

Travel

Charlie's angles

Justine Tyerman becomes immersed in the magic of Charlie Chaplin

I had a chat with Charlie Chaplin the other day and told him my dad was a great fan of his. He had me in fits of laughter and I shed a few tears too. What a multi-talented man.

I met up with him at Chaplin's World in Vevey, Switzerland, an exceptional museum that introduced me to the actor, his private life and the fascinating world of silent movies.

The many representations of Charlie in his multifarious guises were so uncannily life-like, I found myself believing they were real.

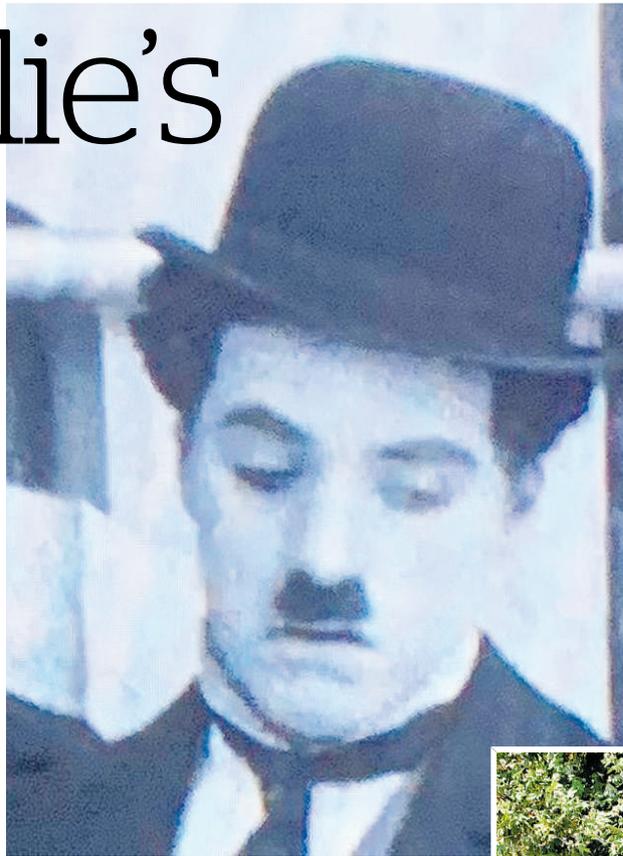
I loved watching excerpts of his old movies especially *The Kid* based on his childhood in London. Charlie's parents were music hall entertainers and his father was an alcoholic who abandoned the family, and died when Charlie was 12 years old. He lived with his mother, Hannah, and elder brother, Sydney, in a tiny attic room in East St. Hannah worked long hours, struggling to support her two sons, and when Charlie was 14, she was committed to a mental asylum. The brothers were in and out of workhouses as children and to earn money, they performed on the street.

When Charlie was just 9 years of age, he went on tour with a troupe of dancers and acrobats, and at 19, he was signed by the prestigious Fred Karno company. He went to America where he developed 'The Tramp' persona and gathered a large fan base. This was the start of a creative career that spanned 75 years. He was an actor, mime artist, producer, screenwriter, writer and composer, and directed and starred in countless movies.

Charlie recreated many scenes from his early life on East St in his movies. The first display in the museum is a fascinating

Right, the first display in the museum is a fascinating replica of the London neighbourhood in which Chaplin grew up.

Photo / Supplied



Left, Charlie Chaplin with trademark moustache and bowler hat; above, Charlie's former home, the Manoir de Ban, is next to the museum in Vevey, Switzerland.

Photos / Supplied

replica of the neighbourhood in which he grew up.

Excerpts of his movies are projected on multiple screens throughout the complex. And there are wonderful mock-ups of his film sets like *The Gold Rush*, *Modern Times* and *Limelight*.

His films were a mix of slapstick comedy and pathos, typified in 'The Tramp's' struggles against adversity. Many contained social and political themes, as well as autobiographical elements.

His 1940 film, *The Great Dictator*, satirised Adolf Hitler and made an impassioned plea against fascism. Charlie played both leading roles: a ruthless fascist dictator and a persecuted Jewish barber. The movie was highly controversial at the time but later became a landmark in the history of cinema.

Charlie's former home, the Manoir de Ban, is next to the museum. The neoclassical mansion built in 1840 overlooks Lake Geneva and is surrounded by a 14-hectare garden. The manoir is a treasure trove of rare photos, books and writings that reveal the man behind the legend. Charlie had four wives and 11 children, eight with his last wife, Oona, to whom he was married for 34 years. In 1952, after being barred from the United States over suspicions that he had communist sympathies, Charlie and Oona settled in Vevey where he continued to make movies. He died there in 1977, aged 88.

His presence is everywhere. In the lounge, he's seated with Oona looking over his shoulder, watching a home movie in which he clowns around with his children on the lawn.

I met Charlie again on the Vevey waterfront dressed as 'The Tramp' in a bronze statue by John Doubleday, complete with his famous toothbrush moustache, bow legs, baggy pants, tight jacket, bowler hat, bent bamboo cane and over-sized shoes.

I became immersed in Charlie's magic that day.

Some of his sayings still echo in my mind: 'A day without laughter is a day wasted', 'We think too much and feel too little', and my favourite, 'You'll never find rainbows if you are looking down...'

Justine Tyerman was a guest of Switzerland Tourism and travelled courtesy of the Swiss Travel Pass

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Above, a model of Charlie so life-like, I found myself talking to him; Right, I met Charlie again on the Vevey waterfront dressed as 'The Tramp'.

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