Next Tuesday: a John Ford program: Waldo W. Winkie (1937) and a fully complete print of Long Voyage Home (1940).

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

March 17 1964

Four Phases of Chaplin

"Twenty Minutes of Love" (Keystone-Mack Sennett, 1914) Directed by Sennett with Charlie Chaplin, Minta Durfee, Edgar Kennedy, Chester Conklin. One reel. (Also known as "He Loved Her So", "Tops and Tumes" and "Love-Friend")

None of the 35 films that Chaplin made for Keystone in 1914 are really good, and even the best of them - perhaps "His Trysting Place" and "His New Profession" - stand out primarily because of good, slower-paced individual sequences. For the most part the keystones are crude, often tasteless knockabout which, for all their frenzy, aren't really funny. Their interest is primarily academic, and once seen, one rarely needs - or wants - to see them again, unlike the best of the Lassanas and most of the mutuels which can be seen again and again. "Twenty Minutes of Love", a largely off-the-cuff affair made before Chaplin was doing his own directing, and the 11th of his Keystone films, is limited to this academic interest. One park bench scene in it has become fairly familiar through its use in compilations, but otherwise "Twenty Minutes of Love" has been a rather elusive item, and this is the first print I have come across in a long time. Hence we are able to eliminate one more largely unknown title from the diminishing list of such Keystone titles.


At their weakest ("The Floorwalker", "The Fireman") the mutuels were slick slapstickers; at their best - and most of them maintained a very high standard - they were sophisticated blends of slapstick, satire, pathos and drama. All twelve are familiar enough today, but "The Rink" - the 8th in the group - is such a delight that one never tires of its grace and charm. There is no purpose other than sheer comedy here - no pathos, no social comment - and the gags, ranging from Chaplin's figuring out a restaurant bill by totalling up the food dropings on a customer's suit to the wildest and skillful prancing on the roller-skating rink, come thick and fast. The print too, is superb, even recalling the intermediate progress shown by the Lassanas group; it's hard to realize that this little gem came only two years after "Twenty Minutes of Love".

"The Bail Class" (First National, 1921) Written and directed by Chaplin, with Chaplin (in a dual role), Ada Furniss, Mack Swain, Allan Carolla, Henry Bergman, Loyal Underwood, John Rand, Lita Grey, Rex Story. Two reels.

It has always seemed to me that, apart from the first one - "A Dog's Life", one of his permanent masterpieces - Chaplin's 11 First National films are his most disappointing works. The feature among them, "The Kid", is probably his weakest feature from any period, not even excelling "The Kid in New York" and the two-reelers are doubly disappointing coming so hot on the heels of the rich mutuel period. It is as though Chaplin now knows what a huge boxoffice draw he is, and feels that it is enough just to keep his admirers contented, rather than to really satisfy them. The films are polished enough, and in some cases quite elaborately mounted, but there is a constant feeling of his "holding back", almost as though he was afraid of dissipating his talents and ideas before he was ready to apply them on a full-time basis to the more

Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

March 17 1964

Four Phases of Chaplin

"Twenty Minutes of Love" (Keystone-Mack Sennett, 1914) Directed by Sennett with Charlie Chaplin, Minta Durfee, Edgar Kennedy, Chester Conklin. One reel. (Also known as "He Loved Her So", "Tops and Tumes" and "Love-Friend")

None of the 35 films that Chaplin made for Keystone in 1914 are really good, and even the best of them - perhaps "His Trysting Place" and "His New Profession" - stand out primarily because of good, slower-paced individual sequences. For the most part the keystones are crude, often tasteless knockabout which, for all their frenzy, aren't really funny. Their interest is primarily academic, and once seen, one rarely needs - or wants - to see them again, unlike the best of the Lassanas and most of the mutuels which can be seen again and again. "Twenty Minutes of Love", a largely off-the-cuff affair made before Chaplin was doing his own directing, and the 11th of his Keystone films, is limited to this academic interest. One park bench scene in it has become fairly familiar through its use in compilations, but otherwise "Twenty Minutes of Love" has been a rather elusive item, and this is the first print I have come across in a long time. Hence we are able to eliminate one more largely unknown title from the diminishing list of such Keystone titles.


At their weakest ("The Floorwalker", "The Fireman") the mutuels were slick slapstickers; at their best - and most of them maintained a very high standard - they were sophisticated blends of slapstick, satire, pathos and drama. All twelve are familiar enough today, but "The Rink" - the 8th in the group - is such a delight that one never tires of its grace and charm. There is no purpose other than sheer comedy here - no pathos, no social comment - and the gags, ranging from Chaplin's figuring out a restaurant bill by totalling up the food dropings on a customer's suit to the wildest and skillful prancing on the roller-skating rink, come thick and fast. The print too, is superb, even recalling the intermediate progress shown by the Lassanas group; it's hard to realize that this little gem came only two years after "Twenty Minutes of Love".

