

Medina, José

b. 1894, Sorocaba, São Paulo; d. 1980, São Paulo

filmmaker, Brazil

Medina became interested in the cinema when he saw films projected for workers at the Votorantim cement factory in Sorocaba. He moved to São Paulo, studied **painting** and **photography**, and worked with amateur theatrical companies. In 1919 he met Gilberto **Rossi** and began a long and productive association in fiction and **newsreel** production: Rossi provided technical know-how and Medina artistic control. Their *Exemplo regenerador* [Regenerative Example] (1919), produced over a long weekend as an exercise in continuity editing, proved successful with local audiences and was followed by *Perversidade* [Perversity] (1920) and others. Although he abandoned the cinema in the 1930s for radio, where he had a productive career for 26 years, Medina also led the Foto-Cine club Bandeirantes, which had great cultural significance in the 1950s–1960s.

ANA M. LÓPEZ

Méliès, Gaston

b. 1852; d. 1915

businessman, filmmaker, France, USA

The elder brother of Georges **Méliès**, Gaston had his start in the film business in 1903, when he opened a New York sales office for Star Films. He proved an able manager, and he himself became interested in production. With the declining appeal of Georges' **trick films** and *féeries*, in 1909 Gaston determined to make films more in the American style. He set up in Texas to produce **westerns**, with director William Haddock and cameraman William **Paley**. In 1911, he shifted operations to California, but eventually could not compete. Gaston's swansong as a filmmaker was a trip to the Pacific and East Asia with a company of actors and technicians in 1912–1913.

See also: Chicago Film Exchange; Oceania/South Pacific

Further reading

Malthête, Jacques (1990) "Biographie de Gaston Méliès," 1895, 7: 85–90.

STEPHEN BOTTOMORE

Méliès, Georges

b. 1861; d. 1938

filmmaker, producer, France

Born the third son of a Parisian shoe manufacturer, Georges Méliès worked in his father's enterprise only for a short time. In 1884, during a professional stay in London, he frequently attended **magicians'** shows at the Egyptian Hall and befriended John Nevil Maskelyne, who taught him the art of illusionism. After his return to France, Méliès performed at the Musée Grévin and the Galerie Vivienne in Paris. In 1888, when his father retired, Georges's two brothers, Henri and **Gaston**, took over the factory, while he used his share of the family fortune to begin a career as director of the Théâtre Robert-Houdin, specializing in magic shows. Simultaneously, in 1889–1890, he also drew caricatures for a political weekly edited by his cousin, Adolphe Méliès, under the alias of Geo Smile.

On 28 December 1895, Méliès was one of the spectators witnessing the Paris première of the **Cinématographe Lumière**. A few months later, in April 1896, he began to show moving pictures at the Robert-Houdin with a Theatrograph, a machine manufactured by Robert William **Paul**, presented by Méliès under the name *Kinétograph(e)*: according to recent research, a machine copyrighted and put on the market under this name in September 1896 by Méliès, together with Lucien **Reulos** and the mechanic Lucien Korsten, seems to have been identical to one copyrighted by Louis Henri Charles in April that year. In May/June 1896, Méliès started shooting his own films with a modified Theatrograph.

In 1897, Méliès erected his first studio in his garden in Montreuil-sous-Bois, where a second was built in 1907. From 1896 to 1909, he produced films of various genres under his own name and for his own company, Star Film, registered as a **trade**

mark in 1902. In order to protect his business interests in the USA, in 1903 Méliès sent Gaston to New York to open a sales office. Although the G. Méliès Manufacturing Company joined the **Motion Picture Patents Company** in early 1909, Méliès was unable to meet production demands, and, in December 1909, Gaston began shooting his own films in the USA. By 1910, Méliès had abandoned film production and returned to the stage, touring Europe with a magic show. Between 1911 and 1913, now financed by Charles **Pathé**, he produced the last six of his more than 500 films.

In 1923, financial failure forced Méliès to sell his Montreuil property, including all of his remaining positive and negative film stock, representing several hundreds of films. The same year, a project extending the Boulevard Haussmann destroyed the Théâtre Robert-Houdin and the Passage de l'Opéra. In December 1925, Méliès was married to his second wife, the actress Charlotte Faes, who, under the name of Jehanne d'Alcy, had played in a number of his early films. She was the concessionaire of a candy and toy boutique in the Gare Montparnasse, where both worked during the following years. When Léon Druhot, editor of **Ciné-Journal**, as well as other writers became interested in the "pioneers" of cinema, their recognition of Méliès's merits led to a gala evening at the Salle Pleyel in Paris, December 1929, where nine of his films, which had been rediscovered, were screened. In 1931, Méliès received the Croix de la Légion d'Honneur, handed to him by Louis **Lumière**. One year later, he, his wife, and his granddaughter Madeleine were given an apartment at the Château d'Orly, owned by the Mutuelle du Cinéma, where he lived until his death on 21 January 1938.

The name of Georges Méliès is above all associated with **trick films** and *féeries*, which, indeed, form a major part of his production. After allegedly having discovered stop motion or the substitution edit/splice because of a camera jam while he was filming at the Place de l'Opéra (the device in fact had already been used by others before), Méliès used it widely in his films. They appear as crucial tricks in recreations of magical illusions such as *Escamotage d'une dame chez Robert-Houdin* [Conjuring a Woman at the

Robert-Houdin] (1896), but also in a more narrativized form as, for example, in *Voyage dans la lune* [A Trip to the Moon] (1902) with its "exploding" Selenites. In many cases, substitution splices were combined with other trick effects such as double exposure, pyrotechnics, or multiple exposures. Some of these films were made initially to be shown as interludes in stage shows. Méliès's *féeries* and trick films were visually spectacular productions, many of them distributed in **color** versions.

