

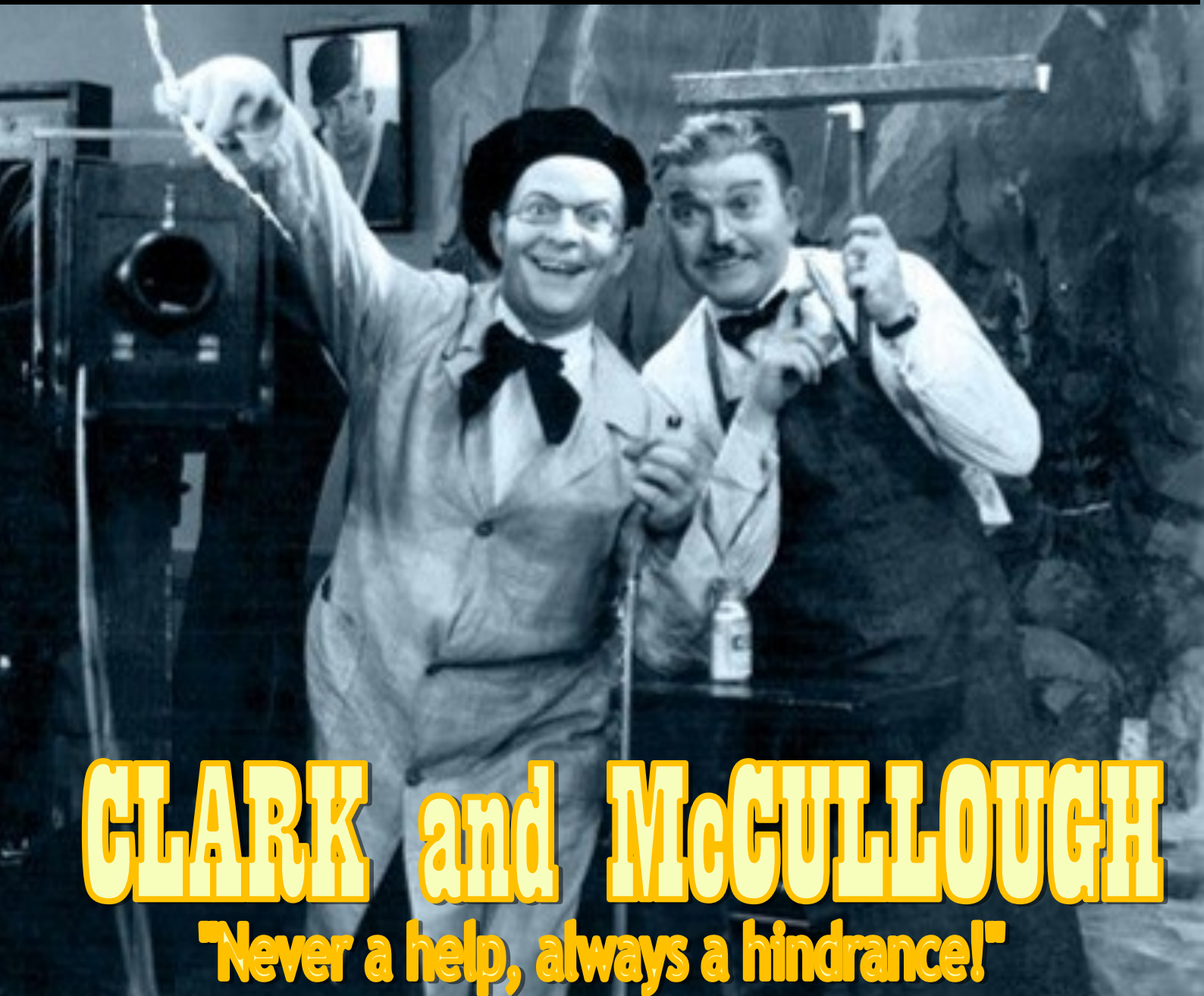


# MOVIE NIGHT



#8

silent comedy. slapstick, music hall.



## CLARK and McCULLOUGH

"Never a help, always a hindrance!"

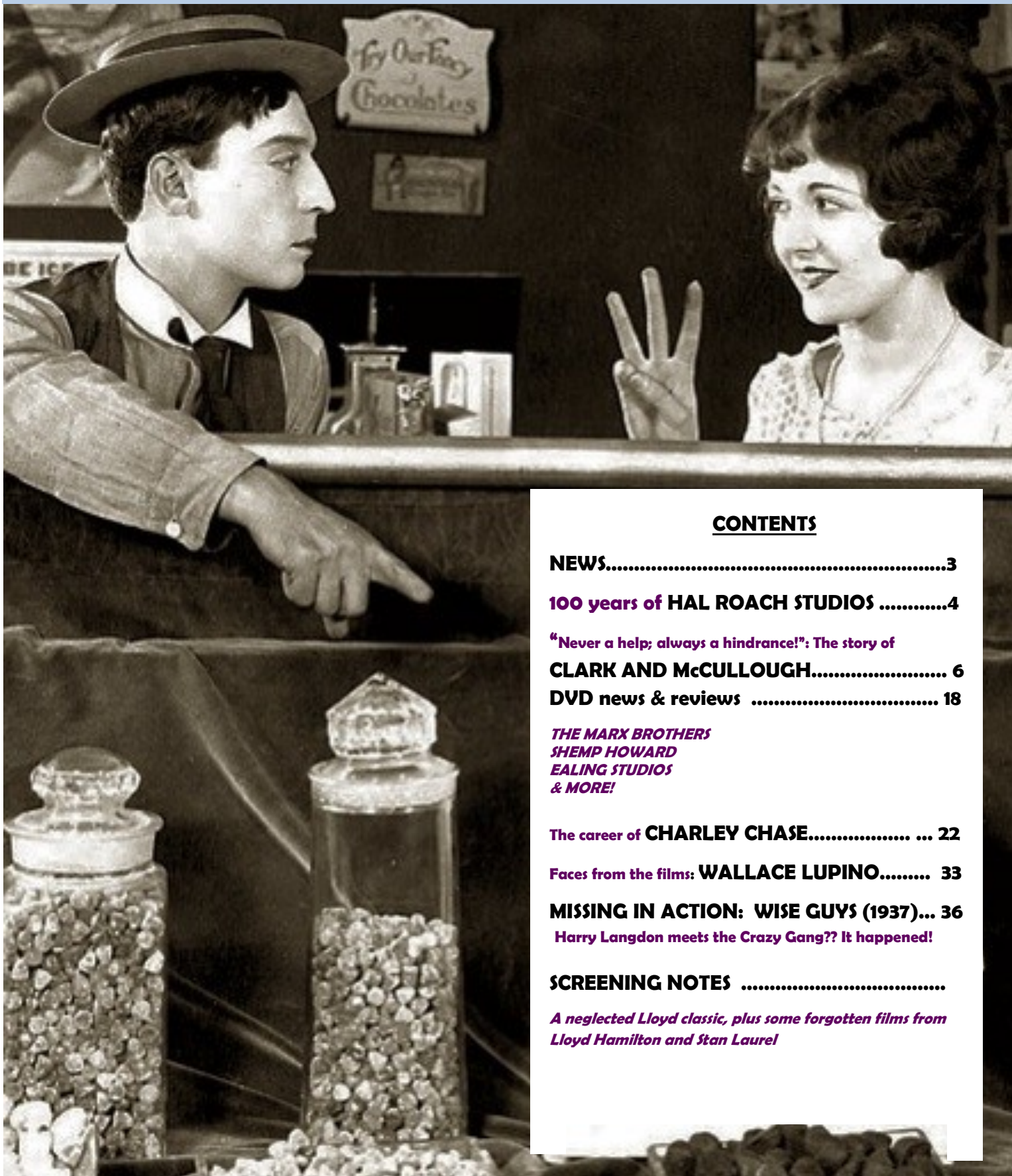
also  
featuring



Many thanks to all those who have sent in articles, reviews and feedback; it really is appreciated!

I'm aware this issue has taken quite a long time to reach you all; I hope it's worth the wait! I'm cracking on with preparing issue 9 already, so hopefully less of a wait next time! As always, article submissions are always welcomed warmly. The more contributions, the quicker the next issue will be ready! Get in touch at [movienightmag@gmail.com](mailto:movienightmag@gmail.com)

Thanks and Happy Reading!



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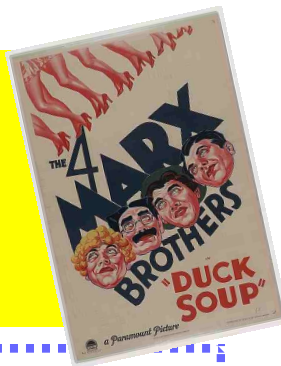
Front cover: Clark and McCullough in 'ALIBI BYE BYE' (1935)

Above: Buster Keaton in 'SHERLOCK JR' (1924)

NEWS

## MARX BROTHERS REISSUED IN UK

The BFI held a Marx Brothers retrospective during the month of February. BFI South Bank screened all 13 of their full length films, and 'DUCK SOUP' saw nationwide re-release throughout March.



MOVIE  
NIGHT  
IN  
PRINT!



I've had requests from several people to receive a printed version of 'MOVIE NIGHT'. Originally, I decided on making an all-digital publication to ensure that it could be free, and to get over the hurdles of starting a printed publication. However, I can fully understand a preference for printed versions.

The free online version will continue as before, but I've decided to offer a printed version to subscribers who would like it. I do this as a hobby and I'm not out to make a big profit, but I do need to a charge for printed editions to cover all the ink used as well as postage. For U.K. subscribers, a cost of

£5.50 will get you a printed issue of Movie Night sent to your doorstep, or if you'd like to pay in advance for the next 3 issues, this would be £15. For US subscribers, the cost with international shipping equates to about \$10 per issue. Alternatively, if you think you might have some rarity for my film collection that I'd be interested in, I'm quite happy to negotiate on that!

The magazines will initially just be printed by me, but if there is enough interest I could look into having them professionally printed. I can also offer printed back issues if required.

If you are interested in the printed version, do please drop me a line and we can sort something out. Please do also feel free to pass this on to anyone you know without computers who might be interested.

### THE RETURN OF LAUREL & HARDY



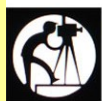
Webmaster of the Laurel and Hardy Forum, Ross Owen is planning UK-wide screenings of L & H films to coincide with Stan Laurel's 125th Birthday.

Find out more at  
[www.laurelandhardyroadshow.co.uk](http://www.laurelandhardyroadshow.co.uk)

### NEW BOOKS

Some book news for Keatonians: Just published is 'BUSTER KEATON'S CREW', by Lisle Foote. This book rounds up information on not just familiar names like Clyde Bruckman or Eddie Cline, but the many other technicians and gagmen who worked behind the scenes. While Keaton was of course the guiding light behind the films' success, they were collaborative efforts, and the input of these many talented craftsmen helped to make the films what they are. A valuable addition to the Keaton Library, to be reviewed in a future issue.

Also in preparation by author Ed Watz is a book devoted to Keaton's sound work, due to be published later this year.



THE CINEMA MUSEUM

London's Cinema Museum continues to provide an eclectic and entertaining programme of events. Housed in a surviving wing of the Kennington workhouse in which Charlie Chaplin once found himself, the museum is devoted to the history of cinema showmanship. It also exhibits films, documentaries and Q & A sessions itself. These often have a Chaplin connection, and of particular interest to readers is 'The Kennington Bioscope', a regular silent film event. The museum also hosts quarterly meetings of The Blinking Buzzards, Buster Keaton's U.K. appreciation society. For more details of events, check out [www.cinemamuseum.org.uk](http://www.cinemamuseum.org.uk)

# 100 YEARS OF HAL ROACH STUDIOS

The early part of 2014 saw much fanfare over the centenary of Chaplin's celluloid debut.. 1914, however, was a boom time for the silent comedy industry, and many of its future icons also debuted around this time. Amongst those breaking into the industry around this time was Hal Roach. Previously having worked as an extra, he had begun to find work as a director for Essanay, but dreamed of starting his own company. An inheritance enabled him to achieve this, and in 1914 he began producing his first comedy. Reconnecting with fellow extra Harold Lloyd, he made 'Just Nuts'. After a slow start, he struck a deal with Pathé, and the rest was history!

The Harold Lloyd films were, of course, just the beginning. As Snub Pollard, Our Gang, Charley Chase, Laurel and Hardy, Thelma Todd and many more followed, the Roach studios created a legacy of laughter to equal (and some would say surpass) Chaplin's.

The Roach studios' Centenary has been celebrated with a showing of films on TCM, and with an exhibition at The Hollywood Museum. Full of rare treasures from throughout the studios' history, the exhibit ran through the summer. Below are some of the featured exhibits...



Above : One of the highlights was seeing real outfits worn by Laurel and Hardy. In the case are two of the iconic fezzes from 'SONS OF THE DESERT'. The suits, though genuine, aren't from the Roach studio. They are actually from the Fox era; on the left are the suits the boys wore in 'THE DANCING MASTERS', and on the right are their overcoats from 'JITTERBUGS'.



Harold Lloyd's gloves were specially designed to contain a prosthetic finger and thumb, replacing those he lost in the 1919 bomb blast. When concealed with make up, the device was hard to notice. Lloyd's accompanying make up kit was also part of the exhibit.

Right: The beautiful cartoon drawings of the Roach three sheet posters are a lost art. An array of beautiful originals advertising Roach films were on display in the exhibit, including this one for 'HIGH GEAR', one of The Boy Friends films, and Langdon's 'THE FIGHTING PARSON' (1930)

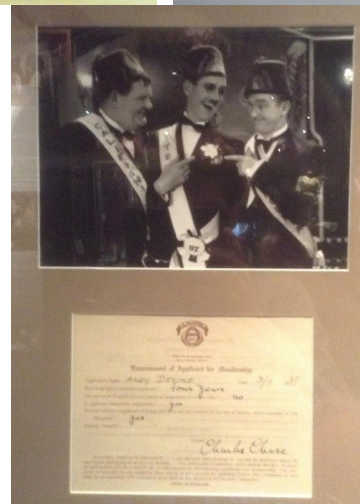
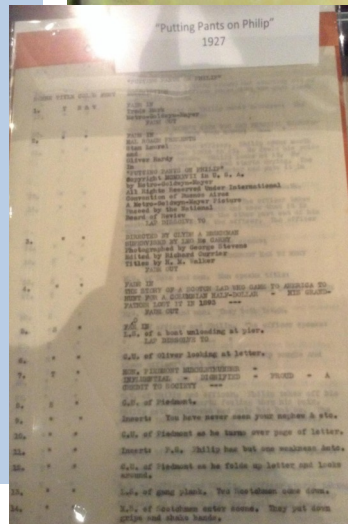


Middle right:

Scripts for Laurel and Hardy's 'SCRAM' and 'PUTTING PANTS ON PHILIP' were also on display. That such flimsy, light-weight documents could be transformed into comedy classics speaks volumes for the filmmakers' talent, ingenuity and improvisational skills.

It was nice to see Charley Chase represented, as well as the more well-known Roach stars. Documents signed by Chase were on show.

On the far right, Marvin Hatley's cornet, used when playing in his 'Happy Go lucky Trio' at the Roach studios.



Below left:

As part of Laurel and Hardy's appearance on 'THIS IS YOUR LIFE' in 1954, Hal Roach named his studio's swimming pool in their honour. The plaque from the dedication reads, "so named because these two comedians spent more time in these waters than any others". The colour photograph is from the dedication ceremony.



Set against a backdrop of more rare stills and posters was this mock up of a scene from Our Gang's 'THE AWFUL TOOTH' (1938). The red and white item is a quilt made for the gang's schoolteacher.



# CLARK and McCULLOUGH

"NEVER A HELP...  
ALWAYS A HINDERANCE!"



Clark and McCullough were a mistral wind whirling through the world of two reel comedy in the 1930s. Words like 'madcap', 'surreal' and 'zany' are often bandied about when describing them. However, such words have become platitudinous clichés to describe anything vaguely unconventional, and scarcely do justice to their fresh and fiery comic approach. For a more accurate impression, perhaps nothing sums up their comedy better than their appearance. Clad in ill-fitting, mothball-stuffed overcoats, they accessorised with painted-on glasses and crepe hair moustaches, resembling nothing so much as a couple of circus clowns who'd bluffed their way to college. This wasn't actually that far from the truth! One-time circus performers, they mixed visual humour and slapstick chaos with the erudite wit and lack of conformity of college humour. They were misfits, but they didn't care. In fact, their mad, leering grins made it clear that they loved it!

If they are mentioned at all today, it is usually only in comparison to The Marx Brothers. It's a valid comparison, both visually (Clark's painted on glasses and cigar) and stylistically (anti-authoritarian mayhem). Yet, it does Bobby Clark and Paul McCullough a disservice to think of them as a watered-down version of the Marxes. Vaudeville and burlesque begat legions of comedy teams ploughing similar furrows of wild, racy, high-pressure humour. The Marxes were the most successful of these, yes, but far from the only ones. It is important to realise that Clark and McCullough were not Marx imitators per se, rather relatives from another branch of the same, richly fruiting comedic vine. What one can say with certainty is that they were the leaders of this type of comedy in the two-reel format. Today, Clark and McCullough's lasting legacy is a 5-year run of two-reelers for RKO between 1930 and 1933. Actually though, these came right at the end of the team's career, and they themselves thought of them as only a minor addition to their body of work. Accordingly, before we get to those films, we need to go way, way back...

Boyhood friends, Bobby Clark (born 1888) and Paul McCullough (born 1883), met through a shared love of dancing, circus and acrobatics. They learned to clog dance and tumble together, developing a mute act of intricate pratfalls involving chairs and tables. They would maintain this act for several years before gradually adding dialogue. For an act that would later flourish with verbal humour, this is at first surprising! Actually though, this foundation in body control and movement helped them to transfer a fluidity and motion to their crosstalk acts. While many such acts stood painfully still, Clark and McCullough would literally run all over stage or movie sets while delivering their lines.

Another surprise for those familiar with the team is that Paul McCullough was initially the dominant force in the act. As the team developed, these roles did a complete 180 degree switch. As the team realised that there was "no future in acrobatics," they began to add in comedy bits, and small bits of humorous speech. This was at the instigation of Bobby Clark, who began adding little comic introductions to their acrobatics and stunts, such as "I will now perform an imitation of a Bulgarian Weasel giving his mating call". As his comic asides expanded, Bobby Clark developed into the driving force behind the team, ultimately becoming a superb rapid-fire patter comedian never lost for words. Quite a journey from the young, tumbling mute! Clark's development as a comedian would be at the expense of McCullough, however, whose role would gradually regress over the years to be almost minimal by the mid-30s.

The team's early career went on to include work in circuses before breaking into burlesque and vaudeville. By the mid-20s, they had settled on the dynamic that would earn their biggest success, and eventually be captured on film. This is how we remember them today. Still retaining elements of their early clownish makeup in the cartoonish outfits and makeup they chose, they had refined their image into a portrait of what Clark himself called 'shabby-genteel dignity'. In an age before the terms 'vintage' and 'retro' came to glorify old clothing, they were kings of the thrift-store, carefully cherry-picking items to build up their characters.



McCullough took great pride in the tattered old carnival barker suit he owned, which he had bought from an undertaker nursing a fantastically inappropriate penchant for loud suits.

Both outfits had the flamboyance of smart-aleck college students, in Clark's porkpie hat and overcoat, and McCullough's extravagant furs. Yet, the threadbare, outdated style of the clothes revealed them as the outcasts they were. As the saying goes, "clothes make the man", and it is likely that these costumes helped to inspire their eventual characters. Certainly, they are perfect fit for the non-conformist, outcast interlopers that the characters developed into.

Clark expanded on this in a 1932 interview:

**"We had a choice to play well-to-do characters or tramps. Now, a tramp has no dignity but false dignity is one of the best comic themes. So, instead of playing two down-and-outs, we shifted into playing two fellows on the way down, but still putting up a bluff."**

Their bluff presented itself through making wisecracks and causing pandemonium. In character, Bobby Clark is a leering vaudeville dynamo, loping hither and thither across the stage. Like most such comedians, he smokes a cigar, cracks wise and chases women. His unique gimmick is the pair of eyeglasses painted on his face. Some have seen this as a pale imitation of Groucho Marx's moustache; I'd argue it actually works even better as a character device, a fraudulent reversal of Harold Lloyd's adoption of glasses. Lloyd's glasses suggested a polite bookishness; McCullough's a sly frat-boy disregard for convention. Lloyd's glasses were without lenses, too, but added sympathy to his character. With Clark, however, the deception is blatant; he might be using the sign of respectability to help him fraudulently present intelligence, but he isn't going to waste time doing it convincingly. Likely, he doesn't care. Just dare to call him on it, go on, I dare you!

