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Critic's Corner:

Chaplin Is Comedy's Standard

By HOWARD ALLEN

What is humor? The word is as hard to define as freedom or democracy, but one way to establish criteria is by setting a standard.

In the movies, that standard is and always has been Charlie Chaplin, who is very much in the limelight again with the current rerelease of his feature films.

While techniques for developing humor can be

can be honed and polished, the basic sense of humor is a learned, while styles of humor gift. You have it or you don't, and Chaplin's inventive faculties operated on more horsepower than anyone else's.

It isn't too difficult to invent bits of action — just pick up a pie and throw it. It's terribly funny. It's also terribly crude. The trick is in the timing, and Chaplin's best routines were

choreographed more closely than a ballet.

Pay heed, for example, to the fight scene in "City Lights." Chaplin was supposed to be fighting a mug with whom he had arranged to take a dive, but the mug is tipped off at the last minute that the cops are after him and flees, and the promoter sics a big bruiser against the little tramp.

Charlie comes into the ring

at the bell and immediately ducks behind the referee. The referee and the bruiser circle the ring as if they were opponents and Charlie synchronizes his movements with the referee beautifully.

When Charlie does start to fight, he never forgets his relationship to both the referee and his opponent. At one point he even suckers the bruiser into fighting with the referee. It's all highly in-

tricate, and the sense of timing is fantastic.

There are a dozen other intricate little moves in any given scene. Notice in the same film how Chaplin copes with a moving sidewalk elevator, seemingly about to step off the deep end a half dozen times. Or consider him on roller skates in "Modern Times" about to skate off the mezzanine of a department store.