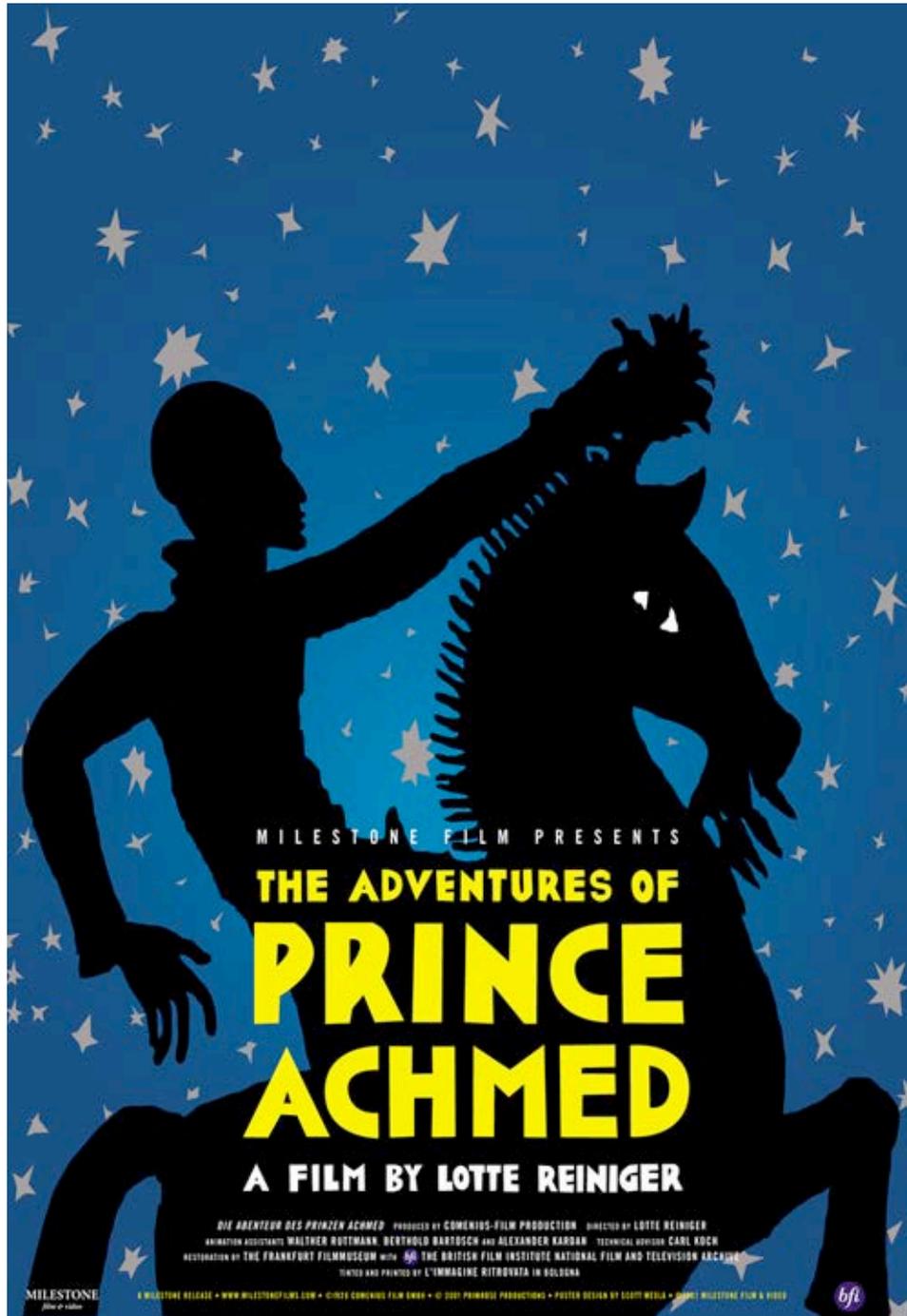


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*“She was born with magic hands.” — Jean Renoir on Lotte Reiniger*

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# **The Adventures of Prince Achmed**

*Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Achmed* (1926)

**Germany. Black and White with Tinting and Toning. Aspect Ratio: 1:1.33. 72 minutes.**

**Produced by: Comenius-Film Production ©1926 Comenius Film GmbH**

**© 2001 Primrose Film Productions Ltd. Based on stories in *The Arabian Nights*.**

## **Crew:**

Directed by ..... Lotte Reiniger

Animation Assistants..... Walther Ruttmann, Berthold Bartosch and Alexander Kardan

Technical Advisor ..... Carl Koch

Original Music by..... Wolfgang Zeller

Restoration by the Frankfurt Filmmuseum.

Tinted and printed by L'immagine ritrovata in Bologna.

The original score has been recorded for ZDF/Arte.



## ***Scissors Make Films”***

**By Lotte Reiniger, *Sight and Sound*, Spring 1936**

I will attempt to answer the questions, which I am nearly always asked by people who watch me making the silhouettes. Firstly: How on earth did you get the idea? And secondly: How do they move, and why are your hands not seen on screen? The answer to the first is to be found in the short and simple history of my own life. I never had the feeling that my silhouette cutting was an idea. It so happened that I could always do it quite easily, as you will see from what follows.

I could cut silhouettes almost as soon as I could manage to hold a pair of scissors. I could paint, too, and read, and recite; but these things did not surprise anyone very much. But everybody was astonished about the scissor cuts, which seemed a more unusual accomplishment. The silhouettes were very much praised, and I cut out silhouettes for all the birthdays in the family. Did anyone warn me as to where this path would lead? Not in the least; I was encouraged to continue.

