

# SILENT



# LAUGHTER

**A WEEKEND CELEBRATION OF SILENT COMEDY**

**AT THE CINEMA MUSEUM.**

**MARCH 10-11, 2018**

PRESENTED BY KENNINGTON BIOSCOPE, IN COLLABORATION WITH KEVIN BROWNLOW.

EVENT CURATED BY DAVID WYATT.

	SATURDAY 10TH MARCH	SUNDAY 11TH MARCH
10.00	THE NIGHT CLUB	LAME BRAINS & LUNATICS
11.30	THE BRITISH ARE COMING!	SEVEN YEARS BAD LUCK
13.00	<i>LUNCH BREAK</i>	<i>LUNCH BREAK</i>
14.00	THE WORLD OF CHARLEY CHASE	WE'RE IN THE NAVY NOW
15.35	A PERFECT GENTLEMAN	SO YOU WON'T TALK
17.15	KEATON CLASSICS	NOISY SILENTS!
18.45	<i>DINNER BREAK</i>	<i>DINNER BREAK</i>
20.00	EXIT SMILING	ROY HUDD + THE BATTLE OF THE CENTURY

In addition to the lunch and dinner breaks, there will be short breaks between each programme.

Many thanks go to our accompanists:

JOHN SWEENEY

MEG MORLEY

COSTA FOTOPOLOUS

NEIL BRAND

CYRUS GABRYSCH

Many thanks also to our many contributors: David Robinson, David Glass, Matthew Ross, Steve Massa, David Macleod, Polly Rose, Susan Cygan, Lisa Stein and Roy Hudd; to the BFI National Archive, Serge Bromberg at Lobster Films and of course to the Cinema Museum and their team of volunteers, Dave Locke & Grant Lobban.



THE CINEMA MUSEUM  
LONDON

# THE NIGHT CLUB (1925) *INTRODUCED BY KEVIN BROWNLOW*

PRODUCED BY CECIL B DE MILLE FOR FAMOUS PLAYERS-LASKY. RELEASED THROUGH PARAMOUNT, APRIL 27, 1925. 60 MINUTES.

DIRECTED BY PAUL IRIBE & FRANK URSON.

SCREENPLAY BY WALTER WOODS, KEENE THOMPSON, CECIL B DEMILLE AND WALTER DE MILLE, FROM WILLIAM DE MILLE'S PLAY 'AFTER DARK'

CINEMATOGRAPHY BY J PEVERELL MARLEY.

STARRING RAYMOND GRIFFITH WITH VERA REYNOLDS, WALLACE BEERY, LOUISE FAZENDA, WILLIAM AUSTIN, LEO WILLIS, EDYTHE CHAPMAN.



There was no-one quite like Raymond Griffith in silent comedy. Certainly, he bore very little stylistic similarities to Chaplin, Keaton or Lloyd. His closest evolutionary relative was probably Max Linder, with whom he shared a suave sophistication and silk-hatted swagger (try saying that with a lisp). To Linder's breezy, debonair attitude, Griffith added a slyness and air of wry amusement that were entirely his own. Paramount billed him as 'THE NEW SHEIK OF SLAPSTICK'; while slapstick was only a very small part of his *modus operandi*, there is something in the 'sheik' part of the description. His cool, effortlessly suave persona was very much a product of the 1920s jazz age, and like Harry Langdon, he was a reaction to the manic, larger-than-life style of many comics. Also like Langdon, his singular take on silent comedy was hugely appreciated by audiences clamouring for something different.

Griffith's style was an example of the move towards greater sophistication in film comedy during the middle 20s. At the extreme end of this movement were the 'light comedies', very polite films which were sometimes so light that they now barely seem like comedies at all. Griffith was able to balance the refined, sophisticated approach of light comedy with a more dynamic blend of sight gags and visual humour.

Partly, his visual instincts came from his training with Mack Sennett, for whom he appeared in shorts during the late teens. He had then worked up to supporting parts in features. After garnering some great reviews for his roles, notably as a drunk in 'OPEN ALL NIGHT' ('24), Griffith was promoted to starring status at Paramount; THE NIGHT CLUB launched his career in features with a high pedigree. It was produced and co-scripted by Cecil B DeMille, and directed by his protégées Paul Iribe and Frank Urson. With their backgrounds in design and cinematography respectively, Iribe and Urson bring a glossy and polished appearance to the film.

Based on the play 'AFTER FIVE' by William De Mille (Cecil's elder brother), it is a farcical tale in which Griffith is stood up by his bride, renounces all women and plots suicide, reconsidering when he inherits a fortune. Griffith gives a wonderfully understated performance that sells the far-fetched story, and shows his trademark skill in creating laughter with subtle gestures and facial expressions. Also providing excellent support are the charmingly gawky comedienne Louise Fazenda, and Wallace Beery in a characteristic 'heavy' role (there's more Wallace Beery in Sunday's programme, in 'WE'RE IN THE NAVY NOW')

'THE NIGHT CLUB' was a critical success, paving the way for a lucrative series of Raymond Griffith features. The New York American echoed the sentiments of many when it commented that "*Raymond Griffith gives Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd or any of our million-dollar-a-year men a race for laurels.*"

Sadly, many of Griffith's features are now missing. The few that do survive, amongst them the proto-screwball comedy 'PATHS TO PARADISE' (shown at the inaugural KB Silent Laughter event in 2015), the civil war comedy 'HANDS UP!' and 'YOU'D BE SURPRISED', reveal a truly unique and gifted talent.



With his individual approach, Griffith remained popular until the close of the silent era. Alas, more than any other silent comedian, he had much reason to fear the microphone. Griffith didn't have a bad voice; he had virtually *no* voice, a previous illness having left him with little more than a hoarse whisper. He did make a pair of talkie shorts, 'THE SLEEPING PORCH' and 'POST MORTEM'S', which explained away his vocal issues, but clearly this could only go on for so long. His final role was wordless, as a dying soldier in 'ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT'. While his acting career may have been over, he remained busy as a producer for 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, passing away in 1957 .

**Matthew Ross**

# THE BRITISH ARE COMING!

*A SELECTION OF BRITISH SHORTS PRESENTED BY TONY FLETCHER*

## BOOKWORMS (1920)



**Dir:** Adrian Brunel. **Asst:** Bernard Carrodus

**Phot:** H.M Lomas **Title Illustrations:** Carlo Norway. **Scenario:** A.A. Milne

**Cast:** Leslie Howard (Richard), Pauline Johnson (Miranda Pottlebury), Henrietta Watson (Aunt Priscilla), Jeff Barlow (Uncle Josiah)

**Synopsis:** ('Reframing British Cinema' – Christine Gledhill)

"'A Comedy in Two Volumes'. The film opens with the traditional fairy tale starting with 'Once upon a Time', accompanied by sketches of castles, dragons and so on. In "Bookworms" the hero attempts to gain access to the closely chaperoned girl-next-door, mimics the problem of the fairy tale princess guarded in her castle by a dragon aunt. While setting their bored little niece the task of darning, her henpecked uncle reads risqué books borrowed in plain cover from the local library".

*Leslie Howard (left) in*

A series of four films was released in October 1920 by Minerva Films Ltd. whose five directors were Leslie Howard, A.A.Milne, C. Aubrey Smith, Nigel Playfair and R. F. Power. All four comedies were directed by Adrian Brunel and all survive at the BFI. The other three titles are: "The Bump", "Five Pounds Reward" and "Twice Two".

## A FUGITIVE FUTURIST (1924)

**Scenario and Dir:** Gaston Quiribet. **Prod:** Cecil Hepworth. **Dist:** Novello - Atlas

This is one of a series of 14 Trick comedy films made by Quiribet during 1923/24. "A Fugitive Futurist" was number 9 in the series. Gaston Quiribet was a regular cameraman for Cecil Hepworth. He also specialised in Stereo- Scenics.

## STARLINGS OF THE SCREEN (1925)

**Probably directed by Will Kellino.**

**CAST:**  
*Sybil Rhoda, Nancy Baird, Shellagh Allen, Molly Weeks, Phyllis Garton, and Moore Marriott (uncredited).*

This was a promotional film made by Stoll Film Company to select an actress to appear in one of their feature films. Three hundred young women applied to 'Picturegoer' to take part in the competition. The illustration on the cover of 'Picturegoer' shown in the film features Brian Aherne and Marjorie Hume from a Stoll feature from 1925 – either "The Squire of Long Hadley or "King of the Castle". The original 300 women were whittled down to 15, who were chosen for a screen test. We see five, including the subsequent winner. They were all put through their paces by a member of the Stoll Stock Company, Moore Marriott.

## CROSSING THE GREAT SAGRADA (1924)

**Prod:** Atlas – Biocraft. **Dist:** Novello – Atlas. **Sc. and Dir:** Adrian Brunel. **Asst Prod:** Lionel Rich

**CAST:** includes Brunel, Rich, and Vivian Van Damm.

This film was the first in a series of 'Burlesques' devised by Adrian Brunel. He parodies the popular ethnographic travel film – this one being 'Crossing the Great Sahara' by Angus Buchanan.

