



THE
BOOT
*Ca*ke

Press Kit

A feature documentary by Kathryn Millard



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IT'S CHARLIE CHAPLIN'S BIRTHDAY PARTY IN ADIPUR, INDIA – AND WE'RE BRINGING THE CAKE...

It's Charlie Chaplin's birthday and a desert town in India – home to the world's largest population of Tramp impersonators - is throwing a party. A wonderful, mad, poignant story of resilience and hope by Australian film maker Kathryn Millard.

Charlie Chaplin is a saint to earthquake survivors in a small desert town in India and they are throwing him a birthday party. Australian film-maker Kathryn Millard is taking the cake - a chocolate truffle sponge shaped like the Tramp's boot. A wonderful, mad, poignant story of resilience and hope.



01

SYNOPSIS

A small desert town on the edge of western India's famous salt plains is the unlikely home of the world's largest population of Charlie Chaplin impersonators. The Charlie Circle of Adipur embraces businessmen, shopkeepers, a doctor who prescribes Chaplin movies for medicinal purposes, teachers, engineers, students and a three-year-old pre-schooler. They all share a passion for the silent film star of the early 1900s, with his twirling cane, wobbly walk and agitated eyebrows.

Award-winning Australian film-maker Kathryn Millard stumbled across the beguiling Charlie Circle during research for another film project. She was immediately invited to join their 116th birthday celebrations, which included a parade of Charlie look-alikes through town along with dancing girls, floats, strolling musicians and a camel. Would she do them the honour of bringing the grand centrepiece: the birthday cake? And not just any cake, but one in the shape of a boot, as homage to the famous scene in *The Gold Rush*, where the starving Tramp boils and eats his own boot.

This was the improbable beginning of an intriguing journey, which takes us from the luxurious kitchens of a posh Mumbai hotel, into the bustle and exuberance of India, where Chaplin is at home on shrines alongside revered Hindu god Krishna. Along the way, we're introduced to some of the world's

earliest Chaplin imitators including Australia's Ern Vockler. After all, Charlie lookalikes were on the scene long before Elvis. We meet a host of Charlie devotees: Dr. Aswani, the founder of the Charlie Circle, Tollywood and Bollywood megastar Kamal Hassan, young aspiring actor, Viswajeet and the urbane Mumbai Charlie, Prevan. We ponder the spiritual resonance felt by so many people for the battler with his toothbrush moustache and baggy pants.

The Boot Cake explores how one community, reeling from the tragedy of the Gujarat earthquake that killed 200,000 people, finds hope and inspiration in the comic genius of Charlie Chaplin, one of the global icons of the past century. We see through their eyes, the pathos and humour of his unique physical comedy and the bitter-sweetness of his philosophies. And in moments of pure Chaplinesque absurdity we find ourselves sharing Kathryn's concern that the chocolate truffle sponge with the cashew marzipan icing will melt in the 50 degree heat.

Funny, poignant and thought-provoking, *The Boot Cake* layers film clips, impersonators, interviews with behind the scenes footage of Charlie's Adipur birthday party. It is a story of resilience, unorthodox spirituality and ultimately, the power of cinema.



02

Q & A WITH KATHRYN MILLARD

Award winning film maker Kathryn Millard is a self-confessed Charlie tragic. Five years ago a chance remark about a Chaplin impersonator working in Japan in 1917 set her on a quest to understand the curiously widespread appeal of this silent film star, with his baggy pants, tight waistcoat and twirling bamboo cane. She found his ghosts and reincarnations in sophisticated cities, back street slums and theatres in countries as widely disparate as Mexico, Brazil, Vietnam, Hong Kong, Australia and India.

Q. WHAT IS IT ABOUT CHARLIE?

I've always liked Charlie Chaplin films. They have a wonderful mix of pathos and humour, of being funny and very, very touching.

I was fascinated to discover that people from all over the world find something in his movies that speaks directly to them. I wanted to find out why; and I think it is that Charlie is the outsider, the immigrant, the underdog, the clown, the wise fool. We can all see a bit of ourselves in him. He thumbs his nose at authority, deflates puffed up officialdom and triumphs over adversity. What's not to like?

