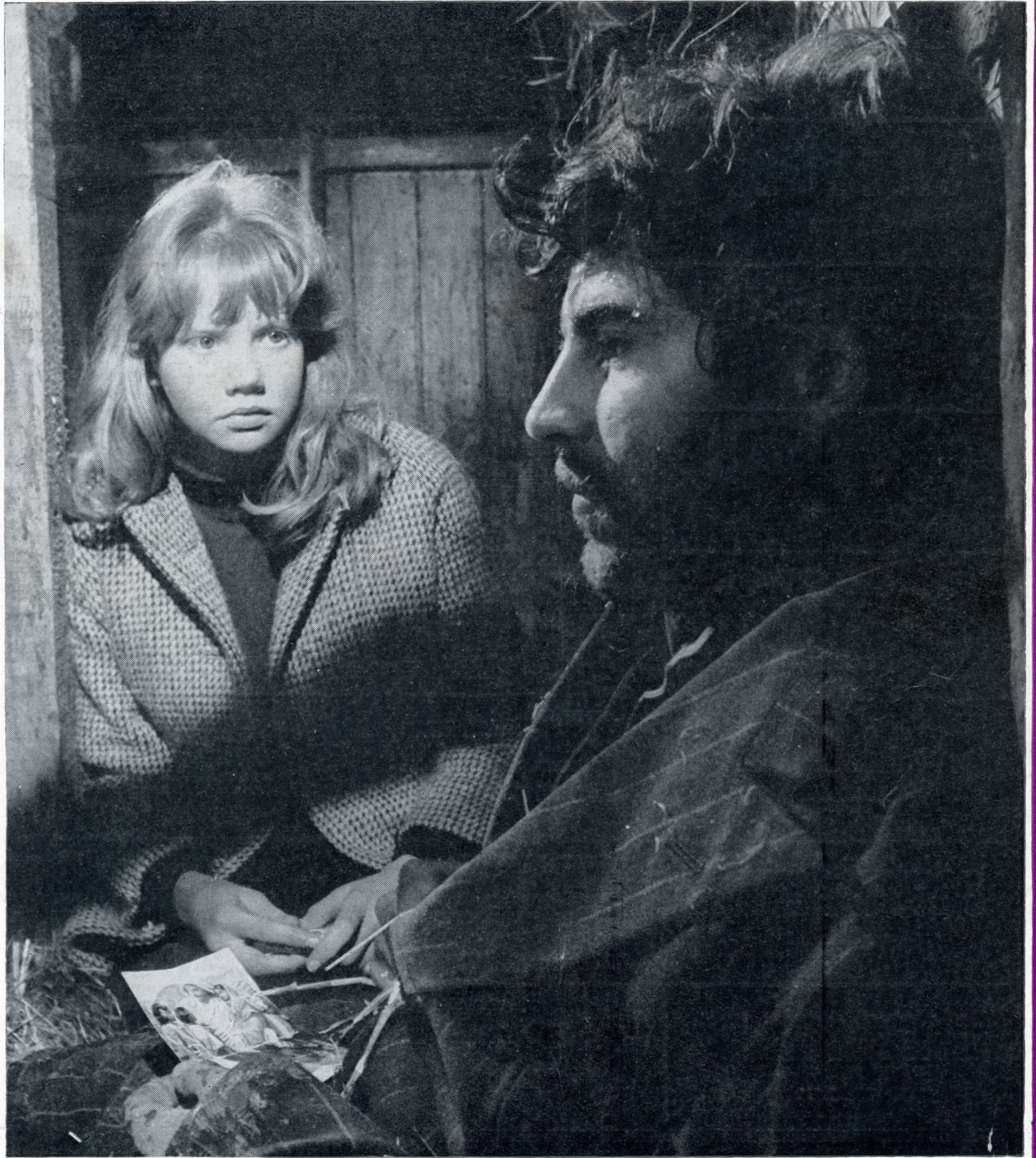


VISCONTI'S *ROCCO*—Script Extract

# Films and Filming

SEPTEMBER 1961

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HAYLEY MILLS and ALAN BATES in *WHISTLE DOWN THE WIND*



# What YOU Think

Send your letters to:  
21 Lower Belgrave St.  
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FROM time to time the fires of controversy blaze on account of low budget supporting films. Many voice disapproval of these programme fillers with the argument that the discerning cinemagoer needs only one satisfying first feature to provide his evening's entertainment. Furthermore, they gain support by quoting examples infested with bad cutting, inconsistency, and lack of enterprise. What is cunningly omitted, however, is the fact that others effervesce with imagination, vitality, and more rarely unpretentious fulfilment.

When assessing the cases for and against second features, the balance is tipped in favour of the present system:

(1) The strict requirements impart discipline to the production team. Under financial strain, the superficialities of show business make way for truthful and sincere striving towards perfection.

(2) Valuable experience can be gained without impeding progress, in fact the rawness of some camera work, directing or acting can be used to great dramatic effect.

(3) There is more freedom for self-expression as overheads are reduced to a bare minimum.

(4) The main commercial advantage relies on the 'balancing' effect of many second features. They give variety; i.e., relief when weighty topics are screened, and realism where fantasy predominates.

A. Forester.

11 Norman Avenue,  
Stoke,  
Plymouth.

## INSULT TO AUDIENCE

I HAVE just returned from seeing a really terrible film, this was the *Middle Course*, which is being shown in support of the excellent *Young Savages*.

Never have I heard such hoots of laughter and shouts of derision as greeted this film at my local Odeon. This otherwise sober audience could not believe that anyone would try to insult their intelligence with such rubbish.

My question, and I hope a representative of the Danzigers or Mr. Rank can answer this, is how this shoddy and careless film could be made with such a glaring disregard of any sense or meaning, and secondly how did the Rank circuit come to book? It after all, the British cinemagoer can take a lot but they had to rebel at this.

Surely it would be better to have a single feature and keep it from the cinemagoer that this type of film is being made at all.

W. D. Stewart

41 Northfield Road,  
Gosforth,  
Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 3.

## CUTTING PROTEST

JOHN CUTTS says in his review of *Return to Peyton Place* about the fate of Luciana Paluzzi and her baby. In the original of the film Miss Paluzzi breaks her leg and is confined to bed while Mary Astor and Brett Halsey go to a town meeting. On the defeat of a motion by Mary Astor, Miss Astor returns and sets fire to her house so that

Miss Paluzzi cannot get out. She is rescued by Mister Gunnar Hellstrom (who plays Nils not Lars). Miss Astor in a fury rushes into the house and is killed.

Do you wonder at the sudden changes of heart of Hellstrom from loving Miss Weld to hating and back to loving? These are explained in a sequence between Carol Lynley and Hellstrom cut from the British version. Why? So that Fox could show *Shot in the Dark*, an episode of their T. V. series *Five Fingers* blown up for the big screen. Note also that Miss Paluzzi a resident star of *Five Fingers* is cut from this episode.

We are having too much cutting out in good pictures to-day. *Tall Story* was cut. Why? To make a double bill for *Sergeant Rutledge*, an inferior film. The American *Because They're Young* could have been a good film if it had not been cut to make room for the atrocious *In The Nick*.

With cinema prices still going up it's about time we protested about this cutting.

P. J. Ferguson.

11 Wester Drylaw Row,  
Edinburgh, 4.

## DEFENCE OF DUBBING

I AM sorry that reader D. J. Parsons did not like our dubbed version of *La Dolce Vita*. I don't know whether he had read the whole of my article in the June issue, but in it I explained that the Italian version of the film was already dubbed, i.e. post-synchronised. Marcello Mastroianni, Annibale Ninchi (the Father), Magali Noel and Nadia Gray dubbed themselves; the other players were dubbed by other actors. If reader Parsons had seen the Italian version, he (she?) would have found the same problem with the scene between Marcello and Emma.

In the Italian version, it was Emma's mouth that didn't synchronise; in the English version, it was Marcello's, because in the original guide track, Mastroianni was acting in Italian and Furneaux in English. If the picture was behind the dialogue, then it must have been the projectionist's fault because when the film left our dubbing studios, the scene was better synchronised in English than it had been in Italian. And that applies to many other scenes. But obviously, one can't expect to synchronise perfectly from one language to another.