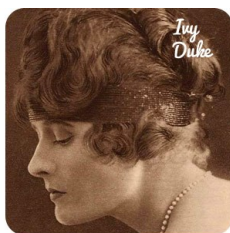
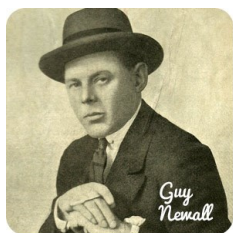


*Director Adrian Brunel.*

## BEAUTY & THE BEAST (1922)

**Prod:** George Clark. **Sc. and Dir:** Guy Newall

**CAST:** Guy Newall (The Beast), Ivy Duke (Beauty), Douglas Munroe (Father), Winifred Sadler (Mother), Ivan Berlyn (Ernest), Mrs. R. Podevin (The Dragon)



This 2-reel comedy is filmed in an almost avant-garde way at times. It is not a traditional comedy but rather zany, where the comedy is built around situations rather than the characters. The film is very different from the half dozen features that Newall and Duke made together in the early 1920's, probably Britain's best male and female partnership at the time, even though an unlikely one. It's a real pity that their partnership folded by the mid-twenties when they went their separate ways.

*All films are on 35mm and come from the BFI.*

**Tony Fletcher**

# THE WORLD OF CHARLEY CHASE



A CAREER OVERVIEW OF CLIPS PRESENTED BY MATTHEW ROSS, AUTHOR OF THE SILENT COMEDY BLOG & MAGAZINE 'THE LOST LAUGH'. ([WWW.THELOSTLAUGH.COM](http://WWW.THELOSTLAUGH.COM))

THE PROGRAMME WILL CONCLUDE WITH A COMPLETE SCREENING OF 'MIGHTY LIKE A MOOSE' (1926), DIRECTED BY LEO MCCAREY.

For many years, Charley Chase was an unjustly neglected figure in silent (and sound) comedy. Recently, this has finally begun to be remedied as his films are seen and appreciated again. He is best known today for his supporting role as the obnoxious conventioneer in Laurel & Hardy's 1933 feature 'SONS OF THE DESERT', but this was only one highlight amongst a long career full of them. The part was an especially out of character role for Chase as, of all the silent comics, he is one of the most eminently likeable.

Born Charles Parrott in Baltimore in 1893, he worked up from singing on street corners to playing in vaudeville, entering films at Keystone in 1914. Most of Charley's earliest available films (including appearances beside Chaplin, most prominently in 'HIS NEW PROFESSION' and 'HIS MUSICAL CAREER') reveal a lanky, fresh-faced juvenile with more than a hint of young John Cleese about him. Amongst the burly, moustachioed Keystone zanies he was somewhat lost in the shuffle, and moved instead towards direction.

As director, Parrott worked notably with Fritz Schade and Ford Sterling at Keystone; subsequently he freelanced at King Bee, Educational and other studios, working with Chaplin impersonator Billy West, Oliver Hardy and Lloyd Hamilton. It was at the Hal Roach studios where he would find a more permanent home, as well as the opportunity to create a lasting legacy.

Initially, he directed his brother Jimmy (billed as Paul Parrott) and Snub Pollard in a series of wild, gag-happy films. He also acted as director-general of the studios, and was at least partially responsible for initiating the 'Our Gang' comedies. As the success of the Harold Lloyd and Our Gang films inspired Roach to follow a more human style of comedy, the naturally funny and good looking Parrott was persuaded to step back in front of the cameras. Choosing Charley Chase as his pseudonym, he began a series of one reel films with 'AT FIRST SIGHT' in 1924. From the get-go, his comic style was set; he was an ordinary young man to whom extraordinary things happened.

If Harold Lloyd had introduced a humanity to the Roach studios brand of comedy with his believable, boy-next-door character, Charley Chase humanized it further. He lacked even the trademark of Lloyd's glasses to mark him from the crowd; he was the chap who'd work in your office or live down the street, confident and usually doing well for himself. As such, the calamities that happened him seemed that bit more crushing. Like the majority of us, his position on the social ladder was a fragile thing at best: to be caught in an embarrassing situation was something he'd never live down; to lose his job would be a catastrophe.

Embarrassing situations would come to be the defining hallmark of the Chase films. Director and writer Leo McCarey joined Chase in 1925 and together the pair formed a dream team, developing a farcical style that revelled in hurling the polite Chase headlong into the liberation of the jazz age, to his eternal embarrassment. Chase-McCarey collaborations like 'HIS WOODEN WEDDING' and 'MIGHTY LIKE A MOOSE' usually begin with a natural, believable beginning, then gradually pile on an escalating series of absurdities. Yet, the performances of Chase and his supporting cast and the flair with which the plots unfold make even the most ridiculous story line always seem totally conceivable. Indeed, virtually all the Chase-McCareys are masterclasses of storytelling, and impeccably constructed. McCarey moved on from the series in 1927, but Chase was able to maintain the high standard of the shorts, in collaboration with his brother Jimmy Parrott and Fred Guiol. As the flapper era progressed, he was able to make his comedies even more risqué, examples including 'THE WAY OF ALL PANTS' and the wonderful 'LIMOUSINE LOVE', which finds Charley innocently transporting a naked Viola Richard in the back of his car en route to his wedding!

The coming of sound presented no problems for Chase. He had a fine speaking and singing voice, which he put to good use in his talkie shorts, which were frequently mini-musicals. While it's fair to say that many of his talkies are more freewheeling and less wonderfully constructed than his silents, there are many gems amongst them, and overall the standard remained high. Sadly, while his storytelling abilities proved that he could have easily made the transition to features, Hal Roach never gave him a chance, instead focusing his energies on Laurel & Hardy and Patsy Kelly. Chase was let go in 1936, finding work at Columbia, both in his own series and as director for the Three Stooges. By this point, he was not a well man, looking far older than his real age. Chase was an incorrigible workaholic who lived for comedy, but also played hard too; problems with alcohol had already taken their toll, and he died prematurely of a heart attack in 1940 aged just 46.

Charley Chase left behind a legacy of wonderful short comedies, and was an inspiration to many others in his career. Leo McCarey said succinctly that, "All I know, I learned from Charley Chase". Often taken for granted in his own lifetime, his films are now recognised as the classics they are, and are at last becoming available on DVD. Today we celebrate the legacy of the original 'Good Time Charley!'



# A PERFECT GENTLEMAN (1927)

STARRING MONTY BANKS. WITH ERNEST WOOD, RUTH DWYER, GEORGE A COOPER, ARTHUR THALASSO, AGOSTINI BORGATO, HAZEL HOWELL, SYD CROSSLEY.

DIRECTED BY CLYDE BRUCKMAN. SCRIPT BY MONTY BANKS AND CHARLES C HORAN, FROM A STORY BY CHARLES C HORAN. SHOT IN AUGUST 1927. RELEASED BY PATHÉ, JANUARY 15, 1928.

Pudgy, dapper little Monty Banks (1895—1950) is best remembered today as Gracie Fields' husband and director. Long before that he was a starring comedian in silent films, and was one of the few second-string comics to maintain a career in feature films. In 1924, he was promoted by Pathé as a successor to Harold Lloyd; there followed an action-packed series of films, including today's choice, 'A PERFECT GENTLEMAN'. The article below, originally published in Picture-Play in September 1927, was written during the shooting of this film, and sums up his story and appeal rather nicely (though you may wish to take some of the anecdotes with a grain of salt or three!)

## Smilin' Through with Monty Banks

Since Monty came to this country from Italy, he has been battered about in slapstick comedies until it's a wonder there's anything left of him, but he has never lost his happy smile and is now at last realizing his dream of producing feature-length comedies of his own.

By Katherine Lipke

THREE times the villain knocked the short, round-faced fellow from the top of the steamer to the deck below. A canvas, stretched out for that purpose, made him bounce back twice, only to be hit again. At last, like the man who went under water three times and came up twice, he sank weakly to rest on the lower deck, bruised and beaten. Lying with his hands coily snuggled under his head, he murmured softly, "Armand, I am dying," in an excellent *Camille* impersonation.

Just Monty Banks, enjoying his chosen work of a screen comedian—Monty, who never lets anything dampen his spirits or down his enthusiasm, who has for years been dreaming of the time when he would be able to produce his own feature-length comedies, and who has at last realized that dream.

When the Italian comedian was given Harold Lloyd's place on the Pathé roster, following the latter's affiliation with Paramount, he was at last able to branch out from two-reel comedies and develop his fun ideas into longer productions. Four pictures have been made by him since then—"Attaboy," "Play Safe," "Horse Shoes," and "A Perfect Gentleman." It was while he was making the last-named production that I sat by and watched him let himself be battered for the sake of a few laughs.

Part of the story of "A Perfect Gentleman" concerns itself with Monty aboard a steamer bound for South America. He has in his possession an oversized wallet which, unfortunately, belongs to some one else. An assortment of villains are on his trail.

Monty worked three days and three nights making that sequence. On the first afternoon, he climbed aboard the steamer by clinging to a hawser. Even the camera man turned sick as Monty swung across the restless ocean hanging to the rope. He hit the side of the boat with a thud and then proceeded to climb up the rope until he reached the deck.

That was on the first day. In the evening, the aforementioned fight was staged. Over and over, the scene



Among Monty's first feature-length comedies was "Play Safe," in which he did anything but that, as can be seen from this picture with Virginia Lee Corbin.

was taken. The comedian kept shouting to the man on the top deck to hit him harder.

