

# PAUL DE PHILIPSTHAL

&  
THE PHANTASMAGORIA IN  
ENGLAND,  
SCOTLAND AND IRELAND

MERVYN HEARD

## Part Three Phew!

The problem with writing history in installments is that information keeps falling onto your doormat and tripping you up. Since I began this series of articles two years ago, there have been a number of new discoveries. Some of these shed light on M Philipsthal/Philidor's earlier activities in Berlin and Vienna. Another reveals that one of Philipsthal's earliest associates in London, M St Clair – whom I had found particularly difficult to pin down – was in fact an actor willing to sell the phantasmagoria secret and his name to as many other 'M St Clairs' as might wish to cross his palm with silver. I have also, with the help of those listed at the foot of this chapter, managed to uncover many more early show sightings. But I'm afraid all of this new information will have to wait for the publication of a more comprehensive history of Philipsthal which I hope will follow in due course. Meanwhile, readers may be assured that the facts contained in this, for the moment, final brainstorm are bang up to date as at the time of writing, in May 1998.

### THE STORY SO FAR

At the close of Part Two we left Philipsthal in Dublin, in May of 1804, threatening, through the pages of *Saunders Newsletter*, to dispose of his entire collection. Having met with poor responses to his exhibition in Edinburgh and now in Dublin, where the public had already experienced various shows of a similar nature, he may well have judged that the phantasmagoria craze was at an end. However, he would have been wrong in such an assumption. The phantasmagoria was merely drawing breath. The efforts of Philipsthal and his fellow exhibitors had sown seeds in the minds of scientists, educators, artists and performers which were only now beginning to put out roots.

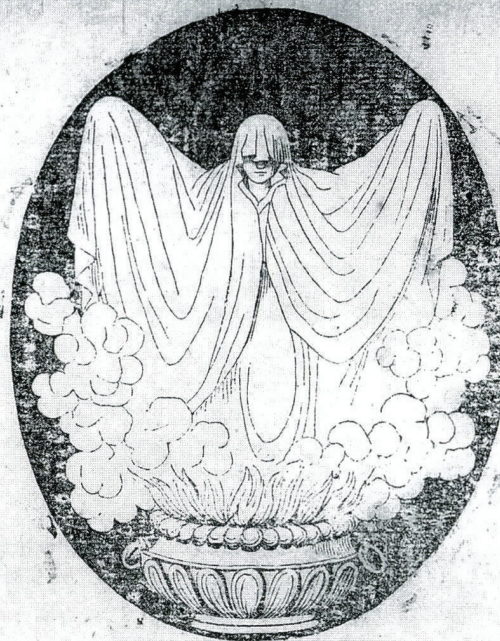
Seven months later Philipsthal returned to the Little Theatre in Dublin, as promised, with an entirely new collection of items, including a fantoccini show and a demonstration of coal gas.<sup>1</sup>

### PANTASCOPICAL PEREGRINATIONS

Meanwhile, back in London, at the famed Lyceum in the Strand, preparations were in progress for a phantasmagorical battle of heavyweight proportions. The antagonists came from entirely different fields of endeavour. In the Lower Theatre, a rising young star of Drury Lane and Sadler's Wells, with advertised links with the Parisian master of fantasmagorie, E G Robertson. In the Upper Theatre a duo of German 'professors' with an impressive lineage in phantasmagoria technique which they vowed could be traced back even beyond the Viennese shows of Philipsthal.

The famous young 'Harlequin' of Drury Lane, Jack Bologna was the first to throw his cap into the ring. On 19 December 1804 the papers announced his forthcoming PANTASCOPIA entertainment.<sup>2</sup> This promised 'a great variety of optical Eidothaumata, among which will be introduced some surprising Capnophoric Phantoms, which to the eye will seem real and palpable, whilst they will be proved to be only visionary, by passing solid bodies through the spaces occupied by the Spectres.'

In all probability Bologna is referring here to projections on smoke (see illustration from Gyngell), which may have been completely new to British audiences, for there is no evidence that Philipsthal ever attempted such a feat. It is not an easy effect to achieve, especially in a large public space full of draughts. Which is perhaps why Bologna had sought the best advice. At the base of the poster the following accreditation appears: 'A considerable part of the apparatus employed has been prepared by M DUMUTIER<sup>3</sup> under the direction of Professor ROBERTSON of Paris.'



1808.

## NEW PERFORMANCES. PANTASCOPIA, AUTOMATON FIGURES; PHANTASMAGORIA, And HYDRAULICS,

By Mr. BOLOGNA, Jun.

*This and every Evening till further Notice.*

TAKE NOTICE,

the Real and Original PANTASCOPIA is at the

## Lower Theatre, LYCEUM STRAND;

(On the LEFT Hand.)

The NOBILITY, GENTRY, and Lovers of the Fine Arts, are respectfully informed, that this NOVEL, CURIOUS, and INTERESTING EXHIBITION, has been enriched by the addition of some surprising Optical Effects which have never before been shewn in this or any other Country, called

## Fairy Gambols,

Which with the EIDOTHAUMATA, OPTICAL  
AUTOMATA, PHANTASMAGORIA,

and other VISIONARY SPECTRES; all of which have undergone much Improvement. In the Course of the Entertainments, to increase the Variety of Amusement,

Mr. BOLOGNA, Jun. of the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, Will exhibit his surprising Experiments in

## HYDRAULICS,

Also his Amusing Mechanical Contrivances of the MARVELOUS SWAN, and TURKISH CONJURER, which make known to the Company, any Card or Number that may be Drawn, &c. &c. and conclude with the most Brilliant Display of

## PYROTECHNY,

On the German Plan, without GUN-POWDER OR SMOKE,  
That has ever been Exhibited.

A considerable Part of the Apparatus employed, has been prepared by M. DUMUTIER, under the Direction of Professor ROBERTSON, of Paris; and, the whole, it is hoped, instead of being like many Exhibitions, calculated only to divert Children, will be found to furnish a Variety of Rational Amusement, even to the most Refined and Classical Taste. Beware of Imposters.

The Public are requested to observe that these Performances are at the LOWER THEATRE, LYCEUM, only, on the Left-Hand up the Passage, and that they have nothing to do with the Performances at the Large Theatre. N. B. No Money to be returned.

Doors to open at Seven; and the Performance to begin at Eight in the Evening. Boxes as Usual. Tickets for the Boxes may be taken at the Lower Theatre, every Day from Eleven till Three o'Clock. Tickets kept till Half-past Eight.

Glendinning Printer.



LARGE Theatre to the Right, UP STAIRS, in the Lyceum,  
lighted with one CHANDELIER of Refined SMOKE,  
by Permission of the Patentee.



This Aërial Knight and his Horse, 11 Feet high, and 12 Feet wide,  
weigh only 1 lb. 12 oz.

# ERGASCOPIA,

FAR SUPERIOR TO THE  
PHANTASMAGORIA.

LARGE THEATRE,  
LYCEUM, STRAND.

Messrs. Schirmer and Scholl,

Professors of PHYSICS, OPTICS, ACOUSTICS,  
MECHANICS, AEROSTATICS, &c.

HAVE exhibited their celebrated Performances, during several years, in the  
largest Cities, and before the first Courts in Europe, to general satisfaction.  
They now presume to offer their Entertainments to a discerning English Pub-  
lic, and leave them to distinguish between THEIR ORIGINAL Inventious,  
and some Imitations that have been attempted in England and Abroad.

The LARGE Theatre is now open EVERY EVENING,  
until further notice.

ACT I.—Two Automata, of most ingenious construction, viz. The one re-  
presenting a YOUTH, of about 14 years old, sitting entirely free and open  
on a Chair, playing on the *Pan Flute* Pieces of Music, with Vari-  
ations. The other is a YOUNG LADY, who performs with equal dexterity  
on a Glass Harmonica. N. B. Both the Figures are capable of repeating  
all Compositions in the Key of C *dur*, after the most expert Performers. A  
third Figure speaks, sings, and blows a Trumpet; when it will be explained  
how the INVISIBLE GIRLS are made to speak, sing, and play.

