

Georges Méliès: Impossible Voyager

Special Effects Epics, 1902 – 1912



Thursday, May 15, 2008
Northwest Film Forum, Seattle, WA

Co-presented by The Sprocket Society and the Northwest Film Forum

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Narration for *The Impossible Voyage* translated by David Shepard. Used with permission. (Minor edits were made for this performance.) It can be heard with a fully restored version of the film on the *Georges Méliès: First Wizard of Cinema (1896-1913)* DVD box set (Flicker Alley, 2008).

This evening's program is dedicated to John and Carolyn Rader.

The Sprocket Society

...seeks to cultivate the love of the mechanical cinema, its arts and sciences, and to encourage film preservation by bringing film and its history to the public through screenings, educational activities, and our own archival efforts.

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The Northwest Film Forum

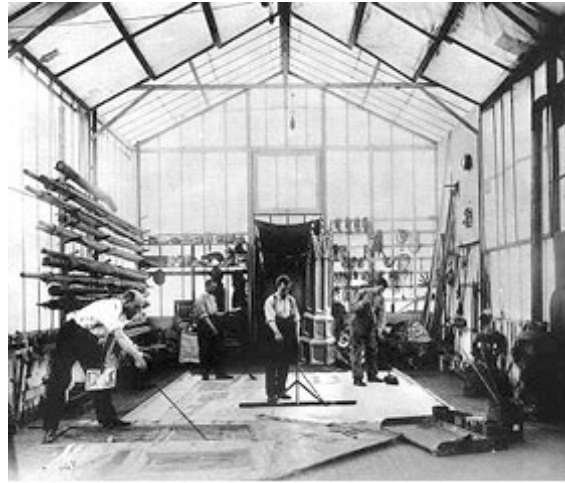
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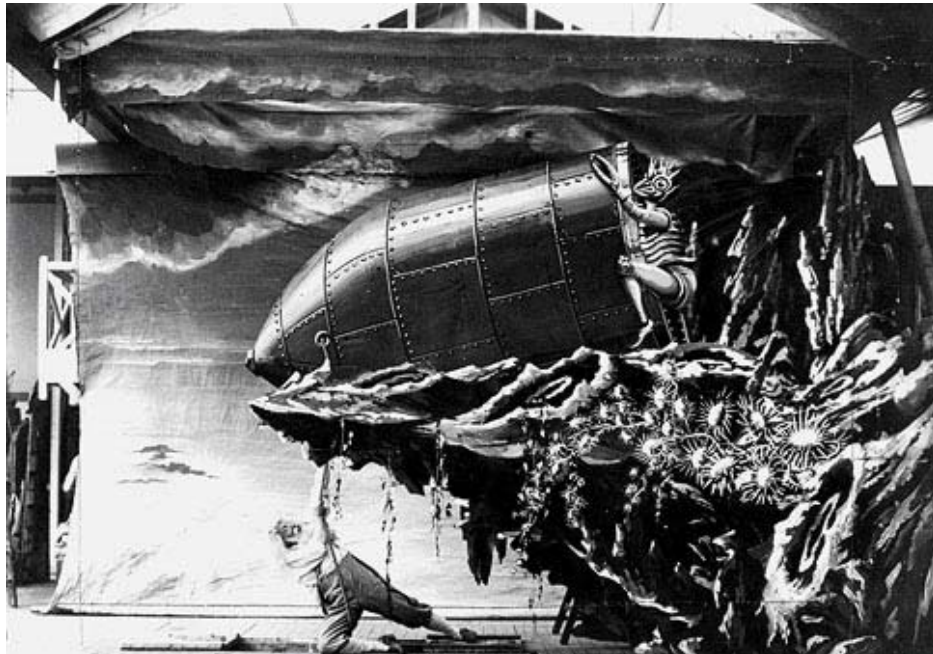
THE STAR FILMS STUDIO, MONTREUIL, FRANCE



The exterior of the glass-house studio Méliès built in his garden at Montreuil, France — the first movie studio of its kind in the world. The short extension with the sloping roof visible at far right is where the camera was placed. In 1905 a second, somewhat larger studio was built.



The interior of the same studio. Méliès can be seen working at left (with the long stick). As you can see, the studio was actually quite small. The stage area was only 16 x 13 feet, exactly the dimensions as that of the Théâtre Robert-Houdin.



A rare behind-the-scenes photo showing an ornate set (from *A Trip to the Moon*) within the tight confines of the Montreuil studio. Below the dangling actor can be seen one of the numerous trap doors Méliès built into the floor.

A Trip to the Moon

(*Le Voyage dans la Lune*; *Voyage to the Moon*)
1902. Star Films #399-411. B&W.

Music. Pink Floyd: “Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun” from the soundtrack to *Pink Floyd: Live at Pompeii* (April Fools Productions, 1972-4)



A meeting of the Scientific Congress of the Astronomer's Club, decked out in wizardly garb, decides to make an expedition to the moon. We visit a great factory as their craft – a giant hollow cannon shell – is being built. Launched from an enormous cannon with the help of some scantily-clad dancing girls, the shell flies through space and lands squarely in the eye of the Man in the Moon (perhaps the most famous image in film history). After a brief dream-filled nap, the explorers are forced by the intense cold to retreat below the surface into vast caverns. There they are confronted by insect-like Selenites. After a Homeric battle, the explorers are captured and taken before the King of the Moon. Attacking the King, they make good their escape, pursued by an army of Selenites. Back

on the surface, they reclaim their capsule and fall back to Earth, a Selenite clinging to the outside. The craft lands in the ocean and is towed to port by a passing ship. Back on dry land, they are feted as heroes by local dignitaries and the captured Selenite is paraded before the crowd. A statue is erected in their honor, its inscription reading “Labor omnia vincit” (work conquers all).

Notes. Later in life, Méliès said this was not his personal favorite. “In brief, it was considered my masterpiece – I don’t agree with that,” he wrote.

