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CLUB FOOT ORCHESTRA

PERFORMS AN ORIGINAL SCORE

FOR BUSTER KEATON'S

SHERLOCK, JR.

USA, 1924

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SHERLOCK, JR.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

CREW

Director:	Buster Keaton
Producer:	Joseph M. Schenck
Writers:	Clyde Bruckman
	Jean Havez
	Joseph Mitchell
Photography:	Elgin Lesley
	Byron Houck
Technical director:	Fred Gabourie
Electrician:	Denver Harmon
Costumes:	Clare West
Length:	46 minutes
Released:	April 21, 1924
Studio:	Metro Pictures Corporation

CAST

Sherlock, Jr.	Buster Keaton
The Girl	Kathryn McGuire
The Rival	Ward Crane
Her Father	Joseph Keaton
The Hired Man	Erwin Connelly

with

Horace Morgan
Jane Connelly
Ford West
George Davis
John Patrick
Ruth Holley

CLUB FOOT ORCHESTRA BIOGRAPHIES

Richard Marriott-*Compositions, trombone, flute, keyboards.* Teachers include Pauline Oliveros, Ali Akbar Khan, and Masayuki Koga. He has led and been the principal composer for the Club Foot Orchestra since 1983. He has composed film scores for ABOUT JOE (by Carol Davis), MYTHIC SCULPTURE (by Slavko Nowytski) and the 1988 Academy award nominee SILVER INTO GOLD (by Lynn Mueller) as well as music for the Della Davidson Dance Company, the Christopher Beck Dance Company and the Berkeley Shakespeare Festival. He is also the inventor of the voltage controlled Casio used by The Residents, Tuxedo Moon, Throbbing Gristle, Eric Drew Feldman and John Adams among others. He currently designs sounds for Walt Disney Computer Software, Sega Genesis and Creative Think.

Beth Custer-*B flat, alto and bass clarinets.* Beth founded the clarinet quintet Clarinet Thing and has recently formed an ethnic improv ensemble with didgeridoo player Stephen Kent. She has composed film soundtracks for Lisa Austin's ONE DIVIDED BY TWO and Peter McCandless' POOL OF THANATOS. She has also composed for numerous dance and theatre troupes including Overtone Theatre, Spoonman's Puppet Show and Tance Dance Action. She has performed with Penelope Houston, Elbows Akimbo, J.A. Deane and Chico MacMurtrie. In 1991 Beth was an Artist in Residence at the Marin Headlands Art Center where she was commissioned to write a work for Earplay. Beth recently completed a solo tour of Czechoslovakia.

Nik Phelps-*Oboe, French horn, saxophones, piccolo.* Nik is a native Texan, and holds BA and MM degrees from the University of Texas. During the Seventies, he performed throughout the Southwest with the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra, the Temptations, the Batucada Ensemble, Asleep at the Wheel, Jerry Jeff Walker, Carole King, Bob Hope and the Creative Concepts Jazz Orchestra. He also appeared on "Austin City Limits" with Beto and the Fairlanes. Since moving to the Bay Area in 1981 he has played with numerous bands and orchestras including: the Berkeley Symphony Orchestra (premiering three ballets by Frank Zappa), the Marin Symphony, Nuclear Whales Saxophone Orchestra, George Burns, Mary Martin, Dick Bright, Burt Bacharach, Lou Rawls, and the Pickle Family Circus Band.

Sheldon Brown - *Alto and tenor axophones, E flat and bass clarinets, flute and piccolo.* Sheldon is a member of The Klezmorim and has played in the past with Anthony Braxton, Jessica Williams, Bishop Norman Williams, O.J. Ekemode, and the Bay Area Jazz Composers Orchestra. Sheldon co-leads Papa's Midnight Hop, and leads the horn band The Rivals. He also performs with the Sheldon Brown-Terry Rodriguez Quartet, the Michael Smolens Quartet, and with Deborah Iyall.

Catharine Clune-*violin.* Born in Texas, raised in Davis and educated in Santa Barbara, Catharine performs regularly with the San Francisco band Zircus and is a member of the free improv group Speed The Parting Guest. Her teachers include Ronald Copes and Gennady Kleyman.