The real Bobby Clark was actually a very quiet, intelligent man, who wrote much of his own material. In another parallel to Groucho Marx, he was very well-read (In the 1940s, he appeared in Molière comedies and even lectured on Restoration Comedy). This is reflected in his witty, meticulously worded dialogue, often rich in verbose asides and mock-theatrical delivery:

**"Our motto is, 'Omnia Cafeteria Rex: we eat all we can carry!'"**

**(whilst dangling high above the street) "My kingdom for a sidewalk!"**

**"Ahh, what is home without a pig?!"**

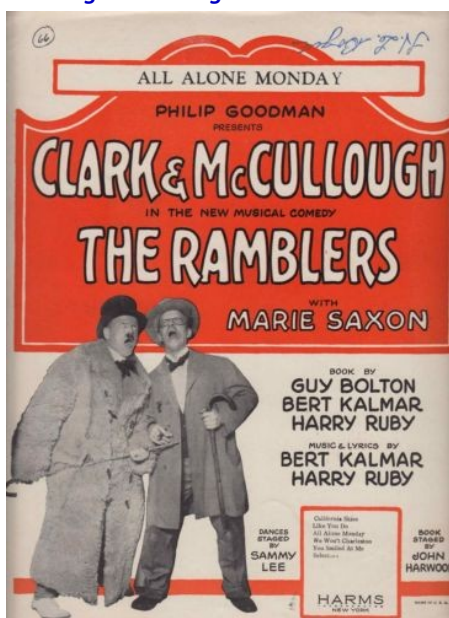
McCullough, by contrast, keeps his thoughts to himself. Bowler-hatted and toothbrush-moustached, he goes along with Clark's schemes, often not adding much to the dialogue. He is undoubtedly thinking, though... and usually about food. In *THE ICEMAN'S BALL*, he spends most of the film in search of pies, his minimal dialogue distractedly running to the pastries he is devouring. While not always given much to do in the films, he is definitely more than just a straight man, and watching him closely can often be rewarding. At times, for instance, he has a Harpoesque tendency for background mayhem, mimicking other character's expressions or performing some quiet bit of business that almost goes unnoticed. Splashed with water, he will go into a mime of swimming, for instance. One of his best scenes comes in 'EVERYTHING'S DUCKY', where he shoves anything he can find, including Clark's hat, into a mincer, throughout the background of a whole scene.

As a team, Clark and McCullough have been criticized for the uneven balance of material. Often, the question is asked of why Clark didn't simply fly solo if he was



**Above: 3 views of Clark & McCullough: in their circus clown getup, in their more famous outfits, and looking unusually stern out of character.**

**Below: publicity for 'THE RAMBLERS', the team's greatest stage success.**



taking the lion's share of material. The usual reason given is loyalty to his old friend, but I do think it runs deeper than this. Comedically, a cartoonish outcast like Bobby Clark cannot exist on his own; he would just look foolish trying to cause mayhem without assistance, and would quickly be shot down. A 'naughty boy' type like Clark needs spurring on, feeding on the laughter and delight of the other less daring members of his gang. McCullough's omnipresent cackle in the face of their antics is the embodiment of this. With apologies to Bobby and Paul, another parallel to the Marx Brothers: In 'GROUCHO, HARPO, CHICO AND SOMETIMES ZEPPÖ', Joe Adamson comments that Chico, while being a fairly limited comedian, is vital as the middle ground between Groucho and Harpo. McCullough exerts a similar 'buffer' effect between Clark and the rest of the world; he makes Clark's schemes more forceful, and somehow more purposeful. And, the presence of a co-conspirator gives Clark's asides a reason to exist, rather than just being pointless words tossed into the empty air. McCullough himself offered a resigned metaphor for his limited participation:

**"Now, did you ever see the catcher walk out and tell the pitcher, 'You get back behind the plate, I'm going to pitch awhile?'"**  
**Well, Clark's the pitcher and I'm the catcher. That's why he has the jokes, or as we say, he has the answers and I have the questions."**

As their act developed into its anarchic format, it thrived. Vaudeville and Burlesque were ideal conditions for the development of such manic, anti authority humour. Just as working class nickelodeon audiences fuelled the puncturing of dignity in silent comedy, so did the similar demographic populating vaudeville houses. Material had to be crammed into short slots on the bill, and it was necessary to make an impression. The result was an act that relished in bringing chaos to convention. Typically, Bobby and Paul would have some encounter with a dignified type, or a classy occasion, and bring it down. This they would accomplish not just with words, but also with pantomime and slapstick. Their circus background played an important role in one of their key sketches, as Clark persuades McCullough to dress in a lion skin so he can wow the audience with a lion-taming act. Of course, the real lion appears, and Clark carries on unaware of the switch, offering encouragement and asides to the lion until McCullough appears at the finale and he realises what has happened.

The team progressed to bigtime vaudeville circuits, but their participation in the performers' 'Great White Strike' of 1919 saw them blacklisted from the major circuits. They turned to burlesque, whose bawdy revues proved an even better home for them. Finding success in a series of Jean Bedini's revues, such as 'THE MUSIC BOX REVIEW' they eventually found their way to Broadway. Their first Broadway show, 'THE RAMBLERS' was a smash, and ensured their place at the top table of stage comedians.



'THE RAMBLERS' would be followed by 'STRIKE UP THE BAND' and a series of other successful shows that coincided with the advent of sound films. Naturally, in the race to scoop up eligible stage talent, the movies came knocking on Clark & McCullough's dressing room doors. In signing with Fox, one of the first studios equipped for sound, they actually had the jump on many other talents, including the Marx Brothers or Wheeler and Woolsey, in entering films.

The Fox contract was initially for shorts, though these would prove to be fluid in length. The first effort, 'CLARK AND MCCULLOUGH in THE INTERVIEW', was a mere one reel in length, though subsequent entries would run to four or five reels, almost feature length.

Unfortunately, this debut is currently unavailable for viewing. Worse still, most of their other Fox shorts share the same fate. 'WALTZING AROUND', a boxing comedy, is one of the few to survive, but has only received scattered screenings at film festivals.

While we cannot see them, it is clear from reviews, synopses and stills that these shorts present their comic modus operandi in full flower. Posing as 'THE DIPLOMATS' gave the team ample opportunities to puncture high society dignity. 'THE BATH BETWEEN' focused, like a number of their later shorts, on high-octane bedroom farce.





Incongruity of setting plays a large role in both 'IN HOLLAND' and 'BELLE OF SAMOA'. The former sees them ruining a farmer's tulip crop and heading off on a mission for the Swiss Edelweiss as compensation. BELLE OF SAMOA, recently re-discovered although still elusive, was a musical featurette, co-starring Lois Moran, and 'Filoi and her 60 Samoan dancers'. The risqué humour and dances were noted with raised eyebrows even before the rigorous Production code was implemented. It seems that these pre-code Fox films especially indulged the ribald side of Clark and McCullough's humour.

The Fox films featured lots of talent on and behind the screen. As well as Clark and McCullough, Anita Garvin turned up in support, and veteran comedy director Norman Taurog helmed several of the entries. Having worked with Lloyd Hamilton, Lupino Lane and, especially, Larry Semon, his anything-goes, gagged up style was probably a good match for the team. Accordingly, the films received positive reviews.

Fox would no doubt have liked to have continued the series, or better yet, put the team in features. Successful Broadway shows like The Marx Brothers' 'COCOANUTS' or Wheeler and Woolsey's 'RIO RITA' were beginning to be filmed wholesale, and one would have expected Clark and McCullough to have followed with a filmic treatment of 'THE RAMBLERS'. However, it seems they were no fans of movie production. Bobby Clark's highly mobile performances must have been difficult to rein in for static early talkie set-ups, something that surely displeased him. Similarly, the ad-libbing madness of the team's Broadway shows would have been out. In some of the films, Clark's painted-on glasses were even replaced with *real* ones, the ultimate sacrilege!

Clark and McCullough opted to return to the format that they felt suited them best. 'THE RAMBLERS' would eventually be filmed, but starring Wheeler and Woolsey in place of its original stars. This version would be released as 'THE CUCKOOS' in 1930.

Back on Broadway, Clark and McCullough ploughed into 'STRIKE UP THE BAND', with music by George Gershwin. In fact, some tantalising footage exists showing the pair rehearsing and bantering with the composer, which as of this writing can be seen on YouTube. 'STRIKE UP THE BAND' continued their eminence on the Great White Way, but in the summer of 1930 they made a tentative return to film. Like other performers, they realised that films could provide a nice supplementary income, especially if filmed during the Summer months when Broadway shows traditionally closed. Advances in sound film production also meant that their lively performances could now be better accommodated. RKO-Radio pictures enticed them to make a short subject as part of their 'BROADWAY HEADLINERS' series\*. Filmed in May of 1930, 'A PEEP IN THE DEEP' proved to be the start of a fruitful relationship with the company. Bluffing their way on board a ship, the pair manage to pass themselves off as the Captain and his assistant. They enjoy the privileges that this entails, but find themselves trapped and forced to sail the craft. Muddling through, they become hopelessly lost, but somehow make it back to the dock. All ends happily when it turns out they have set a new record for circumnavigating the world!

'A PEEP IN THE DEEP' was a big success for all concerned. Louis Brock at RKO offered Clark and McCullough a series of their own, to be filmed quickly during their breaks in performing. Having enjoyed their second attempt at films a lot more, the duo agreed to the offer. At the time, signing for a series of shorts when many Broadway stars were headlining in features must have seemed like a lesser move. However, Clark and McCullough had always trodden their own path in both humour and career moves, and in the long-term this has actually proved the better decision. Their short comedies stand up far better than the dragged out, dated features of many other Broadway stars. The financial side of things wasn't too bad, either. Anthony Slide's Vaudeville Encyclopedia reports that the duo received \$7,500 between them for each film, a cut above the \$2,500 of other RKO stars like Edgar Kennedy.

RKO at this time was also an excellent place to be making comedies. The short subjects made at the studios in the early '30s were of a very high quality yet remain a very under-rated group. They were well filmed, with good sets and some excellent directors. One director who would have a successful relationship with Clark and McCullough was Mark Sandrich, future director of the Fred Astaire-Ginger Rogers 'TOP HAT'. Sandrich shared C & McC's penchant for offbeat gags and wild humour, and helmed some of their best shorts. In addition to talent behind the scenes, there was a reserve of excellent supporting cast members to draw from. In fact, many of these players are familiar from the Hal Roach shorts: James Finlayson, James C Morton, Charlie Hall, Max Davidson, Harry Bowen, Eddie Dunn and Constance Bergen all turn up here and there. As Roach wielded economy cuts and moved further into features, these stalwart players increasingly found a haven at RKO. (Although he never appeared with C & McC, a similar Roach refugee, Edgar Kennedy, became a star in his own series there following his dismissal by HRS. George Stevens would also make the move, becoming Kennedy's director.). The great supporting players didn't just roll in from Roach, either. They came in droves from Sennett, from Educational, and elsewhere; thus Harry Gribbon, Bud Jamison, Vernon Dent, Tom Kennedy, Monty Collins and others added their verve and skill to make the films even more enjoyable.\*\*

*\*They were in good company; amongst the other films in this series was W.C. Fields' 'THE GOLF SPECIALIST'.*

*\*\*Many of these players later joined the shorts department at Columbia, enlivening films of The Three Stooges and others.*



*A screenshot from the live action titles used in many of the team's short films.*

The Clark and McCullough films, however, were much more edgy and anarchic than the Roach films. Nonetheless, the supporting cast found some fine opportunities, adapting to the stylistic change nicely. Finlayson, in particular, has some of his finest moments opposite the pair, his pop-eyed incredulity and short fuse perfect matches for the comic anarchy they created. The most effective Clark & McCullough vehicles saw the pair with a strong nemesis, preferably someone that needed taking down a peg or two. This would give full reign to their naughty boy antics, and keep the audience on their side to prevent them seeming a little *too* obnoxious. Just like in Laurel and Hardy's world, the comically blustering villains were not too real a threat to puncture the cartoon bubble world in which their adventures unfurled, but unpleasant enough to make us root for our antiheroes.

James Finlayson was the embodiment of this kind of villainy, and found a place in the series from the start. He is in fine form in 'FALSE ROOMERS', the earliest of the RKO shorts currently available for viewing. As a deaf landlord with strict rules on "Nooooo cookin'!" in his boarding house, he of course meets his match in Bobby and Paul, who decide to pop corn in their room for the sheer hell of it. Throw in some bedroom farce moments with Eddie Dunn and his wife, and a healthy dose of random (the duo making their escape from the house in a midget car kept in an upstairs room), and you have a blueprint for their future entries in the RKO series. If 'FALSE ROOMERS' occasionally seems a little flat, it is because the studio had yet to master how to give full reign to the duo's madness.

They learned quickly, however, the following year's JITTERS THE BUTLER being one of the best Clark and McCullough shorts. As street cleaners who are more interested in playing with firecrackers than sweeping up, they arouse the ire of Fin, who is head of street cleaners and looking to advance himself politically. After setting off firecrackers under his car, they are discharged, and turn their sweeper's white suits into summer outfits with the simple addition of Panama hats and canes. Strolling down the street, they are knocked over by Finlayson's wife (Dorothy Granger). Fearful of the bad publicity for her husband's campaign, she takes them home, where they proceed to offend guests and bring down the proceedings.

They also engage in a battle of wits with Jitters, Fin's prim and proper valet (Robert Greig, best known from a similar role in the Marxes' 'ANIMAL CRACKERS'). Told off by Granger, Jitters is told to apologise and do the guests' bidding. Always careful to follow orders, Jitters becomes the picture of obsequiousness. When Clark kicks him in the rear, he responds with polite enjoyment: "Thank you Sir, I *did* enjoy that". This becomes a running gag, to the point where he keeps interrupting Clark to ask for "just one more kick". Clark, for his part, is happy to oblige but worries that his performance is becoming substandard: "I feel like I rushed that last one a little..." This kind of silly whimsy, with just a hint of satirical or risqué undertones, was a trademark of the team.

THE ICEMAN'S BALL, also from 1932, features the boys battling Fin again. This time, he is the Police Commissioner, who strikes cops Vernon Dent and Walter Brennan off when they have their car and uniforms stolen. Guess who stole them? The boys are at their most anarchic, stealing the car so that they can cruise around and crash the parties they are supposed to be breaking up as policemen! (The debauched storyline of 'THE ICEMAN'S BALL' would never have been allowed just a couple of years later, after the 1934 Production Code was implemented.) It's important to note, though, that even when playing such antiheroes, with no regard for the other characters in the films, or contemporary morality, Clark and McCullough always remain likeable in their films. This is mainly through their whimsical, 'all-in-fun' attitude to the proceedings, which works pretty much the same as for the Marxes. The whimsy of the kicking scenes or pie throwing antics in these two films lightens the tone of what would otherwise be unnecessarily savage slapstick. This lets them get away with all kinds of innuendo, physical violence and destruction and pass it off successfully as comedy.

Both 'JITTERS THE BUTLER' and 'THE ICEMAN'S BALL' are archetypal of one kind of Clark and McCullough film, which sees them crashing some form of polite society and causing havoc. Many of the films took this approach, but some of the best have them *already* in society, or a position of dubious authority, bringing the system down from within.

'KICKING THE CROWN AROUND' goes somewhat towards this, with the boys working on the inside from the beginning, as a couple of detectives working by royal appointment. It's also an uproarious spoof of prohibition (one of the rare times that the team's films focus their satire on a specific target, rather than more broad condemnation of authority or professions). In a mythical kingdom ruled



Lobby card for 'ODOR IN THE COURT', generally considered Clark and McCullough's best film.

by King Ferdinand Munier, there is a problem: Salami is being smuggled, despite a national sausage ban. The boys cause havoc on their mission to find the culprits, bouncing in bed with the king and tackling villainous monk Disputin. It turns out that Disputin is in league with the queen, who is the head of the Salami Ring. The boys track down the operation to a local tavern, where they discover the secret stashed mountain of sausages. Clark's conclusion? "What a load of Baloney!"

ODOR IN THE COURT (1934) is, justly, the most celebrated of all the team's films. Again, as dubious lawyers, they have a position of authority at the film's outset, and use it to extend their mania outwards. Right from the start, they are presented as crooked shysters who don't really give a damn about their clients or anyone else. They don't care, and neither do we, as the film is so fast and funny. We first meet them trying to summon up business on a street corner, handing out flyers while shouting a range of slogans:

"Cut-rate lawyers: no down payments!"

"Blackstone and Blodgett: we handle anything legal or nearly legal!"

"We'll protect your rights until your last penny is gone!"

Gruff boxer Tom Kennedy passes by, and is nearly hit by a car. Blackstone and Blodgett are disappointed to find that he is unhurt, but decide to make a damage case anyway, ripping up his brand new suit and covering him with garbage with great relish. On finding out Kennedy didn't see the car's number plate, they make a swift exit, laughing gleefully.

Turns out that Kennedy is in league with slimy lawyer Thackeray D Ward (Jack Rice) on a racket to squeeze an innocent husband out of his alimony. The husband decides he needs a lawyer to protect his money, and heads to Blackstone and Blodgett's offices. He finds them pitching horseshoes in their office, the furniture smashed up and the walls full of holes. There, he persuades them to take his case, and is knocked out by a horseshoe for his trouble.

The boys' defence is initially based on one strategy: causing chaos. This they accomplish with aplomb, arriving in court amidst a full marching band and peanut vendors, in a brilliantly satirical comment on the spectator circus surrounding high profile trials. Clark proceeds to make a mockery of the court, with a constant series of quips, asking the orchestra to play chords at dramatic moments and by shouting "I OBJECT!" at every possible juncture. After having been warned not to object anymore, he shouts "I don't object! It's a lie, but I don't object!". Clark never had better material than in this film, the gags coming thick and fast, with not a clunker among them. McCullough, meanwhile, entertains himself cracking nuts under Ward's thumping fist, pouring a drink in Clark's school bell, and taking notes with a giant pencil.

The judge awards alimony of \$25,000 dollars that the boys' client must pay, causing Clark to exclaim, "You forgot to mention the National Debt! My client didn't have a wedding, he had a war!". Luckily, the boys had a backup plan, 'Formula 27'; they have framed Ward in a compromising photograph with their female assistant. In light of this 'new evidence', Ward reconsiders his position and withdraws his request for any alimony. The boys leave the court victoriously with their marching band behind them, until they run into Kennedy again. He chases after them, Clark still shouting "I object!" as the film fades out.



'ODOR IN THE COURT' is fast and furious, without a wasted moment. Both Clark and, yes, McCullough, are on top form with excellent material. Best of all, their madness is allowed to completely take over, while still telling an effective story. This is their world, and while other characters might object, there is nothing they can do. Bobby and Paul are in control, triumphing not by hard graft but by being *almost* as conniving and dishonest as their opponents. Yet, they do it with such glee and enjoyment, we can't help but root for them. As antiheroes in films like this, they reveal themselves as even more anti-authoritarian and free-spirited than the Marx Brothers; MGM could never have brushed them up into something like 'A NIGHT AT THE OPERA'.



Truth be told, it was rare that they could keep the standard this high, in terms of both material and plot construction. However, while few of the shorts would reach the high standard of 'ODOR IN THE COURT', they remained almost uniformly entertaining, and an interesting mixture of styles. As well as the society settings and satires of professions, they also included a healthy dose of situation comedy, bedroom farce and risqué

humour.

THE GAY NIGHTIES sees the team bringing down political campaigns, but finds them doing so through a riotous hotel bedroom sequence. As Hives and Blodgett, the team are political advisors in a race between two candidates. Not that they offer much useful advice to their candidate, preferring instead to frame his libidinous rival (Finlayson again) in a hotel room with a woman. Unfortunately, as no woman is around, the best they can do is McCullough in a Britannia costume, complete with trident and his usual toothbrush moustache! This clearly won't do, so their candidate's wife steps in to get some alone time with Fin. Clark finds himself distracted by a sleepwalking countess, trying to engineer her to sleep in his bed. The Countess's somnambulist dithering, coupled with the interventions of a confused hotel guest and the suspicious hotel detective (Monte Collins) see the corridors and rooms becoming a constant merry-go-round of salacious activity. Ultimately, Fin is framed, but Clark's desires go unfulfilled, as he finds himself in bed with McCullough at the film's close. He turns over and disgustedly goes to sleep.

Though it isn't one of the team's best constructed shorts, shifting direction a couple of times with random events as plot fulcrums, 'THE GAY NIGHTIES' does boast tremendous energy, a barrage of gags and a sterling supporting cast. These assets would not always prove enough to cover for lack of inspiration, but this short flies by as an invigorating two reels of quirky, racy comedy.

