

Nicholas Alexander Dunaev

(1884 – 21 Feb 1963)

Dunaev. Suddenly on Thursday, February 21, 1963 at George Washington University Hospital, Nicholas A. Dunaev of 931 New Hampshire avenue northwest, beloved friend of Jack and Carolyn Petty and family of the same address. Services at 10 a.m., Saturday, February 23, at the Chevy Chase Funeral Home, 5101 Wisconsin avenue northwest. Interment Congressional Cemetery.



The Evening Star, February 23, 1963, p. A15

Nicholas Dunaev Dies, Long-Forgotten Actor

"There cannot be a happy ending to a poet's life, for the ending is its essential tragedy."

With this line from his own work, Nicholas Alexander Dunaev, the son of Russian Czarist nobility and one of the leading figures in the early days of motion pictures in America was buried this morning in Congressional Cemetery.

Services for the writer, director and actor--forgotten by all but a few intimate friends--were at 10 a.m. in the Chevy Chase Funeral Home. He died Thursday in George Washington Hospital after a long illness.

The son of a former Lord Mayor of Moscow, Mr. Dunaev was born in that capital city in 1884. Active in the first Russian revolution in 1917, he was an associate of Alexander Kerensky, head of the provisional government which was toppled by the Bolshevik revolution.

Hailed as Actor

Because of his association with Kerensky, Mr. Dunaev was arrested and sentenced to exile in Siberia. He escaped, reportedly by breaking the iron bars of his prison with his bare hands, and made his way to Europe.

Mr. Dunaev was hailed later as a great Shakespearian actor and interpreter of Ibsen's dramas. While in France he married Edith Donnerburg, noted throughout Europe for her novels about the Russian revolution and the first World War and for her beauty. She died two years after their marriage.

Coming to this country in 1919, Mr. Dunaev went to work for the Vitagraph Corp., one of the first motion film companies, as a writer, director and actor. While with Vitagraph he wrote, directed and acted in "The Cheaters," starring Clare Kimball Young and John Bunny, now regarded as a silent film classic.

With the advent of "talkies," Mr. Dunaev moved to Hollywood where he worked in the studios of Pathe Films and the World Film Corp. It was there he received the nickname, "The Strongman from Moscow," from his ability to bend coins in his fingers, according to his friends.

Mr. Dunaev was a poet, playwright, novelist and critic. His play, "The Spider," with himself in the leading role, played on Broadway in the 1920s. He also starred with Otis Skinner in the original production of "Kismet."

Active in Campaign

While in Hollywood, Mr. Dunaev was active in the presidential campaign of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and received a special tribute and commendation from Mr. Roosevelt for his efforts.

During his Hollywood years, Mr. Dunaev met and married Ina Byron, a dancer with the Ziegfeld Follies. They were divorced after three years of marriage.

Mr. Dunaev came to Washington in 1937 and was active on Capitol Hill as a speech writer for many Senators and Representatives. During this time he formed a close friendship with James Roosevelt, and worked with the late Senator Robert A. Taft.

During World War II, a member of the Mark Twain Society, Mr. Dunaev gave up writing to take a job in a defense plant, where, in his 50s, he worked as a riveter and welder.

In recent years, Mr. Dunaev, only surviving member of a large family, had been living quietly, writing, and nearly forgotten by the top names of Hollywood who once hailed him.

For the last 10 years, Mr. Dunaev had lived with Mr. and Mrs. Jack Petty of 931 New Hampshire avenue N.W.

Services today were simple, as requested by Mr. Dunaev in his will. His remaining friends read briefly from his own works and from those of Mark Twain.

The Washington Post, February 23, 1963, p. C3

N.A. Dunaev, Silent Film Actor, Dead

Nicholas Alexander Dunaev, 78, an author, actor and movie director who escaped from his native Russia following the Bolshevik revolution, died Thursday of a heart condition at George Washington University Hospital.

