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Charlie Chaplin: An extraordinary talent

"A day without laughter is a day wasted"

Charlie Chaplin

Charlie Chaplin was born on April 16, 1889 in East Street, Walworth, London.

Charlie's parents were both music hall performers, but separated before Charlie reached the age of three. His father died at the age of 37 from alcoholism and his mother suffered enduring mental illness. Because of these circumstances, Charlie and his older half-brother Sydney spent a great deal of time in institutions and workhouses. However, despite having a very difficult childhood raised in poverty, Sydney and Charlie adored their mother.

Charlie's professional life started when he was just 10 years old as part of a juvenile clog-dance troupe. He moved to the United States of America in 1913 and was recruited by the Keystone Film Company. Here he created the recognised and much-loved character of the Little Tramp (achieved in only his second one-reel comedy). His Tramp character continues to inspire laughter worldwide.

He became proficient at combining pantomime and drama and was a master of many trades – actor, director, filmmaker, composer, musician, writer, producer, acrobat and visionary - thus creating his unique brand. Always looking for bigger and greater things, he moved around many different companies and created many more famous films.

In the beginning, cinematography included a fixed camera with an actor entering the frame from the left and leaving on the right. Charlie broke this format by making actors move around inside the frame. The L and T shaped compositions were introduced by

him and are still used today. Charlie's ideas of tolerance and humanism go beyond cultures, continents and centuries, and his messages of peace, courage and resilience still reverberate today. Following an eventful marital and romantic life, he married Oona O'Neill in 1943 and they were blessed with eight children.

In September 1952 he went to Europe to promote his film *Limelight* and, as an out-spoken foreigner and suspected radical, the USA revoked his visa. Charlie's brother Sydney suggested they all move to Switzerland and that's what they did in January 1953.

The family settled in the Manoir du Ban in Corsier, in a large neoclassical style mansion, on a 14 hectare park with century-old trees. For Charlie the Manoir was a refuge, a peacefully private place and he appreciated the serenity. Here he directed two more films and completed his autobiography.

Charlie Chaplin passed away on Christmas Day 1977 at his home in Vevey.

Chaplin's World

Several years ago we were excited and interested to visit Chaplin's World; a museum honouring the life and work of Charlie Chaplin in his former home with many interactive displays and a vast collection of memorabilia. This amazing museum is situated at Corsier-sur-Vevey, above Vevey on the Lake of Geneva, offering incredible views of the lake, mountains (Dents-du-Midi) and surrounding area from the expansive park-like grounds. Charlie lived at the Manoir with Oona from 1953 until his death in 1977, with four of his children being born in Switzerland. There is also two 14-storey apartment buildings in Vevey decorated as a

tribute to Chaplin – the murals depict scenes from Chaplin's films, all in black and white.

Charlie Chaplin (our boys had never heard of him) is considered the most famous man in the world because of his amazing ability to make people laugh. Following our visit, our boys loved Charlie Chaplin and the magical world he had created. He was an iconic figure of the silent-film era, and the boys loved his character 'The Tramp'. With his bowler hat, single-breasted black suit, moustache, over-sized floppy shoes and of course the twirling cane! You could even get your photo taken as the tramp. His body control, suppleness, swish of the hands, quick feet, and the wiggle of his moustache all made him recognisable world over... and now the boys are fans too!

We all laughed watching excerpts of his films and admiring how frames were produced to amazing effect. We wandered through the studio which is dedicated to his impoverished and orphaned childhood in London (this influenced his films like 'The Tramp').

The Manoir details Chaplin's personal and family life. In Chaplin's bedroom there is a map on the wall which served as a reminder of where he came from and his difficult childhood living in poverty. A reconstruction of the Manoir living room, dining room and library, complete with waxwork figures of Charlie and Oona watching home movies, are amongst the many exhibits; while outside are the huge, beautifully landscaped gardens with the awesome view of the surrounding area.

Throughout his career he released approximately 81 films with about 35 of them highlighted at Chaplin's World. Entire Hollywood scenes have been reproduced



Charlie Chaplin | Charlie and Oona Chaplin's unique family home (turned museum), Manoir du Ban. They raised their 8 children here.





in original scale and visitors are allowed to enter each scene and get up close. Among the memorabilia are about 32 realistic wax replica of celebrities (close friends of Chaplin – like Einstein, Gandhi, Churchill and Sophia Loren), together with four wax replicas of Charlie Chaplin himself!

To finish off ... a few famous quotes from the unforgettable Charlie Chaplin:

"We think too much and feel too little."

"Nothing is permanent in this wicked world, not even our troubles."

"Life is a tragedy when seen in close-up, but a comedy in long-shot."

"You'll never find a rainbow if you're looking down."

For more, visit: www.chaplinsworld.com/en

By Marianne Drummond

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