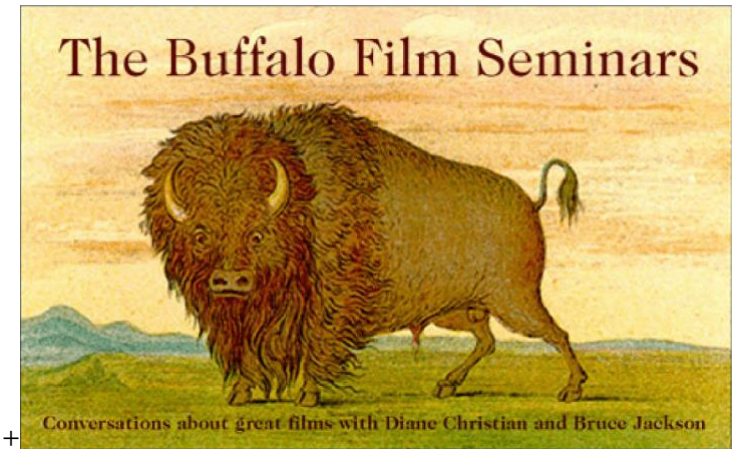
Virtual February 2, 2021 (42:1)
Buster Keaton and Clyde Bruckman: **THE GENERAL** (1927, 72 min)
Spelling and Style—use of italics, quotation marks or nothing at all for titles, e.g.—follows the form of the sources.
Cast and crew name hyperlinks connect to the individuals' Wikipedia entries



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[Vimeo link for **ALL** of Bruce Jackson's and Diane Christian's film introductions and post-film discussions in the Spring 2021 BFS]

[Vimeo link for our introduction to *The General*]

[Zoom link for *all* Fall 2020 BFS Tuesday 7:00 PM post-screening discussions:]
Meeting ID: 925 3527 4384 Passcode: 820766

National Film Preservation Board, USA 1989

Directed by Buster Keaton, Clyde Bruckman,
Written by Buster Keaton, Clyde Bruckman, (written by), Al Boasberg, Charles Henry Smith (adapted by), William Pittenger (book, memoir "The Great Locomotive Chase") (uncredited) and Paul Girard Smith (uncredited)
Produced Buster Keaton, Joseph M. Schenck
Music Joe Hisaishi
Cinematography Bert Haines, Devereaux Jennings
Film Editing Buster Keaton, Sherman Kell
Art Direction Fred Gabourie

Cast
Buster Keaton…Johnnie Gray
Marion Mack…Annabelle Lee
Glen Cavender…Captain Anderson
Jim Farley…General Thatcher
Frederick Vroom…A Southern General
Charles Henry Smith…Annabelle's Father (as Charles Smith)
Frank Barnes…Annabelle's Brother

BUSTER KEATON (b. Joseph Frank Keaton VI on October 4, 1895 in Piqua, Kansas—d. February 1, 1966 in Los Angeles, CA) was born in a boarding house where his parents, Joseph Hallie Keaton and Myra Cutler Keaton, were touring with a medicine show. He made his debut at the age of nine months when he crawled out of the dressing room onto the stage, and he became part of the act when he was three. The young Keaton got his nickname within the first two years of his life when he fell down a flight of stairs and landed unhurt and unfazed. Legend has it that it was Harry Houdini who picked him up in wonderment and commented, "That's some buster you took." The famous magician, along with W.C. Fields and Al Jolson shared headlines with "The Three Keatons": Buster, his father Joe Keaton and mother Myra Keaton. Their act, one of the most dangerous in vaudeville, was about how to discipline

a prankster child. Buster was thrown all over the stage and even into the audience. No matter what the stunt, he was poker-faced. Buster learned to sing, dance, and get by with a guitar or ukulele. He also learned magic and juggling, and was the Buff in a team called Buff & Bogany, the Lunatic Jugglers. By the time he turned 21, however, his father was such a severe alcoholic that the stunts became too dangerous to perform and the act dissolved. Keaton then went on to serving in the Army, where after returning he completed his first full-length feature, *The Saphead* (1920). The film was such a success that by the next following year Keaton formed his own production company, where he wrote, directed and starred in many of his own films. *The General* was to be the most expensive of Keaton's features, originally budgeted at half a million dollars. The cost of the film escalated when July 1926 gave Cottage Grove a record heat wave. Sparks from the engines set haystacks alight and caused massive fires, filling the skies with smoke, and Keaton himself led the fire-fighting forces, who consisted largely of the Oregon State Guard. The governor awarded Keaton an honorary captaincy for his efforts. Tonight's film is rumored to have been Keaton's favorite, however it was also the last film for which he had complete artistic control. In 1928 he reluctantly signed with MGM after his contract expired. MGM quickly began to enforce its rigid, mechanized style of filmmaking on Keaton, swamping him with gag writers and scripts. He often surrounded himself with tall and heavy-set actors in his films, typically as his antagonist, to make his character seem to be at as much of a physical disadvantage as possible. The similarly diminutive Charlie Chaplin also did this. With his creativity becoming increasingly stifled he began to drink excessively, despondent at having to perform material that was beneath him. Ironically, his films around 1930 were his most successful to date in terms of box-office receipts, which confirmed to MGM that its formula was right. His drinking led to a disregard for schedules and erratic behavior on the MGM lot, and a disastrous confrontation with Louis B. Mayer resulted in him being fired. Unlike many silent movie stars,

Buster was eager to go into sound considering he had a fine baritone voice with no speech impediments and years of stage experience, so dialogue was not a problem. In 1935, he entered a mental hospital. MGM rehired him in 1937 as a $100-a-week gag writer (his salary ten years before was more than ten times this amount). The occasional film was a boost to this steady income. In 1950, he had a scene-stealing cameo in *Sunset Blvd.* (1950) playing cards with Norma Desmond's other fellow washed-up silent film friends. This led to other projects including appearing with Charlie Chaplin in *Limelight* (1952), *It's a Mad Mad Mad Mad World* (1963) and *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1966), which premiered seven months after his death. In the 1950s the Museum of Modern Art began showing *The Navigator* and *The General*, which were then thought to be the only surviving Keaton silents, and a new generation discovered Keaton and proclaimed him a genius. In 1965 he won a standing ovation at the Venice Film Festival. He was in tears. "This is the first time I've been invited to a film festival, but I hope it won't be the last." A heavy smoker for most of his life, Keaton was diagnosed with lung cancer during the first week of January 1966 after a month-long coughing bout, but he was never told that he was terminally ill or that he had cancer, as his doctors feared that the news would be detrimental to his health. Keaton thought that he was recovering from a severe case of bronchitis. Despite his failing health, he was active and walking about almost until the day he died. Keaton died in his sleep after playing cards with his wife the night before. Some of his additional films are *One Week* (1920), *Cops* (1922), *Paleface* (1922), *Our Hospitality* (1923), *Sherlock, Jr*. (1924), *Seven*

Chances (1925), *Battling Butler* (1926), *College* (1927), *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* (1928), *What! No Beer?* (1933), *Palooka from Paducah* (1935), *Pardon My Berth Marks* (1940), *Pajama Party* (1964), *Beach Blanket Bingo* (1965), *How to Stuff a Wild Bikini* (1965). He won an honorary Academy Award in 1960.

