



An In-Depth Look at Chaplin's Mutual Comedies

By Jeffrey Vance, film historian

The Floorwalker (Released: May 15, 1916)

Embezzlement is the subject of *The Floorwalker*, Chaplin's first film under his landmark contract with Lone Star-Mutual. Chaplin's inspiration for the film came while he and his brother Sydney were in New York City negotiating his contract with Mutual. While walking up Sixth Avenue at Thirty-third Street, Chaplin saw a man fall down an escalator serving the adjacent elevated train station and at once realized the comic possibilities of a moving staircase. He asked his technical director, Ed Brewer, to design and construct an escalator in a department store set designed by art director and master of properties George "Scotty" Cleethorpe (who had worked for Chaplin at Essanay). "With a bare notion I would order sets, and during the building of them the art director would come to me for details, and I would bluff and give them particulars about where I wanted doors and archways." Chaplin wrote in his autobiography, "In this desperate way I started many a comedy." (18) After seeing *The Floorwalker*, Mack Sennett commented, "Why the hell didn't we ever think of a running staircase?" (19)

The Floorwalker has none of the pathos, romance, or irony of the best Chaplin Mutuals. The crudeness and cruelty of his earlier films is still evident in *The Floorwalker*, although the film contains a stronger plot than most of his previous films, and the moving-staircase chase was novel for 1916. A glimpse of Chaplin's evolution to a more graceful type of screen comedy is evident in Charlie's dance when he discovers the valise of stolen money and dives into the bag. (This dance of joy ends with the manager choking him). Audiences were amazed and delighted by Chaplin's brilliant antics. Yet he was determined to develop a new dimension to film comedy, the beginnings of which evolve in his third Mutual release, *The Vagabond*.

The Fireman (Released: June 12, 1916)

In Chaplin's second effort for Mutual, he portrays an inept firefighter at Fire Station 23. Charlie, still asleep, mistakes a drill bell for a fire alarm and single-handedly drives out the horse-drawn fire engine. When he discovers his error, he simply backs up the engine into the fire station, with horses galloping backward (an early instance of camera tricks—cameramen Foster and Totheroh skillfully cranked the cameras in reverse and Chaplin staged the action backward).

The Fireman was filmed partly at an actual fire station (Fire Station 29, located at 158

South Western Avenue in Los Angeles), and two condemned houses were burned to provide authenticity. Despite its high production values, the two-reel comedy was no more sophisticated than Chaplin's earlier films; the firefighters in the film are reminiscent of the antics of the Keystone Cops or a musical comedy chorus.

The Fireman, like *The Floorwalker*, shares the knockabout comedy of the Essanay films. Chaplin had produced a film carefully tailored to what he felt was public expectation. He then received a letter from an admirer who had seen *The Fireman* at a large Midwestern cinema and conveyed his disappointment. It was perhaps one of the most important letters he received in his career:

I have noticed in your last picture a lack of spontaneity. Although the picture was unflinching as a laugh-getter, the laughter was not so round as at some of your earlier work. I am afraid you are becoming a slave to your public, whereas in most of your pictures the audiences were a slave to you. The public, Charlie, likes to be slaves. (20)

It was a great lesson to Chaplin. For the rest of his career, he trusted and adhered to his own ideas and likes rather than attempting to speculate on the perceived preferences of the public.

The Vagabond (Released: July 10, 1916)

The Vagabond, Chaplin's third Mutual film, was an important step in Chaplin's career, in which he interweaves pathos as an integral part of the comedy. In this way, *The Vagabond* is the prototype of *The Kid* (1921) and *The Circus* (1928). Chaplin employs the same romantic triangle seen in *The Tramp* (1915) that he would revisit again in *Sunnyside* (1919) and *The Circus*. He imposed an unlikely happy ending on *The Vagabond*, in which the gypsy drudge demands that the car in which she is being taken away be turned around to bring Charlie along with her.

Legend has it that Chaplin originally intended the film to end with a scene in which Charlie attempts a watery suicide, is saved by an ugly farm woman, and plunges in again after one look at his rescuer (21). However, the few surviving outtakes from the film do not substantiate this claim. (22)

The Vagabond relies less on outright comedy than Chaplin's earlier work. His direction of the film shows sensitivity and restraint in his treatment of the melodramatic material, such as the dramatic device of the lost child finally identified by her unique birthmark. Chaplin's performance reveals great warmth and depth.

