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Lotte Reiniger's

THE ADVENTURES OF

Prince Achmed

ORIGINAL SCORE
BY SHAWN GARMON

AT
BERKELEYS'S

Fine Arts Cinema



PRESENTED BY REEL WOMEN, CINEMA PRESERVATION SOCIETY AND THE FINE ARTS CINEMA

The following are excerpts from a long interview between Italian Animation Critic Alfio Bastiancich and Lotte Reiniger a year before her death in 1981.

Charlotte Reiniger was born in Berlin in 1899.

Although she moved in Avant-garde circles, in the heady period of the 20's, her work has, fundamentally, little in common with that of experimental filmmakers like Walter Ruttmann, Eggeling, Hans Richter or German Expressionists, although stylistically there are some influences. Most of her films were inspired by fables or music and are notable for their extreme delicacy, ironic humour and fantasy. At the age of 23, she began work on one of the first feature-length animation films, THE ADVENTURES OF PRINCE ACHMED, more than a decade before Walt Disney's SNOW

WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARVES. Although Prince Achmed is a narrative film, there are semi-abstract sequences in which she experimented with wax and sand on backlit glass. Her technical invention also extended to the design of an early form of the multiplane camera (which separates foregrounds and backgrounds into layers to give a three dimensional effect), again, several years before Disney had built his admittedly more complex camera.

When I was at school, all the children used to do paper cut-outs, silhouettes and I loved it. Later, I got the theater bug and used to put on shows. When other children were out playing, I was 'animating' my silhouettes. When cinema appeared, I was bowled over. What I remember being most excited by were the fantasy films of George Melies.

How did you move from the miniature theater and your dolls and puppets to work for the cinema?

I was lucky. In 1915 I went to a lecture given by Paul Wegener, who'd made *The Golem*. He was talking about the technical side, and special effects, which I found fascinating. I was fifteen. I said to myself, this is a man I must meet. I enrolled at the Reinhardt Theater School but it was simply a ruse to get to meet Wegener. I pestered him so much that he ended up giving me small parts in his films. In 1918 Wegener introduced me to a group of young people who had just started a studio for scientific and experimental films, and he suggested they take me on. The people involved were Professor Hanslik, Hans Curlis, Karl Witte and Carl Koch.



Let's talk about Prince Achmed. How did you meet the producer Hagen?

Hagen came to the institute one day with some other people. He was a banker, but he was also very interested in educational films. My husband was making a film for him, about Egypt. So he then saw my films and the way I worked and suggested I make a feature film, something that had never been done before. It was an offer I couldn't turn down. That was in 1925. We rigged out a studio in his country house, in Potsdam, above the garage, but then we left, as it was too difficult to work so far from Berlin. It took three years' work.

The story was inspired by *A THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS*. I read the whole book until I found a story that would lend itself to animation. . . everything I liked about Prince Achmed went into the film; the horse, the magician. . . I started drawing, did sketches. The film was done scene by scene. Ruttmann built the background sets.

Photo: Lotte Reiniger and Walter Ruttmann in their studio in 1926.

(Courtesy of Primrose Productions, Munich)

Continued on Back Page

Saturday and Sunday

← January 10-11, 1998 →

After watching the film it took me several days to actually come up with what I would want. I knew that there would be music for the duration of the film, but I was not sure as to whether there would be one continuous piece or segments linked together by transitions.

Therefore, I decided to give each character a 'voice', each section a theme that would reoccur when certain characters appeared.

What I accomplished in this piece will allow an aural experience as well as the visual.

Shawn Garmon, Composer

THE MUSICIANS:

← **SHAWN GARMON**, composer and musician, has her Bachelor's Degree in Music Theory and Composition from The Wichita State University in Kansas. She has also studied with Mr. Ellis Marsalis and Mr. Kidd Jordan while residing in New Orleans. She has composed numerous scores for theatre and film, as well as jazz pieces. Currently, she is composing a symphony.