CLYDE BRUCKMAN (b. September 20, 1894 in San Bernardino, California—d. January 4, 1955 in Hollywood, CA) had been a sportswriter prior to entering the film business. He was known around town as one of the best 'gag' men in the business, and it was this reputation that caused Keaton to sign him on as co-director of tonight's film. In fact, he had no directorial experience at all, and the responsibility of his new job unnerved him. It was possibly this reason, with the addition of marital problems, that led him to drink. In fact, His keen sense of comedy allowed him to easily shift between diverse assignments for Buster Keaton, Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy and Harold Lloyd without missing a beat. However, by the early 1930s his chronic alcoholism made him unreliable. He'd go on benders during production and fail to show up on sets. Lloyd attempted to keep him in the business during the 1930s, graciously giving him directorial credit on *Feet First* (1930) and *Movie Crazy* (1932) despite his questionable input into these productions. His behavior finally made him all but unemployable in Hollywood and, ironically, in his last paying studio job he contributed gags to a Joan Davis comedy, *She Gets Her Man* (1945), for Universal Pictures that resulted in Lloyd successfully suing him for plagiarizing his property. In desperation, it turned out, Bruckman had lifted material from Lloyd's *Movie Crazy* (1932). The lawsuit resulted in Bruckman being blackballed. He managed scant intermittent work in live TV in Los Angeles with Keaton, but he grew increasingly despondent and destitute. In 1955, Bruckman borrowed a gun from Keaton, and after a meal in a Hollywood restaurant, which the broke director was unable to pay for, he went to the rest room and shot himself. He directed 21 films, the last of them *Man on the Flying Trapeze* (1935). Some of the others were *Horses' Collars* (1935), *The Fatal Glass of Beer* (1933), *Everything's Rosie* (1931), *Leave 'Em Laughing* (1928), *Should Tall Men Marry?* (1927), *Love 'Em and Feed 'Em* (1927), *Cowboys Cry for It* (1925). His life and death were the inspiration for one of the episodes of *The X-Files* (1993). Peter Boyle played a fictional character named Clyde Bruckman in a Darin Morgan-penned episode called "Clyde Bruckman's Final Repose", which was essentially a rebus-like puzzle whose solution was (spoiler alert!) "Buster Keaton".

MARION MACK (b. Joey Marion McCreery on April 9, 1902 in Mammoth, Utah—d. May 1, 1989, age 87, in Costa Mesa, California) recognize Marion Mack as the beautiful but brainless heroine Annabelle Lee, in tonight's classic. However, few realize that Marion was also a talented screenwriter who, with her husband, formed a successful production team. Mack began her career as a Mack Sennet Bathing Girl and she soon progressed to become a popular figure in two-reelers and serials. On one of these, *Mary of the Movies* (1923) she featured – uncredited—as screenwriter as well as star, something she was to do many times. She married the movie's producer, Lewis Lewyn, in 1924. She heard of the part in *The General* through her hairdresser. Marion Mack's character was called Virginia during the shooting; it wasn't until the film was edited that her name was changed to Annabelle Lee, surely an homage to Edgar Allen Poe as well as a reference to General Robert E. Lee. The resulting six-month shoot was arduous, and Marion decided afterwards that she would rather quit acting than endure such a long separation from her husband again. Her last starring appearance was in the short *Alice in Movieland* (1927). From then on, her work was mainly done behind the camera. She and her husband produced a number of successful series of

shorts, including the *Voice of Hollywood* (1930). Soon after Lewis' death in 1969, interest in *The General* was revived and Marion toured extensively with the movie, giving interviews and lectures about working with the comic legend Buster Keaton.

BERT HAINES (b. December 14, 1896 in Dayton, Ohio—d. June 19, 1991, age 94, in Los Angeles, California) Cinematographer (5 credits) known primarily as the partner of Dev Jennings for Buster Keaton's films. Both men created the naturalistic images for *The General* (1926) as well as for Charles Reisner and Keaton's riverboat comedy, *Steamboat Bill Jr.* (1928), however the success of both films is more dependent on Keaton's skill as a slapstick comedian than any pictorial aspects inherent in either project. His other two Keaton projects were *College* (1927) and *Battling Butler* (1926).

DEVEREAUX ("DEV") JENNINGS (b. September 22, 1884 in Salt Lake City, Utah—d. March 12, 1952, age 67, in Hollywood, California) is the brother of special effects expert Gordon Jennings. As cinematographer, Jennings began working on silent films in 1915. In 1918 Helped to found the American Society of Cinematographers along with Dal Clawson and 13 other cameramen. He worked primarily on sixty silent films four of which—among his best-known—star Buster Keaton: *General* (1926), *Battling Butler* (1926), *College* (1927) and *Steamboat Bill Jr.* (1928). His most well-known talkie is *The Public Enemy* (1931) with James Cagney. In 1932, he virtually puts an end to his career of director of photography, shifting his interest to his brother's pursuit, visual effects. Jennings worked on twenty films between 1936 and 1952 (some in collaboration with his brother), the last three realized by Cecil B. DeMille, including *The Greatest Show on Earth*, released in January 1952, shortly before his death). As a technician of visual effects, Jennings earned an honorary Oscar in 1939 for outstanding achievements in creating special photographic and sound effects in the Paramount production *Spawn of the North* (1938). He was also nominated for the Oscar for Best Visual Effects in 1948 for his work on DeMille's *Unconquered* (1947). Some of his additional 85 cinematography credits include: 1937 *Born to the West* (1937), *The Famous Ferguson Case* (1932), *Manhattan Parade* (1931), *Side Show* (1931), *Stranger in Town* (1931), *The Public Enemy* (1931), *50 Million Frenchmen* (1931), *Finn and Hattie* (1931), *Hold Everything* (1930), *The Sap* (1929), *Heart Trouble* (1928), *Vamping Venus* (1928), *The Missing Link* (1927), *What Price Beauty?* (1925), *The Gunfighter* (1923), *Children of Jazz* (1923), *Two Kinds of Women* (1922), *The Daredevil* (1920), *The Feud* (1919), *Evangeline* (1919), *Cowardice Court* (1919), *Miss Adventure* (1919), *The Forbidden Room* (1919), *The Danger Zone* (1918), *Confession* (1918), *Cheating the Public* (1918), *The Spy* (1917), *Durand of the Bad Lands* (1917), *Her Temptation* (1917), *One Touch of Sin* (1917), *The Mediator* (1916), *The Jungle Child* (1916), *Lieutenant Danny, U.S.A.* (1916), *Eye of the Night* (1916), *The Dividend* (1916), *The No-Good Guy* (1916), *The Corner* (1916), *Civilization* (1915), *The Winged Idol* (1915) and *Matrimony* (1915, Short).

KEATON, "BUSTER" (JOSEPH FRANK) from *World Film Directors*, v. 1, Ed. John Wakeman, NY 1987, entry by Philip Kemp

American actor, director, and scenarist was born in Piqua (pronounced and sometimes spelled Pickway), Kansas, the son of Joseph Hallie Keaton and Myra Edith Cutler. His parents had met in 1894 as members of the Cutler-Bryant Medicine Show, manager by Myra's father. They eloped together and joined the Mohawk Indian Medicine Company, which had reached Piqua when their eldest child was born.