Strains of *The Vagabond* appear in many of Chaplin's later films. The film's ambiguous ending regarding Charlie's future with the girl and his care of her foreshadows Charlie's future relationship with Jackie Coogan in *The Kid*. The cruel gypsy chief is the precursor of the cruel step-father of *The Circus*. The scenes in the film of Charlie as the violinist (particularly Charlie, in a musical frenzy, falling into a tub of water) anticipate *Limelight*

(1952). *The Vagabond* clearly shows Chaplin's development of the film elements that Chaplin would use throughout his career, particularly the blending of comedy and drama.

One A. M. (Released: August 7, 1916)

One A.M., Chaplin's fourth Mutual, is an impressive piece of virtuosity, a solo performance except for a brief appearance by Albert Austin as a taxi driver. The film is a *tour de force* of Chaplin's superb pantomime and comic creativity performed in a restricted space, a brilliant experiment that he never repeated. Chaplin reportedly remarked, "One more film like that and it will be goodbye Charlie." (23) Chaplin's second wife, Lita Grey Chaplin, maintained that Chaplin told her that the film was devised as a solo act out of necessity; leading lady Edna Purviance was recovering from the trauma of the first of two abortions Chaplin made her endure. (24) The film's simple situation revolves around a drunken gentleman as he arrives home early one morning and tries to get upstairs into bed. The bed sequence anticipates Buster Keaton's use of such props—the yacht of *The Boat* (1921), the steamship in *The Navigator* (1924), and the train engine in *The General* (1926)—and Chaplin's own treatise on humanity trapped in a world of machines, *Modern Times* (1936). Art director "Scotty" Cleethorpe designed the splendidly surreal set, and technical director Ed Brewer created the folding bed that Chaplin turned into a memorable nemesis.

The film is not only a remarkable experiment, but also an invaluable record of Chaplin's famous drunken character, earlier seen in the Fred Karno sketch *Mumming Birds*. He described what he thought made this type of drunk humorous in an article entitled "What People Laugh At," published in *American Magazine* in 1918:

Even funnier than the man who has been made ridiculous...is the man who, having had something funny happen to him, refuses to admit that anything out of the way has happened, and attempts to maintain his dignity. Perhaps the best example is the intoxicated man who, though his tongue and walk will give him away, attempts in a dignified manner to convince you that he is quite sober.

He is much funnier than the man who, wildly hilarious, is frankly drunk and doesn't care a whoop who knows it. Intoxicated characters on the stage are almost always "slightly tipsy" with an attempt at dignity because theatrical managers have learned that this attempt at dignity is funny. (25)

Curiously, at least one photograph survives of Billy Ritchie, a member of the Karno company, playing the role of the Inebriated Swell (later Chaplin's great success) in *Mumming Birds* wearing the evening clothes and toothbrush moustache of Chaplin's drunk of *One A.M.* (Ritchie went on to do a blatant Chaplin impersonation in films). However, Chaplin's own childhood memories of his alcoholic father were the basis for his portrayal and costume in *One A.M.* Despite the delightful display of virtuosity—with misperception and transformation as thematic ideas—Chaplin believed this was not something that he ought to repeat (let alone sustain at greater length) because Chaplin's comedy was so dependent upon the interactions of the other characters with the Tramp.

The Count (Released: September 4, 1916)

The fifth film in the Mutual series, *The Count*, further develops the situations of *Caught in a Cabaret* (1914) and *A Jitney Elopement* (1915) and anticipates the future Chaplin films *The Rink*, *The Idle Class* (1921), and *City Lights* (1931), films in which Charlie impersonates a man of means in order to underscore the contrast between rich and poor—one of his favorite themes. The film was Chaplin's largest production up to that time, with three substantial sets (the tailor's shop, the kitchen, and Miss Moneybags' home). For the film's dance sequence, Chaplin hired a small orchestra. The slippery dance floor facilitates some memorable eccentric dancing from Charlie, including splits and elevations done by hooking his cane on the chandelier above him.

