



KENNINGTON
BIOSCOPE

SILENT LAUGHTER



2024

	SATURDAY 9 TH NOVEMBER		SUNDAY 10 TH NOVEMBER
10.00	TOO MANY KISSES (1925)	10.00	ONLY ON 9.5mm
11.45	THE KEYSTONE COPS	11.30	THE PATSY (1928)
13.00	LUNCH		
14.00	HØJT PAA EN KVIST (1929)	14.00	FOCUS ON VITAGRAPH
16.00	ANIMATIONS & ILLUSIONS	15.30	THE GORILLA (1927)
17.30	RARITIES & REDISCOVERIES	17.30	CHARLEY CHASE
19.00	DINNER		
20.00	OH! WHAT A NURSE! (1926)	20.00	MINIATURE MASTERPIECES

MUSICIANS: Costas Fotopoulos, Cyrus Gabrysch, Stephen Horne, Meg Morley, Timothy Rumsey, Colin Sell & Ashley Valentine.

Programme curated by Dave Glass & Matthew Ross.

With thanks to the Kennington Bioscope Team and to our many contributors: Christopher Bird, Serge Bromberg, Michelle Facey, Tony Fletcher, Bob Geoghegan, Steve Massa, Glenn Mitchell, Richard M Roberts, Uli Ruedel. Thanks also to David Lavelli, and of course to our projectionist Phil Clark and The Cinema Museum's team of volunteers.

TOO MANY KISSES (1925)

Paramount. Released 1st March 1925. Produced by Adolph Zukor and Jesse L. Lasky. Directed by Paul Sloan. Screenplay: Gerald Duffy. Supervising editor: William LeBaron. Photography: Harold Rosson.

CAST: Richard Dix (Richard Gaylord, Jr.), Frank Currier (Richard Gaylord, Sr.), Albert Tavernier (Manuel Hurja), Frances Howard (Yvonne, his daughter), William Powell (Captain Julio), Paul Panzer (Pedro), Arthur Ludwig (Miguel), Joe Burke (Joab Simmons), Harpo Marx (The Village Peter Pan), Alyce Mills (flapper – unbilled).



Too Many Kisses was adapted from a story by John Monk Saunders, *A Maker of Gestures*, that had been published in *Cosmopolitan* magazine in 1923. It stars Richard Dix, whose rugged leading-man looks suited him to roles ranging between westerns, costume drama and light comedies such as this. William Powell is better recalled for suave nice-guy roles in talkies (notably *My Man Godfrey* and the *Thin Man* series) but in the 20s often appeared as a villainous second lead. They are pitted against each other when Dix's philandering character, Richard Gaylord Jr., is sent to the Basque region of Spain, where the women are said to reject men from outside their community. This does not prove entirely to be the case and he is soon competing with Captain Julio (Powell) for the attentions of the lovely Yvonne (Frances Howard). Julio's henchman, Pedro, is played by Paul Panzer, perhaps most famous as the villain of the Pearl White serial *The Perils of Pauline*.

Billed last, with his not yet universally familiar nickname given here in quotation marks, is Harpo Marx, playing 'The Village Peter Pan', a strange figure who wanders in and out of the scene but sometimes contributes importantly to the action. After years in vaudeville, The Marx Brothers had come to the attention of 'legitimate' theatre critics in their revue *I'll Say She Is!*, which opened at an off-Broadway venue, the Casino Theatre, on 19th May 1924. Ironically, it was the non-speaking member of the team, Harpo Marx, who was taken up by New York's literary set and thus most likely to be given opportunities elsewhere. *Too Many Kisses* was shot in Paramount's New York studio at Long Island (as would later be the talkie adaptations of the Marx Brothers' next two Broadway shows, *The Cocoanuts* and *Animal Crackers*), thus enabling Harpo to work on this film during the day while returning to the theatre for the evening performances of *I'll Say She Is!*. Shortly thereafter, his younger brother Zeppo – billed by his real name, Herbert Marx – appeared in another Paramount film shot at Long Island, *A Kiss in the Dark* (of which only two of the original six reels have been recovered, neither of them featuring Zeppo). He is believed to have been one of several Broadway stars appearing as themselves. The Marx Brothers as a group attempted to make a silent comedy called *Humor Risk* or *Humorisk* (with leading lady Jobyna Ralston, known today mostly from Harold Lloyd's comedies) but it seems never to have been released and has long since vanished. Of all the Marx Brothers, the professionally mute Harpo was easily the best suited to silent picture work so it is a further irony that *Too Many Kisses* is the only film in which he is given dialogue, albeit via title card.