Accounts of Keaton's eventful and accident-strewn childhood have become legendary. Keaton himself almost certainly believed them and later drew on them for the plots of his films, though it should be said that his father, Joe Keaton, had a ready

imagination and an innate knack for effective publicity. The name "Buster" is said to have originated when the six-month-old child tumbled down a whole flight of stairs and was picked up, laughing delightedly, by another member of the company, the then unknown Harry Houdini. "That's some buster your baby took," remarked Houdini, and the name stuck. On other reported occasions the child nearly suffocated in a trunk, lost part of a finger in a mangle, and was sucked into the air and wafted four blocks by a cyclone. Keaton first appeared onstage at the age of nine months when he crawled into the middle of his father's blackface routine, much to the audience's amusement. Over the next two years he continued to make unscheduled appearances until his parents gave in; Buster, not yet three, officially joined the act and The Two Keatons became The Three Keatons.

Even in infancy, Keaton was beginning to develop the two most distinctive elements in his humor: phenomenal acrobatic agility and the famous deadpan face. Both were learned from working with his father: "I just watched what he did, then did the same thing. I could take crazy falls without hurting myself simply because I learned the trick so early in life that bodily control became pure instinct with me." And both father and son soon realized that audiences were convulsed by the child's immovably solemn reaction to all events. "If someone tickled me and I started to grin the old man would hiss, 'Face, face! That meant freeze the puss. The longer I held it, why, if we got a laugh the blank pan or the puzzled puss would double it."

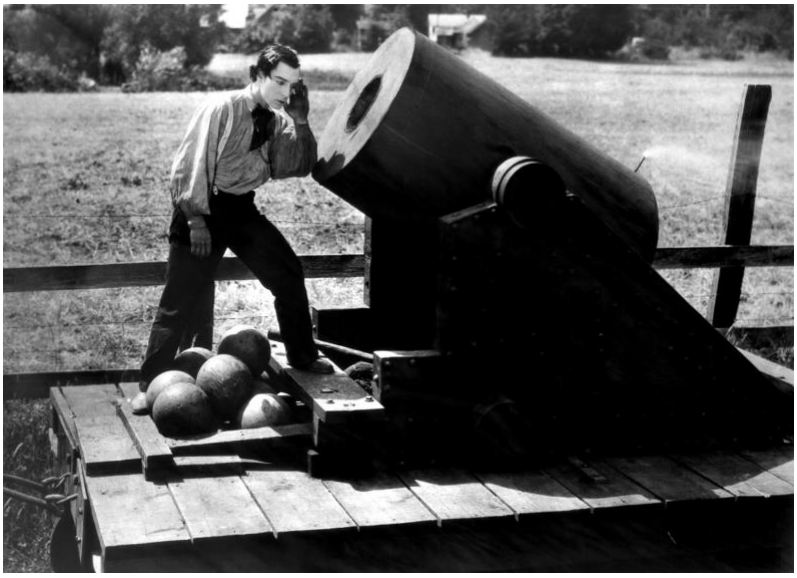
Initially, Keaton's main role was to serve as butt for most of the violence in Joe's act: used to sweep the stage (as The Human Mop), picked up by a handle sewn to his clothes and slung bodily into the wings: "I'd just simply get in my father's way all the time and get kicked all over the stage." (Myra Keaton's part was to take soubrette roles, play alto saxophone, and add a touch of class to the proceedings.) But as his own prodigious comic and athletic gifts developed, Keaton came to be seen as the main attraction: by the time he was six, the act was being billed as "BUSTER, assisted by Joe and Myra Keaton." In 1890 the family made the break from small-time provincial medicine shows to the glittering vaudeville circuit, and for the next eighteen years they played halls in New York and all over the country, usually billed well up the program. In 1909 they made a trip to London, but it was a brief visit and not very successful.

The act broke up in 1917. Joe Keaton was drinking ever more heavily and becoming dangerously violent towards Buster, both on and off the stage. By now a considerable stage star in his own right, Keaton had no difficulty landing a booking from the Shuberts for a show at the Winter Garden in New York at $250 a week. Shortly before rehearsals were due to start, a chance meeting with an old friend led him to visit Joseph Schenck's film studios on 48th Street. Schenck, one of the leading independent producers, had just engaged Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle to make a series of comedy two-reelers, and when Keaton arrived the first of them, *The Butcher Boy* (1917) was in front of the camera. Arbuckle, who knew Keaton from vaudeville days, promptly invited him to take a role in the next scene. The following morning Keaton broke his Shubert contract and joined Arbuckle's team, without even asking what his salary would be—as it turned out, it was $40 a week.

Throughout his life Keaton loved mechanical devices and gadgets and it was the technical no less than the creative aspects of filmmaking that had captivated him. "One of the first things I did was to tear a motion picture camera practically to pieces and . . . [find out about] the lenses and the splicing of films and how to get it on the projector. . . . This fascinated me." He seems to have grasped almost instantaneously what could, uniquely, be done with this enthralling new medium, he realized, as Walter Kerr put it,, "he had a mirror of the universe that altered the universe in certain subtle but important ways which meant that between the record and the fact there was an exhilarating no-man's-land in which

extraordinary but not necessarily untrue events could take place."

Keaton appears in *The Butcher Boy* in a long, intricate routine involving a canful of molasses, shot in a long single take, it was by all accounts, perfect on the first run, with no retakes needed. Although he had not ever previously been before a film camera) Joe Keaton had despised the movies and kept the act well away from them), Keaton's individual style of performance is evident from this very first moment of his cinematic career. "The scene is a village store,": wrote Penelope Gilliatt. "Everyone moves around a lot, to put it mildly. When Keaton enters, the unmistakable calm asserts itself." David Robinson made a similar comment: "He introduces a style in direct contrast to his fellow performers—a style which he was to develop and refine. While their movements are extravagant and overemphatic, excessive, he is quiet, controlled, unhurried, economical, accurate. His solitary calm already rivets attention."



Over the next three years Keaton made some fifteen two-reelers with Arbuckle's Comique Film Corporation, avidly exploring the possibilities of the new medium. "The environment was ideal: everybody in the team was free to suggest gags, help with the editing, or do whatever was needed. Scripts were unknown. A rudimentary plot line was chosen and all the action was improvised around it, just as in Keaton's vaudeville act. They had no outside interference to contend with.... Ttheir comedies were hugely popular, often more so than the feature films."

In October 1917, having made six films, Arbuckle's company moved to California, where conditions were better for movie-making, and set up new studios at Long Beach. Keaton made five more films before being drafted into the army in June 1918; He was sent to France but saw no combat: "By the time I hit the front, the Germans were in retreat.... I was tickled to death at that." Discharged in March 1919, he returned to California and made three or four final films with Comique Arbuckle, as always, was listed as director, with Keaton as uncredited assistant director, but in the later shorts a trend away from the earlier frenetic mugging towards a more controlled style of playing very probably derives from Keaton's influence. One of the last of the series, *Back Stage* (1919), looks very similar in style and execution to Keaton's independent two-reelers.