What we tried to do with *La Dolce Vita* to page 42

## INDEX TO FILM REVIEWS

By Love Possessed .....	p. 30
Francis of Assisi .....	p. 31
Goodbye Again .....	p. 31
Infidelity .....	p. 31
Kitchen (The) .....	p. 29
Last Time I Saw Archie (The) .....	p. 30
Matter of WHO (A) .....	p. 28
On the Double .....	p. 30
Parrish .....	p. 30
Spinster .....	p. 29
Trapp Family (The) .....	p. 28
Two Women .....	p. 27
Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea ...	p. 28
Whistle Down the Wind .....	p. 27

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## Films and Filming

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# THE GENERAL

By PHILIP STRICK

**Year of Production:** 1926, for United Artists, U.S.A. Directed by Buster Keaton and Clyde Bruckman. Adaptation by Al Boasberg, Charles Smith. Photography by Bert Haines, J. D. Jennings. Technical director, Fred Gabourie. Make-up by Fred Ryle. Release date in England, April 18th, 1927. Length, seven reels (83 minutes).

**Cast:** *Johnny Gray*, BUSTER KEATON; *Annabelle Lee*, MARION MACK; *Capt. Anderson*, GLEN CAVENDER; *General Thatcher*, JIM FARLEY; *Southern General*, FREDERICK VROOM; *Annabelle's Father*, CHARLES SMITH; *Annabelle's Brother*, FRANK BARNES; *Recruiting Officer*, FRANK HAGNEY; *Three Union Generals*, MIKE DONLIN, TOM NAWM and JOE KEATON.

**Plot Outline:** *The General* is unique among the films of Buster Keaton in that its main events are based on historical fact. During the American Civil War, in the Spring of 1862, a Union spy called James J. Andrews and a score of volunteer infantrymen penetrated nearly 200 miles behind the Confederate lines in Tennessee, seized a railway train outside Marietta, Georgia, and raced back towards the North, intending to destroy track and bridges as they went. Their object was to prevent the South from sending reinforcements to counter an intended surprise attack upon Chattanooga by General Mitchel. The gamble was a failure, partly because Andrews was delayed by South-bound traffic on the single-track line, and especially because the stubborn Confederate conductor of the captured train, William Fuller, pursued him so closely on foot, handcart, switching engine, and reversed locomotive, that the chances of effective sabotage were greatly limited. Captured only ten miles from Chattanooga, Andrews and seven of his men were hanged, the rest being thrown into prison. They were all awarded the first Congressional Medals of Honour in American history.

The strange incident, typical in its rather aimless heroics of the more dramatic tragedies of the Civil War (the slaughter of some military cadets in 1863, an issue dodged in

Ford's *The Horse Soldiers*, is of similar pathos), has been transformed by Keaton into a spectacular comedy. The persistent conductor has become a stony-faced engine-driver, Johnny Gray, whose love for the mechanical monster in his care makes him determined to recover it. The heroic saboteurs, given the Davy Crockett treatment by Walt Disney in his interpretation of the events (*The Great Locomotive Chase*, made in 1956), have become as near the traditional in screen villainy as is legitimately possible, with droopy black moustaches and furtive movements. This is not to be their story; characterless, in the manner of silent screen second-string performers, they represent the evil in humanity that Will Rogers spent his time in shooting down, the Keystone Cops in trying to catch up with, and Harry Langdon in hoping to avoid. It is Buster's customary duty to combat this insuperable force, to preserve equilibrium instinctively by frenetic and unceasing effort; carried off by the physical machinery of *The Navigator* or by the political machinery of the Civil War, his response is always to put things in their right place again. Here is a hero by inclination and at the same time by accident, unlike Walter Mitty, whose daydreams never coincide with actual experience. Under stress, Buster knows just what to do, just what is expected of him. Yet over all his efforts a whimsical fate presides, sometimes turning everything against him but equally prepared to protect him. This sense of circumstances being beyond his control, together with his physical appearance (clothes, like everything inanimate, seem an impediment to him), reduces Buster's personal stature to that of a Chaplinesque "little man", but the concomitant sympathy he demands greatly adds to his comic impact.

So it is that when we first encounter Johnny Gray patting his beloved 'General' after noting with a satisfied nod of his haunted face that he has arrived on time, we sense at once the infinite tragedies that have turned him into a clown who has forgotten to put his make-up on. The confirmatory de-

tails are then filled in. Johnny Gray walks off purposefully to see his girl friend, Annabelle Lee, and is at once followed in crocodile formation by three children who admired the train when it drew in. Pennypacker juveniles with a zombie-like pre-occupied air, they trot behind him to a verandah where he halts, flicks specks off his coat, and adjusts his tie before knocking nervously on the front door. It is with something of a shock that Buster turns round to discover that not only this entourage but Annabelle herself, who has mischievously joined the procession, have been waiting with interest for the latter to open her own door. Discomfiture is quickly suppressed, however, and his countenance shows only polite devotion to the lady as he ushers her and the zombies into her living room, thereafter hastily to trick the zombies into walking out again. It follows logically that Johnny's visit to his sweetheart does not proceed peacefully. Scarcely has he time shyly to present her with a framed portrait of himself with his engine, and to make that 'odd abrupt motion of his head which suggested a horse nipping after a sugar lump', which is, as Agee said, the Keaton confronted by love, when Annabelle's brother bursts in to inform her father (neither of them taking the slightest notice of the seated couple) that the Civil War has begun.

## Unique Method

The idea of frustrated love suggested by this first sequence is, of course, familiar to the silent comedians. Yet Keaton's method is unique. His girl friends do not treat him with quite the scathing contempt that their counterparts administered to Chaplin and, earlier, to Harlequin, although they are not above throwing rocks at him (*Balloonatic*) or deserting him for someone else (*The Cameraman*). Annabelle is obviously devoted to her engine driver, receiving his portrait with evident delight and giving it full display immediately on a handy table. She gives him such a kiss for his heroic decision to enlist at once that he falls off the verandah in confusion. What gives Buster something to strive for is the frustration of their relationship both by outside events (the children, the relatives, and the Civil War are interruptions of increasing magnitude) and by the idiocy, underneath all that sweetness, of the girl herself. Keaton's leading ladies do their best to send the little man mad by being helpless in a helpful way; when he lifted one of them (Kathleen Myers) off the ground to scan the desert horizon ahead in *Go West*, she stared back at the way they had already come. Marion Mack in *The General* (as far as can be gathered, this represents almost her only appearance in films) is the most beautiful and the most dim-witted of this tribe of thoughtless women; Johnny Gray's love affair is impressive because Keaton makes us wonder how on earth he can put up with her when they are alone together while at the same time demanding our sympathy for their

RETREAT: Johnny busily chops wood on his tender, unaware of the retreating Southern army.





devotion in uncongenial circumstances. This first encounter shows all Annabelle's best qualities and all the opposition Johnny has to put up with in his appreciation of them; it sets the practical tone for all the psychological opposition he is to encounter later in the film.

The engine-driver hurries off to enlist immediately, anxious to do justice to girl and country by being first in the queue (which he manages by tearing across short cuts to arrive at the recruiting office just before the hordes of other patriots). All his effort goes for nothing. The two officials decide that he is more valuable to the South as an engine-driver, and rather unkindly neglect to tell him why they don't require his services as a soldier. Buster is astounded at this rejection (a slight declension of the eyebrows reveals the depth of his emotion) and tries again by several means to get enlisted until he is kicked uncharitably into the street. Annabelle's relatives, waiting in the queue, reach the conclusion from his sad refusal to try another time that he is a coward. Back at the girl's home they throw away his portrait, while Annabelle herself, refusing to believe that such a fine figure of a man as Buster could be turned away, also concludes that he is lying about ever having applied at all. Rejected by all the world, the clown sadly wanders back to his mechanical friend, sits on a wheel-rod, and is given a final betrayal as the train carries him off into a cleaning shed.

### Cutting Off Supplies

A year later the Unionist Captain Anderson outlines his plan to steal a train with 'ten picked men' at Big Shanty, proceeding thence northwards cutting off army supplies to coincide with General Parker's advance, receives a formal handshake from his superior (the fade-out deliberately satirises Civil War prints), and arrives with his men, in disguises as revealing as those of the traditional plain-clothes policemen, on the 'General'. Johnny Gray, still an outcast (Annabelle makes a point of fussing over her brother's war-wound), wanders off to wash his hands while the passengers disembark and is horrified (to judge from some jerky activity reminiscent of a hen with a crick in its neck) to see his engine driven away. Indicating with soapy hands that everybody should follow him, he charges down the line after the vanishing machine at a speed that nobody attempts to equal, soon discovering, without loss to his equanimity, that he is the only pursuer. Leaping on to a handcart, which of course goes backwards when he first gets it on the line, he propels himself as far as the first piece of sabotage—a line removed by the Unionists—at which point the handcart plunges off into a river beside the track leaving Buster to start running again.