Produced well before the Wright brothers flew at Kitty Hawk, Méliès’ most famous film is not only the first true science fiction epic, it is a landmark in the development of cinema. *Le Voyage dans la Lune* is among the very first to tell a story in more than one scene (even before Edwin S. Porter’s *The Great Train Robbery*). It was also a bona fide epic, running nearly 20 minutes in its original version at a time when all other films were still only perhaps five minutes long at most.

It was the longest and most sophisticated film Méliès had produced to date, requiring many months of work at a total cost of 10,000 francs – an *unbelievable* sum for a movie in those days. It premiered at Méliès’ Théâtre Robert-Houdin, and was soon after shown at a major Paris fair. *A Trip to the Moon* quickly took the world by storm, playing in some theaters for months on end, whereas even the most successful films played a week at most.

The story borrows liberally from both Jules Verne and H.G. Wells, whose novel *The First Men on the Moon* had first been serialized in *Cosmopolitan* magazine in 1900-1901. But another influence was undoubtedly an 1876 *opéra bouffe* of the same title by Jacques Offenbach (*Tales of Hoffmann*) which had successful runs at Théâtre de la Gaîté in Paris and later at Niblo’s Garden Theatre in New York City.

The concluding scene of the travelers’ return celebration in this print is quite rare, absent from most circulating film copies and, until quite recently, on video. In 2002, the most complete print yet was found in a French barn. It was also hand-colored, thus far the only such copy known to survive. A restored version of this was premiered at a free outdoor screening at the Louvre, and later presented in 2003 at the famous Pordenone Silent Film Festival in Italy.

In one famous episode, a film purchaser visited the prominent NY film distributor Sigmund Lubin. Various films were shown to him. One of these was a bootleg copy of *A Trip to the Moon*. Méliès had placed his Star Films logo on the sets at various points throughout the film, but Lubin had his technicians carefully scratch them out. Upon seeing the film, the man jumped up in a rage. “You want me to buy that film?” he shouted. “I made that picture! I am George Méliès from Paris!” Lubin simply glared back and responded by describing how difficult it had been to block out his trademark. Astonished, Méliès stomped out. Soon after, he had his brother Gaston start a US office, charged with copyrighting his films in the US.

The Kingdom of the Fairies

(*Les Royaumes de Fées; Fairyland*)

1903. Star Films #483-498. B&W.

Music. Igor Stravinsky, *The Rite of Spring*, Part II (extended excerpt).

At the party celebrating the betrothal of Prince Belazor and Princess Azurine, even the fairies are in attendance. A wicked fairy is slighted and casts a curse on the princess. The evil fairy and her army of spirits kidnap Princess Azurine from her bedroom, carrying her off into the night. The prince arrives and battles some lingering demons, but is too late to save his beloved. The court watches as the evil spirits fly away across the sky.

In the armory of the castle, warriors prepare their pursuit. As Prince Belazor brings up the rear, the evil fairy appears and shows him a vision of the princess being hauled up by a rope into a fortress on a desolate island far at sea. He pleads with the evil fairy, but she only laughs and disappears. A good fairy then appears and gives the prince magic armor that will protect him during the rescue. Emboldened, Prince Belazor and his men set sail on the royal ship. But as it pulls away, the evil fairy appears once more and casts a curse on the ship. Soon it is caught in a terrible conjured storm, wrecks on the rocks, and sinks to the bottom of the sea.

In the depths, Prince Belazor and his men are rescued by the Queen of the Deep. They travel through the Palace of Lobsters and the Azure Grotto to the court of King Neptune. Pleading their case to him, King Neptune pledges his support. Taken to the castle in the belly of a whale, the prince saves the princess, stuffs the evil fairy in a barrel and throws her over a cliff. The royal couple return to their castle to live happily ever after.



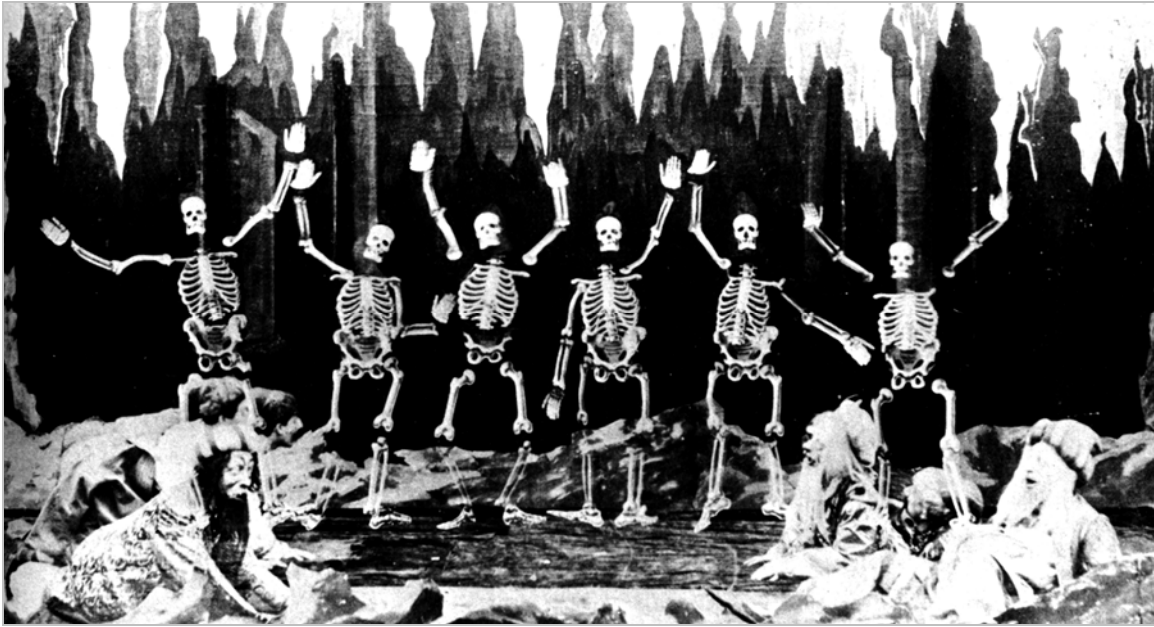
Notes. *The Kingdom of the Fairies* is loosely based on the theatrical fairy pantomime, *Biche au Bois*, first staged in 1845 at the Théâtre Porte-Saint Martin. This film was Méliès' most ambitious to date and a genuine epic of the day. It had an original running time of about 20 minutes, but all existing copies are incomplete (some even ending with the departure of the ship, about half-way through the story). It was heavily promoted and widely distributed, and many prints were lavishly hand-colored. In the big cities, it was accompanied by a specially-composed score, an extremely rare if not unheard-of practice at the time. *The Kingdom of the Fairies* also includes a "meanwhile" sequence, a cinematic device rarely used by Méliès even years later.