All the Comique shorts had been released through Paramount, Adolph Zukor's studio. Schenck now arranged that Arbuckle should move to Paramount to make full-length features while he set for Keaton a new company to make shorts, releasing originally through Metro. The former Chaplin Studios in Hollywood were bought and renamed the Keaton Studios, and Schenck also set up a separate deal with Metro for Keaton to star in a comedy feature. This was *The Saphead* (1920) directed by Herbert Blaché and adapted from a stageplay that had starred Douglas Fairbanks. The film marks the first appearance of the rich, spoiled ninny character that Keaton was to refine in *The Navigator* and *Battling Butler*, but otherwise proved a pleasantly unremarkable light comedy, distinguished only by some spectacular acrobatics in the final Stock Exchange sequence. Before starting work on *The Saphead*, Keaton had already completed the first of his two-reelers, *The High Sign*, but, dissatisfied with it, withheld it from release.

As he had done with Arbuckle, Schenck took over all the business side of the operation and gave Keaton complete artistic freedom to make his comedies any way he wanted, paying him $1000 a week plus twenty-five percent of the profits. Since Keaton had little interest in money and none whatever in business, this suited him perfectly. He apparently never even asked Schenck for a written contract.

In some of the early Arbuckle shorts, such as *Coney Island* (1917), Keaton had allowed himself to smile or even laugh, but from now on, in his own films, he never deviated from the grave deadpan that became his most famous attribute. However, to call Keaton's face (as James Agee did) "rigid" or "untroubled" is misleading. It was in fact far more expressive in its stoical restraint than the most frenzied grimaces of lesser comedians. As David Robinson noted, Keaton "is the only silent comedian with whom you are never for a moment in doubt as to what his thoughts are."

"He could tell his story," his colleague Clyde Bruckman recalled, "by lifting an eyebrow. He could tell it by *not* lifting an eyebrow." His face was also, as many writers have observed, exceptionally beautiful; Penelope Gilliatt referred to "the beautiful eyes, the profile that seems simplified into a line as classical as the line of a Picasso figure drawing,"

From 1920 to 1923 Keaton directed and starred in nineteen comedy shorts, all of them—except the three-reel *Day Dreams* (1922)—two-reelers, perfecting and enriching his craft. The Keaton style, the recurrent Keatonian themes and situations, can all be seen developing in these films, later to be reformulated in the full-length features. Several of the shorts, indeed, can stand as fully achieved masterpieces in their own right. *One Week* (1920), the first of the to be released, "set the style for all the future Keatons," wrote Kevin Brownlow, "the opening gag sequence…the slow build-up…the frenetic climax…and then that climax outmatched by the final sequence." …

Several of Keaton's shorts, *One Week* among them, eschew the conventional happy ending, substituting instead the fatalism implicit in his stoical expression. *The Boat* (1921), a brilliantly structured chain of catastrophes, ends bleakly enough with an entire Keaton family shipwrecked and benighted. *Cops* (1922) finishes with an even blacker gag: Buster, with the whole city police force out for his blood, is spurned by his girl; he re-enters the police station from which he has just escaped. We cut to a tombstone, topped by the unmistakable flattened porkpie hat. "There was in his comedy," James Agee remarked, "a freezing whisper not of pathos but of melancholia."

The near-surrealist quality if Keaton's visual imagination pervades *The Playhouse* (1921), made as a more "sedentary" subject while his ankle healed. [Keaton broke his ankle, catching it in an escalator when making *The Electric House.*] In the opening sequence, by means of a multiple exposure technique that has rarely been equaled, let alone surpassed, Keaton plays every part in a theatre, the whole orchestra, the actors, all nine blackface minstrels, both halves of a dance act and every single member of the audience, young and old, male and female.

On principle, Keaton would never fake a stunt but he was happy to exploit all the special effects that the movie camera could offer. "

He was now building up the team of collaborators who would work with him (and play countless games of baseball, his second passion) on most of his silent features. Clyde Bruckman, Jean Havez, and Joe Mitchell were his main gag writers, along with Eddie Cline, who received codirection credit on most of the shorts. The special effects technician was Fred Gabourie, and Elgin Lessley—described by Keaton as "a human metronome" in that age of hand-cranked, variable-speed cameras—the photographer. Among his regular actors were Joe Roberts, who played heavies, and Joe Keaton, grudgingly reconciled to being in movies so long as his son was directing.

In 1921 Keaton married Natalie Talmadge, whom he had met when they were both working for Arbuckle's company. Natalie was the second (and least famous) of the three Talmadge sisters, and sister-in-law to Joe Schenck who'd married Norma Talmadge in 1917. Keaton rapidly discovered that he had married the whole Talmadge clan: the grandiose mansion into which the couple moved was soon taken over by Norma, Constance, and their mother Peg, a

formidable matriarch with great ambitions for her daughters. The Keatons had two sons: James, born 1922, and Robert, born 1924. Buster had planned, following long-established family tradition, to name his first-born Joseph but was overruled by unanimous Talmadge opinion.

In the summer of 1923, at Schenck's suggestion, Keaton moved into the production of full-length features…Barely four months later, Keaton produced his first full-length masterpiece. *Our Hospitality* (1923) deploys impeccable dramatic logic, along with superb gags and some of Keaton's most breathtaking athletic feats. It is also beautiful to look at and filmed with a tangible sense of period and location.

Keaton had great concern for historical detail. His underlying principle of comedy was that however hilarious it must be believable. ….*Our Hospitality* clearly demonstrates, as much by its omissions as by its inclusions, how Keaton's style of comedy diverged from the conventions of the period. There is no speeded-up action, which he felt spoiled the timing of the gags, and none of the wild mugging and gesticulation that too often passed for comic acting at the time. Studio sets are avoided in favor of natural locations. Titles are kept to a minimum and close-ups are rare. Keaton preferred long shots whenever possible and insisted on them for stunts, to prove beyond doubt to the audience that nothing was being faked. Above all, the gags grow naturally and logically out of the action and are consistent with the characters that they involve, in accordance with Keaton's underlying principle that comedy, however hilarious, must be believable. "The thing is not to be ridiculous," he often remarked.…

In comparing, as they inevitably do, Keaton with Chaplin, critics have frequently noted that the often lachrymose sentimentality that plays so large a part in Chaplin's films scarcely figures in Keaton's. We side with the hero of course, and sympathize with him, but are rarely invited to weep over his misfortunes.

In 1926 Joe Schenck became chairman of United Artists, to whom he now switched the release of Keaton's pictures away from his brother Nicholas at MGM. This made little difference to Keaton who still had the freedom to make films in his own way, improvised around plots scribbled on he back of a postcard. (The story, Clyde Bruckman explained, was "as important as a tune to a jazz band, and no more.") Keaton reposed complete financial trust in Schenck, who was now paying him $1000 a week, plus $27,000 for each film and twenty-five percent of the profits. Keaton owned no shares in Buster Keaton Productions and apparently never asked for any. Both commercially and in critical esteem, he now ranked a respectable third to Chaplin and Harold Lloyd—both of whom, however, had shrewdly insured that they kept full financial as well as artistic control over their pictures."

"All Keaton's films," wrote Raymond Durgnat, "have an ascetic, yet dashing, beauty…. Perhaps *The General* is the most beautiful, with its spare, grey photography, its eye for the racy, lungeing lines of the great locomotives, with their prowlike cowcatchers, and with its beautifully sustained movement." Most critics have agreed that *The General* (1926) is Keaton's finest film, and not for its visual beauty alone. Structured in a classically satisfying symmetrical pattern, its narrative line runs clean and uncluttered from start to finish. Little is superfluous or gratuitous; all the gags—and they include some of his finest—are designed to further the dramatic action. And in The General itself—a train, not a person—he found his ideal prop.