THE DRUGGIST'S DILEMMA' features Fin in a farce again, as the eponymous character. He hires Bobby and Paul to work in his drug-store, where their casual attitude to shaking malted milks make waterproof outfits a necessity. They also entertain themselves making ice cream sundaes on the counter surface ("We're a little shy of saucers today!"). A compulsive gambler, Fin disappears off to a poker game, and loses everything, including his pants. He phones the store with the number of his hotel room so they can bring him replacements before his harridan wife finds out. Unfortunately, McCullough has written the number on the back of a chest plaster which Clark has since sold to a wire-walking acrobat... Things move away from farce to surrealistic thrill comedy as the pair end up trailing the wire-walker inside a pantomime horse costume, high above the city streets.

These random plot points are a common feature in the team's shorts. Sometimes, however, they did away with all semblance of rational plot or setup, and just let the random elements throw freely from the very beginning. IN A PIG'S EYE is probably the best of these films. It starts with the boys as Crotch and Blodgett, tailors, who have two main interests: making waffles, and their pet pig, Ajax. When a Scotsman, the Laird of Loch Looie, visits them, they steal his kilt for the hell of it, and hightail it with Ajax to the dinner party he was invited to. They cause the usual chaos and offence at the dinner party, highlighted by an exchange between Clark and a lady guest:



CLARK: Meet Ajax!

GUEST: He's cute!

CLARK: But not like *you!*

(Clark shared with Groucho an ability to pass off devastatingly backhanded compliments).

The dinner party is given by inventor Bud Jamison, who has invented the Destructo explosive, which will explode at the slightest vibration. He has concealed it, as you would, inside a peppermint wafer... Guess what Ajax's favourite food happens to be? After eating it, Ajax gets indigestion and runs round and round in circles squealing as everyone else cowers. Of course, things end in an explosion, and as the smoke clears, Ajax is playing the bagpipes!



It's almost impossible not to smile at the sheer silliness of a film like this. Like 'ODOR IN THE COURT', 'IN A PIG'S EYE' makes the most of every frame of film. It was, however, dangerous to assume that randomness and chaos could cover when the comedy content wasn't up to snuff. Given the rushed production of the films, the average rate of success was impressively high, but from time to time, the films fell into this trap. FITS IN A FIDDLE is maybe the worst example. In this yarn of the team crashing a radio station orchestra, the material is woefully thin, and the short just peters out before two reels are even filled.

EVERYTHING'S DUCKY is better, but still lacks the team's earlier sparkle. Though the hodgepodge of different comedy styles in the team's approach was usually an asset, it could also misfire. 'EVERYTHING'S DUCKY' fires off in a million directions at once, but never quite succeeds at any of them. Eddie Gribbon is a boxer bizarrely attached to his pet duck, Ambrose. The boys are

**As well as their film work, Clark and McCullough kept up with their stage work, on Broadway and touring. In 1932 they appeared with Beatrice Lillie in 'WALK A LITTLE FASTER'.**

aluminium pan salesmen, whose gimmick is to cook a demonstration meal using their wares. They are not especially diligent at this, and have already been thrown out of one house when they arrive at Gribbon's house. He is expecting some caterers to cook the luncheon his wife is throwing; seeing a money-saving opportunity, he happily accepts the boys' offer of a demonstration.

The boys cause the expected carnage in the kitchen. While Clark throws pots and pans around, McCullough maniacally stuffs anything and everything he can find into a mincer. From here, the comedy gets a bit confused. Clark spills gravy down his pants and has to remove them. When the guests arrive, he uses a Persian rug as cover. Unlike their fresh variations on farce comedy, this is clichéd, and out of character. While it's ok for Fin to be in this situation, at the mercy of the boys, Clark's free spirit character really shouldn't *care* that he's running around in his long johns! Some good lines save the situation, but originality continues to plummet as the story goes on. The turkey destroyed, Ambrose the duck wanders into the kitchen and is quickly sacrificed to the guests' appetites. There is one quite funny gag here as the boys inflate the duck to make it resemble a turkey, but everything fizzles into a warmed over version of Max Davidson's classic 'PASS THE GRAVY'. The guest being served his own pet worked wonderfully in that short, but that was down to characterization, the dread and embarrassment of the henpecked Max creating great comic tension. Here, C & McC are pretty much fearless to begin with, brazenly boasting that Ambrose is on the table. It all seems a bit heartless - unlike the rooster cooked by Davidson, Ambrose is domesticated, making his death seem that little more cruel.

Then, when the penny drops, they suddenly do act fearful and run away for a mediocre ending. Had they adopted either a purely heartless approach or the purely fearful approach, the comedy might have succeeded, but as it is it falls between two schools. This is symptomatic of the C & McC films at this time. Throwing in a few random surreal plot elements was not enough to cover for mediocre gags and clichés. Again like *The Marxes*, the more human and conventional Clark and McCullough's films become, the less hilarious they are. It's understandable that they would look for new ideas in the films, but shorts like 'EVERYTHING'S DUCKY' add little new to the table, they just stifle the old style.

Happily, other shorts did successfully try a new direction. *ALIBI BYE BYE* was the last of the 1935 season, and one of the team's best shorts, period. This film is more situational, but finds a valid place for the team's madness within its structure. Atlantic City 'Alibi photographers' Flash and Blodgett have a neat little line in photographing people who need to prove that they have been somewhere else. Their first customer is Bud Jamison, who has told wife Constance Bergen he is on a hunting trip. The boys snap his photo with a stuffed moose kept specially for such occasions (and which McCullough spends most of the film carrying around with him!). Meanwhile, Constance has decided to have some fun in Bud's absence. She takes off to Atlantic City also, with her friend Dorothy Granger and has her picture taken. The boys spend the rest of the film trying to deliver the photos to Bud and Constance's adjacent hotel rooms whilst avoiding the irate hotel manager and his house detective. They also decide to do a little matchmaking, trying to set Bud and Constance up together. The beautifully choreographed climax involves all the key players just missing each other in a constant stream of opening and closing doors. Eventually the game is up; Flash and Blodgett make a speedy exit, disguised as a moose.

'ALIBI BYE BYE' presents a more focused version of the team's bedroom/bathroom farce situations. Furthermore, it gives them a plausible place within a more realistic situation, whilst still maintaining their outcast domain, running on parallel lines to the real world. As such, it is one of their best-crafted films, successfully mixing their flamboyant style with story and situation.



Alibi photographers Flash and Blodgett in 'ALIBI BYE BYE'.

After completing 'ALIBI BYE-BYE', the team went off on the road again. Between busy Broadway shows, US and European tours, not to mention their film work, they had been continually in demand for years, and had taken advantage of it. While Bobby Clark was a driven man whose life was his work, happy to spend hours perfecting lines of dialogue, the strain was beginning to catch up with Paul McCullough. In January 1936, he suffered a breakdown and was admitted to a sanitarium. By March, he seemed to have recovered enough to be discharged. Being driven home, he asked to stop in the small town of Medford, Massachusetts to visit a barber. He chatted genially with the barber, but a dark surge of despondency was about to grab him. In a seemingly spontaneous act of self-destruction, he reached for a blade as the barber's back was turned, slashing his throat and wrists. The poor man survived for 2 days in hospital, before dying on March 25<sup>th</sup>, aged 52.

Is there any greater tragedy than that of self-destruction? The sadness is felt most keenly with the loss of those who have brought smiles and en-

tainment to others; it is hard to accept that those responsible for our happiness carry a burden too great to achieve some of their own. What leads a man to end his own life, especially in such a gruesomely violent way?

Inevitably, theories have been hashed out. As well as exhaustion, McCullough's increasingly minor role in the team has been conjectured as a source of his depression. In the original act he was the funny man and lead tumbler, now sometimes he was barely in the films. Did years of being a stooge get to him? When discussing his catcher-pitcher theory, he had ruefully concluded with "You can't be chums with someone for 40 years without knowing who is funnier." The interviewer at the time noted that he followed this remark with "sorrowful silence."

The blame has sometimes been laid at Bobby Clark's feet for dominating the partnership, and easing his partner out. Some speculate that Clark was planning to go solo at this point, and McCullough sensed his impending obsolescence. What is rarely considered is the possibility that McCullough's limited role may have been *due* to his problems. The seeds of McCullough's mental health issues had likely been planted years earlier. Clark certainly could have weathered his career solo before this point had he so desired, but he may well have kept the act with his old friend out of loyalty to his partner.

Whether or not McCullough's reduced role added to the problems is now lost to time, but certainly, the news shook Clark. He stepped out of the spotlight for almost a year after his partner's death. He would utter little about his friend's death in later years other than his great sorrow and a regret that he'd not "paid more attention to his problems". Whether he felt guilt for dominating the act, overworking his partner or simply being unable to help an old, dear friend is anybody's call. It scarcely matters now; McCullough's death was a real tragedy, whatever caused it. One only hopes that in death he found the peace that he lacked in life.

Clark was now without his Blodgett, his partner in crime whose background cackle to his antics was the unchanging rock of the partnership. After a long break to re-evaluate things, he resurfaced in the fall of 1936, appearing opposite Fannie Brice in the Ziegfeld Follies.

He would go on to lead a distinguished solo stage career, if not at the heights he had previously enjoyed. He was also able to indulge his more highbrow interests, lecturing about, and appearing in, restoration comedies. Less highbrow, he also appeared in adverts to promote Smirnoff Vodka, and made a handful of TV appearances. He made only one more film appearance, however, in 1938's 'GOLDWYN FOLLIES'. The film was a let-down in many ways, described by Clark as "the world's longest commercial". Things had gone full circle, as, in order to conform, Bobby was made to wear real glasses again. Sacrilege! On screen at least, Clark's non-conformism would only be acceptable with McCullough by his side.

And, today, side by side is how we remember Clark and McCullough. They are another act whose stage performances have now faded, leaving only a tiny fragment of their career available to few. Small it may be, and from late in their career, but Clark and McCullough's celluloid output preserves their special brand of unique anarchy. They were fascinating clowns, who had very few peers in the two-reel field. With good material and a fast pace on their side, they made some absolute gems of comedy that should receive more recognition. Omnia Cafeteria Rex, indeed!

## THE FILMS OF CLARK AND MCCULLOUGH

### FOX MOVIE TONE (1928-29)

**THE INTERVIEW D:** ? The boys are interviewed by a girl reporter. 1 reel.

**THE HONOR SYSTEM D:** ? Clark and McCullough are accused of thievery and given chance to prove their innocence by the chief of police. 1 reel.

**THE BATH BETWEEN D:** Ben Stoloff. With Carmel Myers, Mack Flouker. A film version of one of C & McC's sketches, based around the complication arising in a bathroom shared between two rooms. Film treatment written by Hugh Herbert, later Columbia star. 2 reels.

**THE DIPLOMATS D:** Norman Taurog. With Marguerite Churchill, Andres de Segurola, Cissy Fitzgerald.

The boys bring anything but diplomacy to a Ruritanian kingdom! 4 reels.

### **WALTZING AROUND D: Harry Sweet**

As a pair of tramps, C & McC crash the world of boxing. 3 reels.

**IN HOLLAND** D: Norman Taurog. With Marjorie Beebe, Ralph Emerson and George Bickel.

The boys ruin a farmer's tulip crop, so set off to fetch the rare Swiss Edelweiss flower to atone for their accident. Clark was laid up during shooting after a windmill paddle hit him on the head. 5 reels.

**BELLE OF SAMOA**— D: Marcel Silver.

C & McC find themselves in a Samoan temple, where men are taboo, This provides the excuse for dances by Filoi and her 60 Samoan dancers. Also featuring Lois Moran. 2 reels.

**BENEATH THE LAW** D: Harry Sweet. With Joyzelle, Billy Bletcher, George Bickel. 3 reels.

**THE MEDICINE MEN** D: Norman Taurog. 3 reels.

**THE MUSIC FIENDS** D: Harry Sweet. 3 reels.

**KNIGHTS OUT:** D: Norman Taurog. A medieval comedy. 3 reels.

**ALL STEAMED UP** D: Norman Taurog. With Anita Garvin, Gavin Gordon, Estelle Bradley.

The boys cause hi-jinks in a Turkish bath. 3 reels.

**HIRED & FIRED** D: Norman Taurog. With Helen Bolton, Jack Baston, Ernest Shields, Bertram Johns. 3 reels.

**DETECTIVES WANTED** D: Norman Taurog. With Sally Phipps, Allan Lane, Jane Keckley, Jack Duffy.

C & McC as ineffective sleuths. 3 reels.

### Misc

**STRIKE UP THE BAND:** Not a theatrical release, this is footage shot from the rehearsals of the Broadway show. The duo are seen interacting in some crosstalk with George Gershwin.

### RKO: (BROADWAY HEADLINERS SERIES, 1930)

**A PEEP IN THE DEEP** D: Mark Sandrich

C & McC are mistaken for captains of a ship just about to sail. After 35 days losing their way at sea, it transpires they have accidentally circumnavigated the globe in record time.

### Misc: 'CHESTERFIELD CELEBRITIES' (1931)

CHESTERFIELD CELEBRITIES #1

The first of a series of promo films for Chesterfield featured C & McC. According to 'FILM DAILY', there is no mention at all of the sponsors other than in the opening and closing titles. Instead, a two-reel sketch plays out uninterrupted, as a policeman is constantly thwarted at keeping hoboes Bobby and Paul from their favourite park bench. Has anyone seen a copy of this?

### RKO SHORTS (Clark and McCullough starring series, 1931-35) All 2 reels.

#### 1931

**FALSE ROOMERS** D: Mark Sandrich

Clark and McCullough take a room in James Finlayson's boarding house, and proceed to defy his 'No Cooking' rule with relish.

**SCRATCH AS CATCH CAN** D: Mark Sandrich. With James Finlayson.

The pair are in on an insurance racket. Nominated for an academy award, but lost out to L & H's 'THE MUSIC BOX'.

**A MELON-DRAMA** D: Mark Sandrich. With James Finlayson.

McCullough is carrying around a watermelon, unaware it contains a time bomb!

#### 1932

**THE ICEMAN'S BALL.** D: Mark Sandrich.

—Bobby and Paul steal two cops' uniforms and have a whale of a time at the police commissioner's party.

**THE MILLIONAIRE CAT** D: Mark Sandrich. With James Finlayson, Nora Cecil, Eddie Dunn.

Pest exterminators C & McC find themselves tackling troublesome aunts instead of ants!

**JITTERS THE BUTLER** D: Mark Sandrich. With Robert Greig, James Finlayson, Dorothy Granger.



Street sweepers C & McC have just been discharged by Finlayson. Imagine how pleased he is to find them crashing his society party!

### 1933

**HOKUS FOCUS**— D: Mark Sandrich. With Max Davidson, James Finlayson.

Photographer Fin is in trouble for getting too friendly with his female customers. The boys lend their customary “assistance” to his predicament.

**THE DRUGGIST’S DILEMMA** D: Mark Sandrich. With James Finlayson, Cecil Cunningham, Charlie Hall, Al Thompson.

The boys work for druggist James Finlayson. Fin’s eponymous predicament involves the loss of his trousers in a poker game; Clark & McCullough are tasked with bringing him a replacement pair before his wife finds out.

**THE GAY NIGHTIES** D: Mark Sandrich. With James Finlayson, Monty Collins, Dorothy Granger.

Political advisors Blackstone and Blodgett frame their candidate’s rival (James Finlayson) with a compromising photo.

**KICKIN’ THE CROWN AROUND** D: Sam White. With Ferdinand Munier, Neal Burns, Charlie Hall.

In a mythical kingdom, salami is prohibited. Detectives C & McC are on the trail of some sausage smugglers, who are led by the incompetent Disputin. *Working title: ‘Disputin The Punk’.*

**FITS IN A FIDDLE** D: Sam White. With Herman Bing, Charlie Hall, Barbara Sheldon, Spec O’Donnell.

Buskers C & McC crash a radio orchestra.

### 1934

**SNUG IN THE JUG** D: Ben Holmes. With Harry Gribbon, Anders Van Haden.

newly released from jail, Clark and McCullough enlist a criminologist to help them catch up with Slug Mullins, who landed them in jail. Little do they know that the criminologist is actually Mullins in disguise...

**HEY NANNY NANNY** D: Ben Holmes. With Thelma White, Nat Carr, Sidney Jarvis, Monty Collins.

Posing as magicians, C & McC crash a society party with their pet goat.

**IN THE DEVIL’S DOGHOUSE** D: Ben Holmes. With Tom Kennedy, Bud Jamison, Dorothy Granger.

C & McC are constantly at odds with marine Tom Kennedy, not to mention practical joker Bud Jamison.

**LOVE AND HISSES** D: Sam White. With Ferdinand Munier, Sumner Getchel, Maude Traux.

Clark and McCullough play mischievous matchmakers to the melon-obsessed Ferdinand Munier and his tubby tryst, Maude Traux.

**A BEDLAM OF BEARDS** D: Ben Holmes. With George Hays, Al Hill, Margaret Armstrong, Vivian Fields.

A kidnapper is targeting bearded men. With the aid of some whiskers, McCullough is used as bait to catch the villain!

**ODOR IN THE COURT** D: Ben Holmes—With Tom Kennedy, Jack Rice.

Lawyers Blackstone and Blodgett are in court to fight alimony payments for their client.

**EVERYTHING’S DUCKY** D: Ben Holmes. With Eddie Gribbon.

—Cookware salesman C & McC demonstrate their wares by cooking a Duck dinner for Eddie Gribbon; trouble is, they’ve cooked up his pet duck Ambrose!

**IN A PIG’S EYE** D: Ben Holmes—Crotch and Blodgett, tailors, pose as Scotsmen for the sheer hell of it, and take their pet pig to a party thrown by an inventor. Unfortunately, the pig accidentally eats the inventor’s newest invention: a powerful explosive!

### 1935

**FLYING DOWN TO ZERO** D: Lee Marcus. With Bud Jamison, Harry Gribbon.

The boys try to snare Harry Gribbon in an insurance racket.

**ALIBI BYE BYE** D: Ben Holmes. With Bud Jamison, Constance Bergen, Dorothy Granger, Ben Taggart, Tom Kennedy.

‘Alibi photographers’ C & McC are working for both Bud Jamison and his wife, who are unaware that they are staying in the same hotel!

**BOBBY CLARK SOLO: UNITED ARTISTS (1938):**

**THE GOLDWYN FOLLIES:** D: George Marshall. An all-star revue with Adolphe Menjou, Andrea Leeds, Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, etc,



This article, syndicated in The Pittsburgh Press, was the source of many of the quotes in this article. It offers a revealing insight into the team and their ideas about comedy.

# The Pittsburgh Press

PITTSBURGH, P.A., THURSDAY, MARCH 31, 1932

IN TWO SECTIONS—S

## Architects of Laughter + +

Nothing is less accidental than a laugh. In a series of articles, of which the following is the fifth, A. J. Liebling describes the methods of some of the most successful fun-makers of the day.

By A. J. LIEBLING

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"NOW, DID you ever go up to the Polo Grounds and see the catcher walk out and tell the pitcher, 'You get back behind the plate; I'm going to pitch awhile?'"

Paul McCullough's blue eyes were wide with earnest effort to explain.

"Course not. Well, Clark is the pitcher. I'm the catcher. That's why he has the jokes. Or as we say, he has the answers and I have the questions."

"But why?"

The honest Mr. McCullough gazed aghast at such incomprehension. "Because he's funnier, of course."

"But how do you know he's funnier?"

"Well, if you've been chums with a fellow for nearly 40 years you ought to know who is funnier."

Sorrowful silence. That, my friends, is as near as you can come to an explanation of why Bobby Clark has the big laugh when Clark and McCullough swing into action, whereas offstage he is a far more serious, determined looking little gentleman than his round-faced partner.

### Like Liver and Bacon

There are names which for the public have a rugged individuality, like Mark Cross or John David, and there are other names that cannot be thought of singly. What, for instance, does Weber signify without Fields? Who could conceive of Underwood without Underwood or Park sans Tilford?

So among the leading stage comics one thinks of Ed Wynn or Jimmy Durante or Leon Errol. But one thinks of Clark and McCullough.

The collaboration dates back to the days when two boys practiced tumbling in the Y. M. C. A. gymnasium of Springfield, O., preparatory to running away with a minstrel show. They did a clog dance in the first act and an acrobatic specialty in the "oho." From the minstrels they went to the circus, the original object of their ambitions, traveling with Wallace-Hagenback and then with Ringling for five years.

The comedy was an afterthought. "There was no future in acrobatics," Clark explains.

They started doing a dumb comedy act in vaudeville, in heavy tramp makeup.

They injected a few lines as an experiment.

"For instance," says Clark, "I would say 'I will now imitate a young Bulgarian weasel calling its mate.'"

The result was a shock.

## Clark & McCullough Portray Shabby-Genteel Characters



"Here we were getting a laugh without breaking our backs," McCullough recalls.

### Shabby Gentry Theme

From then on, always excepting the question of how they determined Clark was the pitcher, their development was logical and orderly.

"We had no dialect," Clark says. They speak colorless, slightly metallic Ohio American, as nicely balanced between accents as their state between sections. Moreover, both came of "respectable folks" and had "good schooling."

