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Behind the scenes with Charlie Chaplin

By Derek Zemrak



Photo provided

The Comedians come and go, but none of them kept the public laughing as long and hard as Charlie Chaplin.

From 1914 to 1967 he made over 80 films, and for the first 25 years of his career he reigned supreme as the funniest man on earth. Since his gags were visual there was no language barrier, making him the first truly international superstar. Everyone identified with his iconic Tramp character. The little man in bowler hat, baggy pants and oversized shoes lived in a hostile world that threatened and excluded him, but he was so ingenious and agile that he always came out on top.

One of his greatest contemporary fans is Dan Kamin, who was so inspired by Chaplin's films that he went on to become an internationally renowned mime and physical comic himself. Kamin also brought Chaplin-style physical comedy back to movies, training Robert Downey, Jr. for his Oscar-nominated performance in "Chaplin" and creating Johnny Depp's physical comedy routines in "Benny and Joon."

Kamin will appear in person to present "Charlie Chaplin's Red Letter Days." Drawing on a newly discovered eyewitness account by one of the actors in Chaplin's company, Kamin will provide new insights into Chaplin's beloved screen character and his unprecedented fame. The entertaining and informative program will include the screening of a newly restored version of one of

Chaplin's best short comedies, "The Vagabond." Don't miss this fascinating excursion into the public and private worlds of Hollywood's first superstar.

"Charlie Chaplin's Red Letter Days" will be presented at the Rheem Theatre at 7 p.m. Saturday, July 21.

Asked about his movie work, Kamin says, "Classic movies inspired me, and I came full circle by adding classic visual comedy to modern films. I taught Johnny Depp how to roll the coin around his fingers the way he does at the end of 'Pirates of the Caribbean.' But does he call? Never."

In addition to working with Depp and Downey, Kamin played the wooden Indian that came to life in the cult classic "Creepshow 2" and created Martian movement for Tim Burton's "Mars Attacks!"

Despite his impressive stage and screen credits, Kamin's artistic beginnings were humble. At age 12 he began his performing career as a boy magician. "I struggled in vain to entertain hordes of hyperkinetic, sugar-crazed, children at birthday parties." He attended Pittsburgh's Carnegie Mellon University to study industrial design, "but when I saw the eye-popping movement illusions practiced by master mime Jewel Walker my hopes for a normal life evaporated."

The great silent comedy films of Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin added more fuel to his fire, and soon Kamin was touring the country with his first original show, "Silent Comedy...Live!" Undeterred by the fact that vaudeville was long dead, he cobbled a new vaudeville circuit out of colleges, theatres and corporations, for whom Kamin often appears as a keynote speaker who falls apart. "I applied my industrial design skills to building a collapsing lectern." He is also a frequent guest artist with symphony orchestras, combining comedy with music in his popular series of "Comedy Concertos." Finally, he often becomes "Mr. Slomo," an eerie character who strolls through public places in slow motion "terrifying the very children who tormented me as a youth."

Kamin returned to his comedy roots to write "Charlie Chaplin's One-Man Show," revealing the secrets of Chaplin's comic art. Hailed as a breakthrough work, the book boasted a preface by another Chaplin fan, Marcel Marceau. Kamin's new book, "The Comedy of Charlie Chaplin: Artistry in Motion," updates the earlier work and features an account of how he trained Downey for his Oscar-nominated performance.

During recent seasons Kamin has toured his solo show throughout America and Europe, and "humiliated many symphonies" with his comic antics, including Cleveland, Atlanta, Montreal, Shanghai, Singapore and Malaysia.

Tickets are available online at www.lamorindatheatres.com

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[back](#)

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