The action is set in Georgia, at the outset of the Civil War, Keaton plays Johnnie Gray, an engine-driver who suffers a double rejection—by the Confederate army, who tell him he is more useful driving an engine, and by his girl, who believes he has failed to enlist out of cowardice. His train, and fortuitously his girl, are kidnapped by Northern spies, he pursues them, manages to regain both, along with the enemy's secret plans, brings about a Southern victory, and is commissioned into the army, a hero.

Asked years later why his depiction of the Civil War era looked so much more authentic than that shown in *Gone With The Wind* Keaton replied: "They went to a novel; I went to the history books." "Every shot," wrote David Robinson, "has the authenticity and the unassumingly correct composition of a Matthew Brady Civil War photograph," At the film's climax, the Union locomotive pursuing Johnnie Gray comes to a bridge that he has set on fire and begins to cross. The bridge collapses, hurling the train into the river beneath. Uncompromising as ever, Keaton effused to use a model; with full dramatic impact, a real train crashes through a real bridge—and just to prove it, the frame includes some men on horseback moving on the river bank. This single take—retakes were obviously hardly practicable—is said to have cost $42,000-an unprecedented sum. Surprisingly, *The General* was received with indifference by most critics on its release. *Motion Picture Classic* considered it "a mild Civil War comedy, not up to Keaton's best standard," and the *Herald-Tribune* condemned it as "long and tedious—the last funny thing Buster Keaton has ever done." Box-office receipts were disappointing, the more so since the film had been so costly to make.

Perhaps feeling that he should play safe, Keaton modeled his next film on a proven success. If *Go West* saw Keaton straying into Chaplin's territory, *College* (1927) comes closest to the work of Harold Lloyd, virtually taking over the plot of *The Freshman* (1925), one of Lloyd's biggest hits….With *Steamboat Bill Jr*. (1928), Keaton returned to form.

In 1928, Keaton made what he called "the worst mistake of my life." *Steamboat Bill* had not done well at the box office, and with the coming of sound, times were growing hard for independent producers. Joe Schenck persuaded Keaton to sign a contract with MGM: since Schenk's brother Nicholas was president of the company, it was "all in the family." Despite the urgent warnings of Chaplin and Lloyd and his own misgivings, Keaton went along with the deal. MGM, and Irving Thalberg in particular, seem to have had all the best intentions. Keaton was, after all, a major star and, despite one or two financial disappointments, a considerable box-office attraction. The terms of his contract were generous—$3000 a week, making him one of the studio's highest-paid actors. But his improvisatory working methods were utterly beyond the comprehension of the studio bosses, who thought strictly in terms of approved, closely-budgeted scripts, packed with carefully devised gags supplied by MGM's gagwriters' department.

Twenty-two writers were assigned to produce rhe initial script for *The Cameraman,* which came complete with camera instructions for the director, Edward Sedgwick. Keaton, rebelling, persuaded a reluctant Thalberg to let him junk the script and shoot the film his way. …Several of his old production crew were still with him on the film, including Clyde Bruckman, Elgin Lessley, and Fred Gabourie, but after *The Cameraman,* the team was split up. "I was again assured," Keaton sadly recalled, "that every effort would be made to let me continue working with my team whenever possible. It turned out to be possible very seldom."

Spite Marriage (1929), Keaton's second film for MGM, was his last silent feature, and —by general agreement—the last authentic Keaton film. (Sedgwick was again credited as director.) It was lost for many years….

Even had Keaton been temperamentally equipped to fight the studio, he had other battles on his hands. His marriage to Natalie, which had long been severely strained, was nearing breakdown, and he was drinking at a dangerous rate. Matters were exacerbated by the coming of sound, which panicked the studios into ludicrous errors of judgment. "Talking pictures," it was held, must talk —or sing—virtually nonstop, whatever the innate talents of the actors. From 1929 to 1933 Keaton appeared in eight sound movies for MGM, ranging from the mediocre to the abysmal. Various directors were credited—mainly

Sedgwick, but never Keaton, and indeed little trace of his talent can be detected in any of them.
Natalie Keaton was divorced from Buster in August 1932, taking custody of the children, Drunk and depressed, Keaton took to staying away from the studio. He was fired by MGM in 1933. As far as Hollywood was concerned he was a back number. The rest of the decade was a dismal story of drink, illness, and failure, A nurse who helped him dry out after a binge joined him in a disastrous second marriage that lasted only a couple of years. He starred in a poor film in France and a terrible one in England, and appeared in a whole series of two-reelers for a Poverty Row company, Educational Films. His last directing assignment was for three undistinguished single-reelers in 1938—made, ironically for MGM, for whom he also worked intermittently as a gag-writer.

In 1940, when he was forty-five, Keaton was married for the third time. His bride, Eleanor Norris was a twenty-one-year-old dancer . It was a happy marriage and lasted until his death. Gradually, as he gained some control over his drinking, he began to secure cameo roles in feature films—most famously as one of Gloria Swanson's bridge four in *Sunset Boulevard* (1950). But his great silent films were largely forgotten, and Keaton himself believed they had all been destroyed. He was remembered in France, though: the Cirque Medrano in Paris invited him over in 1947 and he was received with affectionate enthusiasm. He returned there several times and also played on variety bills in London.
An article by James Agee in *Life* (September 5, 1949) "Comedy's Greatest Era" did much to revive interest in Keaton. Prints of his films were tracked down and began to be shown. Briefly and unforgettably, he appeared with Chaplin in *Limelight* (1952)—their first and only film together.

There was plentiful television work and in 1957 a film, *The Buster Keaton Story*, with Donald O'Connor in the title role. It was embarrassingly feeble, but Keaton's fee gave him financial security for the rest of his life, and enabled him and Eleanor to buy a house in Woodland Hills, San Fernando.

By 1960 the Keaton revival was in full swing. Almost all his films had been rediscovered and restored, and were being shown in retrospectives and festivals around the world. Rather to his bewilderment, Keaton found himself elevated from near-oblivion to a position of equality with—or even superiority to—Chaplin in the pantheon of film comedians, a critical estimation that still holds good. 'Keaton,' stated Andres Sarris, 'is now generally acknowledged as the superior director and inventor of visual forms. There are those who would go further and claim Keaton as pure cinema as opposed to Chaplin's theatrical cinema.'" …

The climax of Keaton's return to fame came at the 1965 Venice Film Festival, where *Film*, a 22-minute short written for him by Samuel Beckett, was premiered. Later that day, at the evening gala, Keaton was given a standing ovation of unparalleled fervor. He was touched and delighted, but told Lotte Eisner afterwards, '"Sure it's great—but it's all thirty years too late." He continued working to within three months of his death, although there were now far more offers than he could fulfill. In October 1965, just after his seventieth birthday, lung cancer was diagnosed, and late the following January he suffered a terminal seizure. He no longer knew anybody but, active to the last, wandered all over the house, upstairs and downstairs, until he died in the early hours of the next morning.