"So we had a choice of dressing up for a class act, or doing a tramp act and talking out of character. Well, dignified English from a tramp heightens the laugh. But the suggestion in the part is that the tramp has seen better days.

"Now a tramp has no dignity, and false dignity is one of the best comic themes. So instead of playing two down-and-outs, we shifted into playing two fellows on the way down, but still putting up a bluff. We became shabby genteel."

Two incidents Clark remembers from real life as illustrations of what tickles him in character comedy.

"Out in Kansas City about 16 years ago, when we were playing vaudeville, a bunch of the performers were standing in the alley outside the theater, when 'long came an object bum. He was carrying a red apple, and as he passed up he started juggling the apple like I do a cigar, jauntily. 'Only a few of us left,' he chirped as he passed.

### Hinterland Comedy

"Then when we were in London 10 years ago, one of the Americans in our show gave a party. It was a wild party, and about 4 in the morning a bobby, very stiff and dignified, knocked on the door.

"You'll have to stop," he said. "There've been complaints." Well, everybody was pretty high, and a couple of the girls dragged him in the door. Thirty minutes later the girls were wearing his helmet and tunic and he was down in the cellar trying to beat the host in a broad jumping contest. Finally two more

constables came and carried him out drunk.

"Get the idea? A person without dignity assuming it, or a very dignified person acting like a bum. For instance, if you were out with a judge, and he got drunk, that would be funny."

"If you were out with a judge and he didn't, that would be funnier," put in Mr. McCullough. "But there's more than just the false dignity idea in our characters.

"For instance, when we do that 'Room with a bath' skit, and we peep through keyholes and try to alibi out of being where we shouldn't be, and fight over cigar butts, people are sympathetic, because they recognize themselves."

### Undertaker's Cast-Offs

McCullough's analysis bites deeper than Clark's. It is the repressed canaille in the audience that whoops with glee when shabby genteel in-

hibitions disappear at the flick of a skirt.

It is a comedy of the hinterlands, where deacon-like exteriors and elemental notions of pleasure are current and concurrent.

The costumes of Clark and McCullough are immutable as their characters. Clark wears burnt cork spectacles, a flat ante-bellum collegiate hat and a cigar when he puffs furiously and then, juggles. McCullough changes the expression of his open countenance to dissolute stupidity by the simple addition of a toothbrush mustache. He has two and treasures them because the old German maker is dead, and he says he cannot find a mustache maker to duplicate them.

He wears an old silk hat, a pale gray dogskin overcoat which he bought in Toronto 15 years ago after having been assured that a department store had tried in vain for 30 years to sell it.

"I figured that there must be something funny about any coat nobody would buy," he explains. There is.

His suits all bear on the inner pocket the initials "E. J. B." He gets them from Edward J. Busse, a sporty undertaker in Cincinnati, who favors strident checks and plaids. The undertaker always wanted to be a ticket seller with a circus.

### Thwarted in Life

Thwarted in his life ambition to lead a Bohemian life, he gets a vicarious thrill out of seeing his glad rags on the stage, even though their owner isn't.

Clark has to depend on the second hand shops for his garments. He favors originally genteel things which have come down through half a dozen owners. At present he is wearing a racing coat that figured at the Rock Sand Derby.

But given their characters, their makeup and their general method, they have to think up situations, gags and new bits of business.

Clark's favorite situation is "the man who is left holding the bag. That is the fellow who tries to do his friend a favor and becomes hopelessly involved himself while making the friend's position even worse."

McCullough is strong for "mistaken identity."

Clark's classic was the lion skit he did in burlesque with Bundy—a real but harmless lion. In that epic fragment he was hired to get inside a lion skin and impersonate a lion, since the only animal with a circus had died. While he was making up the circus impresario told McCullough that a real lion had arrived by fast freight and that his friend wouldn't have to do the impersonation.

### Scouting New Material

McCullough forgot to tell Clark, who entered the cage with the lion, believing it to be a phony. His progressive disillusionment made the act.

"Of course, the audience has to be wise to the mistake the comedian is making," McCullough points out.

Both dig assiduously for new gags or variations of old ones.

Clark is a research man. Intensely serious, he reads Shakespeare and the funny papers and knows well that shabby genteel is Dickensian.

He has no desire to play Hamlet, he says, but he knows the part cold.

McCullough is more of a legman. He gets ideas from talking to conductors, policemen, cafeteria cashiers, bartenders and drinking neighbors.

Tomorrow—Hope Williams.



Inspired to get your fix of Clark and McCullough? Recently released on Alpha DVD is this volume, featuring 6 of their shorts: The Gay Nighties, Everything's Ducky, Love and Hisses, Snug in the Jug, Kicking The Crown Around and The Druggist's Dilemma. Picture quality ranges from decent to excellent and the set retails for just \$7.95.

## **DVD NEWS**

### **Network DVD rarities**

Network DVD in the UK has acquired the rights to an enormous number of British films from the 30s, 40s and 50s. Despite the presumably fairly small audience, Network are pressing on with releasing these obscure films on DVD. Many of these feature long forgotten comics whose names and films have been little more than references in history books. Leslie Fuller, Gene Gerrard, Stanley Lupino and many more all finally get their chance to step out from the shadows of obscurity in this lovingly curated series of releases. The decision to release these is to Network's eternal credit, and the series is continuing to spout new releases. There are too many to list here, but below are some of the most interesting examples. A full list can be found at [www.networkdvd.co.uk/britishfilm](http://www.networkdvd.co.uk/britishfilm).

### **EALING RARITIES, VOLS 1-13.**

**This series features an array of films, 4 per volume, made by Associated Talking Pictures/Ealing Studios during its 20 year heyday. No 'Lavender Hill Mob' or 'Man in The White Suit' here, though! These are films that slipped through the cracks, never found an audience or tried something different from the traditional Ealing house style. The 4 volumes on each volume are a mixture of genres. Below, I've highlighted comedies in bold, with star given in brackets.**

- Vol 1: **Cheer up (Stanley Lupino)**/Escape/West of Zanzibar/**Penny Paradise (Jimmy O'Dea)**  
Vol 2: **The Big Blockade (cameo by Will Hay)**/The Four Just Men/Brief Ecstasy/Midshipman Easy  
Vol 3: Cage of Gold/Frieda/Death Drives Through/The Impassive Footman  
Vol 4: **Davy (Harry Secombe)**/ The Secret of The Loch/Birds of Prey/The Loves of Joanna Godden  
Vol 5: The House of The Spaniard/The Ware Case/The Beloved Vagabond/The Shiralee  
Vol 6: **Honeymoon for Three (Stanley Lupino)**/I Believe in You/The Girl in the Taxi/The Fortunate Fool  
Vol 7: Eureka Stockade/The Gaunt Stranger/**Take a Chance (Claude Hulbert)**/**Strike Up The Band (Stanley Holloway)**  
Vol 8: Young Man's Fancy/The Feminine Touch/There Ain't No Justice/The Silent Passenger  
Vol 9: A Honeymoon Adventure/Whom the Gods Love/**Cheer, Boys, Cheer! (Jimmy O'Dea, Moore Marriott, Graham Moffatt)**/**Meet Mr Lucifer (Stanley Holloway)**  
Vol 10: **Let's Be Famous (Jimmy O'Dea/Betty Driver)**/Saloon Bar/His Excellency/The Divided Heart  
Vol 11: Calling The Tune/Return to Yesterday/Lorna Doone/Lease of Life  
Vol 12: Three Men in a Boat/The Bailiffs (Flanagan and Allen short)/Laburnum Grove/Loyalties  
Vol 13: Secret Lives/It Happened In Paris/Autumn Crocus/The Dictator  
Vol 14: Feather Your Nest (George Formby)/The Sign of Four/The Water Gypsies/Lonely Road



### **STANLEY LUPINO**

The rather marvellous Stanley Lupino is now fairly well represented on DVD, thanks to these releases. As well as the titles featured in Ealing rarities, his great film 'OVER SHE GOES' is featured on BRITISH MUSICALS VOLS 1, beside three other obscure musicals (Harmony Heaven/The Song You Gave Me/Music Hath Charms)

Also available on its own is 'THE LOVE RACE', his first film, directed by his cousin Lupino Lane.

### **BANANA RIDGE & AREN'T MEN BEASTS?**

The team of blustery Alfred Drayton and mouse-mannered Robertson Hare in two of their popular farces.

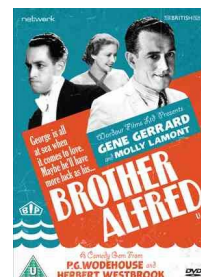
### **ALDWYCH FARCES**

Robertson Hare achieved prominence in a series of stage farces by Ben Travers, in teaming with gruff Tom Walls and silly-ass Ralph Lynn. The plays were wildly successful and many were filmed in the early-mid 30s. Although extremely stagey, these are undeniably very funny films with some very talented comic actors. This series promises to release as many of the films as possible, with 2 films on each set. Great news, as these have been very hard to see for years. The first volume will be released in Spring; it features 'A CUCKOO IN THE NEST' and 'TURKEY TIME'.

### **LUCKY GIRL**

### **BROTHER ALFRED**

Lithe, dapper Gene Gerrard was a popular star of light comedies in the early 30s, starring in and directing many of his own films. These two films are among those he made.



# THE MARX BROTHERS TV COLLECTION

( Shout Factory)

## A brief summation by Joe Migliore

As every Marx Brothers fan knows, the team only made thirteen theatrically-released feature films, which has left us all desperately hungry for more. Shout Factory has come to the rescue, providing over ten hours of Marx material, which largely hasn't been seen since being broadcast. Here are the highlights:



### THE INCREDIBLE JEWEL ROBBERY –

Starting right off with gold, this episode of General Electric Theater features Harpo & Chico in what amounts to a silent short, but before the end draws nigh, another brother shows up. (I won't reveal if it's Zeppo, or Gummo, or some other brother.)



**THE JACK BENNY PROGRAM** – Benny tries to win money on "You Bet Your Life", but Groucho catches on to his scheme.

**MR. SMITH GOES TO WASHINGTON** – Harpo in a case of mistaken identity was probably the highlight of this entire series.

**THE COLLEGE BOWL** – Chico starred in 26 episodes of this series, but this is the only one known to be extant. Though taking place at Easter, by the end it feels more like a Christmas episode..

**THE RED SKELTON HOUR** – Harpo does some pretty good sketch comedy, including a "silent" wartime piece.

**THE HOLD OUT** – Groucho plays a dramatic role in this episode of General Electric Theater, which also stars Dennis Hopper.

**CELEBRITY GOLF** – Your opportunity to see Harpo play golf. (LEFT)

**CHAMPIONSHIP BRIDGE** – Your opportunity to see Chico play cards.

**GROUCHO** – The British version of "You Bet Your Life".

**A SILENT PANIC** – An episode of The DuPont Show featuring a dramatic turn for Harpo, and it is one of the highlights of this set.

**ARTHUR MURRAY PARTY** – Some unexpected fun when Groucho shows up to dance.

**THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF TOYS** – Another episode of The DuPont Show; this one pairs Harpo with Carol Burnett. Audrey Meadows and Milton Berle also appear.

**WHO SAID THAT?** – Groucho disrupts someone else's game show.

**SHOWDOWN AT ULCER GULCH** – Groucho and Chico both appear briefly in this infomercial for The Saturday Evening Post. (So do Bob Hope & Bing Crosby.)

**SKIDOO** – The trailer for the film, starring Jackie Gleason and Groucho.

**BEDS** – Just over three minutes devoted to promoting Groucho's book

**HOME MOVIES** – Rare glimpses of the Marx Brothers at home, narrated by Harpo's Bill Marx, who also provides music.

**PAPA ROMANI** – This episode of Sil-Theater features a Chico married with children, who gets a telephone installed in the apartment. With no live audience, this feels like a theatrical short. (This is included on the bonus disc added to pre-orders from Shout Factory.)

**IT'S YOUR SERVE** – This episode of The Christophers has Harpo playing tennis, and the harp, but not enough of either. (Included on bonus disc.)

**MAXINE MARX INTERVIEW** – Filmed in 1971, but only included on the bonus disc.



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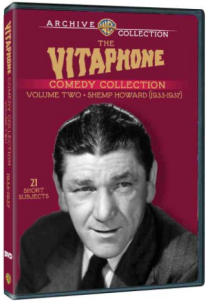
In addition to these gems are loads of clips, that range from Chico & Harpo's appearance on The Colgate Comedy Hour, to Groucho playing pool with Minnesota Fats on Celebrity Billiards. Peppered throughout are the many commercials Harpo did for sponsors such as Labatt's Beer, Foster's Freeze, McCall's Magazine, and All-Pure Evaporated Milk, and even one Groucho did for Right Guard deodorant. I highly recommend this DVD collection to any and all fans of The Marx Brothers; Shout Factory has provided us with the equivalent of seven more Marx movies!

Many thanks to Joe for taking the time to review this DVD. Sounds like a great set!

# REVIEW: VITAPHONE COMEDY COLLECTION ,VOL 2

(Warner Brothers)

A Brief Summation by Joe Migliore



The eagerly-awaited second installment of Vitaphone comedies is a treasure trove of rarely-seen Shemp Howard shorts, though it does get off to a slow start:

**GOBS OF FUN** – This is actually a Charles Judels & George Givot short, in which Shemp briefly appears. You may recall that the first volume had about half a dozen entries in which Shemp was cast in a minor role; this is the only such case here. (You may also remember George Givot from Curly Howard's only solo short **ROAST BEEF & MOVIES**.)

**DAREDEVIL O'DARE** – Ben Blue joins the circus. It's always been a mystery to me how the unremarkable Blue found any work as a comedian, but Shemp effortlessly steals the show. From this point on, this collection really picks up steam.

**MY MUMMY'S ARMS** – Harry Gribbon teams with Shemp on an archaeological dig to find a mummy. Not as strong as **MUSHROOMS** or **ART TROUBLE**, but a worthy attempt to pair them in an exotic locale. These two work so well together, it's a wonder they never starred in a feature. (It's also worth mentioning that Sheldon Leonard has a prominent role in this one.)

**SO YOU WON'T T-T-T-TALK/WHY PAY RENT?** – Both of these shorts are from the Roscoe Ates series, in which Shemp plays his annoying brother-in-law. Typecasting at it's best.

**SMOKED HAMS/A PEACH OF A PAIR/HIS FIRST FLAME** – This charming trio of entries teams Shemp with Daphne Pollard. In the first two, they are a vaudeville act, but in the latter, Shemp is a fireman who has invented "fire-putter-outer" powder.

**DIZZY & DAFFY** – This baseball-themed short features Dizzy Dean.

**SERVES YOU RIGHT** – Shemp is a process server in one of his best shorts.

**ON THE WAGON** – Shemp and Roscoe Ates come home drunk, and end up high on a building ledge.

**THE OFFICER'S MESS** – Shemp is a waiter who can't wait to join the army.

**WHILE THE CAT'S AWAY** – Anita Garvin plays the missus, who is returning home earlier than expected, so Johnnie Berkes helps Shemp tidy up the place. (A reworking of Laurel & Hardy's **HELPMATES**.)

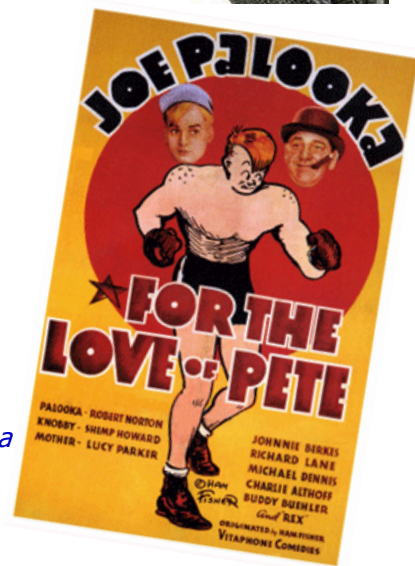
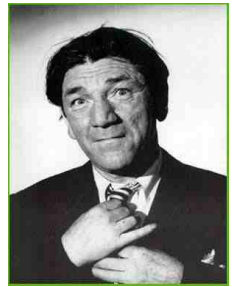
**ABSORBING JUNIOR** – Shemp empties his nephew's bank to bet on a horse.

**FOR THE LOVE OF PETE/HERE'S HOWE/PUNCH & BEAUTY/THE CHOKE'S ON YOU/THE BLONDE BOMBER/KICK ME AGAIN/TAKING THE COUNT** – These seven short subjects are from the Joe Palooka series. Based on the comic strip, Palooka (Robert Norton) is a boxer, and Knobby Walsh (Shemp) is his manager. It's fun to watch these in tandem, as the series quickly becomes a vehicle for Shemp, although all inevitably end in a boxing match.

*With the release of this 2 disc set, it is now possible to enjoy every phase of Shemp Howard's film career in the privacy of your own home, something I never imagined possible when I first stumbled across his filmography. If you're a fan, I strongly recommend snapping up this one from Warner Brothers Archive Collection.*

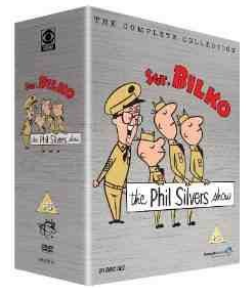
*From top: Shemp, and co-stars Harry Gribbon, Roscoe Ates and Ben Blue. At the bottom is a poster for one of the 'Joe Palooka' shorts featured on this set.*

Thanks again Joe, a great review of another great DVD!



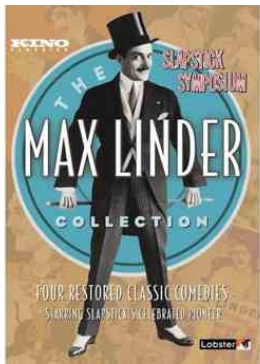
**ATTENTION! AARRR-HEY UP!**  
**THE COMPLETE PHIL SILVERS SHOW COMES TO DVD!**

Although slightly outside the remit of Movie Night's usual coverage, I'm sure many classic comedy fans will welcome this release. Long unavailable, at last the sparkling Sgt Bilko series comes to DVD. These episodes are all uncut and restored as best as possible for vintage TV broadcasts. There are also a multitude of extras, including the original Pilot episode, interviews with Silvers, original scripts and photos, Silvers on 'The Lucy Show' and a BBC documentary about the series. The series has been released both in the UK and the US, but reports are that the UK set is far superior in terms of extras and quality.



**MAX LINDER**

Kino has recently released a new Max Linder DVD. More than just an upgrade of their previous 'LAUGH WITH MAX LINDER' collection, this again focuses on his American Films, but presents a much more complete picture. While the previous release featured only 'SEVEN YEARS BAD LUCK' and an excerpt of 'BE MY WIFE', this new release offers in addition, the complete 'BE MY WIFE', as well as his fantastic parody 'THE THREE MUST-GET-THERES'. This beautifully restored print allows the surreal, anachronistic humour of the film to really shine. Also present is the Essanay short 'MAX WANTS A DIVORCE', which is rather more pedestrian but a rarity nonetheless. All in all, a great release of this neglected but brilliant

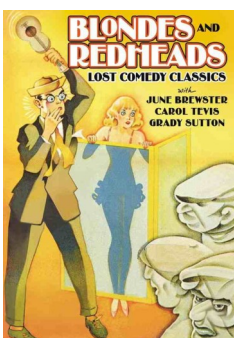
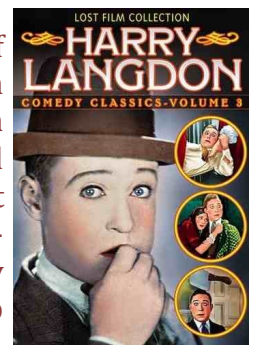


farceur.

**TALKIE RARITIES FROM ALPHA VIDEO**

**HARRY LANGDON**

Releases from budget label Alpha Video have continued pouring out, but sadly few of them have been comedy of late. One notable release is a collection of Harry Langdon shorts, silent and sound. Whilst this offers some duplication of the definitive Langdon set from AllDay Entertainment, the interesting additions are two of his Educational talkie shorts. Both 'THE BIG FLASH' and 'TIED FOR LIFE' are unavailable on DVD at present, although they do stream in low quality at various internet sites. Both are interesting films, with 'THE BIG FLASH' an especially snappy little short, teaming Harry with Vernon Dent as in their classic silents together. At only \$5.95, its worth adding to your collection. Buy online at [www.oldies.com](http://www.oldies.com)



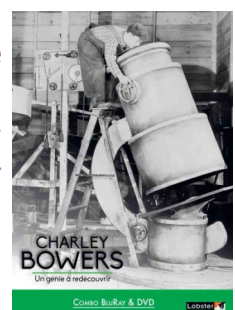
**BLONDES & REDHEADS**

Also released on Alpha is a collection of the 'Blondes and Redheads' shorts. Made by George Stevens for RKO in the early-mid-30s, these were much in the mould of his 'BOY FRIENDS' films made for Hal Roach, even down to including Grady Sutton in the cats. The Blonde and Redhead in question were Carol Tevis and June Brewster, respectively. This volume features four shorts: 'THE UNDIE WORLD, OCEAN SWELLS, THE DANCING MILLIONAIRE and 'ROUGH NECKING'.