The Palace of the Arabian Nights

(*Le Palais des Mille et Une Nuits; The Palace of 1001 Arabian Nights*)

1905. Star Films #705-726. B&W.

Music. The Master Musicians of Jajouka: “The Middle Of The Night”, “Bujloudia”, and “Jajouka Between The Mountains” from *Apocalypse Across the Sky* (Axiom, 1992)



A handsome prince seeks the hand of the princess Aouda. Her father the rajah sends him on a quest to find a great golden treasure, armed with a magic sword. Special rites are held in the grotto temple of Shiva, who gives her blessing. A genie appears from a magic plant and is sent with the prince, the two embarking on swan boats. As they enter the jungle they are beset by acrobatic beasts. Soon they find themselves in the Ice Palace where they battle dancing skeletons. Escaping with their lives, they arrive at a grotto filled with serpentine monsters and giant toads. The goddess of the underworld appears (along with some dancing beauties in tutus), and at last the prince comes to the Palace of the Arabian Nights. The treasure is revealed and an army of slaves carry it and the prince back to the castle of the rajah. The heroic prince wins the princess and they live happily ever after.

Notes. A rare surviving example of Méliès many adventure-and-costume dramas, and probably his most lavish one. Once again, the main inspiration for this film was a stage pantomime: *Aladdin*, created in the 1880s by Alfred Thompson. Méliès' production reflects the period's fascination with exotica, borrowing from Indian, Middle Eastern, and Southeast Asian cultures and landmarks in a riotously incongruous collage.

Almost all of the effects and wonders are produced using classic stage techniques, with little camera trickery beyond some superimpositions and dissolves. Nevertheless, the use of multilayered flats during the prince's passage through the jungle is spectacular even today. To see such things performed in real life at the turn of the century must have been astonishing.

The sumptuous costumes were among a large inventory Méliès bought earlier that year from Maison Lepère, a Paris stage costumer that had gone bankrupt – something that likely helped spur him to produce an exotic adventure. The cast includes acrobats from the Châtelet theater.

The Méliès box set from Flicker Alley includes a spectacular restoration of this film, with extensive hand-colored and what appear to be stencil-colored sequences (if so, a true rarity for Méliès).

Paris to Monte Carlo

(*Le Raid Paris-Monte Carlo en Deux Heures*; *Les Voyages automobile Paris-Monte Carlo deux heures*; *An Adventurous Automobile Trip*.)

1905. Star Films #740-749. Partly hand-colored.

Music. Dick “Two Ton” Baker: “Civilization” (Mercury Records, 1947); and, Fred Lane & Ron ‘Pate’s Debonairs: “Fun in the Fundus” from *From the One that Cut You* (Shimmy-Disc, 1989)

From the Star Films catalog:
“King Leopold of Belgium has come to Paris to renew his acquaintances among the dainty ‘Parisiennes’ who for some time past have known how to appreciate his great fondness for their society. He ardently desires to make a trip to Monte Carlo, the celebrated watering place and gambling resort in the principality of Monaco, but his time is so limited that he cannot give up the seventeen hours necessary for the trip by express from Paris to the Riviera. He chances to meet, wholly by accident, an automobile manufacturer who makes a proposition to accomplish the journey in two hours, and it is this surprisingly rapid journey which is portrayed by the cinematographe.”



But as you will see, none of this is actually related in this classic Gallic farce. We meet the King while he is preparing to leave for Monte Carlo, greeting the crowd in the Paris streets. Later, while filling the tank with gasoline, he loses control of the car and it accidentally backs over a gendarme, flattening him like a sheet. Bicycle pumps are used to re-inflate him – alas, too zealously. The poor man explodes.

As the King and his driving companion careen across the French countryside, they cause all manner of mayhem. Upon finally arriving at festive Monte Carlo, the car flies through the air and crashes onto a bandstand full of well-dressed socialites. The King emerges waving imperiously, oblivious to the outraged mob around him.

Notes. *Le Raid Paris-Monte Carlo en Deux Heures* was originally commissioned by the Folies-Bergère for use in a revue, written by Victor de Cottens, which ran for 300 performances. It was, of course, a satire of the real King Leopold II of Belgium, a famous boulevardier with a taste for Parisian dancers and fast cars, and a legendary reputation for reckless driving. He is also noted for his psychotically despotic rule of the Belgian colony of the Congo, making this evening’s opening musical selection – with its chorus of “Bongo bongo bongo / I don’t want to leave the Congo” – rather piquant.

Numerous members of the Folies-Bergère troupe appear in the film, including featured cameos by the Swedish giant Antonich and English music hall star Little Tich (Harry Relph) – a dwarf famous for comic routines employing boots with 28-inch wooden slats attached to the soles – who are briefly featured in a cigarette-lighting bit. Little Tich previously appeared in a sound film produced in 1900 by the Phono-Cinéma-Théâtre company.