However, Méliès's filmography features many different genres: his first films often were Lumière-like "views," such as his "remake" of *Une partie de cartes* [A Card Game] (1896). Other examples include a series of films shot during the Paris Universal Exposition in 1900. Méliès also produced a number of staged *actualités*, among others his famous film, *Affaire Dreyfus* (1899), and *Le sacre d'Edouard VII* [The Crowning of Edward VII] (1902), commissioned by Charles **Urban**. Other genres found in Méliès's catalogues are comical scenes, melodramas, and numerous films based on literary or legendary stories such as *Jeanne d'Arc* (1900), *Les aventures de Robinson Crusoé* [The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe] (1902), or *Le Juif errant* [The Wandering Jew] (1904).

Despite a number of exceptions, the typical Méliès film is a studio production in a tableau style, with the filmmaker controlling every phase of the process: **screenwriting**, **set design**, *mise-en-scène*, camera work, tricks, and editing. In most cases, he also appears as the main actor. Contrary to **Pathé-Frères**, which quickly embarked on an industrialized mode of production, Méliès continued to see himself first of all as an artist and craftsman. Film historians, therefore, often regard him as an early *auteur*. This mode of production, however, proved disadvantageous in the rapidly evolving market which led to cinema's industrialization. In addition, demand for the fantastic genres in which Méliès excelled and for which this mode of production was particularly suited declined from 1908 on.

Today Méliès is one of the best documented early filmmakers, thanks to the ongoing efforts of the Méliès family to collect and present his work. They have recovered a large number of his films,

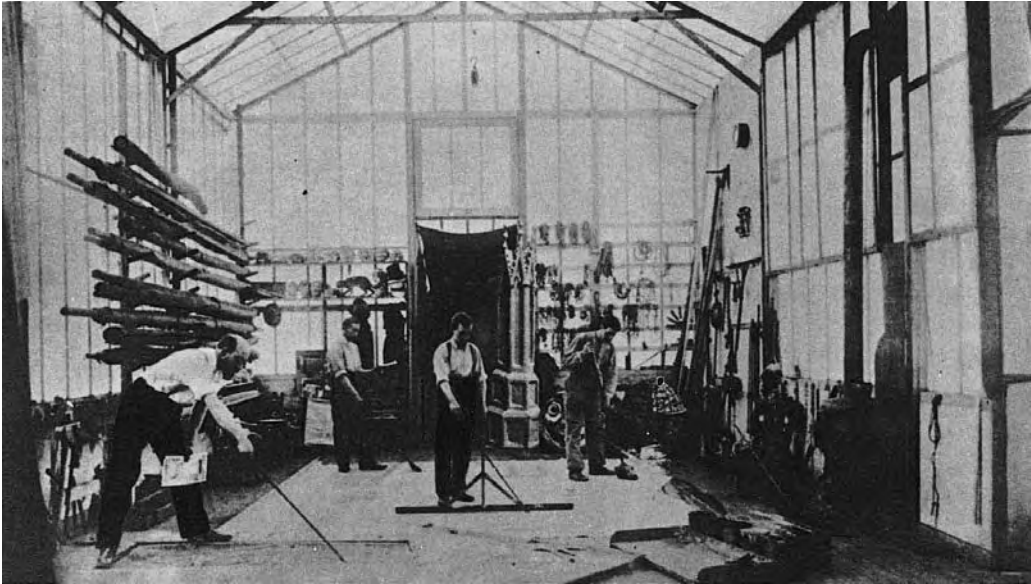


Figure 76 Georges Méliès (left) in his Montreuil studio.

many of them from the families of **fair/fairground** exhibitors, who once formed a large part of Méliès' clientele.

See also: editing: early practices and techniques; editing: tableau style

Further reading

Cherchi Usai, Paolo (1991) (ed.), *Lo schermo incantato/A Trip to the Movies. Georges Méliès (1861–1938)*, Pordenone/Rochester: Biblioteca dell'Immagine/George Eastman House International Museum of Photography.

Malthête, Jacques (1996) *Méliès. Images et Illusions*, Paris: Exporégie.

Malthête, Jacques and Michel Marie (1997) (eds.) *Georges Méliès, l'illusionniste fin de siècle?*, Paris: Presses de l'Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle/Colloque de Cerisy.

Malthête, Jacques and Laurent Mannoni (2002) (eds.), *Méliès, magie et cinéma*, Paris: Paris-Musées.

FRANK KESSLER

melodrama, domestic

As a cultural form, melodrama dates from the end of the 18th century, or the French Revolutionary period. Associated with a new class, the bourgeoisie, melodrama defined itself against a decaying and decadent aristocracy, long aligned with tragedy. The term has its origins in *mélodrame* (music-drama) and refers to a kind of theater in which expression through speech, bodily gesture, and *mise-en-scène* can be understood by analogy with musical orchestration. Yet equally important is the shift from the allegorical of tragedy to the personal of melodrama. Since the social is represented as the personal, the setting is predominantly the home and the situations both familiar and familial.

Early cinema, as it imported its situations from theatrical melodrama, was similarly preoccupied with the emotional ties of family relations, the feelings that bound family members together and the conflicts that broke those bonds. Examples abound in early **Pathé-Frères** films: in *La Loi du pardon* [The Law of Pardon] (1906), a young daughter reconciles her father and wayward