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THE FILMS OF CHARLES CHAPLIN

Program V

October 25, 1973

Royce Hall

EASY STREET

Written and Directed by Charles Chaplin. Photographed by Rollie Totheroh.
Produced and released by the Mutual Film Corporation, January 22, 1917.

CAST: Charlie Chaplin (a derelict), Edna Purviance (a missionary worker),
Albert Austin (the minister; a policeman), Eric Campbell (the bully),
James T. Kelley (a mission worker; a policeman), Henry Bergman (a street
tough), John Rand (a bum; a policeman), Charlotte Mineau (a mother).

Of the twelve two-reel comedies Chaplin made for the Mutual Film Corporation during the years 1916-17, EASY STREET remains the best remembered. The completely developed yet tightly structured story lend to EASY STREET a satisfaction rarely obtained from short comedies.

CITY LIGHTS

Written, Produced and Directed by Charles Chaplin. Assistant Directors, Harry Crocker, Henry Bergman, Albert Austin. Photographed by Rollie Totheroh, Gordon Pollock and Mark Marklatt. Set design, Charles D. Hall. Music score composed by Charles Chaplin, arranged by Arthur Johnston, and conducted by Alfred Newman. Released by United Artists Corporation, February 6, 1931.

CAST: Charlie Chaplin (a tramp), Virginia Cherrill (the blind girl), Florence Lee (her grandmother), Harry Myers (the eccentric millionaire), Allan Garcia (his butler), Hank Mann (a prize-fighter), Henry Bergman (a city official; a janitor), Albert Austin (a streetcleaner; a crook), John Rand (an old tramp), James Donnelly (the foreman), Eddie Baker (fight referee), Robert Parrish (a newsboy), Stanhope Wheatcroft and Jean Harlow ("extras" in the cafe).

When Chaplin began filming CITY LIGHTS in 1928, dialogue movies were largely considered a passing novelty. By the middle of that year, however, it was becoming clear that the "talkies" were here to stay. Throughout, Hollywood silent films then in production were either hastily converted to "part-talkies," entirely remade in the new medium, or simply scrapped. Chaplin halted the filming of CITY LIGHTS to think over the situation.

To most of the writers, directors, cameramen and performers, the addition of spoken dialogue to film was an unwelcome intrusion. The silent film was a unique art form while talkies, or so it seemed then, were stage plays canned in celluloid. (A look at all but a very few of the early sound films easily explains this judgment.) For Chaplin the challenge (or threat) of sound presented a special problem. The tramp character he had so carefully developed over a period of fifteen years had long been a universal figure. To add to it, a distinctive voice in a specific language could not help but compromise, even destroy this universality.

As his own producer, financing his own films, Chaplin was free to make his films any way he saw fit. And so, while everyone else was converting to sound and dialogue, Chaplin resumed production on CITY LIGHTS as a silent film. Those who thought he had lost touch with reality found themselves with much company.

When filming was finally completed in early 1930, Chaplin spent the next several months composing and supervising the arrangement and recording of the score for CITY LIGHTS. Then, with what must have been more than a little apprehension, the film was released to the public. The reviews were ecstatic, the theatres filled, and Chaplin had done it again.

The film itself is, along with the much later LIMELIGHT, the most touching of the Chaplin movies. Its many moments of rich humor are played against an underlying strain of melancholy, bordering on tragedy. To many it is the quintessence of Chaplin.

NEXT WEEK: THE CIRCUS (1928) and BEHIND THE SCREEN (1916)