

# THE LOST LAUGH

#12



Also featuring



MONTY BANKS



BABY PEGGY



ROSCOE ARBUCKLE

& LOTS MORE!



# WALTER FORDE

Britain's Pioneer Film Comedian

silent comedy • slapstick • music hall

Welcome to issue 12 of THE LOST LAUGH.

I hope, wherever this reaches you, that you're coping OK with these troubled times, and keeping safe and well.

These old, funny films are a great form of escapism and light relief at times like these. In fact, I was thinking the other day that the times they were made in had their fair share of troubles : two world wars, the 1918 flu pandemic, the Wall Street Crash and the great depression, to name a few. Yet, these comics made people smile, often even making fun out of the anxieties of the day. That they can still make us smile through our own troubles, worlds away from their own, is testament to how special they are.

I hope reading this issue helps you forget the outside world for a while and perhaps gives you some new ideas for films to seek out to pass some time in lockdown. Thanks to our contributors this issue: David Glass, David Wyatt and Ben Model; if you haven't seen them yet, Ben's online silent comedy events are a terrific idea that help to keep the essence of live silent cinema alive. Ben has very kindly taken time to answer some questions about the shows.

As always, please do get in touch at [movienightmag@gmail.com](mailto:movienightmag@gmail.com) with any comments or suggestions, or if you'd like to contribute an article (or plug a project of your own!) in a future issue. Finally, don't forget that there are more articles, including films to watch online, at [thelostlaugh.com](http://thelostlaugh.com).

Until next time, keep smiling!

Matt

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# BABY PEGGY

## Goodbye to the Last of the Silent Screen Stars



In February, we lost the last direct link to the silent film era when Diana Serra Cary, the child star 'Baby Peggy', passed away aged 101.

As 'Baby Peggy Montgomery', she was one of the most charming child stars of the silent era, and one of the most adept at comedy. Appearing in almost 150 shorts and several features, 'Peggy' was one of the most popular child stars of the 1920s.

I first became aware of her at a screening of her Century comedy, *THE KID REPORTER*, at Bristol's Slapstick Festival about 15 years ago. The print of this short film was rather beaten up, and only had foreign titles (David Robinson ad-libbed translations of them as the film was shown) but Peggy's terrific performance shone through. Accompanied by Brownie the Wonder Dog (with whom she made many films), the intrepid infant adopts a series of disguises to help solve a crime, exhibiting terrific comic timing in the process - and she was only three years old! The short got one of the best responses of the whole festival. So much so, that the following year she was invited to attend in person to introduce a showing of her feature film, *CAPTAIN JANUARY* (1924).

It's no wonder that she was snapped up for features; her ability to switch between comedy routines and genuine pathos was phenomenal. This warm comedy drama also went down a storm, and Ms Carey's introduction was sharp and insightful. Afterwards, I was very fortunate to have a brief chat with her - she was patient and kind to this awkward teenager, and signed a wonderful old still photo to me. Losing that photo in a house flood a few years later was a very real disappointment.

Baby Peggy's career began at the age of 2 and a half. Her first short was called *PLAYMATES*, and 95 years later she still had vivid memories of the filming:

*"I had to sit in a tub and take a bath outside in the sunlight, with the help of Brownie. The suds were actually made with whipped cream which soured in the heat and made me sick to my stomach. I told my father I was going to be ill and he said to just swallow hard. I couldn't look at whipped cream again until I was about 10."*

The film still exists, and shows a very young Peggy acting out the scene with Brownie. Even at such a young age, she takes direction naturally and unself-consciously, and as she grew so did her skill. She quickly developed a real knack for comic timing, which is seen in the surviving entries from the series. Often her shorts kidded adult films, as in *PEG O' THE MOUNTED*, a spoof of North West Mounted Police dramas; in *PEG OF THE MOVIES* she impersonated both Rudolph Valentino and Pola Negri! These shorts, along with other survivors like *MILES OF SMILES* and



L-R: Artwork for *LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD* (1922); Peggy's first film role, *PLAYMATES* (1921), *THE KID REPORTER* (1922), and Diana in more recent years.



**A scene from CAPTAIN JANUARY, and a publicity shot for THE FAMILY SECRET.**

THE KID REPORTER, showcased her effortless charm and wonderful comic reactions.

Peggy soon graduated from the Century comedies to features at Universal. Her time at the top resulted in a string of feature films, including THE DARLING OF NEW YORK, HELEN'S BABIES (alongside Clara Bow) and THE FAMILY SECRET. These tended toward mixtures of melodrama, slapstick and gentle character comedy. THE FAMILY SECRET, recently released to DVD, is a dated gaslight drama of an illegitimate child and her estranged father, but is hugely enlivened by some charming comic scenes, including Peggy trying to bath her dog and starting a food fight at a fruit stall.

At Peggy's peak, she was reportedly earning up to \$1.5 million annually, but was soon to learn the harsh flipside of child stardom. When her father had a disagreement with producer Sol Lesser, her contract was abruptly cancelled. She managed only one more small part in APRIL FOOL (1926) before work dried up.

By the age of nine, she was a has-been. Worse, between her parents' overspending and an unscrupulous manager, most of the "million dollar baby's" fortune was gone:

*"I was earning \$12,000 a week from Universal. It was a huge amount of money for my parents to handle so they gave my father's stepfather, a banker, power of attorney to manage it. Well, he knew how to handle the money – he put it in his pocket and disappeared! All the money was gone and we never saw him again."*

This, coupled with failed investments and the Wall Street Crash, forced her to endure gruelling vaudeville tours and extra work to support her family.

Unlike many other child stars, she had the fortitude to survive these indignities and hardships. Although the 1930s and 40s were very difficult times for her, she ultimately triumphed. In later life, she successfully reinvented herself as an author and silent film historian. She even published her first novel at age 99!. Her books 'Whatever Happened to Baby Peggy?' and 'Hollywood's Children' are fascinating reads, which share the stark realities of child stardom without ever being maudlin. It's a wonder that she was able to come through it all and become so well-balanced.

In her last years, she was feted at film screenings and festivals, and lived a happy, well earned retirement until ill health began to restrict her activities a couple of years ago. Her 101 years were well-lived, indeed.

**Diana Serra Cary/ Baby Peggy-Jean Montgomery, October 29, 1918 – February 24, 2020.**



Diana Serra Cary 's autobiography, **WHATEVER HAPPENED TO BABY PEGGY**, is still in print (and available in a Kindle version).

Her starring feature **THE FAMILY SECRET** has recently been issued by Ben Model's Undercrank productions, and also features two of her surviving shorts : **MILES OF SMILES** and **CIRCUS CLOWNS**.

Both are available from Amazon and other online retailers.



# THE YO

## BABY PEGGY

### ADORABLE

buttoned close around the throat and tied snugly with a bright bandanna handkerchief. She resembled a miniature cowgirl and added realism to her attire by walking over to the farther end of the room and picking up her tiny rope with which she later explained she "wassooed" her chickens and her papa.

"I wish my hair was 'wurly,'" she said suddenly as she stroked her dark silky Dutch cut critically, "'cause some day I want to be a 'whapper,' too."

"A what?" the interviewer asked, unable to comprehend what she meant.

"She means a flapper," said papa Montgomery, coming to her rescue.

"I said a whapper," Peggy commented, just a trifle put out at the ignorance of the interviewer, who hastened to explain that she didn't quite understand.

"And what do you like best to eat?" she was asked.

"Wice cream and all day suckers," was the ready answer; "have you got any?" and Baby Peggy looked disappointed at the answer she received.

#### Hates Finery

"And how many dolls have you?" She protruded a small thumb and started counting off her children on her pudgy fingers seriously.

"There's Susie, what's got a leg off,

Perwillia Dean and Woser, my puppy, pulled her hair out this morning, Wadys Walton, Weneral Pershing, Weorge Washington—"

"That will be enough, dear," interrupted Peggy's proud father, for it seems that his daughter has a family which would have pleased the late Colonel Roosevelt.

"What kind of clothes do you like to wear?"

"Wagged dwesses or overwalls," Peggy said, "it's wawful to dress up, don't you think so?" she asked, but added in a truly feminine fashion, "but sometimes for a party or somethin' I like to dwess up."

#### "Loves Circus"

"And I just love circuses—I'd like to wide the pony in the circus—I can wide like weverything, too," the little comedienne admitted proudly.

Without a doubt Peggy is one of the most attractive kiddies that ever was introduced to grease paint. She is now at the age when kindergarten is a joy to her and she asked her daddy to show the interviewer a tiny basket which she had drawn and colored with her teacher's help.

Just a tiny, sweet, natural baby girl is this popular child-actress. She is obedient to her parent's slightest command and is subject to occasional spankings when she's naughty and is

**S**HE'S just a delectable little bundle of dimples and wrinkles with sparkly brown eyes and a tiny turned up nose is Baby Peggy, the three-year-old Century Comedy kiddie—the kiddie who can reunite a pair of agitated lovers or readjust a house-divided, with one coy glance from her wise young eyes.

With a yardstick up beside her, Baby Peggy lacks six inches of using it all. She is one of those babies about whom you can say, "Little, but oh, my!" With the exception of beginning most of her words with the "w" sound she uses very little baby talk and although she has been in the public eye for almost a year, she is neither spoiled nor humored to excess by her fond parents, Mr. and Mrs. M. Montgomery.

#### A Born Mimic

"Wambitions?" repeated Baby Peggy in answer to the interviewer's question. "I want to be wike Wadys Walton, Wawee Prevost and Warry Carey—and like mamma and papa, too," and it was quite evident from her response that she had made up her mind to this before.

"I'm Woot Gibson today—see!" and Baby Peggy stood off and displayed her tiny pair of chaps, a sombrero and a mannish flannel shirt which was

**Exhibitors:** Take this story to the feature-page editor of your local newspaper. Get him to run it a day or two before you show Baby Peggy to your patrons. Post a copy of the story, as it appears in the newspaper, on the wall of your lobby. It is bound to attract patrons to your theatre when you present this infant prodigy's next Century Comedy.

If the editor of your local newspaper desires to illustrate the story, ask him to fill out the attached coupon and mail it to the Editor of the Moving Picture Weekly, 1600 Broadway, New York City, and he will receive cuts or mats, as indicated, by return mail.

The Editor,  
Moving Picture Weekly,  
1600 Broadway, N. Y. C.

Please send cuts  of Baby Peggy illustrations.  
mats

Editor .....

Newspaper .....

City and State .....

# YOUNGEST MOVIE STAR

## OF CENTURY SCREEN BABY

not allowed to eat much candy. And her hours of play are just as regularly planned for her as her hours of work before the camera. Peggy is an adorable baby.

Baby Peggy was brought to the Century studio by her father in answer to an advertisement for a child to appear in pictures with Brownie, the Century Wonder Dog. Out of three hundred applicants she was chosen, but soon Brownie had to look for another leading lady because her box office value became so great that it was decided to star her alone.

### Facile Transitions

Her older associates all envy the perfection of her acting technique. "Cry, Peggy," says the director, and Peggy cries. "Laugh, Peggy," and Peggy laughs, all without any wear or tear on her emotions. One minute she can be on the set bringing tears to the onlookers, and a moment later she can be found off in a corner of the studio unconcernedly playing with her doll or more likely with one of the many Century pets, for Peggy loves animals and they love her.

The little girl is not pretty, but she has what is a great deal more important, screen personality. In a crowd of children or of grown-ups she stands out and justifies the judgment of the company which made her a star at the age of two, and at the head of her own company of grown-ups at the age of three. The only difficulty in making pictures with Peggy is that she is so cuddly and cunning that every one wants to play with her. Her director frequently has to pull himself up short and remind the other members of the company that they are there for work and not play.

### Many Successes

Baby Peggy's newest series of pictures, which are the adventures of a mischievous little girl, have brought her many new friends, and she made a number of personal appearances for Sid Grauman, at whose theatres her first picture supported by grown-ups was shown recently. It is called "Little Miss Mischief." Her second picture of the new series, "Peggy Behave," was shown as the two-reeler



*Baby Peggy, World's Youngest Film Star, in Characteristic Pose.*

on the same bill as "Wild Honey" at the Central Theatre, Universal's New York first run house. The critics did an unusual thing. They not only came early to see the two-reel comedy with the little girl which preceded the feature, but they gave it space in their columns and some even wrote special articles about the little girl.

Her third release, "The Little Rascal," shows equal promise.

### Highly Praised

Quinn Martin said of her in a special article in the New York Sunday World: "This child is the best equipped of no fewer than a dozen juvenile performers who have been brought by hopeful parents and more hopeful photoplay producers since the first pictures of Jackie Coogan.

"Peggy's face is a delight even in repose. When she smiles every one smiles with her. And when she plays a joke on the grown-ups in the picture, all the while keeping her brown eyes fixed on the director beside her, the women of the audience adore her and the men laugh out loud. Her natural propensity as a mimic is irresistible."

Marshal Neilan recently borrowed Baby Peggy from Century Film Corporation, with whom she has a three years contract, and put her in the all-star cast of "Penrod" in the part of Baby Rennsdale. She made a tremendous hit and wept bitterly all over the scene. "I shall never believe in the genuineness of a child's tears again!" said a member of the New York Times staff after seeing the picture and how tragically Peggy wept. Neilan was so pleased by her work that he waited for her to finish two Century comedies before starting his next production, "Fools First," so that Peggy might play a part in that also.

### Thrifty Nature

Every cent the little girl earns is being put aside for her education by her parents and her director, Arvid Gillstrom, predicts a brilliant dramatic future for her. He says that unlike the majority of child actresses, she has real talent amounting almost to genius. It is the intention of her family to give her every advantage and help to make a brilliant future for herself. Her sole dissipation is a craving for lollypops.

# LAUGHTER IN LOCKDOWN

## BEN MODEL talks us through THE SILENT COMEDY WATCH PARTY



This spring, as lockdown took hold around the world, chances to see live screenings of silent comedy evaporated. Well, not quite, thanks to the determined efforts of silent comedy devotees Ben Model & Steve Massa. After already giving us a string of crowdfunded DVDs and magnificent books between them, the pair have once again proved to be heroes of silent comedy fandom by creating The Silent Comedy Watch Party, a weekly live streaming event that provides a ray of sunshine for comedy fans! The wonderful events take place every Sunday on YouTube. Presenting three comedy shorts with Ben's terrific piano accompaniment and Steve's insightful intros (streamed in via FaceTime), the watch parties make for wonderful viewing and are preserving the essence of live silent cinema in the most difficult circumstances.

Ben very kindly took the time to give some insight into the shows for us:

**The Lost Laugh:** Hi, Ben! Thanks so much for taking the time to answer these questions. Can you tell us a little about the silent comedy watch party and how the idea for the shows came about?

*Ben:* I've had the idea to do a live-streamed silent film show for a few years, actually. I was always reticent to take the plunge and give it a shot because my main interest is in promoting attendance at shows. I didn't want to do something that would make staying home from an art house or museum or whatever palatable. Then the week of March 8th I watch all my gigs topple like dominoes, gradually over the course of a week. One thing that occurred to me was that a cancelled show meant two things: that I wasn't going to do a show and, maybe more importantly, that each of those shows meant 50 or 100 or 400 people weren't going to get to see that silent film they were looking forward to.

I already had all the bits of equipment I needed, tech-wise. Some I had picked up in my recent years' interest in iPhone filmmaking, and some I'd had for a while. And I had this light-bulb moment where all the puzzle pieces came together in my head — including the fact that my YouTube account was approved for live-streaming — and I decided to give it a shot. The response has been, frankly, moving. Even from the first test pilot show we did on March 15. Folks had been in their homes a week already and were looking at movie theaters and more shutting down, knowing they wouldn't be going out for movies for a while.

This became more than a replacement for a live show for people, almost immediately. It meant so much more to people who were watching, to be able to go into that crazy universe of silent film comedy to laugh and get relief from what everyone is going through.

**Have there been any challenges in setting up and performing these live streaming events?**

Most of it came together for the first show, and we've just gotten used to the routine of it. My wife and I practically have to have a sign-up sheet to figure out what function our living room will be at any given moment, since we're both teaching our university courses, and having Zoom meetings and coffee klatsches and phone calls. My wife's a musical theater educator and performer, and hasn't done camera work like this before, but she's gotten the hang of it pretty well.

I'm looking at a few different softwares that allow you to bring in a second performer or guest in a split screen, and to feed the video signal directly into the streamed feed. We want to keep the informal and home-made feel, of course, but if there's an opportunity to tidy up some of the presentation so parts of it look and sound better, I'd like to head in that direction. I'm getting close, testing out one particular program, and we'll see if I can get it to do what I want.

It's also given me an opportunity to try and keep the piano in some semblance of being in tune, and I tidy it up every week or two.

Programming the shows hasn't been too difficult. Steve Massa and I have programmed lots of comedy shorts shows over the years at MoMA. We've been very fortunate in the cooperation we've gotten from the people who've released these films on DVD or online as far as permissions, like Kino Lorber, Milestone Films, the EYE Filmmuseum, and Lobster Films and the Blackhawk Collection. Between that and the great responses we've had to films with really obscure comedians from my Undercrank Productions releases, we're like kids in a candy store.



## How do you go about creating the music for the films you accompany?

Most of it's improvised, like it is at a regular show. What's different for me, and it took me about 2 or 3 shows to realize this, that I'm playing for someone who's six feet away. I'd initially been playing like I was at a theater, and I had to remind myself to dial it back. I was already doing this in my intros, trying to talk like the person watching was in the room with me. It's like doing radio, where you are performing for an audience of 1. It's what Ernie Kovacs referred to as "an intimate vacuum", where it's just you and the person at home, and you don't have to project or have a bigger energy.

## Can you remember your first encounter with silent film? What was it that hooked you in?

I can't remember it — my parents tell me I discovered Charlie Chaplin on TV when I was a toddler. Back in the 1960s the Chaplin comedies were on TV in the daytime, and that's what got me hooked. For some kids it's trains or construction equipment or zoo animals; for me it was silent comedies.

## Looking ahead to the world beyond lockdown... Have you thought about continuing with some live streaming events once we're on the other side?

You know, I've gotten emails and social media comments from people all over the world about the show, people for whom there wasn't a place for them to go see silent film with live music before March 8th. Initially I'd figured I'd stop once the cinemas opened up again and public gatherings resumed. But I've realized, from connecting with so many people who are watching every week, that this is the show with live music they can attend. I don't know that I'll be able to continue on a weekly basis — ordinarily, I have shows a two or three times a month on Sunday afternoons — but I think I'd consider continuing the live-streamed shows in some way.