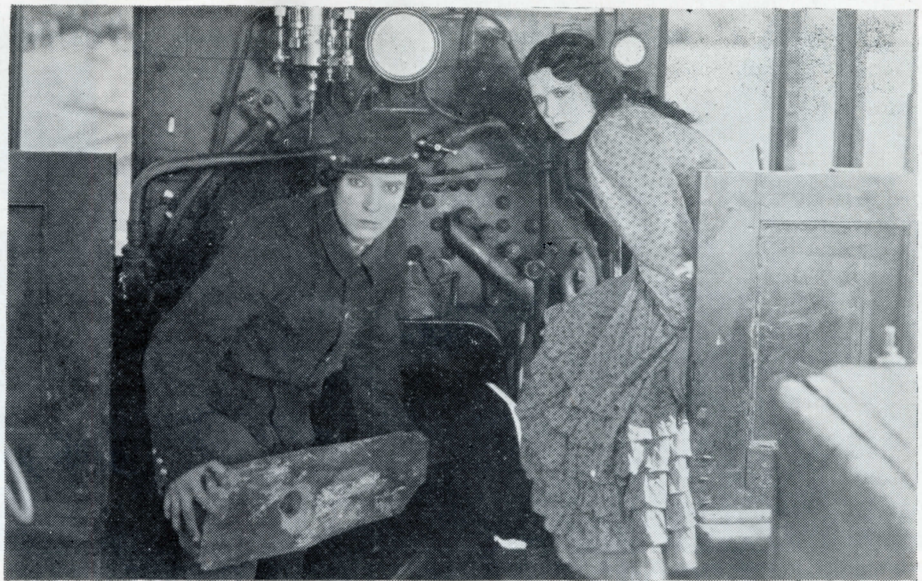
Finding a penny-farthing bicycle, he does a cowboy vault into the saddle and continues a

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Next in the series will be *Louisiana Story* analysed by Alan Stanbrook which will appear in the December issue. You can book your copy of the film from the B.F.I. . . . now!



*HEROIC: Possessing vital information, Johnny (Buster Keaton) has the task of reaching his own lines and getting his girl (Marion Mack) to safety.*

precarious pursuit as far as a junction where there is a troop train (the 'Texas', again historically consistent). Apparently under the impression that only three men have stolen his engine he loads the soldiers on to an open truck, guns at the ready, and drives 'Texas' away, neglecting to check, however, whether the truck is attached to the engine. It isn't. Alone again, Buster spots a cannon on truck wheels in another siding, hitches it to his engine, and, while steaming down the track, measures out gunpowder down the barrel, pops in a cannon ball, and lights the fuse. Instead of hurling the shell over 'Texas' to menace the Unionists, the cannon drops it neatly behind Buster in his driving compartment and he only has time to roll it out before it exploded. Warned by this he empties most of his supply of gunpowder in for the next try, but scarcely is he struggling with loose couplings to get back on the engine again when the barrel of the cannon jerks downwards and points directly at him (a gag repeated from *The Navigator*). Only a loop in the line saves him in time—and the timing here is superb.

### Poker Face

There follows a sequence in which the expressiveness of Keaton's poker-face is clearly demonstrated. The Unionists send a freight carriage back down the line towards the pursuing engine; Buster pushes it into a siding with sufficient impetus for it to reach the other end and get back on the main line again while he is busy with his engine. The faint perturbation with which he greets its reappearance is as nothing to his reaction when it is deflected from the lines by a log dropped by the Unionists, and vanishes while Buster is struggling with a blast of steam. He returns to the controls, sees nothing on the line ahead, and in close-up gives one long blink, an indication of absolute perplexity and implicit resignation to the gods. Further logs left by the spies also provide an instance of Keaton's mechanical ingenuity in times of crisis. Clinging to the cow-catcher he grabs them out of the track as the engine moves forward slowly, and when his arms are full of log manages to dispose of yet another, resting across one line, by bouncing it out of the way

with a well-aimed log-blow on one end!

Under way again, the engine misses the main track and goes off down a dead-end (Buster just saves it in time) where, put into reverse, its wheels slip on the lines. Buster hurries out, flings sand for the wheels to grip on, and of course gets left behind as the train goes off. This experience worries him far more than when, back in control, he finds a burning freight truck on the line; fanning himself with a piece of wood, he soon by-passes the difficulty, and sets about preparing fuel for the engine fire. There follows the sight of Buster swinging an axe industriously on his tender, unaware of armed forces streaming in the opposite direction; the Southern army facing Chattanooga has been ordered to retreat and the victorious North is following (cheered on by the spies after their leader has hastily removed his disguise). Soldiers and cavalry hurry past beside the track, only noticed by the engine driver when he is in the thick of the Northern advance. He hurriedly drops into his cabin, and sits there registering obvious perplexity. The Unionists ahead, now confidently on home ground, pause when a loop

to page 16



*ENLISTMENT: On the outbreak of war Johnny tries to enlist as a soldier, but is turned down as his job is considered of vital importance to the South.*





*LOST: "Hopelessly lost, helplessly cold and horribly hungry," Johnny begins the long search for his stolen train.*

*PRIDE: Johnny removes a speck of dust from the cow-catcher of his beloved locomotive, The General.*



from page 15

in the line takes them on to a bridge high above their pursuer and discover that in fact only one man is following them. They drop logs down on Johnny (who momentarily thinks that his diminished store of fuel is being divinely replenished) and reverse in order to catch him. In his panic, he loses both 'Texas' and a top-hat with a malignant life of its own, and dashes off into the surrounding forest with the run of a pheasant in a hurry.

Some time later, 'hopelessly lost, helplessly cold, and horribly hungry,' the fugitive engine driver finds a house in the woods wherein a table stands with the remains of a meal still on it. He clambers into the room through a window, but barely has time to dive underneath the table before Unionist officers enter to have a conference. Jokes typical of the comic situation then follow; Buster battles with a sneeze, then with a wandering cigar which burns a hole in the concealing tablecloth, while the owners of the boots that ring him round discuss the importance of the 'Rock River Bridge' where there is to be a rendezvous prior to a surprise attack on the Confederate left flank. There is an interruption; Buster peers through the hole in the cloth and sees to his amazement that Annabelle Lee has somehow been captured by Union troops and conducted to headquarters to provide information. It is one of those mysteries into which we are not expected to enquire too closely that the girl should be conveyed such a distance when her usefulness could only be slight (and the details of her capture remain untold), but for the purposes of the saga of Johnny Gray what situation could be more suitable? Possessing vital information, the engine driver not only has to get back to his own lines—he has to perform heroic feats of cunning and strength to get his girl friend back safely as well. In the eye that blinks to itself in the expanse of tablecloth which, like the Keaton face, is expressive in no other way, gleams excitement as well as astonishment; the fugitive is no longer alone, and his fear must be sublimated in deference to an exhibition of strength of character. Frustration has come a full circle; prohibited by the fates from becoming a military hero, Buster is equally obliged not to become a civilian coward. With the arrival of Annabelle, the engine driver's adventures thus take on a new quality, satirising in a gentle way the blatant escapism of Fairbanks' blood-and-thunder.

The intrepid man of action explodes into

violence immediately Annabelle has been led away and locked in a guarded room, and the conference concluded. Nervously, Buster hits a sentry with a log, changes into his uniform, and deals rather more expertly with the other guard. He gets into the girl's room, where Annabelle has wept herself into a sleep so deep that Buster can only wake her by clapping his hand over her face, the first of the series of indignities she is to suffer from his clumsy protective activities. Impressing upon her the need for silence, he trips over a chair and gets caught in the window before he finally manages to bundle her out into the night. A storm is raging in the forest, and as they pause for breath the fugitives are joined by a bear, lit up so infrequently by lightning flashes that it is some time before they hurry on their way with renewed vigour. An encounter with a bear-trap and some misunderstandings of identity exhaust the girl so much that she settles down to sleep in her rescuer's arms and he dutifully crouches beside her in the same position all night, an ordeal which gives him agony when he tries to move the next morning! The couple then discover a Unionist camp, in the middle of which a supply train is being loaded, and Buster immediately works out a plan to escape on this engine. Bundling Annabelle into a stolen sack he carts her off to the procession of soldiers loading a truck, heaves her into it (wincing a little at the sight of cases being dumped on top of her) and appropriates the engine by knocking out a guard on it and driving off before the troops realise what is happening.

