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A Cheer for Mr. Chaplin

TO THE EDITOR:

PERHAPS the saddest film event of this season is the critical reaction to Charles Chaplin's "A Countess From Hong Kong." It is sad because it is so devastating in what it reveals about the film critic in general and the dismal gulf that exists between him and his subject in the large, historical sense. Unhappily, he has been so mesmerized by the current frenetic techni-conscious gyrations of "cinema vérité" and miniminds that he cannot recognize the genuine article when it comes along.

"A Countess From Hong

Kong" is not prime Chaplin. It is simply a salon piece, an encore played at the end of a magnificent concert. It is a lovely comedy of manners sprinkled with marvelous low comic touches. It is saturated with the nostalgic presence of the great clown, sitting apart and viewing his own reflection and the entire reflection of human life at the same time. Fittingly, the film opens and closes with a waltz, a dance that has no end. If one is to judge it at all, one must view it in terms of the total output of its creator. In this sense, I found it very much a part of the whole; direct, winsome,

funny, at times awkward, and, in the final analysis, a tender, mellow, unpretentious re-affirmation of life. Perhaps its greatest asset is that it is so quiet about what it has to say.

As in all of the Chaplin feature films, the camera simply records. Chaplin has always applied stage techniques to filmmaking. He is totally uninterested in the use of the camera in the mobile sense. His primary concern is to tell a story. To discuss him now as "uncinematic" appears to me to be superfluous and sophomoric. After all, we must remember that almost every major Chaplin effort has been

poorly received by the critics, with the possible exception of "The Great Dictator."

I, for one, am deeply grateful for the latest effort of this superb artist. For me it is a breath of clean spring air in a stifling world. Time is on its side. We shall see.

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