There are two or three versions of this movie circulating on film prints (including one preserved by the George Eastman House), which have some scenes in slightly different order and with different colors used in the hand-colored segments.

The Merry Frolics of Satan

(*Les Quatre Cents Farces du Diable.*)

1906. Star Films #849-870. Tinted.

Music. Hal Russell NRG Ensemble: “Hal on Earth” and “Calling All Mothers” from *Hal on Earth* (self-released cassette, 1989; Abduction CD, 1995)

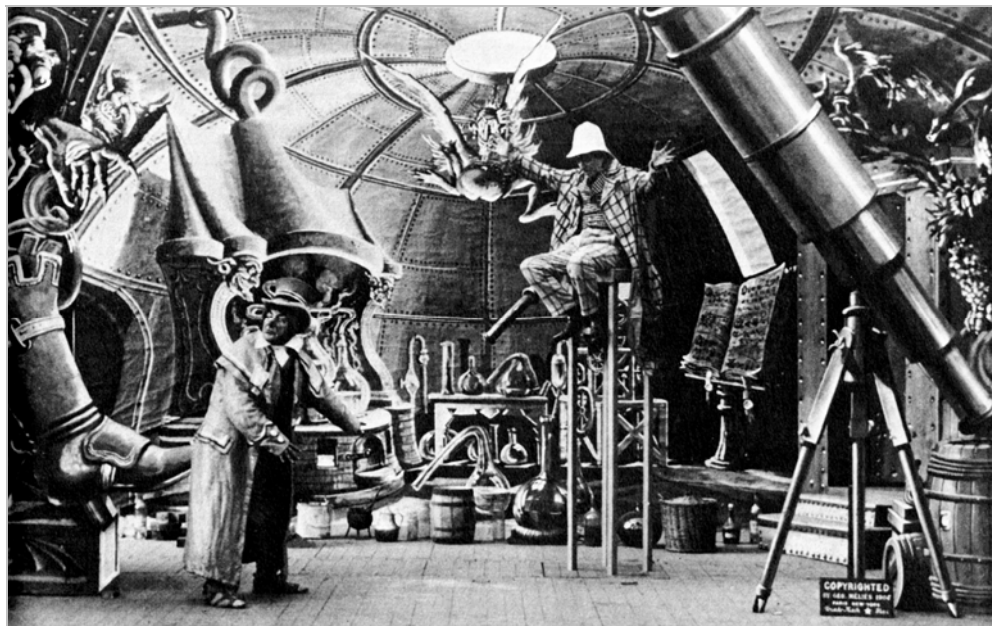
The engineer William Crackford and his assistant are bade to visit the wondrous laboratory of a mysterious Alchemist. The Alchemist prepares for them magic “bombs” that instantly create whatever the thrower wants. They offer to pay the Wizard cash, but he waves it away. Instead he has them sign a contract, and off they go with their new toys. But alas — the Alchemist is actually Satan in disguise!

During a party at their home, the engineers use the magic bombs to create a miniature train. They and their guests climb aboard and ride merrily off. But Satan appears, turns the servants into demons, then takes them all to Hell. Disaster strikes the engineers as a bridge the devilish train is crossing collapses, killing all of the guests. The engineers flee, avoiding capture by angry bystanders.

Now fugitives, the two men travel from inn to inn. But unbeknownst to them Satan is also following. Ravenously hungry, the friends keep trying to eat only to have the food and furniture fly away. At one inn, Satan sends in some evil imps — all Hell breaks loose as imps, engineers, and chefs flail about.

Desperate to get away, the hapless engineers run outside and jump aboard a waiting carriage. Suddenly it transforms into a Carriage of Death, drawn by a skeletal horse. Satan drives up from behind in a car, rams the carriage and pushes it right into the mouth of a volcano. The Carriage of Death flies through strange firmaments, while weird beasts and visions drift by. Suddenly, the two friends crash through a roof and land amidst yet another fine repast. But even their last meal is denied them! Satan once again appears and, contract in hand, drags Crackford into Hell. While demons and devils dance all about, Crackford is skewered on a giant spit and roasted over an open flame, as Satan rises above the demonic hoard. Fire and brimstone explode all about, drawing the film to an apocalyptic close.

Notes. Although a lesser-known film this is Méliès at his peak, with impeccable timing, gorgeous sets, and “chaos” as tightly choreographed as a Busby Berkley number. In 1905, the Châtelet theater commissioned Méliès to film the flying demon-horse sequence for use in their new stage production, *The Merry Deeds of Satan* by Victor Darlay and Victor de Cottens, itself a reworking of the old 1839 favorite, *The Devil’s Pills*. When the show closed in 1906, Méliès shot new scenes to fill out the story, diverging from the Châtelet version but preserving key elements from the older one, and released this masterpiece.



Conquest of the Pole

(À la Conquête du Pôle)

1913, Pathé Films. B&W, with original French intertitles.

Music. The Residents: *Eskimo*. Remix prepared by Scott Colburn, especially for this program.

The greatest scholars of the world meet at Le Club Aeronautique to discuss how they might reach the North Pole. Professor Maboul (“Crazy”) presents a solution: his griffin-headed “Aero-bus,” complete with helicopter action (decades before any real helicopter). Maboul’s factory is seen hard at work on the fantastic machine. Later, at an airfield, the Aero-bus and other flying machines are inspected in advance of take-off.