### Chase Reversed

Johnny Gray is thus on his way South again, the earlier chase now being reversed. The enraged Unionists load themselves on to two other engines (one a supply train that has to go down the line anyway) and set off after Buster, who has meanwhile pulled down a telegraph pole to prevent contact with forces down the line—a piece of calculated sabotage that balances the first action of the spies who stole 'General'. His captured engine going at full tilt, he hacks his way into the supply truck rattling along behind him to find Annabelle, which he eventually does by treading on her in her sack. They climb back to the engine with some difficulty and Buster stops the train to load firewood, while Annabelle, trotting about industriously, fixes up a booby-trap for the Unionists. This she shows to Buster with great pride who, after a losing struggle with the poles he has thrown on the

tender, he prepares to move off. Since the trap is merely a rope stretched across the track between two shrubs, her engine driver is not impressed. It is another instance of a well-meaning Keaton girl showing typically feminine helplessness—yet here, at least, Buster allows her to be misjudged, for the trap does in fact slow down the pursuers by cluttering their wheels. It is a little later that the loving attack on womankind really begins, when the girl throws away a piece of valuable firewood because it has a knot-hole in it and, with the chase getting hotter, starts sweeping the driving cabin with demure domesticity. Buster can scarcely believe the sight; to test how far this half-witted beauty will go he hands her a small chip of wood, which she conscientiously puts on the fire, whereupon the dumbfounded engine driver shakes her violently—then kisses her with resigned affection.

Meanwhile, the Unionists are drawing closer, despite the contents of the supply truck that Buster strews in their path. Eventually he releases the truck itself just as they reach it from behind, and this obstacle keeps them busy long enough for him to jam some points that his engine passes, unfortunately allowing himself to get left behind in the process. By the time he is back in the engine again the Unionists have caught up—but the jammed points divert them on to a branch line on a ramp above. The result is a collection of snorting machinery on the screen in the tradition of the Sennett crazy car gags.

As the Unionists struggle with the points the fleeing engine-driver reaches the Rock River Bridge and starts a fire on it behind his engine, slightly hampered by Annabelle who throws him a piece of firewood not much larger than a match! The blaze builds so well that he is cut off from the engine and when he tries to jump over the flames he goes neatly through a hole in the track and lands in the river below. He returns just in time to save the engine from sliding backwards into fire, and drives off to the safety of Confederate lines where he is greeted with shots, an exhibition of hostility aimed, he eventually realises, at the Unionist sentry's uniform he is still wearing. His news sends the divisional H.Q. into a frenzy of activity.

to page 40

FILMS AND FILMING



# THE GENERAL

from page 16

The army assembles and gallops away while Buster, trying to cross the street, narrowly avoids being run down. As the dust clears the little man discovers a sword and scabbard left behind; heroically he buckles it on, strides off after the troops, and trips over it at the first step. Annabelle, having dashed off to see her wounded father, has deserted him, the Confederate army has left him behind after using his information. To this indomitable figure struggling in the dust to do his duty by that phenomenon known as life, a burden that never succeeds in its attempts to weigh him down, the aura of tragedy returns.

Cut in with Buster's earlier fire-fighting exploits are shots of the advancing Unionist army to emphasise the urgency of his mission and shots of the pursuers, making ineffectual attempts to put the points back into place, to emphasise his immediate personal danger. The last stage of the film is entirely given to these elements of spectacle and violence, which have never been more elaborately staged in a Keaton film—a rattling climax that satirises Griffiths. The problem of the points is solved by a taciturn railwayman with one blow of a hammer, and the trains approach the bridge at the same time as the army itself. A dough-faced officer orders the front engine to drive across the burning bridge, confident that it can still take the strain. He is wrong. The whole structure with the engine on it collapses into the river, a welter of steam, track and wreckage—surely one of the most expensive gags filmed in the 1920's. Dough-face tries rather unsuccessfully to look invisible. The Confederate army reaches the opposite bank and a glorious battle follows, elaborately staged with not an explosion missed. Buster catches up, feeling very important, and imitates the actions of the Confederate general, gesticulating with his sword and pointing out tactics with knowing aimlessness. The sword is a typical Keaton-versus-inanimate object gag; as Buster waves with it, the blade flies off time after time. Yet finally this inconvenience saves his life; urging on a troop of soldiers operating cannons he is saved from a sniper who picks off the gun-crew when the sword-blade flies off into the enemy's back. Dithering round the battleground getting thoroughly in the way, Buster seizes a flag, strikes a heroic pose on a rock, and discovers he is standing on an officer. The Unionists are driven back all the same.

## Captured Engine

When the victorious army returns to H.Q., Johnny Gray makes a professional inspection of his captured engine. He discovers in the driving cabin the Unionist guard he knocked out when he first took the engine, and whom he has kept unconscious with occasional thumps thereafter. Removing the man's pistol, he apologetically but firmly takes him prisoner, handling the gun bashfully as if it were a disability. Needless to say, the thing goes off into the ground just as the captive, an important prize it seems, is ceremonially handing over his sword to the Confederate general. Unexpectedly, and rather more curtly than one would think the honour deserved, the engine driver is made a Lieutenant for his services to his country, and proudly in an ill-fitting uniform returns to an adoring Annabelle and a patiently waiting 'General'. But even the happy ending is a Keaton mixture of frustration and ingenuity. The uniformed Johnny Gray has to salute in response to every soldier that passes by, just when he wants to go into the traditional clinch with his girl, a problem hastily to be solved when he sees the whole camp approaching. The film concludes with Johnny sitting by 'General', kissing Annabelle, while his free arm dispenses automatic and continuous salutes. True value is at last being appreciated—from every direction at once.

**Biographical:** Of the team that made *The General* only Keaton himself remains famous, his co-workers leaving few traces of the course of their careers. His leading lady is unmentioned in the magazines of the time, and information about her is almost impossible to unearth. That this fate is typical of many of Keaton's contemporaries is shown by the case of his friend and co-director Clyde Bruckman (he wrote *The Navigator* and *Sherlock Jr.*), whom obscurity rendered broke and destitute by 1950. Borrowing Keaton's gun, he shot himself in a Hollywood restaurant.

BERT HAINES, whose brilliant photography for *The General* is an added strength to the film, is known to have worked with Keaton on *Go West*, *College*, and *Steamboat Bill Jr.*, among the features of the 1920's, but later use of his talent is not in evidence. It would seem that the reshuffle of talents that accompanied the arrival of the talkies thus robbed the cinema of more than the great silent performers. Given the advantages of a memorable comic sense, his own stardom and direction, and a prolific output, Keaton himself has also nevertheless had to battle against obscurity. To-day his mournful face is as much a reflection of his downfall as a gimmick.

The *Bioscope* review of Keaton's first talking film, *Free and Easy*, made with Anita Page and Trixie Triganza in 1929, put the situation in a nutshell: "With the use of his voice, Mr. Keaton definitely leaves the ranks of those supreme fun-makers whose misfortunes rouse laughter unhampered by human sympathy. He becomes a human being, and therefore has to abandon a form of entertainment in which he was supreme, and enter into competition with many already well-established

in the same line." As Keaton says: "With somebody like me you don't give me a long speech to recite"; but when speech was the order of the day a repeat performance of *The General* style was unthinkable, and all too soon impossible.

JOSEPH FRANCIS KEATON, of Irish and Scots descent, was born in Kansas on October 4th, 1896, the son of Joe H. Keaton, a famous acrobat comedian. He was first carried on to the stage at the age of three months, and was given the nickname 'Buster' at the age of six months when he fell down an entire flight of the Kansas hotel stairs and was picked up undamaged, by Houdini. At the age of three-and-a-half he became one of the Three Keatons, a stage act in which his father threw him all over the stage, fell down on him, and walked over him. Later, his customary stage disguise was as an old man, with a fright wig and baggy trousers; one of the typical gags involved was his being hit in the face with a broom, his response being several seconds of complete lack of expression before he said 'Ouch!' The relative brutality of the Keaton performance sometimes drew complaints from the more tender-hearted of the co-artists, but Buster claims that it was from these early ordeals that he learned his comic timing and physical endurance. At twenty-one he turned down an offer of the leading role in a Schubert revue at the New York Winter Garden in order to work in two-reel comedies with Roscoe Arbuckle, a snap decision made on meeting the comedian in the street. It was a step that meant refusing 750 dollars a week for the sake of 200 dollars a week, but in ten years the choice had been justified, for by 1926, Keaton was receiving a weekly salary in Hollywood of 900 dollars, and was the fourth highest paid star in the business, and the highest paid male comic.