"What's the matter with you up there?" he yelled. "Didn't you have any dinner? Are you weak or something? Hit me—don't pet me! This is a fight, not a love feast."

There is something indomitable about Monty. He is always laughing, but it is never careless, placid laughter. It is, instead, the working of an incessant dynamo which chooses to express its power in cheerfulness and smiling persistence rather than in dominating, obvious strength.

His real name is Mario Bianchi. The son of a musical family in Italy, he decided, after the war, to come to this country. He spoke several languages, but English was not one of them. His money wasn't too abundant. There was just enough to buy a one-way ticket to America. Unfortunately, he neglected to state which America he wanted, and was sent to South America. The trip from there to New York was spent in the ship's galley peeling thousands of potatoes.

In New York he changed his name to Monty Banks, taken from the French word *montebank*. He danced for a time in a small café in the Bowery. But at the first opportunity, he came West, determined to get into pictures.

A bit uncertain of his English, terrifically eager to succeed, willing to do anything asked of him, he was great game for directors and producers. In one picture, he was called upon to play something like seventeen parts. There was just one other character in the film.

For a while, he was a stunt man. In one picture, a boy and girl went buggy riding, so much in love with each other that

they didn't notice where the horse was taking them. Horse and buggy were to go over a cliff, with the occupants jumping out at the last moment. But Monty was the horse, and no one thought to tell him about the trip over the cliff!

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## Smilin' Through with Monty Banks

Continued from page 74

Unable to see where he was going, and intent on being the very best horse that man can be, he kept plugging along in the direction indicated by the reins and finally walked over the cliff. When he was picked up at the bottom, most of his bones were broken. He lay in the hospital many months.

When he was making pictures for one of the Warners years ago, the company used to act before the camera in the morning and then go out and lay sidewalks outside the studio during the noon hour. No one thought anything about it—quite the proper thing for an actor to do.

But those days are all over now. To-day Monty Banks stands at the threshold of a promising future. Not only has he graduated from two-reel comedies into those of feature length but, with Arthur McArthur, he is independently making his own pictures, using his own ideas in his own way.

There is always a well-worked-out plan behind each of his pictures. In the first place, plot is paramount. Monty insists that there be a good dramatic story ready before he will start to work. He usually does the characterization of an eager, well-

meaning little fellow, anxious to please, who often overreaches himself, is often dumped in the dirt, but always comes up smiling with the fifth ace hidden in his hand.

At present writing, he is hard at work on a story dealing with navy life. After that, comes a comedy laid in Europe.

Monty is unmarried, and declares that there is no one in immediate prospect of becoming Mrs. Monty Banks. But you never can tell—Cupid works fast in filmdom.

I have known Monty Banks for well over a year and have often watched him work. And I like him. I admire that indomitable quality in him which makes him laugh in the face of trouble and enjoy best the joke which is on himself.

There is no morbid undercurrent in Monty's philosophy. Picture him not as a sad soul, cursed with the misfortune of a funny face. Not at all! His round, beaming face, his trim little mustache, his smiling eyes and mouth are not a mask to hide a secret sorrow. They are banners cheerfully proclaiming the genuinely happy nature of the comedian.



Above: Monty Banks (or MOHTN БЕНКС) was extremely popular in Russia, as evidenced by this delightful poster for 'A PERFECT GENTLEMAN'

Following the release of 'A PERFECT GENTLEMAN', Banks made one more feature for Pathé, the aviation comedy 'FLYING LUCK' (screened at last year's Silent Laughter day). He then relocated to Britain, where he starred in two more features, 'WEEKEND WIVES' and 'ADAM'S APPLE', before focusing on work as a director. In this role, he would work with Stanley Lupino, Laura La Plante, George Formby, and of course Gracie Fields, who he married in 1938. He also made some sound comedies of his own, one of which, 'SO YOU WON'T TALK' screens in Sunday's programme. His silent comedies, meanwhile, are rarely revived, but reveal a very likeable comedian performing some great visual comedy material.

'A PERFECT GENTLEMAN' gets an additional boost in quality from its director, Clyde Bruckman. Bruckman was one of the most talented of all silent comedy gagmen; he was among Buster Keaton's key collaborators until 1925, before being poached by Harold Lloyd. Hoping for a bit of the magic, Monty Banks would, in turn, poach him from Lloyd. Bruckman would later return to both Keaton and Lloyd (notably co-directing THE GENERAL), as well as directing the early Laurel & Hardy films, and sound features with W.C.Fields. He would be reunited with Keaton for the latter's TV series in 1949-51. Sadly, he got into financial difficulties after lawsuits over his recycling of old material, ultimately leading to his suicide in 1955.

Matthew Ross

# KEATON CLASSICS

FOLLOWING OUR 100<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF BUSTER KEATON'S FILM CAREER IN LAST NOVEMBER'S COMEDY DAY, WE ARE DELIGHTED TO WELCOME A DISTINGUISHED PANEL OF HISTORIANS – KEATON AUTHORS ALL! – TO DISCUSS HIS WORK AND TO REVEAL THEIR FAVOURITE SCENES.

**David Robinson** began his career as personal assistant to documentary-maker and critic Basil Wright before joining the BFI, where he worked variously as associate editor for *Sight and Sound*, programming for the NFT and as editor of *Contrast*, *Critics' Choice* and others. In 1957 he became the first dedicated film critic of the *Financial Times*, moving later to *The Times*. He has been Director of the London Film Festival, the Edinburgh International Film Festival and the Por-denone Silent Film Festival. Among his many books, *Buster Keaton* (1969) remains one of the key studies of the comedian.

**Kevin Brownlow**, Oscar<sup>TM</sup>-winning preservationist, author, historian and film-maker, began by collecting 9.5mm films when still a schoolboy; around fifteen years later he was in Hollywood, interviewing (among many other silent greats) none other than Buster Keaton, the results of which were published in his landmark study of 1968, *The Parade's Gone By*. His TV series - initially in collaboration with David Gill – include *Hollywood* and the 1987 three-parter *Buster Keaton - A Hard Act to Follow*. A book based on the latter is in print from the Cineteca di Bologna.

**David Macleod** has for many years brought a dry wit to his work as a continuity announcer for Channel Four. During a brief period when their announcers were shown on screen, David flew his colours by wearing a Buster Keaton T-shirt, particularly apt given that, for a while, C4 seemed to be the home of Keaton's films on British TV. His 1994 book, *The Sound of Buster Keaton*, broke new ground by being the first full-length study of Keaton's work after the coming of talkies. Since 1996 he has presided over the UK Keaton society, the Blinking Buzzards, who now meet regularly at the Cinema Museum.

**Polly Rose** is a researcher and a member of the US Keaton society, the Damfinos. She has written a number of articles about Keaton and is presently working on a thesis about his editing technique. Today she will be revealing some of her new discoveries about Keaton's 1924 feature *Sherlock Jr.*

**Glenn Mitchell**





# EXIT SMILING (1926)

INTRODUCED BY MICHELLE FACEY

(RELEASED U.S.A. NOVEMBER 14 1926, U.K. JULY 18 1927) PRODUCTION: M.G.M. DIRECTOR: SAM TAYLOR PHOTOGRAPHY: ANDRE BARLATIER STORY: MARC CONNELLY SCENARIO: SAM TAYLOR, TIM WHELAN TITLES: JOE FARNHAM ART DEPARTMENT: CEDRIC GIBBONS, FREDERIC HOPE

CAST: BEATRICE LILLIE (VIOLET), JACK PICKFORD (JIMMY MARSH), DORIS LLOYD (OLGA), DEWITT JENNINGS (ORLANDO WAINWRIGHT), HARRY MYERS (JESSE WATSON), TENEN HOLTZ (TOD POWELL), LOUISE LORRAINE (PHYLLIS TICHNOR), FRANKLIN PANGBORN (CECIL LOVELACE)



**SYNOPSIS (\*\*Spoiler alert!\*\*):** “One of the cleverest ‘hits’ on a travelling ‘fit-up’ we have seen. Brilliantly acted, with genuine human pathos behind the fun. This is Beatrice Lillie’s first screen appearance, and she is quite one of the screen’s greatest ‘finds’. **Story:** Violet, general servant to a travelling ‘fit-up’, has an ambition to play the vamp’s part in ‘Flaming Women.’ One day, a boy, Jimmy, comes on the train and Violet gets him a place in the company – she also falls in love with him. As the tour progresses they come to Jimmy’s home town, which he has left under suspicion of having robbed the bank. Violet so arranges things that she plays his part of the villain, but Jimmy’s presence is discovered. Violet overhears a blackmailed confession of the real bank robber, and an arrangement to meet and buy silence. Emulating the vamp in ‘Flaming Women,’ she delays the thief so that the blackmailer gives him away. On her return to Jimmy she finds his sweetheart has taken him away. **Acting:** Beatrice Lillie is as amusing and clever on the screen as she is on the stage. All her actions tell in the same way, and her delightful personality goes right over. It is hard to believe that this is her first film. She rises right at once to the forefront of screen comediennes, with a great deal more dramatic feeling underlying her fooling than most. Jack Pickford is fair in support and good character studies come from De Witt Jennings and Doris Lloyd. **Production:** Sam Taylor has given every chance to the new star in an out of the ordinary story, which provides some of the best type of burlesque. Beatrice Lillie’s oddities are excellently directed, and the story holds the interest and ends on a pathetic note which is well in keeping with the nature of the comedy. Characters in the ‘fit-up,’ and, indeed, the whole atmosphere has an underlying sense of genuineness which the exaggerations but serve to emphasise. Ludicrous situation follows ludicrous situation without pause, ending on one of the funniest climaxes we have seen when Violet emulates the stage vamp.” *Kinematograph Weekly January 13, 1927*

