



1. Main entrance

## THE PARIS EXPOSITION UNIVERSELLE DE 1900

Bill Barnes



2. Two scenes from *L'Aiglon* with Sarah Bernhardt (left) *Le leçon de tactique* (right) *La mort du Duc de Reichstadt*



4. Frame from *Le Duel d'Hamlet* (Film Stills Archive, MOMA, New York, courtesy of Emboden Macmillan)

5. Poster for *Queen Elizabeth*

3. Poster for Phono-Cinéma-Théâtre (courtesy of Il Museo Nazionale del Cinema, Torino)

6. Stereo postcard of *la rue des Nations*



7. The Grand Wheel (a) at the Paris Fair (b) in Vienna

8. The Palais de l'Electricité

9. (left) Loïe Fuller, serpentine dancer (right) her Art Nouveau theatre (courtesy of Nancy Musée des Beaux-Arts)



The Paris Exposition Universelle de 1900 opened its monumental gate (Fig. 1) on 15 March – one month before Sarah Bernhardt opened in *L'Aiglon*, the play Rostand had written especially for her about Napoleon II, which became the sensation of Paris (Fig. 2). She also appeared in another medium – that of film – which became the talking point of the Paris Exposition when presented in Gaumont's Phono-Cinéma-Théâtre (Fig. 3 – the blank panel on the right was for artistes' names to be added). This used a phonograph linked to a cinematographe, an early attempt at sound motion pictures. The subject of this Bernhardt film was *Le Duel d'Hamlet* and it was directed by Clément Maurice. A fragment of this, her first film, survives but its companion phonograph cylinder unfortunately does not (Fig. 4 – Pierre Magnier plays Laertes).

Sarah Bernhardt went on to make several other films, the most famous being *Queen Elizabeth* (Fig. 5) in 1912.<sup>1</sup> A three-reel feature directed by Louis Mercanton, this was a great success wherever it was shown. It was brought to America by Adolf Zukor of the recently founded Famous Players Film Company, which eventually became Paramount Pictures.

Although this World's Fair in Paris had been established to usher in the beginning of the twentieth century, its primary aim was to promote the glorification of France and her many overseas territories, within grand palaces and pavilions. Many other countries were also represented by their own national establishments in a variety of styles (Fig. 6).

Apart from the pomp and circumstance, the politics and the commerce, it was a place to come to enjoy the many amenities on offer – the cafes, bars and restaurants as well as different forms of entertainment. It was a time to party, greatly enhanced by electricity, the crowning glory of the Exposition. Electricity, the main theme of this event, epitomised modernity, the dawning of a new age. It was a tangible way of presenting to the world a new image of France as a leader in industry and the arts. No doubt magic lanterns still featured but they were no longer attracting headlines.

The Eiffel Tower was illuminated from top to bottom by a myriad of coloured light bulbs, as was the 100-metre-high Grand Wheel (that later transferred to Vienna to become famous again in *The Third Man* with Orson Welles) and other landmarks around the city (Fig. 7). These transformed the Paris night into a fairyland of light and colour. All this emanated from a central point, the enchanting Palace of Electricity (Fig. 8) wherein great dynamos generated power and where the throw of a switch made it all happen. Even the celebrated exotic dancer Loïe Fuller – the 'Electric Salome' – performed her voluminous 'swirlings' in a dazzling blaze of projected coloured lights, probably including magic lantern slides, in her own Art Nouveau-style theatre designed by Henri Sauvage (Fig. 9). If she were queen of the fair, then electricity was king.

Taking a walk in the Champ de Mars one would encounter the Palais de l'Optique, where for 2 francs you could see the wonders of the universe, 'la lune à un metre' (the moon at a metre). Or at the Panorama Transatlantic, 'vues des escales de la compagne' for 1 franc. At the Phonorama you would find a street in Buenos Aires, also for 1 franc, and on offer at the Maréorama 'illusion complète d'un maritime' (complete illusion of a coastline/seascape), for the same price. The Palais de la Femme sounds exciting at any price.

The Palais Lumineuse offered optical marvels for free. Electricity also played an important part at the Palais des Illusions, producing weird and wonderful effects (Fig. 10).