Now I was very fond of the theater and acting. But performing plays in a small flat made rather a confusion, so it was a great relief to all when I began to use my silhouettes for my play-acting, constructing a little shadow theater in which to stage Shakespeare. There was peace for a short time; then came the film. I had refused to learn a profession, and I now had one desire- to make films at all costs. This was a problem, but the fairies must have pitied me. At this time, Paul

Wegener, a great actor and artist, was in Berlin. He produced a number of beautiful and unusual films, and his ambition was to utilize to the full possibilities of the camera for the development of the film... Wegener saw me cutting silhouettes behind the stage in Reinhardt's theater, and he became interested. He liked my silhouettes; he thought they showed a rare sense of movement. He therefore introduced me to a group of young artists who had started a new trick [animation] film studio. Here I first began to photograph my silhouette figures, just as drawings are photographed for the cartoon film, and I was successful in making a film with my shadow figures.

This was in 1919, and the work was so interesting that from that time I have rarely done anything else. In the meantime I married one of the artists, and we started working together, as we have continued to do till the present time. That is my story.

And now the question: How do the figures move? The technique of this type of film is very simple. As with cartoon drawings, the silhouette films are photographed movement by movement. But instead of using drawings, silhouette marionettes are used. These marionettes are cut out of black cardboard and thin lead, every limb being cut separately and joined with wire hinges. A study of natural movement is very important, so that the little figures appear to move just as men and women and animals do. But this is not a technical problem. The backgrounds for the characters are cut out with scissors as well, and designed to give a unified style to the whole picture. They are cut from layers of transparent paper.

When the story is ready, the music chosen, and the soundtrack recorded, then the work for the picture itself begins. Figures and backgrounds are laid out on a glass table. A strong light from underneath makes the wire hinges, etc., disappear and throws up the black figures in relief, while the background appears as a more or less fantastic landscape in keeping with the story. The camera hangs above this table, looking down at the picture arranged below. By means of a wire contrivance the film in the camera can be moved one frame at a time. After the first photograph, the figures are moved into their next position, and the whole photographed again. And so on. The important thing at this stage is to know how much to move the figures so that a lifelike effect may be obtained when the film is run through.

The synchronization between sight and sound is secured by carefully measuring the sound track, and preparing a very exactly worked out scenario, in which the number of shots are calculated according to the musical value. These calculations are the basis for the picture, which is then painstakingly photographed.

There remains a good deal to say about the artistic problems of this type of film, about its future, and about its value. But I am content to leave these matters to those people whose profession it is to bother about such problems. I feel that I do better to concentrate on making the films-and on making as many as my good luck allows. Each new film raises new problems and questions, and I can only hope to live long enough to do justice to them all.

### ***The Restoration of *The Adventures of Prince Achmed****

There is no original German version of *Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Achmed* and no (camera) negative has been preserved. The oldest known material is housed at the National Film and Television Archive (NFTVA) at the British Film Institute: a colored nitrate positive on Agfa film

stock containing edited English intertitles on Kodak and Pathe material from the years 1925-1927. This is not a screening copy, but rather base material for making new copies with added hand-written instructions concerning the coloring of the inserted lengths of white film.

In order to safeguard this supposedly first-generation positive (hence from the camera negative) the NFTVA had three dupe-negatives made in 1949, 1955, and 1969. All the safeguarding material was in black-and-white and varies partly in lengths. The black-and-white dupe-negatives for safeguarding purposes were used as the base for all later copying activities, for example for the 16mm version from the eighties.

For this restoration project, the colored nitrate copy was used as the basis for the first time. During viewing at the National Film and TV Archive in Berkhamsted the colored nitrate positive proved to be an optimum basis for a new restoration. Technically, the condition of the copy is good; the perforation is largely undamaged. The only apparent irreparable damage are light spots in the material and, owing to the earlier customary polishing, scratches and consequently particles of dust which have penetrated the emulsion of the film material.

The colors amber, red, blue, green, yellow and a straw color used in the opening title are in excellent condition. There was no color plan for the restoration on which the assessment of color in a separate sequence could be found. Only by use of the hand-written instructions on the nitrate copy could the coloring be made in a manner that would correspond with an original copy.

The censorship cards from the Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv were used for the intertitles. The film copies available contained no original German title, but an English translation. The new restored version follows the censorship card of 15 January 1926 in regard to the titles and all 124 intertitles. The new linking titles produced by Trickstudio Wilk in Berlin are regarding typeface and the decoration of the background — grafted onto the original nitrate copy. The coloring of the titles was definitely copied from this copy. The intertitles which were not available for the English version, but which can be found on the censorship cards, were filled in but not colored. The arrangement of the acts also follows the censorship cards.

Luckily it emerged that the complete score by Wolfgang Zeller was preserved in the library of Congress in Washington. It numbers among the very few remaining original compositions for silent films. The illustrations of scenes pasted on the score seem to confirm the order of acts and scenes.

The total length of the restoration amounted to 1,770 meters. The copying work was carried out by “L’Immagine Ritrovata” in Bologna. Following the Desmet procedure, a colored 35mm screening copy was made from the black-and-white dupe-negative, into which the new linking titles were edited.

### **Synopsis**

There is an African sorcerer, who is a powerful magician, and also happens to be the ugliest person in the world. He falls madly in love with the beautiful daughter of the Caliph of Baghdad, the princess Dinarsade. The sorcerer uses his power of the magic arts to create a wooden horse that can fly, and uses it to fly to Baghdad.

The Caliph's birthday is being celebrated there. Jugglers, conjurers and dancers compete with each other to entertain the Ruler and his court. The sorcerer and his horse arrive. He soars into the air, fetches a banner from the highest dome of the palace and presents it to the Caliph.

The Caliph is delighted and offers fabulous sums to the sorcerer, but he will not sell the horse for any money.

"So choose among my treasures," suggests the Caliph.

"May I take what I fancy most?" asks the crafty magician.

"I swear it by the beard of the prophet," the Caliph assures him.

The sorcerer chooses Dinarsade, and forces her to follow him. The people are terrified, and the Caliph is helpless, for he can not break his solemn oath. But the young prince Achmed, his son, does interfere. Achmed wants to test the horse, and the sorcerer agrees. The prince mounts the horse, and the sorcerer explains how he can make the horse rise into the sky by pushing a lever on its head. Achmed seizes the lever and the horse soars into the air, higher and higher, until he is out of sight.

