

The March, 2013 LVCA dvd donation to the Hugh Stoupe Memorial Library of the Heritage United Methodist Church of Ligonier, Pa. is the 2-dvd set titled THE CHAPLIN COLLECTION: THE KID. Contents include the title film at wrong correction projection speed, all but annihilating the superb acting of Chaplin and Coogan, and a delightful discovery, MY BOY, featuring Coogan in his prime and captured at a correct projection speed. Below is Kino Ken's review of these two films.

THE KID U.S., 1919-1920 black-and-white silent comedy at 24? f.p.s.
50 minutes (other, more sensibly slowed versions run 60, 62 or even 68 minutes and are much more strongly recommended)

Rating: 15 of a possible 20 points **** of a possible *****

*indicates a superior performance or achievement

Points

- 2 DIRECTION: Charles Chaplin* and Charles Reisner*
- 2 EDITING: Charles Chaplin*
- 1 CINEMATOGRAPHY: Roland Totheroh
- 0 STORY: Charles Chaplin
- 2 ART DIRECTION: Charles Hall
- 2 LIGHTING
- 2 MUSIC: Charles Chaplin*, orchestrated by Eric Rogers*(1971)
- 1 ACTING
- 1 CREATIVITY
- 2 EMOTIONAL IMPACT

Principal Cast: Charlie Chaplin* (a tramp), Jackie Coogan* (the kid), Edna Purviance (the mother of the kid), Carl Miller (the father of the kid), Henry Bergman (Professor Guido / night shelter keeper), Frank Campeau (welfare officer), Nellie Bly Baker (slum nurse), Charles Reisner*(bully), Jules Hanft (physician), Walter Lynch (tough cop), May White (the mother of the kid's maid), Lita Grey, age 12* (flirtatious angel), Jack Coogan, Sr. *(pickpocket / devil), Kathleen Kay (maid), Edith Wilson (lady with baby carriage), Baby Wilson (baby in carriage), Silas Hathaway (the kid as a baby), John McKinnon (chief of police), Granville Redmond (the father of the kid's friend), Minnie Stearns (fierce woman)

Chaplin's second feature film, following the abominable SUNNYSIDE, was THE KID. This film may have been intended as a monument to his firstborn son, who

tragically died when only three days old. It began to take shape in his mind less than two weeks after the death of “the little mouse.” Work seems to have calmed the grieved father’s mind, giving it a creative outlet. He auditioned babies for the infant Kid first, looking for someone unafraid of the camera and suitably amused by his clowning. Obtaining the ideal five-year-old to partner The Little Tramp took considerably longer. Charlie’s search ended when he discovered Jack Coogan, Jr. in his father’s dance show. This amazing tyke could mimic, sing, dance and roughhouse on command. Better still, Jackie was not a bit camera shy. Of course, he had no British accent, but that was no drawback in a silent film role. He would become both a mirror of his co-star’s own childhood and a replacement for his lost child. The role of the kid’s “mother” would of course go to Edna Purviance, an old flame of Chaplin’s whose fading career needed revitalization. She proved more interested in bottles than kids, giving a merely adequate performance. Silent film audiences must have left theaters wondering why she’d want the kid back in the first place. Unless it was merely a plot device of the director.

THE KID has a very simple story line. When an unwed mother is released from a maternity hospital with little or no available funds and a needy baby, the only options look to be suicide, infanticide, or beggardom. If only a wealthy benefactor could come to the rescue.

Chaplin frowned upon evangelical charities. So the Salvation Army and its cousins are not potential fallbacks for his characters.

Well, what if this unmarried mother, called simply The Woman, leaves her babe in an unattended luxury vehicle? Such as the one parked at a nearby curb. This being a comedy, two car thieves are contemplating the same target. The Woman arrives there first, depositing her child in the back seat, then retreating to a park bench. From there she belatedly observes a felonious duo sneak into the limousine containing her baby and speed off, little suspecting their secondary crime.

Tragedy is averted, however. Soon the criminals realize they are not alone. The presence of an obtrusive underage passenger could lead to a stiffer sentence than anticipated, in the event of police interdiction. Hmmm. When one of the pair suggests murder, the other overrules him. That kind of trouble they don’t need. Better to abandon the child in a nearby alley.

Of course, who should subsequently visit that location but our ostentatiously impoverished Little Tramp? Spying the apparently unwanted infant as he strolls rhythmically along, the vagrant makes the fraught error of tentatively picking it up. Almost immediately he is perceived as an irresponsible father trying to shirk

his paternal obligations. In a series of encounters with mothers and police, Chaplin abandons, recovers and relocates the baby before finally deciding to saunter off outright with it.

