

## STOP 7: Moulin Rouge – La Goulue 1891



**Music:** *Cancan d'Orphée aux enfers*

### **Narrator**

This bold image captures the lively atmosphere at the Moulin Rouge – the celebrated dance hall, directed by the gregarious Charles Zidler, which opened at the foot of the Montmartre hill in 1889. It was located in a barn-like building that advertised its presence with a fake windmill at its entrance. The Moulin Rouge soon became Lautrec's nightspot of choice.

At the centre of the poster is the cabaret's most famous star - the dancer, La Goulue – the glutton. She got her name from

her habit of quickly downing customers' drinks as she passed their tables. In the foreground, shown in profile and wearing a top hat, is her dance partner – Valentin le Désossé – or *the boneless one* – so-called because of his ability to perform seemingly impossible dance moves, including the splits. Lautrec knew Parisians would recognise Désossé from his distinctive profile alone.

Among the silhouetted figures in the audience are several recognisable Montmartre personalities. This frieze of silhouettes also alludes to another well-known Parisian art form of the time – shadow plays, using figures cut from zinc plate - that entertained audiences every night at Le Chat Noir cabaret.

This prestigious commission from the Moulin Rouge was Lautrec's first foray into poster design. And when 3,000 copies of the poster were put up around the streets of Paris, it became an instant success, introducing Lautrec's art to a wide audience.