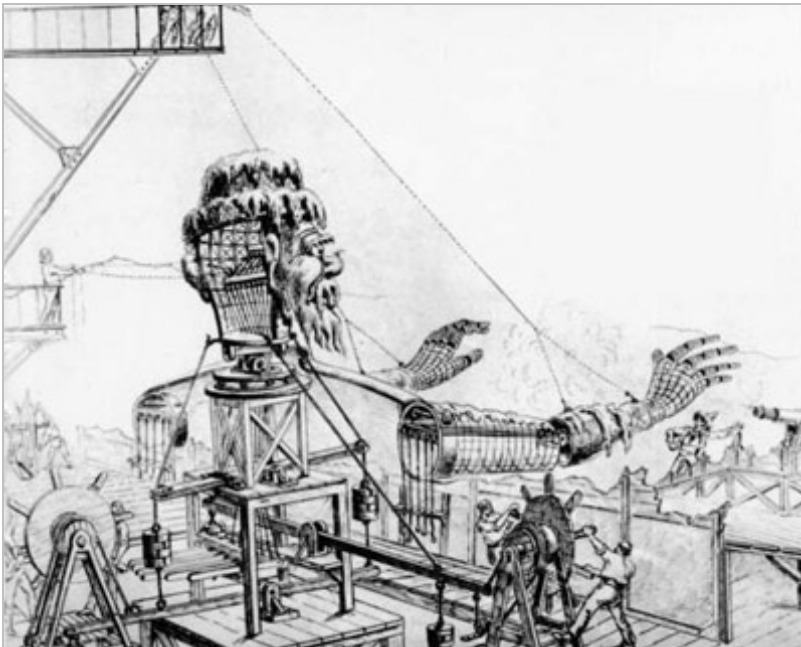
Somewhat inexplicably (tho it was topical at the time), a group of Suffragettes indignantly insist on participating in the expedition, but are rebuffed as the Aero-bus takes to the air. Other competitors also launch their craft – when a balloon is launched, one of the Suffragettes grabs a dangling rope. Alas, at a great height she loses her grip and falls through the air to be impaled on a steeple. Just for good measure, she explodes. Without its Suffragette ballast, the balloon rockets too high and also explodes. Meanwhile, back on the ground, other competitors in automobiles meet a similar fate, falling to their doom off a tall precipice.

Maboul’s Aero-bus traverses the heavens, the adventurers on board marveling at the stars and constellations that are so close, Scorpio sends the craft reeling with a stroke of its tail. Soon they land on frozen wasteland of the North Pole. Suddenly, a figure rises into view: The Giant of the Snows! In panic the men run about as the Giant grabs one poor fellow and devours him whole! A handy cannon is retrieved and when it is fired at the strange beast, he regurgitates his meal unharmed.

Exploring further, Maboul and his company come upon the icy needle of the North Pole, whose magnetic power is so strong they fly through the air and become helplessly stuck to it. Alas! Their combined weight is too much, and the great Needle topples with them into the frozen arctic waters. Thankfully, an airship flying a French flag appears at this desperate juncture and rescues the poor bastards from certain doom. Flown back to the warm haven of Le Club Aeronautique, Maboul and his fellow adventurers are greeted as heroes.

Notes. This one of the very last films Méliès made (only three more followed), and in many ways it is the epitome of his great adventure epics. Originally 20 minutes long, a shorter version is presented here. A largely restored version, complete with original tints, became available on DVD this year.

As usual, Méliès drew inspiration from various places. The bi-polar explorations of Peary,



Amundsen, and Scott were in the news; and aspects of Jules Verne’s *The Adventures of Captain Hatteras* (1897) are also apparent. A more direct inspiration was probably a 1903 film by Robert Paul, *Voyage to the Arctic*, which even featured a giant living at the Pole.

In late 1911, his fortunes failing, Méliès had made a distribution deal with Charles Pathé. But heavy interference and drastic edits of his work – by a director who made a career of Méliès rip-offs, no less – finally led Georges to retire from filmmaking entirely in 1913.

The Impossible Voyage

(Le Voyage à Travers l'Impossible; Whirling the Worlds)

1904. Star Films #641-661. B&W.

Music. Various 78 r.p.m. records, selected by Climax Golden Twins and played on Victrolas.
Presented with the original live narration by Georges Méliès, as translated by David Shepard.



The members of the Institute of Incoherent Geography undertake the greatest expedition ever on their fantastic high-tech train loaded with special vehicles built by Engineer Mabouloff ("Scatterbrains" or "Crazy-head," played by Méliès). They travel across the "wilds" of Switzerland, driving cars through village inns and running their train off a cliff. After leaving the hospital, the "explorers" set out again only to accidentally launch themselves off a mountain top, fly through space, and be swallowed by the Sun. Scorched, they fall back to Earth in a submarine they brought along, landing – fortuitously – in the ocean. Alas, a fire breaks out in the engine room and the ship explodes. The charred nose of the submarine falls through the air to crash on dry land. The adventurers all emerge unharmed to triumphantly return home.

Notes. In this more-or-less sequel to *A Trip to the Moon*, Méliès once again outdid himself with his longest and most expensive film yet (costing a colossal 37,500 Francs, or about \$7,500 at the time). The story was based in part on a successful 1882 theatrical collaboration by Adolphe D'Ennery and Jules Verne himself, which premiered at the Théâtre de la Gaîté. That adventure involved an expedition to the center of the Earth; Méliès decided it would be more entertaining to go to the center of the Sun. There was also a two minute epilogue that could be purchased separately, in which Mabouloff builds a giant magnet to retrieve the cars and vehicles lost during the expedition. A single surviving print of this epilogue was found in 1979; its current status is unclear. Méliès' parodying of modern science and industrialization is more pronounced here than in *A Trip to the Moon*. The Institute is incoherent, and its members have names that translate as President Milktoast, Secretary Fathead, Vice President Fumblefingers, and Mssrs. Busybody and Fatgut. Even their "greatest expedition ever" is ridiculous (how can you "explore" anything on train tracks?), and their being vaulted to the surface of the sun is a result only of their incompetent train driving. Although this copy is black and white, spectacular hand-colored prints of this film do survive.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Dick "Two Ton" Baker

Dick "Two Ton" Baker was a giant (6'2" and 350 pounds) on the Chicago entertainment scene for nearly four decades, from the late 1930s until his death in 1975. A singer and entertainer, he had several popular radio shows on WGN and was a TV pioneer, later starring in very popular children's programs. His appeal spanned all ages, and he recorded numerous novelty, jazz, and children's records during the 1940s and '50s. The song "Civilization" (rel. 1947, written by Bob Hilliard & Carl Sigman) was later a hit for Danny Kaye and the Andrew Sisters.