A succession of vignettes show us the process by which our involuntarily charitable hero refashions his home into a kind of impromptu downscale nursery. Because of the improper speed of this mk2 version of the film, viewers cannot savor the details of the transformation. Instead they are rocketed into Coogan's introductory scene on a curb in the same neighborhood five years later, with a brief stop at a mansion where *The Woman*, having collapsed in front of its door, is taken inside and eventually found to be an incognito opera singer. Signor Guido pilots her hastily into a lucrative career which she pursues between visits to slums as a charity worker. Explanation: she hopes someone does likewise for her son.

On one such visit she encounters Jackie Coogan sitting outside the Little Tramp's home. Unsurprisingly, she fails to recognize him as her kidnapped child and he has no clue to provide enlightenment. She should have remembered to leave something personal behind with him like a proper Dickensian homeless mother. Anyway, it's too early for her to reclaim the boy. He hasn't truly suffered enough. Not according to Chaplin, who is going to parallel *The Kid's* story with his own childhood.

Once Jackie is on the screen the film acquires a beating heart in place of the rampant symbolism of earlier scenes. We watch him longingly gaze at the toys being hauled about by this female stranger. It is the look of a truly deprived child. Chaplin must have been thrilled to see his childhood self returned to life on the screen.

Sensitively directed interaction between *The Woman* and the Kid involves a toy presented to staunch imminent heartbreak. A good deed accomplished, the donor walks off. But it is *The Kid* who holds the attention of camera and viewer giving a small, tentative curved finger farewell. Moments such as these provide true cinema magic. *THE KID* offers several more, from Coogan's undiluted joy smashing windows to generate business for glazier Charlie to the heartcrushing scene of his desolation when forcibly separated from the only caring adult he's known and deposited into the back of a pickup truck from a welfare agency. This is the lamentable result of an officious meddling doctor attempting to liberate him from the tramp's obviously unsuitable guardianship.

The film's conclusion is eminently foreseeable and thoroughly Victorian. Nothing yet points the way to the complex sermons and social tracts Chaplin would deliver in such later works as *MODERN TIMES*, *MONSIEUR VERDOUX* and

LIMELIGHT. Movies as instigators of social reform was a concept Charlie would not explore until the miseries of the Great Depression refocused public attention on the plight of the penniless. THE KID is more of a modified autobiography, with the kind of ending its creator imagined actually occurring. Why not? He himself had found a splendid second home in Hollywood, where he hoped soon to welcome the “unfit” mother who years earlier surrendered him to welfare authorities. His crystal ball did not foresee Hitler, HUAC, or the succession of public scandals which culminated in voluntary exile from an adopted homeland.

Chaplin’s film direction is impeccable with regard to Coogan, the nymphet-like Lita Grey whom he cast as a flirtatious angel, and the doggedly dense bully played by associate director Charles Reisner. His own performance has flawless timing coupled with the facial plasticity of his screen mentor, Max Linder. Jack Coogan Sr.’s pickpocket bum is wondrously unnerving to watch. But Edna Purviance is uninvolved as The Woman. Additionally, several characters overact obnoxiously, the worst offender being Jules Hanft as a charity case physician.

When shown at proper speed this comedy is a masterpiece of editing. As it should be, for Chaplin shot 53 times more footage than he ultimately used.

Anyone who believes iris ins and outs are stodgy and artificial needs to watch how Rollie Totheroh operates them beautifully to provide a seamless rhythm. Otherwise restrained camerawork is harmonious with a desired focus on acting performances and set furnishing details. For the latter, credit must go to Charles Hall, who, according to IMDB, was responsible for this picture’s art direction. Individual scenes resemble Jacob Riis photos, but this would not be possible without an attentive eye for period detail and faithful reproduction of street life.

Mk2’s dvd release offers the 1971 music score with melodies composed by Chaplin himself and orchestrations by Eric Rogers. Both jaunty chase music and pathetic wordless ballads are handled with supreme skill.

DVD extras include the feature film MY BOY, anchored ably by an even more creative and inspired Jackie Coogan performance. That motion picture will be reviewed at length below. Other bonuses are a six-minute introduction to the film by Chaplin biographer David Robinson, newsreel footage of Chaplin’s initial return to Europe in 1921 and the Parisian orphanage visit of Jackie Coogan in 1924 on behalf of a fund drive for Armenian orphans, film posters, a photo gallery, a 1918 featurette showcasing construction of Chaplin’s new First National studio, a short 1920 clip of Jackie Coogan dancing, and a 26-minute documentary featuring an interview with Iranian film director Abbas Kiarostami about THE KID. Do yourself a favor and skip the ghastly black comedy home movie shot at Pickfair. Overall, a

winning package, despite the depressingly awful NICE AND FRIENDLY and the destructively incorrect projection speed used for the collection's lead film. THE KID is suitable for teens and adults, but parental previewing and discretion are strongly urged due to extramarital sex plot, mockery of religion and violence.