## BEATRICE LILLIE

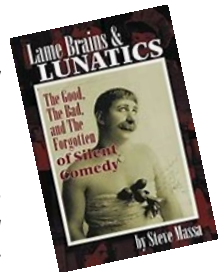


Dubbed ‘The funniest woman in the world,’ Beatrice ‘Bea’ Lillie (29 May 1894 – 20 January 1989) was born in Toronto to a Canadian concert singer and a British Army Officer. Bea took to the stage early, and, having discovered a talent for comic mimicry, was guided by Harry W. Rich and his Rich Concert Entertainment Bureau into developing a repertoire of gestures and character songs, touring as the Lillie Trio with her mother and skilful piano-playing sister. She made her West End debut in 1914 and with Andre Charlot, the Parisian theatrical entrepreneur, taking her under his wing, Bea made a success in various revues on both sides of the Pond, not least when she performed on stage as a male impersonator, “almost before I knew it, I was wearing a tuxedo ‘with an air.’” EXIT SMILING was Lillie’s first, and one of only a handful, of film appearances she made, despite her popularity within the Hollywood community itself. High praise was accorded to her by both Chaplin, who hailed her as his female counterpart, and Keaton, who, on one occasion, laid down outside her hotel door keeping watch like a guard dog. After several screen tests in 1926 it was MGM alone who committed to fashioning a vehicle for her talents, and her apparently unconventional looks, employing the masterful services of Harold Lloyd’s right-hand man, Sam Taylor as director. Bea imbued her comedic performances with little bits of ‘business’, but according to her friend and biographer, Bruce Laffey, she “did not enjoy performing for a camera. She missed the audience reaction she was used to and had no way of knowing if what she did was funny. The technicians were too busy with their own work to pay attention to what was happening in front of the camera.” She returned to the stage as soon as shooting completed. Bea Lillie was considered the greatest comedienne in the world by Noel Coward, was the first one to sing his “Mad Dogs and Englishmen” onstage, performed many of his works and was a close long-term friend of both the Master and stage doyenne Gertrude Lawrence. Bea married 5<sup>th</sup> Baronet Sir Robert Peel in 1920 - he died in 1934 and their only son was killed in action in Ceylon in 1942. She carried on entertaining the troops all through the rest of the War, even on the night she received the news of her son, saying, “I’ll cry tomorrow.”



# LAME BRAINS & LUNATICS

A selection of shorts from silent comedy's anarchic fringe. Programme and notes by Steve Massa; Steve is an authority on silent comedy, and author of the brilliant silent comedy tome 'LAME BRAINS & LUNATICS', celebrating many of the genre's more forgotten and unusual figures.



**LOVER'S LUCK** (Sept. 19, 1914) *Produced by Mack Sennett for the Keystone Film Co. Distributed by the Mutual Film Corp. Directed by Roscoe Arbuckle. Working title: The Three Lovers. One reel. With Roscoe Arbuckle, Minta Durfee, Frank Hayes, Josef Swickard, Phyllis Allen, Al St John, Alice Howell, Slim Summerville, Billy Gilbert, Grover Ligon, Billie Bennett, Harry Russell, Luke.*



Here we get a good look at the innocent, fun-loving, fat boy character that launched Roscoe Arbuckle into movie stardom. After sporadic appearances for Selig and Nestor, Arbuckle started at Keystone in 1913, and within ten months was a star and directing his shorts himself. This early effort is a roughhouse slapstick romp which shows Roscoe's easy mastery of setting up and shooting physical action. By 1916, with shorts like *The Waiter's Ball*, *His Wife's Mistake*, and especially *He Did and He Didn't*, Roscoe had become the most sophisticated director on the Sennett lot and his career raced on unabated with his Comique shorts and starring features. It's well known that his acting career came to a screeching halt with the events that followed his 1921 Labor Day party. But Arbuckle preserved—directing and writing under a pseudonym, and performing on stage. Finally in 1932 Warner Brothers came to him with an offer to star in shorts, and Roscoe had a successful comeback. This upward turn was ended by his early death, and while it seems unfair of fate to have taken him then it seems certain that he died happy.

*Lover's Luck* is also an illustration of Roscoe's generosity in giving ample screen time to his fellow performers. Leading lady Minta Durfee was a talented comedienne, and Arbuckle's real-life wife. String bean Frank Hayes was a longtime stage veteran who often performed without his teeth in numerous Sennett comedies playing fathers, farmers, and chief of the Keystone Cops. He was also a specialist in drag as comic spinsters where he was hideous and hilarious. The 5'8," one hundred and eighty pound Phyllis Allen was a memorable Mack Sennett performer who specialized in battleaxes and domineering wives. Frequently working with Arbuckle, she also supported the Chaplins (Charlie and Syd), Mack Swain, and the rest of the motley Sennett crew. She had a return engagement with Charlie Chaplin for *Pay Day* (1922) and *The Pilgrim* (1923). Also on hand in the cast is Al St John (see *Sky Bound*) and around the edges are Alice Howell, Slim Summerville, and Billy Gilbert as part of the group of lower-class neighbors who are snooping and watching the antics of the principals with great relish (these being the days before television).

**HIS BUSY DAY** (April 28, 1918) *Produced by Hal Roach for the Rolin Film Co. Distributed by Pathe. Directed by (probably Hal Roach). One reel. With Toto, Bud Jamison, Clarine Seymour, Margaret Joslin, Harry Todd, Charles Stevenson, Dee Lampton.*

In the late teens producer Hal Roach was looking for new comics to expand upon the success he was having with his Harold Lloyd comedies. First he tried rotund Dee Lampton in a series of "Skinny" one-reelers, and then picked the stage clown Armando Novello, better known as Toto. Born in Geneva in 1888 to circus performer parents (a horse trainer and a lion tamer), Toto made his own circus debut as a contortionist at the age of five. Becoming a pantomime clown he toured Germany, France, Russia, and England with his parent's troupe. In 1914 he was spotted in London by impresario Charles Dillingham, who brought Toto to the New York Hippodrome. A big hit in America, he was signed up by Hal Roach in April, 1917.



His subsequent Roach one-reelers, which included *The Movie Dummy*, *Cleopatsy*, *Fire the Cook*, and *An Enemy of Soap* (all 1918) – were all well-received by exhibitors and critics, but have mostly disappeared and are unseen today. Toto was very eccentric - the whirring of the camera annoyed him, and there was a clause in his contract that he wouldn't have to jump into water. Disliking making films, he jumped ship before his contract was up (Stan Laurel was hired to finish the series). Of the thirteen comedies Toto made for Roach only four or five are known to survive; this is the only known print of 'HIS BUSY DAY'. After his foray on screen, he remained busy on the stage, making his home in Larchmont, New York until his death in 1938.

Toto's leading lady in *His Busy Day*, and in almost all of his shorts, is Clarine Seymour, a young brunette who began her career as an extra at the Thanhouser Studio. Eventually she was discharged from the Roach lot for refusing to do stunts (and was ultimately rewarded \$1,325 in damages in a suit against Roach). Moving on to Christie Comedies, she was seen by D.W. Griffith and became part of his company. She became ill while shooting *Way Down East* (1920) and died at age twenty-one.

The rest of the supporting crew is made up of members of the Hal Roach Stock Company. Bud Jamison had come from working with Charlie Chaplin at Essanay, and would go on to be one of the rocks of film comedy by working practically everywhere with everyone until his death in 1944. Husband and wife Harry Todd and Margaret Joslin had been leads in Essanay's *Snakeville Comedies*, and stayed with Roach until the end of the teens, with Todd continuing in many western features through the mid-1930s. Fat boy Dee Lampton was Roach's teenage version of Fatty Arbuckle, but died young of appendicitis in 1919. Charles Stevenson did yeoman service for the studio from 1916 to 1925, appearing with Harold Lloyd, Snub Pollard, Beatrice La Plante, Eddie Boland, Paul Parrott, Stan Laurel, and Our Gang.

**SWEET DADDY** (Aug. 12, 1921) *Produced by Morris & Julius Schiller for Schiller Productions. Distributed by the Reelcraft Film Corp. Directed by Marcel Perez. Two reels. With Marcel Perez, Dorothy Earle, Kit Guard, Wilna Hervey.*



Marcel Perez is one of the most obscure comedy creators of the silent era. Born in Spain and raised in European circuses and music halls, he made his film debut in France in 1900. By 1910 he'd made a name for himself with shorts like *The Near-Sighted Cyclist* (1907), and became known world-wide as Robinet (Tweedledum in the U.K. and U.S.A.) in a series for the Ambrosio Company of Italy. At the outbreak of World War I he came to America and starred in shorts for independent outfits like Vim, Eagle, Jester, and Reelcraft. Along with Max Linder he was one of the few direct links between European and American silent comedy, but his career was cut short in 1922 when he had a leg amputated. By 1924 he was back writing and directing for producers such as Joe Rock and Universal, but the cancer that caused the loss of his leg returned as a tumour in his left lung and he died in 1929.