Buñuel: from *An Unspeakable Betrayal*

Few are those who know how to accomplish their mission in the rhythmic, architectural workings of a film. It is the editing–film's golden key–that

combines, comments on, and unifies all these elements. Can greater cinematic virtue be reached? Some have wanted to believe in the inferiority of Keaton as the "anti-virtuoso" in comparison with Chaplin, considering this a handicap, a sort of stigma, whereas we consider it a virtue that Keaton achieves comic effect through direct harmony with the tools, situations, and other means of production. Keaton is loaded with humanity–but a recent and wholly original humanity; a fashionable humanity, if you will.

Louise Brooks: from *The Parade's Gone By* Kevin Brownlow

What a raw deal they gave poor Buster," said Louise Brooks. "When his wife divorced him, Joe Schenck made sure that he didn't own his own films, so he could never resell them. They weren't his own property. Like Lloyd's or Chaplin's. He didn't have a cent. He lived in a magnificent house, on the same scale as a millionaire. But a millionaire's income comes in every year for ever. Poor Buster lived in a mansion with eight or nine servants on three thousand dollars a week. Schenck was making money out of actors, out of films, out of stories. What did it matter to him or Sam Goldwyn if they lost two thousand to four thousand dollars a week in the big bridge games? Or went to the Clover Club and lost twenty thousand? They forced the actors, like Buster to take part because the moment you haven't any dough you're through. You aren't brave any more. No actor could compete financially with a producer. Poor little Buster with his three thousand dollars a week, trying to live like a millionaire. It was impossible. So they broke him.

"His formal education amounted to one day–a day he said he played strictly for laughs, using the rest of the class as an audience. The school felt it advisable for general discipline that he shouldn't return."

"Clyde Bruckman was one of the best gag men in the business. When Keaton credited him for co-direction of one of his pictures, he was signed up by Harold Lloyd. In fact , he had no directorial experience at all, and the responsibility of his new job unnerved him. On top of this, marital troubles led him to drink. In 1953, Bruckman borrowed a gun from Keaton. After a meal in a Hollywood restaurant, which he was unable to pay for, he went to the rest room and shot himself."

"In retrospect, Buster Keaton was probably the best comedy director in the business. Chaplin's use of film was pedestrian by comparison."

Keaton acknowledged his debt to Arbuckle "I learned it all from him" and after his trials when Hays wouldn't let him be hired as an actor Keaton hired him as a director giving him the screen name Will B. Good, then William Goodrich.

Keaton:
"*The General* was my pet. It was a page out of history, although I couldn't use the original finish. Walt Disney tried to do it later (as *The Great Locomotive Chase*) but he couldn't use the real finish either. Because the Southerners took all eight of those guys and they hanged them."

Brownlow
"His greatness was due to a combination of factors; his approach was ideal for silent comedy. He had a

unique screen personality. He had real acting skill, with the sense of timing and of movement that this implies. He was a film director of brilliance, who knew exactly where to put the camera. He also had an intuitive sense of cutting, he was mechanically very ingenious, he had qualities of resourcefulness, authority and foresight. And he had a degree of personal courage which, had it been displayed under conditions of war, would have won him national honors.

"But greatness would still be lacking were it not for one added quality: a capacity for tremendous hard work, a complete dedication to motion pictures, which, fused with the other remarkable elements, made Buster Keaton a master film maker."

From *Buster Keaton Interviews*. Ed. Kevin W. Sweeney. U Mississippi Press, Jackson, 2007
Interview with Studs Terkel 1960

KEATON: . . .We sit around and talk about it for quite a while before we start the picture and then take advantage of anything that happens to add to it. This is a shock to anybody who is in the motion picture business today—I mean your veterans of the pictures of the last twenty-five years or so that didn't know the silent days. A feature-length picture…neither Chaplin, Harold Lloyd, or myself ever had a script. That sounds impossible to anyone today in the picture business. We never even thought of writing a script; we didn't need to. By the time we had worked out what we thought was a picture, for instance…we always got a start. People always come up with a start. Say, that's funny, that's a good start. All right, we want to know the finish right then and there, see. There's nothing else to work on but the finish, and if we can't round it out to something we like, we throw that one away and start on a new one. But when we get the start and the finish, we've got it, because the middle we can always take care of. That's easy. So, by the time we get through talking about it and you got this all set, enough to start, my prop man knows the props he's going to have to get, the wardrobe man knows the wardrobe, the guy that builds the set he knows what sets you want, and you help him design 'em. There's no need for a script. We all know what we are going to do. And if I build a nice set here, says, we got to make this an important set, make it look good and so forth. We find out that the routine I intended to do in there is laying an egg, is not holding up, but a broom closet off of it got me in trouble. So I end up shooting only two minutes of film in the big set and half a reel in the broom closet. So what good would a script have been to me? We just throw gags out right and left when we're shooting because they don't stand out and they don't work well, and the accidental ones come.

TURKEL: *Here's the case of the actual freshness…let what happens happen, depending upon your imagination….*

KEATON: Another thing we didn't do in those days that they do today is that we didn't rehearse a scene to perfection. We didn't want that because it is mechanical then….We didn't want anything to look mechanical….

TURKEL*: What of the art of Chaplin?...*

KEATON: Well, Charlie was one of the best directors ever in the picture business. *A Woman of Paris* with Adolphe Menjou, his first motion picture.

TERKEL: *Edna Purviance.*

KEATON: Edna Purviance was the girl who had always been Chaplin's leading lady. And he made this high-society drama, the background, Paris. He just directed it, and for the first time on the screen, in that dramatic story, he kept doing things by suggestion. Well, every director in pictures went to see that picture more than once just to study that technique. He absolutely revolutionized the direction of pictures.

TERKEL: *You say, "by suggestion." Could you sort of give an example?*

KEATON: Well he wanted Adolphe Menjou…that he wanted the audience to know that Menjou paid for the apartment that Edna Purviance was living in. And the way he did it was that he called on her one evening to take her out, gave her a little bouquet or something like that, and he looked in the mirror and saw a spot on his collar. He took the collar off, went over to a bureau drawer, and took out a clean one.

TERKEL: *That tells the whole story right there.*

KEATON: That told the whole situation.

TERKEL: *This was the first time something of this sort happened in films. It was not diagram but suggestion.*

KEATON: Yes, That's right.

TERKEL: A Woman of Paris *was one of the films that revolutionized directing.*

KEATON: There's something that leads into that. I went into pictures with Roscoe Arbuckle. I mean, his pictures were the first ones that I appeared in. And I'd only been with him a short time, and he says, "Here's something you want to bear in mind, that the average mind of the motion picture audience is twelve years old. It's a twelve-year-old mind that you're entertaining." I was only with him about another couple of months and I says, "Roscoe, something tells me that those who continue to make pictures for twelve-year-old minds ain't going to be with us long." Well, it was only a couple of years later that a scene like this of Chaplin's kind proved that. The minds jumped much faster than we were making pictures.

TERKEL: *That's marvelous. The same principle applies of course…we hear it today applying to television and radio. The same false belief that the public isn't ready for adult…or use of the imagination. What Chaplin did, and what you appeared to do in so many was allow the imagination of the audience to flow freely.*

KEATON: Sure. I always tried to do that. I always wanted an audience to outguess me, then I'd double-cross them sometimes.