ACTS II. & III.—Represent a Superb Collection of Aerostatic Figures, all  
of a Colossal Form, beautifully transparent, coloured and illuminated. First  
appears the Goddess of the Chase, DIANA, seated in a Grecian Car, drawn  
by Stags, surrounded with Lions, Dogs, and other Animals. N. B. One of  
these Figures will be filled with air before the Audience, in order to shew the  
process of raising them. Secondly, appears a ROMAN KNIGHT, mounted  
on a Grey Charger: he will be shot with inflammable air, fall from his horse,  
and represent a Hero wounded in the field of battle.

ACTS IV. & V.—Open with the several Foreign and English Imitations  
of the Phantasmagoria, Phantascopia, &c. as given by Messrs. Philipthal,  
Charles, Olivier, Robertson, Bienvenu, and others, by improved Magic Lan-  
terns, Chalk Busto, Concave Mirrors, &c. &c. After which, their real and  
Original ERGASCOPIA, never seen in this Country, will be produced.—  
These Spectres are full of real and active Life, that perform and express all  
Human Actions and Passions.

Messrs. SCHIRMER and SCHOLL never employ the *charlatanic* aids of Hail,  
Thunder and Lightning, in this truly pleasing and scientific Entertainment:;  
they disdain to frighten Ladies and Children in a Theatre, where rational  
amusement only should prevail. Pantomimic Scenes of Ancient and Modern  
History will be performed, by the most graceful Phantoms, which cannot pos-  
sibly be distinguished from real Life. Amongst others, the most interesting  
Interviews between *Laura and Petrarch*, *Abelard and Heloise*, *Yoric and Maria*.  
*Goliath's Head*, eating, drinking, and laughing, will astonish every Beholder.

Anxious to gain public Favour, a clever MAGICIAN is engaged, to en-  
tertain the Audience with surprising Tricks, during every Change of Scene.  
A SAGACIOUS Dog and COURAGEOUS Bird will also amuse and astonish.

The Entertainments will be varied by Optical Ballets, Plays, Mesquerades, in the Comic-Grotesque  
style, for the Amusement of Masters and Misses from the Boarding-Schools. Between the third and  
fourth Acts, an artificial Rope-Dancer, who tells Dresses, &c. with accuracy.

\* \* \* The LARGE Theatre will continue to be lighted by the Refined GAS, drawn from common  
SMOKE, to render the Performance an Assemblage of Superior NOVELTIES.

First Boxes and Orchestra Seats 5s. Second Boxes and Pit 2s.—The Gallery is  
closed, on account of its too great distance from the Theatre.

††† All the above Objects of Art cannot possibly be given, in one Evening, but a pleasing Variety  
will be produced.

Doors open at 6, begins at 7.—The House will be WARNED.

N. B. A more full DESCRIPTION of all their NOVELTIES, together with the Origin, History, and Expi-  
-ation of the Phantasmagoria, Invisible Girl, &c. will be sold at the LYCEUM, or 349, Strand, price 1s.  
The Nobility and Gentry are respectfully informed, that Private Representations for Families and Se-  
lect Parties, may be bespoke the Day before, on reasonable Terms.

Places of First Boxes & Orchestra Seats may be taken from 11 till 4 o'Clock, at the Lyceum, and 349, Strand,  
Be careful to look for the LARGE Theatre to the RIGHT HAND.

Wells's, Johnson, & Co., Printers, Fleet-Street.

left & above: Posters for two rival shows at the Lyceum in the Spring  
of 1805. Note the mention of Robertson at the bottom of the  
Phantascopia poster. (Both posters are incorrectly pen-dated.)

In addition to the optical part of the entertainment Bologna's programme offered  
hydraulic experiments, a display of automata, including 'a marvellous swan' and a  
Turkish conjurer. There was also to be 'a display of pyrotechny on the German plan,  
without gunpowder or smoke'.

Jack Bologna's family had moved to England from their native Genoa in the 1780s.  
His father, Pietro, was a posture master, and his mother a slack-wire dancer. His  
younger brother Louis and sister Barbara were also accomplished acrobatic dancers.

The troupe's first London appearance took place at Sadler's Wells on Easter Monday,  
April 1786, with the young 'Master Bologna' (aka Jack) rope-dancing in the guise of  
'the little devil'. In April 1792 the family still provided a popular Easter attraction at  
the Wells, and the following year appeared at Jones' Royal Circus. Here, in the  
pantomime of *The Magic Feast*, Jack finally achieved his goal of playing Harlequin.  
In April 1802 he appeared at Sadler's Wells as Satani in *The Great Devil or The Robber  
of Genoa*, finally receiving the highest accolade for any pantomime performer when  
he was invited to play Harlequin to Grimaldi's clown at Sadler's Wells and Covent  
Garden. This established a double act which endured for a number of years. The two  
men became not only good friends but relations through marriage, when Bologna  
eventually married Louisa Maria Bristow, the sister of Grimaldi's second wife.  
Bologna's interests though were not solely confined to the art of pantomime. He was  
also passionately interested in scientific spectacle. In this respect his links with  
Sadler's Wells offered him a wealth of opportunity.

On Easter Monday 1803, the Wells re-opened after a disastrous fire and, newly  
equipped, embarked upon a new sensation—Aqua Drama—exploiting the potential  
of the two natural springs hidden beneath the stage. Bologna became immersed in  
water, figuratively speaking. He began to experiment with various hydraulic  
possibilities, aided and abetted by a person with the girth and stature to assist in  
such a heavyweight enterprise—Signor Belzoni, otherwise known as 'the Patagonian  
Samson'. Belzoni, a native of Padua and fairground strongman, had been drafted in  
to play the part of the giant in the Easter production of *Jack the Giant Killer*. Together  
the two performers evolved an independent show using pyrotechnics and called *Fire  
and Water*, which was first staged first under Bologna's name and later under  
Belzoni's, at Astley's Royalty Theatre in Wellclose Square. Both men were also clearly  
taken with another scientific novelty being presented a street away from the Lane  
at the neighbouring Lyceum.

7 November 1803 would appear to be the date of Jack Bologna's first attempt at a  
public phantasmagoria show. I say this guardedly, because it seems to have taken  
place not in London, but several thousand miles west—on Broadway.<sup>6</sup> According to  
G C Odell's *Annals of the New York Stage*, the venue was the City Hotel, where the  
phantasmagoria was exhibited in partnership with a Mr Tomlinson and billed as  
'Phantasmagoria, Skiagraphic and Brilliances of Perrico, as represented in London'.  
The Skiagraphic part consisted of shadow-pictures and the Brilliances were  
'transparencies imitating crystal'. On 9 November the *New York Evening Post* carried  
a note to say that the machine had not worked properly. The exhibition continued  
at the City Hotel until December, when it moved to the Union Hotel down the block.  
In January 1804 the Bologna/Tomlinson show was staged in New Brunswick, New  
Jersey.<sup>6</sup> As far as we know this was its last appearance in the USA.<sup>7</sup>

Although we cannot prove for certain that this Bologna was England's Jack  
Bologna, we know that he was in New York, giving exhibitions of the 'pantomimic  
arts' in New York during the season; and equally I have been unable to discover  
mention of any appearance by him in Britain during the period. It would, of course,  
seem unlikely that he would have travelled all the way to New York to give a lantern  
show, no matter how novel, and the programme is certainly very different from that  
presented at the Lyceum a year later. It is conceivable though that having been invited  
to New York to demonstrate his pantomimic techniques he may have been  
inveigled into taking part in some local enterprise.

Bologna's show opened at the Lyceum Theatre on 3 January 1805, the self-same  
day that Schirmer and Scholl's Ergascope was launched in the Upper Theatre.  
Suggestive of a more far-ranging, more scientific and mammoth enterprise,  
Schirmer and Scholl promised 'Musical, Mechanical, Aerostatic, Acrobatic and Optical  
Novelties divided into five acts', as detailed in large bills and printed descriptions.