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Steve Kirk-*guitar.* Steve has been performing, composing, and recording in the Bay Area for 10 years. He has performed and toured with Deborah Iyall and Connie Champagne. Steve studied composition with the late Lokram Johnson.

Myles Boisen-*Bass/guitar.* Co-founder of the Bay Area-based Splatter Trio, Myles' musical explorations have taken him from the West Coast to New York, Washington, D.C., Brussels, Rome, London and elsewhere. He has collaborated with guitarists Fred Frith, Henry Kaiser and Robert Fripp and has also worked with John Zorn, Ralph Carney, and the Rova Saxophone Quartet. Along with the group Rubber City, Myles contributed to David Lynch's WILD AT HEART. His recent recordings include: "Notochord" with multi-instrumentalist/tape wizard Eric Muhs, two Splatter Trio CDs, and "Accidental Dialects," a large-scale studio project arranged for Myles' own label - A Small Tribe.

Chris Grady-*Trumpet.* Chris has studied at San Francisco State, the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, his teachers include Joe Alessi, Tim Acosta, and Laurie McGaw. He has toured Europe with the San Francisco and the Oakland Youth Orchestras. He has worked with San Francisco Symphony Brass Choir, the Pacific Brass Quintet, and Sacramento Symphony. Currently Chris holds the first trumpet chair at UC Davis and freelances throughout the Bay Area.

Kenny Wollesen-*Drums and percussion.* Kenny has performed with The Klezmorim, O.J. Ekemode and the Nigerian All-Stars, Laszlo Gardony, Slide Hampton, Clark Terry, Jessica Williams, Eugene Chadbourne, Papa's Midnight Hop, and the New Klezmer Trio and studied with Bob Moses Eddie Marshall, Carl Allen and Adam Nussbaum. He has appeared in Europe at the Montreux, North Sea, Antwerp, and Nice Jazz Festivals as well at the Monterey, Marin, Boston, San Francisco, and Texas Jazz Festivals. Kenny participated at the Knitting Factory Klezmer Festival in New York.

Deirdre McClure - *Conductor.* Deirdre was the founder and conductor of the Sine Nomine Players in St. Paul, Minnesota. Currently a doctoral candidate in Conducting at the Peabody Conservatory of Music, she also holds a Masters in conducting from Peabody, where she has conducted 13 world premieres. Last year, in addition to the critically acclaimed premiere of the Club Foot Orchestra's score for METROPOLIS, Deirdre conducted Olan Jones' "Herakles" for Overtone Theatre and was guest conductor for the San Francisco Winds of Freedom. Her credits this year include conducting "10 PM Dreams" for the Della Davidson Dance Company.

TWENTY-FIVE

IN 1924, at about the time Bobby Keaton was born, Buster began his third feature comedy. His first, *The Three Ages*, ranges from burlesque to satire. The second, *Our Hospitality*, is—in the best sense of the word—romantic. *Sherlock Jr.*, the third, is—again, in the best sense—magical. It is so both in its general tone and in its use of the stage illusions that had enthralled the boy as well as the camera magic that bewitched the man. *Sherlock Jr.* is both the shortest and one of the finest of the Keaton features.

It is easy to miss much of what a picture like *Sherlock Jr.* has to offer. Its appearance of almost childlike naïveté lulls us like a Rousseau jungle painting. We may miss both art and artist in the fairy tale. The simplicity of its stories (for it has two) can conceal the complexity of its structure and divert us too from its piercing appraisal of life and its witty comment on the very medium itself—the motion picture. Its psychological implications may also elude us because clothed in everyday situations.

Being more playful, *Sherlock Jr.* does not register with the unequivocal impact of *Cops* and *The Boat*. It is, however, a more mature work of art than either earlier picture. Insofar as it represents Keaton's retreat from the increasing fragmentation of his personal life back into the safety of childhood and the theatre, it is important autobiographically. It is necessary, however, again to point out the complexity of Buster Keaton, both artist and man. Thus, here the retreat from the situation is at the same time an analysis of the situation from which he is retreating. It is, in other words, a retreat into his art, the metamorphosis of an unbearable situation into creative symbols.