## First for Buster

His first film was *The Butcher Boy* (1917), which recorded on film the first time Buster ever walked in front of a camera, and there followed appearances in *His Wedding Night* (1917), *Allez Oop* (1917), *The Bell Boy* (1918), *Moonsheen* (1918), and *Goodnight Nurse* (1918). He joined the army during the war years and went to France for seven months in the Spring of 1918 as a Corporal in the 159th Infantry Regiment of the 40th Division. He was demobbed in May, 1919, and returned quickly to films, making *A Country Hero* (1920), *One Week* (1920), *Civvie 13* (1920), *Neighbours* (1920), and his first feature film, played straight without the dead-pan, *The Saphead* (1920), which was made for Metro from Winchell Smith's Broadway success, *Henrietta*. This Bronson Howard play dealt with the adventures of Bertie Van Alstyne, a fool with a rich father; Keaton's version was well acclaimed—"Nothing funnier can be imagined than Buster Keaton's Bertie," reported the *Bioscope*—and the upward path had properly begun. This was partly the result of the formation of Keaton's own company after his marriage with the second of the three Talmadge sisters, Natalie, on May 31st, 1920; with her and Joseph Schenck (at that time Norma Talmadge's husband), Keaton supplied films to First National. Two-reel comedies poured from him, although by the usual slap-happy standards of production in the silent days the 1920 features were made slowly, three weeks, being the minimum period even for a two-reeler. The method was as casual as that of Sennett, to whose studios is ascribed the post of gag-man, a legendary and illiterate animal who sat sometimes for hours in silence until a gesture, a grunt, or a muttered syllable gave the script-writers the ideas for a zany sequence. "In those two-reelers" remarked Keaton in an interview, "they didn't bother to give you a name or a character—things just started happening. We never had a script... We just got to talking about a story and laying out all the material we could think of, and then got it all put together. When it came to properties you'd tell the man—a row of houses there, a cabin, or whatever—and he'd go off and make them. I didn't have any fixed acting company, but we had ensemble playing; if any idea came up while we were shooting, fine, we'd use them. It was flexible."

## Thirteen in Two Years

From 1920 to 1922, the Keaton studios made *The Pale Face* (1921), *The Boat* (1921), *Day Dreams*, *The Electric Horse*, *The Frozen North*, *The High Sign*, *Grand Slam Opera*, *The Collapsible Clerk*, *Cops*, *My Wife's Relations*, *Fatty at Coney Island*, *She's Oil Mine*, and *A Rough House* (all in 1922).

1923 saw the first recognised use of the 'frozen-face' technique on film, with *The Three Ages*, although the true origin of the famous Keaton gimmick is not clear. Writers have attributed his dead-pan expression to the stage training from his father, and Keaton maintains that he has only smiled once on film and the audience hated it, although he has also said that the dead-pan was unconscious, and he was unaware of it until he saw his films for himself. Certainly the little automaton dodging hordes of policemen in *Cops* shows exactly that blank expressiveness of the Keaton in *Sherlock Junior* or *Go West*, so to regard *The Three Ages* as the inventor of a new style is to deal unjustly with Keaton's two-reelers. What distinguishes the comedies after the hectic year of 1922 is their increasingly elaborate structure, in which the 'frozen-face' is subjected to every conceivable strain during the course of one film, the average length now being five reels. Larger features meant a reduction in the turn-out of Keaton's company, and he made about two a year from 1923. These were *The Love Nest* (1923), *Balloonatic* (1923), *Forward March* (1923), *Our Hospitality* (1923), *Sherlock Jr.* (1924), *Seven Chances* (1925), *The Navigator* (1925),

*Go West* (1926), *Battling Butler* (1926), *The General* (1926), *College* (1927), *Steamboat Bill Jr.* (1928), *The Cameraman* (1928), and *Big Shot* (1929). They represent the maturity of the Keaton humour; "After having developed his technique through the wildest and maddest fantasy in the short comedies, Keaton really became a relatively abstract personality, a mathematician highly gifted in calculating laughter. That is what appeals to one in his films, and why towards the end of the silent era there was hope that he would produce a masterpiece..." (History of the Film).

With the coming of sound, however, Keaton's appeal slowly waned, and his pictures were spoiled by superfluous speech. After *Free and Easy* came *Spite Marriage* (1929), called *Romeo in Pyjamas* in England, *Hollywood Revue* 1929, *Dough Boys* (1930), called *Forward March* in England, *Sidewalks of New York* (1931), *Passionate Plumber* (1932), *Speak Easily* (1932), and *What! No Beer?* (1933), Keaton being teamed for several of these with Jimmy Durante and Polly Moran. They were financially successful productions but their use of sound was undeniably a distraction. Of *Dough Boys*, the *Bioscope* said: "There is no lack of inventive humour, though perhaps it will again be noted that the humour depends chiefly on what Mr. Keaton does and rarely upon what he says." After making *Le Roi des Champs Elysees* in France in 1934, Keaton visited England to star in *The Invader*, a notable failure. Reviewing the film in 1935, the *Kinematograph Weekly* called it "a feeble slapstick comedy, just a slipshod symposium of threadbare knockabout gags... Buster Keaton does the best possible in the circumstances in his tireless battle with shoddy material... he finds it impossible to raise a laugh, so feeble is the story and the gags." His great days were truly over; returning to Hollywood, he appeared without distinction in the films of the 1940's, working intermittently as a gag-man for Red Skelton (whose *Watch the Birdie* was reputedly a re-make of *The Cameraman*) and Lou Costello, and script-writing. His films were *Hollywood Cavalcade* (1939), *Quick Millions* (1939), *Forever and a Day* (1943), *San Diego, I Love You* (1945), *That Night With You* (1945), *That's the Spirit* (1945), *You're My Everything* (1949) and *In the Good Old Summertime* (1949).

## Ahead of its Time

The 1950's saw a revival of affection for his appearances on the screen, perhaps the natural result of his comedy once having been acclaimed as years ahead of its time by his critics. In Billy Wilder's slightly crazy *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), in his tussle with a piano in Chaplin's *Limelight* (1953), and in his friendly return to France in *Patte de Velours* (1954), and back at last on a train in the haphazard showpiece *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1956), Keaton has always aroused nostalgia and indulgent mention in the newspapers. A provincial tour of England in 1951, with a twenty-minute act consisting only of him trying to put his sleepy wife (his third, whom he married in 1941) to bed—he never managed to get more than her shoes off—and occasional performances on the French stage, have also served to keep him well remembered, although so many of his own films have disappeared completely.

Thus Disney's *Great Locomotive Chase* in 1956 "conjured up a vision of the set, white face Mr. Buster Keaton as he spread confusion on the tracks" for the *Times* critic, and Dilys Powell also recorded her preference for the comedian's version. *The Buster Keaton Story*, directed for Paramount by Robert Sheldon in 1957, with Donald O'Connor, Ann Blyth, and Peter Lorre, roused a storm of critical protest against what was considered a denigration of the Keaton majesty. "Paramount should never have asked an actor of talent to recreate comedy invented by an actor of genius," wrote Paul Dehn in the *News Chronicle*; "I sat dead-pan the whole way through," reported the *Daily Herald*; and William Whitebait asserted that "a harvesting film with Keaton himself and extracts would have been worth a hundred fictions about a star who bought a palace, drank, and never made the grade into talkies. One can only hope he was well paid to allow this grotesque and tedious impersonation."

Certainly the matter of payment was an important one to Keaton if Campbell Dixon's review is to be believed: "Robert Smith, co-author and co-producer, is recorded as having found Mr. Keaton 'in a critical condition' at the Sawtelle (Los Angeles) Veterans' Hospital. 'Smith,' we read, 'dangled a large cheque in front of the old-time comedian, and in three days Buster was up and in fighting trim.' From this we may reasonably deduce that whatever the matters on which Mr. Keaton was consulted, his feelings were not one of them... The writers credit the great man with no wit, no philosophy of life, nothing but the commonplaces of a knockabout comedian. On the evidence of his face alone, I think better of Mr. Keaton."

## Deplorable Biography

This deplorable Hollywood biography provoked some muckraking—Keaton's second wife, Mae Scriven, claimed 1,780,000 dollars damages against Paramount because, she said, the film portrayed her as having married Keaton when he was drunk ("The scriptwriter just thought it improved the story," explained Keaton in a 1959 London interview)—but also brought to light some interesting facts about Keaton's methods.