No matter how down on his luck, Charlie can always see hope. Landing on his bum in the gutter, he's soon cheerfully looking for cigarette butts. He has that quality we now call resilience, in spades.

The Tramp is a mentor, guardian angel or confidante for many people. He has a special appeal for migrants. As people around the world have poured into cities, lured by the promise of employment, Charlie's star has shone ever more brightly.

Q. WHAT DREW YOU TO THE CHARLIE CIRCLE OF ADIPUR?

I thought there was an interesting story in the different cultural appropriations of Charlie and was planning to make a film about all the various impersonators, from Mexico to Japan. Then I discovered Adipur's Charlie Circle and they just stood out as being a fantastic story in themselves. I put the film project aside so that I could do them justice.

They are a bit like a cross between a local Rotary Club and a film society. The members are dedicated both to Charlie Chaplin and the philosophy of life depicted in his films. The Circle members are very active in their community. They see Charlie Chaplin's Tramp as a reminder of our responsibility to others. An invitation to join the Charlie Circle is considered a great honour, so as you can imagine, I was delighted when they made me an honorary member!

Kishore, an Adipur conductor, told me that he saw Charlie's characters on his bus every day. The poor man spending his last few rupees to take

a small amount of grain to the mill. The lazy official sleeping off lunch. The courting couple, snatching a few minutes privacy... How could he not love Charlie's films?

Q. WHAT WAS IT LIKE FILMING IN ADIPUR?

Sometimes, there is something about being in India, that is just like being in a musical.

The Charlie fever in that town was so all encompassing that sometimes I felt like we had been captured by a cult. Day after day, on and off camera, I kept asking people "What is the Charlie philosophy? What is his significance to the people of Adipur?" It was completely absorbing. My world started to shrink. There was only Charlie.

I had the same experience in London at a Charlie Chaplin conference put on by the British Film Institute. The conference attendees were just as passionate and obsessive as the Adipur Circle, spending hours discussing every aspect of Charlie, his comedy and his influence in their lives.

Q. THE STAR OF THE FILM, APART FROM THE MAGNIFICENT BOOT CAKE, IS UNDOUBTEDLY DR ASWANI.

Dr. Aswani is perhaps Charlie Chaplin's most devoted follower. An insightful and compassionate man, he looks after his patients, keeps a lookout for anyone else in town who may need a helping hand and organises Charlie's birthday party - undoubtedly the highlight of his year. Doctor Aswani has a generosity of spirit - a charming mix of playfulness and reverence. He's a wise person, I think.

One of my favourite scenes is when Dr Aswani takes out his prescription pad to write a prescription for a patient. "Please see Circus film." As an Ayurvedic doctor he believes Charlie can heal all sorts of conditions that stem from an unhappy state of mind.

Q. YOU HAVE BORROWED SOMETHING OF ESSAY STYLE IN THE BOOT CAKE. WHY WAS THIS?

I felt that I had to acknowledge that I had become caught up in this story, too - I was not simply a filmmaker recording these events. The film needed a more personal voice, at times. Although I am strictly a 'behind the camera' filmmaker - believe me, I am no Michael Moore!

I wanted to move beyond the classic authoritative style of documentary into something that allowed me to open up the story in a more inclusive way. The essay form foregrounds that. I had so much information and different styles of footage that to present it in one style would have been limiting. I like visual texture and chose fragments of silent film, home movies, contemporary digital animations, rear projections, observational footage, performance sequences and interviews. The film incorporates inter-titles, which are both a reference to silent cinema and to contemporary non-fiction films organised around chapter headings. Mirror images, doubles, silhouettes and shadows are some of the film's key visual motifs.

Centering the narrative around the journey to Adipur allowed me to explore some of the bigger questions - about Charlie, his magic, his philosophies as well as the role of the double or doppelganger in all cultures.