Interview with Keaton at Venice. John Gillett & James Blue, 1965

JG: *Apart from the comedy values, the most impressive thing about all the features you made during the twenties is their distinctive visual style. They all have a kind of look which one associates with a Keaton film. How did you work with your various co-directors to achieve this? Who actually did what?*

BK: Number one, I was practically my own producer on all those silent pictures. I used a co-director on some of them, but the majority I did alone. And I cut them all myself: I cut all my own pictures.

JG: *What exactly would the co-director do?*

BK: Co- direct with me, that's all. He would be out there looking through the camera, and I'd ask him what he thought. He would maybe say "That scene looks a little slow"; and then I'd do it again and speed it up. As a rule, when I'm working alone, the cameraman, the prop man, the electrician, these are my eyes out there. I'd ask, "Did that work the way I wanted it to?" and they'd say yes or no. They knew what they were talking about.

JG: *You would choose the actual camera set-ups yourself?*

KEATON: Always, when it was important for the scene I was going to do. If I had an incidental scene-someone runs in, say, and says, "here, you've got to

go and do this"—the background wasn't important. Then I just generally told the cameraman that I had these two characters in the scene, two full-length figures, and asked him to pick a good-looking background. He would go by the sun. He'd say, "I like that back crosslight coming in through the trees. There are clouds over there right now, so if we hurry we can still get them before they disappear." So I would say "Swell" and go and direct the scene in front of the cameraman's set-up. We took pains to get good-looking scenery whenever we possibly could, no matter what we were shooting.

JG: *What about the visual idea of the films? Take, for instance, a picture like* Our Hospitality, *which has a beautiful period feeling.*

BK: We were very conscious of our stories. We learned in a hurry that we couldn't make a feature-length picture the way we had done the two-reelers; we couldn't use impossible gags., like the kind of things that happen to cartoon characters. We had to eliminate all these things because we had to tell a logical story that an audience would accept. So story construction became a very strong point with us. …

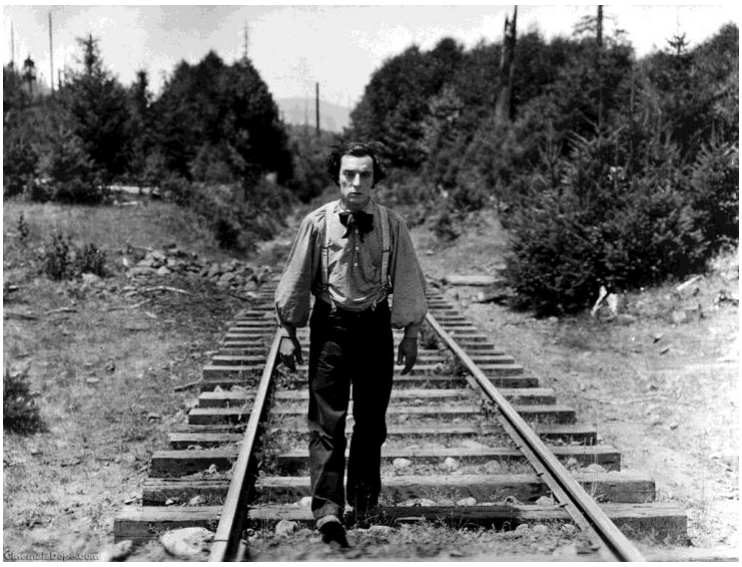
JG: *One of the best gags in the film in the moment when you swing out by a rope from the riverbank and catch the girl almost in mid-air as she goes over the big waterfall. How did you stage this very tricky shot?*

BK: We had to build that dam: we built it in order to fit that trick. The set was built over a swimming pool, and we actually put up four eight-inch water pipes with big pumps and motors to run them, to carry the water up from the pool to create our waterfall. That fall was about six inches deep. A couple of times I swung out underneath there and dropped upside down when I caught her. I had to go down to the doctor right there and then. They pumped out my ears and nostrils and drained me, because when a full volume of water like that comes down and hits you and you're upside down—then you really get it.

JG: *How long did it take to shoot the scene? How many takes were there?*

BK: I think I got it on the third take. I missed the first two, but the third one I got it…And it's hard to realize that it was shot in 1923. It sounds like going back to ancient history.

JB: *But it still works.*



"BUSTER KEATON" Kevin Brownlow/1964

…BROWLOW: W*hich was the railroad you did* The General *on, then?*

KEATON: Well, that was nobody's railroad. Number one, I went to the original location, from Atlanta, Georgia, up to Chattanooga, and the scenery didn't look very good. It looked terrible. The railroad tracks I couldn't use at all because the Civil War trains were narrow gauge, and those railroad beds of that time were pretty crude. They didn't have so much gravel rock to put between the ties, and then you saw grass growing between the ties every place you saw the railroad, darn near. And of course I had to have narrow gauge railroads, so I went to Oregon. And in Oregon, it is honeycombed …the whole state is honeycombed with narrow gauge railroads for all the lumber mills, 'cause they handle all their trees and things like that with narrow-gauge railroads. Well, so I found trains going through valleys, mountains, by little lakes or mountain streams—anything I wanted.

BROWNLOW: *Huge viaducts?*

KEATON: Or anything I wanted. So, we got rolling equipment—wheels and trucks and stuff like that. We built our freight train and our passenger train, and remodeled three locomotives.

BROWNLOW: *You remodeled them. You didn't get the originals out of the. . .?*
KEATON: Oh no, but the engines working in these lumber camps were all so doggone old It was an easy job. They were all wood burners, all of them. [Pointing to a photograph on the wall, Keaton says.] The same engine, that's The General. That's the way she is at the present time. She's at the World's Fair in New York, but they keep it in a showcase down in Atlanta, Georgia, where the start of that chase was supposed to be from, see. And at that period they didn't pay much attention to numbers of engines—they named them all. That's what accounts for The General—and the one I chased it with was The Texas. It's The Texas I threw through the burning bridge.

BROWNLOW: *How. . .that incredible scene?*

KEATON: Well, we built that bridge.

BROWNLOW: *How many extras did you have in that?*

KEATON; We also damned up the water underneath it so that there would be more water, so that the stream would look better.

BROWNLOW: *How did you get down to planning a thing like this? You had Gabourie, and who else did you work with ion a scene like that?*

KEATON: Just Gabourie—he and a couple of his right-hand men, one a blacksmith, because we had a forge and a blacksmith's shop right on the lot!

TOM WEBSTER: *Where did you operate out of in Oregon?*

KEATON: In a place called Cottage Grove, just a little south of Eugene—only about thirty-five miles from Eugene, Oregon. And when I wanted the battle scenes, I managed to get extra people. No experienced people there, being extra people, we just had to train 'em to be extra people.

BROWNLOW: *Did you ship them up from. . .?*

KEATON: No, they were just all around. They came from miles around in Oregon to get in there, see. And when we did the battle scenes, I got the National Guard of Oregon.

BROWNLOW: *But where did you get your uniforms?*

KEATON: From here.

