

MK2 FILMS
PRESENTS



A WOMAN OF PARIS

A DRAMA OF FATE

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY
CHARLES CHAPLIN

1923 – USA – 89' – 5.1 – 1.33 – 4K



SYNOPSIS

Against the wishes of their tyrannical parents, Jean and Marie decide to elope to Paris. The sudden death of Jean's father makes it impossible for him to meet her at the station, and Marie heads for Paris alone. A year later, Jean finds her in the arms of Pierre, a rich and decadent playboy... and tragedy ensues.

INTRODUCTION

A Woman of Paris, in its day the most influential of Charles Chaplin's films, was for more than half a century his least known, since after its first release, Chaplin never permitted it to be shown. Not until the end of his life did he prepare the film for reissue, composing a new musical score at the age of 87.

The film is exceptional in his career as a straight drama, in which he himself makes only a brief token appearance as a railway porter. It was intended to launch his loyal leading lady, Edna Purviance, as a dramatic actress; and the story was suggested by the real-life experiences of the original "gold-digger", the millionaire hunting Peggy Hopkins Joyce.

The story is simple.

The love of a young village couple (Edna Purviance and Carl Miller) is thwarted by their parents. Through a series of accidents and misunderstandings the girl, Marie St Clair, goes off to Paris alone. There, a year later, she has become a courtesan and the mistress of a rich playboy (the brilliant Adolph Menjou, whom the film launched as a major star.)

In Paris, boy and girl meet again and fall in love once more but are again separated by misunderstandings. The boy commits suicide. The girl, reconciled with his aged mother, quits her playboy and Paris for the village.

If the story was in itself unremarkable, everything else about the film was revolutionary. The characters broke with all the stereotypes of the day: the heroine was no better than she should be; the villain was charming and considerate; the hero was weak-willed and mother-dominated; the tragedy was precipitated at all points by the selfishness and bigotry of parents – hitherto invariably hallowed as a class by Hollywood convention. Chaplin adapted an allusive and metaphoric quality in his comedy to dramatic use: the proprietary way in which Menjou takes a handkerchief from a drawer in the girl's boudoir intimates all that need be said about their relationship.

Most revolutionary was the acting style. Noting that *"In life's dramatic climaxes men and women try to hide their emotions rather than seek to express them"*, Chaplin worked to achieve an acting style more understated and yet more expressive than the screen had seen. When a girlfriend maliciously shows Marie a magazine report of her lover's intended marriage, her shock and agitation is expressed only by the nervous way she stubs out her cigarette.

"He [Chaplin] insisted on our learning dialogue and saying it exactly as it was written, something that none of us had ever done before in pictures. This was because he felt that certain words registered on the face and could be easily grasped by the audience. He would work with Monta Bell and Eddie Sutherland to find the right words", mentions Adolphe Menjou about Charles Chaplin in his autobiography, *It Took Nine Tailors* (1948). Menjou goes on: *"At first it was simply a job and a good part. Within a few days I realized that I was going to learn more about acting from Chaplin than I had ever learned from any director. He had one wonderful, unforgettable line that he kept repeating over and over.*

“Don’t sell it!” he would say. “Remember, they’re peeking at you.” It was a concise way to sum up the difference between the legitimate stage and the movies — a reminder that in pictures, when one has an important emotion or thought to express, the camera moves up to his face and there he is on the screen with a head that measures 6 feet from brow to chin.”

It is almost impossible today to understand the extent of the shock the film and its extraordinary modernity produced in 1923, or its influence on a whole generation of directors and actors. Ernst Lubitsch confessed to be indebted to Chaplin, fascinated by *A Woman of Paris*. It was the first film where Chaplin left the leading part to someone else, creating a cruel society drama with cold stunning realism. In September 1923, journalist Quinn Martin wrote *“surely only fools will go on sinking thousands of dollars in gaudy backgrounds and days of superfluous effort after seeing the result of Mr. Chaplin’s system of naturalness in screen play acting. Really the characters seem to be living normally, and thinking normally, and talking normally, and even sinning normally here (...). It attempts to allow the commonplace to remain commonplace. This, coupled with a true reflection of life, is the cinema’s real hope.”*

A Woman of Paris’s charm and fascination have outlasted the first revolutionary impact. Indeed, it may if anything appeal more today’s audience than to the public of the 1920s, who seem to have resented Chaplin’s offering them Art instead of laughter. Ironically, Chaplin’s most innovatory film proved his first box-office failure, as the film barely was profitable.

STORIES ABOUT THE MAKING OF A WOMAN OF PARIS

Adolphe Menjou recalls interesting and funny stories about the production of *A Woman of Paris* in his autobiography, *It Took Nine Tailors* (1948).

About the dinner scene

"Chaplin wanted some rare dish to be served and discussed in a dinner scene. The technical experts racked their minds to remember some of the exotic and expensive dishes served in Parisian restaurants. Finally, one of them had an inspiration—truffle soup with champagne! The second expert refused to sanction such a dish. He had eaten at the best restaurants in Paris and never once had he been served such a potage as truffle soup! But expert number one only curled his lip. "You have probably failed to dine at the finest restaurant of all," he replied. "It is a very small place where a very select clientele is allowed to dine by invitation only. It is called La Truffle d'Or and it is the one place in the world where they serve truffle soup with champagne." Expert number two was sure he was being out-experted by sheer imagination, but despite his protests, Chaplin decided that he liked the idea of truffle soup with champagne and ordered the prop man to prepare such a dish.