Q. WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM MAKING THIS FILM?

Like most film-makers I have to jump through hoops to get funding and a lot of momentum and energy can be lost. Seemingly endless rounds of development and scripting and having to incorporate too many people's ideas and imperatives at the expense of freshness and originality. I was feeling disenchanted with film. Then this came up and I just had to do it. Being on a small budget with just the barest of crew was liberating and reintroduced the notion of "aliveness". It meant I had to be much more spontaneous, solving problems as I went, relying more on collaboration. Interestingly, a working method not unlike those used in early cinema.

Even Chaplin was something of a guerilla filmmaker early in his career. His character The Tramp made his first screen outing in Kid's Auto Races at Venice. Charlie, his director and cameraman just turned up at the go-kart races and improvised their film in front of the crowd. The Tramp became one of icons of cinema, as Chaplin developed the character over the next thirty years or more.

I immersed myself in silent film - not just comedies, but dramas and animations. Early filmmakers used the medium in such inventive ways. They were working before the rules of the medium were all made up and fixed. They often made a virtue of necessity. You can see that energy and audacity in their films. The Boot Cake reignited my passion for cinema and its possibilities.

I also learned, as I say at the end of the film, that personal quests, like saints and gurus, can come in unlikely shapes and forms.



03

ABOUT THE CREW

THE KEY CREATIVES

DIRECTOR/PRODUCER/WRITER

Kathryn Millard started researching Charlie Chaplin several years ago with a view to making a feature film about the cross-cultural and timeless appeal of the comic genius. Along the way she was sidetracked by the beguiling Charlie Circle of Adipur. The result, *The Boot Cake*, joins a body of work that is highly awarded and internationally recognised. Her 2003 feature film *Travelling Light* was nominated for four Australian Film Institute awards including Best Original Screenplay (feature) and winner of Best Supporting Actress for Sacha Horler, as well as being nominated for Best Original Screenplay (feature) at the AWGIES. In 1996 she gave Cate Blanchett her first film role in the short feature *Parklands* which was also nominated for a Best Original Screenplay award by the AFI. Her 1991 documentary *Light Years*, about renowned Australian photographer Olive Cotton was nominated by ATOM as Best Documentary. She has also written extensively for print and radio and acted as a dramaturg and script editor on projects including Noelle Janaczewska's award-winning theatre productions, including *Mrs. Petrov's Shoe* (winner of a 2006 Queensland Premier's Literary Award) and *Songket* (winner of 2002 Griffin Playwriting Award and 2001 Playbox Asialink Playwriting Competition). Kathryn is an Associate Professor in the Department of Media at Macquarie University.

CINEMATOGRAPHER

Himman Dhamija is Indian-born and Australian-trained. The Australian Film Television School graduate has worked in Bollywood, Tollywood (Telugu film), Kollywood (Tamil film) and Australia, shooting documentaries such as *Chinese Takeaway*, *The Trouble with Merle* and *Black Chicks Talking*. He was behind the camera for the multi-award winning *My Mother India*, the story of his wife Safina Uberoi and the marriage of her Indian father to her Australian mother. He also shot big Indian extravaganzas *Heyy Babyy* and *The Rising*, his work being described as "elegant", "rich" and in Hollywood bible *Variety* he was praised for his "eyewatering widescreen compositions."

Himman, who shares his birthday with Charlie Chaplin, remembers watching the silent star's movies when he was just six.

"When TV in India was still black and white, having a TV at all was a big thing. Charlie was shown quite a lot but only the privileged got to see him. I used to go to a friend's house to watch. We loved him."

Himman shrugs off the various challenges of filming – including shooting on salt plains in intense heat and astride a moving bus. His attitude to shooting *The Boot Cake* was to remain open-minded and go into the situation without any preconceived ideas.



“It is about being honest to the place and the people. You go in and see what their story is. They are fantastic people and it was humbling to be with them and to see their belief and faith. Being part of the Charlie Circle brings a kind of humanity to the rest of their lives.”