## You've also produced some fantastic DVDs through your label Undercrank Productions, including the ACCIDENTALLY PRESERVED series, and recent volumes of Alice Howell & Douglas MacLean films. Do you have any plans for future DVDs that you can share?

I had about a half dozen projects percolating when everything shut down in March. Until everyone can go back to work and films can get pulled, inspected and scanned, there's no sense in talking about anything. At the moment, the companies that do DVD duplication are still duplicating, and the MOD company I work with is still MOD-ing for orders that come in on Amazon, TCM Shop, Deep Discount et al. I do have one project that could actually move ahead, but I need to wait at least a month before I can consider launching a Kickstarter for it, and it's another bunch of silent comedy shorts that haven't been available to the public since they were in release in the 1920s. (It's not Hank Mann, though.)

Big thanks to Ben for answering my questions, and of course for hosting the Silent Comedy Watch Party!

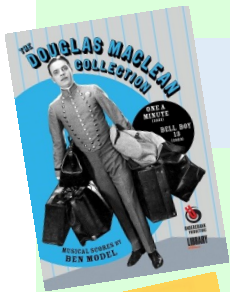
You can find out more about the shows, here: <http://silentcomedywatchparty.com>

Ben's website is at [www.silentfilmmusic.com](http://www.silentfilmmusic.com). Why not sign up to his mailing list?

Support the Silent Comedy Watch Party by becoming a patron on Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/benmodel>

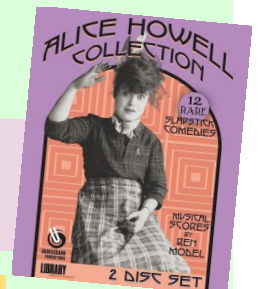
## DISCOVER A WORLD OF FORGOTTEN SILENT COMEDY FROM UNDERCRANK PRODUCTIONS

Ben's DVD label has released some wonderful DVDs focusing on forgotten silent films. Here are a few highlights:

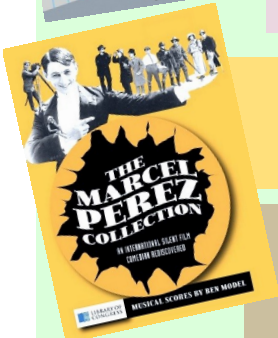


The newest release from Undercrank is this double bill of features from unfairly forgotten light comedian Douglas Maclean, featuring ONE A MINUTE and BELL BOY 13.

Wild-haired free spirit Alice Howell was a wonderfully kooky comedienne. Most of her work has been scattered to the four winds, but THE ALICE HOWELL COLLECTION collects 12 surviving examples, including the delightful CINDERELLA CINDERS.



Only the most ardent silent comedy devotees had heard of Marcel Perez, aka 'Tweedy', aka 'Robinet' before Undercrank's two volumes helped put him back in the spotlight. Like Max Linder, Perez made films in Europe before coming to America.



Four volumes of the ACCIDENTALLY PRESERVED series provide a wonderful assortment of 'orphan' films—preserved by accident thanks to their issue on home movie gauges. Among the goodies in these selection boxes are comedies featuring Clyde Cook, Wallace Lupino, Jack Duffy, Walter Forde, Monty Collins and lots more!



View the complete range of Undercrank DVDs at [www.undercrankproductions.com](http://www.undercrankproductions.com)



# DVD NEWS

## LAUREL & HARDY ...RESTORED!



The UCLA restorations of the Laurel & Hardy shorts completed so far are getting a release in this new DVD from Kit Parker Films. The restorations look absolutely stunning, as evidenced by the trailers available to view online, but the really big news here is the debut of the almost-complete THE BATTLE OF THE CENTURY on DVD. Here's the blurb:

**STAN AND OLLIE LOOK AND SOUND BETTER THAN EVER! New 2K and 4K digital restorations from original 35mm nitrate, Laurel and Hardy's classic comedies are here in the best quality since their first release! Two features and 17 shorts, including the legendary pie-fight silent film "The Battle of the Century," making its video debut and nearly complete for the first time in over 90 years!**

**Films included are: SONS OF THE DESERT, WAY OUT WEST, BERTH MARKS, THE BATTLE OF THE CENTURY, BRATS, BUSY BODIES, THE CHIMP, COME CLEAN, COUNTY HOSPITAL, HELPMATES, HOG WILD, ME & MY PAL, THE MIDNIGHT PATROL, THE MUSIC BOX, ONE GOOD TURN, SCRAM!, THEIR FIRST MISTAKE, TOWED IN A HOLE and TWICE TWO.**

**Among the most exciting of the many bonus features are:**

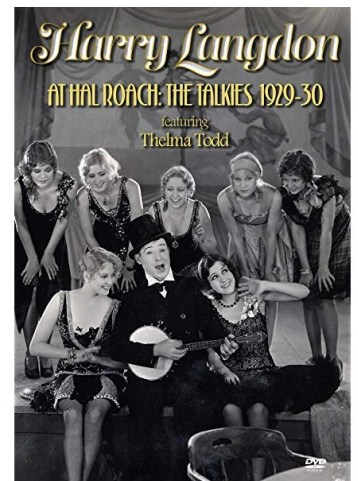
**Commentaries by Randy Skretvedt and Richard W. Bann; never before seen video interviews as well as audio interviews with L&H co-workers; over 2,500 rare photos, posters, scripts and studio files; the oddities reel THAT'S THAT (available for the first time); a restored version of the colour short TREE IN A TEST TUBE; restored trailers.**

The set is available on DVD (6 discs) and Blu Ray (4 discs). Both formats contain all the extra features. Laurel & Hardy: The Definitive Restorations is out on June 16, 2020 (Stan Laurel's 130th birthday!)

## HARRY LANGDON AT HAL ROACH: COMPLETE SERIES ON DVD

The Sprocket Vault continue their terrific mission to release rarely seen classics from the Hal Roach archives. The latest volume, out now covers the series of sound shorts made by the great Harry Langdon. These are an offbeat and sometimes bizarre group of films, but I find them absolutely fascinating and often quite wonderful. While there are some ups and downs in the series, the best, like THE BIG KICK and THE SHRIMP, are great little shorts that successfully adapt Langdon's 'little elf' persona to sound.

As usual, the disc is packed with real treats. For Langdon's devotees, the real holy grail is the inclusion of his first two talkies, HOTTER THAN HOT and SKY BOY. These now only exist in silent versions without their soundtracks, and haven't been seen in many, many years. There's also a Spanish phonetic version of THE BIG KICK! Many find Langdon's speaking voice strange in English.. imagine what it must be like in Spanish. There are also commentaries on the films by Richard Roberts. All in all, a wonderful gift for these troubled times. Current postage restrictions have meant that I've not yet been able to view the set, but a full review will be in the next issue.



Includes: HOTTER THAN HOT, SKY BOY, SKIRT SHY, THE FIGHTING PARSON, THE HEAD GUY, THE BIG KICK, THE SHRIMP and THE KING.

Extras: HARRY LANGDON ANNOUNCEMENT (a short reel for exhibitors introducing the series of films); EL ESTACION GASOLINA (Spanish phonetic version of THE BIG KICK); commentaries by Richard M Roberts.

## MORE 1930S BRITISH COMEDIES FROM NETWORK



In the U.K., Network have resumed their great DVD series 'THE BRITISH FILM' after a long hiatus. Highlights released so far include a new volume of 1930s British comedies, including Leslie Fuller in ONE GOOD TURN and Will Fyffe in SPRING HANDICAP. Getting DVD and Blu-ray treatment are some George Formby and Gracie Fields films. Formby's KEEP FIT, and Fields' LOOKING ON THE BRIGHT SIDE and LOVE, LIFE & LAUGHTER are all on their way.

# LUPINO LANE COMES TO DVD

Exciting news from David Glass and David Wyatt. In March, their new Kickstarter project of rare Lupino Lane films was successfully funded, reaching almost 200% of its goal! It's a terrific undertaking to collect some classic and rare Lupino shorts. Lane's films are usually only seen in grainy, miserable quality (if at all), but Dave & Dave's new Kickstarter project collects some fabulous prints from archives and collections. Here's more from Dave Glass on the contents:



*"Lupino Lane was a major star, both in the UK and the USA. His acrobatic comedic skills rivalled those of Keaton and with his brother Wallace, he produced some of the best two reel comedies of the 1920s. Many of these are either lost or locked away in archives - and those that are available, are often in poor quality.*

*Our vision was to unearth some of these rarities and make them available for the fans.*

*We're delighted to say that we have some exceptional prints (most are 2K scans of nitrate) of some VERY rare films. Through the generosity of Serge Bromberg and Lobster Films, Elif & Co at the EYE Film Museum, The Library of Congress and Patrick Stanbury (Photoplay) we present the following films:*

*HELLO SAILOR (1927) (one of the special event hits at Pordenone 2019)*  
*SWORD POINTS (1928) (35mm 4K restoration)*  
*FISTICUFFS (1928) (even Steve Massa hasn't seen this one!!)*  
*SUMMER SAPS (1929) (complete 2 reel version!)*  
*GOOD NIGHT NURSE (1929) (new scan of 35mm nitrate)*  
*BATTLING SISTERS (1929) (hilarious gender reversal comedy)*  
*JOYLAND (1929) (the complete 'Toyland' rarity - a Joy!)*  
*FIRE PROOF (1929) (a very rare talkie short—only known to exist at the LoC!)*

*The lovely Leenke and her colleagues at EYE in Amsterdam, have now sent me the full 2K scans of HELLO SAILOR and GOODNIGHT NURSE... and they're gorgeous! (I mean the films but I'm sure the EYE folk look great too!) . Work has now begun on comparing footage and translating the Dutch inter-titles on both films.*

*I've also got a young talented Danish (or is it Finnish?).... anyway, some Nordic bloke, to start re-making new authentic looking main and inter-title backgrounds for those films that need them. We're well into the restoration of the four prints from Lobster (Paris) and we're keeping everything crossed that the Library of Congress (USA) can get their JOYLAND to us soon.*

*And now onto the MUSIC....*

*Two of Serge's films already have their musical accompaniment recorded... by maestro Neil Brand. Meg Morley has been composing the score for SWORD POINTS and two more films. (Meg asks if you could subscribe to her You Tube channel too please!) <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCY0R5tO5bUBj5f28ZNcq8HQ/videos>*

*We're also jolly pleased to announce that we're bringing on board the superb services of the hugely talented DONALD MACKENZIE. In case you didn't know, Donald is a regular accompanist of silent films, all over the world.... AND Donald is also the organist in residence at the biggest and most famous cinema in London, The Odeon Leicester Square. I could go on, but to spare his blushes, I suggest you check out his web site if you'd like more info.... <http://www.donaldmackenzie.org.uk/>*

*We'll be providing alternative music scores too, for those who like to switch it up a bit.*

*We're also working on some further treats for the disc to add as extras, and will keep you posted as these develop. The DVD/Blu-Ray box art will of course be produced by a professional graphic designer...and there'll be a "booklet" insert too, featuring specially composed essays by Lupino Lane experts Matthew Ross and Glenn Mitchell.*

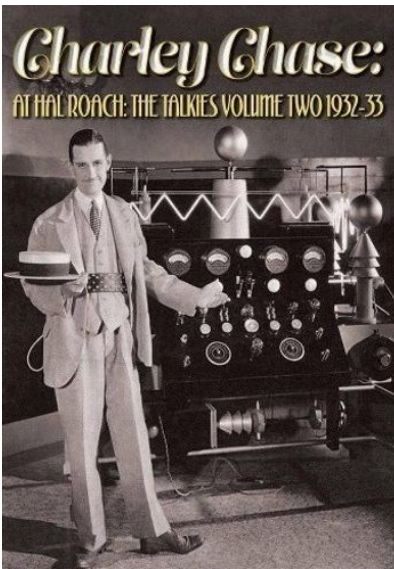
*Lupino Lane was an incredibly gifted comedian.*

*Lovers of film comedy will now be able to see these rare films in their best possible quality and experience the unique talents of this wonderful entertainer."*

*I'm really looking forward to seeing these rare films by one of my favourite silent comedians, and I'm proud to have contributed in a small way by writing some notes for the booklet. Thanks to Dave & Dave for all their efforts getting these films seen again!*



# DVD REVIEW: CHARLEY CHASE AT HAL ROACH: THE TALKIES VOL 2, 1932-33



*Enjoy classic Chase in Sprocket Vault's latest heroic venture into the Hal Roach vaults.*

As with volume 1 of this series, I have to begin by awarding this DVD five stars simply for existing. It's too easy to forget the limbo these films were in for far too long, difficult to see without access to a 16mm print library. Quite simply, nobody wanted to put this stuff out there. I remember first reading about these films in Leonard Maltin's book *THE GREAT MOVIE SHORTS* years ago and longing to see them. After spotty acquisitions of the forbidden fruits via TCM, eBay, old VHS from friends, mailing lists and the like, I finally picked up an almost-complete set of the films on bootleg DVD in 2009. Looking at these beaten up ex-VHS or 16mm transfers made my eyes water and did the films no favours at all. Nevertheless, I treasured those discs as the rare jewels they were, and assumed it was the best I would ever get.

Not so. Fast forward ten years and here's the second chronological set in Sprocket Vault's series. Not only are the films now on an official DVD, but they look beautiful, feature original titles and come with authoritative commentaries. If that weren't enough, there are bonus features, including an incredibly rare Spanish-language version of Chase's *LOOSER THAN LOOSE*, *UN CANA EL AIRE!*

What about the films themselves, though? How do those forbidden fruits taste? Well, if you're not a completist and this is your first Chase purchase, you won't be disappointed. Of the shorts featured here, at least four are among my all-time favourite Chase films, and most of the rest between good and excellent, too. For a bit of context, these fifteen shorts were all made in 1932-33. Chase had settled into sound well by now and so the early talkie clunkiness is now almost entirely gone. He was starting to change his approach, adopting a more fussy, nervous character more suited to a man approaching 40 than the young man about town of his earlier work. For several of the films here he worked with brother James Parrott as director, an always fruitful partnership that inspired some creative comedies.

*YOUNG IRONSIDES* is one of the best films he ever made, full of original sight gags and situations that come thick and fast as Charley is hired to prevent Muriel Evans from taking part in a beauty competition. It develops into a three way game of cat and mouse between Charley, Muriel and a suspicious house detective tailing them both, with the highlight coming as Charley fashions himself a grass skirt of collars and enters the pageant as 'Miss Hamburg'!

*HIS SILENT RACKET* is another classic, with Charley conned into being a partner in James Finlayson's failed dry cleaning business. Lots of great characters and visual gags in this one. *FALLEN ARCHES*, *IN WALKED CHARLEY*, *GIRL GRIEF* and *MR BRIDE* are all other favourites of mine. The last is a particularly daring (for 1932) comedy in which Charley must act as a bride for his fastidious boss Del Henderson on a rehearsal honeymoon! The scenes of Charley being forced into a feminine role amidst everyone's presumptions that they are a gay couple are very unusual, and take Chase's comedy of embarrassment to new extremes. Even more experimental are the technocratic *NOW WE'LL TELL ONE*, surreal *ARABIAN TIGHTS* and bizarre Tarzan spoof *NATURE IN THE WRONG*. Ever wanted to hear a lion speak with the voice of James Finlayson? Of course you have. Well, here's your chance!

In fact, for L & H fans, there are lots of moments where the familiar stock company players shine: Anita Garvin vamps Charley in *HIS SILENT RACKET*; Billy Gilbert does his best Germanic bluster in *LUNCHEON AT TWELVE*; James C Morton and Eddie Dunn pop up in *FALLEN ARCHES*. You also get an introduction to some other great Roach co-stars who didn't appear with the boys, including Gale Henry and Jimmie Adams. Richard Roberts' commentaries fill in lots of great detail on these performers, by the way. The leading lady for most of these films is Muriel Evans, who is a charming performer, if not quite Thelma Todd. Thelma does make one appearance, in *THE NICKEL NURSER*, a wonderful, underrated comedy with Charley an efficiency expert hired to teach a millionaire's daughters the value of money.

Of course, being a chronological set, you do get the ebb and flow of inspiration that naturally comes with any art form — not all these shorts are classics and there are a few duds. Chase's personal and professional lives were both strained at the time, and occasionally it shows with uninspired films like *SHERMAN SAID IT* or *FIRST IN WAR*, both among his weakest. However, even the lesser efforts are watchable, thanks to Chase's charm and natural humour.

In conclusion, if you're at all a fan of the Hal Roach studios, this (along with volume 1) is an essential purchase. If this set is your entry point to Chase, I envy you — there's loads to enjoy here and it's just the tip of the iceberg. If, like me, you're familiar with the films, you'll see them with fresh eyes in this quality and learn lots from the commentary tracks. Of course, for Chase devotees, the inclusion of *UNA CANAL EL AIRE* is worth the price of admission alone. Like many of Roach's phonetic versions, it's much longer than its English language equivalent, and features extra gags. Among the gems are some funny toupee gags, and a brilliant moment as Charley tries to cross a crowded dancefloor.

An essential purchase. Thanks to Richard M Roberts and The Sprocket Vault for making it happen. Available from all major online retailers.

# Do You Remember Walter?

The pioneering British comedies of

# WALTER FORDE



Today, Walter Forde is chiefly remembered as a director of British comedies and thrillers in the 1930s and 1940s, but long before this he had his own starring career in silent comedies. In fact, he was virtually alone in dedicating himself to comedy film-making in the manner of Chaplin, Keaton and Lloyd, et al. While lots of comedians had a go at making films in Britain, few of these had been successful. Most British comedies of the late teens and 1920s tended to be on the stodgy side, a bit too polite when contrasted with the gag-packed slapstick of American comedies.

Forde's own short films were much more in the latter vein, initially owing a large debt to Chaplin, but developing his own style as he went on. They were well received, and he was successful enough to make feature films. The British film industry greeted his work enthusiastically, recognising an energy and concision that had been missing from most British comedies to this point. Posters even exist billing him (with just a bit of hyperbole!) as "Britain's only comedian!"

Despite the hubris of this billing, Forde was actually a painfully shy and modest man. Film historian Anthony Slide, who knew him in his old age, remembered him brushing off interest in his old films, saying "After all, what I have done doesn't amount to much." Of his own starring silent films, he was even more blunt: "They were crap!"

