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# Chaplin Album



All pictures from the collection of Leonard Maltin



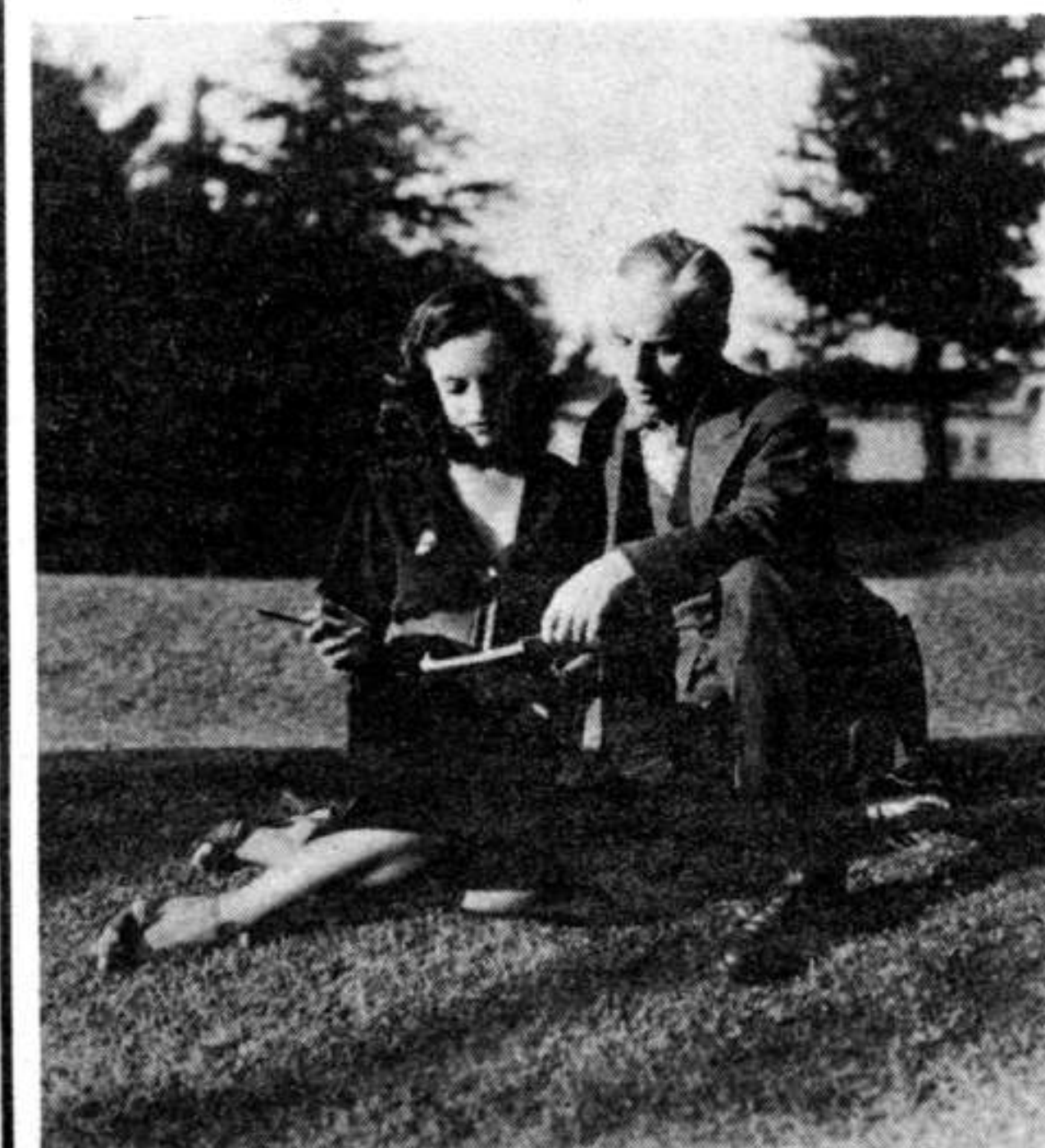
By the time Chaplin made his "golden dozen" two-reelers for Mutual in 1916 and 1917, he was in full command of his powers. Any one of these shorts — like *Easy Street* or *The Adventurer* — would ensure him a niche in comedy history. That almost all of them could be called classic is nothing short of remarkable.



Developing a costume for the Tramp was relatively simple, but creating an attitude was an evolutionary process that Chaplin underwent during one year of hectic production with Sennett. There are only flashes of humanity in his thirty-five Keystone shorts. It was during the next phase of his career, at Essanay Studios, that he had the time and freedom to reflect more on his character and his comedy.



Again in 1936 Chaplin released a silent film, *Modern Times*, but he made a concession to "talkies" by singing a gibberish song near the end of the film. The image of Chaplin vs. *The Demon Machine* remains one of the most vivid from all his films. (Paulette Goddard and long-time associate Henry Bergman are seen here) (Here he takes a lunch break with Keystone colleague Chester Conklin)



Chaplin and his bride Paulette Goddard in 1938; she was his third wife, and his costar in two films.