The Pawnshop (Released: October 2, 1916)

In the sixth Mutual film, Charlie is a pawnbroker's assistant in a pawnshop that evokes the London of Chaplin's childhood. The film is rich in comic transposition, a key element to Chaplin's genius. The apex of such work in the Mutuals is the celebrated scene in *The Pawnshop* in which Charlie examines an alarm clock brought in by a customer (Albert Austin). Playwright Harvey O'Higgins cited the sequence as an ideal illustration of "Charlie Chaplin's Art" in the February 3, 1917 issue of *The New Republic*:

He is a clerk in a pawnshop, and a man brings in an alarm clock to pledge it. Charlie has to decide how much it is worth. He sees it first as a patient to be examined diagnostically. He taps it, percusses it, puts his ear to its chest, listens to its heartbeat with a stethoscope, and while he listens, fixes a thoughtful medical eye on space, looking inscrutably wise and professionally self-confident. He begins to operate on it--with a can-opener. And immediately the round tin clock becomes a round tin can whose contents are under suspicion. He cuts around the circular top of the can, bends back the flap of tin with a kitchen thumb then, gingerly approaching his nose to it, sniffs with the melancholy expression of the packing houses. The imagination is accurate. The acting is restrained and naturalistic. The result is a scream. And do not believe that such acting is a matter of crude and simple means. It is as subtle in its naturalness as the shades of intonation in a really tragic speech. (26)

The sequence with the alarm clock in some ways prefigures Chaplin's most celebrated use of comic transposition, the famous scene in *The Gold Rush* (1925) in which Charlie treats his old boiled boot in every detail as if it were a delicious Thanksgiving feast.

In his first film for Chaplin, Henry Bergman played the pawnbroker. Bergman became an indispensable member of Chaplin's team, appearing in every subsequent film up to *Modern Times* and remaining on the Chaplin Studios payroll until his death in 1946.

Behind the Screen (Released: November 13, 1916)

A refinement of his earlier comedies set in a film studio (*A Film Johnnie* and *The Masquerader* for Keystone in 1914 and *His New Job* for Essanay in 1915), *Behind the Screen*, Chaplin's seventh film for Mutual, lampoons the unmotivated slapstick of the kind Chaplin disliked when he worked for Mack Sennett. Chaplin made the film as a sort of parody of the knockabout, pie-throwing comedy of the Keystone films.

An aspiring actress (Edna Purviance), desperate for work, disguises herself as a boy and is hired at the studio as a stagehand when the regular crew strikes (the strikers plan to blow up the studio is reminiscent of *Dough* and *Dynamite* [1914]). Charlie, discovering that the new stagehand is in fact a girl, gently kisses her just as Goliath (Eric Campbell) enters. "Oh you naughty boys!" Goliath remarks in an intertitle, as he teasingly pinches their cheeks and dances about in an effeminate manner before offering his backside to Charlie, which Charlie promptly kicks. This curious scene representing a homosexual situation is highly unusual in American commercial cinema for its time.

The Rink (Released: December 14, 1916)

Chaplin's eighth film for Mutual, *The Rink*, is one of his most popular comedies. Charlie is an inept waiter who prepares the bill of Mr. Stout (Eric Campbell) by examining the soup, spaghetti, melon stains, and other remnants on the sloppy eater's shirt front, tie, and ear. Charlie employs an unorthodox approach to his work. He shakes an unusual cocktail; his whole body does a shimmy while the cocktail shaker remains immobile in his hands. He carelessly places a broiler cover over a live cat that he serves to a startled diner. Yet, inept as Charlie is as a waiter, he is incredibly graceful on roller skates, which is how he spends his lunch break.

Chaplin developed his skating skills while employed by Fred Karno in the British music halls, and the film was superficially inspired by the Karno sketch *Skating* (which had been partly written by elder half brother Sydney Chaplin). Chaplin did all of the skating himself. He was occasionally aided by wires for shots which required Charlie to appear as if he were about to fall backward or forward while on skates, causing pandemonium in the rink. His agility and grace make *The Rink* one of his most memorable early comedies.

