

# **MAGIC IN CINEMA**

## **CURATED BY: GABE KLINGER**

### **FILMS SELECTED BY JOE BRYL**

"Long before modern cinema with its special effects and deceitful editing, the first masters of visual entertainment were stage show illusionists. The Victorian magician, in fact pioneered the development of early cinema. The magician has always been a keen patron of new technology, needing to stay one step ahead of their mesmerized audiences. In 1794, a traveling illusionist Etienne Gaspard Robertson, terrified Parisian crowds with a haunting production entitled "Phantasmagoria". Naive to the invention of magic lanterns the audiences were completely amazed by the eerie figures which flickered and disappeared. These images of skeletons and ghosts were back projected onto invisible screens, achieved by ironing translucent wax into gauze. By the late eighteenth century magicians around the world began clamoring for projection devices, buying or making their own living pictures to incorporate into magic acts. Many of the world's earliest films were produced by magicians, they employed techniques still used today, such as double exposure, stop motion animation, fast and slow motion and the dissolve."

Clint Hurrell - "The Egyptian Hall: Notes from the interactive exhibition about Victorian stage illusions and optical devices"

Presently, it seems that cinema is overtaken by the use of special effects in every conceivable permutation. This reliance on CGI (computer-generated imagery) is ubiquitous and apparently unlimited in its scope and influence. Whether one goes to the local Cineplex to see Christopher Nolan's nourishing stylized retelling of the Batman saga "The Dark Knight", Steven Spielberg's latest installment of his serialized-based cash cow "Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull" or the George Lucas' production of "Star War: The Clone Years"; one cannot be but overwhelmed by visual effects that not only drive the narrative but are the ultimate *raison d'etre* of the film.

Yet special effects, or rather the use of magic in all its various forms, have been a staple of film from its pre-cinematic years to its infancy in the 1890's. From illusionists working in venues like the Egyptian Hall (aka the "Home of Mystery") in London's west end who used the reflective properties of transparent glass to bring alive ghostly apparitions to the roving minstrels who between the sixteenth and

nineteenth centuries played their trade on the roads of Europe carrying magic lanterns from hamlet to town that both educated and mystified the locals; the use of magic and special effects has tricked and amazed audiences continuously.

To showcase these times of emerging enchantment in cinematic history, Sonotheque in conjunction with Chicago Cinema Forum is hosting "Magic in Cinema" on Wednesday, September 17. The event will highlight the use of mystical and mesmerizing moments of magic in early cinema history and will include a selection of films (1896-1905) by the 1st wizard of cinema, Georges Melies, a recently restored print of Lotte Reinger's animated film "The Adventures of Prince Achmed" (1926), Edwin S. Porter's "Dream of a Rarebit Fiend" (1906), R W Paul's surreal "The ? Motorist" (1906) and other equally mystifying celluloid treats.

## **SHANNON HARRIS: Magic in Cinema: Film Scoring Discography**

### Georges Melies

**The Vanishing Lady**  
**A Nightmare**  
**The Haunted Castle**  
**The Magician**  
**The One Man Band**  
**The 4 Troublesome Heads**  
**The Astronomers Dream**  
**The Magical Book**  
**Fat & Lean Wrestling Match**  
**Going 2 bed with Difficulties**  
**Extraordinary Illusions**  
**The Prince Of Magicians**  
**The Man with the Rubber Head**  
**The Human Fly**  
**An impossible Balancing Feat**  
**The Inn Where No Man Rest**  
**The Infernal Cauldron**

**Turkish Executioner**  
**The Cook In Trouble**  
**The Black Imp**

Edwin S. Porter  
**Dream of a Rarebit Fiend**  
R W Paul

**The ? Motorist**