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Film Description

FILM TITLE:

The General

Programme: Special Presentations
 Director: Buster Keaton, Clyde Bruckman
 Country: USA
 Year: 1927
 Language: No dialogue (English intertitles)
 Time: 76 minutes
 Film Types: Black and White/35mm



SCREENING TIMES:

Saturday, September 18 03:00 PM VISA SCREENING ROOM (ELGIN)

Production Company: Buster Keaton Productions/United Artists

Producer: Joseph M. Schenck

Screenplay: Buster Keaton, Clyde Bruckman, based on the adaptation by Al Boasberg, Charles Smith, based on the novel "The Great Locomotive Chase" by William Pittenger

Cinematography: J. Deveraux Jennings, Bert Haines

Editor: J.S. Kell

Music: Joe Hisaishi

Principal Cast: Buster Keaton, Marion Mack, Glen Cavender, Jim Farley, Frederick Vroom

Buster Keaton was a pivotal figure in silent comedy along with Charlie Chaplin. Known for his stoic appearance and his unparalleled skill at physical comedy, Keaton was considered far less sentimental than Chaplin. The heroes he played were almost invariably on the run, forced to deal with circumstances far beyond their control, but determined to confront them anyway. Machines inevitably broke down or ran away from him, yet he addressed these problems without moving a single muscle in his face. The great American critic James Agee once called this quality Keaton's "mulish imperturbability under the wildest of circumstances."

Lauded by many as Keaton's best film, *The General* recounts the Civil War misadventures of one Johnnie Gray, a Georgian railroad engineer who has two great loves: his train, named The General, and his girl, Annabelle Lee (Marion Mack). A mix-up at the recruitment office leads to Johnnie being branded a coward, but he gets a chance to redeem himself when Union spies steal both his train and his girl and he sets off in hot pursuit – alone.

Packed with crazed and sometimes extravagant stunts, *The General* features some of the most legendary gags in silent comedy history, including classic scenes like Annabelle trying to clean up the cabin of the engine while she and Johnnie hurry to escape a Union platoon and Johnnie rushing to load firewood onto the train and managing to knock off more wood than he loads.

Beautifully photographed (the cinematography has been compared to the Civil War photographs of Matthew Brady), the film was one of Keaton's favourites. Impeccably restored, this print features a lush and energetic score courtesy of Joe Hisaishi, who has worked extensively with Takeshi Kitano and Hayao Miyazaki.

- Steve Gravestock



Buster Keaton was born in Piqua, Kansas and first appeared in the cinema with Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle in 1917. He was soon co-directing and starring in his own short films, including *Neighbours* (21) and *The Paleface* (22). His classic features, produced by his own studio, included *Our Hospitality* (co-director, 23), *Sherlock Jr.* (24), *The Navigator* (co-director, 24), *Seven Chances* (24), *The General* (co-director, 27), *College* (codirector, 27) and *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* (co-director, 28). He continued to perform until his death in 1966.

Clyde Bruckman was born in San Bernardino, California and wrote or co-wrote scores of comedies – including many Three Stooges shorts and almost all of Buster Keaton's best-known features – until his death in 1955. In addition to co-directing *The General* (27), he directed several films, including classics starring Laurel and Hardy, W.C. Fields and Harold Lloyd.

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