As to the Ergascope itself, audiences were promised that they would find it far  
superior to the phantasmagoria, summoning as it did 'the most grateful phantoms  
imitating all human actions and expressions in various scenes—such as Laura and  
Petrarch, Abelard and Heloise, York and Maria, etc. Also Goliath's head, eating,  
drinking, biting and laughing.' In a lengthy advertisement dated 12 January there are  
further details of the four (sic) main acts. The third of these left little doubt as to the  
scope and nature of the optical experiments. Opening with the phantasmagoria the  
professors would demonstrate a machine called the phantascopia along with other  
mechanisms, finishing with a display of their headline attraction, 'the Ergascope or

1. *Saunders' Newsletter*, 6 December 1804 (the advertisement also cites an earlier show  
in Manchester).
2. An unintended pun, perhaps, reflecting his fame as a pantomime performer.
3. Probably 'Dumortiez', who, together with Molteni, was selling lanterns in Paris from  
c.1800. Whether Robertson had personally lent a hand in advising Bologna seems most  
unlikely however.
4. Cox's swan note.
5. *New York Evening Post*, 5 November 1803. For more on the history of phantasmagoria  
in the US see Theodore X Barber's excellent article in *Film History*, vol. 3.
6. *New Brunswick Guardian*, 5 January 1804 (see Barber, op. cit.).
7. Intriguingly, when John Durang, the American dancer and actor, presented a  
phantasmagoria exhibition at the New Theatre, Philadelphia, in April 1808, his publicity  
stated that he was operating with apparatus 'purchased from Sig. Bologna (sic),  
(Philadelphia Aurora, 9 April 1808).



live and active optical refractions from human bodies'. Here then, probably for the first time in Britain, was opaque projection of the kind which Robertson had practiced – the projection of live performers from an adjacent dark chamber.

Other items on the three-hour programme included a display of two automata – one a pianist, the other an acoustic figure on a chair who not only sang and played the trumpet, but even explained the principle of M Charles' 'Invisible Girl'.<sup>8</sup> Act Two was devoted to a collection of colossal inflatable figures. That of Diana in a carriage driven by stags was some 20 feet long. Dogs and tigers too appeared to fly about the room. Then, following the optical part of the show, the finale promised 'an optical ballet' featuring 'graceful Etruscan figures'. As if this were not spectacle enough, between acts there were performances by a sagacious dog, a courageous bird and a clever magician. The whole affair was illuminated by a 'candelabra of refined smoke [coal-gas], by permission of the patentee'.

The coal-gas patentee referred to was one Frederic Albert Winsor, whom we have met before. Winsor had first ensconced himself in the Upper Theatre of the Lyceum in the spring of 1803, taking over the space from Philipsthal, whilst Marie Tussaud was still occupying the floor below. Like Philipsthal, a German showman with very little grasp of English, he had presented his display of coke ovens, distilling apparatus and candelabra on stage, whilst an English lecturer delivered a drunken narrative from the pit. Born in Brunswick in 1763, Winsor had spent some time in Paris, studying under Philippe Lebon, who had succeeded in producing a gas from sawdust. At the age of 40 he had arrived in London, determined to make a fortune for himself as the John the Baptist of coal-gas illumination.<sup>9</sup> In Robert Wilkinson and William Herbert's *Theatrum Illustratum* (1825) it is suggested that Winsor had played a far more dominant role in the Ergasopia presentation than simply providing the chandelier, and indeed that he had headed the consortium. However, I think this is merely an assumption. What is more probable is that when Philipsthal had returned to Ireland a few weeks previously with a coal-gas demonstration, this must have been either the result of direct dealings with Winsor or at least first-hand study of his experiments.

One of the most revealing survivals of the Ergasopia exhibition is a booklet, copies of which were sold at each performance. The title – 'A Sketch of the Performances at the large Theatre, Lyceum and a short account of the Origin, History and Explanation of all the late Optical and Acoustic discoveries called the Phantasmagoria, Ergasopia, Phantascopia, Mesoscopia &c, together with the Invisible Girl'<sup>10</sup> – is cumbersome but nonetheless fulfils its promise. The parts of this document which relate to the phantasmagoria are reproduced as an Appendix to this chapter. In terms of a true history of the phantasmagoria it makes fascinating reading, and it is also the only written document specifically identifying Philipsthal as Philidor.

During the months of January through April the rivalry between the two optical exhibitions at the Lyceum must have given theatregoers cause for a great deal of additional merriment. On 31 January the following poetic jibe adorned press announcements for the Ergasopia:

Sun Beams refract the starry hosts  
By Ergasopic arts and merits  
Thus far above all lantern ghosts  
Shine Newton's sense in SCHIRMER's spirits!<sup>11</sup>

Although he did not directly retaliate, on 9 February Bologna pointed out in his advertisements that the 'show in his Pantascopic Theatre is nothing to do with the one upstairs'. Furthermore, he stated, his show now featured Bologna's experiments in hydraulics and 'Fairy Gambols'.

A week later the lessees of the Upper Theatre declared it 'their duty to point out' that their inventions were 'as original as they are unique'. Furthermore, that 'they have no connection with shows which every English traveller must have seen hackneyed for years in all the fairs in Germany...'. To assist patrons in finding the venue they had also now positioned a large 'aerial dog' on the stairs, to guide the audience aloft, and, inside the auditorium, a sort of large inflatable 'usherette', in the shape of an 'aerial tiger, filled with gas', which diligently toured 'the pit boxes and galleries by its own power of ascension'.

Bologna, having added some 'Androides' (?) and an automaton knife-grinder to his programme in April, seems to have outlasted his rivals. The final advertisement for the Ergasopia appeared on 12 April; whilst the show in the Lower Theatre continued until mid-May. There is no mention of the Schirmer and Scholl partnership surfacing in Britain ever again.

## SEASIDE DIVERSIONS

One showman whose enthusiasm for the phantasmagoria never seems to have waned throughout this period was the magician Moritz. No doubt in 1805 he was still basking in the kudos of the royal patronage which he had come to enjoy in the summer of 1802, having made a hit with the Prince of Wales at the Brighton Pavilion. In the August of 1805 he was appearing in Hull at the Theatre Royal with his 'Real Phantasmagoria from No 28 Haymarket, London... the original invention and not a miserable imitation, like those exhibited from time to time since'. Images were of characters old and new, including Louis XVI changing into a skeleton, the Bleeding Nun, Lord Nelson, the King and 'a curious figure by the name of Toby Phillipot'. His company also included 'Miss Saunders on the highwire' and 'the infant Billington'.<sup>12</sup>

Meanwhile, back in Brighton in November 1805, the Prince of Wales was being feted with an entirely new phantasmagoria show. This possibly home-made version was provided by a scurrilous individual known simply as 'The German Baron'. We first encounter the Baron in Mrs Creevey's diary entry for 29 October 1805. At eleven o'clock at night to be exact, on his emergence from the Prince's dining room in an extreme state of intoxication. Mrs Creevey refers to him rather enticingly as 'a kind of metteur en scène who devised storms of thunder, lightning and rain'. The amusement on the 29th had been dancing, preceded by an exhibition of air-gun targetry, during the course of which one of the guests, Lady Downshire, had managed to hit a fiddler in the dining room. However, on 3 November the diary tells us that The Baron was preparing a phantasmagoria at the pavilion, and that as a result 'she [Mrs Fitzherbert] laughs at what he may do with Miss Johnstone in a dark room'. Of the following evening, and the exhibition itself, there is scant detail, save to say that afterwards Mrs Fitzherbert attacked the Baron for being 'much too busily concerned with his apparatus for the storm of thunder, lightning and rain, with directing the band in solemn music and dressing himself up as a ghastly Phantom of death, to bother his head about little Miss Johnstone'.<sup>13</sup>

Although the Baron is unnamed he was clearly a member of the Regency inner circle from his regular seat at table. As such, one guess is that he was none other than Baron Munchausen, of later literary celebrity, one of the Prince's consuls, who in January of 1803 procured a similarly novel entertainment for his liege at the North House, Brighton, a recital on the eerie glass harmonica.<sup>14</sup>

One final trip to the seaside during 1805 was to the Trout Tavern, Cherry Tree Lane, Bristol to be precise. Here we encounter for the first time Jack Bologna's

friend from the Wells, Giovanni Belzoni, with his own show – a combined 'phantascopia' exhibition and 'grand hydraulic exhibition of fire and water mixed together'.<sup>15</sup>

## A RE-ENCOUNTER WITH PHILIPSTHAL

By 1806 Philipsthal had ended his brief flirtation with coal-gas. In March he appeared at the New Street Theatre, Birmingham, with his 'Grand Optical and Mechanical Museum', offering experiments in optics, aeronautics, hydraulics and pyrotechnics. Among these attractions was a fascinating mixed display of hydraulics and pyrotechnics ('fire and water').<sup>16</sup> Since these were all areas of performance in which he had dabbled before, it is likely that rather than having disposed of his apparatus in Dublin in 1804, as threatened, he had merely 'down-sized' what had by now become an unwieldy collection of apparatus to travel with. Certainly he still had his favourite automata. Neither had he given up completely on the phantasmagoria.