As is well known, Pablo Picasso did this very thing when, in 1953–1954, he had to face his advancing age. He had left women; no woman had ever left him. Then suddenly—when Picasso was seventy-two years old—Françoise Gilot did the unforgivable. Left alone, during the next nine and a half weeks Picasso poured out a series of 180

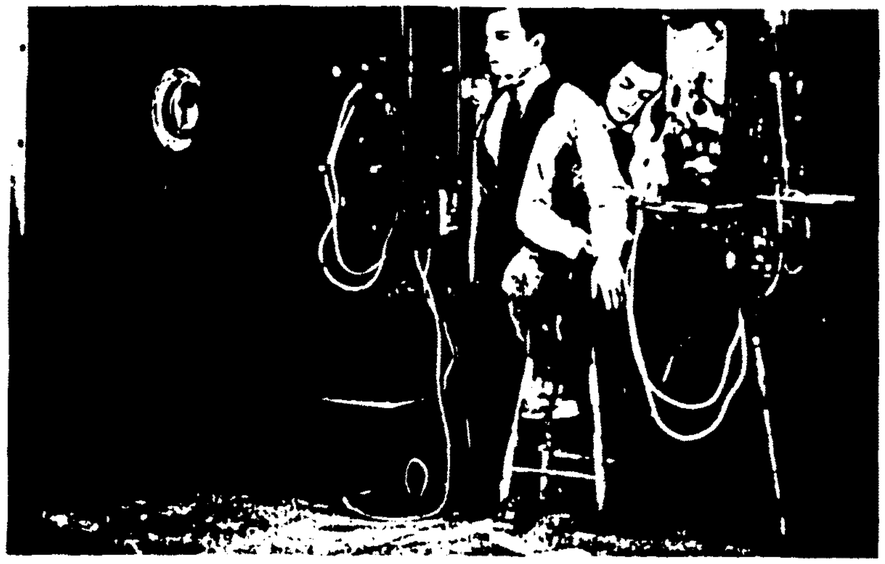
drawings, later published as *Picasso and the Human Comedy*. In these he himself for the first time appears as an old man. The series is therefore not only a confession but also a reassertion of the artist and the man—and a triumph over the defaulter as well.

The two situations, of course, are analogous only up to a point. Picasso has always had his art. With Keaton, the time would come when the opportunity to create motion pictures would no longer be his.

Picasso's drawings stand on their own as art, without reference to his own life. And so, it can be said, does Keaton's *Sherlock Jr.* As such, it is something of a landmark in cinema. The artist discovered the visual means to express highly metaphysical ideas. For example, he develops into a complete story-within-a-story the short dream-sequence idea he had earlier essayed in *The Playhouse*. With the utmost clarity, by an extraordinarily imaginative device, he shows us exactly when the dream begins: the dreamer rises like a transparent ghost from the sleeping body. This, remember, is a silent picture. There is no voice of unseen narrator to bridge the mystifying transition from sleep to dream by saying, "And so he slept and dreamed." But Keaton disdained to use even the silent picture's equivalent of narration, the printed subtitle. Keaton the cinematographer seemed always able to find the visual to express the idea. And the motion picture was then—and is still, despite sound—essentially a visual medium.

Buster Keaton, when he chose to be, could be both complex and subtle. This visual symbol is a case in point. It shows us, to begin with, the invisible, inward transition from waking to dreaming. But it also shows us meaning: which is the more real, the nickelodeon projectionist's prosaic life or his romantic dream? Keaton makes the projectionist's dream into a picture being shown on the nickelodeon screen. He lets the projectionist (in his dream) walk straight into the screen and become a part of this inner motion picture, this picture-within-a-picture. Thus, with the greatest subtlety, he makes us accept the outer story as real (and thus, in effect, all cinema), because we must accept the outer motion picture as real in order to postulate the inner one as unreal, that is, dreamed. This is more than visual semantics; it is graphic epistemology. It is also metamorphic magic. And true metamorphosis—it is as seemingly reversible in either direction as Keaton's own life might well have seemed to him at this particular time.

