

Special Cinema Event Screening
PHONO-CINEMA-THEATRE

*The recovered and restored film “attraction” presented at
the 1900 Paris Universal Exposition*



**A Gaumont Pathé Archives- Cinémathèque française
restoration**

The reconstituted repertory of Phono-Cinéma-Théâtre

Gaumont Pathé Archives and the Cinémathèque française have joint efforts for the restoration and reconstitution of the repertory of Phono-Cinéma-Théâtre (1900).



The long history of talking movies starts with Edison's invention of the kinetoscope, but tremendous steps were taken during the 1900 Paris Universal Exposition. Among the performances presented during the Exposition, the Phono-Cinema-Theater was one of the most successful artistic achievements.

On December 27, 1899, engineer Paul Decauville secured a concession in the compound of the Exposition Universelle located on rue de Paris, near the Invalides bridge. The incorporated society Phono-Cinéma-Théâtre is created on March 2, 1900. Actress Marguerite Vrignault, founder of the project, is named artistic director. The projection room of the Phono-Cinéma-Théâtre, juxting the Théâtroscopé's, is built by architect Dulong based on the designs of "Pavillon frais" created in 1751 by Gabriel for the Versailles gardens.



Shooting is undertaken by Clément-Maurice, whose real name is Clément Maurice Gratioulet. He shoots with a 35 mm camera with central perforation or two lateral perforations, created by Ambroise-François Parnaland. The takes are made in *play-back*, as later for the Gaumont phonoscenes. The phonograph used is the Ideal invented by Henri Lioret who uses

large cylinders (height 22 cm; diameter 13 cm) with 4 minute running time. Later on, in September 19, the Ideal phonograph will be replaced by Pathé's phonograph, Céleste.

The Phono-Cinéma-Theater is a special "attraction" which conjugates many different genres: talking film synchronized with phonograph (songs, monologs, theater play excerpts), but also dances and pantomimes which are simply accompanied by a piano or an orchestra. There was also a sound effect maker and probably a 'bonimenteur'.

The program showcased the most renowned artists of the time, coming from the prestigious Comédie Française as well as vaudeville theaters, music-halls and circus. For the occasion, the mimed comedy *L'Enfant prodigue* by Michel Carré, and André Wormser for the music, is adapted for cinema, for the first time.

Another hit is filmed: the play *Ma Cousine* by Henri Meilhac, created at the theater Les Variétés, on October 27, 1890, featuring renowned actress Réjane. The film can actually be understood only if one is familiar with the story behind the represented scene – the retaking of a pantomime entitled *Le piston d'Hortense*, enclosed in the 3 act play.

For theater, Coquelin the eldest, Gabrielle Réjane, Sarah Bernhardt, Félicia Mallet

For opera and operetta: Mariette Sully, Emile Cossira, Jeanne Hatto, Mily-Meyer, Désiré Pougaud

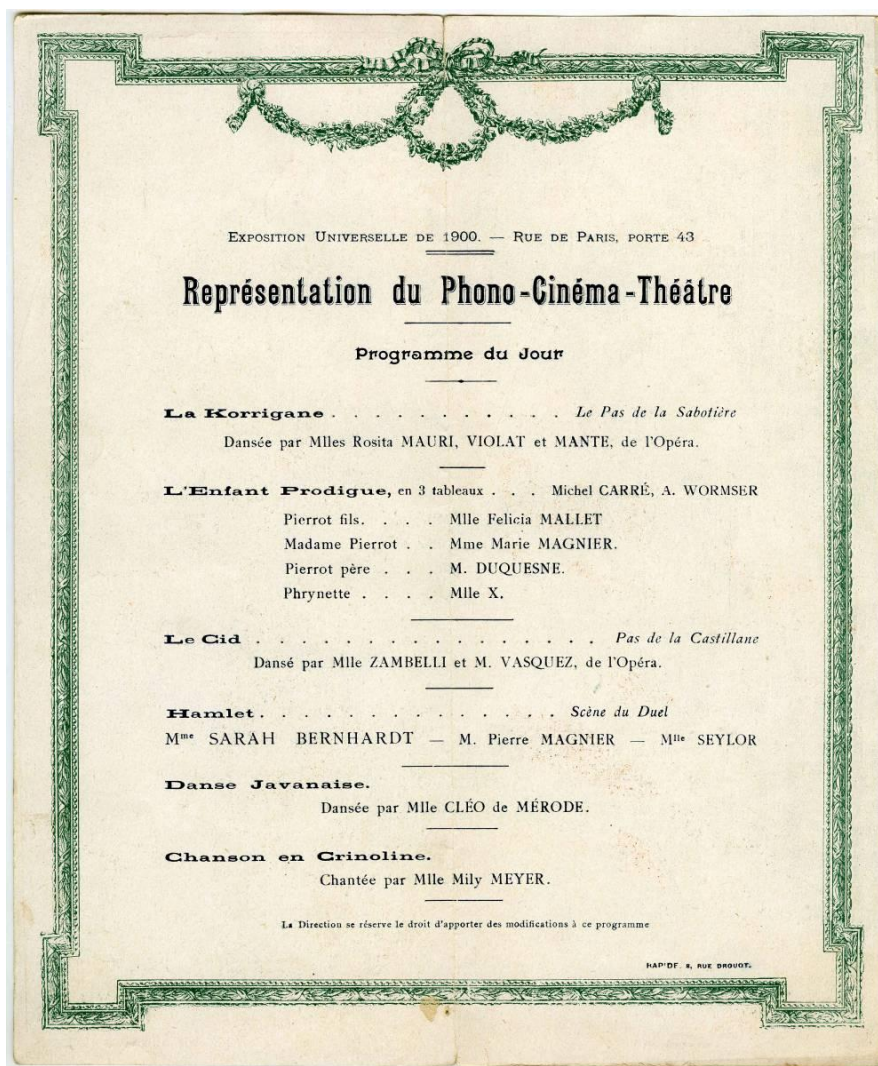
For 'café-concert' and music-hall : Footit et Chocolat, Mason and Forbes, Little Tich, Brunin, Polin, Jules Moy...