This assessment was that of an artist looking back on the naivety of his early work, but like many artists, Forde was too harsh on himself. His career in films certainly began amateurishly, but he had an admirably trailblazing spirit and did some fine work in his two series of comedy shorts and four starring features. He was certainly the only British comedian to successfully transfer the American model of silent comedy making to the U.K, and his efforts are worthy of revival.

## THE BOY PRODIGY

Walter Forde was born in 1898 as Thomas Seymour Woolford. His birthplace was London, not Bradford as has often been claimed; this was apparently a ruse created by a studio publicity department to make his films more popular in the provinces!

Young Thomas was named after his father, the actor-manager Tom Seymour. Seymour had a successful company touring a range of comedies and melodramas. One such, WHEN THE LIGHTS ARE LOW, would mark Thomas Jr's stage debut, at the tender age of two months. In a parallel to young Buster Keaton's stage career being thrown around by his father, Seymour would throw his son out of a window at the dramatic climax of the play! A basket of cushions hidden from the audience would ensure he received a soft landing.

As he got older, the young boy received a training in several performing arts. As he recalled for *The Tatler & Bystander* in 1947, "My father had me trained in tumbling, eccentric dancing, singing, piano, violin, concertina (one tune only), juggling and cartooning"

Of these skills, it was the piano that he would dedicate himself to the most. Piano playing became a lifelong love, and future collaborator Jack Hulbert recalled that Forde would always keep a piano on set. Quickly building his skills, he worked up an act "as a Boy Prodigy Pianist, complete with starched shirt, white tie and tails, playing the Moonlight Sonata and Liszt's Rhapsody No. 2 on the provincial halls."

However, his performances did not remain this highbrow for long: "Respectability has never been my strong suit. I began fooling about in my act. I found the audience liked it. The more I fooled, the more they laughed, and the more they laughed, the more I fooled."

By 1914, the act featured him struggling with an uncooperative piano, and with the new focus of the act came a new stage name. Playing on his surname, he billed himself as 'Wool Forde, the Piano Tamer'. By 1915, Forde had caught the Chaplinitis sweeping the world, and turned his fooling into a Chaplin imitation. In a review of the show SHELL OUT in February 1916, *The Era* considered that "Wool Forde takes off the cinema comedian to the life, faithfully reproducing his mannerisms, and maintains the picture effect, going through the whole performance without uttering a line". The piano part of the act remained, *The Sheffield Independent* noting that "Wool Forde followed up his laughable Chaplin skit with a remarkable gymnastics performance on the piano, and for this he was well received". The act was successful enough to keep him touring around the music halls during the mid-1910s, sometimes alongside screenings of genuine Chaplin films. Many critics have commented on the Chaplinesque style of Forde's early film per-

performances; here we have the particular root of this influence. The piano act also left its own mark on more than one of his films. The opening scenes of his last feature *YOU'D BE SURPRISED* even explicitly refer to his piano prodigy past, as a young Walter is seen learning the piano. In addition to his performances, Forde also used his musical talents to write musical numbers, including the entire musical score for a show called *ROSEBUDS* in 1916.

## WALTER MAKES A MOVIE



Walter's rise was interrupted by war service, but it was during a camp concert that he was seen by comic Fred Goodwins, who had recently returned from America and was planning to start film production in Britain. Goodwins had actually worked with the real Chaplin in his Essanay films and the first three Mutuals (he's most prominent as the bald cashier in *THE BANK*), and was impressed with Forde's comic skill.

On Goodwins' advice, Forde self-produced a trial film, *THE WANDERER*. Obviously deciding that 'Wool' was hardly a suitable name for a movie star, he mutated it into Walter for his new efforts. No trace remains of *THE WANDERER* today, and it seems it failed to find a release. Forde remembered it as "the worst film ever made". Nonetheless, it was a useful experience, and confirmed the path he wished to follow. There was good news when he next met Goodwins, who was involved in setting up a production company to produce short comedies. Goodwins was starring in some himself, but planned on a roster of comedians, and invited Forde to join him.

The result was a short comedy, *FISHING FOR TROUBLE*, made in summer 1920. *The Era* of August 11th noted that "Forde acts with vivacity as the riverside hero, who succeeds in landing himself a big fish in the person of the wealthy and charming Miss Fullogold, despite the machinations of Mr Mighty." Sadly, all traces of *FISHING FOR TROUBLE* seem to have been wiped off the face of the planet, a fate shared by most Forde's other early work. The loss of these films, coupled with the fact that they were made for small, transient indie companies, has ensured they remain a mystery. We can guess from titles like *FISHING FOR TROUBLE* and *THE HANDY MAN* that these were simple, one-situation slapstick comedies, but beyond that, who knows? It seems that, after making a couple of the *British Comedies*, Forde made some one-reelers for Castle films. There are also references in contemporary newspapers to films called *THE CARPENTER* (possibly a working title for *THE HANDY MAN*?), *A DIZZY DAY* and *THE SHOTGUN WEDDING*. The last two are possibly listed as starring Forde in error, or were alternate titles. Either way, information is extremely scant on this early group of films.

The lone survivor is *NEVER SAY DIE*. Held by the BFI, it's a slight film detailing Walter's attempts to try to crash into a high class music school so he can flirt with a pretty piano teacher. What does our first glimpse of Forde tell us about his performing style? Well, his training as Chaplin impersonator is definitely apparent, in both body language and persona. Charlie's rapid eye blinking and shrugging shuffle are present, along with the brash flirtations of the early tramp. To be fair to Forde, it is not an out-and-out imitation. A syndicated article from the time claims that Walter "does not want to be an English Winkle (Harold Lloyd) or British Sterling. His ambition is to create an entirely new type of comic character and a typically English series of films." To this end, he had made a conscious decision to develop his own costume. Eschewing prop moustaches, he used a British straw boater and shabby blazer, and an Etonian-style school tie to suggest an English boy fallen on hard times. While it's more a costume than a character at this point, he adds a few mannerisms of his own too; a shrugging raise of the eyebrows when surprised is his frequent, understated version of a double take.

It's also evident that he is playing a key role in the writing of his films: the idea for the musical setting was surely inspired by his musical passions. Though most of the material is pure knockabout, there are some nice moments that hint at better things to come. Walter gets some good little bits of business at the piano stool, and there's one great gag as he is thrown out of a window, only to land inside a bass drum that is immediately carried back into the building.

The series of shorts seem to have fizzled after a few efforts, and our next glimpse of Walter is rather different. Breaking into the industry, Forde would take any job coming his way, and one oddity that resulted is *THE ECONOMIST*. This curious little short was a promotional film for Osram Lamps, similar in spirit to the industrial films that Buster Keaton would make in the 1950s and 60s. *THE ECONOMIST* begins with Walter proposing to his girlfriend, who rejects him for being too extravagant. Buying a book on how to will oneself to success, he follows its advice to focus on something bright and concentrate. Naturally, he chooses an Osram lightbulb to stare into, and soon finds himself in a trance, dreaming his way into the lightbulb factory.

We follow as he wanders through the different stages of manufacture, all carried out by real workers. At all times, the workers remain totally unaware of Walter's spectral presence, carrying on their business stony-faced as he watches and throws in a couple of sight gags. Eventually he is awoken from his trance by his girlfriend, who informs him that the lightbulb is a much

**THE KING'S HALL.**  
It's "Charlie Chaplin" (as well as roses) everywhere now, and this week, at the King's Hall, the well known Mr. Wool Forde provides his audiences with the cleverest impersonation imaginable of the funny film actor who has convulsed kinema-goers in every quarter of the globe for so many months. King's Hall goers also had a very funny Chaplin film to see in "His Trysting Place." The rest of the



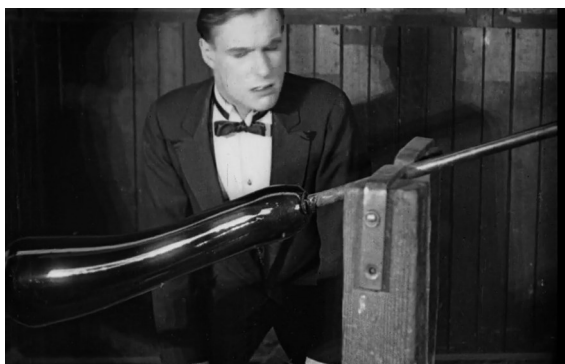
*The early Walter Forde: a review of his Chaplin act at the Grand, Clapham from the Era, July 26, 1916; musical moments from NEVER SAY DIE, his earliest surviving film.*



better economist than he will ever be. All in all, a strange but quite fascinating little dream of a film.

In June 1921, Forde finally got off the ground when he was signed by the Zodiac film company of Catford, South London, to make six two reel films, produced by the American J.J. Bamberger.

Forde and his producers were savvy at establishing a brand for these films. As well as making a big fuss over the fact that they were “British comedies!” in advertising, they did their best to establish the Walter character in the public consciousness. All the films would have his name in the title, and were often alliterative; the intertitles of the films themselves are adorned with pictures of Forde in various poses, further establishing his identity.



Thanks to 16mm and 9.5mm home releases, the entire series (and all Forde’s subsequent work) survive, though most often seen in cut-down versions.

The first two filmed were *WALTER’S WINNING WAYS* and *WALTER FINDS A FATHER*, directed by William Bowman and J.J. Bamberger respectively.

*WALTER’S WINNING WAYS* is a comedy set in an auctioneers (this is another example of Forde bringing his own life experiences to comedy – he apparently spent a short time apprenticed in the trade before his stage career took off). Walter is a clumsy assistant, which provides an excuse for some well timed slapstick and good sight gags, the best of which involves Forde creating an incredibly precarious pile of objects, and then climbing the unlikely tower to help him reach a high shelf. Walter ultimately saves the day by donning a disguise to help Marjorie Russell bid for a family heirloom.



The film was a milestone in Walter’s personal life as well as his career. During shooting, he fell in love with his continuity girl, Adeline Culley. The pair were married shortly after, remaining a happy partnership until her death in 1967. Culley, as she was known, provided both technical and moral support to Walter in his career, acting as his editor and assistant director on many films, and encouraging him along the rocky road to success.

*WALTER FINDS A FATHER* begins with Captain Fish, who has made his fortune but lost his prodigal son on the way. His daughter finds Walter at work on a building site, and notices his matching birthmark. He is taken back to the family home, where a party is thrown for him. Walter is a fish out of water in the society setting and causes chaos, as well as finding himself challenged to a duel. For the slapstick climax of the film, the duel takes place in several rounds. After Walter proves hapless with swords and pistols, the pair resort to dynamite, each trying to light the fuse of a stick tied to the other’s back. (This savagely funny sequence is reworked from an old Italian comedy *DUELLA ALLO SHRAPNEL* (A DUEL WITH SHRAPNEL), where the two participants try to hammer shells on each other’s backs.) Before anyone is killed, Walter’s new family arrive and stop the duel. They then discover that his birthmark is actually just dirt, which rubs off. Walter is cast out, walking away sadly in an ending that emulates Chaplin’s *THE TRAMP*.

**Above: Lightbulb moments: scenes from Forde’s bizarre promotional film for Osram Lamps, *THE ECONOMIST*.**

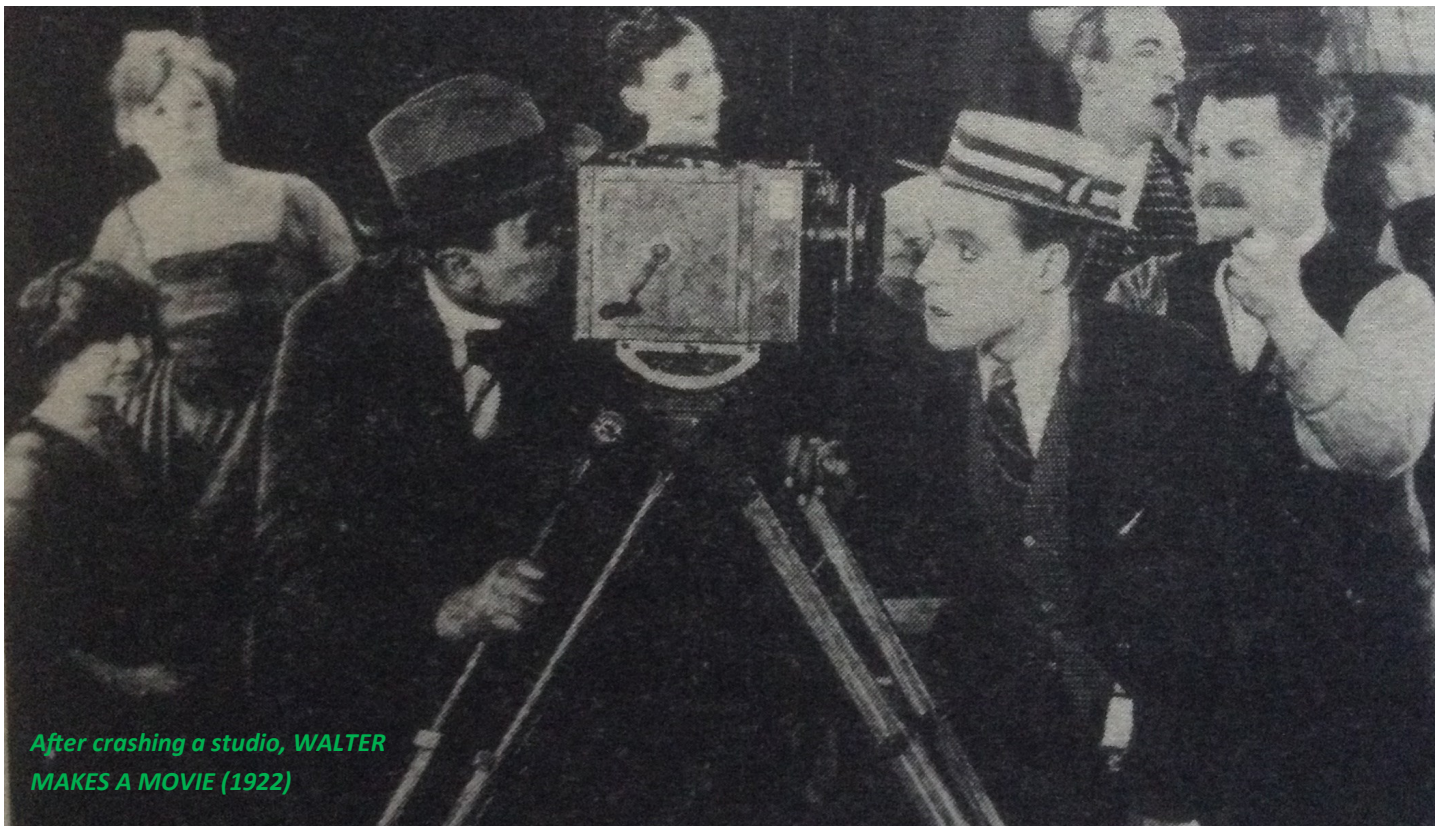
**Below: Walter with his father Tom Seymour in a scene from *WALTER FINDS A FATHER*.**



The first two films were trade-shown in September 1921, to enthusiastic reception. An impressed reviewer from *The Era* considered them “two of the most commendable British comedies yet screened. Walter Forde should go far in his particular kind of work, for he possesses a quaint style that is most pleasing.”

From the third short onwards, there were some changes in the production of the Zodiac comedies. The whole company moved to Kingsbury in North London. The location, on the edge of the new suburbs of *Metro-land*, provided spacious backgrounds with wide streets, modern buildings and proximity to rural settings.

Secondly, Walter had a new leading lady, Pauline Peters, and a new co-director: his father, Tom Seymour, who also took bit parts in the films. Seymour can be seen acting the part of director in *WALTER MAKES A MOVIE*. Perhaps the most widely seen of Forde’s short, it is actually one of the weaker entries in the series. The shadow of Chaplin hangs heavy over the film, not just in Forde’s mannerisms, but also in setting (*BEHIND THE SCREEN*), and an entire restaurant scene half-inched from *THE IMMIGRANT*, with bits of *A DOG’S LIFE* thrown in. The slapstick is rather more frenetic this time round, but there is a good routine



After crashing a studio, WALTER  
MAKES A MOVIE (1922)

based around a hand-operated lift, not to mention a glimpse behind the scenes of a British studio. While a bit too derivative, the energy of the film cannot be denied, which was in stark contrast to the average tame comedy produced by British companies.

WALTER'S TRYING FROLICS (could they have given it a more prissy, English-sounding title?!) also has undertones of Chaplin, this time the recently released THE IDLE CLASS, as Walter becomes mixed up with his upper-class double, Lord Montmorency de Gadabout. This time, Forde allows himself a bit more space in the film to develop routines. There's an amusing scene of him trying to start his dilapidated car in front of a potential buyer. The car is falling to bits, and Walter calmly hands pieces to his customer as they fall off. His underplaying of the situation is really rather good.

WALTER WANTS WORK, the last of the shorts, has Forde as a rather less sympathetic character. He's avoiding getting a job, instead busking with his barrel organ, pretending to have a broken arm with his sling. Again, there's some nicely developed pantomime business here as he keeps forgetting which arm is supposed to be broken, continually switching which one is in the sling! The noise he makes arouses the ire of local residents and of an ice cream seller, leading to a slapstick battle. To get his revenge, Walter tries to blow up the ice cream wagon (!), but only manages to destroy his barrel organ. Heading home, his wife demands that he finally gets a job, and so he ends up with as a bill poster, falling afoul of the police, and the same ice cream seller when he accidentally empties his paste pot into the ice cream. Walter ends up with an angry mob in pursuit, and attempts to escape by bicycle, followed by a crowd of other bikes, trikes and scooters. Arriving home, he finds Mrs Walter on the kerbside as they have been thrown out by their landlord. The couple are reluctant to enter the workhouse, but change their mind when the crowd of angry bicyclists appear behind them.

WALTER WANTS WORK is somewhat cruder and more vicious than some of the other films, but has a great energy and some nice interludes of physical business. The slapstick is well handled, especially the closing chase.

The six films had finally given Forde some recognition. They certainly benefited from the fact that nobody else was making films packed with gags and business like this in Britain. There was also a novelty value for British audiences in seeing this kind of comedy with backgrounds and characters they recognised. Seen today, the films are certainly a mixed bag, but you have to admire their spirit. Though sometimes derivative and below the standard of contemporary Hollywood two-reelers, they do maintain a rough charm and sense of fun.