On the incident in the film taken from his *The Boat*, reputedly causing the longest laugh in cinema history, when a launched vessel runs smoothly down a slipway and straight to the bottom of a river with Keaton standing stiffly on deck, he said: "I ironed out the bugs in the scene for Paramount in five minutes. But that scene alone cost them 60,000 dollars to make. Making



*The Boat*, my salary included, cost only 22,000 dollars." The bugs, it seems, were numerous. "First you find a wooden boat won't sink; you've got to make it sink—the whole thing has to be perforated with holes so that no air-pockets collect. Then you find it won't slide down the slip-way—it has to be pulled. We fixed that with a cable and a sea-anchor..." They were problems, however, that Keaton was accustomed to solving, although the cost of solving some of the later film difficulties, like the trestle bridge sequence in *The General*, pushed his budgets up to the 220,000 dollar mark. His ingenuity was remarkable and instinctive; Margaret Talmadge reported of her daughter's husband: "He learns through observation and experience, and rarely makes a mistake in his judgments of either men or things. He has a decidedly inventive turn of mind, and Natalie says he can fix almost anything with a penknife and a piece of twine."

Keaton's inventiveness enables him to use a sword-fish for protection, a boiler for a bedroom, and a lobster-pot for an egg-holder in *The Navigator*, laryngos for a traffic indicator, a telephone for controlling a horse, and a bomb for a cigarette lighter in *Cops*, tennis rackets for cooking fish in *Balloonatic*, sausages for a snake in his brief appearance in *Hollywood Revue 1929*. The number of mechanical and mathematically precise gags that crowd into his films have helped to make his comedies unique. Although Keaton claims he holds the record for the throwing of custard pies, a technique involving a waist level swing for distances up to eight feet and a discus stance, "like fielding to second base," for targets further away (he scored a bull's eye at 27 feet in *Hollywood Cavalcade*), it is notable that this obvious knockabout reserve was too corny for most of Keaton's films. Laurel and Hardy could litter a whole street with custard pies, pulling down a few pants for extra effect, but while Hardy goes full face into an iced cake in *Hollywood Revue*, Buster concludes his act in the film with some breath-taking acrobatic whirls that would not disgrace a circus entertainer. A famous sequence from *Sherlock Jr.* has Keaton riding solo on the handlebars of a motorcycle, under the impression that his driver is still behind him. He "whips through city traffic, breaks up a tug-of-war, gets a shovelful of dirt in the face from each of a long line of Rockette-timed ditch-diggers, approaches a log at high speed which is hinged open by dynamite precisely soon enough to let him through and, hitting an obstruction, leaves the handlebars like an arrow leaving a bow, whams through the window of a shack in which the heroine is about to be violated, and hits the villain feet first, knocking him through the opposite wall" (Agee).

The editing (Keaton did his own) accounts for some of this outrageously brilliant piece of comic timing, but there is no trickery about the log-bouncing shot in *The General*, or Buster's high dive from the top of an ocean liner in *The Navigator*. His acrobatics and his indestructibility are phenomenal; even Harold Lloyd hanging from a damaged hand above crowded streets cannot match the wildest exploits of Keaton, who performed all his own stunts (and in long-shot, without cuts) even after breaking his right leg on an escalator while making *The Electric House*. The only time he used a double was for a pole-vault into a second floor window, the double being Lee Barnes, an Olympic champion; "when it comes to pole-vaulting into a window—I mean you've got to get somebody who knows what they're doing."

### Motor Cycle Exploit

In *The Paleface*, Buster dropped 85 feet from a suspension bridge into a net, and while filming the *Sherlock Jr.* motor-cycle exploit he hit both cameras, the director, and a car, and broke his neck. For *Hard Luck* he dived 50 feet from a platform to miss a swimming pool by some yards and crash through a "marble" tiled pavement specially prepared from paper covered with wax, a stunt which gave him severe cuts on the head and shoulders. He was nearly drowned in *Our Hospitality*, where he was suspended over a waterfall, and he allowed the two-ton facade of a building to fall over him for *Steamboat Bill Jr.*

Yet it is not as a stuntman but as a unique comic personality that Buster Keaton is revered in the cinema. "No other comedian could do as much with a dead-pan," James Agee wrote of him with affection. He used this great, sad, motionless face to suggest various related things: a one-track mind near the track's end of pure insanity; mulish imperturbability under the wildest of circumstances...; an awe-inspiring sort of patience and power to survive, proper to granite but uncanny to flesh and blood. Everything that he was and did bore out this rigid face and played laughs against it." Keaton explained himself in this way: "You took Lloyd off the farm and put him into the Ford Motor Plant in Detroit. He would be afraid to touch anything unless he was forced to by one of the foremen or something. With me, I'd be just scared of it, but I would take it for granted that I ought to know what I'm doing and to set out immediately to try and do it. Of course, I'd gum it up... but I'd make the attempt." This tremendous involvement with problems that don't really concern him at all, this basic struggle to find a place for himself in an instinctively hostile society, with a cynical suggestion in that blank face that in fact he doesn't need society at all (Buster in a diving suit, looking like a visitor from another planet, is a highly symbolic figure), is what makes Keaton's comedy so sympathetically tragic. His films were never quite as popular as those of Chaplin or of Lloyd because his appeal involves admiration and respect, and even a certain rejection. He is alone and independent, almost a superman in endurance, but with psychological agony he engages in his search for integration and is tragedy

itself when he discovers for the umpteenth time that for all his effort he is still alone. It is this combination of giant fortitude with ultimate weakness that makes Keaton's film character so fascinating, and, way down beneath all the escapism, so realistic a piece of human machinery.

**The Critics:** The reputation of *The General*, after not too good a start, has steadily improved, and it is now regarded with the highest respect, although it is not the funniest of his films nor the most typical. The *Bioscope* review of January, 27, 1927, was disturbingly lukewarm in appreciation: "With very little story, and the action taking place entirely on the footplate of an early Nineteenth Century locomotive engine, Buster Keaton has provided himself with a better acting part than he has had since *Grandma's Boy* (—in fact a 1923 Harold Lloyd comedy of average quality—). The humour is not extravagant, but it is continuous and though the film may not appeal to every class, it cannot fail to please a discriminating audience. Buster Keaton carries practically the whole film on his shoulders and gives a performance of polished comedy. He is well supported by Marion Mack, quaintly attractive in her flowered muslin crinoline, and a very capable company. The old type of locomotive has been revived with great effect and the disaster at the trestle bridge is very well staged. Nearly all the action takes place on the engine; the staging is therefore rather lacking in variety. The photography is excellent."

### Jaded Review

Joe Franklin's comments in *Classics of the Silent Screen* do something to explain this jaded review in the contemporary magazine: "When Keaton made *The General* towards the end of the silent era, fast-paced pantomime comedy had become commonplace to the audiences of the '20's. To us, to-day, the best of it seems not only incredibly ingenious and funny but truly creative. But look at any fan magazine of the late '20's, and you will find any number of great visual comedies being passed off as 'just more of the same,' while pedestrian little situation comedies, relying on lengthy dialogue titles and involved plotting, were rating rave reviews for being 'different' and 'intelligent.'"

The *Kinematograph Weekly*, reviewing the film rather pompously on January 20, 1927, certainly showed this tendency: "Buster Keaton in a Civil War comedy with over-long adventures through enemy lines on a locomotive, is quite funny; an elaborate production, but lacking the variety and richness of his best efforts. It must, therefore, disappoint his enthusiasts, but is a generally acceptable light feature. Keaton is immobile and frenziedly anxious by turns as usual, but has less intimate footage... The rail adventure lasts practically right through the film and becomes monotonous... The picture's occasional thinness is probably due to excess length. Remarkable facilities of old-time engines and railway tracks have been accorded, and the camera work is very deft and cleverly secured in many shots."

Revaluations of the film in the 1950's, however, have shown the critics in no doubt as to its value. "By a long, long way the film of the week," Richard Winnington called it (*News Chronicle*, January 17, 1953), adding: "Keaton does everything that can be done to a railway engine, including investing it with character, intentions, and responses of its own. His frozen-faced struggle against the cruel waywardness of material objects is the classic stuff of screen comedy. And this unbelievable railway journey, fraught with enough comic disaster to furnish four modern full-length comedies, proceeds with an imperturbable lyric sweep." In the *Evening News*

(January 18, 1953), Jympson Harman had no complaints: "What a film! What a fund of comic invention there is in this gorgeous game with cow-catcher trains in the middle of the American Civil War. And what a comedian! They just don't make pictures now like this."

