

## Document Citation

Title	<b>Lumiere and company</b>
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Source	<i>Variety</i>
Date	1995 Dec 04
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	2
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Lumiere et compagnie (Lumiere and company), Moon, Sarah, 1995



# LUMIERE AND COMPANY

(LUMIERE ET COMPAGNIE)

(FRENCH-SPANISH-SWEDISH —  
COMPILATION DOCU — B&W/COLOR)

A Pierre Grise Distribution (France) release of a Cineteve presentation of a Cineteve/Igeldo Komunikazioa/Soren Staermose AB/La Sept-Arte co-production with special participation of Canal Plus. (International sales: Cineteve, Paris) Produced by Fabienne Servan-Schreiber. Executive producer/artistic director, Anne Andreu. Co-producers, Angel Amigo, Soren Staermose.

Directed by Sarah Moon. Based on an idea by Philippe Poulet of the Musee du Cinema de Lyon. Camera (B&W, Lumiere Cinematographe: Philippe Poulet, Didier Ferry; color Hi-8 video: Moon, Frederic Le Clair); editors, Roger Ikhef, Timothy Miller; music, Jean-Jacques Lemetre; sound, Bernard Rochut, Jean Casanova.

New Lumiere films directed by Merzak Allouache, Theo Angelopoulos, Vincente Aranda, Gabriel Axel, John Boorman, Youssef Chahine, Alain Corneau, Raymond Depardon, Costa-Gavras, Francis Girod, Peter Greenaway, Lasse Hallstrom, Michael Haneke, Hugh Hudson, James Ivory and Ismail Merchant, Gaston Kabore, Abbas Kiarostami, Cedric Klapisch, Andrei Konchalovsky, Patrice Leconte, Claude Lelouch, Spike Lee, Bigas Luna, David Lynch, Claude Miller, Idrissa Ouedraogo, Arthur Penn, Lucian Pintilie, Jacques Rivette, Helma Sanders, Jerry Schatzberg, Nadine Tritignant, Fernando Trueba, Liv Ullmann, Jaco Van Dormael, Regis Wargnier, Wim Wenders, Zhang Yimou, Kiju Yoshida. Reviewed at Canal Plus screening room, Paris, Nov. 23, 1995. Running time: 88 MIN.

One hundred years after the Lumiere brothers dispatched their cameramen around the globe to capture street life and momentous events artfully, they're still a hard act to follow. But "Lumiere and Company," an omnibus project that put an original Lumiere camera and homemade film stock into the hands of a broad cross-section of contemporary helmers, proves that the challenge of creating a hand-cranked 52-second movie via natural light and without synch sound remains a goal worth pursuing.

Result is a wildly diverse but technically satisfying oddball gem for fests, specialized webs, classrooms — and posterity. Pic hits Gallic hardtops Dec. 20 and will be broadcast on Canal Plus Dec. 28, when the "First Century of Cinema" celebration culminates with enough commemorative festivities to outdo the Bicentennial of the French Revolution. Next year the Franco-German cultural web Arte will present each self-contained pic individually, and other savvy tube programmers could do likewise.

Lyon-based researcher Philippe Poulet, who is associated with the Museum of Cinema in the Lumiere brothers' hometown, restored one of the vintage Lumiere cameras (the Cinematographe) and pain-

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stakingly re-created the Lumiere emulsion from the inventors' original recipe, punching round sprocket holes (two perfs per frame) in 35mm safety stock (a lone concession to modernity, since the original stuff was nitrate-backed).

With a budget of 10 million francs (\$2 million) and a tight deadline, artistic director Anne Andreu approached some 150 helmers worldwide, of whom 39 were both willing and available. Filming — in locations as far-flung as Los Angeles, Cairo, Ouagadougou, Johannesburg, Hiroshima and the Great Wall of China — was completed between July and early November of 1995. A skeleton crew was present to hand-crank the mini-pics and develop and contact-print them on the spot, using the versatile Cinematographe.



VINTAGE VERITE: David Lynch is one of 39 directors to try his hand at the 100-year-old Cinematographe camera in "Lumiere and Company."

The ground rules were rigidly enforced: a continuous shot to be captured in a maximum of three attempts, no artificial light sources, no synch sound. Abbreviated running time of roughly 50 seconds can seem deeply tedious, cruelly brief or just right depending on whose vision is being expressed.