*Sweet Daddy* is part of Perez's series that was distributed by the Reelcraft Pictures Corp., and was shot at the Mittenenthal Studio in Yonkers, New York. The shorts were produced by Morris and Julius Schiller, who also bankrolled Bud Duncan's *Aladdin Comedies*, and *Sun-Lite Comedies* with Billy Quirk, Jobyna Ralston, and Bobby Burns. The scenes in the big vaudeville house were shot during a publicity "Schiller Night" at Yonker's Proctor's Theatre, where Perez, Duncan, and Quirk entertained the audience, and then Perez shot his scenes, plus the numbers with Dorothy and her Moulin Rouge Chorus. Sadly all the Schiller series came to an end with Reelcraft's bankruptcy in 1922.

Dorothy Earle was a 22 year-old from Ithaca, New York and originally named Esther Elmendorf. Luckily that was changed when she became Perez's leading lady and real-life wife. Earle joined Perez in 1919 when he was making a series of *Jester Comedies* and worked with her husband through the rest of his career. After Perez's early death, Dorothy left the screen, and with her son Marcel Jr. returned to the East Coast where she eventually remarried.

**DANGER!** (May 14, 1922) *A Mermaid Comedy produced by Jack White. Distributed by Educational Pictures. Directed by Jack White & Robert Kerr. Two reels. With Lige Conley, Elinor Lynn (a.k.a. Marion Mack), Spencer Bell, Otto Fries, Cliff Bowes.*

Jack White Comedies billed Lige Conley as "The Speed Boy of Comedy," and while not a startlingly original comic, his breezy personality and ability to perform stunts were the springboards for a six-year series of lightning-paced action comedies. Born Elijah Crommie in 1899, he grew up a couple of miles from the Mack Sennett Studio, and after an early newspaper career his buddy Mal St Clair got him in at Keystone in 1915. Jack White began using Lige in 1920's *A Fresh Start*, first teaming him with Jimmie Adams and then starring him on his own. The title of Conley's best-remembered short, *Fast and Furious* (1924), is a good description of his Jack White/Educational series, which also included *Air Pockets* (1924), and *Cheap Skates* (1925). When this series ended in 1926, Conley made a few starring shorts for Fox and Sennett but soon lost his star status and drifted behind the camera writing gags. In 1937 he was struck and killed by a car while attempting to help a stalled auto.



Leading lady Elinor Lynn is better-known today as Marion Mack, the heroine in Buster Keaton's *The General* (1926). Born Joey Marion McCreery in 1902, she was a beauty contest winner who appeared on the Thomas Ince and Mack Sennett lots before being discovered by Jack White and renamed Elinor Lynn. For the White organization she appeared with Conley and Jimmie Adams in Mermaid Comedies like *Holy Smoke*, *Free and Easy* (both 1921), *Look Out Below*, and *Blazes* (both 1922). By 1923 she had taken the name of Marion Mack and turned up in some *Hallroom Boys* shorts such as *Only a Husband* (1923). In 1923 she co-wrote and starred in *Mary of the Movies*, which was the first feature film from Columbia Pictures. Marion's co-writer was Louis Lewyn, whom she married in 1924. Soon after, she retired from performing and worked with her husband on the shorts series he produced such as *The Voice of Hollywood*, *Hollywood on Parade*, *Hollywood Hobbies*, etc., into the 1940s.

Supporting Conley and Lynn are the trio of Otto Fries, Spencer Bell, and Cliff Bowes. Big and burly Otto Fries was an all-purpose heavy in tons of Jack White comedies, as well as those for Sennett, Roach, Fox, and every place in between. He was also busy in features such as *Pardon Us* (1931), and *A Night at the Opera* (1935) before his death in 1938. Black comic Spencer Bell came from a background of minstrel shows and vaudeville, and appeared on the Hollywood scene in the early 1920s. Despite often having to work in the stereotype of the "scared dinky," Bell had frequent chances to show his stuff – extreme athleticism, split-second timing, and some of the funniest legwork in pictures. Barely seen in the film as Conley's roommate is Cliff Bowes, a former champion swimmer and diver who broke into the movies for Mack Sennett in 1916, and would go on to star in seventy-seven of Jack White's *Cameo Comedies* in the 1920s, including *Drenched* (1924), *Fun's Fun* (1925), and *Squirrel Food* (1926). He died at age 34 in 1929.

**SKY BOUND** (March 28, 1926) *A Mermaid Comedy produced by Jack White. Distributed by Educational Pictures. Directed by Stephen Roberts. Two reels. With Al St John, Zelma O'Neal, Jack Lloyd, Elfie Fay, Otto Fries, Phil Dunham, Jackie "Husky" Haines.*



As one of the most prolific but underrated comedians of the silent era, Al St John is chiefly remembered for the "evil gremlin's country cousin" character that he played in support of his uncle Roscoe Arbuckle, but in his overlooked solo films Al showed more skill and versatility than he's been given credit for. The son of Arbuckle's older sister Nora, Al was six years younger and was appearing on stage with his uncle as early as 1910. Arbuckle made his Keystone debut in 1913, and Al turned up a millisecond after. Besides being Fatty's chief rival and nemesis, he was also busy as part of the Sennett ensemble playing bellboys, waiters, and of course bumbling cops. Long and lean, he was the perfect physical contrast to the rotund Arbuckle, and in addition to being an incredible acrobat and trick bicycle rider, had legs that seemed to be made of spring coils and could bounce him straight up into the air. When Arbuckle left Sennett Al came along and appeared in the Comique Comedies *The Butcher Boy* (1917) through *Back Stage* (1919), and when Roscoe moved into features Al was off on his own in shorts for Warner Brothers, then Fox.

1924 saw him get rid of his country boob character and become a clean-cut (but still bumbling) man-about-town or young hubby in shorts distributed by Educational Pictures. Highlights include *The Iron Mule*, *Curses*, *Red Pepper* (all 1925), *Live Cowards* (1926), *High Sea Blues* (1927), and *Hot or Cold* (1928). When sound came in Al continued in shorts for a while, but soon repackaged himself with a beard and without his teeth as the western sidekick "Fuzzy Q. Jones." Turning in his bicycle for a horse, Al spent the next twenty years as the comic relief for cowboys like Buster Crabbe, Fred Scott and Lash LaRue. In 1952, unhappy with how cheap his oaters were getting, Al retired from films but continued making personal appearances with rodeos, circuses, and wild west shows. While waiting backstage to go on for one of these shows he suffered a massive heart attack and died in 1963.

Jack White, producer of both *Danger* and *Sky Bound*, was the boy wonder of silent comedy and today is its forgotten mogul. Jack began his career as an office boy at Keystone but was fired by Sennett for inadvertently delivering a rival job offer to Ford Sterling. He spent the next few years under the tutelage of Henry "Pathe" Lehrman and was directing Fox Comedies by age 19. At Fox he formed a partnership with Lloyd Hamilton, and became a full-fledged producer in 1920 when they set up their company, distributing their shorts through Educational.

The 1920s were a golden decade for White, producing comedies starring St John, Lige Conley, Lloyd Hamilton, Jimmie Adams, Lupino Lane and others. When sound arrived, changes in the industry combined with the depression, a nasty divorce, and nervous exhaustion led to the filing of bankruptcy that was the end of the company. Although only in his early thirties White was never able to regain his footing in the industry and mostly worked on and off for his brother Jules at Columbia, and occasionally directing the Three Stooges and Andy Clyde (sometimes billed as Preston Black). White died in 1984 at age eighty-seven.

**Steve Massa**

# SEVEN YEARS BAD LUCK

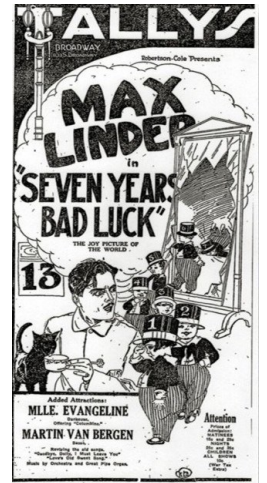
INTRODUCED BY DAVID ROBINSON

RELEASED BY ROBERTSON-COLE, 19 FEBRUARY 1921. PRODUCED, WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY MAX LINDER. CAMERA: CHARLES J. VAN ENGER. FIVE REELS.

CAST: MAX LINDER (MAX), ALTA ALLEN (BETTY, HIS FIANCÉE), RALPH MCCULLOUGH (JOHN, HIS VALET), BETTY PETERSON (MARY, HIS MAID), F.B. CRAYNE (HIS FALSE FRIEND), CHANCE WARD (CONDUCTOR), HUGH SAXON (STATION MASTER), THELMA PERCY (HIS DAUGHTER), CAP ANDERSON (JAILBIRD), HARRY MANN (UNCREDITED).