Campbell Dixon echoed the sentiment in *The Telegraph* (January 19, 1953): "We like to think that acting is subtler, technique more polished. But this is still the funniest film in London." Fred Majdalany in the *Daily Mail* had reservations (January 16, 1953): "The film has some glorious passages, though I think, too, that it shows unmistakably that Keaton's earlier work doesn't survive present day scrutiny quite so triumphantly as have the early pictures of Lloyd and Chaplin,"—but Dilys Powell was generous with her praise. She wrote (January 20, 1953): "*The General* is, until the final battle scene, which I don't like, a completely innocent film, beautiful to watch and brilliantly funny without hurt, except possibly to the thorax of the spectator. I doubt whether, in these days when the Neanderthal-type hero is admired, it will be an incentive to audiences if I add that Keaton in his great days had one of the most beautiful faces on the screen, but I will risk it."

*The Guardian* at the same time called Keaton "one of the cinema's immortals," while *The Times* added: "He has the glazed, desperate calm of a sane man let loose in a lunatic asylum, only, since Keaton is a comedian of humility, the sane man is not altogether sure that the others are as mad as they seem."

Jeffrey Hunter, who took Keaton's part in *The Great Locomotive Chase* is now playing his "compelling eyes," one of his qualifications being his "compelling eyes." From this, it is not illogical to discover traces of divinity in the intensity of Keaton's own expression, and the aloofness he has from the general run of silent comedians gives the notion a certain uncanny justification. His persistence against the forces of evil, his endurance in the pursuit of the rightness of things, and the enigmatic face that gives nothing away—no promises, no denials—have a quality that can easily be translated in terms of religious symbolism. There is martyrdom inherent in the comedy of Buster Keaton; instinctive recognition of it is perhaps what has convinced modern critics of his greatness.

### Visited Europe

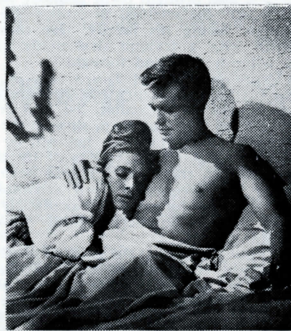
**Revaluation:** Keaton recently visited Europe to investigate the possibilities of re-issuing his films with sound tracks. His chief difficulty lies in discovering where many of his films are; of all his original output only a few are still available or indeed in existence. It is not easy to judge, therefore, how much *The General* differed from his usual feature films, but there is little doubt that it compensates for having less gags than usual by having much more spectacular effects. Franklin attributes this to the already-mentioned tendency of 1920 audiences to prefer something novel; "it is still full of fine comedy and pantomime, but it is slower-paced than any other Keaton comedy, the gags are more deliberately spaced, and there's far more substance in the story, which is luckily so good on its own, and so well handled, that the reduced comedy content is amply compensated for." Certainly the story is a good one—not unnaturally, considering its source. Also it would take an exceedingly poor production not to make anything of the glorious Civil War monsters (Weight: 34 tons; Capacity: 2,400 gallons; Pressure: 130 lbs.; Stroke: 24 ins), hurtling up and down the tracks bristling with firearms.

Yet it is the technical virtuosity of *The General* that takes the breath away—the beautifully photographed shots of Buster on the footplate or the cowcatcher, the sudden long-shots of the two trains racing across country, the gratuitous sequences of horses galloping towards the camera, and the amazing, brief, glimpse of soldiers moving into attack through a wood while the sun percolates down in shafts through the trees and the smoke. The superb battle sequence, which may fit a little awkwardly into the comic scheme but which is nevertheless legitimate excitement, is heralded by a shot of cavalrymen racing towards their horses, ranged down the centre of the screen. Time off from comedy to allow such careful allegiance to historical atmosphere and visual panache is what has made *The General* in many ways the most satisfying of the surviving Keaton films. It is structurally balanced, unhurriedly entertaining, pictorially magnificent; while the frenzied work of Buster himself, hurrying through the collection of Civil War prints rather as his dream projectionist wanders through a thriller in *Sherlock Jr.*, gives the comedy a satiric and buoyant energy that contains, at the same time, an essence of supreme tragedy.

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### NEXT MONTH



### LOOK FOR AUDREY HEPBURN AND GEORGE PEPPAR

in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* on the pink cover of the October FILMS AND FILMING, on sale September 15. Inside: Richard Widmark on the price of independence; distinguished stage director Jose Quintero discusses his approach to his first film; Laurence Harvey on his 'discovery' by Hollywood; an extract from Gavin Lambert's script for Quintero's *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone*; first part of a great new series on Erotism in Cinema, by Raymond Durnat; a monograph of Judy Garland by Douglas McVay. Plus! Festival surveys from Peter Bak-r on Moscow, and Raymond Durnat on San Sebastian; a monograph of Luis Bunuel by Francisco Aranda; a picture spread of Peter Glenville's *Summer and Smoke*; new films reviewed and all the regular features.



# FILMGUIDE

Correct at time of going to press, but subject to alteration.

## West End Premieres

**Black Tights:** Technirama dance musical directed by Michael Powell, it includes Petit's version of *Carmen*—with Zizi Jeanmaire in the title role. The other three sequences: *Cyrano de Bergerac*, with Moira Shearer; *The Diamond Crucher*, with Zizi Jeanmaire; and *A Merry Morning*, with Cyd Charisse. Coliseum, September 4th.

**Goodbye Again:** Anatole Litvak directed this bitter-sweet love story, based on Francoise Sagan's *Aimez-vous Brahms?* with Ingrid Bergman and Yves Montand (Reviewed on page 31). Leicester Square Theatre, August 17th.

**King of Kings:** Nicholas Ray directed this Samuel Bronston spectacle on the life of Christ, with Jeffrey Hunter in the title role. Also featured are Robert Ryan as John the Baptist and Frank Thring as Pilate. Coliseum, November 15th.

**Rocco and his Brothers:** Luchino Visconti's controversial three-hour drama about a Southern Italian family which migrates to Milan to seek security and happiness, with Alain Delon and Annie Girardot. Cameo-Royal and Cameo-Poly, September 14th.

## General Releases

Films reviewed in FILMS AND FILMING are indexed by the review date in parenthesis.

August 14  
A.B.C. *On the Double* (August, 1961). RANK. *The Last Sunset* (August, 1961). INDEPENDENT. *The Absent-Minded Professor* (August, 1961)/*The Horse-masters*.

August 21  
A.B.C. *Parrish* (this issue)/*The Steel Claw*. RANK. *By Love Possessed* (this issue)/*Transatlantic*. INDEPENDENT. *The Hoodlum Priest* (July, 1961).

August 28  
A.B.C. *The Ladies' Man*. RANK. *The Alamo* (December, 1960). INDEPENDENT. *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* (this issue).

September 4  
A.B.C. *What a Carve Up!*/Gagarin to the Stars. RANK. *No My Darling Daughter*. INDEPENDENT. *A Cold Wind in August* (August, 1961)/*Mary had a Little . . .*

September 11  
A.B.C. *Ring of Fire* (June, 1961)/*The Secret Partner* (June, 1961). INDEPENDENT. *The Trapp Family* (this issue).

September 18  
RANK. *Goodbye Again* (this issue).

September 25  
A.B.C. *The Honeymoon Machine*/Murder She Said. RANK. *Victim*.

## What YOU Think from page 3

*Vita* was to render justice to the original text and to match the quality of the acting. In judging our work (which Parsons says was a shambles), it would be fairer not to harp so much on the synchronisation but to decide whether the spirit of the original was conveyed in the English language performances. Fellini himself was satisfied (whereas he was not satisfied with the French dubbed version).

I might add that if some of the dialogue was inaudible, this was the way Fellini wanted it (he personally supervised the final mix of the dialogue tracks), if Parsons and his friends had seen *La Dolce Vita* in Italian they would have lost a third of the dialogue which is not translated in the sub-titles, unless that is they understand Italian and Roman slang. But then perhaps they'd rather see a Moscow Arts Theatre production of *The Cherry Orchard* without understanding a word of Russian or having read the play, then see it in an English production?

Rome, Italy.

John Francis Lane.

### MO-BIKE JOBS

IN July Raymond Durnat reviews *Flame in the Streets*. Just what did he mean by "... the mo-bike jobs are pure rep. theatre"?

Throughout the country there are many excellent actors working in reps. and the film world and all those connected with it ought to be glad that there are still reps. working and training future stars. How often, and where, does Mr. Durnat go to a rep?

Carl Paulsen

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### FALSE COMPARISON

I NOTE Miss Osborne's letter concerning Robert Walker (August) and in particular her odious comparison of Walker to James Dean and the reference that Dean's death could have been prevented.

With all due deference to the illness that caused Robert Walker's early death, it also could have been prevented.