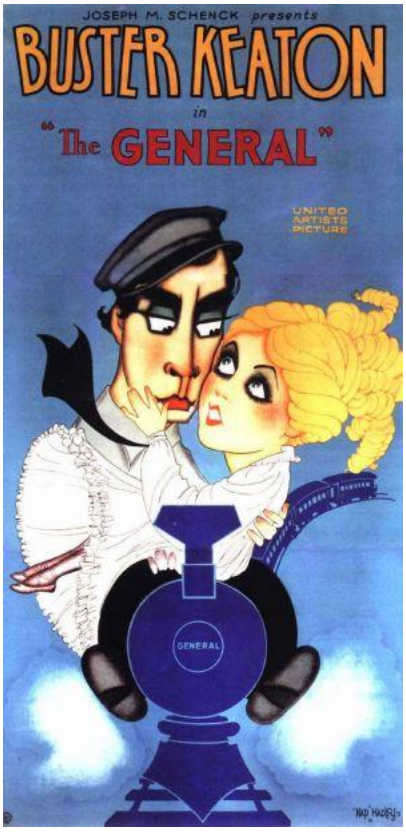
BROWNLOW: *You shipped them all up from. . .*

KEATON: Yes, all the uniforms. Now that location, from Hollywood, is around twelve hundred miles.

BROWNLOW: *Now, and how many cameras did you have on that?*

KEATON: Always had three, and a fourth one when I needed it. Because in the silent days, there's always two cameras on every shot, right alongside of each

other—not to give you different angles but right alongside of each other, because the one generally on the cameraman's left was [for] the foreign negative. Because when you completed your picture, you cut your picture, we said that's it. Now, they cut the same scenes from the other camera. Well, they match that negative and ship that [second negative]to Europe, and in Europe all the foreign prints were made off of that. Otherwise a couple of hundred reels of film would have to be shipped over there—so much cheaper to do it that way. That's why you always had a foreign [negative] print.



BROWNLOW: *So, when you had other camera positions, you'd have two in each place?*

KEATON: Well, no, then we'd start spotting cameras or odd angle shots. If this one was good, this [other] one would have to be satisfied with our angle. That's all there was to it. Europe didn't see that one. Of course, later on when we got rolling and [had] new inventions, we got so we could take and duplicate an odd shot and make a foreign negative out of it, a dupe negative we called it. [In the] early days, they weren't very good. A dupe negative was always grainy and milky—it wasn't good photography, see. But in later years, they had practically perfected it so you could hardly tell a dupe negative shot from the real one.

BROWNLOW: *These were the days, of course, when you had to do your own opticals in the camera.*

KEATON: Oh, yes.

BROWNLOW: *Your chief cameraman was Dev Jennings?*

KEATON: Both Lessley and Jennings.

BROWNLOW: *Well now, to be back a little farther, what I want to try to discover is how you learned about motion pictures yourself, because…*

KEATON: I was going to go into a show in New York. I was going into the Winter Garden for *The Passing Show of 1917*, when I met Arbuckle on the street with an old friend of mine, who introduced me to Arbuckle. Arbuckle asked me if I'd ever been in a motion picture. I said I hadn't even been in a studio. He said, "Come on down to the Norma Talmadge Studio on Forty-eighth Street on Monday. Get there early and do a scene with me and see how you like it." Well, rehearsals hadn't started yet, so I said, "all right." I went down and did it.

Well, the making of a motion picture started to fascinate me immediately . So I stuck with them and went in and out of that picture. First thing I did was I asked a thousand questions about the camera and got into the camera. Then I went to the projecting room to see things cut. It just fascinated me. For a finish I asked them to break my contract, let me out of the show, and I stayed with Arbuckle. And Arbuckle at that time was considered, next to Chaplin, to be the best comedy director in pictures.

BROWNLOW: *Directing? He was directing?*

KEATON: Oh, yes. He directed all his own. He was a good man to watch. Well, I was only with him about maybe three pictures when I became his assistant director. I don't mean in the sense of an assistant director like we have today who sees that people are on the set. I mean when he was doing a scene and I wasn't in it, I was alongside the camera to watch him. I directed when he was in the scene. So by the time I'd spent a year with him, it was no problem at all, when I set out to make my own, to direct.

BROWNLOW: *So, a picture like* Coney Island *would have been co-directed by you and him?*

KEATON: Yeah.

BROWNLOW: *Was Al St. John ever interested in directing?*

KEATON: No. He never was.

BROWNLOW: *Did Arbuckle really have the knowledge and the feel…?*

KEATON: Yeah. Do you remember Sennett's famous picture, *Tillie's Punctured Romance*? Well, Arbuckle did an awful lot of that, although his name wasn't on the screen for it. I think Freddie Fishbach was the director of that, but Arbuckle did an awful lot of work on it for Sennett.

BROWNLOW: *Well, now in those days, cutting wasn't done in animated viewers. You held it up to the light and …*

KEATON: Well, we had the little cranks too, but they were a nuisance. Once we've seen that scene on the screen, we knew about what it is. We can get in the projection room and run down to where the action that we want is. "There just as he goes out that door. Rip it. That's it. Pick up. Give the next shot. Get down to where he's just coming through the door." Edit them and splice together. Now you've started, see. And stopping to thread those things up for that….The only thing that happens today is you got a sound track on there.

BROWNLOW: *Yeah, but how do you get the pacing on it?*

KEATON: Oh, that comes from experience… of assembling.

BROWNLOW: *Experience? This is what I can't understand. Your pictures, right from the start, were so technically perfect. And you say you did it by experience, but, you know, this is…I've been in the editing business for years, and I can't get this experience just by going into the cutting room and doing it like you did. This is something that comes from a knowledge and handling of film, but it comes after many years. But with you, you did it like this!*

KEATON:Yeah, I don't know.

MRS. KEATON: It must have been the timing of actors.

KEATON: It must have….

MRS. KEATON Having worked all his life, he's always had this mathematical timing as far as actors moving around.

BROWNLOW: *True.*

KEATON: See, I was a veteran before I went into pictures. I was twenty-one years old then. So,…pacing for instance. In fast action you'll cut scenes a little closer than just normal action. And when you've got a dramatic scene, you lengthen out a little bit more on those, so you don't get a fast pace.

BROWNLOW: *But you know that every film is based on….the cutting of it is based on the rhythm and you've got to cut right on that. And if you take one of your pictures and you run it at the correct speed and you just sit back and you go [clicks fingers]…like that, every cut comes up right to the frame. That scene where you are running out in* Cops *to grab hold of that car as it goes past—the driving mirror, as it goes up—right to the very frame, it's correct. It's perfect. And this is something which very few editors today could do.*

COMING UP IN BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS, SPRING 2021, SERIES 42

Feb 9 1931 William A. Wellman *The Public Enemy*
Feb 16 1942 Orson Welles *The Magnificent Ambersons*
Feb 23 1947 Vittorio de Sica *The Bicycle Thieves*
Feb 23 1959 Yasujiro Ozu *Floating Weeds*
March 2 1960 Alfred Hitchcock *Psycho*
Mach 16 1969 Éric Rohmer *My Night at Maud's*
March 23 1972 Peter Medak *The Ruling Class*
March 30 1978 Terrence Malick *Days of Heaven*
April 6 1981 Karel Reisz *The French Lieutenant's Woman*
April 13 1989 Spike Lee *Do The Right Thing*
April 20 1993 Jane Campion *The Piano*
April 27 2000 Joel and Ethan Coen *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*
May 4 1982 Ingmar Bergman *Fanny and Alexander*

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