SLAPSTICK

WELCOME TO SLAPSTICK FESTIVAL 2022!

SCREENING NOTES
The Circus (1928)

CAST	CREW
Charlie Chaplin…………………………….The Tramp	Written, Directed and Produced by
Al Ernest Garcia………….The Circus Ringmaster	Charles Chaplin
Merna Kennedy......The Ringmaster's	Cinematography…….Roland H. Totheroh
Stepdaughter, a Circus Rider	Camera Operators…Mark Marlatt, Jack
Harry Crocker………..Rex, a Tight Rope Walker	Wilson
George Davis…………………………….A Magician	Art Direction…………….……Charles C. Hall
Harry Bergman………………………..An Old Clown	Monkey trainer………….Tony Campanaro
Stanley J. Sandford….The Head Property Man	Music by Charles Chaplin
Steve Murphy…………………………….A Pickpocket	

After continued success and the smash-hit of his film *The Gold Rush* in 1925, Charlie Chaplin committed to mounting a production based around a travelling circus; an idea on which he had been dwelling since the early 1920s, and which would encompass aspects of his vaudeville upbringing and personal experience working and living with all manner of showbusiness folk.

However, due to various troubles and personal woes, which would result in his nervous breakdown and subsequent lengthy recovery (the circus set burned down in a fire, the film negative was badly damaged, a bitter divorce was in process with his second wife, he had trouble with the IRS, and his mother sadly died) it would be three years through much struggle and heartache, that *The Circus* would arrive in cinemas. He completed the film in October 1927 and when finally released the film received mixed acclaim. Critics and audiences agreed however, that it contained many moments of vintage Chaplin.
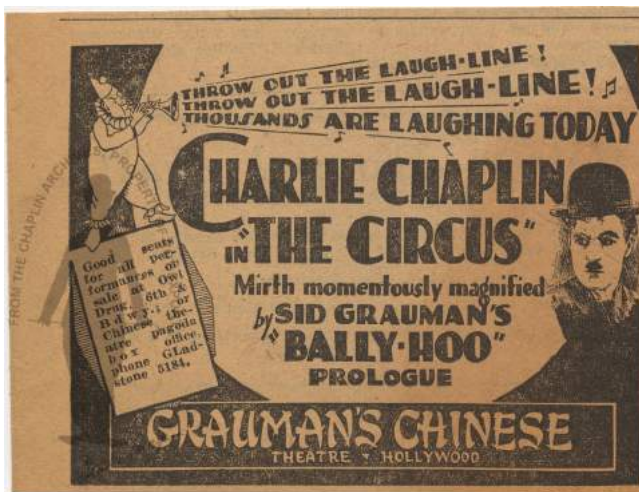
Premiering at New York's Strand Theater on 6th January 1928 and soon after at Grauman's Chinese Theater in Los Angeles on 27th January, the film performed well at the box-office, although it had arrived at a time when the first sound films were drawing audiences. People were moving on from the days of silent cinema, and were now keen to hear their movie stars talk and sing as well. The studios were likewise embracing this progression, leaving stalwarts of pantomime, such as Chaplin, fighting to continue the beauty and traditions of silent screen comedy in spite of the new technological advancements.

In some future films, Chaplin came to something of a compromise, whereby he employed sound effects and used the opportunity for a recorded and synched musical score, but still used intertitles for dialogue and description, and kept his characters in mime. It was not until *Modern Times* in 1936 that his voice for The Tramp character was finally heard, but even then he was singing a nonsense song and dialogue scenes were still played silently. Chaplin held out against the "talkies" for as long as he could.

The film's female lead, Merna Kennedy, herself made the transition to sound, appearing in over twenty more films, but retired in 1934 when she married the renowned choreographer and director, Busby Berkeley. Unfortunately the marriage did not last and they were divorced only a year later. Kennedy sadly died of a heart attack in 1944, aged just 35.

Chaplin's obsessive pursuit of perfection (not unlike stories about the director Stanley Kubrick) resulted in huge amounts of film left on the cutting room floor. The final 6000 foot version of *The Circus* was reportedly edited down from 211'000 feet, after multiple takes of the film's memorable set-pieces were discarded. One such scene required 200 takes! Can you guess which scene this was?

Chaplin was originally nominated for three Oscars at the first ever Academy Awards in 1928 (for Acting, Directing and Writing respectively) but he was later taken out of the main competition and given a Special Award "for versatility and genius in writing, acting, directing and producing *The Circus*". The film is therefore a testament to Chaplin's tremendous perseverance and triumph as an independent artist, striving to make his own statements in spite of adversity, as he did throughout his life.
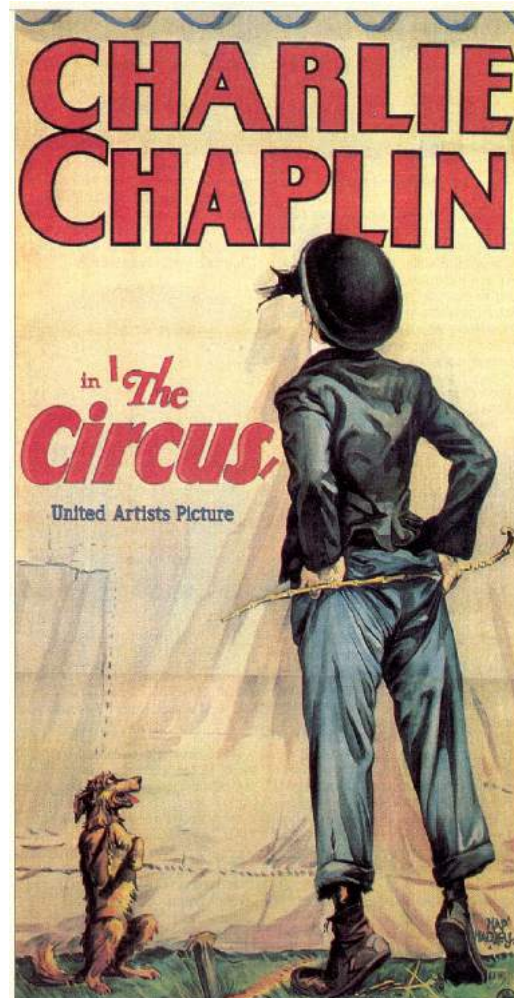
Thank you for attending this evening's special screening, and for supporting Slapstick Festival 2022!