Mr. Dunaev came to America in 1919. Already known as an actor in Europe, he soon became involved in America's fledgling motion picture industry. As a writer, actor and director, he was connected with many old silent films and some of the early "talkies."

He also wrote stage plays and books.

His "Seven Doors to Sin" was published by Vantage Press in 1953. After retiring from the motion picture business, he moved to Washington in 1937. He lived at 931 New Hampshire ave. nw.

March 3, 1924

AMERICAN WEEKLY

Charlie Chaplin's prowess as the champion of custard-pie combats and slap-stick free-for-alls has been firmly established for some time, but it took a real bare-fisted encounter with a wealthy oil magnate in a Hollywood café to qualify him as a runner-up for the bantamweight championship.

Charlie launched his pugilistic conquests with a knockout in the second round, despite the fact that his adversary out-weighted him, "out-stood" him and out-reached him.

Occupying ring-side seats at the table d'hote arena in which the world-famed comedian staged his first ring battle were a score of noted screen celebrities, artists and musicians, who cheered the young battler as he landed right and left punches to the jaw of his opponent with an unerring precision that Charlie attributes to years of experience in hurling pies.

The famous comedian's sparring partner, according to a signed statement issued by Chaplin, and according to numerous witnesses to the affray, was C. C. Julian, millionaire young oil promoter. Julian, however, denies that he was the man who crossed fists with the agile comedian.

Despite this denial the management of the Club Petroushka, exclusive Hollywood café maintained by a group of Russian artists, in which the fracas occurred, stated that the oil man's agents paid a bill for

nearly \$600 to cover damage to musical instruments, spotlights and furniture that were shattered by the combatants in their brief but furious exchange of blows.

In the sport writer's parlance Chaplin was the first to enter his corner, accompanied by Mary Miles Minter and Mr. and Mrs. Carey Wilson. Little did they realize as the preliminary dinner progressed that with the serving of the last course they would be called upon to act as seconds for the genial host.

It was some time later, shortly after midnight, to be exact, before the Julian party arrived at the duellists' rendezvous.

Accompanying the oil man were Mildred Harris, former wife of the noted comedian, Peggy Browne, film actress and member of an old Washington family, two other men, one of whom is said to have been Julian's brother, and another woman, whose name was not learned.

The Julian party, it was learned subsequently, had started earlier in the evening at the Montmartre, another popular Hollywood café, and it was en route to the Petroushka that Mildred Harris and Peggy Browne had rather reluctantly consented to join the party.

Seated at points of vantage about the "ringside" at the time Julian entered his corner, in addition to the notables in Chaplin's party, were Nicholas Dunaev, Russian author and actor, as the guest of Prince and Princess Narichkin, and Jascha Heifetz, world-renown violinist. Dunaev had just returned to Los Angeles after a long illness in New York.

The preliminaries to the main event occurred simultaneously with the arrival of the Julian party, when the host, in a hilarious and high-spirited mood, collided with the stage spotlight.

Apparently resenting the inability of the adamant and inanimate object to remove itself from the course the newcomer wished to pursue, he hurled it to the floor with a loud clatter and crash of glass.

The incident, witnesses aver, may have been merely a demonstration of physical strength conceived to strike terror into the heart of the diminutive comedian who a few minutes later was destined to "cross swords" with the six-foot promoter.

Stepping over the debris of the wrecked spotlight Julian and the members of his party proceeded toward a table in an enclosed booth.

Attracted by the crash and lusty shouts of the new arrival a corps of waiters and attaches of the café rushed forward in an attempt to be of assistance and to smooth the apparently ruffled temper of the guest.

"Get out of here!" Julian shouted.

"Don't bother me. What difference does it make what I break up around here?" the young oil millionaire continued.

Fumbling in his pockets the visitor pulled forth diverse wads of bills, fifteen or twenty of them. They all bore \$1,000\$ on the face. Waving a handful of the currency above his head he again addressed the assembled aggregation of dumfounded waiters:

"Look here!