On 4 August 1806 he presented his philosophical 'Museum' at the Theatre Royal, Manchester,<sup>17</sup> this time with the phantasmagoria taking a minor role. By 10 November, the collection had reached the New Theatre of Arts in Hull.<sup>18</sup> There is no mention of the phantasmagoria by name here, although the poster boasted optical experiments and the creation of 'storms'.

It will be four years before we encounter Philipsthal again.

## THE PHANTASMAGORIA 'SANS PAREIL'

From the outset, professional showmen had not been the only opportunist group seeking to profit from the phantasmagoria craze. In December 1801 regular newspaper advertisements began to appear in the columns of *The Observer and Morning Chronicle* offering lanterns and slides for sale for private amusement. One such ran:

### AMUSEMENT FOR WINTER EVENINGS

The MAGIC LANTERN is a pleasing family amusement, well suited to all ages and sexes, ready in a few minutes for the entertainment of friends or families; in fact a cheerful house should never be without one.

J Scott has prepared an extensive outfit: they are complete in boxes. Each has twelve slides, on which are finely painted about sixty grotesque figures, which by reflection are magnified from a miniature, as large as nature, according to the size of the lantern, which when humorously displayed, may entertain 20 persons or more, at the same time, and are well adapted for youth at this season. Sold complete at 16s, one guinea and a half and two guineas each – Prepared and sold by J Scott, No. 417, Strand, London, which please to observe is seven doors from Bedford Street, Strand, as you go towards the City.<sup>19</sup>

These may have been the first commercial ads anywhere for lantern apparatus. Moreover, it is unlikely that they had suddenly been placed at this opportune time by coincidence. The advertiser's premises were in The Strand – just a stone's throw from the Lyceum.

In January Scott announced additions to the standard package:

30 Magic, magnetic and fanciful entertainments for the fireside, with instruments for their use, being upon an entirely new principle such as has not been seen in this country, being just received from a newly established manufactory in Saxony. The nobility and gentry are humbly requested to alight as they cannot be shown at the door of the carriage.

Perhaps by now visitors to matinee performances of

8. See earlier references to M Charles.

9. Richard D Altick, *The Shows of London*, 1978.

10. British Library and Library of Congress Collections.

11. This and subsequent references from Lyceum cuttings, British Library.

12. *Hull Packet*, 16 August 1805.

13. *The Creevey Papers*.

14. *The Times*, 4 January 1803.

15. *Bristol Mercury*, 15 December 1805.

16. *Birmingham Chronicle* (?), 10 March 1806.

17. *Cowdrey's Manchester Gazette*, 3 August 1806.

18. *Hull Packet*, 10 November 1806.

19. *Morning Chronicle*, 11 December 1801.



# The New Theatre, SANS PAREIL,

Dec. 1806.

Opposite the ADELPHI in the STRAND,  
IS OPEN THIS AND EVERY EVENING (Sundays excepted,)

With the following AMUSEMENTS:

**PART I.** An Entertainment consisting of SONG and RECITATION, occasionally exchanged for other interesting Matter.

**PART II.** An OPTICAL EXHIBITION of VISIONARY OBJECTS, illustrated with Historical Remarks, something in the Manner of that admired Exhibition the PHANTASMAGORIE, but varying materially in the Effect.

**PART III.** An entire New and Interesting SPECTACLE, representing apparently in the Air, AN ANCIENT GRAND BATTLE IN SHADOW,

In which several Thousand Figures, armed in the Costume of their Time, are seen engaged, as said by GODFREY of BOUILLON to have appeared to him while he led the Christian Army under the Walls of JERUSALEM.

To conclude with an Elegant New Constructed

**ARTIFICIAL FIRE WORK,**

In a TEMPLE Superbly Illuminated.

**THE WHOLE ACCOMPANIED WITH APPROPRIATE MUSIC.**

Price of Admission, Boxes 4s. PIT 2s. 6d.—Doors open at half-past Seven, begin at Eight.

Places for the Boxes may be taken from 11 till 3, at the Theatre.

The Nobility, Gentry and Public in general, are respectfully informed, this Theatre is entirely New Built, perfectly Dry, having been finished upwards of Two Years, in a Manner, the Proprietors trust, will meet their Approbation. Artists of the first Abilities have been engaged in the Decorative, as well as the Optical and Mechanical Part; and before the Curtain, the Comfort and Accommodation of the Audience have been most particularly attended to.

J. Smeeton, Printer, 148, St. Martin's Lane.

Early poster for John Scott's Phantasmagoria presentation at the Sans Pareil Theatre (now the Adelphi)

Philipsthal's show had already fallen into the habit of stopping off at Mr Scott's shop, on the way back to Chelsea, for a little memento.

John Scott (1752–1838) was an artist's colourman, and well-known purveyor of 'Scott's Liquid True Blue' for dyeing stockings. Profits from these enterprises and maybe lantern sales must have been quite substantial, for in 1806 he was able to open his own theatre, the Sans Pareil (later the Adelphi), opposite the shop. In part this investment must have been to satisfy the artistic leanings of his daughter, a singing instructress. However, Scott had also apparently trodden the boards himself in his youth,<sup>20</sup> and having become somewhat infatuated, it would seem, with the phantasmagoria, he aspired to a joint ambition with his daughter to provide London with the best in song coupled with state-of-the-art phantasmagoria technique.

The Sans Pareil opened its doors in November 1806, just in time for the Christmas season. The opening programme was divided into four parts. First, a selection of songs from Miss Scott. Then her father's own entertainment described as:

a Tempest Terrific, which will introduce an optical exhibition of visionary objects illustrated with historical remarks, and something in the manner of the acclaimed exhibition, the Phantasmagoria, but varying materially in effect. The illusions will appear with occasional introduction, nearly in the following succession. Ghosts after the manner of Schröpper; Iron mask from the Bastille; Elfrida; Seward; Earl of Northumberland; the maniac; apotheosis of the lamented hero; an animated effigy; Jane Shore; Ixion on the wheel.

The form of the third part of the programme is uncertain, but may have been an Ombres Chinoises sequence. It is described as a 'Vision of the Holy Land or Godfrey of Bouillares Dream – an entire new and interesting spectacle representing, apparently in the air, an ancient grand battle in shadow'. The finale was an artificial firework display in 'a temple superbly illuminated'.<sup>21</sup>

One year later the phantasmagoria was still in evidence, being described as 'an extensive spectrology of ghosts'. However, by November of 1807 spirits seem to have been dropped from the programme, which was now concentrating on musical entertainments, though with grand Gothic themes, such as 'Ulthona the Sorceress', which offered 'new music, scenery, machinery, dresses and decoration'.<sup>22</sup>

## DISSOLVING VIEWS

According to his entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, 1806 was the year in which the 'inventor of dissolving views', Henry Langdon Childe (1781–1874), had first begun to involve himself in the Adelphi entertainments. A consummate artist, certainly on glass, he may well have been a frequent visitor to the artist's colourman's shop, and – having allegedly worked with Paul de Philipsthal – become a welcome addition to the Scott production team.

The *DNB* further suggests that it was during the second year of the Sans Pareil that Childe developed his famous dissolving-view technique, albeit it seems to have taken him a further eleven years to perfect it. The entry is very precise here: but should we accept the given dates and evolutionary time-scale

as indisputable fact? According to the *DNB* resource notes, the information for the entry appears to have come chiefly from 'private friends'. By way of comparison, in a subsequent entry for Richard Cuming, a founder member of the Lambeth Chemical Society, it is reported that Cuming 'invented the phantasmagoria 1801 which was later shown by Philipsthal at Lyceum Theatre 1802'.

