



The Adventures of Prince Achmed

Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Achmed

A silhouette film by: Lotte Reiniger

Production Company: Comenius-Film

Executive Producer: Louis Hagen *

Producer: Carl Koch

Collaborators: Walter Ruttmann, Berthold Bartosch,

Alexander Kardan, Walter Türec

Photography: Carl Koch

Titles: Edmund Dulac *

Music: Wolfgang Zeller

Cast:

Berthold Bartosch

Germany 1926

68 mins

Digital

* Uncredited

With live accompaniment by Hugo Max

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Silent Cinema

The Adventures of Prince Achmed

+ panel discussion with musician Hugo Max and Lotte Reiniger scholar Tashi Petter

Lotte Reiniger on '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 this 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 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, Berthold Bartosch, Alexander Kardan and Walter Türec. Koch was the producer and had

Regular Programme

Relaxed Screening: Doctor Who and the Daleks

+ extended intro by Lillian Crawford, author of *The Mind of the Doctor: Across the Neurodiverse Universe of Doctor Who*

Mon 24 Aug 18:00

Seniors: Barcelona + intro by Ruby McGuigan, BFI Programme Development Manager

Mon 7 Sep 14:00

Woman with a Movie Camera: Wildwood, NJ

+ Q&A with director Ruth Leitman

Fri 11 Sep 18:20

Silent Cinema: Queen Kelly + intro by film critic and historian Pamela Hutchinson

Sun 20 Sep 14:30

Relaxed Screening: Dreams of a Life

+ intro and discussion with curator Benjamin Brown

Mon 21 Sep 18:15

Experimenta: Siticulosa + Maeve Brennan in conversation with art critic Isobel Harbison

+ **Hard Road to Klondike**

Thu 24 Sep 18:00

Film Wallahs: Calorie + intro and panel discussion

Sat 26 Sep 14:45

Restored: My Brother's Wedding + pre-recorded intro by Charles Burnett

Tue 6 Oct 18:30

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control of the technical aspects, I cut out the figures and sets and animated them, assisted by Alexander Kardan and Walter Türck. 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, who wrote the music for special sound effects like flute notes, glockenspiel and marches, and we tried to shoot these in the rhythm of the music to obtain a synchronisation 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 Volksbühne 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-Élysées 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 BFI had made a second negative when the film was shown in London – and so, after a long period – the film being a silent one, it was not shown anyhow – in 1972 a revival was planned. New music was attached to it, this time by Freddie Phillips. The film had gained a certain fame, being really the first full-length animated film in the history of the cinema.

To make it 'Achmed-like' this revival was done by Louis Hagan, 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.

Lotte Reiniger, London 1972

(from *The Adventures of Prince Achmed* DVD booklet, BFI 2013)