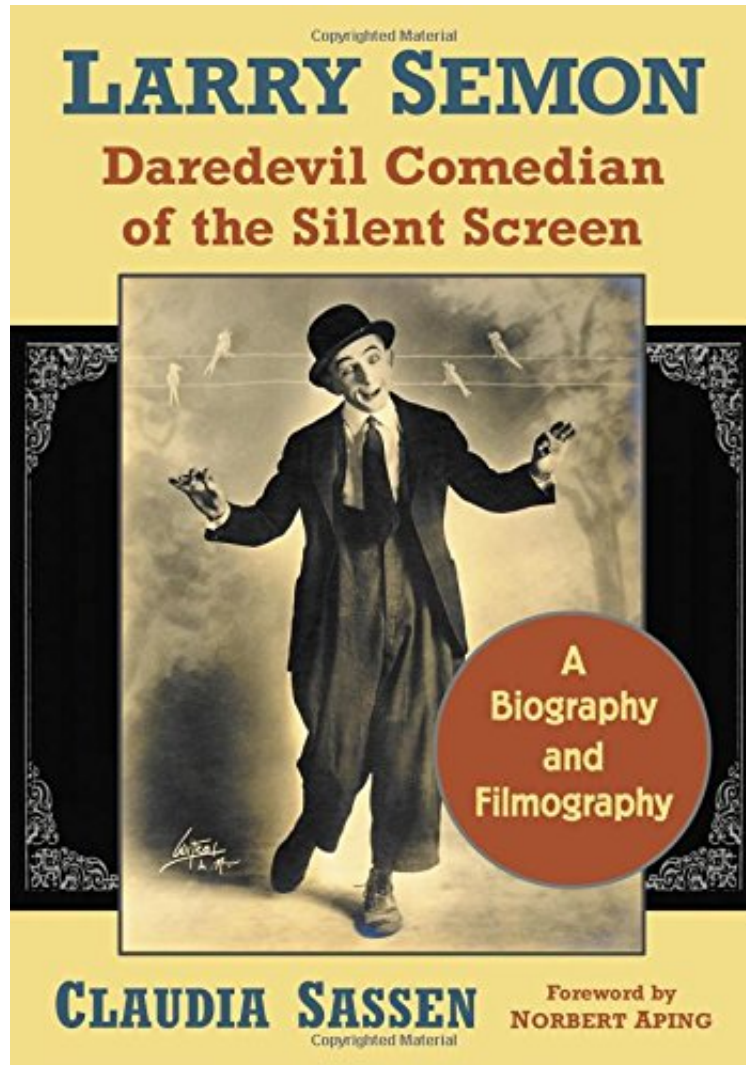


## Larry Semon, Daredevil Comedian of the Silent Screen: A Biography and Filmography

*Claudia Sassen, Foreword by Norbert Aping*  
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**Claudia Sassen, Foreword by Norbert Aping : Larry Semon, Daredevil Comedian of the Silent Screen: A Biography and Filmography** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Larry Semon, Daredevil Comedian of the Silent Screen: A Biography and Filmography:

5 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Was Larry a nice guy, or a jackassBy Robert MccraryI am not sure if the review fits the writing, because the writing of this book is unfocused, scattershot, and often confusing. At times, I find myself lost within the text - was Larry's father a success, or not? Polar opposite statements can be found on the SAME PAGE. Was Larry a nice guy, or a jackass? Stories on both sides bounce back and forth like ping pong balls.

