



The Main Feature

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Double Bill – Tonight's two films are separated by ninety-six years, and all that implies in the technology of cinema, but they are connected by their subject matter. They both look at marriage: the first before the ceremony; the second after the marriage ends.

Seven Chances

US 1925
56 mins Certificate U

Director	Buster Keaton
Screenplay	Clyde Bruckman and Jean C Havez from the play by Roi Cooper Magrue
Cinematography	Byron Huke and Elgin Lessley
Cast	
Buster Keaton	James Shannon
T Roy Barnes	Billy Meekin
Snitz Edwards	Lawyer
Ruth Dwyer	Mary Jones
Frances Redmond	Mary's mother
Erwin Connelly	Clergyman
Jules Cowles	Hired hand



The first half of tonight's double bill is a Buster Keaton silent. The plot is straightforward, if hard to believe. It is based on the stage play by Roi Cooper Magrue which opened on Broadway in August 1916. Keaton's character, Jimmie Shannon, is a broker with financial difficulties who hears he will receive a substantial legacy provided he marries by 7 pm on his 27th birthday – which happens to be that day. He fails to persuade his girlfriend to do the deed, and his business partner finds that Shannon knows seven girls (the *Seven Chances* of the title) at the country club. The film traces his luck – or lack of it – in trying to persuade them to marry him, as well as the power of the press.

Keaton's talent for physical clowning is less in evidence compared to his other films, but his athletic prowess is on show in the second half where there is an extended and imaginative chase described by one critic as 'one of the greatest ever chase scenes'. Another said 'Despite the problems with the film's earlier sequences (see comment below) as a whole it is completely and utterly redeemed in the last 15 minutes, where Keaton stages a fantastically hilarious trajectory gag that stands with the motorcycle chase in *Sherlock Jr.* (1924) and the tornado sequence in *Steamboat Bill Jr.* (1928) as one of his finest feats of stunt-laden comedy'.

Joseph Frank 'Buster' Keaton Jr was born in 1895 in Piqua, Kansas, to vaudeville parents. He started performing with them at the age of five in sketches which sound physically challenging, if not downright dangerous ("The Roughest Act That Was Ever in the History of the Stage"). He was home schooled, and became a rising star of vaudeville. But by the time he was 21, his father's alcoholism threatened the reputation of the family act, so Keaton and his mother, Myra, left for New York, where Keaton's career quickly moved from vaudeville to film. Keaton met Roscoe 'Fatty' Arbuckle at Talmadge Studios in New York City where Arbuckle was under contract to Joseph M Schenck. Keaton performed in Arbuckle's film *The Butcher Boy* and showed such a natural talent for film that he was hired on the spot and made 14 shorts with him.

Keaton starred in the full-length feature *The Saphead* (1920) and came into his own when Schenck gave him his own production unit, Buster Keaton Productions. Keaton made a series of two-reel comedies, including *One Week* (1920), *The Playhouse* (1921), *Cops* (1922), and *The Electric House* (1922). Keaton then moved to full-length features and had a string of successes later in the decade:



Our Hospitality (1923), *The Navigator* (1924) *Sherlock Jr* (1924), *Seven Chances* (1925) *The General* (1926), *The Cameraman* (1928) and *Steamboat Bill Jr* (1928). The club showed *The General* in its first season (1981), followed by *The Cameraman* in 2016 and *Sherlock Jr* in 2019.

His last films had been less profitable than hoped, and precipitated his unfortunate

move to MGM in 1928. The big studio practices hampered his originality, and he later described it as the worst business decision of his life.

The International Buster Keaton Society has the definitive version of his biography (<https://www.busterkeaton.org/overview>).

Given the age of the film, be prepared for some anachronisms referred to by the critic mentioned earlier: the hired help is a white actor (Jules Cowles) under black make-up; there is some racial stereotyping; and visual jokes at the expense of Jewish and black characters. And there is a surprise too - the opening sequences are in colour.

Seven Chances was remade four times, notably by the Three Stooges in the films *Brideless Grooms* (1947) and *Husbands Beware* (1956); in *The Suitor* (1962) (*Le Soupirant*), a French comedy directed by and starring Pierre Étaix; and in *The Bachelor* (1999), starring Chris O'Donnell and Renée Zellweger. A similar plot device was used in Mario Zampi's 1951 film *Laughter in Paradise*, where the will of Henry Russell, a well-known practical joker, leaves £50,000 to each of his four surviving relatives, all unmarried (played by Alistair Sim, Fay Compton, George Cole and Guy Middleton), provided they first perform prescribed tasks that are completely contrary to their natures.

