

# A MAGIC LANTERN SHOW AT VERSAILLES

Jean Louis Coicault

My father belonged to 'Les Amis de Versailles' (Friends of Versailles) for many years and he introduced me to Madame Viard, the Director. After giving her a presentation at home she

decided, a few months later, to invite our small society to give a show at the Palace of Versailles – the most important show we had never done!

On a cold winter morning, 11 December 2022, we got up at 6.30am, had a good breakfast and took an hour to pack the car. After going through security checks at the Palace of Versailles we drove through the gates and up to the 142-seat auditorium where

the stage manager helped us unpack. I had to put my lantern table over the first row of seats in order to fill the 3m diameter screen and finally finished the installation at 1.00pm, two hours before the start – time for a small lunch and a quick rehearsal. The team had all arrived and got into costume. They were: two readers



The Palace at Versailles, on arrival



The performers assemble



Jean Louis setting up the lantern in the auditorium



The audience arrive

Marie Astrid and Anne Marie, my daughter Adèle at the music desk, Sylvie and myself at the magic lantern, plus my partner Tilia and my granddaughter Maëlie (7 years old) and one extra ... just in case.

Half an hour before the show, the audience began to arrive – the dream was becoming a reality! At 3.00pm it was show time. Katelyn from 'Les Amis de Versailles' introduced our company and the show. Then I said a few words about the history of the magic lantern and our show. At 3.15pm we began. All the slides were accompanied with a reading, music and sound effects. At the end of the show, when the pressure was off, I happily answered questions. We had many, from both adults and children, about the lantern, the slides in general and the mechanical slides in particular. By the time the discussion had finished it was 5.30pm and time to pack up. We left the Palace at 7.00pm with wonderful memories and dreams of magic lantern slides.



From the show: La tempête (The storm)



From the show: La vie secrète d'une Abbaye (The secret life of an abbey)

## THE PROGRAMME

- |  |                                 |
|--|---------------------------------|
| 1. The sorcerer  | 6. Dick Whittington and his cat |
| 2. The secret life of an abbey                                       | 7. The man who ate a rat        |
| 3. In search of the explorer Sir John Franklin (text by Jules Verne) | 8. The water mill               |
| 4. The storm   | 9. An evening at Versailles     |
| 5. Comic slides  | 10. Chromatropes                |
| INTERMISSION   | 11. Goodnight                   |
|  | Questions                       |



Leaving the Palace of Versailles at night

Jean Louis Coicault is Président of the association Histoires de Lanternes in France, whose members presented the show.