This is a very difficult book to get through. Maybe some of it has to do with it being translated from the original German, but a good editor would have done a WORLD of good. So why four stars? Because this is easily the most comprehensive study undertaken of Larry Semon and his work, and as such, it must command respect. Ms. Sassen has been obsessed with her subject for years, and it shows. There is a wealth of terrific information found in her book. If it had been written worth a damn, it gets five stars, easy. 4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Even the most difficult-to-love performers deserve a labor of love. By the describer files. Sometimes even the most difficult-to-love performers deserve a labor of love, and that's precisely what Claudia Sassen's biography of silent comedian Larry Semon proves to be. Semon was a top tier clown in his day, a rival of Chaplin (financially, if not artistically), and his career arc is one of the most fascinatingly tragic in Hollywood history. In the nearly 90 years since his death, the consensus on Semon is that he was a self-destructive egomaniac, a man with huge ambitions but finite talent, with a little black book chock full of gags but a seemingly limited back of tricks full of sticky barrels of goo, drums of blank ink, water-spitting ducks and toppling water towers this too-easy depiction of him being shouted into the echo chamber of film history ad infinitum. Where Sassen succeeds is in dimensionalizing Semon beyond the accepted legend to create a complex, baffling and, yes, likable figure. That she succeeded at all is remarkable, since little was written about Semon during his lifetime beyond press squibs and newspaper articles concerning lawsuits, million dollar contract negotiations, and sanitarium stays. Few of his contemporaries spoke of him after his early death; even fewer lived to discuss him during the course of Sassen's exhaustive research. Ultimately, yes, Semon was indeed the architect of his own downfall consumed with anxiety and the need to constantly top himself but with no idea how (what can you say about a man who brings *The Wizard Of Oz* to the screen and spends half the running time in Kansas?). Sometimes legend is truth. But this much-needed biography goes far to bring depth, context and humanity to Larry's story, and in the end achieves the objective of any good biography to have you re-evaluate the artist and his work and, ideally, to pursue that work. On that level it's essential to any silent comedy fan. 5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. A comprehensive look at a one-time Chaplin rival. By Lea S. While silent comedy buffs are familiar with big-beaked slapstick king Larry Semon, but he's unknown to many classic film lovers. Since his popularity nearly rivaled Chaplin's back in the 1920s, he certainly deserves to have his career examined in detail--which is exactly what Claudia Sassen delivers with this comprehensive new book (including an authoritative new filmography). Sassen dedicated around twenty years of research to finding out more about the one-time megastar, and found not only a wealth of information on his career but on his family's careers, too. His father was Zera the Great, a magician and vaudevillian who spent decades touring the country. Much like contemporaries such as Buster Keaton, Semon grew up on the road and performed onstage from a very young age (one of the great photographs Sassen includes is a priceless publicity shot of little Larry in his stage makeup). We're also given details about Semon's early career as a cartoonist, including many examples of his drawings, as well as details about his personal life (believe it or not, the man one person described as looking like he was carved by a drunken puppeteer managed to be a bit of a womanizer). She thoroughly examines his quick rise to film comedy fame, his manic scramble to stay at the top, and his painful decline by the late 20s, while addressing many assumptions made about his work and underrated comic style. While it's certainly true that most of his shorts can only dream of being as masterful as, say, Keaton's, the best of them are brimful of energy and some of silent comedy's most impressive, outlandish stunts (usually performed by stuntmen, but I'd say that's besides the point). And Semon certainly slaved for his success: in one two-year period he allowed himself only a single vacation of two whole days. We also get some honest insights on Semon as a prickly workaholic who was obsessed with perfectionism. You often hear that in real life comedians can be very different from their film personas that was definitely true in Semon's case. One former employee said that you didn't work WITH Larry, you worked FOR Larry. He may have been generally liked and respected by his fellow Hollywood folk, but a happy-go-lucky soul he was not. (The unfortunate history of Semon's dealings with his first wife and his daughter certainly backs up this up.) And yes, Sassen addresses those rumors that have surrounded Semon's death. In short, it's been speculated that he might've faked his own demise in order to escape his ruined career and enormous debts. Let's just say that there are sound reasons to believe that he met his maker back in 1928. There's few things I, as a silent comedy fan, find more exciting than getting to know a more obscure comedian. Books like this remind us just how huge and multi-faceted the world of silent comedy world can be. I would recommend "Larry Semon, Daredevil Comedian of the Silent Screen" to anyone who enjoys exploring that world in all its detail. (It will certainly make you want to start digging through YouTube for as many Larry shorts as possible!)

Prior to his premature death from tuberculosis in 1928, Larry Semon was one of the most popular comics on the silent screen. For a time he rivaled comedy legends Charlie Chaplin, Harold Lloyd and Buster Keaton for fame and fortune. The son of magician Professor Zera the Great, Semon participated in many of his father's early performances. A talented youth, he worked as an illustrator and cartoonist before going into motion pictures with the Vitagraph Company. He soon became a Hollywood legend, responsible for his own stories, gags, acting and direction. The result of 30 years of research, this long overdue biography recognizes one of Hollywood's most overlooked auteurs. The author draws on numerous articles and contacts with Semon's family and friends, and screens many films previously

believed to be lost.

"Definitive...very highly recommended." --Examiner  
About the Author Claudia Sassen is a cartoonist and linguist by profession, currently associated with the Technical University of Dortmund, Germany. Her cartoons have appeared in calendars and in a variety of newspapers and magazines. She lives in Duisburg, Germany.