Almost three years after his first American series, for the Essanay company (one of which, *Max Wants a Divorce*, was screened at our November comedy event), Max Linder arrived with his business manager and secretary in Hollywood the second week of January 1920 for another go at making films there. He had made no prior arrangements for doing so, probably because he wanted to hold open the opportunity to film at the Chaplin studios that Charlie and Sydney had offhandedly suggested to him when he left the States in summer 1917. In the meantime, it had become extremely unsafe to travel via ocean liner. Time passed. And so, Max and Company showed up in Hollywood almost two years after the Chaplin invite, discovering the offer had dried up (or was never seriously considered in the first place). Linder then turned to countryman Maurice Tourneur, who offered to share his studio space at Universal. He was also able to get Robertson-Cole interested in distributing. So, with those hurdles surmounted, Linder formed his own production company, Max Linder Productions, and began work on his first American-made 5-reeler, initially entitled “The Broken Mirror.” By June, after a change of cameraman to Charles Van Enger due to the loss of a considerable amount of film by the previous one, what became *Seven Years Bad Luck* was previewed in Los Angeles in August and finally premiered on February 19, 1921 at Chicago’s State-Lake theater.



One of the most notable slapstick elements of the film is the “mirror scene,” a tried-and-true vaudeville/music hall gag that Linder had employed once before in his *Le duel de Max* (1913), one that cost him then due to copyright infringement and one that would cost him once again with this film, in the Schwarz Brothers’ 37<sup>th</sup> court case on the issue. Of course, the gag found its way into many other films and television shows regardless, including The Marx Brothers’ *Duck Soup* (1933), Chaplin’s *The Floorwalker* (1916), and Bugs Bunny’s *Hare Tonic* (1945), among many others. Other notable elements of the film include fun with zoo animals (with Linder supposedly bitten on the arm by Lucille the lion), train stations, swimming pools and county jails, combined with Linder’s adroit portrayal of various offbeat characters, that aid in disguising him throughout his trials.

Images courtesy of  
Lisa Stein Haven.

Linder’s company included Charles Dorian (on loan from Tourneur) and Al Davis, assistant directors, with a cast comprised of Thelma Percy, Alta Allen, Betty Peterson, Lola Gonzales, Harry Mann, Chance Ward, Ralph McCullough, Hugh Saxon, Cap Anderson, F. R. Crayne and Pudgy the dog. Jessie Robb, writing in *Motion Picture World* (7 May 1921), noted that the film was “custard pieless and free from the ordinary slapstick and suggestive vulgarity of most so-called comedies. Much of the fun is subtly achieved.” In *Motion Picture News* (7 May 1921), J. S. Dickerson commented that “‘Seven Years’ Bad Luck’ is unadulterated farce of a quality that seldom reaches the screen in more than two-reel lengths and presents Max Linder in a role eminently suited to his talents.”

**Today’s copy of ‘SEVEN YEARS BAD LUCK’ is screened by kind courtesy of Serge Bromberg of Lobster Films.**

## LES EFFETS DES PILLULES (1910)

At the time Linder made this film, he had reached the height of his career at Pathé, with his inept dandyish man-about-town character now both recognizable as Max Linder and labeled as such in advertisements across Europe. Also, with the film just previous to this one, *Max est distrait*, Linder is believed to have finally taken the directing helm away from Pathé’s Lucien Nonguet and Louis Gasnier, a position he was soon to adopt permanently.

The UK title for the film was *Love and Goodfellowship Pills*. This one-reeler contains a spin or two on several Linder comedy standards, such as marital discord, accidental infidelity and the duel (here in the multiple). With a scenario by Linder himself, the film provides further evidence of his fascination with the effects of chemical alteration on human behavior and also, the blurry and intransigent line between life and death, that also occurs in films such as *Le Pendu* (1906), *Le duel de monsieur Myope* (1910), *Max a un duel* (1911), *Max et Jane veulent faire du théâtre* (1911), *Le duel de Max* (1913), and others.

Long considered lost, the film was recently discovered (February 2017) in the Gaumont Pathé archives in Paris, by Linder scholar Georg Renken. Today’s screening is a new restoration of the U.K. release by Bob Geoghegan, from the Archive Film Agency collection.

Lisa Stein Haven



# WE'RE IN THE NAVY NOW! (1926)



PRODUCED BY B.P. SCHULBERG FOR PARAMOUNT. DIRECTED BY EDWARD SUTHERLAND. STORY BY MONTE BRICE. SCENARIO BY JOHN MCDERMOTT. TITLES BY GEORGE MARION JR. CINEMATOGRAPHY BY CHARLES P BOYLE.

RELEASED BY PARAMOUNT, NOVEMBER 6, 1926

CAST: WALLACE BEERY (WHIFFER HANSON), RAYMOND HATTON (SHRIMP DOLAN), LORRAINE EASON (MADELYN PHILLIPS), MAX ASHER (ADMIRAL PUCKERLIPPE), TOM KENNEDY (HOMICIDE HARRIGAN), CHESTER CONKLIN (CAPTAIN STIFFE), JOSEPH W. GIRARD (ADMIRAL SOMES), DONALD KEITH (ENSIGN MARTIN), MALCOLM WAITE (LIEUTENANT VON ELM).

As immediate memories of the Great War began to fade, Hollywood began to tackle the subject with dramas – notably 1925's *The Big Parade* – and service comedies, usually – though not necessarily always - set during that war. One of the comedy hits of 1926 was Paramount's *Behind the Front*, directed by A. Edward Sutherland, with Wallace Beery and Raymond Hatton unwittingly joining the Army; so successful was the film - it actually became Paramount's biggest box-office success of the year - that the same trio swiftly embarked on a perhaps superior sequel, *We're In the Navy Now*, which in turn sparked a further film in 1927, *Now We're in the Air*. The last of these, long thought completely lost, survives in a version running less than half of its original running time; the first two seem to be around only in the slightly abridged 16mm Kodascope versions, one of which is the source for today's print, presented by Kevin Brownlow.

*Behind the Front* is a reasonably close template for the second film, in that each sees the two central characters swept up as World War One volunteers despite having no intention of joining up; they prove inept recruits and fall foul of their superiors on all levels; and eventually they turn out to be heroes, albeit perhaps with no great credit due them. As is typical of the 'service comedy', the style of humour is essentially robust but, in a review (headed 'Thunderous Fun') published on 8 November 1926, Mordaunt Hall of the New York Times clearly thought that no bad thing:

A note of humor that possesses all the melody of the booming of a big drum is struck successfully by Wallace Beery and Raymond Hatton, throughout their new comedy, "We're in the Navy Now," a raucous half-brother to their previous masterpiece, "Behind the Front."

Noting the pair's mostly physical humour ('one wonders how the delicate Rialto screen can stand it'), Hall recalled Beery's transition from his scheming comic villains of earlier years (as in the famous Keystone comedy *Teddy at the Throttle*) into the lumbering buffoon type of comedian who, on this occasion, even has trouble getting into his uniform and, in tandem with Raymond Hatton, cannot master the intricacies of a hammock. Hall concludes:

Beery plays the comic sailor in very much the same easy way he does a villain, realizing perhaps the jabs he will make on the risibles of audiences. Mr. Hatton deals, one might say, in a lighter mood, that is if you can call an elephant light when talking of a brontosaurus.

Prepare for some unpretentious fun!

*Glenn Mitchell*





# SO YOU WON'T TALK (1935)

PRODUCED BY IRVING ASHER FOR WARNER BROTHERS-FIRST NATIONAL. RELEASED MARCH, 1935.

DIRECTED BY WILLIAM BEAUDINE.

SCREENPLAY BY FRANK LAUNDER & RUSSELL G MEDCRAFT

STARRING MONTY BANKS, WITH ENID STAMP-TAYLOR, VERA PEARCE, BERTHA BELMORE, CLAUDE DAMPIER, JULIAN ROYCE, RALPH INCE, A BRAMLEY DAVENPORT.

CINEMATOGRAPHY: BASIL EMMOTT. CHOREOGRAPHY: FRED LESLIE. SOUND RECORDING: LESLIE MURRAY & H.C. PEARSON.



With 'SO YOU WON'T TALK', we take an excursion into the sound era. Of course, silent comedy didn't entirely die with the coming of sound. When they were permitted to amongst the melee of "ALL TALKING! ALL SINGING! ALL DANCING!" 1930s films, many of the silent clowns continued flying the flag for visual comedy.

Since 1928, Monty Banks had been resident in the United Kingdom. Initially starring in silent films (for more on Banks' silent career, see notes for Saturday's screening of 'A PERFECT GENTLEMAN'), but increasingly turning to directing. Banks' Hollywood experience was welcomed at the dawn of the sound era in Britain; along with other ex-silent comics Walter Forde & 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 was a versatile director for British International Pictures and Associated Talking Pictures, equally at home with the low comedy of George Formby, the musical theatre of Bobby Howes, or more legitimate light comedies such as 'THE CHURCH MOUSE' AND 'MAN OF THE MOMENT', both with Laura La Plante. One of his very best films as director is 'YOU MADE ME LOVE YOU', a sparkling musical update of 'THE TAMING OF THE SHREW' starring Stanley Lupino and Thelma Todd.

Incidentally, the Formby films he directed, 'NO LIMIT!' and 'KEEP YOUR SEATS PLEASE!', very much followed the model of his own silent comedy features. Future Formby films would follow this formula, and would in turn provide inspiration for the Norman Wisdom films, meaning that Banks' influence was actually quite far reaching for the slapstick side of British comedy.