Miss Osborne confesses that she has only seen Walker in this one film and states that he had so much more to offer than Dean in originality and talent. Of course this can only be conjecture, but Walker was in films for some ten years

or more before his death and managed only to make a series of mostly indifferent comedies like *Her Highness and the Bellboy*, the Marion Hargrove series, and a couple of films with June Allyson and the occasional more serious film like *Since You Went Away*, *The Beginning of the End* and *Under the Clock*, none of which revealed any outstanding talent. Even his last film *My Son John* with Helen Hayes and Van Heflin was an anticlimax after his performance in *Stranger on a Train*, which, incidentally, was virtually by way of a comeback in a career which looked as if it had faded away.

I do not wish to detract at all from Miss Osborne's praise of Walker in the Hitchcock film, I enjoyed the film and Walker's performance tremendously. I liked Walker and saw most of his films which makes me feel qualified to comment on his career.

What I do object to is Miss Osborne's patronising dismissal of James Dean, who to my mind showed more promise in his three films in his pitifully short career than Walker in his twenty or more films that scanned more than a decade and also her obvious ignorance of the facts concerning Robert Walker's career.

Godfrey Lassman

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### MORONIC SADISM

IN his review of Franju's *The Keepers*, (August), Raymond Durnat refers to his successor, *Eyes Without a Face*, as a "minor masterpiece." He must be the first critic to approve of that unnecessary and revolting display of moronic sadism.

Personally, I find it impossible to praise such an objectionable film; obviously made solely to nauseate its audiences.

Peter King

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### THAT BRICK

CONGRATULATIONS TO FILMS AND FILMING to be one of the few reputable critical magazines all over the world. But if everything else is perfect or passionately controversial in its pages, why write badly the short few lines devoted to the photographs?

By instance, concerning the biographical article "Man of two worlds," by Adolphe Menjou (August) page eight: "Flirt: Chaplin's only straight drama, 'A Woman in Paris, gave his leading lady, Mabel Normand, her big chance.' No, the actress was Edna Purviance. Alfonso Pintó Laenggastasse 44, apt. 38, Bern, Switzerland.

## NEW RECORDS

## Worthy Jazz Score

THE much-discussed film by Shirley Clark of Jack Gelber's play, *The Connection* provided some unusually effective jazz, effective because it was completely in context with the drama. There is an LP of the music by the Howard McGhee Quintet (London LTZU15221) and it certainly does justice to the moody, at sometimes sombre, Freddie Reed "score". Take for instance the bluesiness of *O.D.* (Overdose). The sleeve notes are excellent and Alan M. Lorber is to be congratulated for such a lucid description of the fitting of the music to the stage action. The recording (which has only reached me in mono) is of a high standard. Warmly recommended . . . even for those who did not like the film!

The Hollywood Studio Orchestra conducted by Mitchell Powell (both new names to me) provide a big selection of Ernest Gold's overblown *Exodus* score on another LP (London HAT3362). The music has some high colouration and tends to be as noisy as the film is emotional. One feels one has heard (and seen!) it all before . . . and better.

If you are a Disney fan you probably enjoyed *101 Dalmatians*, one of Disney's less sentimental feature cartoons. The story and music turns up on a Golden Guinea (Pye GGL0091). The reconstruction is done in a matter-of-fact way, although divorced from the image the boyish voice does not sound much like a Dalmatian pup. But doubtless it is intended for children and the very lack of sophistication is a good thing.

ROD HUME.

## TORRE-NILSSON from page 39

With *The Hand in the Trap* he renewed his partnership with Beatriz Guido and took a significant step forward; his characters are more positive and up-to-date, they are not carried away by reality but wish to unravel it.

This changes from a certain passivity towards a more active and vibrating treatment takes place in the atmosphere of a small provincial town, full of the prejudices and the false pride that Buenos Aires has already overcome. The desire of youth to understand the contradictions of a *weltanschauung* that oppresses it is revealed in the lack of responsibility, joys, sorrows and fury of a young man (Leonardo Favio); and in a girl (Elsa Daniel) who is a mixture of intellectual assertions, ethical frivolity and prejudices, and who is suddenly swept away by the tide of reality.

This girl—a special kind of mythomaniac (Maria Rosa Gallo) who prefers to lock herself in secretly for years instead of publicly admitting a failure; and a play-boy (Francisco Rabal) of certain typically Argentine strokes of character are the finest psychological values of this original drama on the truth and falsehood of human relationship.

It is quite possible that his experience with the vivid narrative of *A Tough Guy of 1900* influenced this new achievement, with which he won the critic's award in Cannes this year.

Another legacy of *A Tough Guy of 1900* can be seen in his last film, *Summer Skin*, in which, through the relationship of a couple, he treats the uncertainties of growing love, the truth of a feeling that sometimes is discovered when it is too late or not discovered at all. He tried to symbolise to-day's world, where people let themselves into situations without being conscious whether they live them intensely or not, because they cannot promptly discover the legitimacy or the falsehood of the feelings that overcome them.

This legacy is inherent in the use of long scenes: *A Tough Guy of 1900* taught him the convenience of lengthening scenes if their dramatic flavour can be best achieved by length. Until then he had been against them (on account of a complex he got when he was twelve, during the premiere of one of his father's films, *Return to the Nest*).

His father had faith in showing life by means of a thorough, slow approach that would bring forth the essence of human behaviour. He was ahead of his time and did not always succeed in filling the vacuum of action with the emotions he tried to reflect. In spite of some remarkable qualities, *Return to the Nest* bored the public and brought forth protests, shouts and stamping in which the terrified director's son saw the ghost of hunger facing his family. He came out of this experience with a trauma that made him avoid long scenes without a second thought!

His own experience with *A Tough Guy of 1900* and the fact that his father's theory had been rehabilitated by the recent works of Antonioni led him in *Summer Skin* to that rhythm that may seem slow to the audience not communicated with the film, but not so to those who follow the thoughts and feelings of the characters and are interested in their reaction and behaviour.

This change has necessarily been accomplished by another one: the abandonment of calculation and pre-elaboration in order to submerge blindly in a creation of unforeseeable results.

These are a young man ill at the point of death (Alfredo Alcon) and a girl (Graciela Borges) who accepts to entertain him in his last weeks of life, when she is offered a trip to Paris as reward for her sacrifice. He loves her intensely, she pretends to return his love, he is miraculously cured, she crudely tells him all about the deal, he commits suicide and she later realises that her fiction had developed into a true feeling.

After a somewhat irresolute beginning—perhaps to avoid resemblances with the first scene of *Butterfield 8*—Torre Nilsson establishes a vivid contact between characters and audience. He employs Alfredo Alcon's great acting ability, Graciela Borges' strange face and, above all, a keen camera that surrounds, watches and transfixes the characters, that constantly travels with and toward them. On the whole, Torre Nilsson avoids the kind of repetitions that made several parts of *L'Avventura* and the last reels of *La Ragazza della Valigia* tedious, and which have constituted until now a defect of "intimate" Cinema. In some scenes in these films are introduced third persons who, for one reason or another, must know the true relationship between the central characters or understand their feelings. With that purpose, situations are repeated or emotions are explained that the audience already saw or felt. In short, the audience knows what those third

persons do not. It becomes a weakness when the situation is re-stated.

This does not happen in *Summer Skin*, where communication is not interrupted and where the "third person" never knows what the spectator knows.

This film, of so many aesthetic and dramatic values, may close another chapter in Torre Nilsson's career; he'll start now to work in Europe. He will make there *Man at Siesta's Time*, from a book by Beatriz Guido and with an international cast headed by Alida Valli. It is a dangerous step. Bergman, Bresson, Kurosawa, Fellini, Visconti, none of the truly greats make films outside their native countries. They express the universe through their own peoples. Torre Nilsson also attained universality through Argentina and the Argentines. Will he keep it far away of his own land?

Fortunately, when I was finishing this article I heard from him that his European film will be rather an isolate experience and that he does not intend abandoning his work in Argentina.

## ROCCO from page 21

*of workers still linger he smiles. In a little run with fast short steps he glides along the side of the pavement. Suddenly he stops abruptly. His attention is caught by a newspaper kiosk. All around the kiosk, arranged in good order and at an equal distance from one another is a display of sporting newspapers. By a trick of the mirror the same image is repeated infinitely. Luca is slowly struck by it. In fact the image is a smiling photograph of Rocco. In big letters under the photograph an important tour of the young champion from Cecchi's is announced: Brussels, London, Melbourne, etc. . . After Luca has examined the images of his brother he goes on his way home pursued by the lacerating screams of the sirens.*