

# THE PARIS 'CABARETS ILLUSIONISTES'

Bill Barnes



The Cabaret du Ciel at 53 Boulevard de Clichy with the Cabaret de L'Enfer adjoining, c. 1900. Bibliotheque Nationale Paris

**MY BROTHER AND I HAD LONG BEEN INTERESTED** in the Paris 'Cabarets Illusionistes' but unfortunately had little success in obtaining much information on the subject, mainly I suppose due to our lack of knowledge of the French language. So it came as a very pleasant surprise when I saw that at last someone had taken up the subject, in the person of Madelon Hoedt (see the *New Magic Lantern Journal*, vol. 10, no. 6, Autumn 2010, pp. 99–102).

However, I am able to offer a little more information in the way of illustration, and a few facts of which she may not be aware.

The three cabarets, Le Ciel, L'Enfer and Néant were apparently owned by the same entrepreneur, according to Charles Rearick,<sup>1</sup> but unfortunately in his book *Pleasures of the Belle Epoque* he fails to name him.

Their forerunner was of course the famous Le Chat Noir, a 'cabaret illusioniste' noted for the shadow shows performed there by Henri Rivière, and for which there is ample information and illustration.

The Néant was situated in Paris-Montmatre at 34 boulevard de Clichy. The souvenir booklets of postcards issued by the two other cabarets, Le Ciel and L'Enfer, give the name of the Director-Administrateur as A. Alexander. They also contain a few more facts.

Both these establishments operated on two floors. Regarding Le Ciel, the ground floor contained 'Paradise' and the first floor 'Heaven', where one could witness a lady spectator metamorphosed into an angel, and also 'visions of Mahometan Paradise and oriental ecstasy'. On the ground floor one could witness 'The Monk's Dream', illustrated by 'Tableaux Vivants of Lusts of the Flesh', and first-class refreshments were served during the spectacle.

On the ground floor of the cabaret L'Enfer, patrons could 'purify their souls in purgatory' and enjoy 'up-to-date music, dancing and first-class refreshments', while on the first floor they could witness 'Illustrations of the eternal damned and Tableaux Vivants of the deadly sins'.

Other than these few random facts and some extra illustrations there is little I can add to Madelon's most excellent article.



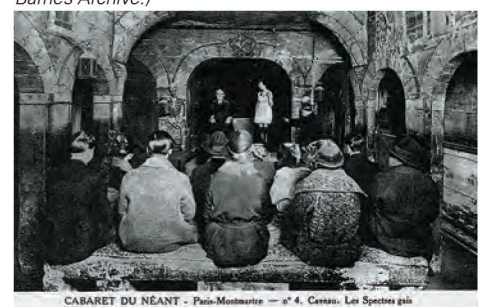
Front and back covers of the souvenir booklet containing four detachable postcards of exterior and interior scenes in the cabaret du Ciel (Heaven). Subject matter can differ with some editions. (The Barnes Archive holds three variants.)

Front and back covers of the souvenir booklet containing four detachable postcards issued by the Cabaret de L'Enfer. Subject matter can change with each edition. (The Barnes Archive holds two variants.)



Two postcards issued by the Cabaret du Ciel in separate editions, neither appearing together in the same booklet: interior of one of the rooms of the Cabaret du Ciel; a Tableau Vivant as performed at the Cabaret du Ciel.

A postcard of the interior of one of several caverns in the Cabaret du Néant (Nothingness). One of possibly a numbered set of six issued as souvenirs by this establishment. (There are six numbered examples in the Barnes Archive.)



1. Rearick, Charles, *Pleasures of the Belle Epoque*, Yale University Press, 1985, p. 64. The illustrations of Le Ciel and L'Enfer in the Boulevard de Clichy are also from this publication.

**Editor's note:** The site of Le Ciel and L'Enfer is now a Monoprix store (Google Earth Streetview accessed 13/8/2014) and there is no trace of the old building. These two cabarets were just across the boulevard de Clichy from the Moulin Rouge. The site of Le Néant at 34 boulevard de Clichy looks as though it may well be the same building, and it is now a pharmacy and sauna.

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