The Caliph asks the sorcerer if the prince knew how to guide the horse, back to earth?

"He did not ask me," the sorcerer replied.

The Caliph is shocked and has him put in irons and thrown in prison. The prince however, has vanished.

The magic horse carries the prince high above the clouds. When he moves the lever backward and forward, believing it will bring the horse down, it only accelerates its speed and carries him up into the starry night. He gropes along the back of the horse and discovers a lever near its tail, and the horse lowers itself toward earth.

The prince is relieved, but is far from home. Under him, lays the magic islands of Wak Wak. On one of the islands he perceives a graceful little pleasure seat and guides his horse onto the roof. He walks into a chamber where he finds many charming girls, lying sound asleep. They wake up when he approaches, and greet the beautiful stranger joyfully, offering him refreshments and kisses. He happily accepts them, but when the beauties start to quarrel with each other for the favor of the handsome visitor, and even come to blows, he flies away on his horse.

On a neighboring island he sees a beautiful lake. He lets his horse glide down and walks along under the trees. Suddenly, down come two large and graceful birds, landing on the edge of the lake. He hides himself, watching the birds discard their feathery garments, to reveal lovely maidens. An even more wonderful bird flies down, and is greeted by the others with deep reverence.

Out of this feather dress emerges the most enchanting beauty Achmed ever saw. It is Peri Banu, ruler of the islands of Wak Wak. At the sight of her, Achmed's heart trembles and he falls madly in love. He takes her feather dress and hides it.

When the maidens return from bathing, they notice the loss of their queen's feather dress. Achmed steps forward and the girls slip back into disguise and fly away. Peri Banu however, can not. She asks the prince to restore her feather garment, but he asks her to follow him to his home country. Afraid, she escapes away from him, until she faints. The prince gently lifts her up, and puts her on his horse and flies into the air.

After they travel many miles they find themselves above China. They land in a valley, and Achmed puts Peri-Banu under a tree. She regains her consciousness and Achmed speaks to her softly. But she trembles with fear and warns him of the powers of the demons of Wak Wak. "Allah's mercy will protect us, if you will become my wife," replies the prince. Peri Banu begins to weep.



Meanwhile the wicked sorcerer sits in his prison, laden with chains and searching for the whereabouts of his magic horse. He discovers where it is, transforms himself into a bat and flies away through the barred window of the dungeon.

In vain, Prince Achmed tries to persuade his beloved. Finally, he can not bear to see her so distressed and hands her back her garment. She receives it gladly, but when she sees how intensely he suffers and how young and beautiful he is, her heart is overcome with love and she agrees to follow him. Beside himself with happiness he throws himself at her feet.

The sorcerer approaches them in the shape of a kangaroo and takes hold of the feather dress. Achmed pursues him. The sorcerer returns to Peri Banu, having changed his appearance into a Chinese servant.

The prince is stuck in a gorge being attacked by a giant snake, but he finally overpowers it, and the body of the slain viper enables him to get out of the gorge, hurrying back and taking the bird dress with him.

But Prince Achmed is too late. The magic horse and Peri Banu are gone. He throws himself to the ground in despair.

In China there rules a cheerful emperor, whose favorite pleasure is to listen to the melodies that his slave, a hunchbacked dwarf, plays for him on his chimes. The sorcerer brings Peri Banu and sells her to him as a slave. The emperor smiles at Peri Banu, but she does not respond. Infuriated by her resistance, he orders his hunchbacked dwarf to marry her and everything is prepared for the wedding.

The sorcerer transforms the bags of gold the emperor has paid for Peri Banu into winged afreets. With them he returns to Prince Achmed, still stricken with grief. He lifts him into the air and brings him to the fiery mountains, where he hurls Achmed onto the summit of a volcano. He changes the afreets into a heavy rock, which he places on the breast of the poor prince, and says to him; "And now, my brave prince, I will get your fair sister, you won't be able to hinder me any more." And flies away.

In the flaming volcanoes lives a powerful sorceress: the witch of the fiery mountains. She dwells among her slaves, a gang of fantastic monsters. She notices that on top of one of her volcanoes something unusual is happening, and sends her slaves to find out the reason. They bring Achmed to her, and the witch brings him back to life. He tells her his story and that the African sorcerer is the author of his misfortunes. This pleases the witch, for the sorcerer is her hated foe. She promises to help him, and he implores her to bring him to the isles of Wak Wak, for he believes that the demons have bound Peri Banu, and brought her there. Employing all the skill of her magic art she conjures up magic weapons, which will protect him against the demons. They leave for Wak Wak, and on their way, the witch observes that under them, in the town of the Chinese emperor, a big marriage is being celebrated and that the bride is Achmed's Peri Banu. She succeeds in disturbing the wedding, and happily the lovers sink into each other's arms.

Next the dreaded demons are on their way to search for their lost ruler, and discover the lovers. Achmed struggles against them gallantly, but in the turmoil of the fight the demons manage to carry off Peri Banu. Achmed subjugates one of them and forces him to bring him to Wak Wak. But, they are too late. The gates of Wak Wak are closed.

A flaming writing informs the prince, that the gates would open only to him that own the wonderful lamp of Aladdin.

Helplessly Achmed looks around him in the desolate wilderness. There he beholds a gigantic monster, about to devour a man. He seizes his bow and arrow, shoots and kills the monster, and hurries down to assist the victim. The stranger falls at his feet and thanks him.

"I am Aladdin," he says.

"So you are the owner of the wonderful lamp? Where is it?" he asks eagerly. The young man lowers his head and confesses that, the lamp has vanished and begs the disappointed Achmed to listen to his story.