**CHARLEY BOWERS ARRIVES**

The Lobster films updated version of Charley Bowers' films mentioned in the last issue has recently been released. A combination DVD/Bluray edition, it features all the titles previously featured, with the addition of recent discovery 'WHOOZIT'. I've not seen evidence yet, but I'm hopeful that the rediscovered first reel of 'MANY A SLIP' is also included.

The set retails at 32 Euros, and is available at [www.amazon.fr](http://www.amazon.fr) and [www.lobster.fr](http://www.lobster.fr).



# Chasing Charley Through the Years



Charley Chase maintained a successful career in films for almost 30 years. The remarkable consistency in his characterization and the quality of his work, as well as his long-term association with Hal Roach, can tend to have us thinking that he plugged away in exactly the same role for years. A while ago, I read an article arguing that Laurel and Hardy's characters evolved through several distinct phases over the years. It struck me that the same applied to their Hal Roach studios colleague, Charley Chase. On-screen he maintained the same general character and appearance, but actually, his comic style went through several distinct phases over the years, as he created comedy in front of, and behind, the cameras. In the early years of his career, this took the form of building up his screen character— "becoming Charley Chase", as David Kalat termed it. Later, he experimented with the character and the types of situation he found himself in. This article is an attempt to track some of the eras of Charley's comedy, and hopefully bring fresh light to some of his more neglected films.

## AT FIRST SIGHT: THE EARLY YEARS



March, 1914. The dusty, knockabout collection of buildings in Edendale known as Keystone Studios was barely two years old. Out among the lemon groves at the end of the trolley line, screen comedy's rules were being formed and the studio was beginning to expand its company. Alongside Roscoe Arbuckle, Mabel Normand and Ford Sterling, Sennett had just engaged a young Englishman he had seen in vaudeville. The centenary of the young Charlie Chaplin's debut with Keystone has been widely celebrated, but around the same time Charley Chase also joined Keystone's call-to-arms.

In fact, there was no Charley Chase in 1914, nor would there be for the next decade. Filling the erstwhile Mr Chase's shoes was a svelte young man by the name of Charles Parrott. Hailing from Baltimore, he had worked up from singing on street corners to vaudeville and now, moving pictures. His arrival was lost in the general punkish hubbub of Keystone, receiving little notice as his first film there, 'ACROSS THE HALL' was unleashed on March, 23rd.



Top: Young Charles Parrott as he appeared at Keystone.

Above, with Chaplin in 'HIS NEW PROFESSION'

Most of Charley's earliest available films reveal a lanky, fresh-faced juvenile with more than a hint of young John Cleese about him. Unusually for the circus sideshow of Keystone males, there isn't anything intrinsically funny about him, and amongst the burly, moustachioed types like Fritz Schade or Ford Sterling, he gets somewhat lost in the shuffle. Nevertheless, he kept plugging away in a variety of roles. Often, he had small parts in support of other comedians; you can see him opposite Chaplin, most prominently in 'HIS MUSICAL CAREER' and 'HIS NEW PROFESSION'. Sometimes, he is the juvenile lover, trying to thwart the villainous antics of Sterling et al. Occasionally, he plays roles far outside his future arena; 'PEANUTS & BULLETS' has him more in line with Keystone's moustached delinquents, as a deviant boarder skanking a free lunch. In 'TILLIE'S PUNCTURED ROMANCE', he is convincingly made up to resemble an older Sheriff, a role for which his height probably suggested him.

In early 1915, young Charley would be given a chance to shine, appearing as star in several shorts with a more down-to-earth feel. His natural appearance promoted the formation of films with a slower pace and less emphasis on slapstick, and, in shorts like 'SETTLED AT THE SEASIDE' or 'THE RENT JUMPERS', he showcased a performing style as different from most other Keystone comics as his own appearance was from theirs\*. While slapstick was still in place, story and situation came to

\*It's worth noting that he wasn't the only one to do so. Arbuckle and Normand's films often showed a more subtle, domestic side, as did the Bobby Vernon—Gloria Swanson comedies. Keystone's modus operandi might have been madness, but not exclusively so.



Director Charley Parrott in 1916: a posed shot from Fox publicity for the Hank Mann shorts directed by Charley.

the fore in these light little romantic comedies. One of the best is 'LOVE IN ARMOR', included in All Day Entertainment's 'BECOMING CHARLEY CHASE' set. This film sees Charley donning a suit of armour at a party to go undercover and catch thief Fritz Schade, winning back his girlfriend Mae Busch from him, too.

'LOVE IN ARMOR' is reminiscent of Max Linder films, especially 'MAX AND THE STATUE'. In fact, Brent Walker's DVD commentary reveals that this is actually a remake of a 1912 Mack Sennett Biograph film called 'HAPPY JACK ,THE HERO'. The more genteel Biographs had been inspired by the Linder films, however, and both sources were undoubtedly an inspiration for Chase's emphasis on story. His Keystone career left its own imprint too, in terms of adding more gags to the stories.

While the synthesis of these elements is beginning to show through in these 1915 films, it is only a rudimentary sketch of Chase's later greatness. The stories have yet to develop depth, and his character lacks the embarrassed dignity of later. However, while early and primitive, 'LOVE IN ARMOR' is actually a remarkably prescient foretelling of his eventual style, a Rosetta Stone for his classic run of comedies to come. Indeed, there is more than an echo of the earlier film in Chase's classic 'THE NICKEL NURSER', which again sees him donning a suit of armour.

Chase's last few starring films for Keystone tended to go in a different direction, however. 'A VERSATILE VILLAIN' is a comic twist of D.W. Griffith's dramas, and 'HE WOULDN'T STAY DOWN' is a darkly amusing tale of murder. At first sight, these have less in common with his mature work, but actually the acidic mock melodrama of these films would stay with him. Chase would employ it more subtly, in smaller doses, such as lapsing into mock dramatic speeches in his sound films, but this tendency surely has some roots here.

## CHARLES PARROTT: DIRECTOR

Parrott continued at Keystone, but from mid-1915 forsook performing in favour of direction. Having chance to work with and watch a variety of talent would have been instrumental in helping him form his own approach, stockpiling elements he liked and rejecting those he did not. Initially, his films at Keystone starring others are fairly indistinguishable from the rest of the studio's product. Of 'A DASH OF COURAGE', one reviewer said, "a never-fail chloroform apparatus, slippery streets, two skidding automobiles, a stone wall, a neatly contrived plot, a safe, a little nitro-glycerine and six principals are the ingredients mixed here by director Charles Parrott to make a Keystone comedy". This heady combination of ingredients is definitely a recipe for Keystone madness rather than Charley Chase comedy.

Moving away from Keystone, Parrott was able to flex his creative muscles a little more. He worked as director for Fox Sunshine comedies and subsequently became director general of the tiny King Bee studio. In these years, he worked with a variety of comics: eternally hangdog Hank Mann; Billy West, a talented Chaplin imitator, who surely benefited from Charley's first hand work with Chaplin; Oliver Hardy, playing heavy to West. Parrott's films starring these comics allowed him a more free rein, away from an established studio style. They also allowed him to continue developing his storytelling and gag-writing talents.

Amongst the comic highlights of these films, 'A ROLLING STONE', starring Billy West, features a beautifully choreographed routine with West meeting his double, Leo White, which then becomes a fantastically synchronised chase. 'THE FLIRTS' is full of movement, and split-second timing brawls between Jimmy Adams and Harry Mann. There is also a great little gag where Adams sends Mann into a room with angry Leo White in. He sets out a mattress on the floor to cushion Mann's inevitable flight from the room, then sits down on a chair to eat his sandwiches and enjoy the show. This sort of witty, human touch amongst the slapstick became a Chase trademark.

'PLAYMATES' has a very funny moment with Billy West reproaching a dope fiend for his habit with a florid lecture until the guy shamefully puts it down

Above: Some of the stars Charley directed in the teens (top-bottom): Hank Mann, Billy West, Carter de Haven, Lloyd Hamilton.

Above right: Charley clowning with Billy West and producer Nat Spitzer in 1919.



and walks away to reform. After a short pause, Billy picks up the dope and takes it for himself! The actor playing the dope fiend? Charley Parrott!

Charley was starting to show an interest in performing again, pulling a Hitchcock in many of the two-reelers he directed. He's a bearded anarchist in 'A ROLLING STONE', a temperance minister in 'ITALIAN LOVE' and even takes *two* roles in Lloyd Hamilton's 'MOONSHINE'.

While these cameos afford us only limited glimpses of his developments in performance, undoubtedly he was developing ideas and theories that he would eventually apply to his own comedy. This is shown in the only film he starred in from this period, MARRIED TO ORDER. The provenance of this isolated little film was in 1918. During some downtime when West was recovering from influenza, Parrott got his team together and shot his own little film. 'MARRIED TO ORDER' is a real ful-

crum of his career, the midpoint between his starring Keystones and his later Roach films. Picking up where 'LOVE IN ARMOR' left off, Charley calls on girlfriend Rosemary Theby, but knocks into a decorative suit of armour. The noise it makes is unfortunate as it awakes her irate, near-sighted father (Oliver Hardy). Charley hides in the suit of armour, while Rosemary passes off the noise via title card: "I just dropped a stitch."

Father disapproves of Charley, thinking he is a mollycoddle, and bans him from the house. Charley disguises himself as the milkman, with the aid of a horse hair moustache, but his ruse is discovered, and he is again ejected. Meanwhile, Rosemary disguises herself as her brother, who is away out of town. Near-sighted father welcomes "him" back warmly, with a generous supply of Scotch and cigars. He also sees the chance to get one over on Charley, telling the "son" to dress as the daughter to fool him (Confused yet?). Father takes the joke a step further, persuading the pair to get married. They do so, just as the real brother turns up and Rosemary reveals her identity.

This isn't a Charley Chase film as such, but it's damn close. So many of the elements that made up his comic approach later are in place already: bashful Charley the mollycoddle having to prove himself; the situational setup turning into outlandish farce; the quick twists and turns in the plot; gender-bending humour. It also goes to show both how advanced his approach was, basic ideas obviously stemming from Charley himself, and how different he was from the majority of comics. The multiple gender changes are certainly more sophisticated and complicated than the plotlines of the Billy West films he had been directing!

After this interlude, Charley returned to making the sort of films he had been making before, but it is clear that the seeds of his later approach had been sown. Furthermore, it shows that the inspiration for the classic Chase style of comedy came from Charley himself. The quality of his work was beginning to get him noticed, and more high-profile work came his way. In 1920, he was signed to direct a few shorts for Mr and Mrs Carter De Haven, considered a more prestigious assignment. This was followed by a couple of the new 'mermaid' comedies for Educational pictures, starring Lloyd Hamilton, still sketching out his idiosyncratic 'poor boy' character.

Working with Hamilton was to have a profound influence on Chase. He greatly admired his approach, and would poach parts of it for his own performances. Charley later quoted his theory that a performer could build a fresh and original approach to comedy by basing a character on another performer very different in physical appearance from himself. On this basis, he would absorb Lloyd Hamilton's bashfulness and dignity, yet create something uniquely his own. He also later cited a specific example of how he poached one of Hamilton's gags for use in his short 'THE CARETAKER'S DAUGHTER'.

In fact, though his own performances in these years were few, Charley was developing greatly through his opportunities to sit back and watch the performers whom he was directing. It wasn't just Hamilton who inspired him; his close work with Oliver Hardy finds recognisable antecedents in Charley's own frustrated camera looks and dapper courtliness.

## MR PARROTT MEETS MR ROACH

Charley's talents heading up the Bulls-Eye/King Bee units and directing for Educational did not go un-noticed. In December of 1921 he was hired as director with Hal Roach, then expanding his studios beyond the Harold Lloyd and Snub Pollard comedies. Charley had been tipped for the job by his brother Jimmy, future director of Laurel & Hardy. As Paul Parrott, Jimmy was one of the new stars Roach was promoting. In signing with Roach, Charley began the association of his career.

While he stayed behind the cameras, we still have ample evidence of his comedy style at this time. As director, he was the driving force behind the comedy content and gag construction in the films bearing his name. The most interesting thing about Charley's films at this time is how different they were from both his mature style and the advances he had been





*Two of the Hal Roach stars directed by Charley: Snub Pollard and Paul Parrott. Paul/Jimmy/James Parrott was Charley's younger brother.*

making towards this in films like 'MARRIED TO ORDER'. Rather than subtle, situational light romantic comedies, he began producing manic, gagged-up films in which the laughs came fast and furious. Considering that, later on, he became one of the most talented integrators of gags with story, many of these films have only the flimsiest stories and focus purely on crazy gags even wilder than those in the Billy West films.

Part of the reason for this was that the comics he was working with did not lend themselves especially well to intricate storylines or in-character gags. The likes of Snub Pollard or Paul Parrott were capable comedians but lacked the substance that Chase would develop in his own subsequent work. Part of Charley's success in working with such comics was probably due to his realisation of this; he knew that films with more limited performers needed to be loaded with clever gags to compensate for the lack of depth. He would prove himself a master of this in the early 20s, developing a line in action-packed, crazy visual gags that raised the films above just slapstick.

One of the most celebrated films from this era is 'FRESH PAINT', which contains a great gag when Snub Pollard is knocked unconscious by Noah Young. As Snub passes out, the emulsion of the film seems to completely melt away; when he regains consciousness, the picture reassembles and the action continues! This brilliant effect raises a throwaway bit of slapstick into an incredibly sophisticated, fourth-wall breaking gag.

Such moments are peppered throughout the films, which took on wilder storylines flowing from Charley's fertile imagination. 'WHAT A WHOPPER!' (1921) takes a simple story and embellishes it with loads of great touches. Snub has told his wife he has been on a hunting and fishing trip with Noah Young; actually the two have been off on a bender. Snub wakes up with a hangover in a sanitarium, his condition shown by superimposed miniature demons banging away at the Pollard cranium with pickaxes. Meeting up on their way home to their wives, Snub and Noah get their story straight. To support their alibi, Noah buys a duck and Snub buy a fish (he tells the fishmonger to throw it to him so he can truthfully say that he caught it!).

The domestic setup is quite in the line of Chase's farces, but the comic approach is based more in the wild tall tales that Snub tells, shown in flashback: the tiny fish pulls on the line while Snub is sat in his car, pulling him across the countryside in a wild chase. Snub proudly unwraps his parcel at the conclusion to the tale... of course, the parcels have been mixed up and he is forced to explain how his fish is actually a duck. This he does by beginning another elaborate tale, culminating in the duck eating the fish! Incredibly, Mrs Pollard buys it, but just at this moment, Noah appears, chased by his wife.

"How can a fish swallow a duck?!" she says, angrily via title card. Snub's wife cottons on, and the pair of them are chased down the street.

Charley's sterling work developed the Pollard films into great little gag-packed comedies. Sure, Snub isn't the most memorable character, but the films contain so much fun that it barely matters. Accordingly, Roach decided to move Pollard into two-reel shorts. Charley was also promoted, not just to scaffolding the Pollard shorts, but to being director general of the whole studio, with a hand in supervising most of the studio's product.

The Pollard films were now double the length, but carried on much as before. 'THE COURTSHIP OF MILES SANDWICH' is a bizarrely funny parody of the pilgrim fathers. Another two-reeler, 'SOLD AT AUCTION', is one of the best of all Pollard's films. It has a patented Chase style plotline: Snub accidentally auctions off the contents of James Finlayson's house while Fin is on holiday. However, rather



*Lobby card for Snub Pollard's 'THE OLD SEA DOG', directed by Charley.*

than focus on the misunderstandings and embarrassment of the situation as Chase might later have done, most of the humour comes from Snub's frenetic attempts to reclaim all the belongings before the family returns. This includes the patently absurd situation of trying to recover a pair of false teeth from a stunt pilot! The teeth lead directly to the film's payoff gag, when they are finally returned to the family's granddad: he is overjoyed, as he can finally eat a ham sandwich that he has been saving!

Unfortunately, the quality of the two-reel Pollard films did not translate into good box office. Perhaps the public felt that Snub was just too one-dimensional for the longer format. He returned to vaudeville, but subsequently returned, demoted to one-reelers alongside Paul Parrott. Some of these films even featured the pair of them teamed, such as 'DEAR OL' PAL'. Although a demotion, films like this retained the high quality of the 2-reelers, 'DEAR OL' PAL' in particular being a lightning-paced laughfest chronicling the rivalry between Snub and Paul.

Charley also busied himself starting up a series starring humourist Will Rogers, who was to become a close friend. Though Charley directed only the first entry 'JUS' PASSIN' THROUGH', he remained friendly to Rogers and assisted behind the scenes with other shorts. The Rogers films ranged from brilliantly absurd parodies ('UNCENSORED MOVIES') to more low-key love triangle comedies ('THE COWBOY SHEIK'). Though Chase and Rogers remained close, Rogers was never happy with the comedies; "All I do is run around barns and lose my pants," he observed laconically. Actually, though, many of the Rogers films are great fun, if not quite capturing his unique style of humour.

Charley's tenure as director-general was about to come to an end, and it had brought with it mixed successes, artistically and financially. The Snub Pollard and Paul Parrott films had some great moments, but had just about run their course, and didn't turn a great profit. Many of Charley's greatest contributions became more noticeable in the long term, and turned out to be of great importance to the studio. Bringing Will Rogers to the studios might not have produced great successes with audiences, but Rogers' low-key, human wit did begin to infuse his films, moving a little closer to the human comedy of the classic Roach style. More importantly, Charley was responsible for closely guiding the development of the 'OUR GANG' series, even co-writing the first entry, and bringing in former colleague Robert McGowan to direct. However, his greatest contributions to the Roach comedy style would come not as director, or supervisor, but as on-screen performer. Charley Chase was about to be born...



## MEET JIMMY JUMP

In 1923, Harold Lloyd and Hal Roach parted ways after 8 years making films together. Though the parting was friendly enough, it left Roach without his biggest star. At the same time, the Snub Pollard series had just about run out of steam. The same could be said for that starring Paul Parrott, who was also having personal problems linked to illness. Roach looked to replace them with something more in the vein of Lloyd's comedy. His attention turned to his director general, who was constantly impressing him with his wit and impromptu performances on their business trips together. Roach basically instigated a switch for the two Parrott brothers; Charley would try his hand at starring in a series of shorts, while Paul/Jimmy retreated behind the camera to focus on gag writing and direction.

And so, in August 1923, Charley Parrott began filming his first starring role since 'MARRIED TO ORDER'. He also had not one, but two, alliterative pseudonyms: he acted under the name of Charley Chase, but his on-screen character was named Jimmy Jump. From the get-go, the Jimmy Jump films offered a change of pace in Roach one-reelers. Charley's natural appearance on screen is much in contrast to the moustachioed caricatures of Pollard and Paul Parrott. Pathé made much of this in publicity: "Have you seen Charley Chase yet? Here is a comedian who looks, dresses and acts like a human being, yet is really funny!". This human approach forms the basis of the comedy and, like 'MARRIED TO ORDER', his first Roach short, 'AT FIRST SIGHT', features his future persona remarkably well-formed. Right from the outset, Charley had a clear idea where he was going with his series. It is not a grab-bag of gags and parodies like the Pollard films, but the realist chronicles of an eternally embarrassed young man.

In 'AT FIRST SIGHT' and many other shorts, the embarrassment is financial: Charley dresses dapper, but is actually stuck in a white collar job like chauffeuring or book-keeping. Sometimes, he is embarrassed by his own gaucheness in polite society: HARD KNOCKS sees him confused by 'RSVP'





on an invite to a swanky party, and turning up in a "riding suit (very proper)".

At other times, the source of his embarrassment lies with other characters, and this is the theme he would continue most of all in his future comedies. Embryonic examples among the Jimmy Jump films include 'JUST A MINUTE', which sees Charley constantly delayed for his wedding by the agonising indecisions of a customer he is serving. 'SEEING NELLIE HOME' takes

things a step closer to the bedroom farce of his late '20s work; Jimmy is escorting a girl home, but ends up trapped inside her house when it transpires that she is actually married.

In films like this, the outline of his most familiar character is taking shape. There were still anomalies and variations, however. Sometimes, the similarities to Harold Lloyd became a little more pronounced. 'POWDER AND SMOKE' features Charley in a most Lloyd-like role, even down to appearing without his moustache; 'PUBLICITY PAYS' ends up with him clampering around on the outside of a building to catch an escaped monkey. Quite probably, these were as much due to Roach's desire for a "new Lloyd" as to Charley's own comic instincts.