However, at this moment in *Sherlock Jr.*, he irreversibly fixes it:



Scene from *Sherlock Jr.*, 1924.

once the dreamer has walked down the aisle of the theatre and right into the screen, he is suddenly involved in the cutting from scene to scene of a plot he does not yet understand. He must (and forthwith does) change into another person in order to become a part of *this* story. With this startling but simple device, we not only are told that this is a different world but are given *en passant* Keaton's ironic comment on the all too often overused cinematic device of quick cutting from scene to scene—what he has called the "homeless camera."

Keaton was and is, first and always, a comedian. To make us think, he must make us laugh. Besides, he has a horror of the pompous and the obvious. Had Keaton made a long, solemn picture, very avant-garde, very realistic (and of course very sexy), along the story lines of *Sherlock Jr.*, it would, beyond any question, long ago have been hailed as a serious message. Keaton did not do the serious picture because he is too serious and because he is an artist. His art is the art of the clown.

And he worships clarity. In *Sherlock Jr.* he announces his intentions with his first subtitle: "Do not try to do two things at once and expect to do justice to both. This is the story of a boy who tried it." He tells us this is a fable and then defines fable: "A short story to teach a moral."

The boy, of course, is Buster Keaton, expressly in this film but equally in real life. In the outer story he has no specific name, nor do the other characters. He is the Boy, they are the Girl, Her Father, and the Sheik. In the inner tale, which is the Boy's dream, he alone of the four has a name: Sherlock Jr., the World's Greatest Detective. Kathryn McGuire is the Girl, Joe Keaton is Her Father, and Ward Crane is the Sheik.

The outer story is this. The Boy is projectionist and janitor of a small-town nickelodeon. His two ambitions are to win the Girl and to become a great detective. His rival in love is the Sheik, a Jazz Age city slicker ("lounge lizard" or "tea hound"). The Sheik gets in his dirty work. He steals Her Father's watch, then pins the theft on the Boy. Consulting his correspondence-school textbook, the Boy orders everyone searched. In his own pocket is found a pawn ticket: "Watch and chain, $4." It was planted there, of course, by the Sheik. The Boy is given the heave-ho by Her Father, and he returns to the nickelodeon to project the matinee movie. While it is running, he falls asleep. As he sleeps, the mystery of the theft is solving itself. When the Girl reclaims the watch, the pawnbroker fingers the Sheik.

Meanwhile, however, the Boy begins to dream. This will be the inner story. At its conclusion we shall be back in the projection room to witness the Triumph of Right. The outer story is very short, no more than prologue and epilogue to the dream. (So much for Keaton's own view of the relative importance of actuality versus dream, daily life versus theatre, reality versus art.)

Now for the inner story. The Boy has started running a film called *Hearts and Pearls, or, The Lounge Lizard's Lost Love*. He looks through the projection-booth porthole. On beyond the audience he sees a rich living room on the screen. There are three actors with their backs to the audience—a young man, a young woman, and an elderly man in the act of placing a string of pearls in a wall safe.

The Boy sits down on a stool, yawns, and falls asleep. Immediately he stands up, as transparent as a ghost. Leaving his solid, sleeping body on the stool, he looks again through the porthole. At that instant the three actors turn around. Their faces slowly change from what they were and metamorphose into the Girl, Her Father, and the Sheik.

Ghostly Boy shakes sleeping Boy but cannot awaken him. The transparent dreamer walks to the door of the booth and peels a shadowy porkpie hat from the solid one hanging on the hook. He descends to the auditorium, losing transparency and gaining corporeality as he does so. He walks down the aisle, up over the apron, and right into the screen. The effect is uncanny: one moment he is still in the theatre, the next he is in the movie.

Having walked into a movie plot, he is the immediate victim of whatever way the scenes happen to be cut. As he sets foot in the living room, the scene cuts and instantly he is outside at the entrance door. He knocks—cut—and then falls off the steps. The steps have

disappeared. He is now in a garden. Then, just as suddenly, he is in an empty street. He starts walking and is in the mountains, his foot over a precipice. He turns and runs—into a group of lions in the jungle. The lions leap up snarling, then are gone—he is in a desert, almost instantly being nearly run down by a train rushing out of nowhere. The hummock of sand he falls back upon is suddenly a rock, and sea waves are breaking over him. He dives—into a snowbank in a Far North forest. He leans on a tree, the tree vanishes, and then he is back in the garden.