COMPOSER

Elena Kats-Chernin was born in the Uzbekistan capital of Tashkent then moved to Yaroslavl where she enjoyed a childhood that included watching Chaplin movies. Trained in Moscow, Australia, and Germany, she is one of Australia’s leading composers. Her diverse output includes operas, orchestral works, chamber and solo pieces for The Sydney Symphony Orchestra and Australian Chamber Orchestra, plus music for dance, film, and theatre. Her music was featured at the Opening Ceremony for the 2000 Olympics as well as the 2003 Rugby World Cup.

Kathryn involved Elena from earliest pre-production, showing her footage as she sourced it over her years of researching Chaplin. The Tramp worked away on Elena’s subconscious. When Kathryn returned from India with final footage for *The Boot Cake*, Elena sat down at the piano to turn her ethereal ideas into a composition.

For scenes of Chaplin at his most madcap, Elena created simple, jaunty rhythms using a combination of instruments to create what she calls, “a slightly bent, silent film sound”. In discussion with Kathryn they decided Elena would play the piano and they would also incorporate mandolin, electric guitar, trombone, clarinet and violin.

Some scenes needed a subtle approach so as not to overburden the atmosphere with music that would be “too busy”.

“There is a reflective scene where the doctor is watching Chaplin in *The Gold Rush* and that called for something quite modest musically, just a bit of piano, violin and clarinet. It is not a Chaplinesque moment. Often music is not what you see on screen but the emotion behind what you see.”

Elena praises the music team she led, including Scott Saunders who worked on preparation. “We knew from the start of working on the music for *The Boot Cake* that the film would win if we were to choose improvising musicians who would be able to change the style of playing according to the way the film was unfolding. It was incredible fun for me to play piano alongside Paul (clarinet), James (trombone), Carl (guitar) and Shenton (violin and mandolin).”

“Sometimes, when working on a particular sequence we would decide not to use, let’s say, trombone, because it would perhaps add an unnecessary comic flavour to an otherwise serious contemplative scene. However, while recording for another sequence, we would need exactly that sort of ironic sound that was wrong for another scene.

The Boot Cake required a surprising mix of many of Elena’s different skills. “It has an offbeat charm about it. It is an unusual film. Kathryn, as well as the film itself, left me a lot of freedom with the kind of music I could compose. Even though it is not a silent film, I felt that I could sometimes treat it as such and that gave me a lot of creative independence. It was a fun way to work.”

SOUND DESIGN

Kathryn Millard had two words for sound designer **Andrew Plain** - “have fun”. It was music to his ears. As a triple recipient of Australian Film Institute awards for Best Sound, nominated 10 times, it was clear his work would be technically brilliant, so Kathryn gave him carte blanche to have as much fun as he liked. It was a rare treat for Andrew, who has gained an international reputation through



his work on such diverse films as *The Truman Show*, *Lantana*, *In the Cut* and *Oscar and Lucinda*.

"We were allowed to be playful. Kathryn didn't want us to be reverential. We put in bangs and clashes and had a lot of fun. The way the music was composed she was trying to inject the film with the same tempo as a Chaplin film."

Familiar with the frantic pace and challenges of shooting on the road Andrew expected the worst when the sound recordings arrived at Huzzah Sound at Fox Studios in Sydney. "With documentaries that is always the area that causes the most headaches. It is where they scrimp to save money and it makes our job so much harder, where we have to scrape stuff out before we can actually get to work making it better. But she came back with such beautiful recorded sound. The sound from on top of the bus was so clean we had to put wind buffeting in to make it sound authentic."

Andrew used to be a Buster Keaton fan but after working on this film has switched to Charlie.

"It's a lovely meditative piece. I love it at the end where she says she ended up taking a cake to a birthday party. It's both funny and very poignant. Just like Charlie."

FILM EDITOR

As a director of award-winning films Kathryn had a wide choice of film editors. She chose a former film student she had taught at Macquarie University, believing that his sense of visual rhythm put him among the best in the business. **Andrew Soo** has won acclaim and awards since graduating from Macquarie (1997) and AFTRS (2003) including *Checkpoint*, winner of 7 international awards - including the Jury Prize at the 2006 Montreal World Film Festival - and *Liu Awaiting Spring*, winner of the Teddy award for short film at Berlin Film Festival.