"I've got money enough to buy out this whole blooming place and a couple more if I wanted to! Away with you!"

The "preliminaries" were fine, thought the spectators, who settled back for another sip of coffee as Julian and his party were escorted to seats in a booth directly adjoining the one occupied by Chaplin and his party.

Peace and quietness were not to have sway long, however. Members of the Chaplin quartet turned occasionally to see where the hilarious din came from, but Charlie says that at that time he was entirely unaware of the identity of the occupants of the adjoining booth.

The square-off for the first round, without the customary formal introduction, sans the smiling bow and sans the subsequent applause, came a few moments later, when the new arrival arose somewhat heavily and lurched against one of the women guests at the Chaplin table.

Chaplin looked up, plainly registering irritation.

Julian leered.

"Please be careful," said Chaplin in a low voice.

With that, witnesses aver, the first round started in a very unceremonious manner.

For reply to the comedian's admonition to be careful, the newcomer is alleged to have slapped the girl on the back and leaned on her chair.

"I asked you to please be careful," repeated Chaplin, warningly, in a rising voice, filled with indignation at the intrusion.

"Oh, you did, did you?" scowled the intruder.

"Yes, I certainly did," retorted Chaplin. "I would appreciate it if you would kindly leave."

In reply witnesses say Julian rapidly landed several blows on the comedian before he had a chance to arise from the table.

Round one ended with the heavier adversary having a decided advantage.

Humiliated and angered by the sudden attack, Chaplin sprang to his feet. As an opening move of round two Charlie, facing his opponent square in the aisle, unleashed his "million dollar" wallop, catching the heavier man on the point of the chin.

Plainly taken back by the comedian's ferocious attack, Julian swung wildly at the agile Chaplin.

He missed, but Charlie connected with another stiff punch to the chin, and the six-footer hit the floor for the count, a tiny stream of blood trickling down his face.

By this time the café was in an uproar. Squads of waiters joined the melee in an attempt to restore order.

Another member of the Julian party, said by witnesses to have been the oil man's brother, also of athletic build, pounced onto Chaplin's back a moment after the first knockout.

Again the film comic brought his small fists into a fast play and felled the second assailant, while café attaches struggled to separate the other combatants.

Nicholas Dunaev, by his own story, became a participant in the affray shortly after Chaplin scored his first knock-down. While Chaplin was then engaged in battling new adversaries Dunaev said he squared off with the oil man after he had struggled to his feet, landed another stiff blow and sent him to the floor for the second and last time.

When the din of shouts, curses, women's shrieks, thud of blows, and crash of furniture had subsided, members of the Julian party quickly made their exit, while café attaches began to take stock of the damage, which, in addition to the crashed spotlight, included a valuable cello and several chairs.

Mildred Harris and Peggy Browne declare they left the Julian party just before the fisticuffs started. Miss Browne said Julian had been threatening to "get" Chaplin in Miss Harris' presence and that Chaplin's former wife pleaded with him not to create a scene.

The young actress declared that she and Miss Harris attempted to leave but were observed by Julian as they slipped down a staircase, and that he gave chase.

Frightened, Miss Browne related that the couple fled through a rear door, scaled fences, and ran through underbrush to her home. When she reached her bungalow, she bolted her door and sat up all night with a revolver in her hand.

Immediately after the dust of battle had cleared away, Nat Arlock, owner of the Club Petroushka, said he was given a check for \$392 by a member of the Julian party, covering "supper and damages."

The next day the café manager received \$203 in cash from an emissary of Julian for other damages.

"I saw the whole proceedings," said Arlock, "and am embarrassed that it should have occurred in my place, which is a genteel establishment.

"Mr. Chaplin was listening to the music. He is very fond of Russian music. Zamu Lenko, the Moscow violinist, was playing. Chaplin was very much engrossed in listening to him when the trouble first started."

Princess Dagmara Saricheva, hostess of the club, and Mme. Malova, prima donna, interposed themselves during the melee and attempted to hold Chaplin back when he began to rain blows on his opponent.