I am not suggesting that Childe was not the prime mover in the perfection of the 'dissolving view' process. There are sufficient acknowledgments of this fact from colleagues with whom Childe later worked at the Polytechnic. I merely question the dates. Thus far I have found no proof that any form of 'dissolving views' were ever exhibited at the Sans Pareil or at any other public venue in London before the 1820s. Similarly I am not happy with the word 'inventor'.

Taking the evolution of cinema as a parallel, I think it more likely that Childe was responsible for perfecting a process which a number of 'lanternists' always knew was a possibility, largely through his great skill as a painter of the transmutable images necessary to make it work. We know that the notion of producing magical effects using two or more lanterns existed in the 1790s. Robertson had used two lanterns when he presented sequences such as the 'Nonne sanglante' – one lantern being placed behind the screen to provide a backcloth, and one before to provide the character. In Japan similar experiments were conducted in the early 1800s, using multiple lanterns. It was a possibility which had probably occurred to many showmen who possessed more than one lantern.

Several sources and colleagues of Childe suggest that Philipsthal had experimented with the idea and if, as suggested, Childe, had once worked as the showman's assistant, they may well have experimented with the idea together. This is suggested by an article from *The Penny Magazine*, 1843:

It is said that a German, Philipsthal, who introduced the phantasmagoria about sixty years ago [sic] also gave the first rough idea of the 'dissolving' views. He was in the habit of representing, among other subjects, the raising of the ghost of Samuel by the witch of Endor, in which he made the phantom appear to rise from the ground; but he conceived that if he employed two lanterns and slides, making the wick of one rise whilst he lowered that of the other, and directing both images to one spot, a more aerial and supernatural effect might be produced. This method succeeded, and Philipsthal was led to the adoption of similar arrangements for representing landscape scenery.

...The improvements which have been made within the last few years have brought this plan to a point of great excellence.

*The Penny Magazine* then goes on to describe the mechanical fading process operating in 1843.

Unfortunately, since we are working on hearsay in all these circumstances, and have no knowledge either of the time-frame or nature of any Philipsthal–Childe relationship, we are left with few real conclusions. However, the following reports indicate something of the slow evolution of such a process from around 1812.

## THE SAME ONLY DIFFERENT

In the autumn of 1807 Mr Moritz opened his own 'variety theatre' in London, the Temple of Arts, Catherine Street (also known as the Minor Theatre). The programme was fairly standard – conjuring performances, a performing dog and goldfinch act and his phantasmagoria, featuring the witch of Endor, the ghost from Hamlet and poor old Louis XVI's umpteenth transformation into a skeleton.

From May 1807 until the spring of 1809 Giovanni Belzoni also criss-crossed the country with his hydraulic experiments, feats of strength, panorama-

20. Apparently he had acted at the Pantheon Theatre in London (cf. *Annals of the Liverpool Stage*). After

relinquishing ownership of the Sans Pareil in 1820, he established the Pantheon in Liverpool in 1824.

21. *Fragmenta*, vol. 17, British Library.

22. Enthoven Collection – playbills, Theatre Museum.



tribute to the late hero Nelson, who had died at Trafalgar in October of 1805, and his 'phantascopia'. All of these items featured in the programme he gave at Hull in May 1807. When he reached The Theatre, Taunton in March of 1809, the 'phantascopia' became the 'improved phantasmagoria' with new figures ... 'which will move eyes and mouth'.<sup>23</sup> However, the phantasmagoria does not always appear as a regular item on the various Belzoni bills produced for his two-week stay at this venue.<sup>24</sup>

The concept of an 'improved phantasmagoria' was clearly an attempt to keep interest alive. At the Fantoccini Theatre, Capel Street, Dublin, in November 1807, there had been a similar 'improvement', billed under the alarming title of the 'Necrophonia'. To illustrate the difference a demonstration of the original phantasmagoria was also offered.

#### PHILIPSTHAL AND MAILLARDET

We next encounter Philipsthal in March 1811, in the West of England. Now his name is allied with that of a partner – the eminent mechanical engineer and showman, Henri Maillardet.<sup>25</sup> At the heart of this joint enterprise lay a shared interest in automata. In advertisements for the show at Bridgwater there is no mention of optical effects, merely of their collection of robotic figures. However, when the show moves into the Theatre Royal, Bristol, in May, optical effects are again back on the menu. At the Assembly Rooms in Bath in July there is no mention of Maillardet, only of 'Philipsthal's Rational Museum'.<sup>26</sup> By 11 September 1811 they are again billed together as joint owners of the 'Automatical Museum' when they take up residency at The Theatre, Gloucester, for ten days. So what are we to make of this seemingly uncoordinated arrangement? For an answer we may need to look ahead to the beginning of the following year.

On Monday 3 February 1812 Philipsthal and Maillardet embarked upon a new joint venture in Catherine Street, close by the Lyceum. The name of their venture was the 'Automatical Theatre'. An announcement in *The Times*<sup>27</sup> declares that the theatre (possibly Moritz's establishment), had undergone 'a complete repair', with the intention of providing 'the most astonishing effects of mechanism that human ingenuity ever prepared'.

The evening's entertainment was divided into three parts, the first and third comprising beautiful automotive entertainers, in the form of dancers, a magician, piano player and a beautiful bird of paradise. The second act consisted of 'a very sweet illusion on the principle, we suppose, of Mr Philipsthal's former production (the Phantasmagoria); the present consists of a series of landscapes (in imitation of moonlight), which insensibly change to various scenes producing a very magical effect'. Could this be a first tentative step in the direction of dissolving views?

We have already mentioned in a previous article a possible link between Philipsthal and the city of Bath, and now I offer a risky speculation. Since the cluster of shows staged by Maillardet and Philipsthal seems to be intended as a provincial try-out for their new

UNDER THE SANCTION OF  
HIS MAJESTY'S ROYAL LETTERS PATENT.

## PHILIPSTHAL and MAILLARDET'S Royal Museum, FROM LONDON,

Which has been honoured several Times with the Presence and most flattering Applause of their MAJESTIES and the whole of the ROYAL FAMILY,

Will Open for Public Inspection,  
At the ASSEMBLY ROOM, BRIDGWATER,  
On FRIDAY the 22d. of MARCH instant,  
And will Continue Open until Thursday next, the 29th which will positively be the last day  
CONSISTING of the following most INGENIOUS PIECES of

# Mechanism,

NEVER BEFORE WITNESSED IN THIS PLACE.

The many Years this elaborate Museum has been exhibited in LONDON, and the principal Cities of this and other Empires. Thousands of Spectators have been highly delighted, and justly pronounced it to be the most perfect and elegant and surprising Workmanship ever seen!—Although no Description can properly illustrate these Mechanical Pieces of Art, yet, to convey to the Public an Idea of the Singularity and of the intuitive Power, with which they were invented, the following Explanation is submitted;—

A SUPERB

## Musical Automaton.

Representing the BELLE ROSEANE, is seated at an ORGANIZED PIANO-FORTE, and plays with the greatest Precision, the most melodious Airs at command. The interior grand Mechanical Power which animates this beautiful Figure, with the exterior Brilliance and the highly-finished Workmanship, cannot be seen without Admiration.

THE MECHANICAL.

## Drawing and Writing-Master;

An interesting LITTLE BOY, who writes a beautiful Hand in ENGLISH and FRENCH, and draws any Thing that Company will be pleased to command. The Mechanism of this highly-finished Piece of Artificial Animation has astonished every Beholder.

## An Old Necromancer,

Will, by his elaborate Mechanical Combinations, resolve Epigrams, and, with his Apparent Magical Powers, answer the most complex Questions put to him.

A MOST

## BEAUTIFUL GOLD BOX,

Mounted with fine PEARLS, in which A BIRD OF PARADISE is concealed, which Darts from its Box at command, and warbles the most Melodious Notes ever heard, then disappears. It will repeat the same Melody as often as any Lady or Gentleman will be pleased to command. The Effect of this ingenious Piece of Mechanism is truly Wonderful, considering its Minuteness.