He never did completely abandon performing, often pulling Hitchcockian cameos in the films he directed, as well as some larger supporting roles, including 'ATLANTIC' (1930) and 'THE GIRL IN POSSESSION' (1934). Perhaps his 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. Banks is due to inherit a fortune, but only if he can win a wager that demands he not talk for a month. It's a great idea for a film starring a silent comedian, offering him many opportunities for pantomime and visual humour. One can only imagine what Keaton would have done with the idea.

The director of 'SO YOU WON'T TALK' was William Beaudine, himself a veteran director of silent comedies, including comedies with Douglas McLean, Charlie Murray and Laura La Plante (1928's wonderful 'HOME JAMES' was shown to great response at Silent laughter 2016). Beaudine could also handle drama, including 'SPARROWS' and 'LITTLE ANNIE ROONEY' with Mary Pickford. His stay in Britain would lead him to direct three Will Hay films for Gainsborough's pictures, including the classic 'WINDBAG THE SAILOR', and after returning to the U.S. he would remain active well into the 1960s.

Among the supporting cast are Enid Stamp-Taylor as Banks' conniving cousin and the wonderfully droopy comedian Claude Dampier as a solicitor. Born Claude Cowan in 1879, Dampier billed himself as 'The Professional Idiot', matching his gormless, hangdog looks with a slurring, fruity voice ("Ohhh yerrrrsss..."). He had been a big success in Australia in the stage show 'THE ADVENTURES OF ALGY', even starring in a silent film version of the play there. Back in Britain, radio was his daily bread, where he recited monologues about his life with landlady Mrs Gibson. One such broadcast landed him in hot water with the po-faced BBC censors as he talked of his desire to squeeze Mrs Gibson's oranges! Among his other notable film roles are the all-star extravaganza 'RADIO PARADE OF 1935', and Will Hay's 'BOYS WILL BE BOYS', where he would be reunited with director William Beaudine.

'SO YOU WON'T TALK' would turn out to be the last starring film Monty Banks made. His career would reach a turning point the following year, when he directed 'QUEEN OF HEARTS' with Gracie Fields. He would become Gracie's regular director, and subsequently her husband. On the outbreak of WW2, Banks' Italian immigrant status made him an undesirable alien; to avoid his internment, he and Gracie moved to the USA. There, Monty was able to direct Laurel & Hardy in 'GREAT GUNS', and also had small roles in 'BLOOD & SAND' and 'A BELL FOR ADANO'. Post-war, he and Gracie relocated to the Isle of Capri, surely one of the most idyllic retirements of any silent film comedian. It was to be short-lived, however; he died in 1950 of a heart attack, whilst on-board the Orient Express.

Today's screening is a rare chance to see Banks' last hurrah as a starring comic, in a 35mm print courtesy of the BFI.

# NOISY SILENTS!

A PROGRAMME OF SHORTS PRESENTED AND ACCOMPANIED BY NEIL BRAND

Silent comedy was never really silent. Musical accompaniment was, of course, an integral part of the cinema experience from the earliest days of the nickelodeons. For comedy too, the waves of laughter through the audience added an extra aural dimension to the experience. Beyond these tangible sounds, some silent comedy makers even went as far as to incorporate imagined sound into their films, basing gags, sequences and sometimes entire plots around sound and music. In this programme, Neil Brand presents some fine examples of that wonderful oxymoron: the noisy silent film!

## NOISY NOISES



*Jean Darling & Joe Cobb*

PRODUCED BY ROBERT F MCGOWAN FOR HAL ROACH. DIRECTED BY ROBERT MCGOWAN. RELEASED FEBRUARY 9, 1929 BY MGM.

STARRING 'OUR GANG' (JOE COBB, ALLEN 'FARINA' HOSKINS, BOBBY 'WHEEZER' HUTCHINS, JEAN DARLING, HARRY SPEAR, MARY ANN JACKSON, GORDON THORPE, JAY R SMITH, BRET BLACK & PETE THE PUP), WITH LYLE TAYO, MICHAEL MARK, TENEN HOLTZ, EDITH FORTIER & JACK O'BRIEN.

The 'Our Gang' comedies, popularly known as 'The Little Rascals', made up Hal Roach's longest running series of short comedies. From 1922 to 1938, the various incarnations of the gang appeared in 169 films, masterminded by firefighter-turned-director Robert McGowan ('Uncle Bob' to the Gang kids). The success of the films was largely due to McGowan's letting the kids basically be kids, rather than self-consciously cute.

'NOISY NOISES', released Feb 9, 1929, is among the last silent Our Gang comedies, and clearly shows the filmmakers pre-empting the surging tide of sound in the talkies; in fact, on original release, it came with a pre-recorded music and effects track on disc, to be played in sync with the film. The line-up of kids in this era of the gang pre-dates the most iconic Spanky/Alfalfa/Darla combination, but is one of the most charming and talented ensembles. Taking the lead here is chubby Joe Cobb, a jolly little chap who was with the gang from its inception in 1922 through to the early talkie shorts. Here he has two problems: a nagging toothache, and a little brother who won't go to sleep. Incidentally, Cobb never grew much taller than he was here, barely scraping five feet in adulthood.

Allen 'Farina' Hoskins was one of the gang's longest-serving and most talented members. A personal favourite of director McGowan, he possessed fantastic comic reactions and timing. As a sidenote, while the gang films, in common with many other comedies of the period, sometimes contained racial gag material reflecting now unacceptable prejudices, they always included mixed races of children playing together happily, a forward-thinking attitude at a time of racial segregation.

Another mainstay of the series featured in this film is devilish little Bobby 'Wheezer' Hutchins. The boys don't carry off all the honours, though. Mary Ann Jackson, with her Colleen Moore 'bangs', was a wonderful little comedienne who worked for Sennett before joining the rascals; also present is the wonderful Jean Darling, the gang's golden girl and often a crush for the boys! Jean was one of the longest lived Our Gang members, remaining an ebullient attendee at Laurel & Hardy and film conventions until her passing in 2015.

## SUMMER SAPS (1929)



PRODUCED BY E.W. HAMMONS. DIRECTED BY HENRY W. GEORGE. RELEASED BY EDUCATIONAL PICTURES, MARCH 17 1929.

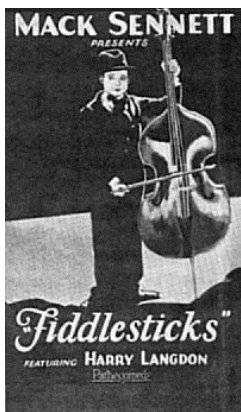
STARRING LUPINO LANE, WITH WALLACE LUPINO, BLANCHE PAYSON, JACKIE LEVINE, TOM WHITELEY.

Lupino Lane was a man of many talents: film and stage comedian, director, phenomenal acrobat, and originator of 'The Lambeth Walk' song and dance craze. Between 1925 and 1929 he was Educational Pictures' #1 comedy star, producing a series of snappy little comedies that showcased his physical comedy prowess. 'SUMMER SAPS' (1929) is a late entry in the series, directed by Lane himself under the name 'Henry W George'. 'Directed' is perhaps less an appropriate term than 'choreographed'; like many of Lane's films, this is more of an intricately timed slapstick ballet than anything else.

In common with 'NOISY NOISES', this film uses sound as a source of frustration. Lane's henpecked husband longs for a relaxing seaside holiday; alas, continuous rain forces him to be trapped in his boarding house, where the boisterous antics of his family and the other holidaymakers drive him to the verge of a nervous breakdown. As a Brit, not to mention one who frequently toured seaside resorts with music hall acts and pantomimes, one senses that Lane wrenched much of 'SUMMER SAPS' from his own painful memories of wet afternoons in tatty B&Bs! One of his final silent films, the cramped sets that provide so much of the comedy of frustration were most likely an aid to wrapping up the silent film series quickly, making way (and saving money) for the installation of sound equipment at Educational's studios.

Lane would take the basic premise of the henpecked husband's family holiday and expand it into his 1931 British feature 'NO LADY', which features lots of fine location work in Blackpool. Ironically, while 'SUMMER SAPS' is a silent film with suggested sound elements, 'NO LADY' is a sound film that features large chunks of silent footage!

Trivia note: the boarding house resident Lane takes his wrath out on his brother, Wallace Lupino. Also among the residents is Tom Whiteley, a survivor of the *Titanic disaster*.



## FIDDLESTICKS (1927)

PRODUCED BY MACK SENNETT. DIRECTED BY HARRY EDWARDS. SCREENPLAY BY ARTHUR RIPLEY & FRANK CAPRA. RELEASED BY PATHÉ, NOVEMBER 27, 1927

STARRING HARRY LANGDON, WITH VERNON DENT, ANNA DODGE, LEO SULKY, TINY WARD

Harry Langdon was among the most gifted pantomimists in all of silent comedy. Playing a blissfully innocent character lost in a harsh world, the best of his films balance facets of a child's character with those of a grown man in a sort of ageless limbo.

A star vaudevillian who came to films late in 1923, Langdon came to prominence at Mack Sennett's studios. His 'Little Elf' character was based on his vaudeville routine 'JOHNNY'S NEW CAR', and developed further by the team of Arthur Ripley, Frank Capra, Harry Edwards and Langdon himself (Capra's later claims that he alone was responsible for the character have now been very much debunked, by the way).