The prop man was stumped. He refused to admit his ignorance, however, and called up several chefs in the town's best restaurants to get a special order of truffle soup. But there were no truffles in all Los Angeles nor was there a chef who would attempt to make imitation truffle soup. Prop men are always ingenious, however, so we ended up with a horrible concoction that looked like a clear soup with several withered objects floating in it. No one ever had nerve enough to taste the truffle soup with champagne, but it was in the picture."

About Charles Chaplin's sense of perfection

Each morning the whole company was invited to the projection room to see the rushes of the film that had been shot the day before. Chaplin listened to everybody's ideas and evaluated them with an unerring instinct for those that were good. I remember hearing him say in an argument about a certain scene, "I don't know why I'm right about the scene, I just know I'm right." And it was true. We saw it proved many times when we would play scenes in various ways and then run them in the projection room. No effort was too great if one foot of the picture could be made better. One day, after watching the rushes of a scene, Chaplin expressed approval and asked me how I liked the scene.

"I think I can do it better," I told him.

"Great!" he replied. "Let's go." So we spent the rest of the day shooting the scene over again.

THE RESTORATION OF “A WOMAN OF PARIS”

The 4K restoration of *A Woman of Paris* (1923) used a second-generation full-frame dupe negative, deposited by Roy Export S.A.S. with Fondazione Cineteca di Bologna and selected as the best available element.

The film was restored by Fondazione Cineteca di Bologna at L'Immagine Ritrovata laboratory in 2019 in association with Roy Export S.A.S. as part of the Chaplin Project.

INTERVIEW WITH TIMOTHY BROCK ABOUT THE MUSIC OF "A WOMAN OF PARIS" A NEW SCORE FOR ITS 100TH ANNIVERSARY IN 2023

A WOMAN OF PARIS was originally released as a silent film in 1923, as sound technology had not yet become the norm. The film was reissued over half a century later in the 1970s with music composed by Charles Chaplin. Why was Chaplin's 1976 score changed for this new 4K restoration of A WOMAN OF PARIS?

The 1977 score to A WOMAN OF PARIS was pieced together very late in Chaplin's life by his musical associate at the time, Eric James. James was confronted with an extremely difficult task in trying to utilize a mere handful of previously unused compositions Chaplin composed some years earlier. The score had a number of issues, not the least being a general lack of material, and what material there was had been intended for comedies.

In 2003 the Chaplin office had uncovered, and subsequently preserved, a large amount of recordings of Chaplin composing music to his film LIMELIGHT, among others. Within these 19 hours of recordings Chaplin can be heard painstakingly composing the score to not only LIMELIGHT, but also THE KID, THE PILGRIM and THE CIRCUS. Like all of his films since CITY LIGHTS, Chaplin composed far more than he needed, and routinely left a lot of music unused. I therefore had the idea, that, since LIMELIGHT is his only other drama, I would take a stab at creating a new score for A WOMAN OF PARIS using his mostly-unused compositions from the former.

How did you restore and reconstruct this new orchestral accompaniment? What material did you use?

Over the course of many weeks I aurally transcribed what Chaplin was working out on the piano, and identified about 14 finished compositions and about 20 un-finished, or incomplete, musical ideas. It is these pieces, in conjunction with some of the 1977 score, that make up the new posthumous score of 100% Chaplin compositions. I developed the new score as best I could in the Chaplin earmarks and idioms, and orchestrated it in the model of CITY LIGHTS, which was Chaplin's earliest personal attempt at orchestration, some 8 years after A WOMAN OF PARIS.

What were the biggest challenges in creating and orchestrating this new score?

The biggest challenge for me was attempting to hypothesize what Chaplin might have wanted in his score, and to study his past musical choices when it comes to dramatic development. I have been restoring Chaplin's scores for 25 years, but not a single drama among them. I was extremely lucky enough to be a former student, and later friend, of Chaplin's greatest musical associate, David Raksin, who gave me much insight to the musical intricacies of Chaplin as a

composer. But even he only had experience working with him on his comedies (MODERN TIMES, THE GREAT DICTATOR), and there is no one still living who knew what Chaplin's tendencies were towards musical drama. We do have much pathos in Chaplin films, always bookended by comedy, but this is a rare and unique film that is 82 minutes of rather solemn, and continuous, drama. How does Chaplin handle that? I can only postulate, and hope it is effective.

CAST

Marie St. Clair	Edna Purviance
Pierre Revel	Adolphe Menjou
Jean Millet	Carl Miller
Jean's mother	Lydia Knott
Jean's father	Charles French
Marie's father	Clarence Geldert
Fifi	Betty Morrissey
Paulette	Malvina Polo
Head waiter	Henry Bergman
Man about town	Harry Nothrup
Masseuse	Nellie Bly Baker
Orchestra leader	Carl Gutman
The strip-teaseuse	Bess Flowers
Revel's fiancée	Stella De Lanti
Porter	Charlie Chaplin

CREW

Writer / Director	Charles Chaplin
Producer	Charles Chaplin
Director of Photography	Roland Totheroh
Second Camera	Jack Wilson
Assistant	Edward Sutherland
Literary Editor	Monta Bell
Art Director	Arthur Stibolt
Production	Regent – United Artists
International sales	mk2 films

A WOMAN OF PARIS

Motion Picture: © 1923 Roy Export S.A.S. All Rights Reserved.

Renewed: © 1951 Roy Export S.A.S. All Rights Reserved

Motion Picture with Soundtrack : © 1977 Roy Export S.A.S. All Rights Reserved

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Composed by Charles Chaplin. Adapted, arranged and conducted by Timothy Brock.

Recording by the Orchestra Città Aperta. Audio Post Production by l'Immagine Ritrovata

PRESS MATERIAL

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