



ADMISSION GRANTED

# THE SOCIETY PROGRAMME



A KEEPSAKE FROM  
THE OPEN CINEMA SOCIETY

EARLY CINEMA ▪ PUBLIC DOMAIN ▪ SHARED INHERITANCE



THE OPEN CINEMA SOCIETY · ESTABLISHED 2026

PROGRAMME

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This programme is not a catalogue of old films, but a small invitation to notice how the language of cinema first learned to speak.

PLEASE KEEP THIS PROGRAMME AS A TOKEN FROM THE SOCIETY.

FROM THE FOYER

# A LETTER FROM THE SOCIETY



DEAR ESTEEMED MEMBER OF THE SOCIETY,

**T**here was a time when the moving image was not yet an industry, but a curiosity — a flicker of possibility cast onto a wall, watched in astonishment by people who had not yet learned what cinema could become.

The earliest films were brief, strange, practical, magical, theatrical, documentary, comic, and sometimes all of these things at once. A sneeze could become a spectacle. A train could become an event. A painted moon could become a destination.

The Open Cinema Society exists to welcome these works back into view. Public domain cinema is not disposable content. It is cultural inheritance: available to be studied, shared, restored, remixed, remembered, and loved by anyone who wishes to enter the theatre.

This small programme is offered to you as a keepsake: a guide to beginnings, a companion to the collection, and a reminder that the cinema we know was built one experiment, one trick, one gesture, and one beam of light at a time. As a member of the Society, you are not merely passing through the foyer; you are helping keep the theatre lit.

THE OPEN CINEMA SOCIETY



PRESERVING AND PRESENTING CINEMA WHOSE LEGACY BELONGS TO ALL.

BEFORE THE FEATURE BEGAN

# THE ORIGINS OF CINEMA



## MOTION BECOMES VISIBLE

Before cinema became storytelling, it was observation. Photographic experiments studied movement frame by frame, revealing what the eye alone could not separate: a gallop, a stride, a gesture, a body in motion.

## THE MACHINE BECOMES A THEATRE

Early moving images moved from peepshow devices and demonstrations into public exhibition. The audience became part of the invention. Cinema was not only a machine; it was a room full of people watching together.

## REALITY TAKES THE STAGE

The earliest actualities presented everyday scenes with new wonder: workers leaving a factory, waves breaking, crowds moving, trains arriving. The ordinary became worthy of attention simply because it moved.

## FANTASY FINDS ITS TOOLS

Almost immediately, filmmakers discovered that the camera could do more than record. It could transform, vanish, multiply, exaggerate, and dream. Cinema became both evidence and enchantment.

◆ **Society Curiosity:** Silent films were rarely silent. Screenings were often accompanied by live music, lecturers, sound effects, or whatever a local theatre could provide.

THE EVENING BEGINS BEFORE THE FEATURE BEGINS.

# WHEN THE IMAGE FIRST MOVED



## ROUNDHAY GARDEN SCENE

1888

A fragment of people walking in a garden, yet monumental because of what it represents: the moving image surviving at its earliest edge.

**Watch for:** not plot, but proof: motion preserved against time.



## WORKERS LEAVING THE LUMIÈRE FACTORY

1895

A simple crowd exits a workplace, and the world learns that daily life can become cinema when framed, timed, and projected.

**Watch for:** choreography hiding inside ordinary movement.



## ARRIVAL OF A TRAIN AT LA CIOTAT

1896

The famous train approaches the camera, transforming perspective into sensation and making the screen feel newly physical.

**Watch for:** depth, diagonal movement, and the thrill of proximity.



## THE SPRINKLER SPRINKLED

1895

A mischievous garden prank becomes one of cinema's earliest comic stories, proving that a tiny setup and payoff could make moving pictures feel narrative.

**Watch for:** cause, effect, timing, and the birth of screen comedy.



MARQUEE SELECTION

# A TRIP TO THE MOON



1902 · Directed by Georges Méliès

A cannon, a capsule, a face in the moon: few images in early cinema remain as instantly recognizable. Méliès brought stage magic to the screen and made fantasy feel handmade, elaborate, mischievous, and grand.

Its importance is not only that it imagines space travel, but that it treats cinema as a dream-machine: a place where painted scenery, theatrical timing, editing tricks, and spectacle could combine into something no stage could quite contain.

**What to notice:** the tableau compositions, the handmade effects, and the confidence with which the impossible is presented as entertainment.

◆ **Society Curiosity:** Early fantasy cinema often looked theatrical by design. Painted flats, costumes, smoke, and stage blocking were not limitations alone; they were part of the spell.

THE IMPOSSIBLE RECEIVES ITS ADMISSION TICKET.

# THE FILMS THAT BUILT CINEMA



## THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY

1903

A compact action film whose staging, pursuit, and direct address helped establish the pleasures of screen momentum.

**What to notice:** location changes, action continuity, and the famous final gunshot.

## SUSPENSE

1913

A tense early thriller notable for its visual invention and split-screen technique, proving that editing and framing could create psychological pressure.