He tells him that he lived in the Caliph's city as a poor tailor. One day an odd stranger visited him. The stranger seemed to have a hypnotic power over him, so that he had to follow him. He showed him the Caliph's palace in all its splendor and finally the Caliph's beautiful daughter Dinarsarde. He fell in love with her instantly. The stranger promised him that he would help him to win this charming princess, if he would render him a small service. Overjoyed, he accepted

and the stranger led him into a high mountain to a derelict well. The shaft of the well let him into a cave, where the wonderful lamp was. He extinguished it, and hid it in his garment and ascended the rope ladder. The stranger stretched out his arms towards him and demanded that he hand over the lamp immediately. But he no longer looked friendly, so Aladdin became frightened for his hands were not free to hand over the lamp. At his hesitation the stranger became mad, pushed him back into the shaft, pulled up the rope ladder, closed the well and went away.

For a long time he languished in the dark cave until he succeeded in lighting the lamp. Then a genie appeared, and asked what the master of the lamp wished him to do, for he would obey his every whim. Aladdin asked to be brought home and immediately he was there. Now he knew how to win the lovely Dinarsarde.

The servants of the lamp brought priceless treasures to her. Overnight he had them building a palace for her. In the morning the astonished Caliph visited the marvelous palace and in the end Princess Dinarsarde became his wife.

Achmed embraces Aladdin again with warmth “The Caliph is my father,” he says “Dinarsarde is my beloved sister, tell me what happened further...”

Aladdin lowers his head sadly, “One day all had vanished, the palace, the princess and the lamp,” he confesses. “The Caliph condemned me to be beheaded, the executioner had already lifted his axe, when I succeeded in escaping and fled the Caliph’s fury. In a small boat I drifted out into sea. A storm broke, my boat was dashed into pieces and the wild waves threw me on the cliffs. As I wandered among the rocks, I saw a big tree, full of luscious fruit. While I gathered some, the tree began to move. I saw with horror that the tree threw off its leaves and became a giant monster, which seized me with fury. Thus you found me.”

“Do you know who that stranger was?” Asks Achmed.

“The African sorcerer! He coveted Dinarsarde, and also plunged me into misfortune for I hindered him to obtain Dinarsarde.”

They are interrupted by the witch, who flies down to them. She has searched for Achmed everywhere. “Hasten prince Achmed and save Peri Banu! The demons want to kill her because she followed you.” Aladdin implores the witch to find the sorcerer and the magic lamp. He promises her the lamp as a reward. Achmed too, begs her to kill the sorcerer. “I will try,” says the witch.

With all her powers she makes the sorcerer appear. And a terrible magic fight begins between them. Achmed and Aladdin watch.

The sorcerer turns into a scorpion and the witch into a lion and they fight on earth. Then the witch becomes a cock and the sorcerer a vulture and they fought in the air. As neither can conquer the other, they turn into fishes and fight in the water, but even there no one is victorious. They regain their own shapes and throw flames at each other, wilder and wilder, until the witch of the fiery mountains wins and the sorcerer falls down dead.

The witch steps toward them, the beaming lamp in her hand. The demons rebel against Peri Banu, and are determined to kill her, when the rays of the lamp penetrate into the realms of Wak Wak. Prince Achmed stands before the gates demanding the delivery of Peri Banu. His magic arrow kills the demon who is about to throw her down a bottomless pit. Achmed runs to her and places himself protectively in front of her. Armies of black demons pour forth out of rocks and attack him. Aladdin tries to approach him and frighten away the demons with the rays of his lamp, but one of them snatches it from his hand. Achmed rescues him but the situation is desperate. Then the witch takes over.

She regains possession of the lamp and troops of light white spirits stream out of the light and they engage in a battle with the black demons. There are so many that the demons can hardly cope.

The most fearsome of them (a monster with many heads) seizes Peri Banu, and rushes her to the bottom of the rocks. Achmed follows boldly, and fights with him bitterly, he cuts off the monster's many heads one after the other, but new ones grow back. The witch hurries to the rescue and stops the battle with the lamp's rays. Peri Banu is saved, and the black demons fly back into their clefts, while the shining white spirits join in a victorious dance. The blissful lovers and Aladdin embrace the witch gratefully.

The witch calls the white spirits back into the lamp, while from the air, Aladdin's marvelous palace hovers down and alights before them.

The fortunate lovers thank the witch and leave. They go into the palace, where Aladdin hopes to find Dinarsarde. The witch lifts her lamp to greet them fare well, and the palace rises to bring them back to the land of the mortals.

Aladdin finds Dinarsarde, and the palace carries them home. At dawn they see the domes and minarets of Baghdad appear beneath them. The palace goes down and alights on the same spot where it stood before. The Caliph sees it and is so overwhelmed with joy that he pardons Aladdin, and embraces them. Meanwhile the calls for the morning prayers are heard from the minarets.

The End



**Lotte Reiniger's Introduction to  
*The Adventures of Prince Achmed***

For Centuries Prince Achmed on his magic horse had lived a comfortable life as a well-loved fairy tale figure of the Arabian nights and was well contented with that. But one day he was thrown out of his peaceful existence by a film company which wanted to employ him and many other characters of the same stories for an animated film. For this purpose he had to be recreated like many other unfortunate fellows from tales of other literary regions. And this more thoroughly than usual with live actors, where it would be sufficient to find a protagonist who corresponds somewhat to the character which is represented in the story, give him the part and let him go on. This had to be a film of animated silhouettes as the filmmaker who was obsessed with this idea — in this case myself — could not do anything else but make silhouette films. These were films whose actors were movable shadow figures, laid out flat on a glass plate, lit from below and filmed from above frame by frame, so that when projected on the screen it looked as if they were moving by their own free will.

Hitherto I had only made short films of a few minutes in length, of this kind, but Prince Achmed's adventures would occupy a whole hour, and so, many other items of the Arabian Nights rich treasure chest, which were especially suitable for fantastic animation had to be included. The shape of the prince himself had to be found, drawn, cut out, made movable, lit up, moved frame by frame and thus filmed.

This all happened in Berlin in the years from 1923 to 1926, for that was the time it did take to finish the film. Why? For such a film demands that for each second, 24 different frames be taken. It may be left to algebraic abilities of the kind reader to figure out how many frames would be necessary for an opus of one hour in length.