On the second dvd of THE CHAPLIN COLLECTION: THE KID can be found another fascinating silent film spotlighting Jackie Coogan. It is titled MY BOY, plays at correct projection speed and presents a far better showcase of Jackie's acting than the mk2 version of THE KID.

MY BOY U.S., 1921 black-and-white silent feature melodrama at correct projection speed 55 minutes Jackie Coogan Productions

*indicates outstanding performance or achievement

Rating: 11 points of a possible 20 **1/2 of a possible *****

POINTS

1 DIRECTION: Albert Austin and Victor Heerman Supervisor: Jack Coogan, Sr.*

0 EDITING: Irene Morra

1 CINEMATOGRAPHY: Glen MacWilliams, Robert Martin

1 STORY: Marc Abramson (intertitles), Victor Heerman, Shirley Vance Martin
(art titles)

1 ART DIRECTION

1 LIGHTING

2 LOCATIONS

1 ACTING

1 CREATIVITY

1 EMOTIONAL IMPACT

Principal cast: Jackie Coogan, Jr.* (Jackie Blair), Claude Gillingwater (Captain Bill Hicks), Mathilde Brundage (Mrs. J. Montague Blair, Jackie's paternal grandmother), Frank Hayes (rent collector), Patsy Marks (Little Girl)

Young Jackie Blair is left an orphan when his mother dies two days into a transatlantic voyage from France to America. Father has been killed in France, presumably in World War I and not by an irritated father-in-law, though the intertitles fail to deliver details. Passage for the boy in steerage being already paid, Jackie is left in isolated misery for the remainder of his trip to the United States. Viewers are shown by contrast aristocratic first-class passengers enjoying a game of shuffleboard, perhaps hinting that the forlorn boy somehow belongs to that part of society.

Disembarking, our hero arrives on Ellis Island. No one shows up to claim the child, leaving him at the mercy of bureaucrats. Meanwhile, a retired ship captain named Bill Hicks has come to the processing center to apply for work, and possibly also to catch up on the latest shipping news. While conversing with an official in the main hall, Hicks is bumped by a frolicking Pinkosuwitz child too engrossed in a game of ring-around-the-rosy to heed bystanders. That action produces a telling remark that these kids shouldn't be allowed in here. Is this a complaint against rambunctious juveniles or anti-immigration opinion? An examining doctor overhearing the mariner comments that one child will be returned to his homeland due to the sorry circumstances of parental deaths. He then points out woebegone Jackie Blair, staring mournfully at the floor planks from atop a wooden crate. Momentarily sympathetic, crusty Hicks walks over to the youngster and attempts to engage him in conversation. When the lad remains mute, Bill studies the situation for a moment. Then he leads Jackie over to the reformed circle of Pinkosuwitz kids, inserting the boy into their game in hope of dispelling the child's glumness. At the same instance, Ma Pinkosuwitz covers her sleeping infant to keep it warm, making the bundle in her arms appear just another wrapped parcel from the old country. This confuses the exiting official when her family leaves the holding center to join relatives on the other side of the wire screen separating residents from new arrivals, so that he mistakenly includes the Blair orphan as one of eight Pinkosuwitz children, failing to detect the enfolded baby. Jackie, holding the hand of Sammy Pinkosuwitz, is dragged along with the rest of the clan. But neither "parent" recognizes this stranger when tallying their offspring as they board a streetcar outside. Papa Pinkosuwitz firmly rejects the interloper, leaving him disheartened and once again solo.

Just then Captain Hicks is also departing the Main Hall of Ellis Island. He makes the fateful decision to stop walking a moment in order to light his pipe. Here is a prime reason, smokers, to kick the habbit. Read on to find what may happen if you persist.

Jackie, scouting for any semblance of a guardian, spots the old fellow on the street who'd brought him into the circle of children. He resolves to follow him, having no better plan for security. Captain Hicks steers his unwanted shadower back towards the sea, but cannot prevent being tailed home, much to his exasperation.

Gradually, a bond forms between unemployed senior citizen and homeless outcast. These two rejected souls need each other far more than the impecunious elder will admit. Surely now is not the time to bring another hungry mouth to the

table. But if not the present, when? Time is running out for him to serve as anyone's grandfather, real or imaginary.

For his part, the younger half of the mismatched pair introduces virtues of charity, cleanliness, and piety to a man who had forgotten their exercise. Memorable scenes follow with Jackie using a colander as makeshift shower head and dragging a table loaded with dirty dishes across Captain Hicks' single-room apartment in order to facilitate washing them. Another highlight is Coogan's song-and-dance routine, partly copied from watching an organ-grinder's monkey perform.