**What to notice:** divided space, urgency, and cross-cutting rhythm.

## THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI

1920

A landmark of German Expressionism, with distorted sets and shadowed design that made the world itself feel unstable.

**What to notice:** painted shadows, jagged architecture, and mood as design.

## NOSFERATU

1922

An unauthorized vampire tale transformed into one of cinema's great images of dread: elongated, pestilent, and unforgettable.

**What to notice:** silhouette, landscape, and the unnatural stillness of Count Orlok.

◆ **Society Curiosity:** Early filmmakers did not inherit a finished cinematic language. They invented it in public, one cut, close-up, chase, trick, and shadow at a time.

# RHYTHM, SCALE, AND FEELING



## BATTLESHIP POTEMKIN

1925

A film of revolutionary force and formal precision, remembered especially for its montage and the escalating movement of the Odessa Steps sequence.

**What to notice:** collision, repetition, and editing as argument.

## THE GENERAL

1926

Buster Keaton turns machinery, timing, and danger into a comedy of astonishing control, where every gag feels engineered with architectural logic.

**What to notice:** scale, physical precision, and calm under chaos.

## SUNRISE: A SONG OF TWO HUMANS

1927

A lyrical silent drama whose camera movement and emotional atmosphere show silent cinema reaching a remarkable expressive height.

**What to notice:** moving camera, soft light, and emotion carried by visual rhythm.

## THE PASSION OF JOAN OF ARC

1928

Austere, intimate, and intense, this film uses faces and framing to turn historical trial into spiritual ordeal.

**What to notice:** close-ups, negative space, and the absence of decorative comfort.

◆ **Society Curiosity:** Silent cinema was never one single style. By the 1920s it could be comic, expressionist, documentary, epic, intimate, abstract, or spectacular.



MARQUEE SELECTION

# THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA



1925 · Starring Lon Chaney

A cathedral of shadows, masks, chandeliers, and spectacle. The Phantom of the Opera remains one of silent cinema's most enduring horror-romance landmarks, in no small part because of Lon Chaney's unforgettable transformation.

The film understands the power of revelation. It withholds, frames, and then confronts the viewer with an image designed to stay in memory — not only as fright, but as theatre.

**What to notice:** scale, costume, the contrast between elegance and dread, and how the film turns architecture into emotion.

◆ **Society Curiosity:** Silent horror often depended on makeup, lighting, posture, and timing rather than sudden sound. The scare had to be composed.

THE MASK WAITS. THE THEATRE REMEMBERS.



MARQUEE SELECTION

# METROPOLIS



1927 · Directed by Fritz Lang

A city of towers, machines, workers, elites, and visions. Metropolis is one of the grand monuments of silent cinema: immense in design, mythic in imagery, and still startling in its architecture of the future.

Its influence reaches far beyond silent film. Science fiction, dystopian design, robot imagery, urban spectacle, and the visual grammar of industrial anxiety all find one of their great early cathedrals here.

**What to notice:** vertical space, crowds as design, machine rhythm, and the way spectacle becomes social metaphor.

◆ **Society Curiosity:** Some silent-era films feel surprisingly modern because they helped invent the visual futures later films would keep returning to.

THE CITY RISES. THE MACHINE DREAMS.

SOCIETY VIEWING NOTES

# HOW TO WATCH EARLY CINEMA



**Watch for invention.** Many familiar techniques were not yet rules. A cut, a close-up, or a moving camera could still feel like discovery.

**Let the pace change your eyes.** Early films often ask for a slower kind of attention. Instead of waiting for plot alone, notice movement, gesture, framing, and rhythm.

**Remember the room.** These films were often experienced with music, audiences, and theatrical presentation. The screen was part of an event.

**Look for the handmade.** Painted sets, miniature effects, makeup, tinting, and physical stunts carry the charm of visible craft.

**Hold history and artistry together.** Some films are beautiful, some troubling, some technically pivotal, some all three. A Society viewer can admire form while remaining honest about context.

Classic cinema becomes more alive when it is easier to encounter, and more meaningful when it is thoughtfully framed.



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CREDITS

# SOURCES & IMAGE NOTES



Image notes are included as a courtesy and archival trail for this Society keepsake. Several images are public-domain film materials or frames captured from public-domain works.

**Roundhay Garden Scene (1888):** sourced via Public Domain Review search for “Roundhay Garden Scene 1888 frame.”

**Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory (1895):** captured by The Open Cinema Society from the film.

**Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat (1896):** captured by The Open Cinema Society from the film.

**The Sprinkler Sprinkled / L'Arroseur Arrosé (1895):** sourced via Wikimedia Commons media search for “L'Arroseur Arrosé 1895 still.”

**A Trip to the Moon (1902):** sourced via Wikimedia Commons media search for “a trip to the moon.”

**The Phantom of the Opera (1925):** sourced via Wikimedia Commons media search for “Phantom of the Opera 1925 Lon Chaney still.”

**Metropolis (1927):** captured by The Open Cinema Society from the film.

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**The reel continues.**

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