The garden disappears, and with it the Boy. The real movie and the dream movie have both rejected him. He doesn't belong. When he returns he will no longer be the Boy but his own dream of himself, a great detective.

But will he return? We see the living-room set again with the three original actors. Our vantage point is that of the nickelodeon audience, and our view, like theirs, shows the screen framed by the proscenium arch and the upper part of the orchestra pit. What will happen now in the screened action? Will it go forward or backward? In other words, does the Boy up in the projection booth dream on or wake up?

Preceding any further action, a visual symbol answers the question. The nickelodeon screen begins to expand, wider, higher, until it fills the entire picture frame of the film. The theatre—audience and all—has disappeared. Now the play—that is, the dream—is the thing, the whole thing.

The action among the three actors goes on. The pearls are missing. The Girl's Father telephones the World's Greatest Detective, Sherlock Jr. He comes, in silk hat and with cane. Making light of the matter, he says, "Don't bother to explain."

Sherlock Jr. lives a charmed life. The deadly traps laid for him by the thieves—the Sheik and his accomplice, the butler—boomerang on their guilty perpetrators: the Sheik is nearly beheaded by a battle-ax rigged over an easy chair intended for the detective, and the butler nearly drinks the poisoned wine. The third trap, counted on if all else should fail, is a pool ball filled with dynamite. One tap on that ball and the joint blows up.

The Sheik engages Sherlock in a game of rotation pool. Suspensefully it runs out to the last ball. Each time the young detective raises his cue the villain dashes from the room. The balls click, there is no blast, and he creeps back for his shot. Shot after shot, the balls skim a hairbreadth from the lethal 13. Then Sherlock slams the 13 in. There is no explosion—we discover that the omniscient detective had substituted an unloaded ball.

Now, as Sherlock Jr. gets to the heart of the crime, two old stage illusions save his life. On the first occasion he dives through a magic box. He has trailed the thieves to their headquarters. His valet, Gillette (a kind of servitor Watson), hands him a round cardboard box and lid. The box is about four inches deep and thirty inches in diameter. We watch Sherlock arrange a woman's dress in the box and replace the lid.

The thieves and two accomplices are in the house. Sherlock, outside, sets the box upright in an open window and then walks over to the front door. He is promptly spotted and is yanked inside. As the thieves prepare to do away with him for good, he gets hold of the pearls and whirls to escape. He does not, as the thieves expect, make for the open door. Instead he veers and dives headlong through the window in which he has placed the magic box. Outside, with the pearls, he strolls away undetected by the pursuing thieves.

How this is accomplished is made clear by an extraordinary pictorial device that, to be implemented, required the building of a house with a detachable end. Just as Sherlock Jr. reaches for the pearls, the camera moves outside the room interior for an exterior shot, a distant diagonal view that takes in the end, corner, and front of the house, including the entrance door and the window that holds the magic box. The camera remains at this angle while the action, unseen, continues inside and then, after a few seconds, the end of the house vanishes and we have a cutaway view, as on a dollhouse. Thus (the camera not having shifted during this fantastic develop-

Scene from *Sherlock Jr.*, 1924.

ment) we can now view interior and exterior simultaneously and so see the detective dive headlong directly through the box, land on the ground outside, and spring to his feet. Sherlock Jr. goes into the box a man and comes out a woman, walking away in bonnet and crinolines while the gang mills around in blind confusion.

Thus, as on a dual stage, Buster Keaton bared in one clear, continuous shot the secret workings of an old illusion in order to make equally clear that he was playing the gag, cinematically speaking, dead on the level. Though clearly a magician's trick, it is no easy camera trick.

Belatedly the gang discovers the ruse, and the chase is on. They are on the detective's heels as he runs toward an old barn. He seems cornered at last. But an even more spectacular illusion saves him once again. This time he seems to dive right through a man and a door. The faithful Gillette, disguised as a female peddler, stands in front of the closed barn door. Gillette is holding in front of him a street peddler's tray, open and with its lid (like that of a valise, and draped with men's neckties) up and leaning against his chest. Sherlock comes on the dead run. Gillette points urgently to the tray. Without slackening speed, the young detective dives (so far as we can see) right through the upraised lid and right through Gillette's chest and the solid door behind him. One instant Sherlock is outside, the next he is behind the closed door of the barn. It is the vanishing act deluxe.