When his benefactor's rheumatism threatens confinement to bed, Jackie undertakes to bring back necessary expensive liniment and medication, earning their purchase price by attaching himself to an ensemble consisting of hurdy-gurdy player and companion chimpanzee. The chimp's acting temporarily upstages even Coogan's, but it was left similarly statueless in the pre-Oscar early Twenties. After being dispossessed of his share of collected coins by the simian's master, Jackie grabs the capful of disputed money and dashes off, precipitating a protracted chase reminiscent of similar pursuits in *THE KID*. Successfully ditching his greedy accompanist, the urchin rummages through the cap, taking out what he felt was owed him and leaving the rest for what an intertitle informs us is the monkey's "father." A sly dig at evolutionism.

Returning to a rheumatic housemate, our protagonist attempts to play nurse. Being unable to read, the always-caring boy pours liniment out of its bottle onto a spoon which he then offers the patient. Aside from extreme distastefulness, this oral medication nearly poisons its recipient. Oops.

Touches of natural humor in similar style abound. Whoever truly directed repeatedly captures child behavior in its most unaffected form from all the juveniles in the cast, even the extras. Note, for example, the aggressive stance of the kid on the left of the frame while Jackie sings his heart out.

In a posher section of town, Mrs. J. Montagu Blair has received a letter communicating the imminent arrival of her fatherless grandchild. Not expecting the boy to come ashore alone, she cannot fathom where he might have wandered. Being a woman of considerable wealth and influence, she soon sets the New York City police force to the task of finding her stray.

Concern over potential kidnapping does not prevent issuance of invitations to settlement house children to attend an upcoming party at her mansion. Even the unfamiliar Jackie Blair gets one, which sets off dreams of sweets and games. But the captain's illness and recuperation take priority. There will be no partying while

someone is sick at home. However, when the rheumatic is handed Jackie's card about the party, he insists upon his attendance there.

Despite a tardy entrance, Jackie is escorted into the room where cake and other treats await fellow pauper children. While they are focused on stuffing themselves and being entertained, the latecomer sneaks various foodstuffs inside loose-fitting clothes, intending to bring back proper nourishment to Captain Hicks. All does not go well, however, since Mrs. Montagu, who is also present, interrupts a game of pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey with an inquiry about her missing handbag. Did any of the waifs take it?

One of them begins to feel awfully queasy as playmates are searched by a neighborhood constable called in to assist. Just before the policeman can inspect him, Jackie bolts, electing to preserve food for the rheumatic above all other considerations. Even if everyone else thinks him a guttersnipe thief.

On top of all the other confusion, authorities from immigration services and the alerted police are in unrelenting search of a boy named Jackie Blair, who has now become the most wanted kid in the entire metropolis.

Can you figure out the rest?

A considerable number of intertitles display refreshingly witty humor, investing a conventional story with oddball charm. Mathilde Brundage is effectively restrained and credible as Jackie's grandmother, while Claude Gillingwater gives an old school overemphatic performance as Captain Hicks. Particularly annoying is the stereotypical rent collector portrayed in most exaggerated fashion by Frank Hayes.

The original music score by Eduardo Pereyra and Jose Rosito is not used in this version. Is it lost? Instead we are swathed in absolute silence, unbroken by melody, dialogue, or sound effects. MY BOY here is that great rarity, a completely silent film.

Photography efficiently focusses on Coogan, allowing the viewer to savor every physical nuance of a completely realistic depiction of childhood.

Lighting varies in quality throughout the film, with flickers and occasional scratches marring generally balanced, though conventional shots. Bizarre camera angles, a legacy of German expressionism, had not yet found their way into American film, and the panoramas and extended tracking shots of a D.W. Griffith are eschewed by this camera crew due to the intimate nature of MY BOY's melodrama. In fact, every shot with Coogan is constructed to maximize inspection of his features, something even Chaplin failed to achieve. I believe this must have been by order of his father, the credited production supervisor. We must forever

be grateful to him for insuring the preservation of a priceless legacy: his son's thespian accomplishment in its prime.

The only real deficiency in the film lies in the editing of Irene Morra, which leaves too much unexplained. However, there appear to be some gaps in the footage, so intermittent hops of plot and shaky scenery may not actually be traceable to any action or omission on her part.

MY BOY is a remarkable treasure, with Jackie Coogan's unique sensitivity most ably backed by a company of juveniles who appeared to take their cues more from him than from the putative directors. It absolutely should not be missed by anyone interested in seeing the full measure of gifted pantomime a child actor can exhibit. Suitable for family viewing, revelatory and thoroughly entertaining.