

Evolution of French Cinema

Evolution of French Cinema – Study Notes

1. Foundations (Late 19th?century – 1910s)

Period	Key Developments	Notable Figures & Works
1895–1905 – Birth of film	• First public screenings (Lumière brothers, 1895) • Early “actualities” and short narrative sketches	Auguste and Louis Lumière – <i>La Sortie de l’usine Lumière</i> (1895)
1905–1914 – Early narrative cinema	• Adoption of story?telling techniques (cutting, close?ups) • Rise of “féerie” (fantastical spectacles) and serials	Georges Méliès – <i>Le Voyage dans la Lune</i> (1902) Louis Feuillade – <i>Fantômas</i> (1913?1914)
1914–1918 – WWI impact	• Production slowed; many studios converted to war work • Emergence of patriotic and documentary films	René Clair (early short comedies)

2. The Silent Golden Age (1910s – 1929)

Sub?period	Characteristics	Representative Films
1910s	• Expansion of studio system (Pathé, Gaumont) • Development of feature?length narratives	<i>Les Vampires</i> (1915?1916, Feuillade)
Early 1920s	• Influence of Impressionist art • Emphasis on visual poetry, montage, and subjective camera	Abel Gance – <i>La Roue</i> (1923) Jean Epstein – <i>La Glace à trois faces</i> (1923)
Mid?late 1920s	• “Poetic realism” seeds appear • International co?productions, especially with Germany	Marcel L'Herbier – <i>L’Inhumaine</i> (1924) Robert Wiene (German) – <i>The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari</i> (French?German version, 1920)

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Result: France becomes a hub for artistic experimentation, influencing Hollywood and Soviet montage.

3. Sound Era & Popular Genres (1929 – 1945)

Phase	Technological & Cultural Shifts	Major Genres & Films
1929–1934 – Transition to sound	• Introduction of “talkies” (e.g., <i>Le Million</i> 1931) • Rapid construction of sound stages	René Clair – <i>Sous les toits de Paris</i> (1930)
1935–1939 – “Classical” French cinema	• Strong studio system (Pathé, Gaumont) • Rise of comedy, musical, and literary adaptations	Marcel Pagnol – <i>Marius</i> (1931), <i>Fanny</i> (1932) Jean Renoir – <i>La Grande Illusion</i> (1937), <i>La Règle du jeu</i> (1939)
1940–1944 – Occupation & Vichy	• Censorship, limited resources • “Cinema of the Resistance” (subtle allegories)	Marcel Carné – <i>Les Enfants du paradis</i> (1945, filmed during occupation)
1945 – Liberation		