Easy Street (Released: February 5, 1917)

Chaplin's last four Mutual-Chaplin Specials are among his finest work. While each of the preceding Mutual comedies took approximately one month each to make, Chaplin took more time with the last four (ten months in total), which extended his twelve-month contract period to approximately eighteen months. For *Easy Street*, his ninth film for Mutual and the most famous of the twelve, Chaplin ordered the first of the T-shaped street sets to be built that he would consistently utilize to provide a perfect backdrop to his comedy. The look and feel of *Easy Street* evoke the South London of his childhood (the name "Easy Street" suggests "East Street," the street of Chaplin's birthplace). However, life on "Easy Street" is anything but. Poverty, starvation, drug addiction, and urban violence—subjects that foreshadow the social concerns in his later films—are interwoven in "an exquisite short comedy" wrote Pulitzer Prize winning critic and writer

Walter Kerr, “humor encapsulated in the regular rhythms of light verse.” (27)

In 1930 Chaplin told Russian film director Sergei Eisenstein that the scene in *Easy Street* in which Charlie scatters food from a box to a group of poor children as if they were chickens was indicative of his dislike for children. “You see, I did that because I despise them. I don’t like children,” he said. Eisenstein, who was not surprised by the remark, noted that those who normally do not like children are themselves children. (28) Chaplin was, in fact, intimidated and felt rather inferior to children. He wrote of children: “Most of them have assurance, have not yet been cursed with self-consciousness. And one has to be very much on his best behavior with children because they detect our insincerity.” (29)

Chaplin carefully choreographed all in the action in his films. As a result, there were no injuries to the cast while making the films, with the exception of a minor accident involving Chaplin on December 16, 1916, during the filming of *Easy Street*. He recalled, “We had one accident in that whole series. It happened in *Easy Street*. While I was pulling a street-lamp over the big bully to gas him, the head of the lamp collapsed and its sharp metal edge fell across the bridge of my nose, necessitating two surgical stitches.” (30) The injury also held up production, as the stitches prevented him from wearing makeup for several days. The injury, the size of the production, and a particularly rainy season in Hollywood contributed to a delay in the release of the film. Upon its release, *Easy Street* was hailed as a watershed moment in Chaplin’s career.

The Cure (Released: April 16, 1917)

The Cure, the tenth film in the series, is perhaps the funniest of the Mutuals. It was partly inspired in its setting by the Fred Karno sketch, *The Hydro*, which was set in a hydrotherapy clinic. Further inspiration for the film was drawn from the Los Angeles Athletic Club, where Chaplin was living at the time and where the idea of a health spa first occurred to him. The wrestling bouts in the gymnasium of the Athletic Club caught his imagination and inspired the scene in the film in which Charlie wrestles the masseur.

Completion of the film again was delayed because of Chaplin’s quest for perfection. Outtakes survive showing that the film began quite differently, with Charlie intending to play a bellman and later a spa attendant in a health resort before settling on the inebriate character. Production was further delayed when Chaplin caught a chill after filming some of the water scenes.

Chaplin’s use of dance in *The Cure* also is notable. There is a delightful scene in the changing room where Charlie assumes several poses in his swimsuit as the curtains open and close before he dances along to the pool. The scene was inspired by the tableaux vivant, a popular feature of many British music-hall programs.

The Immigrant (Released: June 17, 1917)

The Immigrant, which contains elements of satire, irony, and romance as well as

cinematic poetry, endures into the twenty-first century as a comic masterpiece. The film, Chaplin's eleventh in the Mutual series, is the best-constructed of his two-reelers and was Chaplin's favorite among all his two-reel comedies

The original idea for the film was a variation of *Trilby* set in the Latin Quarter of Paris, which evolved into a comedy about two immigrants who meet on a boat, part ways, and are reunited by a chance encounter, a menacing waiter, and an artist's enthusiasm. Chaplin shot as much footage on *The Immigrant* as most directors would to photograph a feature-length production. In his efforts to refine the film continuously, he exposed more than 90,000 feet of negative (the finished film runs approximately 2,000 feet), and he went four days and nights without rest while editing the film to final length.

In devising *The Immigrant*, Chaplin drew on his own experiences immigrating to the United States and attempted to find the humor in otherwise traumatic aspects of coming to a new land. Chaplin conjures many funny gags out of the hardships of an Atlantic passage on an immigrant vessel. The rocking effect of the boat itself, which was partly achieved by a heavy pendulum that was fitted to the camera head, enhanced these gags. Tothoroh put the camera on a special tripod that allowed it to rock from side to side. Once the ship moved, the camera moved as well. The rocking interior of the dining hall was a studio set built on rockers. With the rocking effect perfected, Chaplin was free to fashion every seasick gag imaginable. He also found material for the film in his experience as an outsider careful with his money upon his arrival to America. During that time, Chaplin was intimidated by waiters and realized that others shared similar feelings. This fear was the spark for the café sequence.