This was not the only reason for the length of the period it required to make this film. At this time animation was still walking in its infant shoes: there was no Mickey Mouse yet. We had to

experiment and try out all sorts of inventions to make the story come alive. The more the shooting of Prince Achmed advanced the more ambitious he became. But he was lucky.

In the twenties, there lived in Berlin many artists who went their own ways and tried out new methods of animating films and Prince Achmed succeeded in winning two of them for collaboration on his film: Walter Ruttmann and Berthold Bartosch.

The young Berlin banker who sponsored the idea of making a full length animated film, a never heard of thing in this period, transformed the attic of the garage in the vegetable garden near his house in Potsdam and allowed us to experiment in it to our hearts' content.

We, that was me, my husband Carl Koch, Walter Ruttmann, Bertold Bartosch, Alexander Kardan and Walter Turck. Koch was the producer and had control of the technical aspects, I cut out the figures and sets and animated them, assisted by Alexander Kardan and Walter Turck. Ruttmann invented and created wonderful movements for the magic events, fire, volcanoes, battles of good and evil spirits and Bartosch composed and cut out movement of waves for a sea storm, now a household word in animation but something quite new at this period.

Although the film was made in the days of the silent films, we collaborated from the very beginning with the composer Wolfgang Zeller. He wrote the music for special sound effects like flute notes, glockenspiel and marches, and we tried to shoot these in rhythm of the music to obtain synchronization with the orchestra, which was to accompany the film later on.

When the film was finished no theatre dared show it for "it was not done". So we made on our own a first performance in the theatre of the Volksbuhne in the north of Berlin. It turned out to be a big success. This was in May of 1926. In the following July Prince Achmed had his first public show in the theatre des Champs Elysee in Paris with equally great success, whereupon in September the Gloria Palast in Berlin gave him a start.

The negative was destroyed in the battle of Berlin, 1945. But the British Film Institute had made a second negative when the film was shown in London — and so — after a long period — the film being silent, was not to be shown anyhow — in 1972 a revival was planned. They attached new music was attached to it, this time by Freddy Phillips. The film had gained a certain amount of fame, being really the first full-length animated film in the history of the cinema.

To make it 'Achmed-like' the revival was done by, the son of the banker who sponsored the film in 1923. He had assisted in its creation as a small boy. So it was granted to old Prince Achmed to have a happy resurrection after almost half a century.

### **Background**

Lotte Reiniger was born June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1899 in Berlin-Charlottenburg, and is today regarded as the creator of the silhouette film. With more than forty silhouette films to her name — she died in Germany on June 19, 1981 — leaving behind quite a significant body of work. Lotte Reiniger began her career at an early age. Even as a young child she was intent upon a career in entertainment, but her first desire was to be an actress. It was this ambition which led her to meet Paul Wegener, the film director and star, at the tender age of sixteen. Soon after that she was studying under the famous theater director, Max Reinhardt. It was there that she had her first

epiphany in regards to working with silhouettes. She would stand in the wings watching the performance, becoming enthralled by the actors' silhouettes against the limelight. This led her to begin making silhouette portraits of the performers. And before long she developed a keen interest in the art. At the same time, Lotte acquired a skill few animators learned as well even today, the subtle art of body movement to express emotion. The characters in her films — for example, in the scene where Prince Achmed first meets and woos Peri Banu — have a wondrous quality of expressive movement. This could be traced not only to her incredible animation skills, but perhaps to her lessons learned at Reinhardt's school and later, her work in silent film.

Lotte's introduction to film and film making was by Paul Wegener, who hired her to assist in the animation of puppet rats for his film *Der Rattenfänger Von Hamelin* (*The Pied Piper of Hamelin*, 1918). Before this he hired her to do the title animation on a few of his works. Wegener's enthusiasm for Reiniger's skill at cutting silhouettes led him to bring her to the Institut für Kulturforschung, where she began to produce a series of short animated shadow play films.

Shadow theatre was originally introduced to Europe from the Orient. The increasing interest of German film makers in Oriental subjects, seen in May's *Das Indische Grabmal* (1921) or Lang's *Der Mude Tod* (*Destiny*, 1921) paralleled that of other artists, such as Kandinsky and Marc, who reproduced pictures of Egyptian shadow play figurines in *Der Blaue Reiter* magazine. Director Paul Robison hired Engert, a noted silhouettist, to create a shadow play for the film *Schatten* (1923). The time seemed propitious for a shadow play feature film.

Lotte Reiniger soon met and became intimate with Carl Koch, a noted art historian, who would help Lotte throughout her career with the more technical ends of her filmmaking. Koch also introduced her to many important figures in the Berlin arts community most notably Berthold Brecht and Hans Richter. Koch was working on a film on the psychology of school children, and Reiniger spurred by him and the young group of German experimentalists, who were to give the silent cinema such a magnificent expression, decided she would elaborate on her experiments with silhouette animation. When a Berlin banker by the name of Louis Hagen visited the Institute where they were working, he asked them whether or not it would be possible to make a feature length animated film. This of course was unheard of at the time, animated films were short films that made people laugh that's all, and nobody dared try to stretch its format longer than ten minutes. Everyone they discussed the idea with was horrified by the proposition. But, because Reiniger and her artist friends did not belong to the industry, they were not afraid of the challenge. Making a collage film was not very expensive, it didn't require a large personnel, and money was becoming less and less valuable in Germany's quickly crumbling economy, so they were generally unburdened by working on this epic project. Hagen did not want the films made in the shadow of the Institut für Kulturforschung and so offered to install a small studio above his garage, in Potsdam. Reiniger went there to work on the project, accompanied by her now husband Carl Koch on camera, Walter Turck on backgrounds, Alex Kardan as detail checker and artists Bertold Bartosch and Walter Ruttmann on special effects. The studio that the banker had built was very low, so the shooting field with its glass plate had to be very near the floor in order to get the camera up high enough in a suitable distance, with just enough space to place the lamps underneath. Reiniger had to kneel on the seat of an old dismantled motorcar to execute her animation. Reiniger claims that she preferred this type of seat to the swivel variety she later used, describing the motorcar seat as being "very comfortable". They finally decided that the theme they would use for their epic animation piece would be *The Arabian Nights*. Their decision was based on the idea that the action should show events that could not be performed by any other

means. So from all the 1001 stories they sorted out all the events which fell into that category; the flying horse, magic islands, fantastic birds, djinns, sorcerers and witches, transformations and all there is to be found in abundance in these tales. It was out of these items that they formed the script, which would eventually take the form of *The Adventures of Prince Achmed*.