Michael Hipkins



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After Love

UK 2021

89 mins. Certificate 12A

Directed & written by Aleem Khan
Cinematography Alexander Dynan
Costumes Nirage Mirage
Editor Gareth Scales

Cast

Joanna Scanlan	Mary Hussain
Nathalie Richard	Geneviève
Talid Ariss	Solomon
Nasser Memarzia	Ahmed Hussain
Jeff Mirza	Ahmed Hussain (voice)



The second film in tonight's double bill about marriage is an under-stated, critically applauded film about grief and loneliness, secrets and deceptions. Set in Dover and Calais, it is defined by a remarkable performance from Joanna Scanlan.

After Love tells the story of Mary Hussain, a middle-aged, white English Muslim convert, contentedly married to Ahmed, a Pakistan-born Captain on a cross-Channel ferry. Ahmed dies suddenly at home. After the funeral Mary finds a French ID card for an unknown woman (Geneviève) in Ahmed's wallet, and reads some suggestive text messages between the pair on his mobile phone. She travels to Calais, where rather bizarrely Geneviève mistakes her hijab-clad English visitor as an agency cleaner sent to help her move house. Mary covertly learns more about Ahmed's second family, and Geneviève (a vivacious and carefree single mother) casually confides what Ahmed has told her about his wife in England. Mary starts to bond with Geneviève's teenage son Solomon (stroppy, secretly gay and desperate to spend time with his father). Eventually, Mary reveals that she is Ahmed's widow. Emotions boil over (and then settle).

The film is the debut feature from Aleem Khan, self-described as an English-Pakistani gay Muslim film-maker. Like Mary, Khan's own mother first met her future husband at 14, and later converted to marry him. He said that he was interested in bringing a character to the screen who is not often portrayed: "an older woman of a certain size, who wears the headscarf – we never get to see the full interior spectrum of a character like this on screen." There is a knowing sense of loneliness embodied in Mary, who at one point explains that she learned Urdu so "she could understand what Ahmed's family were saying about me" and it is noticeable that her English relations are never seen or mentioned.

Joanna Scanlan is a familiar face on TV - notably as the hapless press officer Terri in *The Thick of It* and more recently as Ma in *The Larkins* - and has several supporting roles in films (including *The Girl with the Pearl Earring* and *Bridget Jones's Baby*). Her IMDb profile coyly notes that she is "known for matronly roles."



Scanlan told the Guardian that "[Mary] finds out she's not as nice a person as she thought she was. Confronting who you actually are, compared with who you want to think of yourself as being, that horrible tension inside her, that was quite tricky to negotiate."

Her performance left critics grasping for superlatives, with the Times praising “a monumental turn” and “a giant performance in a perfectly measured film of simmering tensions” and the Guardian gushing “extraordinary... it (may) sound depressingly bleak but, trust me, you won’t be able to look away.” Scanlan won Best Actress at the 2022 BAFTAs (beating the likes of Lady Gaga). Matronly indeed!

A final comment from Deborah Ross in the Spectator: “It’s a beautifully restrained yet devastating exploration of love, loss, grief and identity wrapped up in a story that’s not just gripping but also — prepare yourself for a shock: ready? — wholly original.”

Eugene Smith

Comments and reactions to: **Flee**

No of reaction slips received = 19

Average score = 6.79

Score	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	~	~	~	1	~	2	6	3	4	3	~

Loved the mix of old film and contemporary drawing – the drawings as opposed to the animation were particularly interesting. A desperate story told in a manner that we could best stomach it!

Poignant, frightening and unresolvable

Thought provoking – well told with animation and real footage

A gruelling watch

Very moving. An exceptional insight and beautifully executed

A very good film, very cleverly made with its mixture of animation and reality

A harrowing story, but told with cinematic brilliance through its mixture of animation (of different styles) and newsreel

Daring, engaging and touching

Good choice of mood music before the film/at interval. Animation was awesome

Harrowing and thought provoking. How fortunate we are here!

Interesting way to tell such a story. Good use of animation and actual footage

Harrowing and absorbing – but in the end too much!

Position	Film	Average score
1	The Duke	7.75
2	Mandela and de Klerk	7.47
3	Flee	6.79
4	Day for Night	6.57

Forthcoming attraction: 24 November 2022 – **L’Eclisse (Eclipse)**



This romantic drama by Michelangelo Antonioni follows the love life of Vittoria (Monica Vitti), a beautiful literary translator living in Rome. After splitting from her writer boyfriend, Riccardo (Francisco Rabal), Vittoria meets Piero (Alan Delon), a lively stockbroker, on the hectic floor of the Roman stock exchange. Though Vittoria and Piero begin a relationship, it is not one without difficulties, and their commitment to one another is tested during an eclipse. letterboxd.com