TONIGHT'S SHOW!

Sem Donkers - young performer and writer • The Adventures of Kid Keaton
Buster Keaton's Puzzling Shorts • Movie Review • Rogue's Gallery
And... Buster Kitten!
Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for our very first edition of The Play House. Can you give us an introduction to yourself?

I’m Sem Donkers from the Netherlands and I’m (at the moment) twelve years old. I always loved acting and performing. I created my own little plays as a little kid and performed them for my parents. I watched an animated series featuring Charlie Chaplin’s character “The Little Tramp” (Chaplin & Co.) I looked him up on the internet and saw the real black-and-white Charlie Chaplin. I was afraid of him. Years later (in 2016) when I was a few years older I heard the news a musical about his life was going to be performed in Amsterdam. That interested me and I rediscovered Chaplin. I wasn’t afraid of him anymore and began to appreciate him, his work and his life. I started watching his films and reading books about him.

I staged my own little production of the Chaplin musical at home for my family. I wanted to perform in a revised production of the musical the next year called Charlie, the musical — Take Two! I never performed the show, as I got the chance to perform a show about Chaplin at my local theatre. I contacted them (my parents didn’t know) and they gave me the chance to perform my show there. It became a whole different version of the show I performed for my family. People were very enthusiastic about my performance. I also wrote another play about Chaplin which was published as a book in 2018.

I contacted another theatre because I wrote a comedy play based on Sherlock Holmes’ “The Hound of the Baskervilles.” I got invited for a conversation and I told them about my work as Charlie Chaplin. The woman who runs the theatre also co-organizes a big Christmas theatre festival. The theatre agency who organizes the festival hired me as a double act with an actor as an older Charlie Chaplin. Charlie Chaplin and his son. We put on an act and performed at the festival. It was a success. I still work for the theatre agency performing as Charlie Chaplin.

I love making people laugh. I love giving them a good feeling or make them feel happy just by doing my hobby. I’m also a fan of Laurel and Hardy. I wrote a book about them published this year (2019) and I performed a short play at the 13th European Sons of the Desert convention. It was a great experience! I made a lot of new friends. I’m not only a fan of Charlie Chaplin and Laurel and Hardy, but I’m fascinated by the whole history of cinema and theatre. If you are a fan of silent comedy, you should know Buster Keaton. I watched a lot of his movies and now I’m also a Buster fan too. It’s a shame these genius comedians don’t get the appreciation they deserve.

It all started for me with Charlie Chaplin, but I don’t say he is the best. He was a genius and so was Buster. They both deserve the title of ‘best silent comedian.’

Which Buster Keaton movie would you recommend to someone who had never seen his work? Which is your favourite?

I don’t know what movie I would recommend to someone
who had never seen his work. Probably a short. People who aren’t interested in silent movies find it hard to keep watching a feature film in black and white. For a short I would probably say *One Week* which is also my favorite short. It features Buster’s acrobatic stunts, but also a lot of hilarious slapstick. My favorite feature is *The General*. It’s magic how Buster mixes drama with comedy.

*Do you have any future projects regarding Buster you can share with us?*

I am currently writing a book about Buster called “Battling Buster” (it’s a working title so it may change). It’s a lot of fun writing this book. It will be my first book in English. The book will tell Buster’s life and career in the style of a screenplay. It’s like telling his life through the medium that made him famous. Unfortunately I’m not a rich producer so I can’t make a Buster biopic. But reading my book will be like watching a very detailed biopic. I took creative license, but I tried to stay as close to the truth as possible. I’m also putting on a show telling the story of the evolution of cinema through comedy sketches based on the work of Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy and Buster. It starts with the pie-throwing comedians and the improvised chases to the musicals in the 1950s.

*Thank you again, Sem. We expect Buster would be impressed by your resumé & work-ethic!*

For Dutch-speaking Damfinos, Chéz Stan & Ollie is available to buy here: [boekscout.nl/shop2/boek.php?bid=9700](boekscout.nl/shop2/boek.php?bid=9700)
Our roving reporter, Evie visited The Cinema Museum in London where The Blinking Buzzards were holding a showing of The Navigator plus two shorts; The Boat and The Love Nest.

My favorite of the two shorts was The Boat — I couldn’t stop laughing. When they build the boat it gets stuck in the house and everything in the film keeps going wrong. The wall pancake is funny, it’s really funny — they nail a pancake to the wall to stop a leak. It’s a BAD pancake so it works! My Mum’s pancakes are a bit better than those.

In The Love Nest Buster is bossed around by Big Joe Roberts and he accidentally pours coffee on his hand. He nearly gets thrown off the ship. Later they say, “All hands on deck” and Buster puts his hands on the deck. I didn’t realize what that meant and neither did Buster. It means that the crew need to get to work. I’ve been on a warship on a school visit so I know lots more about boats now.

The Navigator was the best movie and made me laugh the most. The little cannon was so hilarious — I like when he taps it at the end to say thank you. When he’s running round the ship and he can’t find the girl and she can’t find him — you’ll like that bit.

I like Buster Keaton because he’s really funny and he’s really good in the films. Obviously he’s so clever to do the stunts, make the films, everything.
Buster Keaton grew up on the stage, officially beginning his career on 17th October 1900, a couple of weeks before his fifth birthday.

He toured America with his parents, Joe and Myra, in the Medicine Shows of the Old West and later on stage as a Vaudeville act. They would perform anything up to three shows a day which meant there wasn’t really time for school.

In the 1900s children were still expected to go to school though, just as they are today! The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (AKA The Gerry Society), would go to shows if they thought children were working in the act and get them back in the classroom.

It’s not that Buster didn’t like the idea of an education, but he did love to entertain and besides, he and his family moved around so much he was never in one place long enough to settle. But, one day he did go to school...

Aged six, his Dad woke him up at the horribly early hour of 8am to go to a public grammar school in Jersey City. But once he got there, Buster had a captive audience; his classmates. And as the day went on he cracked gag after gag which meant there wasn’t nearly as much learning going on as there should have been.

At roll call, when they called, ‘Keaton” he answered, “I couldn’t come today.” It instantly earned him the role of ‘class clown.’

Buster was sent home with a note from the Principal asking him not to come back again. After that, his mother homeschooled him and he learnt far more that way.

Years later he ended up writing his own book, My Wonderful World of Slapstick which is where this story came from.

Ada Palumbo is a five year old Damfino who has been watching Buster Keaton with her Mom since she was born. We love how Buster is balancing in this masterpiece; keep up the good work!

Chloe Fadem attended the Annual Buster Keaton Convention and recreated this image of Buster on the streets of Muskegon - nice stone face ;)