They began executing the animation for *Prince Achmed* in 1923, finally finishing in 1926. They began using black and white only, and then gradually developed more scenery as movable backgrounds, using soap and sand and paint on different layers, sometimes two negatives, each done on different animation benches and composed by different artists entirely after their own conception. This process caused anxiety to Reiniger that was almost unbearable. While working on the animation the artist can only see the subject in which they are working on at that moment, and in only one position. They had no knowledge what it would look like once it was developed, or if it would even work at all. They only had the answer to their queries when the film was developed. Most of the effects — and *Prince Achmed* is a virtual encyclopedia of different techniques of animation — that Reiniger and her crew achieved are common place now, but at the time they were brand new, and sometimes it would take weeks for them to get one particular shot perfected.

Bertold Bartosch created the scenes involving the twinkling stars and the ocean waves. At the time nobody was experimenting with creating ocean waves, and Bartosch was able to achieve amazing results from extensive trial and error. In fact Bartosch was so excited by creating these stupendous wave scenes that he experimented afterwards with great success. It was only due to the producer Carl Koch, that Bartosch didn't continue his experimentation during production. As Reiniger says, “we had to finish the film at some point”, and she goes on to praise Koch for being a “real gardener” when it came to stopping the crew from going too far with endless experiments. Walter Ruttmann commissioned Oskar Fischinger (they had met the year before in Frankfurt) to make a wax-slicing machine for many scenes including the sorcerer's creation of

the magic horse and the climactic duel between the priestess and the evil sorcerer. Reiniger's cutouts and shadow puppets are unbelievably detailed and intricate, often involving several versions of the same character for closeups and long shots. Each moving part had to be cut separately and joined to the others with fine wire.

Although the film was made during the period of silent filmmaking, Reiniger and crew still wanted to provide the picture with as much support as possible to ensure its coming over well to its audience. To do this they enlisted the help of musician Wolfgang Zeller, who composed a score especially for the film. When they had a procession for example, Zeller would compose a march, and they would measure the beats with a stopwatch, and then try to move the figures accordingly. At this period the theater would employ an orchestra and for the more ambitious films special music would be composed. In the *Achmed* score, for instance, when they wanted a certain sound, they would splice in a small picture that would cue the conductor when to add a particular effect. For the film's premiere performances in London and Paris, they invited Zeller to come and conduct the orchestra himself.

The most troublesome time for Reiniger and her crew came when German inflation stopped. Money was suddenly worth something and they were only half way through production. Eventually, however their financier allowed them to carry on, and the production was finished in the spring of 1926. When they looked for a theater to play their film they were unsuccessful, being turned down by every major theater. Convinced to play the film by any means necessary, Reiniger arranged for it to have its premiere at the Volksbuehne, a theater in Northern Berlin, where Wolfgang Zeller himself, was in charge of the orchestra. Zeller's musicians consented to play for his sake, and they invited everyone they could think of. Since Reiniger and her crew were isolated for a number of years, they knew of practically nobody in the press. At this point Bertold Bretsch (a friend of Reiniger's and Koch's) helped them out by inviting some very prominent people in the community. Because it was a Sunday in the middle of spring, they felt most people would not attend an event, taking place inside a darkened movie theater. As it turned out the theater was over crowded, apparently people were greatly enthused. This did however, lead to numerous problems during the *Prince Achmed* premiere. Various audience members were claiming their coatroom tickets for seat tickets and demanding seats, inspiring numerous rows among patrons. Then the projector lens broke, and since it was Sunday morning, no photo shops were open. In despair Carl Koch took a taxi over to the UFA house, he knew it would be closed but he went anyway. He stood there just looking at all the glorious equipment displayed in the windows, and was at the point of throwing something through the glass, when a man came by and opened the door to the equipment house. Koch confronted him and pleaded with the man, telling him sympathetically of his situation. As it turned out the man with the key could and would most definitely help him, and so Koch was able to get the right lens at the eleventh hour. This however, was only the beginning of problems for the premiere. Halfway through the film, policemen arrived and informed them that the theater was overcrowded and that the film must be stopped. They prolonged their arguments with the authorities until the second to last reel had ended. Then Koch introduced Reiniger to the police as the budding young filmmaker on the brink of success, going on to explain that there was just one reel left, and asked them how they thought the audience would react if the police closed the screening down. As Reiniger went on stage to bow before the projectionist played the final reel, the police said to her "You will hear from me..." and promptly left. It was during the final reel that something even more serious occurred. Reiniger noticed that during the projection of the final battle sequence, smoke was beginning to cloud in front of the screen. Knowing that she had not created smoke during that

scene and that nitrate film was highly flammable she rushed over to the front of the screen to see what she could do. As it turned out the smoke was completely benign, being caused by some wet sacks that the stagehands had placed over the heating vents, so that they could sit down and watch the film too. However if the audience had ever gotten the idea that there was a fire, in the densely packed, crowded auditorium, the police warning would have seemed most proper, and Reiniger most definitely vilified. In the end however, the premiere was a success and was followed by its official premiere in Paris and later in the Gloria Palast in Berlin.

Today, Lotte can still be seen as she has left her own mark on her famed work of art. At least twice in the film, on single frames at 45 and 53 minutes into the film, lay the shadow of the creator's slender hand itself in the act of creation.