## THE LITTLE SPANIARD,

Who will DANCE and PLAY HIS INSTRUMENT AT COMMAND. The ingenious Combination of its interior Construction will highly gratify the Curiosity of the Public, and give them an Idea of the whole powerful Mechanism.

## A BEAUTIFUL SOURIE DO'R,

SET IN PEARLS.

Who will not less surprise every Beholder by its apparent Natural Sagacity and Motion, running and moving about in every Direction, as a Living One.

AN

## ETHIOPEAN CHENILLE DO'R,

BEAUTIFULLY ENAMELLED.

AND

## A TARANTULA SPIDER:

Their minute Mechanism is so wonderfully constructed to resemble Nature, that they are often supposed to be Alive!

Admittance, from Eleven to Five o'Clock, 2s.

\* In Order to give Mechanicals, and others, an Opportunity of minutely inspecting those truly wonderful Pieces of Art,

The Admittance from 7 to 9 o'Clock in the Evening, will be 1s. only.

N. B. The whole of the Exhibition is under the Direction of Mr. LEWIS, the principal Engineer of the Mechanical Department, who will use his utmost Exertion for the Amusement of those Ladies and Gentlemen who may be pleased to honour the Museum with their presence.

J. Yoele, Printer, Bridgwater.

Bill for the Philipsthal and Maillardet partnership begun in 1812. No optical material is mentioned. Footnote specifies that the exhibition is 'under the Direction of Mr Lewis', who appears to have taken full control of Philipsthal's cabinet from 1812 until just prior to Philipsthal's death in the late 1820s.

23. Somerset County Archive, playbill collection.

24. In 1809 Belzoni gave up touring, accepting a commission in Dublin to design hydraulic effects for a pantomime. Apparently the machinery went berserk and he ended up almost drowning the orchestra. The following year he performed as an actor in Perth, Edinburgh and Plymouth, and in 1812 toured Portugal, Spain and Malta.

25. Henry Maillardet (1745–?) and his brother John David were distinguished Swiss automata designers who had learnt their craft under Jacquet-Droz and Leschot at Chaux de Fonds. In the 1790s, Henri was sent to London to manage the company's considerable British interests, and by the turn of the century had begun to exhibit figures publicly at various venues in the capital and provinces. Many were based on the Jacquet-Droz designs.

26. *Bath Chronicle*, 11 September 1811.

27. *The Times*, Saturday 8 February 1812.



UNDER  
THE SANCTION OF HIS MAJESTY'S  
Royal Letters Patent.



**THE THEATRE, NOTTINGHAM,**  
WILL BE OPEN

On MONDAY, WEDNESDAY, and FRIDAY, the 17th,  
19th, and 21st days of December, 1827,

WITH  
**THE EXHIBITION**  
OF  
**The Royal Mechanical and Optical**  
**MUSEUM,**

FROM THE LYCEUM, LONDON,  
(Not exhibited here these Fourteen Years.)

WHICH was received with unbounded applause in the Metropolis, and in the principal Cities of the United Kingdom, and highly gratified the curiosity of the discerning Public of Nottingham also, when it was exhibited at the Theatre, by Mr. LEWIS, a native of Switzerland, then in the employ of Mr. PHILIPSTHAL, the Inventor and Proprietor of it, who first had the honour of introducing it to public notice at the Lyceum, London, where his Majesty graciously granted him His Royal Letters Patent.

Although the substance of this interesting rational  
**AMUSEMENT**

Is already advantageously known to the major part of the Inhabitants of this Town, yet Mr. P. thinks it incumbent to state, for the information of those Ladies and Gentlemen who have never witnessed the Exhibition, that it consists entirely of ingenious Pieces of MECHANISM AND OPTICS of a peculiar nature, which may be seen by all Classes of Society, (without the least scruple or prejudice against going to a Theatre,) as the Exhibition is not only quite different from those of a Theatrical description, but highly instructive and amusing. In order to refresh the memory of some, and to give a proper idea of it to others, a slight enumeration of subjects is necessary, viz.

**VARIOUS SPLENDID VIEWS**  
OF  
**LANDSCAPES, ARCHITECTURE, TEMPLES,**  
**Pagodas, Idols,**

*Ruins of Castles, Monasteries, &c.*

Will appear in succession transforming themselves imperceptibly (as it were by Magic) from one form into another;—the pleasing effect of which has been highly admired by the best judges, and publicly declared, that the Optical Exhibition alone, is more than enough for one Evening's entertainment. To this is added, a whole set of

**Mechanical Pieces,**

OF VARIOUS KINDS, VIZ.:

**TWO ELEGANT AUTOMATA,**  
AS LARGE AS LIFE!

In the Characters of Spanish gymnastic Dancers; the one represents a beautiful Female Figure, the other a Boy of about ten years of age. Nothing can surpass the admirable construction of these Figures: both seem endued with human faculties, exhibiting the usual feats of Rope Dancers, in the fullest imitation of life. Their compact and well proportioned forms have been greatly admired, and considered by the very best judges as the happiest imitations of Nature.

A WONDERFUL  
**MECHANICAL PEACOCK,**  
AS LARGE AS LIFE,

In its natural Plumage, which imitates so closely the cries, actions, and attitudes of that stately bird, that it is not unfrequently supposed to be a living animal, trained to act as an amusing deception.

Full-column ad for Philipsthal's show in Nottingham, December 1827. Note the inclusion of dissolving views... 'Views will appear in succession, imperceptibly changing from one to another.'

**AN OLD NECROMANCER,**  
Which may fairly be denominated the British Enchanter; for few of the fables concerning the arts of these wonder-working Sages in the Druidical groves of oak, whose magic spells impend every bough, go beyond the astonishing realities of this Automaton.

A SMALL FEMALE FIGURE REPRESENTING

**A Cossack Solo Dancer,**  
Who will make her appearance in a Mourning Dress, and, at desire, immediately change it for an elegant Ball Attire, salute the company gracefully; and, at their command, begin to dance a true Cossack Hornpipe, with every action of real life.

TOGETHER WITH A GRAND DISPLAY OF  
**HYDRAULICS,**  
AND HYDROSTATIC EXPERIMENTS, UNITING  
**FIRE AND WATER.**

A description of the variety of Subjects Mr. P. produces by means of the above Elements, can but imperfectly convey ideas adequate to the effect.

The SECOND PART of the Evening's Entertainment  
CONSISTS OF

**OPTICS,**

OF A NOVEL AND INTERESTING NATURE.  
THE FOLLOWING BEAUTIFUL

**VIEWS**

Will appear in succession, imperceptibly changing from one to another.

**A STRIKING VIEW OF THE CATACOMBS**  
**OF VALETTE, AT MALTA.**

The Perspective of this subterraneous View has been admired by every beholder.

*The Ruins of the Temple of Carnack, at Thebes, (lately published by Belzoni) of about 2000 years standing.—The Interior and Exterior of Kirkham Abbey, Yorkshire.—A View of His Majesty's Pavilion, at Brighton.—Carlton House, the King's late Palace, in London.—The Tower of London, taken from Thames-street.—The ancient Priory Gate, St. John's, Clerkenwell, London.—Whitehall, and part of Parliament-street, London.—The beautiful Street in London, called the Quadrant, and Regent-street.—Charing Cross, with the Statue of King Charles I.—Two Views of Somerset House, fronting the Strand and the River Thames.—A View of the Cast-Iron Bridge over the River Wear, at Sunderland, span 136 feet, height 100 feet.—Northumberland House, Strand.—A view of Temple Bar.—Chelsea College, with the Gardens, Obelisk, and Trees.—Claremont House, the residence of the late Princess Charlotte, of Saxe Coburg, from which a Balloon will appear to ascend, and lose itself in perspective.—With many other subjects too numerous to mention.*

The whole to conclude with a series of Variegated Artificial  
**FIRE WORKS,**  
Which follow in brilliant succession!—These Fire Works are a compound of Optical and Mechanical Effect, of great Beauty and Brilliance, perfectly free from Gunpowder, or any smell.