Despite the increased sophistication, a link to his gagged-up direction of the Pollard and Paul Parrott films is seen, albeit subtly, in some abrupt changes in plot, and occasionally more 1-dimensional characterisations than he became famous for. As these were 1 reel films, portraying a slightly more contrived or stereotypical character trait allowed for a quick story set up. For instance, in 'THE FRAIDY CAT' he is ridiculously shy, in 'DON'T FORGET' a hopeless amnesiac. These sort of one-off variations on character did actually remain in some of his later mature work, perhaps when inspiration for his normal character flagged, or when an idea simply struck him as funny for a one-off. In 'FALLEN ARCHES' for instance, he has a semi-autistic propensity for taking things literally, and in 'GIRL SHOCK' has a manic fear of ladies.

*Scenes from two now-vanished Jimmy Jump films: 'THE ROYAL RAZZ' and 'SWEET BABY'.*

Occasionally, he was wont to slip back into the more cartoony, gagged-up style of his Snub Pollard days. 'THE RAT'S KNUCKLES' sees him as a kooky inventor working on a fantastically overcomplicated Rube Goldberg-style mousetrap, and as late as 1925's 'BIG RED RIDING HOOD', Jimmy Jump is hired to translate Red Riding hood into Swedish, reading the book on a bicycle, and dreaming himself into the story.

For all these experiments and transgressions back to an earlier style, mainly the Jimmy Jump films grew ever more sophisticated. One of the high watermarks was 'TOO MANY MAMAS', a farcical series of misunderstandings between Charley, his girl, the boss, the boss's wife, the boss's secret date, and a pair of apache dancers. The tightly wound tale culminates at a nightclub, with a fantastically dexterous scene wherein all the participants have to keep switching partners to satisfy the suspicious party currently scrutinising them.

With so many complications in just over ten minutes, 'TOO MANY MAMAS' shows Charley and his collaborators stretching the bulging confines of the one-reel format. There is a real conciseness of action and storytelling that show both a mastery of the one reel short, and the fact that he was ready for bigger challenges. One collaborator in particular must be singled out for his contribution to the series. Young Leo McCarey, future director of Laurel and Hardy, The Marxes' 'DUCK SOUP' and 'GOING MY WAY', had his first direction credits on the Jimmy Jump films. McCarey brought not just a flair for gag-writing, but also one for story structure that was to prove invaluable, and was already being shown in films like 'TOO MANY MAMAS'. Chase and McCarey's great collaboration in the Jimmy Jump films saw the series promoted to two reels in 1925. The two men were on the verge of fulfilling the potential seen in the films so far; Charley Chase was here to stay, and about to have his greatest successes.



## FANTASTIC FARCES: THE McCAREY YEARS

With his move to silent two-reel shorts, Charley enters the most critically acclaimed phase of his career. The lack of time that made his Jimmy Jump shorts seem occasionally abrupt or sketchy was gone. Fittingly, so was Jimmy Jump: the pseudonym would be done away with after the first couple of shorts.

*Leo McCarey would prove to be the greatest of all Chase's collaborators.*



*Katherine Grant made a wonderful co-star for Charley in 1925.*

*For more about her, see [Movie Night, issue 5](#).*

Charley's initial two reeler, 'HARD BOILED', is now lost, but his second and third remain. 'BAD BOY' sees pampered Charley sent into the real world, where he must act tough to prove himself. This is especially hard to achieve when his doting mother wants him to appear in her pageant, dancing as Pan. It's a great little short, but definitely belongs to the Jimmy Jump era rather than the forthcoming golden dawn. The same can be said of 'LOOKING FOR SALLY', which sees Jimmy doggedly pursuing a mystery girl, when all he knows about her is that she is called Sally. This is a step closer, but still goes off on some gag-riddled detours, notably a dream sequence of Charley as an alcoholic.

However, with the next short, 'WHAT PRICE GOOFY', Charley and McCarey refined their style to near perfection. If 'TOO MANY MAMAS' was the blueprint for the intricately plotted farce comedy that Chase was capable of, this is the moment where it reached fruition. The two-reel format offers more space for greater complications, deeper characterisations and more embarrassment for poor Charley!

Chase (no longer Jimmy) is a devoted husband but still must contend with wife Katherine Grant's eternal jealousy. There is trouble from the outset. When a stray dog follows him home, Katherine assumes it is a present from a female admirer and walks out. In the meantime, the couple have a guest arriving. Charley has invited Professor Brown to stay, but remains unaware that the professor is female. She arrives and makes herself at home; so does Charley, and the two both ready themselves for dinner, enacting a meticulously timed series of just-missed encounters in the bathroom. Charley finally realises the truth just as Katherine returns home. Fearing her wrath, he locks the professor upstairs; when the wife is suspicious about the lack of a professor, Charley passes off a burglar (Noah Young) as the pedagogue, and locks the real professor in her room. This leads to amusing scenes at the dinner table, especially as the professor's specialist subject is etiquette, and Noah's table manners are sadly lacking. Things worsen as the real professor bangs and slams in her attempts to escape her upstairs prison, which Charley passes off as the butler's attempts to learn Russian dancing. In the meantime, his newly acquired dog is practising playing fetch...with the professor's lingerie! Katherine finally storms upstairs, and Charley attempts to silence the professor. Meanwhile, Noah helps himself to the silverware. Hearing the commotion, a policeman arrives on the scene; so too does Katherine's gossipy friend, just as Charley is trying to smuggle the professor out of the house in a laundry sack. Unfortunately, the sack breaks, and the professor's leg sticks out! At the same time, Noah steals the gossip's clothes to escape in, leaving her in her underwear. Charley pins everything on the outraged butler, telling Katherine, "men like that get their punishment from above". The dog knocks a vase from the balcony above at this moment, knocking Charley unconscious.

'WHAT PRICE GOOFY' is the first of Charley Chase's two reel triumphs. As you can probably tell from the complicated summary above, not a second is wasted as complexities pile atop complexities. In addition, not only are the situations, gags and Chase's own performance superb, but there is also space for the supporting actors to shine. To his credit, this would always be something that Chase encouraged, and made a large contribution towards creating the ensemble comedy that distinguishes the best Roach comedy of the late 20s and 1930s.

For many comedians, 'WHAT PRICE GOOFY' would have been a high water-mark, but for Chase and McCarey it was just the first of many triumphs. As they found their feet with the two reel format, they maintained an astonishing consistency in style and quality over the next two seasons. McCarey has been credited as a giant part of the success of Charley's films in this period. Certainly, his work was first class and he deserves a good deal of plaudits, but auteur-ist name-dropping has perhaps praised him at the expense of Chase himself. As we have seen from the Jimmy Jump films and earlier, Chase's vision was already in place. Indeed, McCarey himself said that everything he learned, he learned from Chase. What McCarey *did* give to the Chase series, aside from rich comic contributions, was discipline. While Charley would follow comic whims and sometimes deviate into more gagged-up territory, McCarey was a stickler for tighter stories and situations. This resulted in a uniformity and consistency



*Charley makes a professorial substitution in 'WHAT PRICE GOOFY'; Katherine Grant will be on the scene at any minute!*

tency in the Chase series that his past and future efforts sometimes lacked.

In any case, no matter who did what, Chase and McCarey were a comedy dream team. In 1925 and 1926 they produced a series of beautifully crafted comedy classics that remain some of the greatest comedies of Chase's career, and also some of the best two-reel comedies, period.

Focusing in on the farcical elements of the Jimmy Jump films, they developed a series of films that found Charley's dapper and well-meaning, yet slightly bashful, character accidentally embroiled in embarrassing situations. Usually, this was through no fault of his own: in films like 'DOG SHY' or 'THE CARETAKER'S DAUGHTER', he finds himself caught up in complicated love triangles or bedroom farce through chance or machinations of other characters.

There was also a unity in these films brought about by many recurring gags and themes. 'WHAT PRICE GOOFY' had already provided a blueprint for a number of these. The storyline of innocent Charley appearing guilty of infidelity would be used time and again. The 'just-missed' routine with doors opening and closing with split second timing became something of a speciality, also. So too did Charley's partnership with Buddy the Dog. However, the variety of situations and gags that these were adapted to fit prevented any detectable formula from becoming stale

'INNOCENT HUSBANDS' (1925) sees Katherine Grant return as the jealous wife. She is also superstitious, constantly consulting mediums to find out if Charley is being faithful to her. Charley is innocent, but once again is embroiled in trouble when a girl from his neighbour's party ends up passed out in his flat. He discovers her as Katherine returns home to host a séance. Using the séance as cover, Charley and the neighbour remove the girl by 'levitating' her as a spirit across the darkened room. With the aid of a flashlight and a painting, Charley also "appears" as a spirit to scold Katherine for her treatment of her innocent husband. However, the jig is up when the lights come on, and Katherine exacts revenge on Charley.

Katherine Grant was simply brilliant as the ice-cold jealous wife character, and she's back again in 'THE CARETAKER'S DAUGHTER', which also makes much of another "just-missed" routine. Charley's boss is having an affair, and plotting a weekend away in a cabin. However, his paramour Symona Boniface's husband is on to him, so he persuades reluctant Charley to drive her there. Katherine gets wind of him driving another woman somewhere and follows him. So too does the jealous husband.

Arriving at the cabin, Charley meets the limping, moustachioed caretaker (James Parrott). When Katherine shows up, he passes Symona off as the caretaker's daughter. The jealous husband also turns up; Charley makes himself scarce, disguising himself as the caretaker (the film capitalises on the strong resemblance between the Parrott brothers). Unknown to Charley, Symona also has this idea...

Meanwhile, an awkward dinner is served to Charley's boss, Katherine and the husband, with Charley and the caretaker avoiding being seen together through carefully timed entrances and exits to the kitchen. Things are made especially difficult by Charley's loose moustache, which at one point falls into Katherine's soup and must be retrieved.

After dinner, the complexity of the just-missed encounters is doubled: Symona picks this moment to try and escape, and suspicious sleuth James Finlayson, engaged by the husband, also appears in the same disguise. The end result is four limping, moustachioed caretakers all limping in and out of doors within seconds of each other! Inevitably, they can't keep it up for long and mayhem breaks loose. Somehow, Charley manages to escape to the car outside, but Katherine is waiting there for him and knocks him unconscious.



The three films described above all contain a great deal of overlap, but the variations in plot, gags and complications never make them feel tiresome or repetitive. This is perhaps the greatest evidence of Chase and McCarey's skill. They didn't just stick in this narrow vein, either, trying a great many different storylines as the series went on. Sometimes the plot setups would be rather bizarre, yet the rooting in characterization and careful story build-up made them seem totally acceptable and even natural, rather than cartoonish. 'HIS WOODEN WEDDING' (1925) is a great example of this. Charley is to be married, but his rival convinces him that his bride-to-be has a wooden leg! Imagining a wooden-legged family, Charley gets blind drunk and runs away, finding himself at sea. He put his wedding ring in an envelope and attempts to throw it overboard, but the wind blows it back onto the boat and down the back of Gale Henry's dress! When Charley finds a broken-hearted note from his bride, he decides to make it back to the wedding, but first has to retrieve the envelope... With the masterful comic minds of Chase and McCarey, an absurdly ridiculous story is imbued with real humanity and almost

seems like it could happen.

The same can be said of 'CRAZY LIKE A FOX', which sees Charley acting deranged to get out of an arranged marriage, only to find that his intended bride is the girl he has already fallen in love with. Chase and McCarey's greatest collaboration, 'MIGHTY LIKE A MOOSE', also falls into this slightly fantastical category. This film has been well described in many other places, but really does bear another mention. It is a story of two homely people who have plastic surgery without telling one another, Charley fixing his buck teeth and his wife Vivian Oakland having her huge Roman nose straightened. Obviously, this is a pretty far-fetched situation, but Chase and McCarey carry it off with aplomb.

After their surgery, the pair meet, but fail to recognise each other. They are attracted to one another though and, both unused to the attention, decide to attend a party together. Both sneak home, and prepare themselves for the party secretly, in another masterful 'just-missed' scene. Attending the party, they are raided by the police, and have their photo captured by the local newspaper. Both return home to face the music, but Charley realises what has happened first. Outraged that his wife would find another man attractive, he decides to teach her a lesson. With the aid of false teeth, he appears in both his old and new guises, staging an elaborate 'fight' with himself. Finally, Vivian realises the truth, and teaches *him* a lesson.

'MIGHTY LIKE A MOOSE' is simply brilliant. It has all the hallmarks of classic Chase: a simple, slightly unbelievable setup developed into outlandish farce, executed with great charm, humanity and precision timing by Chase and his co-stars, finished off with a liberal sprinkle of great sight gags and routines. Even when these routines are borrowed, like the fight scene (appropriated from Max Linder), Charley makes them his own. Most impressively, the potentially unsympathetic cheating lead characters are made likeable and empathetic by Chase and Oakland's performances. We really believe that they are a real couple, and that they would want to surprise each other to appear more attractive. It also seems perfectly understandable that, after years of being unattractive, they would welcome some attention. Who can blame them? Charley's outrage that his wife would cheat on him, despite him having done exactly the same, is a wonderfully human touch. The focus on such foibles of human nature take a ridiculous story and make it believable, with the comedy packing a greater punch, and the audience really caring about the characters. The direction by McCarey is also exquisite, tying all the elements together.

Unfortunately, all good things must come to an end, and McCarey's strong talent for story structure saw him promoted. As director general, the position once held by Chase, he would troubleshoot and scaffold the development of such series as the Mabel Normand, Max Davidson and Laurel & Hardy comedies, before going on to be an Oscar-winning director elsewhere. Although Chase definitely missed McCarey, he was hardly at sea without him. As we have seen, the basic vision for his comedies was in place before McCarey came along, and his fertile imagination meant he would have no trouble in continuing to craft the comedies on his own, or with different collaborators. Roach knew that he could rely on Charley to carry on as before, otherwise it is unlikely he would have moved McCarey from the successful series.

Charley's ability to do so is very evident in the comedies made after McCarey left. Films like 'A ONE MAMA MAN' and 'ASSISTANT WIVES' follow a very similar vein of precision farce as before. No doubt he was helped greatly by his new director: he was reunited with brother James, and the two brothers' close relationship meant they had no trouble meshing their comic styles to create comedies that equalled the Chase-McCarey shorts.

One difference was the brothers' slightly more wacky tendencies; whilst McCarey was a stickler for a tight story, the Charley and James were quite happy to take a more meandering, gag-laden path from time to time.

'FLUTTERING HEARTS' (1927) is a good example of this. It falls into two distinct halves, and although the plot is linked, each half exists more to justify the gag 'islands'. As the film starts, pretty Martha Sleeper is speeding in her car to a department store sale. A cop (Eugene Pallette) sees her zoom past and commandeers Charley's car to help catch her. When they do catch up with her, Charley is smitten and talks the cop out of giving her a ticket. In fact, Martha even persuades them both to help her get the bargains she wants in the sale! So begins the first main gag island, the attempts of the trio to invade the scrum of terrifying bargain hunters. Eventually, they emerge, ragged but victorious. Unfortunately, the Police Chief passes by and fires poor Eugene for the state of his uniform, ripping his badges from him. As Charley is picking up his badgeless cap, Martha's father wanders past, looking for a chauffeur. Seeing the



*Oliver Hardy worked beautifully with Charley Chase. Here in one, of Charley's all-time funniest scenes, he seduces Hardy with the aid of a mannequin. From 'FLUTTERING HEARTS' (1927).*

cap, he mistakes Charley for a chauffeur, and engages him. It turns out that Father is being blackmailed by a burly speakeasy owner (Oliver Hardy) over an incriminating letter, and he charges Charley with the task of retrieving it. Thus begins the second gag 'island', as Charley enters the speakeasy, and masterfully manipulates a female mannequin to flirt with Hardy and steal the letter. This scene is borrowed from a similar scene Chaplin performed in 'A DOG'S LIFE', but I'd venture to say that Chase actually improves upon it. He gives the lifeless mannequin real character, and adds a risqué element in his flirting attempts, including an attempt to flash some leg. He accidentally shows off far too much, to Hardy's lascivious delight! Hardy's presence in the scene is also a great asset, and one can only wish that he and Chase had made more than their handful of appearances together.

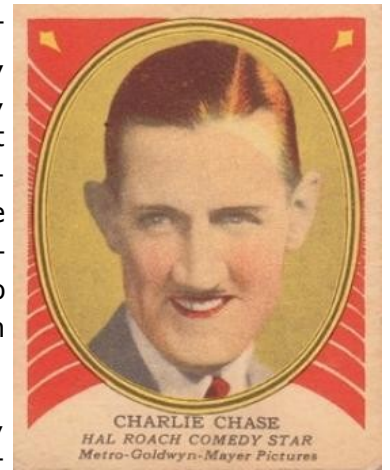
'FLUTTERING HEARTS' may not be as tightly constructed as the best of the McCarey films, but is just as funny. The James Parrott-directed films continued to maintain this high standard, but more changes were coming just around the corner. After saying goodbye to Leo McCarey, Charley now had to say hello to Leo the lion...

## GOOD TIME CHARLEY & LEO THE LION

In the 1927/28 season, two more changes occurred on the Chase series. The first was Hal Roach's change in distributor from Pathé to MGM. At first sight, this doesn't seem that big a change, but actually this had quite an impact on the films. The budget was now increased, and so the films have a new polish to them. This also seems to have enabled more location shooting, as all the Roach series suddenly start making much more use of Culver City street locations. This directly influenced the farce comedies that Chase was producing, in expanding the canvas on which he painted. The McCarey films were often confined to house sets, with the climaxes taking place in bedrooms, dining rooms and parlours. Now, the climax more often than not takes place on the streets of Culver City. Charley's embarrassment was now not just combined to the principal characters in the films, but was made universal: crowds gather on the streets to gape and laugh at his predicaments, heightening the comic effect of his embarrassment. (This was fast becoming a Roach studios trademark in the MGM era; see for example the L & H and Max Davidson films).

This wider canvas is evident from the very first MGM short, 'THE STING OF STINGS', in which Charley takes a group of boys from the orphanage out for a disastrous day trip in his new car. It was also incorporated into the typical Chase farces; 'THE WAY OF ALL PANTS' sees him ending up on a bus journey through the city streets without his trousers, while 'THE FAMILY GROUP' has Charley flying high *above* the streets, attached to a host of balloons he has bought to keep his child happy at a portrait session.

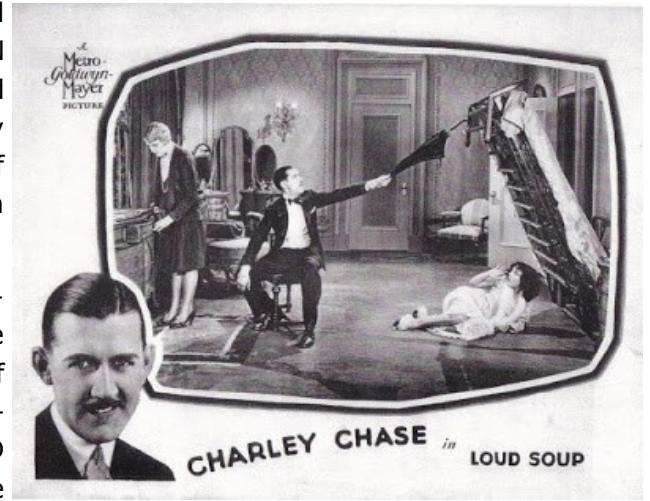
Another change to come over the farces was the increased presence of risqué humour. As the Jazz age wore on, the modern age of sexual promiscuity inspired films to become more daring. Charley for his part has some (for the time) much more racy plotlines. The aforementioned 'THE WAY OF ALL PANTS' sees Charley, a butler and a detective all running round trouser-less in the same household, chasing after the same pair of pants. ("Rather too much shown of where trousers should be" sniffed one exhibitor's review). Most notably of all, 'LIMOUSINE LOVE' features a completely naked Viola Richard stuck in the back of Chase's car on the way to his wedding! Another one of those slightly unbelievable plot setups that hallmark many of Chase's best films, this short is one of the best things he ever did. Interestingly, exhibitors did not seem moved to complain about *her* state of undress...



*Charley's MGM films developed his comedy in some new directions. From top: 'THE STING OF STINGS' and 'THE FAMILY GROUP' saw him as a family man suffering at the hands of unruly children. He also developed his farces in more risqué directions. In 'THE WAY OF ALL PANTS' he ends up pants-less on a bus, and in 'LIMOUSINE LOVE' it is Viola Richard's turn to lose her clothes!*

'LIMOUSINE LOVE' was directed not by James Parrott, but by Fred Guiol. As Brian Anthony and Antony Edmonds noted in 'SMILE WHEN THE RAINDROPS FALL', the rise of Laurel and Hardy saw many good directors transferred from the Chase series, with the reliable Charley left to train up newcomers. While Charley was more than capable of this, his series would forever be robbed of the sustained collaboration that made the McCarey or James Parrott films such a success.