← **Marie Park**, oboist, holds a Master's Degree in Music from The Julliard School where she studied with John Ferrillo. She has been a featured soloist with Yo-Yo Ma and The Harvard Radcliffe Orchestra, and most recently was featured with the Sacramento Chamber Orchestra. You may find her playing with her Klezmer band, Wander/LUST, at The Brady Street Dance Center.

← **Rebecca Roundman**, cellist, is a sophomore at California State University, Hayward, where she is pursuing her Bachelor's degree in Music Performance. Her instructor is Lawrence Granger. Rebecca is currently a member of the San Francisco Youth Orchestra and has won numerous competitions and scholarships. Her plans for the future include teaching and playing professionally.

← **Loralyn Staples**, violinist, recently completed her Master's Degree in Music from Wichita State University. While in Kansas, she played with The Wichita Symphony and served as Concertmaster of Wichita State University Symphony. She was also a member of the The Graduate String Quartet there. She returned to her native state, Utah, and began exploring jazz and blues, as well as Celtic style fiddle-playing. She is thrilled for the opportunity to perform in a new vein with Shawn Garmon et al in The Adventures of Prince Achmed.

It was quite rare to see such entirely different temperaments working together, since Ruttmann was a lot older than I and was considered a great artist whereas I was only a novice. I was very scared of him but he seemed quite at ease doing the movements for the backgrounds whilst I worked on the characters' movements in the foreground. The result was two negatives which we then put together.

Your husband worked as a cameraman on the film?

He wasn't simply a cameraman: he had a great understanding of cinematic language, truly extraordinary. He was the brains, I was the crazy one.

Bartosch made the Aladdin's voyage sequence: what was Ruttmann's contribution?

He did the sequence in which the Magician makes the flying horse appear. It was a very complicated thing to do, using thin sheets of wax underneath a machine he invented. Then he did the lamps and all the effects in the final battle between the Magician and the Witch. Whereas, for the sequence in which Waq Waq's devil fights the white spirits we all worked on it together.

The film was finished in May, 1926. How was the preview at The Volksbühne on Bulowplatz?

Hagen was exhausted and having problems with the film, as no cinema would take it, they didn't dare. He was furious. Since we only had the cinema for a Sunday morning, we wrote postcards to everyone we knew, and all our friends, inviting them to come.

So it wasn't a screening for the press?

No. There were press there, for which we had to thank Bert (Brecht) who knew who to invite... he was very astute.

And how was the film received?

We were all very anxious since it was a Sunday morning in May and nobody went to the cinema in spring, but in fact there were a lot of people, the cinema was bursting at the seams. I was in the lighting box and saw all of these people waiting for my film, Fritz Lang among them.

And did the audience like the film?

I've never seen anything like it. They clapped at every effect, after every scene.

Was the first version of the film in color?

Yes, all of it. We shot it in black and white and on the negative indicated the colors we wanted for each scene: it was very time consuming. We tried with Technicolor but the colors were too dense and corroded the silhouettes. At Filmagie, on the other hand, they did the backgrounds in colour and projected the silhouettes in black. We were very pleased with it. That way, I found the colors didn't overimpose, indeed, shooting the film in black and white with a range of greys, the colors lose a lot of their liveliness and that gives the film a greater sense of movement.

The original negative was destroyed in the war.

But the British Film Institute had had a negative made. When I went to London for the first time I met the person who'd been working on the film. It was the son of the banker from Potsdam who'd financed the film. As a child he used to sit and watch us working in the make-shift studio above the garage. He saw it as a kind of family affair, and had worked like mad to reconstitute the colors and tinting in the film ■

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And sincere thanks to Shawn Garmon for her faith and her enthusiasm for this project.

Poster Design by Lisa Zamarin.

The story in this film is make believe. The characters are caricatures and stereotypes and are not meant to reflect real people or cultures. We sincerely regret if anyone is offended by any part of this film.

Reel Women is a sponsored project of the San Francisco Women's Centers.