To celebrate the completion of the series, Forde attended a lookalike competition at the Kennington Theatre. *The Bioscope* noted there was "a packed house, despite the weather," and that the winner was promised a part in Forde's next planned film, a three reeler. Sadly for Jock Cameron of Herne Hill, that three-reeler never materialised. Forde had bigger, more exciting plans on the horizon...

### **TO HOLLYWOOD AND BACK AGAIN**

The success of the Walter films led him to be contacted by Harry Spoor, a prominent figure in U.K. film distribution. Spoor recommended that Forde should try his luck in the U.S., and offered an introduction to his brother George, who had co-founded the Essanay company. The lure of Hollywood was too great to pass up, and he sailed for New York with Culley and his father in October 1922. However, when they arrived at Spoor's house, Forde recalled that "he took one look at me and slammed the door in my face. Hollywood without an introduction was a cold place indeed."

Walter found that he was now a small fish in a big pond; success in a minor series of British two-reelers meant little in the crowded comedy industry of L.A. Shopping himself round the studios brought no joy, and so he found work as a house painter to pay the bills. Fortunately, it turned out that the door slamming had been a mistake, and he was contacted by a representative from Univer-

sal with the company's apologies. Forde was signed to make one-reel comedies for them, the first of which was A RADIO ROMEO.

A RADIO ROMEO was directed by Lloyd Bacon. Forde featured as a small town poet whose romantic readings on the airwaves captivate the hearts of housewives. Their jealous husbands plot revenge, but through a misunderstanding get the wrong man. *Film Daily* (June 24, 1923) considered the short "mildly amusing, [with] quite a bit of slapstick."

After one more short, GOOD DEEDS, Forde was dropped as a starring comedian, though he also apparently directed some Western shorts. Sadly, Universal's shorts have a very low survival rate, so we're not able to judge his American work today.

Forde returned home to London, though his father stayed on in Hollywood, apparently finding work as a gagman for Hal Roach. Though he put a brave face on for newspapers, saying he planned to return to the US, the next few years were tough for Walter. There were no film offers and he had to fall back on his piano playing, earning 35 shillings a week accompanying films at a local cinema. As he commented later, it was quite a fall from 500 dollars a week, especially in the depths of the British winter.

Eventually, Forde got another chance at stardom. *The Bioscope* of August 13, 1925 announced that he would shortly begin shooting a series of six-two reel films, with Pauline Peters back as his leading lady. The new series had James B Sloan in the director's chair, though Forde effectively co-directed (existing outtakes show him setting up a gag for the camera) and was largely responsible for the comedy of the films. It is immediately apparent when watching one of the new series of films that Forde has spent his time away thinking of new approaches and of the developments in film comedy. Watching the films he was playing to must have kept him up to date with developments in screen technique, not to mention new comic ideas.

Accordingly, the new films are smoother and more sophisticated, with less frenetic slapstick and more space given to developed gag routines. Walter's character is a little more sophisticated, too; it is immediately apparent that he has shifted from Chaplin as his main influence to the lighter, "boy-next-door" style of Harold Lloyd. To this end, his costume is smartened up with shiny-buttoned blazer and 'Oxford bag' trousers, then in vogue. Instead of a bum or petty thief, he is now a smart young man struggling to get by in the modern world. Gone are the building sites and farmyards of the earlier films, replaced with white collar jobs in offices, insurance and retail.

WALTER THE SLEUTH was the first of the films to be made, on location on the Upper Thames riverbank. Pauline is being courted by George Foley (regular heavy in the new series), but he's actually more interested in her father's diamond. To avoid his advances, she tells her father she is already engaged to a detective; when Dad demands to meet him, she searches the river for a suitable candidate to act the part. Enter Walter, who is having an unsuccessful day fishing. His main catch is Foley's straw hat, and a lot of clothes from some ladies who are undressing for a swim behind some bushes. This is a fun, slow-burn sequence as Walter first finds the items of clothes amusing, then becomes increasingly unnerved as they become more risqué! He is accidentally pulled into the water behind Pauline's boat, and she has found her detective. Returning to the houseboat for lunch, Walter and Foley play a hidden game of tit for tat when their hosts aren't looking. Walter is given custody of the diamond, and is chased by Foley and his gang. He eventually recovers it and the crooks are apprehended, but as he and Pauline embrace, the diamond drops down a drain. Most surviving prints are rather choppy and abbreviated which doesn't help the film, but it's clearly a step up from Forde's earlier work, and the riverside settings provide a pleasant background to the action.

Location shooting also played a big part in the next short, WALTER'S DAY OUT, which was filmed in the seaside resort of Margate, and on-board *MV Crested Eagle* in September 1925. Walter works in an office and plans on spending his half-day holiday at Limpet-on-Sea with Pauline. However, his boss (Foley) has other plans, leaving Walter a stack of work to finish. Walter defiantly tries to leave the office, but is continually caught by the boss. There's a little of Lloyd's SPRING FEVER in this sequence, but Walter develops some nice gag variations of his own, pretending to take the waste paper out as he is caught in the act. Eventually, one of his colleagues offers to do Walter's work, on the condition that he does him a favour. Of course, Walter replies, as the colleague opens a door to reveal the favour: his two small children. Walter is supposed to drop them at his home, but loses his address on the way and so has to take them along. The children cause mischief on the boat and on the beach, leaving Walter and Pauline forever chasing after them. There are extra complications as Walter's boss has decided to take a day at the beach too. After a chase through Margate's Dreamland theme park, Walter is fired.

An enjoyable little comedy, the mixture of sunny location shooting, fast moving gag sequences and nice situational humour make WALTER'S DAY OUT perhaps the most satisfying of all Forde's shorts.

WALTER'S WORRIES also has some enjoyable gag sequences, based around Walter's employment at a tailor shop. He's in a romantic mood, and is constantly being distracted by gazing at Pauline, the cashier. This leads him to several mistakes, including mixing up the suits being tried on by a thin and fat man, and sewing a roll of fabric to a gent's tail coat, which trails behind him as he leaves the shop, tangling up everyone he passes. After accidentally setting fire to a gent's new hat, Walter is shown the door, and his invite to the company dinner is taken away, the rest of the film detailing his attempts to gain access to the banquet and see Pauline. Incidentally, a reel of outtakes

Incidentally, a reel of outtakes



Forde with his principal cast members from the second series, Pauline Peters and George Foley.





*A mystery candid photo, taken during Forde's location filming around Kingsbury for his Zodiac series. The identities of the old lady and baby are not known.*

survives from WALTER'S WORRIES, including a brief glimpse of Forde setting up a gag.

The Walter character's promotion to more middle-class professions is seen again in WALTER'S PAYING POLICY, where he works for the Busy Bee Insurance company ("insuring against everything from divorce to dandruff!"). Antique collector Max Gruff (George Foley again) has just added a priceless vase to his collection, and Walter's boss offers a large commission for the employee who gets him to insure it. The rest of the film is a well-timed game of one-upmanship between Walter and his rival, as they attempt to gain entry to Gruff's home through a variety of guises, including window cleaners and decorators (during which Walter uses the priceless vase to mix wallpaper paste in). Ultimately, the pair decide to break into the house, hide the vase and scare Gruff into signing the policy, but a real burglar enters the house at the same time. In the ensuing kerfuffle, Walter manages to hide when the police arrive, and gets Gruff to sign on the dotted line.

WALTER THE PRODIGAL and WALTER TELLS THE TALE rounded out the six films required. The entire series was shot speculatively between late 1925 and early 1926, before Forde and Sloan found a backer. Finally, in June 1926, Wardour films announced they had taken up an option on the films and a trade show was organised the following month. Response was favourable, with *The Bioscope* considering the films to have "excellent direction and satisfactory story value. Though not endowed with pronounced individuality, Walter Forde is undoubtedly a born comedian and as there is a complete absence of vulgarity in his style, deserves a warm welcome".

The films were released beginning in January 1927. It's amazing how slowly the industry moved in Britain at the time; some of these two-reelers were almost two years old by the time they reached cinemas. The wait also meant another period of uncertainty for Forde, as any future films he made would depend on the critical and commercial success of the shorts. Happily, good luck was around the corner, and he would go on to bigger successes that would eclipse his short films. Today, his shorts seem undeniably crude compared to the contemporary efforts of the best Hollywood comedians, but on their own terms are an enjoyable novelty, not to mention an incredibly valuable training ground for his talent. It's not quite fair to judge them by the same standards as the Hollywood comedians; the British film industry was simply not geared to producing quality comedy films at speed, and so the opportunity to learn 'on the job' was never as available. The slow advances of his career in films meant that he was never going to improve as quickly as Harold Lloyd, for instance, who took nearly a hundred films to reach a mature version of his 'glasses' character. Forde made only about 15 silent shorts in twice the time, but nevertheless you can see an outline of a character coming into focus, comic technique developing. One has to admire Forde's efforts at forging a film career, trying to develop a unique style. The films, while not comedy classics, are entertaining and fascinating for the glimpses they offer of a vanished Britain. The best, like WALTER'S DAY OUT and WALTER'S WORRIES, are amusing in their own right. Happily, Walter Forde's next opportunity to make films would see him move to even better things. We'll get to that in the next issue... **WAIT AND SEE!**

# WALTER FORDE: THE SHORT FILMS

Films in red are not known to exist.

## Self-produced.

**THE WANDERER** 1919? Not released.

## Goodwins/British comedies

**FISHING FOR TROUBLE** 1920

Directed by and starring Walter Forde.

## Castle films

**NEVER SAY DIE** 1920

Directed by and starring Walter Forde., with Tom Seymour.

*Walter poses as a music student to meet a pretty piano teacher.*

**THE HANDY MAN** (Is this the same title listed under the working title **THE CARPENTER?**) 1920.

Directed by and starring Walter Forde.

Other titles listed in trades, probably in error: A DIZZY DAY, A SHOT-GUN WEDDING.

## London Press Exchange

**THE ECONOMIST** 1921

Directed by? Starring Walter Forde, with Jean Miller.

*A promotional film for Osram Lamps. Rejected by Jean, Walter dreams himself into a lightbulb factory. As you do.*

## Zodiac Films

**WALTER'S WINNING WAYS** – filmed June/July 21. Trade shows in September & November 1921. General release January 1922.

Directed by William Bowden. Starring Walter Forde, with Marjorie Russell, Doris Stapleton.

*Auctioneer's assistant Walter poses as a rich bidder to help a young lady regain her family heirloom.*

**WALTER FINDS A FATHER** Directed by J.J. Bamberger. Starring Walter Forde, with Marjorie Russell, Tom Seymour. July 21. Trade shows in September & November 1921. General release February 1922.

*The rich Captain Fish laments his long-lost son. Builder Walter is identified as the prodigal by his shamrock birthmark, and is invited to the family home, where he gets involved in a duel.*

**WALTER WINS A WAGER**

Filmed November 1921, released March 1922. Directed by T.W. Seymour & Walter Forde.

Starring Walter Forde, with Pauline Peters, Tubby Philips.

*Walter poses as a crook to help catch a gang of counterfeit coiners.*

**WALTER'S TRYING FROLICS**

Filmed January-February 1922, released April 1922. Directed by T.W. Seymour & Walter Forde.

Starring Walter Forde, with Pauline Peters, Tubby Philips.

*Walter is trying to sell his dilapidated car. On a test run, he crashes into a car driven by his double, Lord Montmorency de Gadabout, and is taken to the Lord's home. At a costume party that evening, black-mailers arrive to kidnap him, but the whole affair turns out be a dream.*



## **WALTER MAKES A MOVIE**

Directed by T.W. Seymour & Walter Forde. Released May 1922  
Starring Walter Forde, with Pauline Peters, Tom Seymour.

*Pickpocket Walter steals a purse belonging to an actress, and ends up crashing a movie studio when he tries to return it.*

## **WALTER WANTS WORK**

Released June 1922

Starring Walter Forde, with Pauline Peters, Vera Wilkinson, Tom Seymour, Tubby Philips.

*Organ grinder Walter feuds with an ice cream vendor, then gets work as a bill poster.*

## Universal Pictures.

**A RADIO ROMEO** Released 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1923.

Directed by Lloyd Bacon. Starring Walter Forde.

*Walter 's poetry readings make him a housewives' darling...but their husbands object!*

**GOOD DEEDS** Released 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1923.

Directed by William H Watson. Starring Walter Forde.

## British Super Comedies, released by Wardour Films

**WALTER THE SLEUTH**

Directed by James B Sloan (& Walter Forde). Filmed August 1925, Released January 1927

Starring Walter Forde, with Pauline Peters, George Foley.

*Walter poses as a detective to help Pauline avoid an engagement, but then finds himself on the trail of some riverboat crooks who have stolen a diamond.*

**WALTER'S DAY OUT.** Filmed September 1925, released c. February 1927.

Directed by James B Sloan (& Walter Forde).

Starring Walter Forde, with Pauline Peters, George Foley.

*Walter and his girl skive off work for a day trip to the seaside at Margate, but they end up babysitting a colleague's children.*

**WALTER'S PAYING POLICY.** Filmed c. Autumn 1925, released 1927.

Directed by James B Sloan (& Walter Forde).

Starring Walter Forde, with Pauline Peters, George Foley.

*Walter is an insurance broker, playing a game of one-upmanship with his rival to secure the commission on a policy to insure a priceless vase.*

**WALTER TELLS THE TALE** Filmed c. 1926, released 1927.

Directed by James B Sloan (& Walter Forde). Filmed August 1925, Released January 1927

Starring Walter Forde, with Pauline Peters, George Foley.

*Penniless architect Walter takes actress Pauline out to dinner.*

**WALTER THE PRODIGAL** Filmed early 1926, released 1927.

Directed by James B Sloan (& Walter Forde).

Starring Walter Forde, with Pauline Peters, George Foley.

*Coming home with the milk, Walter is thrown out by his parents... but he's still in his fancy dress party outfit: a convict's uniform!*

**WALTER'S WORRIES** Filmed c.1926, released 1927.

Directed by James B Sloan (& Walter Forde).

Starring Walter Forde, with Pauline Peters, George Foley.

*Tailor's assistant Walter blags his way to a banquet dinner after he is fired.*



*After losing his shirt in a fancy restaurant, WALTER TELLS THE TALE to Pauline Peters...*

## WALTER IN THE HOME MOVIE MARKET

The Walter Forde shorts still exist principally because of their comprehensive issue on home movie gauges. Thanks to David Wyatt for the following information on their issue:

**8mm:** Mountain films sold complete 2 reel WALTER FINDS A FATHER & WALTER'S TRYING FROLIC

**16mm:** Ensign film Library had all 12 shorts available for hire; Wallace Heaton & Vauxhall Film Libraries (all in London) had 10 of them (minus WALTER THE PRODIGAL & WALTER'S WORRIES) .Not clear if copies were sold or not but there seem to be more copies around than would just be library copies sold off when libraries closed.

**9.5mm-** from Pathescope in UK. (most released in 1934/5 -then WALTER FINDS A FATHER 1937 & the extracts from WALTERS WORRIES in 1938/9)

WALTER'S WINNING WAYS - 300 ft (plus 60 ft extract as REMOVAL MEN possibly not released?)

WALTER FINDS A FATHER - 300ft

WALTER MAKES A MOVIE— 300ft plus extracts FOOTING THE BILL 30 ft (cafe scene) ; STOP THIEF (cops chase W) 60 ft

WALTER WANTS WORK - 300ft

WALTER THE SLEUTH - 300ft

WALTER'S WORRIES— 2 extracts TAILOR'S DUMMY 60 ft & TAILOR MAID 30 ft. both tailors shop scenes from first reel.

WALTER'S PAYING POLICY- 2 300ft reels. (so more or less complete)

WALTER THE PRODIGAL - 300 ft.

WALTER TELLS THE TALE - 300 ft (plus 60ft extract THE RENT'S DUE - possibly not released)

WALTER'S DAY OUT - 300ft plus 30ft extract THE SANDWICH (boy puts starfish into W's sandwich on beach)

Novascope , a company that tried to revive sales of 9.5mm prints in 1970's released 300ft reels (the auction room scenes) from WALTER'S WINNING WAYS as FRAGILE WITH CARE.

**MISSING  
IN ACTION**

# ONE HOUR MARRIED (1927)



Produced by HAL ROACH. Directed by JEROME STORM and (uncredited) HAL YATES

Filmed June-July 1926, and released by Pathé, February 27th 1927.

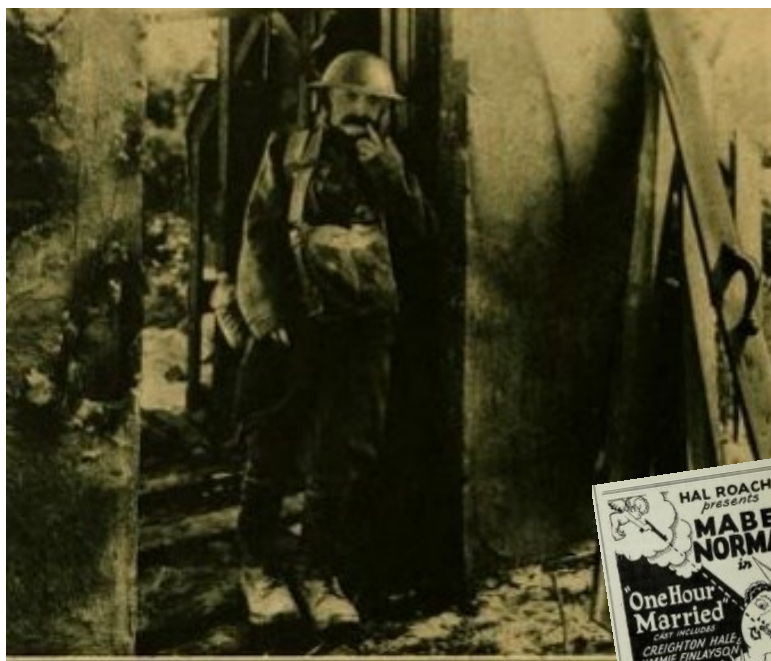
Starring MABEL NORMAND, with CREIGHTON HALE, JAMES FINLAYSON, NOAH YOUNG, SYD CROSSLEY and CHARLES GELDERT. (Oliver Hardy was apparently slated to play in the film, but was injured by the famous accident that led to the accidental teaming of Laurel & Hardy)

Mabel Normand's career was in trouble by the mid-1920s. One of the earliest film stars, she was in danger of being left behind in the fast-moving flapper age. Matters weren't helped by the fact that she'd been (innocently) connected to a number of scandals, and was suffering health problems. After one last film produced by Mack Sennett in 1923 (THE EXTRA GIRL), she was absent from the screen for all of 1924 and 1925.