*The Great Dictator* marked a radical departure for Chaplin, although it featured his Tramp for the last time on screen. The writer-director-star tried to balance broad burlesque with an impassioned plea for peace and hope in this controversial film. Jack Oakie costars as Napaloni, with Henry Daniell as Garbitsch.





It was seven years before another Chaplin film appeared, seven stormy years during which his private life and political opinions were headline fodder. When he released *Monsieur Verdoux*, his cynical comedy-drama about a modern Bluebeard, some critics were horrified, and the general public stayed away. The years have been kind to *Verdoux*, however, and revealed it to be a film ahead of its time. Many of its sentiments are commonplace today, and its black humor well attuned to the 1970s. Martha Raye parried with Chaplin in the film's funnier moments.



*Limelight* was Chaplin's last American film, a sentimental and overlong account of a has-been clown and his young protegee (Claire Bloom). But its moments of power and beauty help make up for its flaws, and many consider it one of his loveliest works.

## Leonard Maltin

More than 60 years ago, when movies were still young, when there was no television or radio, when worldwide communication was still somewhat primitive, Charlie Chaplin soared to heights of international fame that no entertainment figure had ever known before. It is difficult to think of a modern-day equivalent. Almost anything one can name — the Farrah phenomenon, the Fonz cult, the *Star Wars* blitz — is mild, and at best transient, alongside Chaplin's impact, which was not only enormous but lasting.

All a theater owner had to do, anywhere in the world, was post a cardboard cut-out of the Little Tramp outside his theater with the slogan "TODAY" pasted on top, and crowds were sure to gather. So magnetic was his appeal that imitators sprang up in many countries, ranging from the not-untalented Billy West, who made a career out of his Tramp impersonation, to a Mexican with the temerity to call himself Charles Aplin! There were animated cartoons, popular songs, merchandising, and Charlie Chaplin contests in theaters throughout America.

His success was revolutionary in more ways than one. At this time, movies were considered cheap entertainment for the masses, and they were disdained by many citizens of culture and breeding. Chaplin cut through this social barrier; his coarse antics and everyman character appealed to the average moviegoer, while his pantomimic grace attracted him to highbrows. Within one year of his film debut, he was the subject of articles in distinguished newspapers and magazines which praised his art. This was unprecedented for a movie star.

His appearance was his cinematic passport. In the era of silent film, one had to make a visual impression on audiences. John Bunny was the screen's first fat comedian; Mary Pickford was beloved for her golden curls. Chaplin created a unique costume and makeup, embellished with gestures and mannerisms that were his alone. He was as recognizable in Belgium as in Bayonne, and he achieved this stupefying worldwide fame without uttering a single word.

Chaplin's art flourished in unlikely surroundings. The Mack Sennett Studio was the home of broad, unrefined knockabout comedy — not just slapstick as we know it today, but hard-edged physical humor where throwing bricks and kicking people in the stomach was considered funny. This was not the only kind of humor on the screen; John Bunny and Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Drew had popularized domestic and character comedy long before Mack Sennett ever opened shop. But Chaplin was the first to combine subtlety and sledge-hammer comedy into his own personal style. It was immediately apparent that he was one of a kind.

Leonard Maltin is a film historian whose new book, *The Great Movie Comedians: From Charlie Chaplin to Woody Allen* will be published this spring by Crown. Last year he organized the Museum of Modern Art's eight-month salute to American film comedy.

It has been said that Chaplin lost touch with his audience as the years went on. His later films are overpowering in their egocentricity and self-indulgences. But who could have avoided such pitfalls given the same situation? After all, this was Charlie Chaplin, roundly hailed as the funniest man in the world. With each year, with each decade, he came to rely more on himself and his own instincts instead of the reactions and suggestions of those around him. He had complete control over his work, so no one could dictate to him even if anyone had dared to try.

One thing is clear: Chaplin never lost his ability to create comic magic. His blackest film, *Monsieur Verdoux*, contains moments of high hilarity, and the funniest single moment of his last film, *A Countess from Hong Kong*, is when he makes a cameo appearance as a seasick steward.

But more importantly, his classic films have lost none of their luster, though more than half a century has passed since many of them were made. A film like *Easy Street* or *The Rink* needs no apologies or explanations to be shown today. What audiences saw and responded to then is still there. The originality, the warmth, and the truth of Chaplin's comedy will make them live for many years to come. Chaplin's star need never be tarnished by time.



After ten years, Chaplin returned to filmmaking one last time, to make *A Countess from Hong Kong*. His stars, Sophia Loren, Marlon Brando, and son Sidney Chaplin, gamely tried to match the exuberance of Chaplin the director, who insisted on acting out every role before shooting a scene. But the results were pallid, and it was an unfortunate farewell for a creative giant. One bright spot remained: his own cameo appearance. At age 77, he still knew how to get a laugh.