Chaplin was justifiably pleased with the film's opening gag, which contained the element of surprise. He wrote in 1918:

Figuring out what the audience expects, and then doing something different, is great fun to me. In one of my pictures, *The Immigrant*, the opening scene showed me leaning far over the side of a ship. Only my back could be seen and from the conclusive shudders of my shoulders it looked as though I was seasick. If I had been, it would have been a terrible mistake to show it in the picture. What I was doing was deliberately misleading the audience. Because, when I straightened up, I pulled a fish on the end of a line into view, and the audience saw that, instead of being seasick, I had been leaning over the side to catch the fish. It came as a total surprise and got a roar of laughter. (31)

The gag foreshadows a similar gag in the most celebrated moment in *The Idle Class* (1921), in which Chaplin, with his back to the camera, appears to be sobbing, yet when he turns around, he is actually mixing himself a drink with a cocktail shaker.

Undertones of social criticism are suggested in *The Immigrant*, the first of many Chaplin films to contain such themes, which were seldom found in comedy films of this period. For instance, when the immigrants first see the Statue of Liberty the immigration officials rope all the foreigners together like cattle, causing Charlie to cast a quizzical second look

at the land of the free. When an immigration officer turns away from Charlie, Charlie kicks him in the backside. Carlyle Robinson, Chaplin's publicity director, (a position formerly held by actor Fred Goodwins) joined the Lone Star Studio on the day the dailies of this sequence were being screened. Chaplin asked his new employee what he thought of them.

"Very funny and very realistic," Robinson replied.

"Do you find anything shocking in it?"

"Not that I can recall."

Apparently, the social criticism issue had been raised by one of Chaplin's associates, and Robinson's answer satisfied Chaplin. As Robinson affirmed, "The scene was kept in the final version of the film and there was never the least complaint." (32) Indeed, the critics were not put off by traces of social commentary in the film. Julian Johnson wrote in *Photoplay*, "In its roughness and apparent simplicity it is as much a jewel as a story by O. Henry, and no full-time farce seen on our stages in years has been more adroitly, more perfectly worked out." (33)

The Immigrant also is significant in Chaplin's evolution as a filmmaker because it is the first film in which his character embarks upon a full-fledged romantic relationship. To help evoke a romantic mood on the set, Chaplin—like many filmmakers of the silent era—employed "mood" musicians to play music off-camera while scenes were being filmed. Chaplin wrote in his autobiography, "Even in those early comedies I strove for mood; usually music created it. An old song called 'Mrs. Grundy' created the mood for *The Immigrant*. The tune had a wistful tenderness that suggested two lonely derelicts getting married on a doleful, rainy day." (34)

Chaplin recalled that he worked harder on portions of this film (especially the restaurant scene) than any other comedy he made up until that time. (35) He retained a special place in his memory for the film. He wrote in *My Life in Pictures*, "*The Immigrant* touched me more than any other film I made. I thought the end had quite a poetic feeling." (36)

The Adventurer (Released: October 22, 1917)

Chaplin and his brother Sydney went to San Francisco for a vacation after completing *The Immigrant*. Chaplin was growing tired from the hectic pace of the series; four months passed before the last film, *The Adventurer*, was released—the longest interval between films for Chaplin in his entire career up to that time.

The most popular of the Mutuals, *The Adventurer* begins and ends with a chase. It is the fastest-paced film of the series, and although it has more slapstick than *Easy Street* and *The Immigrant*, it is redeemed by its construction, characterization, and Chaplin's balletic grace.

A famous moment in the film has Charlie spilling ice cream down the front of his oversized trousers. Chaplin wrote a detailed analysis of the scene in his article, "What People Laugh At":

All my pictures are built around the idea of getting me into trouble and so giving me the chance to be desperately serious in my attempt to appear as a normal little gentleman. That is why, no matter how desperate the predicament is, I am always very much in earnest about clutching my cane, straightening my derby hat and fixing my tie, even though I have just landed on my head.

I am so sure of this point that I not only try to get myself into embarrassing situations, but I also incriminate the other characters in the picture. When I do this, I always aim for economy of means. By this I mean that when one incident can get two big, separate laughs, it is much better than two individual incidents. In *The Adventurer* I accomplish this by first placing myself on a balcony, eating ice cream with a girl. On the floor directly underneath the balcony, I put a stout, dignified, well-dressed woman at a table. Then, while eating the ice cream, I let a piece drop off my spoon, slip through my baggy trousers, and drop from the balcony onto this woman's neck.