For dance, Blanche and Louise Mante from the Paris Opera, Carlotta Zambelli, Michel Vasquez, Rosita Mauri, Jeanne Chasles, Achille Viscusi, Christine Kerf, Cléo de Mérode...



Hamlet, the duel scene, with Sarah Bernhardt

The Phono-Cinéma-Theater premiere took place on April 28, 1900 at the Paris Exposition Universelle. The machine operators are Georges and Léopold Maurice, Clément-Maurice's sons; synchronization is manually performed by the projectionists, who constantly adjust the speed to keep the visual and the sound in-sync together.



In spite of the fame of the actors, singers, dancers, clowns, mimes who participated in the undertaking, in spite of the laudatory press reception, the beautiful poster by François Flameng, the gala evenings, the audience does not flock at the Phono-Cinéma-Théâtre, and at the end of the Exposition, the society is only modestly financially successful. The society Phono-Cinéma-Théâtre is dissolved on November 26, 1901, but it does not prevent for the show to continue in Paris, then in Switzerland, Suede, Spain, England, Germany, Austria, Italy. . .

The films of the Phono-Cinéma-Théâtre are rediscovered again by chance in 1961: 24 negatives (with sometimes several takes for a single title) and one positive copy, corresponding

to 18 different titles, are then at the Cinémathèque française, in December 1961. In 2010, the Cinémathèque française decided to restore this collection. Some of the negatives have seen better times but many are still in remarkable condition.



Little Tich from the Folies Bergère

In 2011, a private collector of cinematographic equipment, Mr. Olivier Auboin-Vermorel gave the Cinémathèque française an assortment of early films, among which figure several films from Phono-Cinéma-Théâtre not seen before, as for example *Ma Cousine* with Réjane or *L'Enfant prodigue* – two tableaux out of three, unfortunately. These films, still in good condition, are also digitalized.

Determined to reconstitute, if all possible, the entirety of the Phono-Cinéma-Théâtre repertory with its original sound tracks, the Cinémathèque française asks expert Henri Chamoux for the already recorded material of the still existing cylinders. Seventeen cylinders of the



Phono-Cinéma-Théâtre, corresponding to eight titles, were found. Most of the cylinders are stored at Radio-France in Paris, which becomes a partner in the project. Henri Chamoux created the « Archéophone », a device capable of reading and recording damaged and even broken cylinders. Synchronisation is therefore again possible, especially with digitalization. But some films still remain silent, when their original cylinders have not been found yet..

Great news came from Manuela Padoan, of Gaumont Pathé Archives, who has stored, on her side too, a collection of original nitrate copies of the Phono-Cinéma-Théâtre, beautifully hand -painted. The two combined collections, Gaumont Pathé Archives and Cinémathèque française, allowed for the reconstitution of the quasi totality of the Phono-Cinéma-Théâtre repertory, with colors on top of it all! Henceforth, « the colors and the sounds echo each other », as Baudelaire would say . . .

Ultime miracle, Gaumont Pathé Archives had in its collection the first tableau which was missing for *L'Enfant prodigue*. The film is now complete with its three integral parts. Last discovery: in 2012, the director of the School of Dance at the Opéra de Paris, Claude Bessy, makes available to the Cinémathèque française a positive copy of *Le Cid (La Habanera)*

It is therefore possible today to savor, just as in 1900, one of the most beautiful cinematographic attractions of the Paris Exposition Universelle. One will have to keep one's ears open however; the sound is not that loud – as it was neither originally! But one will savor the pleasure to see again, in colors sometimes, the greatest artists of the time. Sarah Bernhardt, Jeanne Hatto, Jean Coquelin, Victor Maurel, Rosita Mauri, Félicia Mallet, Zambelli, Mily Meyer, Little Tich, Cléo de Mérode, Jules Moy, le ténor Cossira, Christine Kerf, Footit et Chocolat, Polin, etc., the best dancers, theater actors, pantomime and music-hall performers of the '*Belle Epoque*'.

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***Le Cid*, ballet performed by Carlotta Zambelli and Michel Vasquez**