For *The Boot Cake* Andrew immersed himself in the world of Chaplin film studying footage and absorbing the rhythm into his bones. It set the tone.

"It wasn't a conscious thing but definitely at the back of my mind was Charlie. When I got a particular piece

of footage showing the impersonators I would think what would Charlie do with this footage? At other times I didn't have to do much at all. The archive footage was so good those scenes dictated themselves."

The essay style - layering narration with archive footage, impersonator performances and interviews, was a bigger challenge. An early edit incorporated footage of one impersonator so seamlessly with archival footage that it could be easily confused with the real Charlie. Andrew and Kathryn reworked it and found different ways to incorporate archival footage, using it to change rhythm.

"There were pretty much no rules. It was a case of diving into it and not knowing what to do until we did it. Kathryn was quite clear that she wanted an essay style, highly constructed with voice over and archive, many different textures. It is really attractive as a result. It isn't a formulaic doco with lots of talking heads. It was a tremendous challenge but a lot of fun."



04

THE MAGIC OF CHARLIE - IN THEIR WORDS

Charlie made people laugh while he himself was crying. Charlie is not a national of one place but a citizen of the universe. His acts and his thoughts are everywhere. He is not from London, Hong Kong, New York. Charlie belongs to the world.

Charlie himself was crying, but he made other people laugh. My story is the same. There is a lot of sadness. But to bring a smile to someone's face, to bring joy - that is very difficult. Not everyone can do it. This is a very big thing. He wore the clothes of a tramp, and made people laugh.

Whenever I dress like Charlie, I behave like Charlie. There is a strange magic and intoxication in Charlie's moustache and his dress.

DR ASWANI
Founder of the Charlie Circle of Adipur

People have to yell these days to get heard, But Charlie is the man, Charlie is the man. It's a talent most people should learn How to make you laugh without saying a word Charlie was the man and that man could turn serious into delirious.

JJ FIVE
Rapper

Some times I feel that Charlie Chaplin is inside me. We have had the same life- the same struggle. Struggle to live, struggle to eat, Struggle to walk, struggle to take the train.

VISWAJEET MUMBAI
Impersonator

I first saw Chaplin on the television... there were no TVs in our village, but I used to come to my uncle's place in the city. There I saw Chaplin on the television. And I was inspired by him – his movements, his acting, his innocence. I was totally haunted by that character. And I liked imitating him. Even my mother told me – 'you're looking like him'. I know so many things in life through his films, his philosophy and his performances.

PREVAN MUMBAI
Impersonator

Quests – like saints and gurus – come in unlikely shapes and forms.

KATHRYN MILLARD
Writer/Producer/Director

Tragedy is life in close -up. Comedy is life in long shot. The perspective of the gods.

CHARLIE CHAPLIN

CREDIT LIST

Special Thanks

Written, Produced and Directed by
Cinematography
Editor
Music Composed by

Doctor Ashok Aswani and the Charlie Circle of Adipur
Kathryn Millard
Himman Dhimaji (Adipur), Mrinal Desai (Mumbai), Steve Macdonald (Sydney)
Andrew Soo
Elena Kats Chernin, Carl Dewhurst, Shenton Gregory, Paul Cutlin, James Greening
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Andy Postle (Sydney)
Kathryn Millard, Amrit Gangar, Noelle Janaczewska
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Cathy Flannery
Sadhana Jethanandani
Safina Uberoi
Charles Anthony
Binh du Tay

Musical Director

Location Sound

Sound Design

Script Editor

Online and Grade

Technical Director (Post-Production)

Piano

Violin, Mandolin

Trombone

Clarinet

Guitar

Music Producer

Narrator

Titles and Graphic Design

Titles Animation

Web Developer

Additional Camera

Additional Sound

Research

Production Manager (India)

Post-Production Manager

Translations

Subtitles

Charlie Lookalike (Sydney)

Charlie Dancer (Sydney)

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