A letter to Motion Picture Magazine from a reader in Michigan in early 1926, sums up Mabel's situation. Its description of her as "one of our oldest stars" is telling of the way she was seen to belong to a cruder age of filmmaking, but the author went on to argue that "We [still] need her because she is a great actress, and this is why we pay our hard-earned half-a-dollar: to be entertained, and not because our entertainers were on a party or failed in church attendance last year. Come back to the front, Mabel fans. I am sure many of you have missed "the little slim princess" as much as I have, so let's get together on it."

In early 1926, Mabel's close friend, director F Richard Jones, set up a series for her with his employer Hal Roach. Roach had been starring a variety of ex-big feature stars in his shorts. Many of these, like Lionel Barrymore and Theda Bara, weren't really cut out for comedy, so Mabel was a big improvement! Pathé trumpeted Mabel's return in a series of ads:

*"Hal Roach made a ten-strike when he signed Mabel Normand for short comedies. Her record, as a feature star, has been great. She pulls the crowds. She makes money for exhibitors. She spells D-O-U-G-H!"*



Her first film was the Cinderella-esque RAGGEDY ROSE, and in July, Motion Picture News announced that she was shooting her as-yet untitled second comedy. Directing was a new face at the Roach studios, Jerome Storm. Storm was better known for Westerns and action films; he had probably been chosen as Mabel's new film was to be a war comedy, with action mixed in the comic scenes. In the cast were reliable Roach regulars Jimmy Finlayson and Noah Young.

There are signs that pulling ONE HOUR MARRIED together took quite some effort. Filming took three weeks, longer than the average Roach comedy, and although the film was completed and titled by September, it was held back for release until February





1927, released as the fifth and final of Mabel's Roach comedies. (Hal Yates apparently did some uncredited work directing the film; Storm didn't work for Roach again. Coincidence?)

What do we know about the content of ONE HOUR MARRIED, then?

The film began with Mabel's wedding day to Creighton Hale, (leading man in other shorts with her, most memorably in SHOULD MEN WALK HOME?), who has been rejected by the army. However, the same day America joins WW1, and after only one hour of marriage, Hale is unceremoniously frog-marched away by recruiting sergeant Noah Young. Not wanting to be without her man, Mabel stows away to France, too. Disguising herself as an 'Old Bill'-type soldier, complete with bushy moustache, she sets out to find him. Together the pair dodge shot and shell in no-man's land, before capturing a German machine gun post.

On release, reviewers were impressed. *Motion Picture News* considered it "well-conceived and carried out. There are many hilarious moments in this tabloid war comedy. Much time, thought and money have gone into the making of ONE HOUR MARRIED". *Film Daily* concurred that "Mabel Normand is in her element, clowning around a great rate while dodging shot and shell in no-man's land".

Though well-received, the film would turn out to be the last time audiences saw Mabel on screen. By the time it was released, she had already made her last film for Roach; her health had continued to decline, and she wasn't up to continuing the series. Suffering from Tuberculosis, she would spend the next couple of years in sanatoriums, passing away tragically young in 1930.

ONE HOUR MARRIED remains a frustrating gap in her filmography. It would be lovely to see one of the final appearances by this gifted and pioneering comedienne once more.

*The picture at left is an on-set shot . Mabel knew Charley Chase from years back, during her time at Keystone when he was the young juvenile Charles Parrott.*

*The shot wasn't taken on the set of ONE HOUR MARRIED, but of RAGGEDY ROSE, her first film for Roach. Still, it's too good not to reproduce it here!*



## The Lost Laugh needs you!

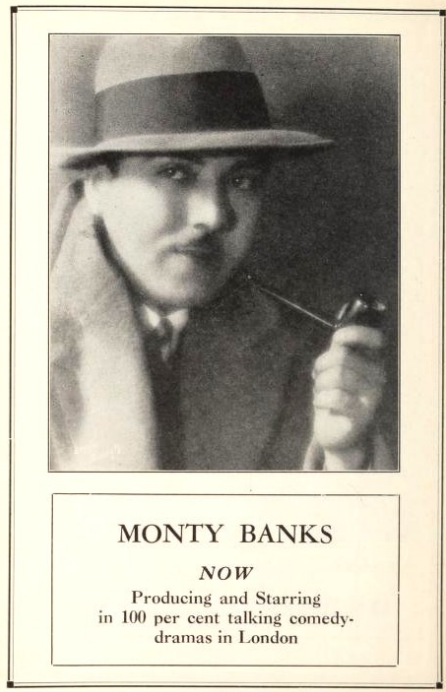
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# SO YOU WON'T TALK?

## THE SOUND FILMS OF MONTY BANKS

Following on from last issue's article on Monty Banks' silent comedy features, here we look at the work he did in sound films, both as comic and director...



In the silent era, Monty Banks had come tantalisingly close to joining the top echelon of screen comedians. While many others struggled to make the coveted feature-length comedy, Banks managed to star in a string of them. Despite this, and the high quality of much of his work, he had been unable to really break through in the public consciousness.

1929 found him at more than one crossroads in his career. Not only was sound looming, but he had also faced a major relocation. Facing impending bankruptcy, he had fled the US and settled at British International Pictures.

It proved to be just the shot in the arm his career needed. B.I.P were delighted to have a real Hollywood-trained star and, enjoying the effects of being a big fish in a small pond, Banks was able to pick up where he had left off in starring vehicles. He was also able to spread his wings further, and showed signs of moving away from his traditional starring comedies. *WEEKEND WIVES* had seen him in a supporting role in a more sophisticated bedroom farce, and he had moved behind the camera to direct *COCKTAILS*. Quite possibly he was wary of the oncoming demise of silent comedy, and considering backup options. His thick Italian accent undoubtedly gave him a little extra reason to worry.

Banks' last planned silent was *THE COMPULSORY HUSBAND*. Based on a novel of the same name, this veered towards the farcical direction he had taken in his last few features. Monty played a young fiancé on a ski-ing holiday, who ends up sheltering a woman on the run from her estranged husband. The setting in the Alps enabled him plenty of scope for his thrill comedy specialities, with the big finale planned to be a cross-country ski and car chase, that leaves Monty's vehicle overhanging a mountain precipice.

One of his co-stars in the film was a stage actress named Gladys Frazin, who would become his new love interest in real life. However, the Banks-Frazin partnership was tempestuous from the beginning. During their courtship, Monty's constant presence backstage at one of her stage shows led to her being dismissed; a subsequent show part-funded by Banks ended abruptly under a financial cloud. They would be married during 1929, but the relationship was doomed never to be a happy one.

Banks co-directed *THE COMPULSORY HUSBAND* with Harry Lachman, and filmed exteriors in Nice during January 1929. However, during production, B.I.P. switched over to sound. Like Lloyd's *WELCOME DANGER*, *THE COMPULSORY HUSBAND* was to be re-shot with sound sequences. Before this could be completed, the studio planned a prestigious all-star talkie. *ATLANTIC* was a thinly veiled retelling of the Titanic disaster, given just barely enough dramatic licence to avoid lawsuits and complaints. The White Star Shipping line protested, leading to the renaming of the ship, and a final shot of the ship going down was deleted, for fear of upsetting survivors. Only 17 years after the Titanic disaster, memories were still raw.

Under any name, the film is a stodgy and pretty dismal thing to sit through\*. There is some interest in seeing Banks playing an essentially straight role as one of the doomed passengers. While he is there to provide a bit of light relief, he does get to do a little



*Banks at BIP, with Alfred Hitchcock & Betty Balfour, among others.*

\*To save you the bother, here's a spoiler: the ship sinks.

dramatic acting in the final scenes, and his quiet despair is actually rather effective compared to the over-elocuted melodrama of the other principals. Another off-kilter career move, the role shows that he really was moving out of his comfort zone at this point.

Following completion of ATLANTIC, Banks revisited THE COMPULSORY HUSBAND. Some scenes were overdubbed, others shot anew and some apparently left silent. On its eventual release in February 1930, Variety claimed that it consisted of about 40% sound sequences. The same review lamented that the talking scenes really slowed the film's momentum, with "some verbal gags pushed to the limit". The more familiar visual comedy won praise, however. British critics were generally impressed, with *The Evening Telegraph* singling out a drunk sequence as a highlight, as well as Banks' antics on skis. *The Hull Daily Mail*, while sniffily declaring that "there is a great deal of running about in pyjamas", admitted to "admiration for Banks' feats of daring in the alpine scenes". Praise for the final 'high and dizzy' sequence was unanimous. *Variety* even claimed it comparable to Chaplin's cabin sequence, "but not faked"! Sadly, we can't see for ourselves, as the film is lost. Although the mixture of silent and sound footage undoubtedly gave it an uneven quality, it sounds as though there some hallmarks of Banks' best silent work in it, so the loss is a shame.

Despite the success of THE COMPULSORY HUSBAND, its release marked the end of Banks' starring career, at least for the time being. For the rest of the decade, he would be known primarily as a director, although he would occasionally come back in front of the cameras. Along with other ex-silent comics Walter Forde and Lupino Lane, he played a large role in developing British Comedy Film at this time, the trio melding music hall influences of performers with their own experience of the classic silent comedy style.

Banks' first full sound film as director was to have been MUMMING BIRDS, an adaptation of the famous Karno sketch starring Syd Chaplin. However, a notorious assault scandal involving Syd led to the film being cancelled. Syd's biographer Lisa Stein Haven has speculated that Banks, too, had some involvement in the incident, which was eventually settled out of court. Chaplin never made another film, but was Banks briefly blacklisted by B.I.P. too? This is given some credence in that his next work was not for B.I.P., but for theatre agent-turned-independent producer Gordon Bostock, and by a report from *Variety* from April 1930, stating that Banks "had got over his rumpus with [B.I.P.]". Was this partly the reason he made no more starring films for a few years..?

Certainly, the work for Bostock was a clear demotion, directing a series of short featurettes. Bostock had struck a deal with Pathé to distribute the films in the U.S., in abbreviated two-reel versions. It is these which survive today, with at least three doing the rounds. It is safe to say the US critics were unimpressed, with good reason. These were low-budget films cobbling together a bunch of Bostock's acts in the flimsiest of contexts. THE MUSICAL BEAUTY SHOP is a dismal and quite bizarre little thing,

*The climax to THE COMPULSORY HUSBAND. Inset: Monty in ATLANTIC.*





*Some of Monty's Hitchcock moments! The top two are from THE CHURCH MOUSE (1934). The third image is from YOU MADE ME LOVE YOU, with Stanley Lupino and Thelma Todd in the back seat. Above, he plays a French taxi driver in HEADS- WE GO! (1932). Claude Hulbert is on the left.*

States.

Banks' status as the U.K.'s premier transatlantic comedy film director made him the natural choice to helm these films. With Constance Cummings he made HEADS WE GO, followed by one of his very best films, YOU MADE ME LOVE YOU. On paper, this could have been a car-crash. The musical update of Shakespeare's THE TAMING OF THE SHREW starring English comic Stanley Lupino and Hal Roach comedienne Thelma Todd wove together lots of disparate elements that could have clashed, but instead mesh together beautifully under Bank's direction

Warner- First National were also in on the transatlantic productions, and Banks was again selected to helm some British vehicles for their American star, Laura La Plante. In 1934 and 1935, he made a trio of comedies with La Plante, beginning with THE GIRL IN POSSESSION. As well as directing, he took screenplay credit and had a juicy

its title serving as the entire plot(?) of the film. In between slight gags of barbers and saunas, there are some awkward dances and excruciating blackface minstrel stuff. NEAT AND TIDY is a bit better, featuring building site slapstick. Many of the gags are stolen from the classic jerry builders act of Willie West & McGinty. There's also interest in seeing Billie Reeves, a Karno clown and Chaplin mentor, make a rare film appearance. The blame for these scrappy films can't be entirely laid at Banks' door, working as he was with meagre resources and scripts, but they certainly did his reputation no good at all.

Fortunately, once the dust from the Chaplin scandal had blown over, Banks was welcomed back to B.I.P. The studio probably realised that they needed his expertise with the comedy films they had planned to help bring a glut of stage comedians to the screen. Their faith was well placed; Banks would prove a versatile director, equally at home with low slapstick comics or West End farce and musical comedy.

In the former category was Leslie Fuller, an earthy, populist clown who played blustering but good-natured working class types. With Fuller, Banks made a trio of service comedies in 1930-31: WHY SAILORS LEAVE HOME, NOT SO QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT and KISS ME, SERGEANT.

At the more sophisticated end of the spectrum, he directed stage comedian Bobby Howes in FOR THE LOVE OF MIKE, and formed an alliance with playboy Gene Gerrard for THE WIFE'S FAMILY and LEAVE IT TO ME.

Banks' work was being noticed. The American trade reviews were often very scathing of British releases, but singled out Banks' work as being much more palatable. *Film Daily* described THE WIFE'S FAMILY as "one of the best British comedies seen on this side", praising Banks' direction, and the fact he presented the actors to make them "not too English" for American audiences. His skill at managing transatlantic appeal of films gave credence to the 'International' aspect of B.I.P.'s moniker.

Perhaps inspired by these reviews, he tried his luck back in the States, returning in early 1932. Though no directing assignments came his way, he found work co-scripting Joe E Brown's THE TENDERFOOT and also made a small appearance in Wheeler & Woolsey's HOLD 'EM JAIL.

Gladys had accompanied him on the trip, but their marriage was in deep trouble by this point. She had developed drinking problems and, one suspects, mental health issues. In late 1932, she disappeared for several days. Banks eventually gave in and was granted a divorce. Sadly, Gladys would continue to deteriorate into alcoholism, jumping to her death from her apartment window in 1939.

The relationship had been a distraction from Monty's career, but now he found himself on the rebound. The next few years would be the most successful of his post-silent career, and see a boost to his personal life. Re-affirming his links with the Hollywood industry that had originally made a star of him had particularly proved a shrewd move. Around this time, the British film industry was looking to increase it's standing in the international market. British International Pictures, in particular, was planning to import American stars to add prestige to their product, and make the films more marketable in the



comic supporting role as an American con-artist. This missing film was included in the British Film Industry's 'Most Wanted' list, but no copies have surfaced yet.

THE CHURCH MOUSE, which does exist, is a mild but charming romantic comedy featuring LaPlante with Ian Hunter. Hunter is a businessman tired of his secretaries vamping him, so he engages work-minded, mousy Laura, but nevertheless falls in love with her during a trip to Paris. Monty gets a nice little comic role in the opening scenes as an eavesdropping window cleaner.

Last in the trilogy of Banks-La Plante collaborations was MAN OF THE MOMENT the following year, which also featured Douglas Fairbanks, Jr and wonderful 'silly ass' comic Claude Hulbert. Hulbert seems to have been one of Banks' favourite comic actors, the two working together often. There's another little cameo from Monty, too; clearly he had never quite lost his fondness for performing. In many of the films he directed, he took small Hitchcockian cameos, occasionally just to perform a random sight gag.

Now, he was about to get another chance to star in his own vehicle. Made by Warners British, SO YOU WON'T TALK was the first Monty Banks star comedy in six years. Perhaps Banks' strong Italian accent had dissuaded him from starring vehicles, but SO YOU WON'T TALK sidesteps this neatly by a) presenting him as owner of an Italian restaurant, and b) providing a plot that requires him not to speak for a month. The plot is another one of those improbable-conditions-in-a-will trifles, but provides enough original twists to actually be rather wonderful. Monty is due to inherit a fortune from his grandfather Osgoode Fielding, who hated noise and excessive talk... but only if he can win a wager that demands he not talk or write for a month. It's a great idea for a film starring a silent comedian, offering him many opportunities for pantomime and visual humour.

Monty plays Tony Cesare, who owns a share in the restaurant along with his girlfriend Katie and two other friends. A shady racing tipster (Ralph Ince) talks Tony into secretly putting the group's savings on a race horse; the horse is disqualified when it emerges that the owners have been arrested for tampering with the race. When Fielding's butler (the wonderfully gormless comic Claude Dampier) arrives to take him to the reading of the will, Tony assumes he is being arrested, and is amazed to find that he stands to inherit £110,000. The will also stipulates that he must stay at the house; also living there are his matronly relatives and vamp-ish cousin (Enid Stamp-Taylor). If Tony breaks his silence, the fortune reverts to them, so naturally they do all they can to coerce him into speaking. This gives the excuse for a series of comic vignettes, as they alternately starve him, flirt with him, ply him with alcohol and wrestle him! Throughout all of this, Monty's performance is excellent as he uses mime to communicate; one highlight is his attempt to order several drinks, including miming a cow for a glass of milk and dancing a highland fling for a glass of Scotch.

Meanwhile, with no word from Tony, Katy and the others at the restaurant conclude that Tony has absconded with their money. The month has nearly passed and Tony is still silent (smugly wearing sticking plaster across his mouth!). Seeing a chance to get in on the dough, Young offers to make Tony talk for a cut of the fortune. He sets up a fake murder, threatening to shoot Katy. Tony begs him not to shoot, and has lost the fortune with seven minutes to go. Well, not quite. This is a farce after all, so naturally it turns out to be the first day of Summertime, and the clocks have gone forward. Monty wins the fortune and the restaurant is saved.

SO YOU WON'T TALK is an unexpectedly wonderful little film, a minor classic that gives Banks' silent comedy skills one last hurrah. He is ably assisted by the supporting cast and by director William Beaudine, himself a veteran director of silent comedies, including comedies with Douglas McLean, Charlie Murray and Laura La Plante.

On its release in late 1935, SO YOU WON'T TALK got a terrific reception, even in America. For *The Motion Picture Herald*, the film "very successfully recaptures the atmosphere of the pre-talker screen farces, where actions spoke more entertainingly than words. It is full of action, has speed, and a genuinely funny plot idea. The individual incident is of the semi-slapstick variety so lacking of late." *Variety* concurred that "Monty Banks' pantomime gets 90% of the laughs".

The essence of Banks' silent work was revisited again, if not quite as explicitly, in his next assignment. NO LIMIT was the first film at Associated Talking Pictures (Ealing Studios) for



Poster for SO YOU WON'T TALK, Monty's last hurrah as starring comic.



Northern comedian George Formby. The story of an amateur motorbike rider who takes part in the TT races on the Isle of Man, with its exciting race climax, was very much in the mould of Banks' silent features like RACING LUCK and PLAY SAFE.