**The Whimsical Solo Dancer.**  
The MARVELLOUS TOMB SCENE, with the appearance of Her late Majesty, the Queen, and the Princess Charlotte, of Saxe Cobourg, will also be introduced every Evening.

Doors to be open at Six o'Clock, and the Performance to begin at Seven. Tickets to be had of Mr. DUNN, Mercury Office, where Places for the Boxes may be taken.—As the nature of this Exhibition precludes the Theatrical Rule of HALF PRICE, Mr. P. by the advice of his Friends, has reduced the admission to the following low rate:—

Boxes, 3s.—Upper Boxes, 2s.—Pit, 1s.—Gal. 6d.

Schools and Juvenile Branches of Families, under Ten Years of Age, Half-price to Boxes and Pit.—Every part of the Theatre will be properly aired, and the Exhibition will be accompanied with Select Music.

mention of the founders. Two years later at The Theatre, Stourbridge, on 8 September, 'Mr Louis (Principal engineer and a native of Switzerland)' is still the exhibitor.

There is a further possibility that Philipsthal, having grown somewhat weary of travelling, had trained up M Louis, preferring to remain in London and run the premises in Catherine Street. There is an intriguing entry in the parish records of St Luke's Church, Chelsea, for a double christening on 13 August 1819. The children were named Albert Augustus and Theresa Paulina. The parents are given as Paul de Philipsthal and Mary, his wife. The father might of course have been a son, another relative or someone totally unrelated. However, the name is very uncommon. (I have found only one other record of anyone in Britain bearing a similar surname, and this appears twenty years later, in Hull.) There is also mention of a 'Theatre Mechanique' operating in Catherine Street in February 1820, which may have some connection.

We will meet up with Philipsthal just once more.

**GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN**

By the commencement of the second decade of the 19th century the phantasmagoria had lost most of its pulling power as a public show, even if it was still regarded with affection. As a home entertainment, the proliferation of 'phantasmagoria lanterns' and the notion of creating parlour ghosts by all manner of means was to remain popular for several more decades. However, the first decade of the century had seen a dramatic swing away from the long-held religious superstitions of the past towards a more rational understanding of the new sciences. The phantasmagoria itself made a contribution in this respect. Events such as the phantasmagoria offered by a certain 'Mr Smith' at Bartholomew Fair in September 1812 were probably now regarded more as the 20th century views a ghost-train ride—a blend of pleasing surprise and derision.

In February 1813 Belzoni was still presenting optical illusions as part of his programme, though now under the title of the 'Aggrecopius'... in which the objects will change posture, and so far will they seem animated to the spectator, that some of them will change their countenances'.

At Sadler's Wells in 1816, 'phantasmagoric likenesses' were included in a production entitled *The Magic Cauldron*. Images of famous theatrical personages such as Grimaldi were shown as well as 'a living skeleton' and 'death on a pale horse'.<sup>28</sup>

From about 1824 there was a marked revival of interest in the phantasmagoria, though I suspect this had much to do with the development of the dissolving view process, particularly since the revival seems to have centred on the former Sans Pareil, now (following Mr Scott's departure in 1820) renamed the Adelphi. (The Drummond light was also being developed at around this time, although it was not until the early 1830s that it began to be used by lantern exhibitors.<sup>29</sup>)

At the Adelphi on 1 April 1824, M Henry—conjurer and ventriloquist—presented a humorous entertainment which introduced audiences for the first time to the remarkable effects of laughing gas. Various optical sequences were also scattered through the programme. These included comical transformation effects (possibly the use of slipping slides), several 'striking likenesses' of famous actors and actresses, and a 'Dance of Death—with several laughable figures'. In an earlier part of the programme a 'phantasmagoria' was also presented. A review of M Henry's show in the *Globe & Traveller* states that 'the whole is much on the same plan as an exhibition given several years since at the Lyceum by M de Philipsthal, and which was received with some applause.'

enterprise, is their pattern yet another indication that Philipsthal had links with the south-west of England, and Bath in particular?

One assumption leads to another: perhaps Philipsthal was either quite old by now, like his partner, and/or not a well man. I rush to this conclusion because by 9 March 1812—just one month after opening the new venture—both *The Times* and *The London*

*Telegraph* were carrying announcements stating that all shows at the 'Automatical Theatre' were now being conducted 'under the direction of Philipsthal's assistant engineer, M Louis'. Three years later, in April 1815, at The Theatre, Wakefield, we find M Louis still exhibiting Philipsthal and Maillardet's 'Royal Mechanical and Optical Exhibition', but this time entirely under his own name, and with no

28. Sybil Rosenfeld suggested that Huggins was the showman involved, as these images also featured in some of his later shows.

29. Lieutenant Thomas Drummond's first use of the

'lime-light' was in Ireland in November 1825, when it was used as an aid to surveying by the Royal Engineers. It proved so successful that experiments were then carried out to examine its suitability

for use in lighthouses. A trial was eventually carried out in May 1830. It was probably therefore that it first came to the notice of lantern exhibitors in the early 1830s.



A year later Henry was back at the Adelphi with a programme again incorporating a 'phantasmagoria' consisting of 'theatrical portraits, flying heads and a dance of witches'.<sup>30, 31</sup>

In 1826 M Henry returned for a third season with 'Odd Sayings and Queer Doings'. This time his 'Dance of Witches' had turned into a 'Dance of Monkeys', and more prominently there was a new optical display – featuring landscapes and Gothic ruins, and defined as 'imperceptibly changing views'.

Henry's subsequent 1826 provincial tour is more interesting. On 9 May he appeared at The Theatre, Cheltenham, referring to his landscapes and other pictures as 'dissolvent views' – possibly the first recorded use of the term.<sup>32</sup>

Moving on through Gloucester and Tewkesbury he arrived at the New Room, Wine Street, Bristol, in October. The poster for the show is intriguing because the illustration at the top is almost identical in design to that of Philipsthal's early bill, except that the shrouded figure on the left has now been replaced by a rather cruder representation of a bleeding nun. In November 1826 Henry concluded his provincial tour with visits to Wells, Bridgwater and Taunton.

On 2 March 1827 Henry premiered another new show, *Whims and Oddities*, though not this time at the Adelphi but at the Theatre Royal in the Haymarket. This offered a 'series of views which seem to dissolve into each other. Introduced last year, but much improved.'

A week later Henry Langdon Childe put in his first bid to the public presentation of dissolving views, at the Adelphi, as the finale to Mr Yates's comic monologue entertainment *Portraits and Sketches in Town and Country*. The effects offered are classic: 'the eruption of Vesuvius, storm with shipwreck, mill scene with effect of a rainbow and various moonlight scenes'. Some items also allude to views with moving elements, such as 'Newstead Abbey ... with moving swans, etc.' In March, Childe's display of 'Magic Views' moved to the Theatre Royal, where advertisements explained at some length that these transformations had been 'originally introduced by him, at incredible expense and are totally different to any of the party imitations that they have given rise to'. Thus does the history of optical entertainment repeat itself.

In 1827 Childe also painted and projected a representation of *The Flying Dutchman* which was used in Fitzball's drama at the Adelphi.<sup>33</sup> When Henry is seen to be exhibiting both 'dissolvent views' and the 'phantom ship' at the Theatre Royal, Windsor in May, one is led to the inevitable conclusion of either a very close association or plagiarism going on between Childe and Henry over the course of several years. By November of 1827 a Mr Huggins had joined the ranks of this new breed of London-based lantern entertainers. His *World of Magic* at the Whitechapel Pavilion included a mixture of fairies, spectres, storms and even 'Bologna transformed into Harlequin'.

During 1828 Childe, Huggins and W H Williams drew crowds with similar shows, both at the Pavilion and the Coburg (later the Old Vic).<sup>34</sup> Maybe it was this flurry of activity which brought Philipsthal out of retirement. In December 1827 The Theatre, Nottingham played host to 'M Philipsthal's Grand Mechanical and Optical Exhibition' for thirteen nights.<sup>35</sup> (This time there is no sign of M Louis.) A series of advertisements for the show reveal that his collection of automata was still very much intact, and that the phantasmagoria had now been replaced by optical effects reflecting the new interest in dissolving views. September 1828 finds Philipsthal still in evidence in Hull, with his 'beautiful views ... the changes from one to another executed without the least perception'.<sup>36</sup> In November there is a much smaller announcement for the show in York.<sup>37</sup> After 5 December the advertisements cease.

