



Georges Méliès was one of the most important pioneers of early cinema. A successful magician and owner of the Theatre Robert-Houdin in Paris, Méliès attended the first screening of the Lumiere Cinematographe on December 28, 1895. In February of the following year, Méliès purchased a motion picture camera, and he began making his own films three months later.

Cinema technology was just being developed, and Méliès studied the various new mechanisms, and then had projectors, printers, and processing equipment custom-made, based on other the inventions of other people or on improvements of his own design.

Méliès' first films were straightforward cityscapes and event films, patterned after the short films of the Lumieres, but soon he was using the camera to document magic acts and gags from the stage of the Theatre Robert-Houdin. By late 1896, Méliès was incorporating his knowledge of the mechanisms of motion pictures with the format of the stage magic skit, producing his first "trick" films. These short films relied on multiple exposures to create the illusion of people and objects appearing and disappearing at will, or changing from one form to another.

Over the next few years, Méliès was perhaps the most inventive filmmaker in the world. Not only did he experiment with what could be done inside the camera with special effects and multiple exposures, but Méliès led in the development of a film language based on separate scenes edited together in chronological order. At a time when most filmmakers were content with single-shot films, Méliès was stringing shots together to make mini-epics like "Cinderella" (1899), which used seven minutes and 20 separate scenes to tell the popular fairy tale.

Méliès best known film, "A Trip to the Moon" (1902) was one of the longest and most elaborate of his trick film epics. The film as hugely successful, but not as profitable as it should have been. "Trip to the Moon" was perhaps the most heavily pirated film of its era, and while crowds around the world marvelled at its tale of space travel, relatively little of this success translated into financial gain for its creator.

Méliès continued to produce films at a frantic pace, but his filmmaking style did not progress much past the groundbreaking work of 1899 to 1902. Although Méliès had developed the idea of composing film narratives from separate scenes, he never really moved beyond this stage in his later films. His scenes continued to be made up of single shots. These were complex shots, to be sure, involving a lot special effects work. But newer techniques of composing scenes out of separate shots, of changing the camera's point of view, and of employing close-up in addition to medium and long shots, were not used by Méliès in his films.

In terms of their film "language," Méliès' films from 1905 through 1912 were well behind the curve of the groundbreaking work of filmmakers like Edwin S. Porter and D.W. Griffith. But even the declining popularity of his films failed to induce Méliès to change with the times.

Ultimately, Georges Méliès wasn't a filmmaker. He was, in truth, a film magician. A conjuror who experimented with films, but who was more concerned with how the film reflected his concept for the tricks involved than for the evolution of the new art form. As a filmmaker, Méliès may have stopped producing important films by 1903. But as a magician, he continued to create dazzling presentations of cinematic marvel.

The inventiveness, humor, and visual power of Georges Méliès' film-created tricks, when projected in a theatre or performance hall like those where Méliès was first exposed to the cinema, have lost little of their ability to dazzle. The films of George Méliès possess a unique magic that has lost little of its potency over the past 100 years.

Born Marie-Georges-Jean Méliès, Paris, December 8, 1861. Died January 21, 1938.

Méliès Films, 1896-1910 - (Commonly-used English Title / Original French Title)

- The Vanishing Lady / Escamotage d'une dame chez Robert-Houdin (1896)
- An Up-to-Date Conjuror / Illusioniste fin de siècle (1899)
- Cendrillon / Cinderella (1899)
- The Dreyfus Affair / L'Affaire Dreyfus (1899)
- A Trip to the Moon / Le Voyage dans la Lune (1902)
- The Infernal Cakewalk / Le Cake-walk infernal (1903)
- The Mystical Flame / La Flamme merveilleuse (1903)
- Kingdom of the Fairies / Le Royaume des Fées (1903)
- The Monster / Le Monstre (1903)
- The Melomaniac / Le Mélomane (1903)
- The Inn Where No Man Rests/L'Auberge du Bon Repos (1903)
- The Magic Lantern / La Lanterne magique (1903)
- The Ballet Master's Dream / La Rêve du Maître de Ballet (1903)
- The Damnation of Faust / Le Damnation de Faust (1903)
- The Terrible Turkish Executioner / Le Bourreau turc (1904)
- Untameable Whiskers / Le Roi du Maquillage (1904)
- The Impossible Voyage / Le Voyage à travers l'Impossible (1904)
- Palace of the Arabian Knights / Le Palais des Mille et Une Nuits (1905)
- Paris to Monte Carlo / Le Raid Paris-Monte Carlo en 2 heures (1905)
- The Merry Frolics of Satan / Les 400 Farces du Diable (1906)
- The Mysterious Retort / L'Alchimiste Parafaragamus ou la Cornue infernale (1906)
- The Eclipse / L'Éclipse du soleil pleine lune (1907) ([image](#))
- Dream of an Opium Eater / Le Rêve d'un fumeur d'opium (1907)
- The Doctor's Secret / Le secret du Médecin (1910)

- Baron Munchausen's Dream / Les Hallucinations du Baron de Münchhausen (1910)
- Conquest of the Pole / Á la Conquête du Pole (1910)