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Media Contact: Beth Brooks
206.281.7788 ext. 240
Cell: 206.250.2807
bethbrooks@onereel.org
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The Spiegeltent

To house Teatro ZinZanni, One Reel imported two beautiful antique theatres from Belgium and erected them in downtown Seattle and on San Francisco's Embarcadero.

Opulent palaces of red velvet and gold brocade, stained glass and deep mahogany, the European cabaret tents, known as spiegel tents (mirror tents), were constructed in the 1910s by renowned craftsman Willem Klessens. These warm, intimate circular theatres hosted dances, wine tastings, cabarets and celebrations in Europe for almost a century.

Each tent consists of over 4000 pieces. Designed to be erected and broken down in a hurry, Klessens' spiegel tents require no metal fasteners for construction and can be assembled by a team of three or four in a single day.

There are currently about one hundred of these remarkable structures in existence, and these two tents, San Francisco's *Palais Nostalgique* and Seattle's *Moulin Rouge*, are among the oldest in the Belgian collection.

The tents are still owned by the Klessens family and Willem's grandson, Willy Klessens (and his son Johnny), have been lovingly restoring and touring grandfather's tent since 1987. Willy traveled to Seattle and San Francisco with his son Johnny and brother-in-law Tom to oversee the construction of these tents for Teatro ZinZanni.

Each of these gorgeous pavilions has a unique history.

The *Moulin Rouge* was nearly destroyed by the Nazis as retribution for a resistance force that blew up a bridge in advance of the Nazi approach. The Nazis burned the wood from the tent in a huge bonfire at the foot of the demolished ridge and smashed all the mirrors.

While very little of the *Moulin Rouge* is original, San Francisco's *Palais Nostalgique* was buried deep underground during WWII and made it through the conflict unscathed.

The century-old tents are still in fine form. They stand twenty-nine feet tall, with a circumference of 211 feet. They can comfortably accommodate 300 audience members, along with the waiters, clowns, singers, jugglers, trapeze artists, contortionists, musicians and acrobats who serve them.