION; which no other mortal has yet been able to discover. These artists never employ the charlatanic aids of Hail, Thunder and Lightning, in this truly pleasing and scientific amusement. They disdain to frighten Ladies and Children in a Theatre, where nothing but decent and rational amusement should prevail.

Entire Pantomimic Scenes of Ancient and Modern History will be performed by the most graceful Phantoms, and which cannot possibly be distinguished from real or natural life. Amongst others, the most interesting interviews between Laura and Petrarcha, between Abelard and Heloise, between Yoric and Maria &c. will be produced in the course of the Season. If Mr PHILIPSTHAL and others could excite so much optical deception on the English Public, by a Magic Lanthorn only; Messrs Schirmer and Scholl flatter themselves that their experiments produced by a difficult combination of Optical Instruments &c &c. will create the highest degree of pleasing delusion and astonishment, when among the most learned professors in the optical Science. Not only all HUMAN ACTIONS but all the HUMAN PASSIONS will be expressed by their phantoms, for the audience will see them plainly to eat, drink, laugh, smile, grimace &c &c.

ORIGIN, HISTORY and EXPLANATION of All the late Optical and Acoustic Discoveries called the PHANTASMAGORIA, &c.

... In the year 1793, a certain Mr Cavallo, an Austrian gentleman, produced at Vienna, in Austria, these Optical Ballets, in which several grotesque, comic and caricature figures appear and disappear, by means of stained glasses, skins, or papers, sliding back and forwards through Magic Lanthorns.

Some of these improvements were soon copied and imitated by Mr Philidore, alias Philipsthal, then at Vienna, and who also copied from the noted professor Schröpfer of Leipzig, those Magic lantern Apparitions which were named the Phantasmagoria.

A celebrated work published at Berlin entitled Wiegler's Natural Magician [sic, read Wiegler] since continued by Professor Haller [sic, read Halle], in about 40 volumes, octavo, contains a particular description of some hundreds of the most curious experiments in various speculative sciences.

From these works a number of persons, since the year 1760, attempted to reduce Wiegler's and Haller's theories into practice with various success. Mr Philidore, alias Philipsthal, witnessed several experiments in Germany, and at last succeeded in producing his subsequent exhibitions.

During the French revolution, Mr Philipsthal exhibited in Paris, and his copies were soon imitated again, by Messrs Charles, Bienvenu and Roberts [sic], alias Robertson.

Messrs Charles and Robertson having made some slight alterations in Mr Philipsthal's Optical Exhibitions, called themselves the original inventors in Paris, and had a law suit together, which was decided in favour of neither of them, because it was proved* that they had only produced copies from copies ...

FOOTNOTE

*A Mr Zobel, brother-in-law of Professor Enslin, the original inventor, was a witness at this trial, together with the Secretary of the Imperial Embassy from Vienna.

Unfortunately this document is too long to reprint here in its entirety, but later in the text the authors also claim, somewhat tantalisingly, that Robertson had at some point made large offers both to Enslin and themselves for an apparatus of their Ergascope, which 'can be proved by the original letters of Mr Robertson, who seems to be quoted in England as an oracle of optical science'.

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MORE ON MELIÈS

An article in *The Magic Lantern Journal* volume 7, number 1, "A Film Maker's Magic Lantern Years" referred to Georges Méliès' 1903 film *La Lanterne Magique*. We are now able to reproduce the original synopsis of this film from the contemporary American catalogue issued by Méliès' "Star" Film Company.

"STAR" FILMS

NO.	TITLE	Length about, feet	PRICE
520-524	The Magic Lantern. (<i>An amusing and picturesque ballet with several captivating new tricks</i>)	315	\$54.00

The scene represents the interior of a toyshop. Punchinello makes his entry dancing a characteristic step, and his friend Pierrot follows shortly after performing a step to the tune of "Au clair de la lune." The latter holds a candlestick and he shows his friend Punchinello. "I will give you some, and at the same time I will show you something most astonishing." He asks Pierrot to give him a lift. Then both bring a platform and construct section by section a huge magic lantern. Punchinello puts inside of it a large lamp, light it, and opens the slide thereby, throwing upon the wall a large white disc within which pictures in varying subjects begin to appear. At first, a grand personage with his consort is shown then follow two eccentric characters, and afterwards the pictures of Pierrot and Punchinello highly magnified. (These moving pictures dissolve one into the other upon a white background, - a new feat in cinematographic work.) Punchinello puts out the light in the lantern and the views disappear, when suddenly the sections of the lantern fall apart and out of them come forth six English dancing girls who do a four-step after the style of the Barrison Sisters. And as they finish, a charming eccentric makes her appearance and does a very pretty turn. The dancers retire. The magic lantern which had been shut up by Punchinello again opens and out of it emerges an entire corps de ballet from the Paris Opera House, and they all execute a dance together. The "premiere danseuse" comes on and mingles with the dancers: Punchinello and Pierrot become her suitors, they quarrel and soon engage in a hard fight, the sight of which causes the dancers to flee in terror. A body of policemen arrive. Pierrot and Punchinello hide in the lantern. These policemen with eccentric manners examine it on every side. Suddenly the lantern opens, but Pierrot and Punchinello have vanished and they have been replaced by a monster who extends himself and contracts and at the same time executes some ludicrous contortions. The policemen at this strange sight flee in hopeless confusion; the corps de ballet returns and dances among the remains of the lantern and around the monster who continues to contort himself in a comical fashion.

George Méliès (1861-1938) in old age.

