

Charlie Chaplin: Music Man

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Charlie Chaplin is famous all over the world. He was one of the first really international stars. His silent films were extremely popular in the early years of cinema. They were silent because they didn't have dialogue, but music played an important part in the films, and in Chaplin's life. His character "The Little Tramp" was instantly recognisable all around the world.

Chaplin was born in London in 1889. His parents were music-hall singers. Charlie learned to sing, dance and play the violin when he was young.

By age nine, he was working professionally as a dancer and then actor. He learned to mime and create comedy like a clown. He became very popular and went on two American tours. In 1913, one of the new film companies in California offered him a contract to make films.

The Little Tramp

In 1914, he first invented the "Little Tramp" character and his costume: a shabby black suit, moustache, bowler hat and cane. His famous films were all silent: they had no dialogue. That is why he became famous all over the world.

But they were always accompanied by music in the cinemas. Chaplin loved music, and often choreographed his films like



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tramp: person who has no home, no job, and goes from place to place.

shabby: Shabby clothes are old clothes, clothes in a bad condition.

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dance, with music playing when they were filming. He continued to make films for years after other films started to have sound and dialogue. But he composed music to be included with those films. He made his last film with no dialogue, *Modern Times*, in 1936, almost 10 years after the beginning of "talking films". The film, a satire about modern industry, was a triumph.

Chaplin Talks

Chaplin refused to make a talking film with the little tramp character. But he did finally talk in his last great success: *The Great Dictator* (1940). It was a satire about a dictator character with a distinctive moustache: the tramp's moustache but also Adolf Hitler's. ■

Charlie Chaplin: l'homme-orchestre
Exhibition at La Philharmonie de Paris
Till 26 January 2020

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almost: nearly, very near but not exactly.