"The Bail Class" (First National, 1921) Written and directed by Chaplin, with Chaplin (in a dual role), Ada Furniss, Mack Swain, Allan Carolla, Henry Bergman, Loyal Underwood, John Rand, Lita Grey, Rex Story. Two reels.

It has always seemed to me that, apart from the first one - "A Dog's Life", one of his permanent masterpieces - Chaplin's 11 First National films are his most disappointing works. The feature among them, "The Kid", is probably his weakest feature from any period, not even excelling "The Kid in New York" and the two-reelers are doubly disappointing coming so hot on the heels of the rich mutuel period. It is as though Chaplin now knows what a huge boxoffice draw he is, and feels that it is enough just to keep his admirers contented, rather than to really satisfy them. The films are polished enough, and in some cases quite elaborate, but there is a constant feeling of his "holding back", almost as though he was afraid of dissipating his talents and ideas before he was ready to apply them on a full-time basis to the more
important features. "Pay Day", which is pure slapstick, seems merely a
rather uninspired extension of the Kultus, while "Sunnydale" — though
I may be alone in this opinion — seems just a pretentious bore. "The Idle
Class" irritates because it has such wonderful things in it, but they are
rather mathematically rationed out so that there are decidedly dull spots,
which become more pronounced towards the close of the film. Nevertheless,
it's good moments are often top-calibre Chaplin. There's a marvellous moment
when he reads a telegram from his wife saying that she has left him and will
return only when he stops drinking. He turns his back on the camera, his
body apparently wrecked with sobs of remorse. Then, casually and almost
impudently he turns around. He is merely mixing another drink. "The Idle
Class" is decidedly funny, and some of it even has a kind of Lubitsch flair
which must have made it seem far more sophisticated in 1921 than it does
today, but withal, it is still a retrogression from "The Immigrant", "Easy
Street" and "The Cure". However, it is also a fairly unfamiliar Chaplin,
and any such, from his later period, is more to be welcomed than pulled apart.

— Intermission —

"THE CIRCUS" (Chaplin-UA, 1926-28) Original length: 5 4/5 reels; length of
this print: 5 2/3 reels; written and directed by Chaplin,
assisted by Harry Crocker; photographed by Rollie Totheroh,
asst  by Jack Wilson and Mark Marklatt; with Kerna Kennedy,
Allan Garcia (circus owner), Harry Crocker (Rex), Betty
Ferrissey (the vanishing lady), George Davis (magician)
Henry Bergman (old clown), Stanmore Sanford (chef property man)
John Rand (assistant property man), Steve Murphy (pickpocket)
Doc Stone (prizefighter).

Since it is some eight years since we last showed Chaplin's last film from
the silent era, and it is conspicuously absent from the current Chaplin
revivals, now seems an appropriate time for a re-screening. Spaced between
"The Gold Rush" (1925) and "City Lights" (1931), "The Circus" is not top-
grade Chaplin, but nevertheless it is a film that certainly doesn't deserve
the comparative obscurity it has fallen into. Not too well regarded at the
time because Chaplin showed a tendency to return to the uncomplicated paths
and lengthy slapstick sequences of the old Kultus, "The Circus" has come to
be considered as not an "important" or "significant" Chaplin. Perhaps it is
because of its initial reaction, that Chaplin has never revived it.
Certainly it isn't as "classic" a film as "The Gold Rush", but it seems to
wear rather better. The great sequences of "The Gold Rush" are as classic
as ever, but much of the rest of it seems rather tiresome and pretentious.
Because "The Circus" has no pretensions, it doesn't seem to date — and
on its comedy and charm is as strong as ever. For is it all
devoid of serious or sophisticated moments, One of the most notable is an
intriguing little dream image of a woman wherein Charlie blissfully imagines
himself sharing his romantic rival, all the time standing politely a few
feet away and giving no sign of the thoughts that are racing through his
mind. This sequence makes an interesting comparison with the quite similar
dream image of "The Idle Class", in which Charlie's whole life flashes before his mind's eye in literally a few seconds. And in its
situation of a clown who ceases to be funny, "The Circus" also invites
comparison with the soon-to-be-seen-again "Limelight". Considering the many
problems which beset the production of "The Circus" (litigation which attached
the film for a while, and divorce proceedings with Lita Grey) the film stands
up well, and its comedy highlights — the wonderful pantomime in the chamber
of mirrors, and the eating of the baby's hot dog — are superb Chaplin.
The print, like all "Circus" prints, is a bit ragged, with jump cuts and
scenes shortened. But apart from the final shot of Chaplin crumpling up
the piece of paper with the imprinted star, and kicking it away, nothing of
importance is out. For better or worse, the print is the best available today,
and we are thankful to have it at all.  —— Wm. K. Everson ——