On the positive side, the lack of sustained collaborator possibly influenced him to try new things, because in his late MGM silents, we see Chase experimenting with ideas more than he had since the days of Jimmy Jump. His classic-style farces continued (including some re-vamps of classics: 'WHAT PRICE GOOFY' was reworked as 'LOUD SOUP', and 'MIGHTY LIKE A MOOSE' inspired 'ALL PARTS'), but some very different comedies began to emerge.



*'LOUD SOUP' was a partial remake of 'WHAT PRICE*

One particular subgenre that Charley was fond of at this time were films featuring him not just married, but with a young family. As a comedic device, Charley's family were both a further audience for his embarrassment and often the source of it. The films made in this mould are successful, and some of his most charming. 'MOVIE NIGHT' chronicles the Chase family's night at the pictures, with the chief source of problems being the hiccups of adorable little Edith Fellowes. Less innocent is the bratty son who keeps disrupting the family portrait session in 'THE FAMILY GROUP'. The Chase baby is persuaded to smile with the aid of a balloon, but the elder son repeatedly bursts it with his peashooter. Finally, Charley resorts to buying a whole bunch of balloons, which promptly whisk him high above the city streets! A missing film, 'IMAGINE MY EMBARRASMENT', saw Charley the victim of his daughter's chewing gum, which attaches itself to him as he attempts to dance with society hostess Anita Garvin.

In between these films, Charley was also experimenting at the other extreme from presenting himself as a family man. Abandoning his usual pleasant, mild-mannered character, he adopted a wholly unpleasant, back-slapping practical joker type. Later seen most famously in his 'SONS OF THE DESERT' cameo, this was first seen in 1928's 'THE FIGHT PEST' as a constant annoyance for boxing fans, and in 'IS EVERYBODY HAPPY?', in which his practical jokes are the bane of politician Del Henderson's campaign. However, Chase must have recognised that he could not play this type constantly and still be likeable, as it only crops up occasionally in his canon of work.

Sadly, we are robbed of seeing much of Charley's invention and innovation during this time, as his MGM silents have a pretty abysmal survival rate. (For a more detailed look at these films, and what we know about the missing ones, see issue 3).

The biggest change to his film-making technique was about to come, though. Beginning with 'IMAGINE MY EMBARRASMENT', the films were released with music and effects tracks, a portent of the forthcoming talkie revolution. In 1929, Hal Roach gave in to inevitability, ending production of silent films. The magnitude of this change is hard to imagine now, but it was an earth-shattering development that forced even the most experienced comedians and filmmakers to give serious thought to their technique. Happily, Chase, like Laurel and Hardy, was able to make the transition smoothly. Yet he would still constantly be experimenting with and refining his technique in sound films, and had many more bright comedic moments to come.



**NEXT ISSUE!**

**ALL TALKING! ALL SINGING! ALL DANCING!**

**CHARLEY CHASE'S**

**SOUND COMEDY CLASSICS**



# FACES FROM THE FILMS:

## WALLACE LUPINO



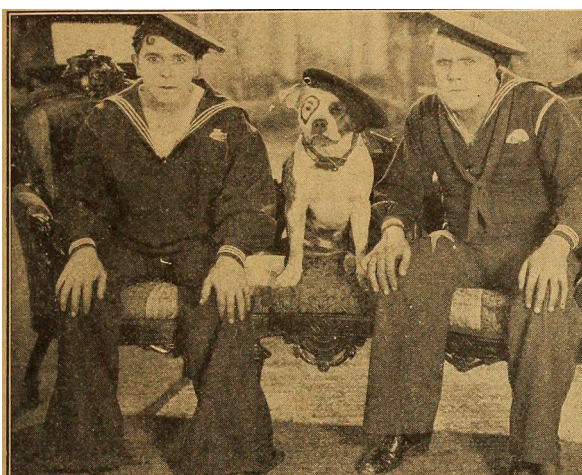
One of the greatest assets to the American silent comedy was the influx of talent from the British Music Halls. Aside from the obvious examples of Chaplin and Laurel, there were many, many more players who brought their training on the boards with them to the screen. Not all of these found stardom, often remaining part of the terracotta army of supporting players and gag writers who contributed to the industry. Amongst these, one of the most talented of was Wallace Lupino. Yet another member of the prospering Lupino dynasty, he is most familiar from the films of his brother, Lupino Lane. Wallace was certainly integral to the success of those films, adaptable as heavy, straight man or partner in comic two-man slapstick routines. However, he also added support to many other films, as well as starring in his own.

Born in Scotland on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1898, whilst his family were on tour, Wallace was five and a half years his brother's junior. The elder Lupino had been busy in those 5 and a half years however, already finding fame as a child star under the billing of 'Nipper' Lupino Lane, or 'Little Nipper'. Although Wallace had been born into the same environment as his brother, the family's efforts were already focused on the career of 'Nipper'. Subsequently, though Wallace would receive the same schooling as his brother, he would never achieve the same prominence. He was also a little stockier, and not as tailor-made for tumbling. However, this certainly did not prevent him from finding a berth in the family trade. From reading 'HOW TO BE A COMEDIAN', Lane's study of his family's techniques, it is clear that acrobatics was only part of their arsenal. For Wallace, this meant that there were a whole host of other skills to master: character comedy, accents, impersonations, knockabout, light comedy. He would master many of them, showcasing them both on stage and later in films.

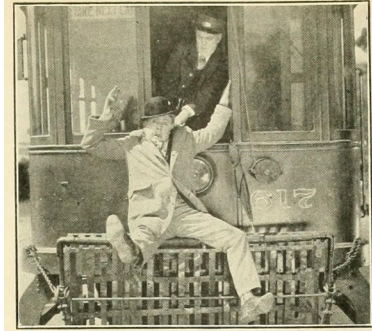
Starting at age 9 alongside his brother and father, Wallace appeared in a variety of pantomimes and shows. He also apparently spent some time in the Royal Air Force during World War 1. He was a keen boxer, and later publicity claimed that he was a welterweight champion during this time. However, he was also on hand for the first films made by Lane, in the UK in 1916-1919. The two brothers would always remain close, both in their personal and professional lives. Wallace never seems to have minded playing second fiddle to his brother, and 'Nip' appreciated his talented support. It is important to realise that Wallace's appearances are down to far more than just nepotism; he had developed into a deft and versatile comic actor. This is evidenced by his success in shows without his brother.

Wallace did not accompany Lane on his first trip to the U.S. in 1922-23, keeping busy in stage shows such as 'ROUND IN 50', a vehicle for George Robey based on 'AROUND THE WORLD IN EIGHTY DAYS'. In that show, he was teamed up with another relation, cousin Barry Lupino, as a pair of bumbling detectives trailing Robey around the world. *The Era* commented that, "The amusing Lupinos were both in their element with their remarkable acrobatic dancing and trap-door business." The show was a smash, and after 469 performances at the London Hippodrome, toured for much of 1923.

When Lane made his next trip to the USA in 1925, Wallace was along for the ride. He became a fixture of the Lupino Lane comedies made for Educational Pictures between 1925 and 1929. The close-knit unit saw Wallace acting in a similar capacity to Syd Chaplin on the set of Charlie Chaplin's films. He had input behind the scenes (more on that at the end of the article), as well as acting a variety of roles showcasing his versatility. In some of the shorts, like 'THE FIGHTING DUDE' or 'HOWDY DUKE', he plays a fairly standard comic heavy, but other films gave him more chance to shine. In 'MAID IN MOROCCO', he plays a villainous Caliph, in 'FANDANGO' a suave gaucho. 'HELLO SAILOR' and 'ROAMING ROMEO' allow him to practically co-star, engaging in dexterous and wonderfully-timed physical comedy set-pieces with his brother. Perhaps his most impressive roles are some brilliant moments in drag in both 'LISTEN SISTER' and 'BATTLING SISTERS'. In both films, Wallace portrays matronly dowagers, who he convincingly makes into real characters funny in them-



*(L-R): Wallace played many different roles opposite his brother. As heavy, he is in costume for 'FANDANGO'; 'HELLO SAILOR' sees them teamed as sailor buddies. They also made appearances on radio and record together.*



Wallace also starred in his own shorts.

(Top) a glum moment with Betty Boyd and Louise Carver in 'WEDDED BLISTERS'

(above): an awkward moment in 'HUSBANDS MUST PLAY'

selves. One of the funniest moments in all of Lane's films is in *BATTLING SISTERS*, as he and Wallace enact a parody of romantic melodramas in reverse: it is the matronly Wallace trying to seduce the innocent Lupino!

As fantastic a comedian and acrobatic as Lupino Lane was, characterization wasn't his strongest suit. Wallace's closely observed characters and versatility filled a gap in the films; in fact, while Lane was the superior comedian and acrobat, Wallace was arguably the finer comic actor.

Accordingly, his talent did not go unnoticed at Educational. Soon, he was being headhunted for supporting roles in other comedians' films made by the studio. Amongst others, he appeared opposite child star 'Big Boy' Sebastian in 'NO FARE', with Jerry Drew in 'JUST DANDY', with Al St John in 'HIGH SEA BLUES' and with Dorothy Devore in 'RAH! RAH! RAH!'

His personal life was also busy at this time. Wallace was married to Rose Jones, who was Buster Keaton's cousin. The marriage did not last, but it seems he was remarried to one Grace Shirley not long after. This marriage did last, and together they had a son, Richard Lupino. Richard would also go on to become an actor, appearing in the title role of some 1930s 'JUST WILLIAM' films.

Around this time, Wallace was also promoted to some starring roles. Educational's 'Cameo' series of comedies were one reel shorts that allowed up-and-coming talent to have chance to star; several of these starred supporting players like Wallace, or Monte Collins. As the least prestigious of Educational's product, the Tuxedo films were turned out fairly quickly. They usually had a domestic set-up, taking a basic gag or situation and riffing on it until the reel was up. This was assembly-line comedymaking, and as a group, there is a fair bit of overlap between them. However, the talent involved in front of and behind the camera meant that, individually, they were well-crafted, entertaining little films.

Wallace starred in a handful of Cameos, and was promoted to the 'Tuxedo' shorts, which were the next step up Educational's production schedule. Of these, only 2 or 3 seem to circulate today. His relaxed, character-based approach served him well in these down-to-earth domestic stories. Ironically, 'THE LOST LAUGH' is one of the few survivors, and has been issued on the 'ACCIDENTALLY PRESERVED' DVD.

'HARD WORK' is similar domestic, slapstick comedy. Wallace, with young wife Betty Boyd and their bratty son in tow, arrives at a farmhouse he has just purchased. Of course, the house is a tumbledown old place in severe need of repair, and the family's attempts to do this only succeed in totally destroying it.

The Cameo films were not just a development ground for budding stars; rookie directors also began here. Jules White, future Stooges overlord, helmed 'HARD WORK' as one of his early efforts. As you might expect, it contains much of White's signature vigorous slapstick. Some especially savage gags include. However, while this could seem a bit too rough and painful in sound films, the gags in 'HARD WORK' succeed very well. Slapstick dominates, but it is handled with panache, and the destruction is so total that it becomes very funny.

Sadly, most of Wallace's other shorts are elusive today. They included 'AUNTIE'S ANTE', 'SWEET BABY' and 'HUSBANDS MUST PLAY'. 'WEDDED BLISTERS' featured him moving all his furniture, and a gobby mother-in-law, across town on a small horse and cart. 'CROWN



Two more stills from Wallace's own starring films. He's atop the furniture wagon in 'WEDDED BLISTERS', and administering corporal punishment with Betty Boyd in 'HARD WORK'. Both films were released in 1928.



Wallace in *'THE MAN WHO COULD WORK MIRACLES'* (1936)

ME' is a dentist comedy that would be especially interesting to see as it was directed by Lupino Lane.

The starring shorts ended with Educational's reorganisation for talking pictures, but Wallace shows up in the four sound shorts made by Lupino Lane in 1929.

When Lane left to return to England in 1930, Wallace went too, and together they rebuilt their careers at home. Britain welcomed them back with open arms, and the Lupino brothers were prominent in the UK film industry as talking pictures arrived. Whatever Lane appeared in, it was guaranteed that Wallace would find a part. 'NO LADY', one of their first big successes, actually sees Wallace taking on *three* roles, as a cabbie, a fisherman and a foreign spy! One of their most notable films together was the now missing 'TRUST THE NAVY', which saw them paired together in a remake of the silent short 'HELLO SAILOR'. He also appeared opposite other family members, with Stanley Lupino, and in some talkie shorts with Barry Lupino.

Again, Wallace's talent was recognised outside the family. He was used in supporting roles in many other films, including one of the 'JOSSER' films starring Ernie Lotinga, 'UP IN THE AIR'. His most high-profile appearance was in Alexander Korda's version of the HG Wells fantasy story 'THE MAN WHO COULD WORK MIRACLES'. Mild-mannered Roland Young discovers that he can somehow make anything happen that he wants to simply by saying it. He has just discovered this and is experimenting by making trees appear when up comes suspicious police constable Wallace. Acting officiously, he gets on Young's nerves, to the point where he tells him to "Go to blazes!". In a flash, PC Wallace finds himself in Hades, surrounded by flames. His response is to take out his notebook and continue his officious business by taking notes, until his notebook catches fire! Meanwhile, Young is feeling guilty, but is in a quandary: he can't bring him back as he will be arrested, but doesn't want him to suffer. His solution is to send him somewhere else, far across the world; in another flash, PC Wallace is wandering the streets of San Francisco, totally bewildered!

As Lupino Lane returned to the stage, Wallace usually found a part in his productions. He had a prominent role as Parchester the lawyer in Lane's greatest success, 'ME AND MY GIRL', both on stage and film. Other shows he appeared in included 'MEET ME VICTORIA', 'SWEETHEART MINE', and 'LA-DE-DA'. He also made time to appear in other films throughout the war years, notably 'WATERLOO ROAD' (1945).

In his later years, Wallace retired from performing due to the onset of arthritis and became a publican. He outlived his brother by two years, dying in 1961. His work had been so tied up with Lupino Lane's that inevitably he remained in his brother's shadow for much of the time. However, he was a very talented comic and supporting actor in his own right, and added immeasurably to both the films of his brother and of others.

## THE MYSTERY OF 'HENRY W GEORGE'

Many of the best films starring Lupino Lane and Wallace Lupino are credited to the direction of 'Henry W George'. This is not a name seen widely in silent comedy, and the accepted theory is that it actually refers to Lane himself (Lane's birth name was Henry George Lupino). As further proof, 'George' worked exclusively on Lane's films, including some he made after returning to the UK, such as 1935's 'TRUST THE NAVY' and 'THE DEPUTY DRUMMER'. But why did Lane not use his own name, as he would on other films such as 'NO LADY' (1931) or MAID OF THE MOUNTAINS (1932)?

Perhaps the answer lies in that middle initial. As Lane and Wallace were always such a close team in their work, maybe the W indicated Wallace, with the pair co-directing, or Wallace acting as co-director. Certainly, Wallace must have had creative input in making the films, sharing gags with Lane and working to stage complex two-man routines. Mystery solved! Well, all except for one curiosity...

The Motion Picture Blue Book was a listing of actors, directors and technicians working in the trade, kind of a filmmakers Yellow Pages. Each listing presented a résumé of that person's career. The 1930 edition gives Henry W George a listing. It mentions his work directing Cameo comedies and Lupino Lane comedies, but also adds a mystery of its own. George is described as 'director and actor', having acted in 'When Fleet Meets Fleet', a 1928 British war picture about the Battle of Jutland. Even given their British roots it's highly doubtful that Lupino Lane or Wallace would have appeared in this serious picture. So why is it listed? In error? As a joke? In confusion with a similarly named actor?

After a little bit of research, the latter turns out to be true. 'WHEN FLEET MEETS FLEET' was actually an Anglo-German production, also known as 'DER VERSUNKEN FLOTTE'. Mainly filmed in Germany, it featured an international cast, including one Heinrich George. Presumably, George's name was anglicized to Henry George for the film's release in the USA. It seems fairly safe to assume that our 'Henry W George' stuck to comedy and left the German fleets alone! What of Heinrich George? He was actually a distinguished German actor, having appeared in Fritz Lang's 'METROPOLIS'. Less glamorously, after being blacklisted by the Nazi regime, he was persuaded to star in several Nazi propaganda films. He would subsequently be interred in a Soviet Camp as a collaborator, where he died in 1946.



**Definitely not a Lupino:  
Heinrich George in some of his  
Nazi propaganda.**

# KEATON KURIOSITIES

Some rare Keaton curios from around the web:

- 1: Another still from that mystery Keaton/Karl Dane photo session discussed in the last issue.
- 2: An ad heralding BK's 1921-22 series of shorts for First National, this highlights a great shot from 'THE BOAT'
- 3: A great cartoon titled 'A study in Optimism and Pessimism': alongside BK are Doug Fairbanks, Mary Pickford and Jack Holt.
- 4: A real oddity: a German performer from the 1930s named Syd Fox promised that he was 'Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd and Charlie Chaplin in one person'. No pressure, then! Does anyone know anything else about this chap?



2

Take a Peek Through the Port Hole at His New Series of Comedies.

**Keep Your Eye on Buster Keaton!**

He is putting out a new series of high class comedies, the funniest you ever did see! The first three are knockouts!

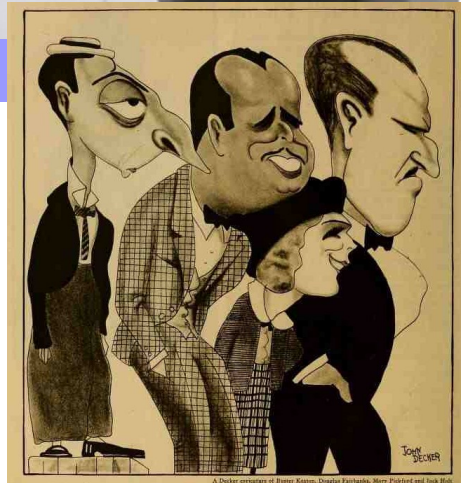
"THE BOAT"—"THE PALEFACE"  
"THE PLAYHOUSE"

Written and Directed by:  
Buster Keaton and Eddie Cline  
Presented by Joseph M. Schenck

THE first three of Buster Keaton's new series of comedies are conceded by critics to be the funniest he has ever made. Exhibitors can contract for the three or each separately. But if you are looking for something absolutely novel throw your hat in the ring quick.

A First National Attraction

3



4

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TAGLICH 8 1/4 UHR - MITTWOCH SONNABEND SONNTAG 4 1/2 UND 8 1/4 UHR

DER CHAPLIN DER TRICKTANZER

**SYD FOX**

BUSTER KEATON  
HAROLD LLOYD  
CHARLIE CHAPLIN  
*in einer Person!*

**MISSING  
IN ACTION**

# WISE GUYS (1937)

**STARRING CHARLIE NAUGHTON & JIMMY GOLD.**

**With Audrene Brier, Robert Nainby, Walter Roy, Sydney Keith and David Kier.**

**Directed by HARRY LANGDON.**

**A FOX BRITISH picture made at Wembley Studios.**



*Naughton and Gold, the stars of 'WISE GUYS'.*

Some of the most intriguing moments in the history of any art form are those where paths of prominent artists meet. Sometimes, these are premeditated collaborations between heavyweight artists. At other times, they are more coincidental, dictated by circumstance.

The era of classic comedies brought about many such occurrences. Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin performing a routine in 'LIMELIGHT' is perhaps the most famous, Roscoe Arbuckle's partnership with Keaton the most productive. Charley Chase guesting in Laurel and Hardy's 'SONS OF THE DESERT' is perhaps the most beloved. Less high-profile, these encounters became more and more frequent as silent comedy became a niche of ever decreasing circles. Stars on their way down clustered together to make a living, at Educational pictures and Columbia for instance, and later on television. Thus, in later years we get Buster Keaton directed by Mack Sennett, Snub Pollard supporting the Three Stooges, and Keaton performing with Billy Gilbert on TV, amongst many others. Some of these obscure, ephemeral appearances are among the most interesting for comedy devotees, if not always the most entertaining.

One to definitely file under this curiosity category is 'WISE GUYS' (1937). This is a long-vanished British film, directed by none other than comedy great Harry Langdon and starring an obscure team of Music Hall comedians! Just the notion of Langdon, who directed few films, helming a British film of the 30s, is bizarre in itself. So how did this come about?

Contrary to the myths perpetrated by Frank Capra and others, Langdon was far from hapless in the sound era. He had starred in many successful short films throughout the late 20s and early 30s. Whilst his hopes for a full comeback remained unfulfilled, he remained popular and visible in supporting roles in a variety of features. By 1936, this work had started to dry up a little however, and for a change of pace he took up with a stage show, 'ANYTHING GOES'. The play, in which he played a comically bumbling gangster, took a year-long tour to Australia. This was very successful, and the presence of a Hollywood star was rare indeed. In contrast to the USA, Langdon was feted by the press.