'FIDDLESTICKS' takes as its inspired beginnings that painful experience for many parents, a child's attempt to learn a musical instrument. In this instance, Harry's awful cello playing sees him booted out of the family home to find a real job, but he is determined to make his way as a musician. This leads him to encounters with a German music professor and a junk dealer, two diverse characters both played wonderfully by Vernon Dent. Character actor Dent was a mainstay of both Langdon's films and those of other Sennett comedians, capable of everything from full on 'heavy' to slow-burn frustration. His roles in the latter vein opposite the innocent Langdon certainly provided a blueprint for the embryonic Laurel & Hardy partnership. Dent would continue to be in demand throughout the sound era, especially playing in Three Stooges comedies at Columbia.

Langdon too is at his best in 'FIDDLESTICKS', which provides several showcases for his etiolated, slow-thinking pantomime routines. One of his last silent shorts for Mack Sennett, it was filmed in late 1925. Shortly after it was made, Langdon entered features with First National and would be briefly catapulted to stratospheric stardom. 'FIDDLESTICKS', meanwhile, would be held back for release until November 1927. The delay was not due to any quality concerns, but rather a ploy by Sennett/Pathé to delay release on the last few Langdon shorts and eke out the most possible money from them. Langdon made some wonderful features for First National, such as 'TRAMP! TRAMP! TRAMP!' and 'THE STRONG MAN', but his stay at the top was already nearing an end by the time 'FIDDLESTICKS' was released and was pretty much over by the time sound came in. Nevertheless, he was able to remain busy in talkies, as both actor and gagwriter (especially for Laurel & Hardy), until his early death in 1944.



## YOU'RE DARN TOOTIN!' (1928)

PRODUCED BY HAL ROACH. DIRECTED BY EDGAR KENNEDY. RELEASED FEBRUARY, 1928. RELEASED IN THE U.K. AS 'THE MUSIC BLASTERS'

STARRING STAN LAUREL & OLIVER HARDY. WITH OTTO LEDERER, ROLFE SEDAN, LYLE TAYO, CHRISTIAN FRANK, AGNES STEELE, GEORGE ROWE.

Thematically similar to 'FIDDLESTICKS', this film shows that, while Laurel & Hardy might have been influenced by Langdon (& Dent), they took an approach to the material that was very much their own. 'YOU'RE DARN TOOTIN!' remains a classic example of their tactics for comedy structure, presenting them with a hostile world that systematically robs them of their possessions and dignity. First, their incompetence loses their jobs as bandmen; subsequently they lose their home when the landlady kicks them out. Attempts at busking wind up in the destruction of their instruments and livelihood, and

finally frustrations boil over in a giant trouser-ripping street battle that sees the last shreds of their dignity literally torn away. If it wasn't a comedy, it could almost be the synopsis for a bleak Russian tragedy, but with, er, more trouser-ripping...

The carefully built 'reciprocal destruction', that sees the boys' squabbles turn into a collective mania swallowing up whole crowds of people, was a classic L & H routine. First developed as a hat-ripping version for the now lost 'HATS OFF', it was so successful that it spawned many variations, in which pies, trousers, mud, cooked rice, Christmas trees, houses, ice creams, cars and soup are just some of the weapons used! While detractors occasionally criticise the slapstick nature of these routines, this is slapstick with psychology; each battle is built carefully and naturally as a result of human foibles and reactions. Some commentators have even likened the nature of these 'reciprocal destruction' battles, not unreasonably, to the escalation of hostilities between nations. Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un in a trouser-ripping battle? Now *there's* an image for you to consider while you watch 'YOU'RE DARN TOOTIN!'

In the director's chair is comedian Edgar Kennedy, he of the bald pate and slow-burning rage. This is one of a few films he made as director; more often he was on the receiving end of L & H's chaos, including films such as 'LEAVE 'EM LAUGHING', 'SHOULD MARRIED MEN GO HOME?' and 'NIGHT OWLS'. He also supported many other comics, notably the Marx Brothers in 'DUCK SOUP'. From the early 1930s onward, he would also be starred in his own right in RKO's 'Mr Average Man' series, films which were forerunners of the modern sitcom. The series ran until Kennedy's death in 1948.

While the noisier end of silent comedy tends more to the slapstick side of things, each of these films has its own distinct approach to the comedy. The films will be introduced and accompanied by Neil Brand. One of the leading silent film accompanists, Neil tours around the world accompanying films, and has scored many for DVD. He is also an expert on silent film history, as well as a writer and broadcaster whose works include the drama 'STAN' and recent BBC4 series 'THE SOUND OF SONG' & 'THE SOUND OF MUSICALS'. We're thrilled to have him here with us today.



# ROY HUDD



We are delighted to welcome back comedian, actor and writer Roy Hudd OBE for his fourth visit to the Cinema Museum. This is Roy's first involvement in a specific Kennington Bioscope event and in keeping with the general theme of the weekend, the choice of clips – ranging across film, theatre and TV – is geared essentially to visual humour. As with his first two talks at the Museum, Roy will be in conversation with KB's Glenn Mitchell, a former writer for Roy's long-running radio series *The News Huddlines*.

As is well known, Roy's career goes back to the last days of Britain's Variety theatres and thus links directly with the heyday of music-hall, which in turn fed the development of silent film comedy both here and in America. His encyclopaedic knowledge of

the business will guide us through often inter-related routines by comedians hailing not just from the familiar Anglo-American scene but also from Europe, establishing links across national borders as well as down through the generations. Above all, Roy will be introducing us to his visual comedy heroes, a number of whom were his personal friends.

The event will conclude with a rare screening of Laurel & Hardy's 1927 classic *The Battle of the Century*, including the newly-rediscovered complete second reel. For those unacquainted with its history, this famous sequence was until recently thought to exist only in a heavily-abridged version prepared for a 1950s compilation by Robert Youngson, *The Golden Age of Comedy*; it was not known that Youngson had kept a complete copy of the reel for his personal collection. It is presented here alongside the surviving footage from reel one (which was also missing for years!).

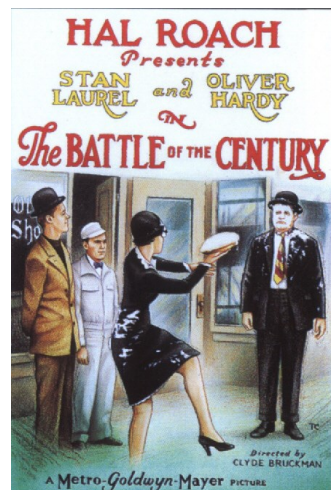
**Glenn Mitchell**

## THE BATTLE OF THE CENTURY (1927)

RELEASED DECEMBER 31, 1927. PRODUCED BY HAL ROACH. DIRECTED BY CLYDE BRUCKMAN.

STARRING STAN LAUREL & OLIVER HARDY, WITH NOAH YOUNG, CHARLIE HALL, EUGENE PALLETTE, SAM LUFKIN, ELINOR VANDEVERE, ANITA GARVIN, LOU COSTELLO.

Among the very first 'real' Laurel & Hardy comedies, 'THE BATTLE OF THE CENTURY' was also one of the first to really put them on the map with audiences and critics. Laurel is a hopeless prizefighter, Hardy his manager. When Stan catastrophically loses his fight with Noah Young, Ollie takes out insurance on him, and then contrives to have an accident happen... The 'battle' of the title is a reference to both the boxing scenes and of course the epic pie-throwing denouement that results from Hardy's attempts to cause an accident. It's also a rare example of a directly topical reference for L & H. 'The Battle of the Century' was how the 1927 Dempsey v Tunney prize fight was billed, and it became notorious for its 'long count'. *The Chicago Tribune* takes up the story:



*Amid a screaming crowd of 104,943 spectators, reporters at ringside said it took champion Gene Tunney somewhere somewhere from 12 to 15 seconds to regain his feet after being knocked down by former champion Jack Dempsey.*

*It should have taken referee Dave Barry 10 seconds to count out Tunney, making Dempsey a winner by a knockout in the seventh round. But Dempsey ignored the rule that he first had to go to a neutral corner. He thereby transformed those few seconds into legend. Barry escorted Dempsey to a corner, then began a delayed count. Tunney rose before it reached 10. In his autobiography, Dempsey conceded that he forgot all about the rule: "It's hard to stop what you're doing, standing over a guy and waiting for him to get up."*

The boxing scenes are therefore a direct parody of this incident. They are also notable as perhaps the moment where the 'Stan' character is really born. While previous films *THE SECOND HUNDRED YEARS* and *PUTTING PANTS ON PHILIP* were both wonderful comedies with terrific performances from Laurel, he's a bit too spirited and spritely in both to fully represent the later Stan we know and love. 'BATTLE' shows a new, slow-thinking nuance of performance from Laurel that represents the real birth of 'Stan'.

Pie throwing was considered old hat by 1927, but the L & H approach in 'BATTLE' is different. As Laurel later stated "We made every pie count!", and the range of variations on a pie in the face shown is brilliant. Seen for the first time in many years in its original, "as nature intended" state, this masterful silent comedy sequence can now be seen complete.

**'Canvasback' Clump**