The next time the exhibition surfaces is in Wakefield the following April, in the form of a benefit performance for Philipsthal's 'widow and dependants'. Extensive combing through local papers has so far revealed neither the cause of death nor the place where it occurred. We might perhaps assume that it was somewhere in the north-east of England, with the old showman still in harness. The fate of Philipsthal's collection is also a mystery.

We know that a further benefit performance was held for his widows and dependants in Newcastle in May 1830. In December 1829 a collection of automata was displayed at Paul's Head Assembly Rooms, Cateaton Street, London,<sup>38</sup> during the day, with a demonstration of dissolving views in the evening. No showman or show-woman is named, though many of the items associated with Philipsthal, Maillardet and Louis were exhibited. It is possible

30. *The Times*, 8 March 1836.

31. The 1825 season was followed by a tour of the provinces, taking in, in chronological order, Liverpool, Wigan, Warrington, Wolverhampton and Stourbridge. This and subsequent detail comes from the Henry Collection of cuttings and playbills held by the British Library and spanning the period from 1817 to 1829.

32. In 1849–50, Henry Mayhew conducted an interview with a toy seller, who specialised in the sale of lanterns (cf. *The Unknown Mayhew*, 1871). The interviewee recalled, 'Mr Henry who conjured at the Adelphi Theatre some 18 years ago was one of the first – indeed I may say the first – who introduced dissolving views at a place of public amusement ... Henry used two lanterns for his views, but using them with oil, and not on so large a scale, they would be thought very poor now.'

33. Edward Fitzball, *Thirty-five Years of a Dramatic Author's Life*, London, 1859.

34. Playbills in the Enthoven Collection, Theatre Museum.

35. The Theatrical Notebooks of T H Wilson Manley (British Library) record that the showman paid two guineas a night for the privilege.

36. *Hull Packet*, 9 September 1828.

37. *York Herald*, 23 November 1828.

38. Guildhall Library playbill collection.

# Theatre, Wakefield.

## THE LAST WEEK

OF THE

### ROYAL MECHANICAL & OPTICAL MUSEUM,

NOW CARRIED ON FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE

## WIDOW and CHILDREN

OF THE LATE MR. PHILIPSTHAL.

Mrs. P. in returning her Thanks to the Public of Wakefield, for the flattering marks of Approval with which her Exhibition has been received, begs to inform them it will be Open

On Monday, 27th, Wednesday, 29th of April,  
And CLOSE on Friday Evening, the 1st Day of May, 1829.

To commence as hitherto, with the various interesting

## MECHANICAL PIECES.

In addition to the great variety of subjects already Exhibited with unbounded applause, the following will be introduced in the second part of the Evening's Entertainment; a new Historical Scene which took place during the Rebellion, about 177 years ago, representing the

## EXECUTION

OF THE EARL OF DERBY.

Who was taken Prisoner by the Parliamentary Troops, and conveyed to Chester, sentenced to Death, and ordered for Execution at Bolton, where it took place in Church-Street; with a View of the Scaffold, surrounded by a Troop of Cavalry, with the Earl of Derby, his Chaplain, and the Executioner on the scaffold, &c. – The above Tragical Scene has been exhibited at Bolton and Chester, with unbounded applause, and duly impressed the surviving Generations of those who then witnessed the Execution with a grateful sense of the blessings of Peace they now enjoy.

A REPRESENTATION OF THE LATE ERUPTION OF

## Mount Vesuvius.

A VIEW TAKEN IN PARIS, REPRESENTING

## THE THUILLERIES,

WITH THE BRIDGE OVER THE RIVER SEINE.

A VIEW OF

## JERUSALEM,

With the Mount of Olives,

As seen from the Terrace of the Latin Convent of St. Salvator. – The View is from a Sketch made by Sir William Chatterton, Bart.

## The Ancient GATE at Southampton,

Called Abene Bar, built by Canute, soon after his Landing, in the year 873.

## VARIOUS INTERESTING VIEWS IN LONDON.

An interior View of the Greek Church, St. Sophia at Constantinople.

A Panoramic View of Southampton.

Two Views of the interior and exterior of Netley Abbey.

A View of Chelsea Gardens, with the Ascent of a Hill.

A fine View of Broad-Street, Ludlow.

A View of St. Mark's Church, at Venice.

A View of Hamlet-Street, with St. Mary's Church in Perspective, at Taunton, in Somersetshire.

Westminster Abbey.

THE SUMMER PALACE OF THE LATS

## Emperor Alexander.

AT VASILIOSTROP, ON THE RIVER NEVA.

A FINE VIEW OF THE

## Suspension Bridge

OVER AN ARM OF THE SEA AT MENAI,

CONNOTING THE COUNTY OF CARNARVON WITH THAT OF ANGLESEA.

Descriptive efforts can but imperfectly convey ideas of the ingenuity and marvellous combination of mechanical labour entined in this unique and most powerfully efficient structure. The thousands of massive links which compose the multitude of united chains, riveted at their innumerable joints with the strongest bolts imaginable, present, notwithstanding, a most elegant and gracefully light appearance; while in festoons of the utmost symmetry, these chains support, as they flow from two sets of noble cantilever abutments at either end of the arch, all the extraordinary combinations of mechanism which sustain the immense structure, and form its three grand parapet avenues of admirable perspective, and capacious extent.

A GROTESQUE BALLET, REPRESENTING THE

## FAIRIES' MIDNIGHT REVEL,

By some hundreds of fancy-formed Supernatural Beings, producing the most whimsical Spectacle.

## The Tragic Scene of CORNELIA,

The Superior of the Roman Vestal Virgins, who underwent the awful sentence of being BURIED ALIVE, in the Reign of Domitian, the Eleventh Roman Emperor, A. D. 81.

## Marvellous Tomb Scene!!

With the appearance of Her late Majesty the Queen, and the Princess Charlotte, of Saxe Cobourg, &c. &c.

The Exhibition commences as usual with Two elegant

## Automata Rope-Dancers,

IN FULL IMITATION OF LIFE,

And various other surprising mechanical Pieces. Also, a series of

## HYDRAULICS

AND

## HYDROSTATIC EXPERIMENTS,

Uniting Fire and Water.

The whole to conclude with a series of Variegated Artifices!

## FIREWORKS,

WHICH FOLLOW IN BRILLIANT SUCCESSION!

These Fire Works are a compound of Optical and Mechanical Effects, of great Beauty and Brilliance, and perfectly free from Gunpowder or any Smell.

Doors to be opened at Seven o'clock, and the Performance to commence at half-past

Tickets to be had of Mr. NICHOLS, Bookseller, where Places for the Boxes may be taken.

As the nature of this Exhibition precludes the Theatrical Rule of Half-Price, Mrs. P. by the advice of her Friends, has reduced the Admission to the following Rate:—

Boxes, 2s. 6d.—Pit, 1s.—Gallery, 6d.

For Schools, and the Juvenile branches of Families under 15 years of age, to the Boxes, 1s. 6d. each, Pit, 6d.

RICHARD NICHOLS, TYPOGRAPHER, WAKEFIELD.

Poster for the benefit performance for the widow and children of Paul de Philipsthal presented in Wakefield, May 1829. (Although titled 'Mechanical Pieces' with the exception of item one the other items above the line appear to be lantern views.)



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 produced 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 Abeldar 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'.

My sincerest thanks to the following individuals for their help in the preparation of this series of articles: Theodore X Barber, Mike Bartley, Undine Concanon and Madame Tussaud plc, Richard Crangle and the Bill Douglas Centre, Dr Eddie Dawes, Ann Hecht, Stephen Herbert, Ricky Jay, Peter Jewell, John Jones, Laurent Mannoni and the Collection Cinémathèque française – musée du cinéma, David Robinson, Deac Rossell, Mike Simkin, Lester Smith, Janet Tamblin, Alan Wesenraft and the Harry Price Library, Thomas Weynants.

## MORE ON MELIES

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	<b>The Magic Lantern.</b> ( <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.