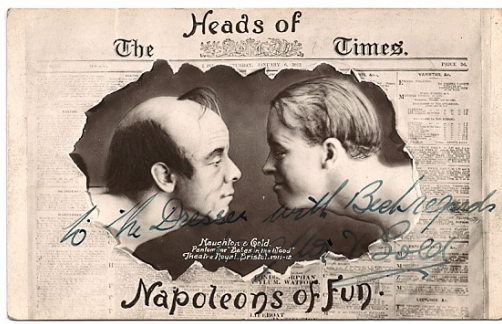
After a successful stay, and without too much demand at home, he found himself taking a leisurely wayward journey back to the states. With wife Mabel and son Harry, Jr in tow, they saw a little of Paris and then travelled on to London. Whilst there, Harry obtained a small part in a musical, 'STARDUST' (also known as both 'MAD ABOUT MONEY' and 'HE LOVED AN ACTRESS') with Ben Lyon, and also found himself asked to direct a film.



*Harry as he appeared in 'STARDUST' (1937).*

Quite how this came about is lost to time, although possibly through the influence of Ben Lyon, who was an old co-star of Harry's. In the fumbling British B-picture industry of the 1930s, the presence of any Hollywood star in a film was seen as something of a coup. 'STARDUST', featuring Lyons and Langdon as well as Lupe Velez, was just one example of this kind of 'booster' film, and probably someone connected with the production saw a chance to cash in on Langdon's name.

The stars were Charlie Naughton and Jimmy Gold, a long standing Scots comedy team. They had a history on the Music Halls dating back to 1908 and were considered real veterans. In the mid-30s they were finding a new prominence as members of 'THE CRAZY GANG'. Alongside the other teams of Flanagan & Allen and Nervo & Knox,



*The 'Napoleons of Fun', early in their career*

they starred in a series of successful shows at the Palladium, as well as branching into film.

The Crazy Gang have been referred to as 'The English Marx Brothers', but this isn't really a very accurate assessment. Though they shared with the Marxes a penchant for excruciating puns, their humour was much less cerebral. It was certainly lively and boisterous, though, a high-spirited mixture of slapstick, word play, cross-talk and jokes that creaked like the deck of a ghost ship.

Flanagan and Allen proved the most enduring of the constituent teams, with a creative line in fumbling wordplay, based on the lovably bedraggled Flanagan's attempt to pronounce words:

By contrast, Naughton and Gold are probably the lesser lights of The Crazy Gang. They chatter away in Scottish accents so thick you could spread them on bread, and witter around not doing anything especially funny, at least in the films. One of the problems with The Crazy Gang was that its individual members were sometime lost in the chaos; Naughton and Gold, as the least distinctive comedians, suffered the worst from this.

Their records, without the other members of the gang, allowed them more prominence. These tend to play on their Scottish heritage, such as 'IN SEARCH OF THE LOCH NESS MONSTER'. As Comedians, their main problem seems to be that they chuckle desperately at their own ragged jokes, rather than delivering bad puns with the knowing slyness of Groucho or Chico Marx. To be fair, this is a criticism that one could level at many British comedians at this time. With a few exceptions, Brit comedians were mostly just too shy to have the audacity to deliver puns with confidence.

Despite their failings on film and record, it could be that these just weren't the right media to capture Naughton and Gold. They were stage comedians first and foremost, with 30 years experience polishing their act. This longevity must speak for a certain amount of skill. Originally debuting as tap dancers, they subsequently shifted their athleticism toward slapstick. Gold came from a family trade of painters and decorators, and the duo's most praised act centred on paste and paper slapstick. Inevitably, in the time their films date from, they were getting on in years; we know them from a time when they were trading more on dated whimsy than slapstick. Among the louder members of the Crazy Gang, this is somewhat lost. Whether or not they fared better in their 'solo' starring vehicles is hard to say now, as all three—'SKYLARKS', 'HIGHLAND FLING' and 'WISE GUYS' have vanished. The latter two were made for the cheapie studio Fox British, which churned out 'Quota Quickies', films made quickly to satisfy a ruling that a percentage of films shown in Britain must be made domestically.

The context of the manufacture doesn't make one hold out great hope for the quality of 'WISE GUYS', but who knows? Langdon had common ground with Naughton and Gold in whimsy, visual humour and a long history of stage training prior to films. Charlie Naughton's character had some similarities with Langdon's 'little elf', with a curious mixture of middle aged man and pudgy baby about him. Indeed, he was often the put-upon child-figure of the Crazy Gang. Perhaps Langdon adapted some comic bits for him.

The story of WISE GUYS is another play on Naughton & Gold's Scottish origins. As extreme spendthrifts, they find themselves related to a rich racehorse owner, Phineas MacNaughton (Robert Nainby), and determine to prove themselves members of the rich family. Unfortunately, this involves them – shudder – spending money! The few stills I've managed to track down show them trying to show themselves splashing out in a fancy restaurant, and . Unfortunately, their efforts are all in vain as they are pipped to getting a piece of the racehorse, and the family fortune, by their cousin Audrene Brier. The boys return to spendthrift happiness.

The story has potential for some good sequences, and plenty of fish-out-of-water comedy. One particularly amusing still shows the pair in the swanky restaurant, trying to show off living the high life, but still on a budget: they have ordered the tiniest roast chicken ever seen.

The overall success of 'WISE GUYS' would have been limited by the rushed shooting schedule and limited budget. Langdon's direction has also been a bone of long contention. At this point, he hadn't directed a film since 1933's ragbag short 'THE STAGE HAND'\*, and not



*A scene from 'WISE GUYS'.*

helmed a feature since 1928's HEART TROUBLE, the film that was effectively his last as a major star. Langdon's own direction has often been cited as the reason for his crash-and-burn from stardom, though 'THE CHASER' has picked up many fans in recent years following DVD release. The jury is still out on his skills as director, though it's important to note that, like Stan Laurel, he was the unofficial director on many of his films. His idiosyncratic style so set the style and pace of most of his work, that he had an influence way above that of just acting. 'WISE GUYS' is the only time he directed other comedians, which makes its disappearance that more frustrating. The claims that ego had a negative effect on his direction would no longer apply to directing other comedians, allowing us to judge it more objectively.

This isolated instance would be the last film Langdon directed. Following completion, he headed back to the States, and would live with Stan Laurel for a while until he sorted out work. Laurel would lead him to more behind-the-scenes work, at Hal Roach Studios. After writing for L & H's 'BLOCKHEADS' he would find himself at another of those curious cinematic crossroads. In 1939 he starred with Oliver Hardy in 'ZENOBIA', after Roach fired Laurel. Despite this, the Laurel-Langdon friendship remained firm until Harry's untimely death in 1944.

As for Naughton and Gold, the Crazy Gang concept now gathered steam, with their 1937 film 'O-KAY FOR SOUND' being a smash. They would make a run of other successful comedies together, including 'ALF'S BUTTON AFLOAT' and 'THE FROZEN LIMITS', as well as a long, long run of stage shows lasting to the early 1960s. Making their final performance together in 1962, Naughton and Gold secured a record as the longest running double act in British history: 54 years!

In that lengthy career, 'WISE GUYS' was a mere brief moment. It's unlikely that this long forgotten feature was an out and out classic. Nevertheless, it would be fascinating to see the fruit borne by this unlikely meeting of comic minds.

## THE PICTURE PALACES

### THE REX CINEMA, ELLAND



The Rex Cinema in Elland, West Yorkshire, is the U.K.'s oldest surviving cinema still in operation. Opening in 1912 as the Central Cinema, it was rebranded as the Rex in 1959, before closing as a cinema in the late 1960s. Then, like many other abandoned cinemas, it was converted into a bingo hall. This too closed in the 1980s and the building's fate was uncertain until it was bought by local businessman and cine-ophile, Charles Morris.

Mr Morris, who still owns the cinema today, worked tirelessly to restore the Rex to its former glory. Reopening in 1988, it has gone from strength to strength, remaining fiercely independent.

Retaining many original features and a real period charm, the jewel in the crown is a working organ, still regularly used for recitals, and to accompany occasional silent film screenings. There is also an exhibit of vintage cinema projectors.

One of the best things about the Rex is its annual Laurel and Hardy film night, which has become a beloved institution that always sells out!

The Rex is a wonderful example of a truly independent cinema that continues to stay true to its roots, showcasing a real love of films and filmmaking. Long may it continue!

For more information: [elland.nm-cinemas.co.uk](http://elland.nm-cinemas.co.uk).

**Have you got a local cinema that relives the golden age of film spectatorship? Share it with us here! [movienightmag@gmail.com](mailto:movienightmag@gmail.com)**



# SCREENING NOTES



## In praise of 'SPEEDY' (1928)

Harold Lloyd's 'SPEEDY' is not an obscure or rare film, but one that manages to be consistently overlooked. It was Lloyd's last silent film. As Harold 'Speedy' Swift, he's a baseball fanatic who can't keep his mind on his work long enough to stay in a job for more than a day at a time. Eventually, he gets work driving his girl's grandfather's horse-drawn tramcar, just as the big railroad company tries to force it out of business. The tram must run once a day to keep its franchise, and Speedy is charged with keeping the service running, despite all the big company's attempts at sabotage. He manages to overcome all the obstacles to save the day, allowing Grandpappy to sell the line at a profit. Alongside all his other classic silent features, it's often overlooked. Alright; it probably isn't his best film - there's nothing as iconic as the building climb in 'SAFETY LAST' here, and the story isn't as evenly sustained as in 'THE KID BROTHER', but personally, it's my favourite of all Lloyd's films.

So, what sets it apart for me? Well, first of all, SPEEDY has a rather different quality to many of his other films. Most of the other Lloyd features fall into two groups; the first, including 'THE KID BROTHER', 'DR JACK' and 'GIRL SHY' are based in small, rural towns. The other, more Metropolitan films, are comedies of jazz age city speed and thrills, like 'SAFETY LAST' or 'FOR HEAVENS' SAKE'. These all take place in the metropolis of Los Angeles, although it is never explicitly stated. 'SPEEDY' on the other hand, has a definite geographic setting, on the opposite coast. It specifically takes place in New York, with landmarks like the Yankee Stadium and Coney Island integral to the film's plot. It even features real life baseball star Babe Ruth as himself. Neither before nor since in Lloyd's career was the fantasy quite so inextricably linked with reality.

Most unusually for Lloyd, his character has already won the girl before the film starts; he's confident and self-assured, and so we get a change from the usual 'weakling has to impress girl by making a man of himself' plot. While Harold still gets to save the tramcar and succeed in making a fortune, the plot is a bit less contrived than in some of the others. In fact, his relationship with Ann Christy is probably the most realistic and genuine of any of his films, having a real, winsome charm to it. Their scenes at Coney Island are one of the highpoints of the film, and there is a lovely little scene where they catch a lift back to town in a furniture van, setting up home and dreaming of the future during the ride back.

This charming quality applies to the film as a whole; the outdated streetcar is matched by the now-vanished Coney Island funfair scenes, always a highlight. From here, through backstreets of New York, to hot dogs, yellow taxi cabs and baseball, Lloyd celebrates icons of Americana. None of his other films reflect the title of his autobiography, "AN AMERICAN COMEDY", quite so well. With the passing of time, this has taken on an even greater nostalgic quality. Indeed, the whole film is permeated by an atmosphere of celebrating the old ways as the modern world changes everything. Is it just a coincidence that this is the film that Lloyd was making as Sound technology threatened to change the movie industry and the careers of the silent comedians beyond all recognition? \*

Truthfully, 'SPEEDY' is somewhat haphazardly constructed, but there are lots of high spots, with Harold's continued failed attempts to hold down a job provide for plenty of good gag sequences. The best is probably his short-lived career as a taxi driver, which even includes a cameo by Babe Ruth! To top it all off, there's a classic Lloyd chase through the streets of New York, as he races to the finish line, driving the streetcar like a chariot. Lloyd later recalled how an accident when he crashed the streetcar was worked into the film, a brilliant example of the fluidity and spontaneity of silent technique, soon to be lost with the crushing rigidity of the talkies.



SPEEDY is a real charmer, and a fine way to draw the curtain on the silent era. Lloyd's next film, the talkie 'WELCOME DANGER' is best forgotten. I prefer to leave him at the high point of SPEEDY, racing his streetcar to the finish line.

*\*It's interesting that Keaton's last silent, 'STEAMBOAT BILL JR', also celebrates an obsolete form of technology.*



# CAMERA SHY



(1930)



*Stills and publicity from 'CAMERA SHY'*

CAMERA SHY is one of Lloyd Hamilton's talkie shorts for Educational. Produced during his first sound season at the studio, it was when he was on the comeback trail and trying hard, turning in an excellent performance. The film itself is a mixture of nostalgic throwbacks to his silent days and some new ideas.

In the former category, the first scene is almost totally silent. A couple sit eating in a restaurant. Behind them at the window appears Hamilton. His attention taken, he distractedly and hungrily mimes along with their eating, his face sharing the frustrations and enjoyment as the man tackles some slippery spaghetti. A similar scene was in Hamilton's celebrated 'MOVE ALONG' (1926); here he brings the scene into the sound era by adding commentary to the couple's dinner: "That was nice work!"

Continuing his occupation as professional pest, Ham then wiggles his way into a crowd of rubberneckers at a film shoot. He continues to make a nuisance of himself, shouting 'BANG!' when a gun fails to go off properly and making suggestions to the director from the sidelines. The leading man is fired and Hamilton steps forward. However, rather than simply allowing him to make a predictable mess of the proceedings, the film takes a left turn. Ham, in his classic pompous, bluffing mode, proceeds to tell the cast and crew his ideas for screenplays. These are seen in a series of flashbacks, his story taking place in a deep south Civil War era setting. His 'story' is nonsensical, an incoherent parody of the tedious costume dramas being turned out by the dozen in Hollywood. It offers some reminders of previous Hamilton shorts such as 'THE EDUCATOR' as he tries to teach a class of schoolchildren, and 'HIS BETTER HALF' as he is persuaded to pose in drag as a southern belle. Most of the humour in the sequences comes from Ham imagining himself as a leading man in such an incongruously dignified setting, tripping over a pig and stumbling over his lines, etc. It's fairly thin stuff, but this is the intended effect; the scenes themselves only form part of the comedy. Rather than simply letting the 'movie within a movie within a movie' play out as such, we keep cutting back to the present day. After each scene, whoever he has been telling his story groans and directs him to tell it to someone else. This escalates to the point where the whole crew are fleeing as he looks for his next pair of ears! Rather than being the stuff of belly laughs, the film is one of sly smiles, funnier as a complete slowburn gag sequence, than in its individual scenes. It must have been even funnier to those working in Hollywood, who no doubt had to endure such ordeals all the time!

I'm not convinced that this film quite works on the whole; it's just a little oddball and needed a few more solid laughs in the individual scenes. However, it is an interesting attempt to do something different, in the manner of Hamilton's best work. His performance is also excellent, and shows that he could do just fine in sound films. Many of the shorts he was making around this time have similarly off-beat premises, and I hope to be able to catch up with them in time to see how they compare with this one. Certainly, 'CAMERA SHY' is a worthy effort, and an intriguing little comedy.

## SOMEWHERE IN WRONG (1925)

The 1924-25 series of films made by Stan Laurel for independent producer Joe Rock represent the apex of Laurel's solo career as star comic. Over the 12 films, Stan toned down the 'hyperactive child' tendencies of his screen character. He began to build up breathing spaces in the films for longer set pieces, better characterization and more reaction time. Within this space, he began to morph into an almost recognisable embryo of the later 'Stanley' character; the vacant stare and winsome childish looks begin to appear, along with his slower reactions. Stan begins less to channel Chaplin and Dan Leno than two other comics riding a crest of popularity at the time: the solemn approaches to comedy of Buster Keaton and, especially, Harry Langdon, helped transform Laurel from music hall sprite to subtle pantomime artist. He began to have the confidence to stand back from laughing at his own jokes, now, like Langdon, letting the spaces between gags speak for themselves.

'SOMEWHERE IN WRONG' is one of the finest examples of Stan in transition during his 'crossover period'. Featuring Stan as a ragged,

penniless tramp, it is reminiscent of both Chaplin's wanderings and the future dustbowl misadventures of Laurel and Hardy. More specifically, it finds itself a comfortable midpoint between Chaplin's 'THE TRAMP' and L & H's 'ONE GOOD TURN'.

Stan and fellow bum Max Asher are first seen washing in a stream. Stan's outfit is so ragbag that, to wash his feet, he simply pulls his shoes up to his knees, as they have absolutely no soles in them. The pair arrive at a farmhouse to beg, borrow or steal some food. Unfortunately, the farmer's dog (Tige, soon to be more famous as Our Gang's 'Pete the Pup'), has other ideas and makes a meal of Stan's trousers. Briefly, we see a glimpse of an embryonic Laurel Cry!



Undeterred, the pair attempt to hoist Stan along a clothes line to reach a plate of warm doughnuts whilst simultaneously avoiding Tige. This attempt is cut short by the farmer and his gun (Max is chased away, putting paid to any more proto-L & H teamwork). However, the farmer's pretty daughter (Julie Leonard) takes pity on the hungry-looking Stan, and invites him in. The scene that follows is one of the best examples of Stan's change in pacing, a routine that he refined and used in the L & H films.



The earlier Laurel would have tried to make double time with Julie Leonard, chatting her up at the stove. The new Stan sits placidly at the kitchen table. He is not tempted by flesh, but his eyes are drawn to a huge pile of doughnuts... His eyes look longingly at them, and tentatively he begins to reach forward, like the child reaching into the cookie jar. Julie turns to speak and he quickly makes his grabbing gesture into a pantomimed display of brushing away flies. Sheepishly, he tries again, grabbing a doughnut and cramming it in his mouth. His temptation has been aroused, and he returns again for doughnut after doughnut, swallowing them whole and cramming them in his pockets. At this point, the farmer again catches him red-handed, and he sheepishly returns the doughnuts from his pockets to the plate.



The childlike predilection for food was a definite Laurel trait of the future, and this scene paints a clear path to the secret 'wax-eater' of 'SONS OF THE DESERT'. However, the execution is not quite fully his, yet. When caught by the farmer, he offers a slow double take and rueful stare that are pure Langdon.

*Echoes of the future Laurel in 'SOMEWHERE IN WRONG': the film sees him briefly teamed with Max Asher as a pair of bums.. He also exhibits Langdonesque wistfulness, and even experiments with an embryonic version of his famous cry.*

Temptation to steal runs as a theme throughout 'SOMEWHERE IN WRONG'; Stan's next encounter is with the safe. In a very well-composed gag, he tries to turn the combination dial but finds he cannot get a grip. He is puzzled until he discovers it is actually a reflection of the safe in a mirror. Julie has been watching him and directs him to the real safe with a knowing sarcasm. Humbled by her response, Stan vows to go straight and begins working as a farmhand. Trouble is brewing elsewhere, though, as the villainous mortgage holder begins to move in on the farmer and his daughter, having already stolen the money for their payment. Stan revives his dishonest past for good use, and sets off to break the mortgage holder's safe with an armful of tools. Meeting the suspicious villain in the street, he pantomimes other uses for his tools, first digging a hole with his spade and then miming a game of golf with crowbar as putter. He returns with the money just as the mortgage holder is closing in and saves the day. Sneakily, he then steals the money and returns it to the safe. When he reveals his efforts to Julie, she is unimpressed and Stan skulks away defeated, back to his chores.

Another example of the Laurel change in pace follows, as he attempts to stack dishes on a shelf. Rather than utter slapstick catastrophe, the scene focuses on the fate of one dish. Stan slips when putting it on the shelf and the dish wobbles... tension builds until it finally falls. Miraculously, it is unbroken. Stan, relieved, steps forward, smashing the dish with his foot. A similar gag occurs in Langdon's 'THE FIRST HUNDRED YEARS'.

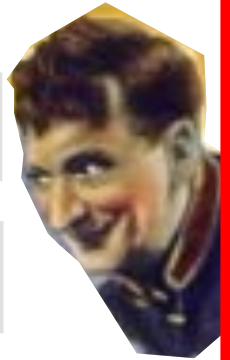
Stan ultimately sees Julie go off with another man, and leaves defeated. He bursts into tears, consoling himself with more doughnuts, which he stuffs in between howls. While still meant for comic effect, this isn't quite the familiar Laurel cry, yet. Stan's great, gulping howls are still cartoonish, but somehow don't seem as funny. Stan's later whimperings are generally in response to child-like problems or fears; losing the one he loves is just a bit too genuine a situation to use for comedy in this way.

This is fairly typical of Laurel's comedy at the time. He was still in the process of learning which gags to pick and choose, and how to remake them in his own image. But, he was well on the road to learning lessons like these, and 'SOMEWHERE IN WRONG' hits far more often than it misses. If it pales beside his later, mature work, it still succeeds as a very entertaining, well-thought out and directed comedy in its own right. Somewhere in wrong, maybe, but definitely doing something right!

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