Climax Golden Twins

For 15 years, Seattle's Climax Golden Twins (Robert Millis, Jeffrey Taylor, and occasional other co-conspirators) have defied categorization with their diverse explorations of sound and music. Their most recent release is *Victrola Favorites: Artifacts from Bygone Days* (Dust to Digital, 2008), a 2-CD compilation of rare 78 RPM recordings from all over the world packaged in a deluxe 144-page clothbound book of illustrations. Their many recordings of their own have run the gamut from delicate environmental and *musique concrète* assemblages to free improv to avant rock splurg to nuanced acoustic guitar compositions and beyond. Their works for film have included an original soundtrack for *Session 9* (2001), and a collage of 78 RPM records for *Grass* (1925) which was screened at the Experience Music Project and the Grand Illusion Cinema. They have also created scores and sound environments for installations, art exhibits and dance.

Scott Colburn

Seattle-based producer/engineer and sound designer Scott Colburn has been performing audio wizardry since 1982, when he was a central figure in the Indiana punk scene. For more than 25 years, he has helped realize some of the most adventurous and respected music in the world for albums, film, radio, and live performances spanning every conceivable genre. Just some of the artists Colburn has worked with include: John Fahey, Harmony Korine, Sun City Girls, Animal Collective, Arcade Fire, Cerberus Shoal, Elizabeth Falconer, Mudhoney, Eyvind Kang, Amy Denio, Caroliner, Charlton Heston, Sidney Sheldon, and of course Climax Golden Twins, which he was a member of for several years. His audio restoration work includes the Grammy Award-winning Charlie Patton box set *Screamin' and Hollerin' the Blues*, Revanant's landmark Captain Beefheart box set *Grow Fins*, as well as recordings by Cecil Taylor, The Sonics, Betty Davis, Albert Ayler, and the Tolowa Indian Tribe.

Fred Lane

The *nom de plume* of Tim R. Reed, a musician, raconteur, and woodworker in the university town of Tuscaloosa, Alabama. During the mid-'70s, he was part of an avant garde music scene heavily influenced by Alfred Jarry's 'pataphysics and the emerging free-improvisation scene of the time. Lane/Reed often performed with Ron 'Pate's Debonairs, an 11-piece big band that merged skilled musicianship with anarchic arrangements and outrageous humor. The song "Fun in the Fundus" was originally part of the stage production *From the One that Cut You*, and was recorded in Tuscaloosa on Nov. 13, 1976.

The Master Musicians of Jajouka

Jajouka is a village in the Rif Mountains of Morocco. There the Attar clan are keepers of one of the world's oldest and most unique surviving musical traditions. According to legend, if they stop playing their pipes, the world will end. From early childhood, the master musicians of Jajouka are taught a complex music unique to the village in a tradition said to be as old as 1,300 years. Seen as having great spiritual power, the Attar clan are guardians of the shrine of the 8th century holy imam Sidi Ahmed Sheikh, and for generations were the Royal Court musicians for Moroccan kings. Artists Brion Gysin and Paul Bowles learned of the Master Musicians in 1950. Later, their friend William S. Burroughs wrote extensively about Jajouka's ancient rituals and powerful music. During the 1960s, Brian Jones of the Rolling Stones visited for some

time, later producing a legendary album of heavily processed collages of recordings he made there. During the late 1980s and 1990s, the Master Musicians began to record and occasionally tour the West. The pieces played with this evening's program are all from the album *Apocalypse Across the Sky*, produced by Bill Laswell in 1992, which proved to be a major breakthrough that reintroduced them to a new generation.

Pink Floyd

Formed in 1964 by some friends at Cambridge, Pink Floyd hardly need any introduction. *Live at Pompeii* was filmed in late 1971, capping a period following the tragic departure of founding songwriter Syd Barrett in 1968 and just before the 1973 release of *Dark Side of the Moon*. The group had created soundtracks for the films *More* (Barbet Schroeder, 1969) and *Zabriskie Point* (Antonioni, 1970), with *La Vallee* soon to follow in 1972. These experiences had an undeniable influence on their sound. This version of "Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun," while used in the *Live at Pompeii* film, was actually filmed on a soundstage in Paris with front projection of material shot on location.

The Residents

Best recognized by their signature eyeball masks, The Residents are a mysterious and famously anonymous art collective that formed sometime in the late 1960s, allegedly in Louisiana, and in 1971 took root in San Francisco where they founded Ralph Records. Everything else about the group is shrouded in legend, usually intentionally misleading. What is known is that, working from a Dada-influenced aesthetic, The Residents have been influential pioneers in electronic music, video, and performance art. Over the last 30-40 years, they have released over 60 albums (including one LP with three sides), as well as numerous films, DVDs, and multimedia projects. Their classic album *Eskimo* (1979) was remixed by Scott Colburn especially for tonight's program.