### **The Reception of *Prince Achmed***

*The Adventures of Prince Achmed* was an over whelming success. The morning after its "unofficial" premiere in Berlin, the press was full of praise for the film. However distributors still shunned the film because of its difficult format (i.e. animation). Therefore the first public performance was held in Paris later that year at a legitimate theatre then being run by Louis Jouvet. Jean Renoir, Rene Clair and all the French avante garde turned out to distribute the program notes on the first night.

The film ran for three months and was then transferred to another theatre, where it ran for six months. It was shown in almost every country in the world with great success, except Germany. A distributor there eventually bought it but advertised it as a "detective" film. It was only after legal action had been taken that Lotte Reiniger regained the rights to her own film and showed it in the original version in her own country.

The meeting with Jean Renoir on the night of the Paris premiere led to a close friendship and professional co-operation between the French director and the team of Miss Reiniger and her husband. They contributed to a number of Renoir's masterpieces, including *La Grande Illusion*, while in *La Marseillaise* she employed her facility as a shadow puppeteer to present a traditional play. She also made one attempt, unsuccessfully, to direct a live action film, with Jean Renoir and his wife Catherine Hessling starring in her production *Running from Luck*. Just prior to his death, Renoir summed up Miss Reiniger's talent with these words: "She was born with magic hands."

### **The first animated feature ever?**

There are many claims to being the first animated feature ever produced. For many years, Disney claimed that *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* was the first and this was repeated in film history books. *The Adventures of Prince Achmed*, however, is generally considered now to be the first but there are other interesting contenders who have come to light.

The Guinness Book of Movie Facts and Feats names Quirino Cristani's *El Apostel* (1917) as the world's first feature-length animated film, saying that it was 60 minutes long, was based on a book by Alfredo de Lafarrere, and that the chief animator was Diogones Tabora. It says that it was a satire on Argentina's President Irigoyen, and was filmed over 12 months, and employed 58,000 drawings. The book also says that Argentina provided the first full-length animated

talkie, *Peludopolis* (1931, sound on disc), another satire on Irigoyen, for which the chief animator was Cristani. Unfortunately a vault fire at the Argentine Cinematheque in 1969 destroyed the prints of *El Apostol* as well as *Peludopolis*.

When we broached this subject to film and animation historian Mark Langer of Carleton University, this was his reply:

*El Apostel* premiered on 9 Nov. 1917. However, its status as the first feature length animated film is uncertain, as this claim relies primarily on the memory of animator Quirino Cristani. A subsequent Argentinian film called *Sin dejar rastros* (1918) has a similar claim as first feature length animated film, but this was only shown for one day before being confiscated by the government. Without physical evidence or more compelling documentary evidence, it is difficult to say whether these were actually features, or something more along the line of O'Brien's *The Ghost of Slumber Mountain*. Max and Dave Fleischer released two films that were largely, if not entirely animated and which both predate *The Adventures of Prince Achmed*. These were the *Einstein Theory of Relativity* and *Evolution* films, which were released in both feature-length and shorter versions. *Einstein Theory of Relativity* was produced by Premier Pictures and first showed at a special invitational opening at the Rivoli Theatre for educators. The short version was first shown on February 11, 1923 and the official opening of the full length one was the next day. The long version was 4,000 feet, which equals about 50 to 55 minutes depending on the film speed. I have reason to believe that some of the footage in this film was actually from a German film dealing with the same subject, but I have been unable to locate any information about it. There are some names in the credits of the Einstein film that may be a clue — supervision by S.F. Nicolai, H.W. Kornblum, C. Bueck. Scientific American reviewed the Fleischer version and mentioned that the German film had been seen in New York the year before. *Evolution* opened at the Rivoli on July 12, 1925 and was produced by Red Seal Pictures, a company owned by Max Fleischer and Edwin Miles Fadiman (brother of Clifton Fadiman). Unlike the case with the Einstein film, I haven't personally screened *Evolution*, but it is alleged that it contains footage from O'Brien's *The Ghost of Slumber Mountain*. *Evolution* was 4,200 ft. in length. Both of these films would be significantly shorter than Reiniger's. Whether or not they would qualify as features is certainly open for debate. I can say that the Einstein film is not completely animated, and should be disqualified from the running for that reason alone. I can also say that based on the experience of viewing the Einstein film — it may not be long, but it sure feels long! A Bray Studio production, *Elements of the Automobile*, was a 12 reel entirely animated production that predates these efforts. However, it was meant as an educational series to be projected in 12 different “chapters” and the film was padded with re-cycling of the animation. In general, the jury is out as far as the question of what was the first feature length animated film.

In 1926, Lotte Reiniger wrote that she used 100,000 single frames for her film; shooting about 250,000 frames. This is one of the reasons I am skeptical about the claim on behalf of *El Apostel*, as it is reputed to have been 50,000 frames long. But it isn't impossible that it was padded, as was the case with *Elements of the*

*Automobile*. I'm not convinced by the evidence that one can dismiss Reiniger's film from the running.

### **Berthold Bartosch (1893-1968)**

Born in Bohemia (now Czechoslovakia), Berthold Bartosch studied architecture and fine arts in Vienna — where he became interested in Chinese painting and philosophy as well as cinema) before moving to Berlin in 1919. There he befriended Walter Ruttmann, Viking Eggeling, Hans Richter, Lotte Reiniger and the writer Berthold Brecht. Bartosch first worked with Reiniger on *The Ornament of the Loving Heart* and worked on several advertising films before he worked on his first independent work, *The Battle of Skagerrak* in 1922. His contribution to *Prince Achmed* was described in Eric White's *Walking Shadows*, written in 1931:

For an effect of stars he will take a piece of cardboard, pin prick it and photograph it moving slowly before the camera with a strong light behind. He will then take the same piece of cardboard upside down, move it in a different direction and at a different direction and at a different speed, and superimpose the second shot upon the first. The result is a sky of stars moving slowly and (apparently) in different directions and at different speeds, nothing could be simpler or more effective... For years Bartosch has experimented with waves, making them out of superimposed pieces of semitransparent tissue paper. These he moves with such consummate skill as to convey the impression of the sea's natural sway and surge. Moonlit water he depicts by means of silver paper, in this case the waves overlap broadly, and the scene has to be lit from the front (above)."

