

# Chaplin: a great mesh of opposites

By LLOYD CHESLEY

Charlie Chaplin is a study in opposites. Put them together and you have the man who was the greatest star of all times and who made some of the finest movies ever made. One is *Modern Times*, now at the Silent Cinema for, we hope, an extended run.

Chaplin is an artist and an entertainer. His movies are fantastic fun to sit through, running the gamut from wild comedy to touching pathos.

"Tragedy is life in close-up; comedy is life in a long shot," says Chaplin, and he moves our focus of attention in and out to achieve one or the other.

His balance of the two is perfect; never does he hold a mood too long nor starve us for it to continue. When his situation is not too personal we are rolling with laughter. Because of his beautiful character development, it is usually at the beginning of the film that we have the longest funniest scene, so that we are not sufficiently wrapped up in the character for our laughter to turn to pity.

*Modern Times* opens with one of the funniest sequences Chaplin ever came up with, as an assembly-line worker goes mad from his work and wreaks havoc in his factory (this is after he has been attacked by an automatic feeding machine, designed so that workers don't have to break for lunch).

After he is released from the hospital, fully recovered, we begin to delve into him and his position in a cock-eyed world. He is the most adaptable of people, even accepting jail as a better place to live in one of his frequent visits to the hoose-gow.

As the comedy develops so does the Chaplin string of themes as the Tramp fights to retain his ability to roll with the blows of his half-mad world. Chaplin's perfection of comedy comes in his making it not

only funny but real and meaningful as no other clown ever has.

Chaplin is the greatest of humanists, but he can also be deadly cynical. *Modern Times* opens first with a shot of pigs moving through a pen, then this dissolves into people leaving a subway. Chaplin always takes the opportunity of booting someone or something in the rear once it has its back turned.

During his nervous breakdown at the beginning he gets some of his best laughs from the lowliest

sources. But this basic concern is with man and with man's continuing courage to fight and with the ultimate goodness that must be the basis for existence.

He satirized production, bit business, the law, politics and high society as anti-human, idiotic and ultimately destructive. He pleads the simple pleas of brotherhood and damns the greed and distrust that is destroying life and happiness. His characters are workers and orphans.

After an hilarious bit of clumsiness where he frustrates his boss to distraction, the two find out that work is halted for a strike. They are united in a common moment of mutual loss, showing how they are comrades after all.

His heroine is a tough, pretty little waif (Paulette Goddard) who steals to feed her sisters. Together she and the Tramp personify man's enduring quality.

Chaplin is gentle and he is tough. His films are packed with brutal violence and cruelty, and the Tramp himself is always prepared

to fight and always makes sure that he gets in the last blow. But basically he is the kindest, most gallant, most romantic of heroes. He stands up for the defenseless against any odds and he is the ultimate gentleman. He is never harsh with the good. He always seems to be happy.

His technique is composed of opposites also. At times he reverts to his stage training, using the cinema only to record his perfect acting, grace and most of his comic bits. Roller-skating blind-folded near a three-story drop he is unaware of makes for exciting thrill-comedy and it is all shown in one shot.

But he can make use of the cinema, especially in his tender close-ups and his portraits of city life with its peculiar atmosphere of strength in squalor. The last shot of the movie captures both these elements, merging in a crescendo of pathos and happiness.

Chaplin was the last hold-out. Although made in 1936, *Modern Times* is predominantly silent (there are sound effects and a beautiful score composed, as it always was, by Chaplin himself), even to the point of using titles in the odd instant where they are necessary. But some lines are dubbed in, and there is an entire sequence based on voice. This is interesting, but mostly irrelevant, except that it may be difficult to adjust to.

More has been written on Chaplin than on any other personage of the cinema. But he deserves more attention, for he is one of the ultimate artists of the medium. enough, he proves in *Modern Times* that he is also one of the most entertaining of movie-makers that we may ever have the luck to see.

## Humble Pie

### A flawless success recipe

By PAT KUTNEY

Humble Pie, known as England's latest supergroup for the last four months, assaulted a packed Massey Hall audience with an uninhibited barrage of music and showmanship last Saturday.

Consisting of musicians culled from some of England's most popular groups, that have gone largely unnoticed in North America, Humble Pie had to rely on musical ability to relate to their audience.

Steve Marriott and Peter Frampton, late of the Small Faces, and Herd fame respectively, were idolized by the screamies of England and the Continent. Marriott, described as "Pete Townshend from the waist up and Mick Jagger from the waist down" in regard to stage movements by the *Western Gazette's* Thomas Aquinas, and Frampton, *Rave* magazine's "Face of 1968", had both been in the position where the emphasis was on them as people rather than as musicians.

On top of that, The Herd performed gutless rubbish. In Humble Pie, these two guitar-keyboard players, together with bassist Greg Ridley (from Spooky Tooth) and drummer Jerry Shirley (from the obscure Apostolic Intervention) merit much laudatory praise. They came across like a steam engine, with its power and solidarity, taking the scenic route.

Add to this the vocals of Frampton, Ridley, and especially Marriott, which weave and soar through and above each other, and their complex rock form. All this together with their unequalled enthusiasm for performing, made Humble Pie's flawless recipe a success.

The success of the Moody Blues can best be attributed to the use of the mellotron. The mellotron is able to simulate the sounds of an orchestra, be it a clarinet, four french horns, or the entire string section to an astonishing degree.

That the Moody Blues are excellent singers and better than competent musicians, and that they perform beautiful music cannot be debated. But is Mantovani-type music really beautiful? The mellotron had a lulling effect on the audience just as Mantovani music would. Unfortunately the Moody Blues' use of the mellotron adds little in the way of dynamics to the group's music. Its effect is one of mellowing the edges of the other instrumentalists into a sort of bland pudding.

Can you imagine the disaster that would occur if the Toronto Symphony actually did play with the Moody Blues?

Eliminate the mellotron and one would still have roughly the same sound.

The music of the Moody Blues is nonetheless justifiable despite its pretentiousness.

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