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THE FILMS OF CHARLES CHAPLIN

Program VII

Thursday, November 15, 1973

Royce Hall

THE IMMIGRANT

Written and Directed by Charles Chaplin. Photographed by Rollie Totheroh.
Produced and released by the Mutual Film Corporation, June 17, 1917.

CAST: Charlie Chaplin (an immigrant), Edna Purviance (an immigrant), Eric Campbell (restaurant headwaiter), Albert Austin (a Russian immigrant; a diner in the restaurant), Henry Bergman (a fat woman on the ship; the artist), Stanley Sanford (gambler-thief), James T. Kelley (the old tramp), John Rand (a diner in the restaurant), Frank J. Coleman (restaurant owner).

Another of the classic two-reel comedies from Chaplin's Mutual period, The Immigrant, with its carefully blended mixture of burlesque and social satire, seems a perfect prologue to tonight's feature, produced some forty years later.

A KING IN NEW YORK

--United States Premiere--

Written, Produced and Directed by Charles Chaplin. Assistant Director, Rene Dupont. Photographed by Georges Perinal. Art Director, Allan Harris. Edited by Spencer Reeves. Score composed by Charles Chaplin; arranged by Boris Sarbek; conducted by Leighton Lucas. An Attica Production filmed at Shepperton Studios, London. Released in Great Britain by Archway Film Distributors, Ltd., 1957. Distributed in the United States by RBC Films, 1973.

CAST: Charles Chaplin (King Shadov), Dawn Addams (Ann Kay), Oliver Johnston (the ambassador), Michael Chaplin (Rupert Macabee), Maxine Audley (Queen Irene), Harry Green (Shadov's lawyer), Phil Brown (the school headmaster), John McLaren (Mr. Macabee), Allan Gifford (the school superintendent), Joan Ingram (Mrs. Cromwell), Sidney James (Mr. Johnson), Jerry Desmond (the Prime Minister), Robert Arden (the elevator operator), Shani Wallis and Joy Nichols (nightclub vocalists), Lauri Lupino Lane and George Truzzi (nightclub comedy act).

When A KING IN NEW YORK was released in Europe in 1957, reports filtering back to the United States via the press clearly indicated that Chaplin had produced an unfunny, hate-filled diatribe against his former adopted home. (Art Buchwald, then the Paris correspondent for the New York Herald-Tribune, even went so far as accusing Chaplin of having "used his son to spit out his hatred at America.")

Now that A KING IN NEW YORK is finally available for us to view, it may be surprising to find that the movie is not nearly as bitter as we might have been led to suspect from contemporary reports. Nor is it as angry as one might well expect from a man who had been treated as unjustly as was Chaplin by the US government. Presented with a re-entry permit prior to his trip to Europe in 1952, Chaplin, a British citizen, was informed on the day following his departure from New York that he would not be allowed to return to his home in the United States unless he submitted to a Department of Immigration hearing on charges of a political nature and of alleged moral turpitude. This double-cross did not sit well with Chaplin and he decided to make a new home in Europe.

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The atmosphere in the US at that time has been described as one of paranoia. The fear of internal subversion by Communism had reached a fever pitch which was being cleverly exploited by various politicians, newspapers, and a wide assortment of super-patriotic groups. Chaplin, an extraordinary successful capitalist with vaguely leftist political sentiments, became a prime target for hysterical villification. His two previous films, MONSIEUR VERDOUX (1947) and LIMELIGHT (1951), had been extensively picketed and theatres showing them threatened with year-long boycotts. The man once the most famous and loved in America had become one of the most controversial. Adoration had turned to villification.

It is the national state of mind that caused this strange turnabout that Chaplin deals with in A KING IN NEW YORK.

The film, however, is not entirely about politics and McCarthyism. The surface of our whole way of life is gently satirized; commercial television, our popular music of the fifties, dogma-spouting Marxists, even wide-screen movies become the object of humor. But ultimately it is the spectacle of a society gone insane that Chaplin, the most celebrated victim of this insanity, presents to us here.

At the end of A KING IN NEW YORK Chaplin as King Shadov assures the young boy whom he has befriended that in time the hysteria will pass. In 1972 an elderly Charles Chaplin revisited the United States to receive the adoring cheers of New York's Philharmonic Hall and of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. The prediction had proved true and the King had returned in triumph.

NEXT WEEK: "THE GOLD RUSH" (1925) and "PAY DAY" (1922)