Hal Russell NRG Ensemble

Hal Russell (born Harold Luttenbacher, 1926-1992) was a pioneering figure in Chicago's free jazz scene whose mark is still felt today. Moving from Detroit to Chicago as a teenager, Russell learned drums and vibes. Soon he was playing and sitting in with some of the biggest names in jazz, including Woody Herman, Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman small groups, Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins, and many others. In the early 1960s he played in the Joe Daley Trio, which recorded one of the earliest free jazz records in Chicago. In the early 1970s, he started a series of his own groups (usually with saxophonist Mars Williams) and composed for them. Russell began to learn saxophone in 1977 and embarked on a major period of creative exploration. In 1978 he formed the NRG Ensemble, a quintet of multi-instrumentalists. The original group released several small-run albums, but achieved little notice. In the late 1980s, the final NRG Ensemble line-up solidified and the group began to play monthly gigs at Club Lower Links, honing their anarchic sound into a finely controlled machine. In 1990 the quintet played at the famous Moers Festival, and Europe sat up and took notice. In short order, a record deal was signed with the prestigious ECM label, and they began to play other major European jazz festivals. Three full-length CDs were released in just two years. Then in 1992, five months after finishing his last album, Russell died of a heart attack in Chicago. The NRG Ensemble continues today with its original members, augmented by MacArthur Fellowship winning saxophonist Ken Vandermark (who briefly played with NRG while Hal was still alive). Hal's legacy and influence was also felt through his constant mentoring of young musicians, including many who are still active new music artists, including Jeb Bishop, Weasel Walter (founder of The Flying Luttenbachers), and others.

Igor Stravinsky

Considered by many in both the West and his native land to be the most influential composer of 20th century music. He was a quintessentially cosmopolitan Russian who was named by *Time* magazine as one of the 100 most influential people of the century. His 1913 ballet, *The Rite of Spring* (*Le sacre du printemps*), was so radical that a riot broke out at its premiere and the police had to be called to quell the violence. Choreographer Nijinsky was forced to shout the beats to his dancers from offstage, because the music could not be heard over the din of the fighting crowd.

LOST VISIONS: SAVING THE FILMS OF MÉLIÈS

In all, Georges Méliès is known to have made about 525 films in just 16 years (including five advertising films produced from 1896 to 1900 but never openly released.) When Méliès died in 1938, he believed only eight of them still existed. The fate of these films is a storied one, at times seeming as though destiny conspired to rob future generations of Méliès' wonderful and groundbreaking work.

The problems began as early as 1907, when a number of negatives were stolen from the New York office of Star Films, perhaps by someone working for a competitor such as Sigmund Lubin. These never surfaced again, but may well have been used as masters for some of the many bootleg prints that circulated over the years, much to Méliès' chagrin.

In 1913, Méliès stopped making films, though he continued to show his work at his theater until 1914, when all cinemas and theaters in Paris were ordered closed at the outbreak of what proved to be World War I. Then in 1917, at the height of the war, Méliès' offices at the Passage de l'Opera were occupied by the military. Hundreds of prints and negatives stored there were seized and melted down to recover their silver content and convert the celluloid into boot heels for the army – a terrible irony for a man who had sold his shares in the family boot empire to finance his plunge into the theater.

1923 was a terrible year for Méliès. The Théâtre Robert-Houdin was ordered demolished to make way for a new street. All of the prints stored there were sold by the pound to a merchant who in turn sold them off to second-hand film collectors and at street markets. In the same year, the last remnants of Méliès' Star Films buildings and facilities were lost to Pathé in a long-pending foreclosure delayed by the war. Forced to live in a tiny Paris apartment with his family, one night a despairing and embittered Méliès burned the last negatives still in his possession. Forgotten and impoverished, Méliès resigned himself to a life selling candy and toys in a small, drafty stand outside the Paris train station.

Meanwhile, in 1920 Jean Mauclaire had discovered a small cache of Méliès prints stored in some dairy buildings on the estate of the executor of the Dufayel will. (The Dufayel Department Store had commissioned Méliès to make a number of films, ca. 1906, to be shown to its clientele and their children.) Mauclaire held onto these films until 1929, when they were shown at a special gala honoring Méliès. After this, Mauclaire gave all of his copies to the Cinematheque Francais. In 1940, as the Germans invaded France again, these films and many others were evacuated from Paris to Tours. Nevertheless, they were eventually found and confiscated by the Nazis and ultimately lost forever. Fortunately, the Cinematheque had loaned some of their Méliès films to Walt Disney during preproduction for *Fantasia*. Disney kept them safe and at the end of the war returned them to a liberated France.

More than a decade later, in the early 1950s, a number of other films were recovered. Beginning in 1903, the Star Films office in the US began submitting paper prints to the Library of Congress for copyright purposes. For many years there was no provision for copyrighting motion pictures. Early on, one of Edison's lawyers struck on the solution of printing films on long strips of paper 35mm wide. Since they were on paper they could be copyrighted, and soon other filmmakers and studios followed suit. After 1914 or so, when changes to US law permitted copyrighting actual celluloid prints, the LOC paper print collection had been largely forgotten, left to languish and decay. In 1953, LOC librarian Kemp Niver spearheaded a massive effort to preserve and laboriously rephotograph, frame by frame, as many of the paper prints as possible onto 16mm safety film. Consequently, 33 Méliès films thought lost were rediscovered.

The Museum of Modern Art in New York also played a key role in saving the films of Méliès. Its Film Library, founded in 1935, had acquired a sizable number of early and rare films. In 1939, the library began to make titles available through public screenings and its circulating film program. One of the first of its specially-compiled 16mm programs was devoted to Méliès, and this was made available to film societies, universities, and organizations all over the US.

But even with the combined Méliès collections at the LOC and MOMA, as well as others in France and Britain, by 1961 the accepted belief among scholars was that only some 50 Méliès films – less than one-tenth of his work – had survived. The rest were thought to have been destroyed or simply lost forever.

Then, some time later, it was discovered that a group of 65 Méliès films had been donated as a restricted collection to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in Los Angeles. Georges Méliès' brother, Gaston, had for many years distributed Star Films in the US, as well as running a small production company specializing mainly in westerns. When the Star Films company collapsed in 1913, Gaston closed the US operation and decided to embark for Asia. Reportedly without the knowledge of Georges, he sold

all of the Star Films negatives and prints he had been holding to the Vitagraph Company. In 1925, Vitagraph was acquired by the new Warner Brothers company. In the 1930s, legendary producer Leon Schlesinger (best known for the Looney Tunes and Merry Melodies cartoons) became interested in the collection of Méliès films. He managed to convince Warners to sell him the negatives, which he kept for the rest of his life. When Schlesinger died in 1949, his widow donated them to the Academy but the terms of the agreement stipulated there be no public access to them. Later, in order to preserve the decaying nitrate negatives, the Academy made fine grain duplicates. Finally, in 1975, Mrs. Schlesinger relinquished control over the collection. Blackhawk Films purchased the commercial rights, while the Academy made prints for its permanent collection and then deposited the original negatives with the Library of Congress. Thirty of those 65 films proved to be titles thought to have been lost forever.