Ironically, after shooting scenes of motorbike crashes, Banks was involved in a road accident himself (he seemed to have at least one a year!). There was more drama on-set as Formby and Desmond clashed, and Formby's legendarily domineering wife Beryl constantly interfered with the shooting. One would never guess that there had been friction behind the scenes, as NO LIMIT is a happy, sun-soaked little gem of a film. It launched Formby's career successfully and the Formby-Banks-Desmond trio would be reunited for a follow-up, the delightful KEEP YOUR SEATS, PLEASE.



*Top left: A glum-looking Banks directs George Formby on location in the Isle of Man, 1935. He got on rather more successfully with his next assignment, Gracie Fields: the pair were married in March 1940.*

Before this, Monty had another chance for a prominent co-starring part with Claude Hulbert in OLYMPIC HONEYMOON. Capitalising on the upcoming Berlin Olympics, the plot had Hulbert mistaken for an Olympic Ice Hockey player on his honeymoon, and then mixed up with a Miss America, causing jealousy from his bride (Princess Pearl). Monty played a Frenchman who tries to mend fences between the newlyweds, but only makes matters worse. Though Hulbert is always amusing, Monty's part is far less rewarding, and the film is far below the standard of SO YOU WON'T TALK. At just 63 minutes long, it gives the feeling of being unfinished, which was possibly the case. During shooting, Princess Pearl came down with the flu and missed two weeks' filming. Time was precious as ATP were eager to get Monty directing KEEP YOUR SEATS, PLEASE, so production was cobbled together, but the film was deemed unsatisfactory and sat on the shelf for four years (by which time the next Olympics were due!). Retitled as HONEYMOON MERRY-GO-ROUND, it crept out to theatres as a second feature in May 1940, with Banks not even mentioned in most adverts.

KEEP YOUR SEATS, PLEASE was another smash success for George Formby. Banks was now a logical choice to direct Formby's female counterpart, the Rochdale-born comedienne Gracie Fields. Fields had been in films since 1931, hitting her stride in 1934 with SING AS WE GO. Like Formby's vehicles, the Fields vehicles were a mixture of unpretentious comedy and musical numbers with Northern working class backgrounds, glossed up with enough production values to sell them nationally. Banks' first film with Fields was QUEEN OF HEARTS, in which seamstress Gracie is mistaken for a rich patron of the arts and finds herself backing a stage show. Banks directs the comedy nimbly, particularly an Apache dance number, and added another cameo. The film was a success, and became a defining moment in both their lives. Monty became Gracie's regular director, her manager, and before long their relationship became more than just professional. The rest of Banks' life would be devoted to Gracie, in both a professional and personal capacity.

Turning down work with Alexander Korda, Banks instead went to America to try and negotiate a deal for Fields with an American studio. He found interest from 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, arranging a deal where he would direct the films (to be made in England) and released on both sides of the Atlantic by Fox. The first in the deal, WE'RE GOING TO BE RICH, co-starred American Victor MacLagen, an indicator of its rather transparent attempt to appeal to US audiences. Better were the show troupe story KEEP SMILING (its title borrowed from Banks' own silent feature) and SHIP-YARD SALLY.

SHIPYARD SALLY is set against a backdrop of unemployment in the Glasgow shipyards. With her uncle (the wonderful character comic Sydney Howard), she sets out to get the shipyards re-opened. An enjoyable vehicle, SHIPYARD SALLY was nevertheless out of date by the time it reached cinemas in October 1939, as the outbreak of war meant the shipyards were once again bustling.

The war would come to spell trouble for Banks and Fields. When Italy entered the war in June 1940, Banks' Italian immigrant status made him an undesirable alien at risk of internment. Banks' discussions early in the year with Mussolini's son, looking to break into film production, had not helped matters. (Though Italy was neutral at this point, it was still an unpopular and foolish move; Mussolini's fascist regime was not approved of by the Jewish-dominated US movie industry, as Hal Roach had discovered when he had engaged in similar discussions with Mussolini).

Luckily, Banks had been in the US when Italy joined the war, but could not return home. Gracie went back to England to settle their affairs, rejoining her husband later in the year. Meanwhile, Banks shopped around for work. Thanks to his contacts at Fox, he was given the job of directing Laurel & Hardy's 'GREAT GUNS' under the one-time Sunday name of 'Montague Banks'. Apparently, this was not a happy experience. Glen MacWilliams, cameraman on the film, told Randy Skretvedt *"There are probably a hundred other directors who would have been better on this picture than Monty Banks. He was very aggressive, very vulgar. He yelled a lot and always had to have a whipping boy around him."*

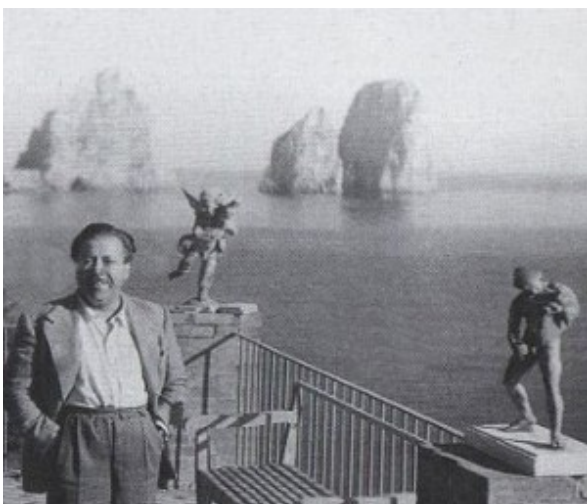
Stan Laurel's opinions on Banks don't seem to have been recorded, although he and Hardy did send a letter to producer Sol M Wurtzel saying, *"We can not find words enough to say how pleasant our association has been during this picture and how much you have contributed in making our stay a pleasant one"*. Perhaps just another example of their innate courtesy, but it's certainly hard to believe that Banks could have managed a ten-year directing career that saw him much in demand, if he was as poor a director as MacWilliams describes.

Probably, Banks was struggling to cope with the situation he found himself in. Fox was a long way from the cosy cottage industry of film making in Britain, and the US industry had changed a lot since Banks last made a film there. Add to this the upheaval and overhanging worry of a war that conflicted his home and adopted countries (not to mention his marriage) and it is likely that Banks was a very unhappy man during this period. To his credit, 'GREAT GUNS' does remain one of the better of L & H's Fox films.

The experience was to be his last in the director's chair, however. He did manage a couple of character actor parts in the Fox films BLOOD & SAND and A BELL FOR ADANO, but spent most of the war with Gracie, doing fundraising drives for Allied troops.

As soon as the war was over, he and Gracie relocated to the Isle of Capri, surely one of the most idyllic retirements of any silent film comedian. Monty's happy ending was to be short-lived, however; he died in 1950 of a heart attack, whilst on-board the Orient Express.

Monty Banks' entire career is one that showed extreme resilience and adaptability. From his humble beginnings as immigrant clown to star performer in features and successful director, he was able to constantly mount new challenges despite a number of setbacks. During his last years in Capri, he must have been able to look back with pride on his achievements. Rightly so, as he created some wonderful comedies of his own, and gave many other performers great assistance with his directing skill. The best of his work, silent and sound, still endures today as enjoyable entertainment.



*An idyllic retirement: Monty relaxes at his post-war home, on the island of Capri.*

# ARBUCKLE (WITHOUT KEATON)

Roscoe Arbuckle's series of shorts for the Comique film corporation are among his best-known work. Certainly, they are the best represented on DVD. This is almost entirely due to the Keaton factor – the presence of a young Buster in most of the films. This bias is confirmed by the obscurity of the films in which Buster does not appear, made during his military service in 1918-19. While the popularity of Keaton has ensured that all but one of the Arbuckle-Keatons are now accounted for, the survival rate drops much further for the shorts made in his absence. Only a couple are known to exist, and only one has been restored and released. Details of many of the films are sparse, with a couple remaining mysteries.

Ever since critics first took an interest in Keaton, Arbuckle has always been in his shadow. At worst, the lazy critical opinion is that Arbuckle's style was wholly crude and unsophisticated, and that the only merit in the films came from Keaton's input. Silent comedy aficionados know better, of course; nevertheless, an unfortunate legacy of the dominant view is the lack of interest in this bunch of films. Along with their unavailability, this remains in stark contrast to those that came on either side of them. Let's take a look at this neglected group of films, hopefully waiting to be rediscovered.

## THE SHERIFF

Released 24 November 1918.

Written & directed by Roscoe Arbuckle. With Betty Compson, Al St John, Monty Banks & Glen Cavender. **No copies known to exist.**



In late 1917, the Arbuckle company had moved to California from the East Coast, partly enticed by the better backgrounds on offer. The desert settings of the west were seen to good advantage in OUT WEST, and Arbuckle reused the theme in this short.

Arbuckle plays a Sheriff enamoured of the movie heroics of Douglas Fairbanks and William S Hart. After falling asleep and dreaming a dramatic rescue in a Mexican town where He gets the chance to try a real heroic rescue, when his schoolteacher girlfriend Betty is kidnapped by bandit Al.



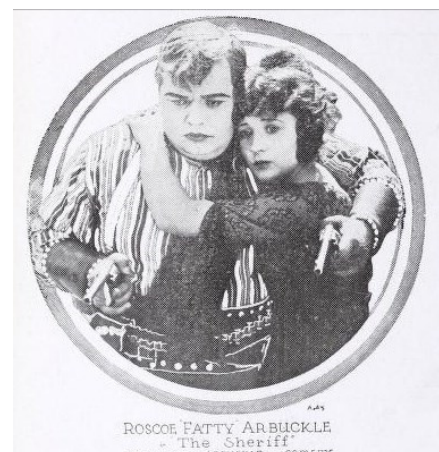
THE SHERIFF is possibly the most intriguing of all these films, and sounds like it was an amusing little gem. Arbuckle surely got good comic contrast from impersonating Fairbanks and Hart, and THE SHERIFF is perhaps similar to the clever, cliché spoofing Arbuckle-Keaton short MOONSHINE. While OUT WEST had been an exercise in comic savagery, reviews of the time commented that THE SHERIFF was rather more subtle and sophisticated. Here's a review from Motion Picture News of November 23, 1918:

*THE SHERIFF is better by far than anything contributed to the Arbuckle Paramount program. For one thing, it is free from vulgarity & sloppiness. The classic kick shines by its absence. For another, the situations have been developed logically, producing maximum fun out of minimum action.*

One of the common misconceptions about Arbuckle is that any sophistication in his films came from Keaton's input. While there's no denying that Keaton had big creative input into the films, Arbuckle, rather like Charley Chase, liked to play with different styles and could happily jump from wild gags and slapstick to gentle situation comedy. Some of his earlier Sennett films, made with Mabel Normand, like HE DID AND HE DIDN'T, show a gentle and sophisticated side to Roscoe before Keaton ever appeared on the scene.

Nevertheless, Arbuckle definitely felt the loss of Keaton in his supporting cast, and hired another diminutive comic to take his place: Mario Bianchi (the future Monty Banks). His leading lady in this film is also notable; Betty Compson would become a star in features, her career getting a boost the following year when she appeared with Lon Chaney in THE MIRACLE MAN.

Incidentally, spoofing William S Hart came up again in Keaton's later short THE FROZEN NORTH. It was an idea contributed by a writer who remained uncredited... Roscoe Arbuckle! In the short, Keaton made a mockery of Hart's tendency to always have a scene where he cried in his films; did Arbuckle use a similar bit of business in THE SHERIFF?



## SCRAPS OF PAPER (aka A SCRAP OF PAPER)

Released Autumn 1918

Directed by Roscoe Arbuckle. Written by Adam Hull Shirk. With Glen Cavender, Al St John, Monty Banks. **Exists complete.**

Not part of the regular series but made at the same time, this is Arbuckle's equivalent of Chaplin's THE BOND. Like that film, it is a propaganda effort designed to promote the Canadian War Bond fundraising effort. As well as each making a promotional film, Chaplin and Arbuckle made public appearances together to promote the loan drive, and newsreel footage of one of these events still exists.

Like THE BOND, SCRAPS OF PAPER features our hero coming face to face with the Kaiser (Glen Cavender) and the 'clown quince' (Al St John). After mocking the goose-step marching of the Kaiser's soldiers (one of whom is Monty Banks), Arbuckle tells him that there's one thing he hasn't considered, and unleashes a snowstorm of Liberty Bonds which engulf the Germans. Roscoe addresses the audience directly (via intertitle) telling them to do their bit and invest in the Liberty Loan Drive. Not much of a comedy, but an effective piece of propaganda and an interesting historical curio.

## CAMPING OUT

Released 5 January 1919

Written & directed by Roscoe Arbuckle. With Alice Lake, Al St John, Monty Banks & Mildred Reardon.

CAMPING OUT is another survivor from this group of films, albeit a scarce one, existing only in a composite print assembled from two incomplete sources (one from Italy and one from the Netherlands). This print has received a number of screenings, and is held at the EYE film institute. Arbuckle again took advantage of the West Coast climate and locations, filming the short on Catalina Island in November 1918. If THE SHERIFF showcased a more subtle side of Arbuckle, then this film returned to the cruder slapstick milieu of films like THE ROUGH HOUSE.

The basic premise of CAMPING OUT recalls FATTY AT CONEY ISLAND, a tale of Arbuckle playing hookey from his wife, and enjoying the freedom by flirting with other men's wives. Unable to stomach his wife's dreadful cooking, he escapes for a while, taking the ferry to Catalina for a camping trip. En route, he (inevitably) meets Al St John, and his pretty wife Alice Lake (returning to the series for the last time). In the the ensuing tussle, Al is thrown overboard. Fatty and Al's wife proceed to the campsite, Al, Fatty's wife (armed with some very long carving knives) and a couple of ANGRY Italian grocers, one of whom is played by Monty Banks.

There are lots of jokes about the terrible food and seasickness, and Arbuckle gets plenty of mileage out of the camping setup, including dealing with a goat that invades his attempts at cooking a meal. It would be nice to see this film get a release one day.

*Pressbook ad for CAMPING OUT. Is it just me, or is "See Fatty Knit!" the worst strapline for a film ever?!*



## THE PULLMAN PORTER

? **No copies known to exist, and no details known. Probably an unfinished/unreleased film.**

THE PULLMAN PORTER is a curiosity, an elusive mystery film. The Arbuckle shorts were popular and well publicised, with Paramount often placing full-page ads in the trade papers for them. For THE SHERIFF, we can piece together lots of information, for instance. But for this film, the trail runs cold. So far, I've found no reports of the production, no stills, no reviews... nuthin'. Nada. Zilch. But, it does have a cited release date, Feb 16. It does seem strange that an Arbuckle short released at this time would receive next to no coverage in the trades.

There has been confusion between releases in the series before, for instance the earlier short A RECKLESS ROMEO was actually filmed earlier for Keystone, but bought and released by Paramount. There also seemed to be various other reissues of earlier Arbuckle shorts occurring at this time, so could THE PULLMAN PORTER fall into one of these categories? It seems most likely that it was a tentative idea, scrapped and replaced during filming.

## LOVE

Released 2nd March 1919. Directed by Roscoe Arbuckle. Written by Roscoe Arbuckle & Vincent Bryan.

With Winfred Westover, Al St John, Frank Hayes, Monty Banks, Kate Price.

Exists complete . Available on THE FORGOTTEN FILMS OF FATTY ARBUCKLE DVD.

LOVE is a wonderful little short that survives complete. The film was preserved just in time, and issued on Laughsmith Entertainment's terrific 2005 DVD set THE FORGOTTEN FILMS OF FATTY ARBUCKLE.

The short is in the classic rural barnyard slapstick mould, one of Arbuckle's favourite motifs. However, LOVE is way more sophisticated than the earlier Keystone shorts, Arbuckle had come as a comedian and director since those times. While the knockabout is still rough, it is developed into some terrific, well-developed set pieces .

Roscoe makes one of his best entrances, riding on a country road in his "economy model" Ford (a glorified go-kart) and using a pair of bellows to blow away huge boulders in his path. He is courting farmer Frank Hayes' daughter (Winfred Westover), but Hayes has plans to marry her off to local boy Al St John in return for some land.

Among the comic set pieces around the farm yard is a scene where Hayes falls down a well, and Roscoe and Monty Banks try to winch him up; each time something goes wrong, sending Hayes plummeting down the well again and again. Then, we're into a classic version of the 'broom-bashing' routine memorably used in THE WAITER'S BALL. (Of course, the routine was originally pinched from The Three Keatons' vaudeville act, so Buster does have a little influence over this film after all. It would be nice to think its inclusion here was a tribute from Arbuckle to his absent friend). This version is even better, turning into a nice four-handed version with Roscoe, Monty, Frank and Al St John.

Roscoe tries to elope with Winifred, but is foiled when his ladder breaks, catapulting him into the house, and leaving Winifred dangling from a first floor window. (Poor Winifred Westover takes quite a lot of punishment in this short—no wonder it was her only film with Arbuckle!)

Though there are occasional lapses in taste (like the scene mentioned above) where the slapstick maybe gets a bit *too* violent, the comedy scenes in the first half of LOVE are some of the best in the whole Comique series.

The second half of the short involves Roscoe's plan to sneak into the house and sneak Winifred away from the wedding. Sneaking soap into the cook's stew to get her fired, he dresses in drag and takes her place. Suggesting that they stage a rehearsal ceremony with the preacher, Roscoe takes the groom's place. Once they have said "I do", Monty pulls strings attached to Roscoe's dress and wig, revealing his true identity.

LOVE contains several of Roscoe's pet routines, and is a thoroughly enjoyable two reels, brim-full of exuberant gags. As a farewell to the barnyard setting, it was a high note to go out on.



*Paramount's artwork to promote Arbuckle was often terrific. The lower image captures another go-round of the broom-bashing routine pinched from The Three Keatons. Roscoe also got chance to do another of his drag routines; he's seen here with Monty Banks.*



## THE BANK CLERK

? **No copies known to exist, and no details known. Probably an unfinished/unreleased film.**

Like THE PULLMAN PORTER, details about THE BANK CLERK are sparse. Initial reports in the trades show that Arbuckle had embarked on a film of this title, in which he works as a window cleaner in the bank, but (excuse the pun) climbs the ladder to a career in finance. However, in April 1919, Film Daily reported under the heading "Arbuckle Changes Plans" that "owing to weather conditions which have held up production of the Paramount-Arbuckle comedy THE BANK CLERK, and also so that revisions can be made to the script, Fatty Arbuckle has decided to temporarily suspend work on this particular subject and make a Western subject for his next comedy." Like THE PULLMAN PORTER, THE BANK CLERK was probably never finished. That the two films were never released is supported by an advert from 1920 offering a reissue of the whole Comique series. Every film is listed and illustrated with a still, but there is no mention of THE PULLMAN PORTER or THE BANK CLERK.

