

PREMIERE JAMS BROADWAY

(Reprinted from Saturday's late edition)

BY EDWIN SCHALLETT

Broadway completely outdid Hollywood Boulevard last evening. The maddest and most glittering premiere of the year was held at the new Los Angeles Theater.

Swirling crowds invaded the environs of the show house. They took possession of the streets in its vicinity virtually from sidewalk to sidewalk. Traffic became a mad melee, police charged the throng, cries, shouts and cheers added to the wild pandemonium. At times even the microphone through which arriving stars spoke was threatened with demolition. Some of the spotlights that were used for illumination actually were smashed.

But despite all the storm and stress of the occasion it was a glamorous evening. A throng of stars and other first-nighters that had come to view the new playhouse and to see Charlie Chaplin's feature comedy, "City Lights," nearly three years in the filming, attested to that.

ULTRA OF ULTRAS

Such a spacious, ornate and comfortable playhouse as the Los Angeles Theater has seldom, I venture to say, been unveiled anywhere. It is the ultra of ultras in its modernistic appointments and its conveniences, but more than anything, perhaps, does the amplitude of its great auditorium impress the on-looker. One has no feeling of crowding. The archways and walls soar to the high-vaulted ceiling, and there is an abundance of aiseways, which make entrance to the seats particularly easy.

Sumptuousness is the note most strongly emphasized in the scheme of decoration. The gold that is sufficiently dazzling when the interior is fully lighted, dims invitingly when the theater is darkened, giving a rare illusion of richness.

From the time one enters the foyer with its grand staircase he is in the presence of "sights to behold," whose allure is only increased upon investigation. There are a ballroom and refreshment room, for example, below the main floor. In the ballroom is a miniature screen on which the pictures may be viewed while one is dancing or waiting for the moment to be seated in the main auditorium.

Other details of the construction command attention, but the primary note that is struck throughout is that of a direct appeal to the public's convenience and enjoyment.

FILM REAL NOVELTY

In this decidedly elaborate environment was Chaplin's latest production offered, and doubtless few films could be described as more of a novelty. For as far as actual dialogue goes this new feature offers none of it. There are synchronized score and sound effects, but the spoken word as such is shunned. No need to relate this, perhaps, because Chaplin has expressed his views on the subject more than definitely.

One could scarcely say, of course, that "City Lights" would completely alter the present articulate character of pictures, as some have averred it would. The comedian stands on a lonely isle in the present hubbub of conversation, and he can dwell there in serene solitude probably as long as he wishes because of his pantomimic gifts. That

is, he is one star who can go on without talking, if anyone can, and certainly "City Lights" goes to show that he knows as of yore the key that unlocks the way to popular entertainment.

The amusing character of this picture is intriguing. Even comedy tricks that are not essentially new are employed with consistent cleverness. The Chaplin capacity to make folk laugh and laugh uproariously, is preserved with all its uncanny individuality.

There is a more romantic story in "City Lights" than usual in a Chaplin film. The love of the blind girl for the funny man—her idealized impression of him as very wealthy when he is naught but a tramp—provides a stronger plot impetus than one generally finds in a Chaplin feature, and it is amazing how serious the last ten or fifteen minutes of the production turn out to be as a consequence.

The ending stresses pathos even more strongly than do Chaplin pictures ordinarily.

However, I do not believe that the majority of audiences care as much for the Chaplin seriousness as they do for his comic effervescences, and there are many rich instances of the star's caprice in this respect.

TAKE-OFF ON TALKIE

The very beginning of the picture is a capital satire on the talkies. Speeches are given at the unveiling of a monument. Various persons stand and address the crowd. But they do not speak actual words, rather a strange and clever sort of gibberish, which is a great take-off on the actual talking picture.

Chaplin has used sound again for the laugh admirably in the scene where he swallows a penny whistle. The toy keeps chirping like a bird when Charlie gets an attack of the hiccoughs. The noise interferes with a musicale, causes a taxicab driver to try to induce the comedian to enter the vehicle, and finally brings a whole troop of dogs into his lap.

"City Lights" evidences much larger opportunities for the supporting cast, I would say, than any other recent Chaplin film, Harry Myers shining out as an exceedingly clever actor in a great number of scenes. He appears as the eccentric rich man, who becomes a bosom pal of Chaplin whenever he is intoxicated, and regards him as an utter stranger whenever he is sober. A goodly proportion of the mirth originates from this situation.

Hank Mann is also to be credited with contributing humor by his impersonation of the Chaplin adversary in a boxing match, which is one of the most hilarious high spots.