Through these and other archival discoveries, by 1979 fully 137 Méliès films had been saved and many were in wide circulation as Super 8 and 16mm prints sold to the home and library markets primarily by Blackhawk Films.

Rescue work has continued, spearheaded in large measure by Georges' granddaughter Madeleine Malthête-Méliès (raised by Georges and his second wife after her mother's death). She made it her mission to save as many of her grandfather's films as possible, founding the association Les Amis de Georges Méliès in 1945 for that purpose.

More recent discoveries

The last decade has seen a surprising number of new rediscoveries.

In 1999, "two hundred pounds" of Méliès films – including many believed lost – were discovered hidden in a house in France. These came under the control of the preservation group Lobster Films in Paris. A number of these films were shown in 2002 at the 20th Pordenone Silent Film Festival in Italy.

In 2000, the 200th Méliès film to be recovered was screened at Pordenone, plus two other new discoveries, as part of an extensive program devoted to Méliès.

In 2002, the most complete print yet of *A Trip to the Moon* was found in a French barn. It was also hand-colored, perhaps the only such copy surviving.

In 2005, a print of *Cléopâtre (Robbing Cleopatra's Tomb)*, 1899, Star Films #175-176) was discovered in a French store room.

FURTHER READING

- John Frazer, *Artificially Arranged Scenes* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1979). Invaluable. Hands-down the best English-language book about Méliès and his films. Sadly, it's also rare as hens' teeth. Includes extensive biographical information, a history of Star Films, and an exhaustive filmography with detailed descriptions and production notes about all Méliès films known to survive at the time of publication. Illustrated throughout.
- David Robinson, *Georges Méliès: Father of Film Fantasy* (London: BFI/Museum of the Moving Image, 1993). An extremely thin but well written and researched book published as a companion to a Méliès retrospective by the British Film Institute. Probably the best introduction, but somewhat hard to find.
- Paul Hammond, *Marvelous Méliès* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975). Thin but very worthwhile, albeit organized in rather scattershot fashion. Profusely illustrated throughout, with solid research for the time. Includes a non-annotated filmography with survival status (ca. 1975). A fine if dated book.
- Maurice Bessy and Lo Duca, *Georges Méliès, Mage* (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1961; orig. Prisma Editions, 1945 in an edition of 2,000) Alas, only ever published en Français and also fairly rare, but the first extensive biography and a true treasure trove of rare illustrations, including original production sketches. Also includes extensive excerpts of *Mes Memoires* by Méliès.
- Stan Brakhage, *The Brakhage Lectures: Georges Méliès, David Wark Griffith, Carl Theodore Dreyer, Sergei Eisenstein* (Chicago: The Good Lion/School of the Art Institute, 1972) Transcripts of lectures given as part of a credit course at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago during the fall and early winter of 1970-71. Available for free (legal) download at <http://www.ubu.com/historical/brakhage/>
- Elizabeth Ezra, *Georges Méliès: The Birth of the Auteur* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000). A slim book emphasizing analysis and geared toward the film school and theorist crowd. Still, it has a lot of useful information.
- Frank Thompson, *The Star Film Ranch: Texas' First Picture Show* (Plano, TX: Republic of Texas Press/Wordware Publishing, 1996). The only book devoted to the film work of Georges' brother, Gaston Méliès, who ran the US office of Star Films. Relocating to Hot Wells, TX in 1910, Gaston began producing his own films, primarily westerns, very few of which survive today. Includes an extensive filmography, with lengthy quotes from the trade press of the day. Illustrated.

FILMS AND VIDEO

- Le Grand Méliès* (Georges Franju dir., 1952) – with Andre Méliès as his father. A loving featurette homage.
- Georges Méliès: First Wizard of Cinema (1896–1913)* (Flicker Alley, 2008) – the gold standard home video collection of Méliès, with 173 films (most of the ones known to survive, including his very first) on five discs, plus an illustrated booklet. Expensive, but well worth it for true devotees.
- Ballerinas in Hell: A Georges Méliès Album* (Unknown Video, 2004) – includes films and prints previously unavailable elsewhere. Increasingly hard to find, but recommended for those not willing to shell out for the Flicker Alley box set above.
- Méliès the Magician* (Arte Video, 1997) – a new documentary plus numerous Méliès films, mainly shorter works from his incredibly prolific 1903-1905 period. Frankly, most are fairly lackluster.
- The Movies Begin, vol. 4: The Magic of Méliès* (Kino, 1994) – 15 films, plus a documentary. Most films are minor works, except for *The Impossible Voyage* which is presented in a hand-colored restoration and with the original narration. Re-released in May 2008 as the stand-alone DVD, *The Magic of Méliès*.
- Landmarks of Early Film, vol. 2: The Magic of Méliès* (Image Entertainment, 1994) – almost identical to the Kino collection above.
- Various anthologies and individual shorts released by Blackhawk Films (later: Film Preservation Associates) on Super 8 and 16mm (1976–2007). Individual titles were: *A Trip to the Moon*, *The Impossible Voyage*, *Paris to Monte Carlo*, *Baron Munchausen's Dream*, and *Conquest of the Pole*. A catalog of the numerous anthologies and the films included in them can be found online at... http://www.spencersundell.com/blog/2006/07/22/Méliès_titles_from_the_blackhawk_anthologies/