## A DESERT HERO

Released 15th June 1919. Written and directed by Roscoe Arbuckle.

With Al St John, Molly Malone, Jack Coogan, Monte Collins, Sr.

**No copies known to exist.**



Arbuckle was obviously very fond of Western settings at this point in his career; this is the third film in just over a year to play on the genre. Down the years, this has meant confusion for Arbuckle & Keaton scholars, with the three films (OUT WEST, THE SHERIFF and A DESERT HERO) often being mixed up, especially when they turned up in prints without main titles. As late as the 1970s, A DESERT HERO often found its way into Keaton filmographies, with stills from OUT WEST being attributed to this film instead.

It's not surprising, as there is a strong overlap between all three films. In OUT WEST, Alice Lake had a prominent role as a Salvation Army girl; here, Molly Malone takes on a similar part. Arbuckle's burlesque of William S Hart from THE SHERIFF is also revisited in this short.

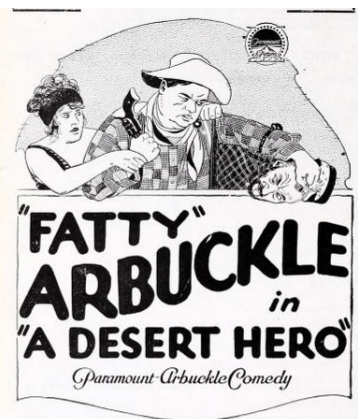
The long-faced, wiry Hart played solemn tough guys, and Roscoe plays on this for comic effect here. An opening title introduces "a gaunt, thin boned stranger from the desert", before cutting to the very non-gaunt Roscoe! Arbuckle carried on spoofing Hart through the film, as the press books tell us: "He's the toughest, hardest, roughest Western cuss that ever lived, in "A Desert Hero"! He eats 'em alive! Breaks rocks with his teeth he's so ornery!"

Roscoe reforms when he meets Molly and joins her in the salvation army. Surviving stills show lots of comic business with brass band instruments, before Molly is kidnapped by Al St John and Roscoe has to rescue her. Molly continued with Roscoe for the remainder of the series.

Though A DESERT HERO was his last Western short, Arbuckle would return to the genre one last time, for his debut feature THE ROUND UP the following year.

Keaton's war service in France was over in early 1919, and after a hospital stay, he rejoined Arbuckle in May. The Arbuckle-Keaton partnership returned to the screen for three more shorts, BACK STAGE, THE HAYSEED and THE GARAGE, before Arbuckle moved to features.

Many of the Arbuckle-Keaton shorts are deservedly well-regarded, but we shouldn't neglect the films Roscoe made without Buster. As a comic creator, he was at the top of his game, as evidenced by LOVE. Hopefully one day, THE SHERIFF and A DESERT HERO, will be available for us to enjoy again, too.



# A footnote: Arbuckle Without Arbuckle!

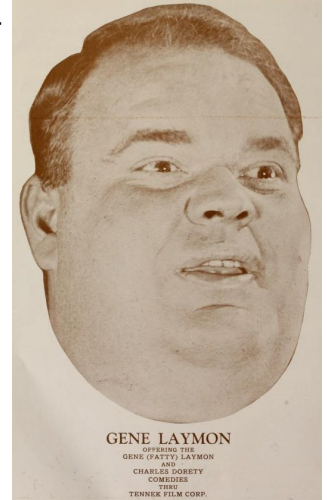


An interesting footnote to the Arbuckle-Keaton partnership is a series of shorts that imitate the pair.. Arbuckle's popularity had spurred a number of other chubby comedians to call themselves 'Fatty' and try their luck, but none were quite so brazen as Gene Laymon. A vaudevillian, Laymon was looking to break into films, and made a series of low budget shorts in 1927 aping Arbuckle. To make it even more explicit, he roped in comic Charlie Dorety as ersatz Buster to his imitation Roscoe.

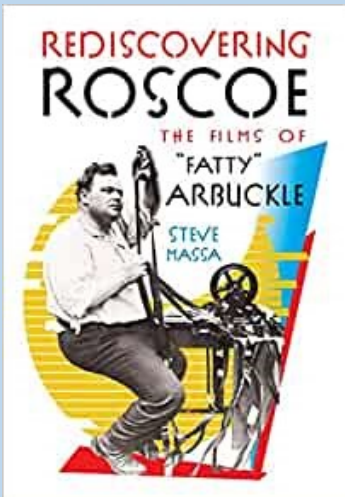
Homage is a generous word; like the Snub Pollard-Marvin Loback films which aped Laurel & Hardy, 'cash-in' is a more appropriate term. It's perhaps surprising to think that, during Arbuckle's screen blacklisting, he would be popular enough to be worth ripping off, but by this point popular opinion was turning in favour of him.

One surviving entry is ARE GOLFERS CUCKOO? Cuckoo? Maybe. Funny? Absolutely not. The film has barely any gags and is principally run-of-the mill slapstick, just proving the special comic chemistry that the original Arbuckle and Keaton had. Apparently there was a series of twelve of the shorts, including THE INVENTORS, FATTY'S FIRST FANCY and RADIO MAD. The films were obscurities, released through Tennek's Film Corp on a states-rights basis. As you'd expect, they didn't set the world on fire.

Dorety would repeat his Keaton impersonation in a handful of films. Laymon moved away from starring, but continued to be a chancer. As late as 1943, he was setting up a budget film production company, with Dorety named on the board.



## FANTASTIC NEW ARBUCKLE BOOK PUBLISHED



I'd already researched and written the preceding article when Steve Massa's new book on Roscoe Arbuckle came out in February. It fills in loads more information about these obscure films, and confirms my suspicions that THE PULLMAN PORTER and THE BANK CLERK were probably never finished.

A book on Roscoe's films has long been needed. The only other Arbuckle book, David Yallop's THE DAY THE LAUGHTER STOPPED, is more focused on *that* scandal and Arbuckle's personal life than on his comedy skills.

Steve Massa was just the person to take the focus off the tragic, and put it back on to the comic. What he doesn't know about silent comedy isn't worth knowing, and his books are always meticulously researched, packed with detail but absolutely readable as well. His previous books, LAME BRAINS & LUNATICS, and SLAPSTICK DIVAS are absolutely essential for any silent comedy bookshelf, and this new book is no exception.

Roscoe's career is covered in detail, film by film, with biographical details included as well, with contemporary reviews of the films as well as notes based on the author's own viewings. It's especially great to see the films he directed under the pseudonym William Goodrich included, films starring the likes of AL St John, Lupino Lane, Lloyd Hamilton and more. REDISCOVERING ROSCOE is illustrated throughout with an array of wonderful and rare stills.

Arbuckle was a very talented individual, and many other comedians benefited from his guidance over the years. For a time, he was the essence of silent comedy, and this book rightfully puts the spotlight back on him.

REDISCOVERING ROSCOE is available from all major online suppliers, as well as in a very reasonably priced Kindle version.

**While we're on the subject of Roscoe, the following pages reproduce two nice articles from the time of these films. The first is a behind the scenes look at OUT WEST from Photoplay, the second an interview from Moving Picture World, printed at the time of LOVE's release.**





# "Writing" Comedy *with*



This one was so funny it will probably go on the screen because the rehearsal got such a laugh. No one was shot as Roscoe interrupted the feud by "crowning" Buster with the bottle.



Fatty thought this would be much funnier if they reversed the order and had him at the top. His motion was beaten two to one.

"Cummon, it's time to get to work," says Buster Keaton. Buster is the keeper of a wild west dance hall and gambling house and Roscoe is his drink dispenser. Buster's watch, it will be seen, is equipped with skid chains.

# Fatty Arbuckle

HEREWITH is presented a bunch of "gags" that you probably won't see on the screen. They are merely being tried out to see if they're funny—if they can "get a laugh."

What is a "gag"?

Why, a "gag" is a bit of "business"—a situation, that will shake a laugh out of the casual looker, because of its incongruity, its abrupt contrast, or its physical humor. It may be a subtle piece of work or a sudden bit of rough stuff.

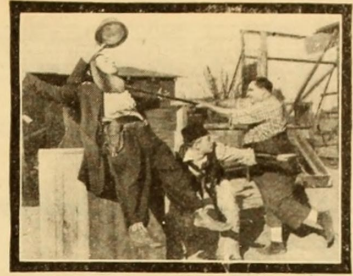
Now comedy making is largely inspirational. Most of the "gags" are evolved on the scene, so that the "writing" of the vehicle is largely a matter of physical experimentation.

Many times the screen comedian keeps his entire company on the set for hours, just to provide him with the atmosphere necessary to work out his "gags."

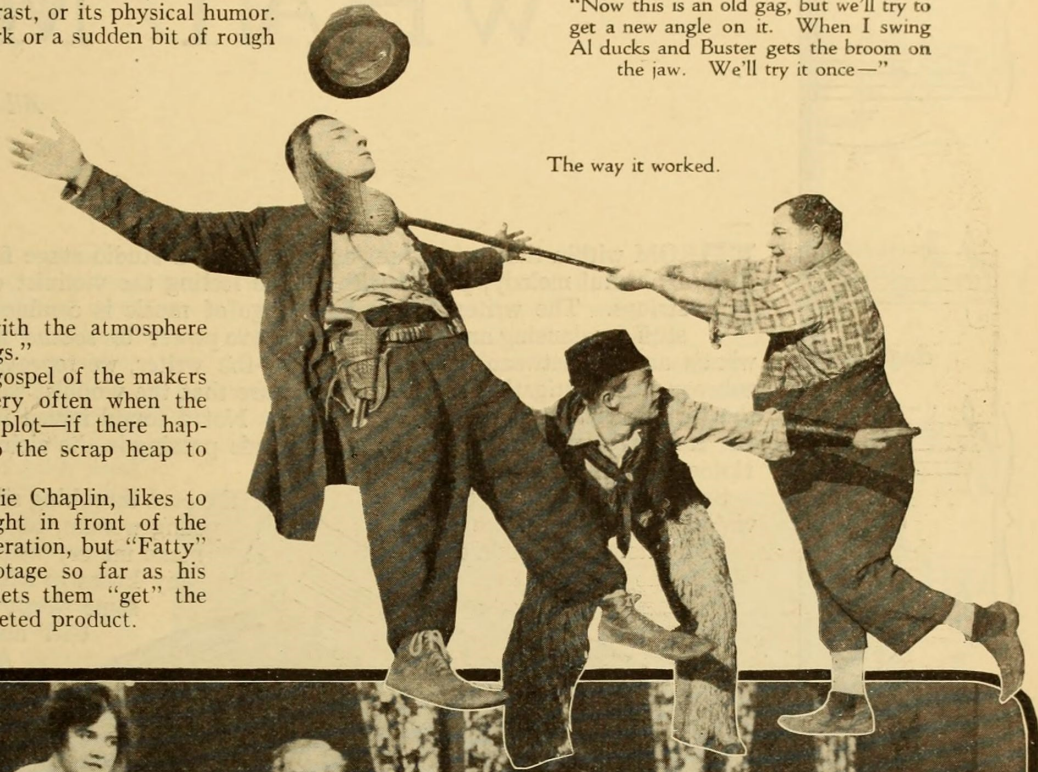
"The gag's the thing" is the gospel of the makers of slapstick comedy. And very often when the "gags" are coming good, the plot—if there happens to be one—is tossed into the scrap heap to make room for the "gags."

Roscoe Arbuckle, like Charlie Chaplin, likes to dope out his funny stunts right in front of the camera, even if it is not in operation, but "Fatty" is more generous with his footage so far as his colleagues are concerned—he lets them "get" the laugh if it improves the completed product.

Photographs by Stagg



"Now this is an old gag, but we'll try to get a new angle on it. When I swing Al ducks and Buster gets the broom on the jaw. We'll try it once—"



The way it worked.



This picture is defective in only one particular — it doesn't show Buster's banjo. It might be entitled "When—and why—the jazz band stopped playing." The Salvation Army lass is Alice Lake, Fatty's leading lady.

# HOW FATTY ARBUCKLE MAKES "LOVE"

Roscoe of the Movies in New York for a Week-End  
After Signing a New Paramount-Ar buckle Contract  
—Tells of Latest Comedy With the Romantic Title

**I**N one way Roscoe of the Movies is a disappointment. He keeps all of his comedy for his pictures. During an hour's interview with him he did nothing to uphold his reputation as one of the leading funny men of the screen. He leaned against a desk in a corner office at the Paramount and talked as soberly and sensibly of his plans and his work as might the head of a steel corporation. Before many minutes his listeners began to understand why it took more time and money to make one of his two-reel comedies than are required to complete the average five-part serious drama.

Hard mental application and days of preparation are necessary to produce a piece of business that may not run a minute. The story is written as Scenarist-Director-Actor Arbuckle thinks up a new bit of the comic-continuity and tries it this way and that and starts all over again and tries it another way and four or five other ways and then throws them all away and thinks up something new.

Such a steady course of close brain work doesn't leave a man much time to be funny in a casual off-hand way for the amusement of chance callers. That is why he is glad to relax occasionally and have other persons do funny things to make him laugh. So he has run on from Kansas City for a week end in Times Square and a visit to as many smart shows along Broadway as can be taken in before he starts back for the Coast on Sunday.

## Arbuckle Renews Contract.

"How did you come to make your start from Kansas City instead of Los Angeles?" Roscoe Arbuckle was asked.

"It was an after thought," was the reply. "My old contract with the Paramount was about up and Joseph M. Schenck, my manager, and Lou Anger, my personal representative, met Adolph Zukor at the Mouhlbach Hotel, in Kansas City, last Saturday, and signed a new contract and I was taken along to keep me out of mischief. The business was completed in short order and everyone was so pleased with the terms of the contract that the New York members of the deal insisted upon dragging me back with them for a play spell."

"He didn't need much urging," put in Personal Manager Anger. "And I don't mind saying for Mr. Arbuckle, who is a painfully modest man, that the new contract is the largest one ever signed by Mr. Zukor for an individual artist. It covers a period of three years and involves over three million dollars."

## Comedian Pays Tribute to Associate.

A large American flag floating from a tall flagpole in front of the Public Library changed the conversation to the wonderful parades that have passed up Fifth Avenue during the war and since the boys have started to come home.

"Where's 'Buster' Keaton?" the stout comedian was asked.

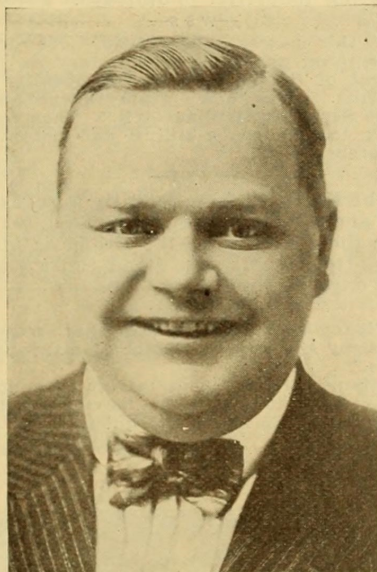
"Still over in France, waiting to be sent back. We are making every effort to get him started. It is utterly impossible to replace him. To my mind, 'Bus-

## By Edward Weitzel

ter' is the coming comedian of the movies and will be a very successful star."

"I'll wager he is a great favorite with his company."

"He can entertain them, all right! By the way, he had a funny experience, or rather his drill squad did, when 'Buster' first joined the army. He was eager and anxious to learn but knew just a little about handling a gun and about military tactics as the rest of the rookies. In going through the drill he unconsciously put in some of the funny steps and movements with which he was accustomed to burlesque military exercises. Everyone knew who he was and nothing but military discipline kept



Roscoe As He Is.

him from breaking up the show. When off duty he was the best entertainer in camp, with his ukelele solos and his stock of natural comedy. We'll all be glad to get him back again."

## Yes, Luke Is a Regular Actor.

"How about the four-footed member of your company—you must pay him an enormous salary to make him such a willing worker."

"My dog! Oh, he's a true artist and works for pure love of his art."

"What part of his art does he love best?"

"Biting Al St. John and 'Buster' Keaton."

"Do you have any trouble teaching him his share of the business?"

"Very little. The only thing is to prevent him from overdoing it. Both boys wear stout leather union suits when there is to be a mix-up with the dog, and the instant they start to run he darts after them without being told. In the picture where he jumps off the pier we didn't bother about rehearsing

him. It was a thirty-foot drop, but the instant one of the actors jumped he was right after him. It must have hurt when the dog struck the water, but he was always game for the next jump."

"That must have been a difficult scene to photograph," remarked Publicity Promoter Peter Smith.

## Is Careful About Risks.

"Well," explained the comedian, "it took us two days to get the camera rigged so that we could shoot the jumps, and you know how many minutes the scene lasts. One reason why it takes so much time and expense is because we are obliged to guard against accident. We cannot afford to take any unnecessary chances of the actors getting hurt. There is enough risk that cannot be avoided, as it is."

The next question asked the comedian sounded like an attempt to pry into his private affairs:

"Do you mind telling, Mr. Arbuckle, how you made 'Love'?"

The expected blush did not appear on the face of the man who has shown how Bill Hart woos a maiden when he burlesqued him in "The Sheriff."

"You mean my new picture?—some subject, isn't it?"

"To tell in two reels!—it certainly is. You're the hero, of course?"

## Admits He Is There With Strong Arm Stuff.

"Oh, yes! I may not be as handsome as some of the other screen lady-killers, but I can be just as brave and hold the heroine in my arms just as long as the best of them."

"What kind of a hero are you? A cowboy hero?"

"No, a farmhand hero who is in love with the farmer's daughter on the next farm. I have a rival, a rich young chap played by Al St. John, and he almost beats me to it in the tying of the wedding knot. But true love conquers in screen comedies—when the hero writes his own scenario—and I put one over on the wealthy youth by a trick, and marry the bride five minutes before he expects to make her his own wife. I'll not explain how the trick is worked, but it contains a lightning change act that I'm rather proud of."

"One more personal question, Mr. Arbuckle. Has your past experience made you competent to do justice to the subject? In other words, what do you know about making love?"

"Everything. I've been making it all my life."