Chef Spiridon Ignatowich, who was chef to Czar Nicholas II, of Russia for twelve years, said he was too busy making borscht in the kitchen to take part in the fracas.

Notwithstanding Chaplin's signed statement naming him, and the statement of nearly a score of witnesses C. C. Julian, the oil magnate, has strongly held to his denial that he was present or a participant in the affray.

Despite a subsequent admission that he was in Los Angeles on the morning of the fight Julian has stoutly maintained that he was in San Francisco, nearly 500 miles distant, when the now famous Chaplin combat took place less than twenty-four hours later.

Other than to declare that he was in San Francisco with his wife Julian declined to make any further comment, characterizing the reports of the café row as "very amusing."

Miss Harris, recounting her story of the party, expressed deep regret that her former husband had become innocently involved in the affair.

"Poor Charlie," she said. "I do hope my presence there will not be misunderstood. I did not know Charlie was there and I am sure he didn't see me.

"Charlie and I are perfectly good friends. Reports that the trouble started through a quarrel over me are preposterous. As a matter of fact I personally was not with Julian. I merely happened to be with my girl friend who was a member of the party. Charlie is very sensitive. I sympathize with him deeply in this affair because I know how dreadful it all must be to him."

Miss Browne's entry into the party came unexpectedly, she stated. She was at home when Mildred Harris called her from the Montmartre Café, where the Julian party started, invited her to join the group.

"Mildred and I were unescorted," Peggy declared. "We just went along with the others because we couldn't very well get away after we joined them.

"After we arrived at the Petrouska, Julian told me I was 'too ritzie.' I pushed back by chair and started to leave, but it wasn't any use. He wouldn't let me go.

"All during the party Julian made scathing remarks about Mr. Chaplin. Miss Harris urged him to discontinue his uncomplimentary utterances, and when he refused a moment before the trouble started, she left the table. As soon as I saw something was going to happen I became so frightened I ran down the stairs to get away. I didn't see any blows struck."

Following the affair Chaplin issued a statement regarding his version of it. The statement follows:

"In justice to the motion picture profession in general, I am compelled by the seemingly unfair notoriety being forced on members of our industry and myself to plead for fairness and justice from the press and public.

"The erroneous and flippant reports of the past incident in which I was unfortunately present have placed me in the light of being a café brawler, intimating that motion picture actresses were the cause of the affair. This I wish to deny most emphatically, as it was the business men whom the press have ignored but who were entirely responsible in causing the disturbance.

"I wish to state that I neither drink nor smoke.

"No one is more conscious or appreciative of my position with the general public and the esteem and regard with which I respect them, especially the children.

"I do not hold my position lightly and the obnoxious affair which was forced on me in a public restaurant has compelled me to make this plea for fair play in the press.

"The stories I have read report me as having stood on tables or platforms issuing challenges to these men who attacked me. Nothing is further from the truth and if it is necessary for the truth to be known I will commence proceedings immediately.

"What actually happened was this:

"While I was dining with a few friends in a restaurant a party of men and ladies arrived and seated themselves at a table nearby. The men acted very boisterously, kicking over a spotlight lamp and generally conducting themselves in a very loud manner.

"Later, one of the men, unknown to me but whom I am informed was C. C. Julian, lurched towards me, striking at me while I was seated at the table.

"In self-protection I defended myself. He fell down. Then another member of the party, who is said to be a brother, struck me from behind. A general disturbance was caused until employees of the restaurant intervened and quiet was restored.

"I am not a fighter, not a braggart of fistic prowess, as has been reported. I have always endeavored to conduct myself as a gentleman and appeal to the press and public to believe that my part in this affair was forced on me and that I did only what any red-blooded man would have done had he been in my place."

But meanwhile Hollywood boulevardiers are loudly singing peans of praise to the fistic ability of one Charles Spencer Chaplin and greet him on all sides with "How's the 'million dollar wallop'?"