The first laugh came at my embarrassment over my own predicament. The second, and the much greater one, came when the ice cream landed on the woman's neck and she shrieked and started to dance around. Only one incident had been used, but it had got two people into trouble and had also got two big laughs.

Simple as this trick seems, there were two real points of human nature involved in it. One was the delight the average person takes in seeing wealth and luxury in trouble. The other was the tendency of the human being to experience within himself the emotions he sees on the stage or screen.

One of the things most quickly learned in theatrical work is that people as a whole get satisfaction from seeing the rich get the worst of things. The reason for this, of course, lies in the fact that nine tenths of the people in the world are poor, and secretly resent the wealth of the other tenth.

If I had dropped the ice cream, for example, on a scrubwoman's neck, instead of getting laughs sympathy would have been aroused for the woman. Also, because a scrubwoman has no dignity to lose, the point would not have been funny. Dropping ice cream down a rich woman's neck, however, is, in the minds of the audience, just giving the rich what they deserve.

By saying that human beings experience the same emotions as the people in the incidents they witness, I mean that—taking ice cream as an example—when the rich woman shivered the audience shivered with her. A thing that puts a person in an embarrassing predicament must always be perfectly familiar to an audience, or else the people will miss the point entirely. Knowing that the ice cream is cold, the audience shivers. If something else was used that the audience did not recognize at once, it would not be able to appreciate the point as well. On this

same fact was based the throwing of custard pies in the early pictures. Everyone knew that custard pie is squashy and so was able to appreciate how the actor felt when one landed on him. (37)

Other highlights from the film include Charlie donning a lampshade and freezing in position as the guards run past him and a chase in which he dodges a prison guard and his rival for the girl by using sliding double doors which become, in turn, a temporary stockade, a moveable wall, and an escape route.

It is ironic that in his last film of the demanding Mutual series Charlie escapes from prison. In contrast with Essanay, Chaplin's relationship with the Mutual Film Corporation ended amicably. Indeed, Mutual offered him a million dollars for eight more films, but Chaplin sought even greater independence. Chaplin later wrote, "Fulfilling the Mutual contract, I suppose, was the happiest period of my career. I was light and unencumbered, twenty-seven years old, with fabulous prospects and a friendly, glamorous world before me." (38)

The Mutual-Chaplin Specials were frequently revived theatrically, non-theatrically, and in prints sold to libraries and for home use. Chaplin's son Sydney remembered watching some of the Mutual comedies with Jerry Epstein at the Silent Movie Theatre in Hollywood in the late 1940s. They enjoyed the films, but not nearly as much as the man several rows behind them, who was manically and uncontrollably laughing. When the show ended and the two turned to investigate, they discovered the laughter was from Chaplin himself. "It was my father who was laughing the loudest! Tears were rolling down his cheeks from laughing so hard and he had to wipe his eyes with his handkerchief. He was sitting with Oona. He had brought her to the Silent Movie because she hadn't seen any of them before." (39)

Perhaps Chaplin had such a fondness for the Mutuals because, in many ways, the films serve as a foundation for all that would follow in Chaplin's remarkable career. Chaplin's prior films, although wonderful in their time, failed to ignite the cinematic alchemy that would come to be called "Chaplinesque"—the blending of comedy, pathos, and social commentary into a single narrative whole, as seen in *The Vagabond*, *Easy Street*, and *The Immigrant* and in all of Chaplin's best films thereafter. No other filmmaker had consistently injected this combination of elements with such an exquisite level of skill into a comedy film. The Mutual films are extraordinary because they represent the only period in Chaplin's career during which he allowed himself to revel in rather than to revile the creative process, to tinker in his comedic laboratory, resulting in some of the finest work of his career. A testament to the enduring quality of the Mutuals is not only that others appropriated sequences from the films (including Chaplin's contemporaries Harold Lloyd and Buster Keaton, and later comedians such as the Marx Brothers), but that Chaplin himself often borrowed liberally from the Mutuals in his later, more sophisticated films. Perhaps he had great fondness for the Mutuals simply for the same reason that generations of audiences have as well—because of the sheer joy, comic inventiveness, and hilarity of this extraordinary series of films.

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