In 1930, Bartosch married and relocated to Paris — partly because of the Nazi's rise to power, and his own involvement in anti-Nazi propaganda. He began working on *The Idea*, an animated film based on a famous book of wood block prints by Belgian artist Franz Masereel and finished in 1932. Between 1935 and 1939 he labored on an anti-war film titled *St Francis* (or *Nightmares and Dreams*). However, he and his wife were forced to flee Paris when the Nazis marched in and he was forced to deposit this film-in-progress at the Cinémathèque Française. Bartosch told his friends, "when they came to look for me, they didn't find me, but they found my film and destroyed it." Only a few test strips remain. The loss was a devastating blow, and although he did continue to work in animation after that, he mostly devoted the last years of his life to painting.

Although lame for his entire life and having spent many years in poverty as he refused most of the advertising work offered him, Bartosch lived his life with an undying belief in his art and animation. He died in 1968 after a long illness. In his last conversation with animator Claire Parker, he talked about another animation technique he had used those many years ago on *Prince Achmed*: "During my years of work I have learned many things. Soap, it is quite extraordinary, with soap one can do everything."

### **Walter Ruttmann (1887-1941)**

A native of Frankfurt, Walter Ruttmann studied painting, engraving, architecture and music before devoting himself to abstract cinema, or what he called "painting with time." After his groundbreaking film *Lightplay Opus I* received widespread acclaim, he went on to produce *Opus II-IV*. He provided special effects and backgrounds on Lotte Reiniger's feature film *The*

*Adventures of Prince Achmed*, but moved away from abstractionism after that and focused on producing and editing more documentary-like films. In 1927, he created his most famous film, *Berlin: Symphony of a City*, which was scripted by Carl Meyer and photographed by Karl Freund. Ruttmann traveled to Italy where he filmed *Steel* in 1932, based on a play by Luigi Pirandello. He returned to Germany and collaborated with Leni Riefenstahl in 1936 on the editing of *Olympia*, which many credit him for the artistic success it received. Ruttmann died on July 15, 1941 after a serious operation — though there were rumors that he might have actually died while filming on the Russian front.

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|---|--|
| 1. Rübezahls Hochzeit (Titles, 1916)  | 13. Doktor Dolittle und seine Tiere (The Adventures of Dr. Dolittle, three shorts - Abenteuer: Die Reise nach Afrika - Abenteuer: Die Affenbrücke - Abenteuer: Die Affenkrankheit, 1928) |
| 2. Die Schöne Prinzessin von China (Titles, set decoration and props, 1916)     | 14. Zehn Minuten Mozart (1930)   |
| 3. Der Rattenfänger von Hamelin (The Pied Piper of Hamelin, titles, 1918)       | 15. Die Jagd nach dem Glück (Running After Luck, feature sequence, co-script and sound, 1930)  |
| 4. Das Ornament des verliebten Herzens (The Ornament of the Loving Heart, 1919) | 16. Harlekin (Harlequin, 1931)   |
| 5. Der fliegende Koffer (1919)  | 17. Sissi (Interlude for Kreisler opera premiere, 1932)  |
| 6. Aschenputtel (Cinderella, 1919)  | 18. Carmen (1933)  |
| 7. Amor und das standhafte Liebespaar (1920)                                    | 19. Don Quichotte (Sequence for feature film, 1933)  |
| 8. Der verlorene Schatten (Sequence for feature, 1920)                          | 20. Das rollende Rad (1934)  |
| 9. Der Stern von Bethlehem (1922)   | 21. Der Graf von Carabas (1934)  |
| 10. Dornröschen (1922)  | 22. Das gestohlene Herz (The Stolen Heart, 1934)   |
| 11. Die Geschichte des Prinzen Achmed (The Adventures of Prince Achmed, 1923-6) | 23. Papageno (1935)  |
| 12. Der scheinotote Chinese (From a un-used segment of Prince Achmed, 1928)     | 24. Galathea (1935)  |

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| 25. Das kleine Schornsteinfeger (The Little Chimney Sweep, 1935)      | 38. The Gallant Little Tailor (for TV, 1954) |
| 26. The King's Breakfast (1936)                                       | 39. The Sleeping Beauty (for TV, 1954)       |
| 27. Tocher (1936)   | 40. Caliph Stork (for TV, 1954)              |
| 28. Le Marseillaise (sequence for Jean Renoir's French feature, 1938) | 41. Hansel and Gretel (1955)                 |
| 29. Dream Circus (not completed, 1939)                                | 42. Thumbelina (for TV, 1955)                |
| 30. L'elisir d'Amore (not completed, 1939)                            | 43. Jack and the Beanstalk (for TV, 1955)    |
| 31. Mary's Birthday (1951)  | 44. The Star of Bethlehem (for TV, 1956)     |
| 32. Aladdin (for TV, 1953)  | 45. La Belle Helene (1957)                   |
| 33. The Magic Horse (for TV, 1953)                                    | 46. The Seraglio (1958)                      |
| 34. Snow White and Rose Red (for TV, 1953)                            | 47. The Pied Piper of Hamelin (1960)         |
| 35. The Three Wishes (for TV, 1954)                                   | 48. The Frog Prince (1961)                   |
| 36. The Grasshopper and the Ant (for TV, 1954)                        | 49. Wee Sandy (1962)                         |
| 37. The Frog Prince (for TV, 1954)                                    | 50. Cinderella (1963)                        |
|   | 51. The Lost Son (1974)                      |
|   | 52. Aucassin et Nicolette (1976)             |
|   | 53. The Rose and the Ring (1979)             |

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