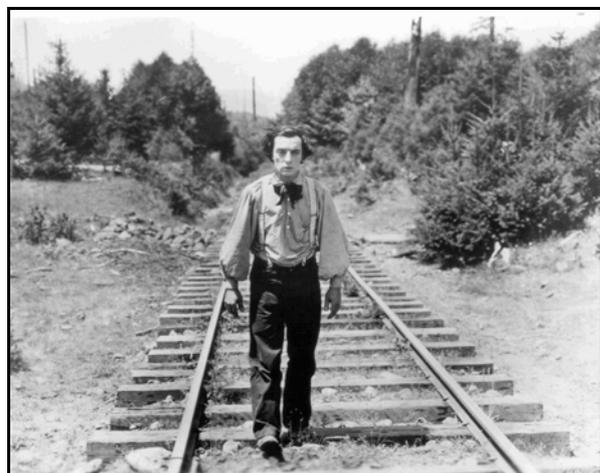


THE GENERAL

1926

Directed by **Buster Keaton**
and **Clyde Bruckman**



Cast

Annabelle Lee: Marion Mack
Her father: Charles Smith
Her brother: Frank Barnes
Captain Anderson: Glen Cavender
General Thatcher: Jim Farley A
A Southern General: Frederick Vroom
Union generals: Joe Keaton,
Mike Donlin, Tom Nawn
Johnny Gray: Buster Keaton

Photography: Dev Jennings
and Bert Haines
Editing: J Sherman Kell
and Harry Barnes

A print from the camera negative
Duration: 76 minutes
Projection speed: variable
Aperture: full

Score by Carl Davis
(32 players)



LIVE CINEMA

THE GENERAL

1926

Buster Keaton said he was 'more proud of that picture than any picture I ever made because I took an actual happening out of the Civil War.' *The General* was based on 'The Great Locomotive Chase' by William Pittenger, written in 1863. A daring raid by northerners to capture a locomotive and burn bridges to break lines of communication was thwarted by a quick-thinking Southern railroad man. Keaton omitted the end of the story, however: 'I couldn't use the original finish. Because the southerners took all eight of those guys and hanged them. That was the real finish to that.' Instead, Keaton wrote his own ending: miles behind enemy lines, he learns of plans for a surprise attack, and manages to escape on his captured engine, with his girlfriend stuffed into a sack in one the wagons.

But when it came to recreating the period, Keaton told his crew 'Make it so authentic, it hurts'. The look of the film was based closely on Matthew Brady's photographs of the Civil War, and some events were taken direct from them. The enormous railway cannon used for one of the most famous moments was not invented for the film but had really existed. To find long stretches of unused track and open territory, Keaton filmed in the virgin woodland and plains of Oregon.

Said Keaton, 'You can do some awful wild things with railroads.' A bridge across a creek was specially built, and then burnt by Buster to thwart his pursuers. They attempt to drive their locomotive over it regardless, and both collapse into the abyss – the single most expensive shot of the entire silent era. People flocked from miles around to watch the spectacular scene being filmed. Some fainted, thinking the dummy engine driver fixed in the cab had really been killed. The wrecked engine was left in the creek, and became a tourist attraction until it was salvaged for scrap metal in 1942.

The complex production was beset by problems. Several men almost drowned in a sequence in which a dam is blown up, and sparks from one of the engines started a forest fire, delaying production for weeks while the smoke cleared. The film soared over budget, and never recouped its costs. Amazingly, reviews were poor, *Variety* complaining 'The General is far from funny'. Yet today it is frequently voted one of the greatest films ever made, and is regarded as Buster Keaton's masterpiece.

Often seen only in poor quality copies, *The General* is here available in prints made direct from the original camera negative which replicate perfectly the high standard of photography. We are given a precious glimpse of the virgin West— sometimes down to the tiniest leaf - as unspoilt as it would have been in the nineteenth century. Carl Davis's score further evokes the period by drawing on Civil War themes.