Sarah Moon generated the compilation's narrative glue in the form of still photo portraits and Hi-8 video "making of" segs in which the helmers are asked questions including "Why did you agree to do this? Will film as a means of expression endure? Why do you make movies?" A surprising number of participants are at a loss to articulate why they film, with Jacques Rivette literally speechless.

Each helmer and his or her chosen location is identified with simple titles before video docu footage shows us the director in the physical act of directing — the shifting expressions on helmers' faces are often wonderful. Only then are we shown what it was they were shooting. The before/during/after approach injects much-needed suspense into what could otherwise have been a mostly academic exercise carried out by a distinguished cast.

Part of what entralls about the original Lumiere footage, aside from its sterling pictorial quality, is the lost world it portrays. First at

bat, Patrice Leconte does an amusing riff by refilming the Lumieres' "Train Coming into the Station at La Ciotat." Of course, the train in question is now the high-speed TGV, which barrels through La Ciotat without stopping.

The subtext to Wim Wenders' shot of Berlin, into which two of his "angels" wander, will be lost 100 years from now, but Zhang Yimou's gorgeous and funny gag set on a scenic bend in the Great Wall of China will hold up as long as the film itself.

Spike Lee and Lasse Hallstrom choose to immortalize family members. Andrei Konchalovsky orchestrates a memento mori: In a desolate French gorge, the camera settles on a dead dog hosting a maggot convention.

Alain Corneau's lovely entry captures the enchanting movements of a young woman dancer from India; Corneau later hand-tinted the footage with a range of dyes from old-style pastels to Day-Glo.

David Lynch's ingenious showstopper plays like a cross between "Creature from the Black Lagoon," "Intolerance" and the opening credits sequence from "Tucker." Lynch packs his entire universe of wholesome/creepy juxtaposition into a 52-second continuous take, using elaborate sets, a clever camera rig and choreography so tight that rehearsals must've been timed via atomic clock.

Helma Sanders puts 88-year-old master electrician Louis Cochet on a pedestal at Versailles, where he literally conducts light as an orchestra conductor would.

With the Brooklyn Bridge in the distance, Jerry Schatzberg nails a very New York-style encounter between a bag lady and a trash collector.

Youssef Chahine plants his ersatz Lumiere brothers in front of the pyramids only to have an early censor emerge from the dunes and wreak havoc. Abbas Kiarostami keenly limns the end of a romance using a close-up of a frying pan, a couple of eggs and a voice on an answering machine.

Hugh Hudson bravely goes handheld (there's no viewfinder) in Peace Park while President Truman's voice announces that the bomb's been dropped on Hiroshima. Kiju Yoshida brilliantly uses the same location to prove that there are some things that simply can't be filmed.

"Indochine" helmer Regis Wargnier is heard to say, "After all, this isn't Catherine Deneuve." Soon after, we see a gentleman strolling toward us who turns out to be Francois Mitterand. In voiceover, the former French president reminisces about filmed images that affected him.

Claude Lelouch — who clearly loves directing — has finally made a Lelouch film that no one could possibly dislike. Merchant Ivory also pull off a particularly appealing visual coda, for which Richard Robbins composed a compact score.

A real movie set is put to splendidly eerie use by John Boorman in Dublin, where he shoots period extras and contemporary techies on the set of Neil Jordan's "Michael Collins."

Michael Haneke in Vienna had the inspired idea to grab 52 seconds from the TV news of March 19, 1995, 100 years to the day since the crank first turned on a Lumiere camera in Lyon.

Theo Angelopoulos is last in line, with a shot that perfectly mimics the mythical/biblical tableaux of yesteryear. Ulysses, washed ashore near Athens, asks himself (via title card), "On what foreign shore have I landed?" and then

emerges from the water to hold the camera in his cool explorer's gaze, which resonates as a pun on the title of helmer's Cannes competition entry, "Ulysses Gaze."

Soundtrack choices include syn-copated music, operatic arias, mumbled dialogue, a dose of Bernard Herrmann and the evocative mechanical sound of camera gears being cranked. Incidental music between pics is jaunty.

The "new" Lumiere-style films are gorgeous and effective ambassadors for the still potent virtues of black-and-white. Blowups from Hi-8 look fine.

—Lisa Nesselson