Keaton does not give away the secret of this illusion in the film, and it is all but too complicated to describe. It involves a hidden trapdoor in the barn door directly behind the tray lid and what *seems* to be Gillette's chest. Actually, however, Gillette is suspended in a horizontal position shoulder-high off the ground—head, shoulders, and arms *outside* the barn; torso, legs, and feet *inside*. He wears the peddler's dress over only arms and shoulders, the rest of the costume hanging down, with dummy ankles and feet, like a curtain in front of the barn door and its trapdoor workings. Keaton actually did dive through the tray lid (that is, it hinged back and down at the push of his outstretched hands), but he did not dive through Gillette or the barn door, only its small trapdoor.

In recent times, Buster reenacted this scene on the Ed Sullivan television show.

The rest of the Sherlock saga is the final chase, one of the best that Keaton ever devised. Far from surrendering, the gang is fleeing to the lonely mountain-cabin hideaway where the Girl is held hostage. Gillette, now in motorcycle cop disguise, takes his master on the

handlebars of his vehicle and then, under way, promptly falls off and is left behind. Sherlock, totally unaware that no one is steering, rides at breakneck speed through some genuinely hair-raising sequences. Among these is Sherlock's swift traversal of an excavation ditch with the diggers leaping out ahead of him like jacks-in-the-box. Even more sensational and dangerous is his lightning-swift crossing of a forty-foot gap in a broken aqueduct across the roofs of two moving vans at the exact moment they meet and pass in the gap. As usual, no doubles for Buster Keaton, and well the audiences knew it.

When, finally, he looks around and makes the chilling discovery that he is alone on the motorcycle, he is promptly catapulted right through the window of the very room of the very cabin where the Girl is. They leap into the Sheik's car, which is parked outside. The gang, having been outdistanced by the motorcycle, now drives up and the chase is reversed, along a narrow, winding sea-cliff road. Sherlock ends it, and the gang, by an accurate heave of the dynamite-loaded 13 ball, which he has been carrying in his pocket all along.

They are free. Then, almost immediately, they are sinking in the sea. The quick scuttling of victory comes about in this way. At a blind intersection in the road at the water's edge, they meet a truck. Sherlock Jr. steps on the brakes; they lock; the chassis stops dead still, but the car body—they in it—sails over the truck and into the sea.

Presto! The young detective raises the convertible top up to its halfway, vertical position, and in the spanking breeze, with the top as canvas, they sail away. But, like the *Damfino*, this impromptu boat is doomed to sink. As Sherlock hands the Girl the pearls and she embraces him, it founders. He is swimming with her in tow as the scene fades.

This ends the dream sequence, the movie-within-a-movie.

Back in the nickelodeon projection booth, the Boy, horizontal on the stool, his eyes closed, is making swimming motions. He falls to the floor, wakes up, and rushes to the projection-room peephole. *Hearts and Pearls* is nearing its end. That other movie, in which he had been so deeply involved, is gone. The ghostly Boy, the invincible detective, all the thrilling drama and sweet romance are no more. It is back to life.

The Girl enters, too excited to knock. "We've made a terrible mistake," she says. She is shy, he at a loss. Something romantic should happen here. What is it, and how do you do it?

He looks out at the screen. *Hearts and Pearls* is moving toward the clinch. Its hero turns the shy heroine to him. Good. The Boy

turns the Girl. Next? The hero slips a ring on the heroine's finger. The Boy does likewise. Then comes the long, slow kiss. The Boy, now a little beyond his depth, manages a quick peck. Then *Hearts and Pearls* fades into its epilogue: the hero sitting at home holding twins on his lap while the heroine, rather ominously, is busy knitting. This is really deep water. The Boy scratches his head and looks directly at the camera with the full, inerasable, everlasting puzzlement of that famous frozen face. *How do you do* that? he is obviously wondering.

Beyond all its many allusions to many things, its questions posed, and its symbols from Keaton's own life transformed into signs more universal, *Sherlock Jr.* is a gay picture and a magical one. Even by themselves, the gaiety and the magic would be enough.

reprinted from -

KEATON, by Rudi Blesh
1966, The Macmillan Company