The Palais du Costume presented 'l'histoire de la femme à travers les ages' (the history of women through the ages), which must have been worth the 1 franc admission fee. Then, of course, there was the Tour Eiffel, built for the 1899 Exposition. If you had a head for heights, to ascend all three stages would set you back 3 francs. The Village Suisse apparently was very popular and a great place in which to relax. To see the Panorama du Club Alpin was only 50 centimes, while the Grand Globe Celeste (Fig. 11) – a kind of planetarium – cost 1 franc 50 centimes.

However, the pavilions and booths of the more 'popular' forms of entertainment – the chansonniers (singers), the travelling shows, cinematographs, etc – were to be found on the rue de Paris and along the Cours la Reine on the right bank of the River Seine.<sup>2,3</sup>

At the Aquarium girls in leotards with fishtails sat among octopuses and lobsters – 'all done by mirrors'. There were marionettes at the Théâtre des Bonhommes Guillaume on rue de Paris (Fig. 12); at La Roulette, chansons animée (animated songs), and at Auteurs Gais, chansonniers. The Grand Guignol Exposition (Fig. 13) had something special to offer apart from



its main attractions of horror. The 'American Biograph' of the Biograph and Mutoscope and Mutoscope Company of France, an English branch of the American Mutoscope and Biograph Company, under the management of Julian W. Orde, presented exclusively 'scenes never before shown especially prepared for the Exposition, comic scenes and actualities, great voyages', including the latest films of the Boer War, not mentioned by Toulet.<sup>4</sup>

Films were also shown at La Roulette. In fact, Madame Toulet's count of seventeen venues where films were shown as an extra enticement to various exhibits indicates how cinema had infiltrated the Exposition as a whole. At Le Manoir à L'Inverse (the Upside Down House) visitors were able to take part in optical games. There was modern and old-time dancing at the Palais de la Dance, while the Theatroscope advertised spectacle and diverse attractions which included the cinematograph.

Also located on the rue de Paris was the 'Wonder of the Age' – Gaumont's Phono-Cinéma-Théâtre (Fig. 14) where one could witness many of the leading 'artistes célèbres' on a screen and hear their voices on a phonograph singing or reciting. Stars included Sarah Bernhardt, Cléo de Mérode, the erotic dancer, and that other great actress, Réjane (Fig. 15). The films (Fig. 16) were projected by Clement Maurice who had projected the Lumière films at the 'Salon Indien' in the basement of the Grand Café, Boulevard des Capucines, on 28 December 1895. The phonograph was operated by Henri Lioret, who had invented the talking doll. Besides the film of Sarah Bernhardt in the duel scene from *Hamlet*, Constant Coquelin Snr appeared in a scene from *Cyrano de Bergerac*, Réjane in one from *La Cousine* and Cléo de Mérode performed a classical dance. A poster in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris lists the names of nineteen artistes who were filmed and recorded on cylinders for the Phono-Cinéma-Théâtre of Louis Gaumont.

At the Place de L'Alma, Quai Billy, one could see 'Vieux Paris' for 1 franc but, more importantly, at the Lumière Cinématographe – in its own unique cinema of rather oriental design, perhaps foreshadowing Grauman's Chinese Theatre in Hollywood many years later (Fig. 17) – one could see 'animated travels' (views of France, to the music of Francis Thomé, for 1 franc during the day but 2 francs in the evening). The Brothers Lumière had intended to present films on an enormous screen (Fig. 18) by means of a large-format film with a 4.5 cm x 6 cm frame, but the projector was not perfected in time for the Fair. However, the screen was somewhat reduced in size and large pictures were achieved using the ordinary sized film and projector but with a more powerful illuminant. The films were shown this way throughout the Exposition.<sup>5</sup>

As if wonders never ceased there was the Cinéorama of Grimoin-Sanson, another special attraction constructed for the Paris Exposition which, like the Lumière brothers' wide-film experiment, failed because of technical difficulties (Fig. 19). It only received two or three performances before being closed by the Police Commissioner as unsafe for public display due to the intense heat generated by the several illuminants used for projection.