## Campbell Completes Animal Comedy.

William S. Campbell, having completed the editing and titling of his first animal comedy, made at Universal City, is now working on his second two-reel production. The title for the second comedy has not been decided upon to date, but, like the first, it will feature Harry Burns and Dorothy Vernon, and a good percentage of the large Universal zoo will be in support of the leading players. Mr. Campbell has given his first effort the title, "Loose Lions and Fast Husbands."

# Groundhog Day for 'Our Gang'

## The curious story of Melton Barker

In the wake of Hal Roach's success with the 'Our Gang' comedies, it wasn't unusual for other filmmakers to try their hand at producing new 'gangs' of their own. One such producer was Melton Barker, an independent producer from Texas. Barker already had a particular interest in 'Our Gang', as he claimed to have discovered chief rascal George 'Spanky' McFarland. While it's easy to be cynical of this sort of claim, a photograph of Barker with Spanky at the Hal Roach studios seems to verify his story.

Inspired by Spanky's success, Barker figured there must be other talented kids out there waiting to be discovered, and embarked on a quest to find them. So what? Lots of other talent scouts were combing the country in the same way. Well, perhaps, but Barker had a rather different gimmick. He hit upon the idea of making Our Gang-styled comedies in towns across the USA, each time featuring a different cast.

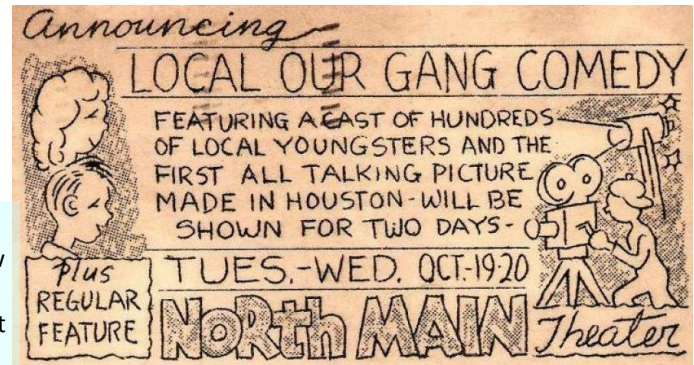
Barker worked out a script he liked. Then he remade it. And filmed it again. And again, and again, each time with a different cast of kids. All in all, he made about 300 versions of KIDNAPPER'S FOIL. Each time the dialogue and action are almost identical, but the faces and locations are different.

Every version begins with a girl called Betty Davis being kidnapped. The local gang of kids manage to rescue her, and to celebrate Betty throws a party with a talent show (a handy excuse for every kid to do their party piece...)

Remaking the film wasn't as pointless as it might at first seem. In an age before home movie making was generally affordable, this was an irresistible pull for pushy parents everywhere. They paid for their children to have a role in the film; the film would be made in a couple of days, edited by Barker in his hotel room, and then screened at a local cinema. Caroline Frick, the director of the Texas Archive of the Moving Image, has spent more than fifteen years mapping Barker's film-making travels, revealing that his smoothly refined business model was successful enough to keep him going for about 20 years!

What about KIDNAPPERS FOIL? Is it any good? Well, unfortunately not. Even Frick has acknowledged that the films are "pretty painful to sit through". Essentially, you're watching someone else's home movies, rather than a polished product. The charm of the real OUR GANG films is conspicuously missing and there's one particularly stark contrast: while the Gang films always showed different races of kids mixing and playing together, all the KIDNAPPERS FOIL feature exclusively white kids.

There are 22 versions of the film in existence. As entertainment, that's about 21 and three-quarter versions more than anyone needed. As a piece of social history, however, the films are absolutely fascinating.



Melton Barker of Hollywood who will come to Galveston soon to screen a local two-reel kid comedy with a cast of 100 Galveston boys and girls, is shown here with Spanky McFarland, one of his child discoveries who is now starring in Hal Roach comedies in the film city. The local movie is being sponsored by the Martini Theater.

Melton Barker of Hollywood will arrive in Galveston around Sept. 25 to produce a two-reel comedy similar to "Our Gang" comedies, according to an announcement by Mr. Martini, manager of the Galveston Theaters. The local play will be a kidnap story and will be shown at the Martini Theater when completed.

The entire picture will be made in Galveston and about 100 children will be in the cast. Some singing and dancing will be used in the picture but it was not necessary for the child to be able to sing and dance to get a good part as all types of children are needed.

After the cast has been selected there will be three or four days of rehearsals, teaching them to act before the sound camera and to talk before the microphone. There will be a small charge for this training but there will be no charge for registering and try-outs.

Children between the ages of 3 to 12 years wishing to try out for parts must register at the Martini, Queen or State theaters at once. When the casting director arrives in town he will get in touch with those who have registered and arrange try-outs. Rehearsals or shooting of the picture will not interfere with school work.

*Publicity for the filming of KIDNAPPERS FOIL, and a newspaper clipping showing Barker with Spanky McFarland.*

Find out more about Melton Barker and watch the existing versions of KIDNAPPERS FOIL (if you dare!!) at <http://www.meltonbarker.org/>

# Screening Notes

## THE WHOLE TRUTH (1923)

Produced by Hal Roach. Released by Pathé, November 4th, 1923.

Directed by Ralph Ceder

Starring STAN LAUREL, with Helen Gilmore, Charley Stevenson, James Finlayson, Earl Mohan.

One of the rarest Stan Laurel solo films, THE WHOLE TRUTH is an unusual effort as it is something of a patchwork job, using stock footage from his earlier short ROUGHEST AFRICA, and possibly from another abandoned short (more on that later). While the earlier film is one of Laurel's best-known solos, this one remains pretty obscure. The print I saw was from the collection of Tony Saffrey, shown at Silent Laughter Weekend 2019.

This tale of the divorce courts seems a bit portentous for Stan's future matrimonial woes! From his entrance, it's clear that Stan is quite the womaniser, greeted by adoring female fans. His wife (Helen Gilmore) complains that he went out for a cigar and was gone three weeks ("Where'd you get it? Havana?" asks the judge).

Stan's response is to tell his stories of "squirrel hunting in New Jersey" with his lawyer Finlayson: cue the unused footage from ROUGHEST AFRICA. There are some funny gags in this, particularly the opening shot of Stan and Fin in a rowing boat. Suddenly the boat rises up, being carried along on a rhino's back as it plods out of the water!

After some more of Stan's attempts to hunt the rhino, we cut back to the courtroom. The judge is not impressed and demands that Stan is administered a truth serum tablet. Now he will tell THE WHOLE TRUTH...! The next flashback shows him going out to buy some flowers for his wife. At the chemist, the flowers are accidentally dipped in chloroform, but Stan is unaware of this as he wanders through the streets, leaving a trail of unconscious people behind him.

Ultimately, he comes under their spell himself, and falls into a trance. Shopkeeper Charley Stevenson sees him and spots an opportunity to use him as a mannequin, advertising fresh flowers for sale. Fade in and fade out; three weeks later Stan is still in position, only now with a ridiculously bushy beard, which Stevenson trims neatly. Stan eventually comes to, not realising that three weeks have passed.

The judge is satisfied that this must be the truth, and Stan's wife forgives him... but as he leaves the courtroom, he turns to the camera with a wink and removes the truth pill that was hidden under his tongue all along.

It would be interesting to know if the flowers sequence was, like the ROUGHEST AFRICA footage, discarded material, perhaps the start of another film that petered out. Or, was it filmed alongside the courtroom footage and always intended to be used this way?\* Either way, this is a funny little film that manages to raise above its patchwork construction. Like his parodies, the free-wheeling plot allows for some great surreal gags that don't seem out of place. It's also interesting to see Stan playing a character who is a genuine philanderer rather than his usual clumsy everyman.

The framework plot was obviously one he was keen on; it pops up later in two future Laurel films. NOW I'LL TELL ONE is Charley Chase's take on courtroom tales and flashbacks, this time with Stan playing the lawyer. More loosely, Stan the gagman used a similar device to link some scraps of unusable footage in DON KEY, SON OF BURRO, suggesting that they could be used as a script submission being presented by an aspiring writer to a film producer. A similar setup was later used by W.C. Fields to frame the lunacy of NEVER GIVE A SUCKER AN EVEN BREAK. Thus passeth wisdom!

*\*It wouldn't be the first time that Stan reused scraps of films, his MIXED NUTS drawing on clips from his first film NUTS IN MAY/ JUST NUTS.*



*Stan has accidentally chloroformed himself; Charley Stevenson finds him useful as a store dummy!*

# THERE GOES THE BRIDE (1925)

Produced by Hal Roach. Released by Pathé, November 1925.

Directed by James W Horne.

With Lucien Littlefield, Walter Long, Noah Young, Martha Sleeper, Husky Haines, B Wayne Harmon.

The Hal Roach 'All-Star' films of the mid-20s are a rum bunch, to be sure. Were it not for the fact that several of the late entries brought together Laurel & Hardy, they would probably be entirely forgotten. Indeed, the early All-stars, before Stan & Ollie's appearances, are some of the most obscure and hard-to-see of all the HRS catalogue. They feature some unusual appearances by Charley Murray, Al St John and others who rarely appeared under the Roach banner. *THERE GOES THE BRIDE* is particularly notable for being the only silent appearance by a future Roach mainstay, Walter Long. Several years before becoming a staple villain in the Laurel & Hardy shorts, he appeared on the other side of the law in this short, as a hard-boiled sheriff

William K Everson amusingly noted that "All-star meant the same then as today: no stars!", and that's certainly true of this entry, which is an ensemble piece of actors usually in supporting roles. First-billed Lucien Littlefield is nominally the lead, but the focus shifts between the different actors throughout the film, and no-one really feels like the star here.

Littlefield is on a train honeymoon with his bride, the lovely Martha Sleeper. Unfortunately, he's suffering with toothache. Meanwhile, Sheriff Long boards the trains with two kidnapers he has arrested (Noah Young and B Wayne Harmon), as well as the millionaire baby they held to ransom (Husky Hanes). After passing through a Forest Fire, the train crashes. In the chaos that follows, Young and Harmon escape, handcuffing Long and Littlefield together (Top Noah Young moment here: Long gets up off the floor and realises half his droopy moustache is missing; cut to Noah grinning maniacally, with the 'tache between his teeth!)

The chase that follows is an amusing sequence with Long and Littlefield attempting to ride on two horses, each facing in the opposite direction, while handcuffed. Meanwhile, Martha ends up hanging over a precipice, stuck by her dress, before falling out of it and finding herself nude, pursued by bear! The scene is tastefully done, but still earned the wrath of local censors, as evidenced by its inclusion in a reel of censored snippets, held at the Library of Congress.

The climax of the film occurs as Martha, the crooks and the baby all head down river, towards a huge waterfall. But fear not, Littlefield and Long come to the rescue, the baddies are captured, Martha is saved and everyone can go back off location shooting and home to Culver City. Huzzah!

Speaking of location, the grand backdrops of the film, featuring raging rivers, waterfalls and forest fires (the latter presumably from newsreel footage) are rather alien to the usual Roach settings of drawing rooms, corridors and city streets from this period. If anything, this feels more like Keaton's realm, and the river scenes certainly bring *OUR HOSPITALITY* to mind.

Much of this feel is probably down to the director, James W Horne. Horne had built a reputation for directing Western, action and thrill pictures, often mixed with comedy, such as Douglas MacLean's *THE SUNSHINE TRAIL*. *THERE GOES THE BRIDE* features much of the air of the surreal serial that permeates his wonderful *CRUISE OF THE JASPER B*, released the following year. (Later, of course, he would helm Laurel & Hardy's own take on the Western, *WAY OUT WEST*). Horne's expertise shows in the dramatic sequences in this film, but somehow it never quite manages to be more than the sum of its parts. Still, it remains an interesting diversion from the usual Roach fare at this point and is well worth viewing.



## CLUNKED ON THE CORNER (1929)

Produced by Mack Sennett. Released by Pathé, January 6th, 1929.

Directed by Harry Edwards.

Starring JOHNNY BURKE, with Vernon Dent, Carmelita Geraghty, .

In the last years of silents, Mack Sennett introduced three 'quickie' series of shorts as a cost-saving measure. One of these was the 'Handy Andy' series starring Johnny Burke, another attempt to replicate the success of Harry Langdon. Sennett even assigned Langdon's director Harry Edwards to the shorts.

However, it all goes to show that you can't reheat a soufflé. Burke is competent, but as Brent Walker noted in 'MACK SENNETT'S FUN FACTORY', he's a poor fit for an attempt to warm over the Langdon style. Restricted by trying to fit into another comic's style, he just doesn't have anything to mark him out from legions of other pasty-faced, slightly Langdonesque clowns: the best that can be said is that he's maybe a notch or two above Billy Dooley, .

Nevertheless, there are a few good gags here, particularly in the early scenes. Burke is a newspaper boy, which sets up a series of original gags with his attempts to hold on to his bunch of papers, accidentally setting them alight and then trying to retrieve them from beneath an obstinate dog. Things sag later as he gets involved with jewel thieves who plant a necklace on him, and the pacing slows to treacle as he is vamped in an attempt to get the necklace back. It's the little scenes like these that show there is only one Harry Langdon. While Harry often seemed to be doing nothing, his very subtle comedy actually took great skill. With a more anonymous comic in the scene, the magic is gone and there really is nothing happening!

The real reason to watch this is for the supporting cast. Vernon Dent, playing villain Jip Bennett, is superb as always. His accomplice, Necklace Nell, is played by Carmelita Geraghty, who vamps nicely. She's introduced by a great title, telling us that she "lifts pearls faster than oysters can make them!"

Overall, while 'CLUNKED ON THE CORNER' lacks the imagination that marks the best of Sennett, it's nothing to be ashamed of. Perhaps it's best viewed as a reminder of how good Sennett (and Langdon's) better films were.

## GALLOPING BUNGALOWS (1924)

Produced by Mack Sennett. Released by Pathé, 2nd November 1924.

Directed by Del Lord.

Starring BILLY BEVAN, with Sid Smith, Jack Richardson, Sunshine Hart, Natalie Kingston and Andy Clyde.

This is more like it! Here's a terrific example of what Sennett did best: fast paced slapstick chases full of wild sight gags. Like many of the best examples, it was directed by the king of the genre, Del Lord, and stars loveable walrus-face Billy Bevan. As in most of the Lord/Bevan's concoctions, the plot just barely exists: Billy answers a matrimonial ad, thinking he is marrying a millionaire. Flashing his money, he is ripe for conman Jack Richardson, who sells him a flimsy beach bungalow. To move the bungalow, Billy puts it on a wagon pulled by horses. The horses stampede and the bungalow sets on fire, leaving Billy, Sid Smith and fire chief Andy Clyde to pursue it with a dilapidated fire engine.

Of course, the plot doesn't matter, it's just an excuse for the fun. The chase scene is fantastic, both funny and exciting, with some great gags on a fire engine that keeps splitting into two, held together only by its ladder. Sid Smith is an underrated comedian, a slight fellow with a startled expression, but he always does well in these stunting sequences. The chase has a great finish as the bungalow is smashed into by a train, the horses just running free in time.

As well as the big gags, there are lots of other smaller pleasures in GALLOPING BUNGALOWS. Bevan's films often opened with "reveal" gags; here there's a good example as he seems to be conducting a band, but is revealed to be actually selling hot dogs. Jack Richardson's con tricks are also good fun, including a tree that grows "instant melons" (actually balloons blown up by his hiding accomplice), and Bevan gets good mileage out of trying to hold the flimsy hut together.

Finally, a shout out to another of Andy Clyde's fuzz-faced characters, the fire chief. Billy and Sid search for him, and finally find him eating a sandwich. Arms waving, they tell him of the urgent situation. Clyde listens interestedly, nods sympathetically and then indicates he'll be with them just as soon as he's finished his sandwich. A funny little moment in a short jam-packed with them; Sennett's team at the top of their game.



*Johnny Burke, about to do some of the eponymous clunking...*



*Contemporary cartoon ad for GALLOPING BUNGALOWS sums up the Sennett triumvirate nicely: moustachioed comic; bathing beauties; speed.*

# IN ISSUE 13 OF THE LOST LAUGH...

## SNUB POLLARD

WALTER FORDE'S FEATURE FILMS

## BUSTER KEATON & LOTS MORE!



Don't forget that you can download all previous issues from [www.thelostlaugh.com](http://www.thelostlaugh.com) !

The image displays a grid of 18 covers for 'The Lost Laugh' magazine, each featuring a different silent film star or comedian. The covers are arranged in a roughly rectangular layout, with some overlapping. Each cover includes the title 'MOVIE NIGHT' and a subtitle 'The silent comedy, slapstick and music hall magazine'. The featured stars and their associated details are as follows:

- Cover 1:** THE TAXI BOYS, BUSTER KEATON AT EDUCATIONAL PICTURES, HARRY LANGDON STAN LAUREL and much more!
- Cover 2:** LUPINO LANE, HARRY LANGDON AT HAL ROACH STUDIOS, SID FIELD LAUREL & HARRY and much more!
- Cover 3:** CHARLEY CHASE, PIERRE LUPINO LANE BUSTER KEATON AND MUCH MORE!
- Cover 4:** CHARLEY BOWERS, ALICE HOWELL ERIC SYKES, The sketch that launched Charlie Chaplin, Fred Farnes's 'MUMMING FILMS'
- Cover 5:** LLOYD BRANTON, THERESA TOOD RAYE DRYCE RAYNE KELLY BRITISH RADIO STARS OF FILM
- Cover 6:** THE RETURN OF ROSCOE ARBUCKLE, MACK SENNETT AND... HAL ROACH'S COMEDIENNES LOST FILMS REDISCOVERED
- Cover 7:** "Turned Out Nice Again!" THE FILMS OF GEORGE FORMBY, BILLY BEVAN ANDY CLYDE BUSTER KEATON LAUREL & HARRY
- Cover 8:** CLARK and McCULLOUGH, "Never a help, always a hindrance!"
- Cover 9:** CHARLEY CHASE, NEW YORK, also featuring... and lots more!
- Cover 10:** FRANK RANDLE, also featuring... and lots more!
- Cover 11:** Will Hay, Britain's Greatest Screen Comedian, also featuring... Moore Marriott & Graham Moffatt Charley Chase Marjorie Beebe Laurel & Hardy
- Cover 12:** The forgotten feature films of MONTY BANKS, Also featuring... & lots more!
- Cover 13:** WALTER FORDE, Britain's Pioneer Film Comedian, also featuring... & lots more!