In the gardens of the Trocadéro could be seen the Moving Stéréorama of Messieurs Francovich and Gadan (Fig. 20) – 'voyages sur la Medi-côte de l'Algérie' – apparently in 3-D. Nearby at the Place de Trocadéro the 'Panorama de Madagascar' was presented in a most imposing structure (Fig. 21) which should have been saved for future generations to enjoy.

At the Transiberian one could take a train on an imaginary journey from Moscow to Peking. Was this, I wonder, a forerunner of Hale's Tours? The Theatre Indo-China seems a likely place to see a shadow play, but it certainly had a cinematograph show in its basement. In the caves beneath the Trocadéro there were a number of 'attractions' – one wonders what took place in this 'monde souterrain' (underground world).

This summarises briefly what was on offer in the way of cinematic presentations at the Paris Exposition Universelle de 1900 that caught the imagination of the world, and indeed still do today. The Pathé films made at the time can be viewed on YouTube. One shows the moving platform at the station of Quai d'Orsay (Fig. 22) – a thoroughly modern concept and one that can be seen at Heathrow today.

**NOTES**

All illustrations are from the Barnes Archive unless otherwise stated. Most of the information in this article has been culled from the official organ of the Exposition: *Le Moniteur*, published in twenty-four parts during the Fair. Other sources are:

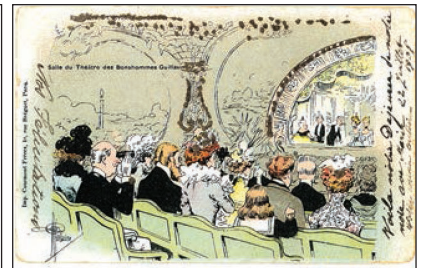
1. Joanna Richardson, *Sarah Bernhardt*. Max Reinhardt, London, 1959, p. 192.
2. Various authors, *La Belle Époque Fifteen Years of European History*, William Morris, New York, 1978.
3. Charles Redrick, 'Pleasures of the Belle Époque', *Turn-of-the-century France*, York University Press, 1985.
4. Emmanuelle Toulet, 'Cinema at the Universal Exposition Paris 1900', *Persistence of Vision*, no. 9, Journal of the Faculty of the City University of New York, 1991 (courtesy of Lester Smith).
5. Raymond Fielding, *A Technological History of Motion Pictures*, University of California Press, 1983 (contains Louis Lumière, 'The Lumière Cinématographe', *Journal of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers*, Vol. 27, December 1936).



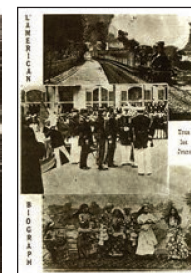
10. (left) Le Palais Lumineux (right) Le Palais des Illusions from Le Moniteur



11. Le Grand Globe Céleste from Le Moniteur



12. The Théâtre des Bonhommes Guillaume



13. The Grand Guignol announcing (left) films of the Boer War (right) the American Biograph (Bibliothèque Nationale Paris, courtesy Emmanuelle Toulet)

14. The Phono-Cinéma-Théâtre of Louis Gaumont (left) show (photograph: Seeberger) (right) commemorative stamps (Lester Smith Collection)



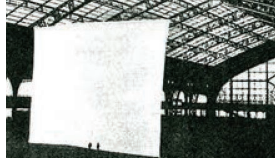
15. Famous artistes at the Phono-Cinéma-Théâtre (left) Sarah Bernhardt (centre) Réjane (right) Cléo de Mérode



16. Three of the films at the Phono-Cinéma-Théâtre (left) the tenor Cossira in Romeo and Juliet (centre) Coquelin Snr in Les Précieuses Ridicules (right) Cléo de Mérode in a classical dance (Jacques Deslandes Collection)



17. Lumière Cinématographe Cinema from Le Moniteur



18. Giant screen (24 metres x 30 metres) for the Lumière Brothers' large format films (note size of men at base of screen) (Lumière Archive, courtesy of SMPTE)



20. Messieurs Francovich and Gadan in Le Moniteur



19. Poster for the ill-fated Cinéorama of Grimoin-Sanson (courtesy of Jacques Delandes Collection)



21. The Panorama building



22. Moving platform at the station of the Quai d'Orsay