Harpo Marx's memories of the experience were short-lived and perhaps misleading. Leonard Maltin's book *Movie Comedy Teams* quotes Harpo's comments to a journalist when filming *Cocoanuts* at Astoria four years later, saying he had taken all his friends to see *Too Many Kisses* and waited in vain for the first two reels; 'it seems the cutters had been at work on the film and they hadn't figured my acting amounted to much'. As Harpo bent down to pick up his hat, his mother said 'There he – goes'. 'I never did see myself,' said Harpo, adding 'I hope I am better off in *The Cocoanuts*'. As it turns out, Harpo's first appearance is indeed about two reels in, initially a fleeting glimpse of him walking through the Basque village before attending to Julio's horse, suggesting the possibility that he and his party may have thought that was all and left the screening before his main contribution to the film.

Although Harpo's appearance was thought (mistakenly) to be brief, the mere fact that he was in it at all made *Too Many Kisses* a sought-after film – and the subject of considerable speculation, not all of it accurate – for a great many years. No copy was known to exist until 1971, when author and film historian Robert S. Birchard located a 16mm print in the collection of Irvin V. Willat. The print was a direct reduction from the 35mm camera negative and thus enabled the American Film Institute to make a high quality duplicate negative, subsequently donated to the Library of Congress within the AFI/Irvin V. Willat Collection. The beautiful tinted restoration screened today was completed in 2020 by the Film Preservation Society.

THE HOUSE THAT SHADOWS BUILT (EXTRACT)

Paramount 1931.

CAST: *The Four Marx Brothers (Groucho, Harpo, Chico and Zeppo), Ben Taggart.*

To celebrate its upcoming 20th anniversary, Paramount Pictures assembled a feature intended only for exhibition to the film trade called *The House That Shadows Built*, a title borrowed from Will Irwin's 1928 biography of studio founder Adolph Zukor. The film runs about 48 minutes and tells the Paramount story using clips from their silent productions (some of them now otherwise lost) and detailing their upcoming productions of the time, some of which do not seem to have been completed. One of these was *Monkey Business*, the first Marx Brothers film to be made after their relocation to the West Coast. It was also their first to be written specifically for the screen rather than being adapted from one of their stage shows. At the time *The House That Shadows Built* was in production there was as yet nothing available from their new film, so the team's backlog of stage material came into use after all; they perform a sketch set in an agent's office that had formed part of their revue *I'll Say She Is!* and had begun life in an earlier presentation called *On the Mezzanine* (a variant of which, *On the Balcony*, had been their London debut sketch in 1922). The main change in each version of the sketch was which celebrity each Marx Brother impersonated when auditioning for the agent; on this occasion they chose Paramount star Maurice Chevalier, in line with their attempts to pass themselves off as him in the feature itself. In all other respects this brief item represents the earliest Marx Brothers routine to be preserved on film. Ben Taggart, who plays a ship's captain in *Monkey Business*, appears as the agent.

- Glenn Mitchell



The Four Marx Brothers pose with their father, Sam 'Frenchie' Marx (so nicknamed because of the Gallic ways inherited from his Alsace birthplace) in the agent's office set of The House That Shadows Built. 'Frenchie' may also be glimpsed in the Marx Brothers feature this was designed to promote, Monkey Business.

CRIKEY... IT'S THE KEYSTONE COPS!



Mack Sennett's Keystone Cops have become legend: the image of chaotic, flailing policemen careering down Los Angeles' streets is one of the defining sights of silent comedy, and is shorthand for an entire subgenre of slapstick. However, the history of the Cops is often confused. Who were they, and how many films did they make? In this presentation, Lon Davis and Dave Glass shine a light on the Cops, their history and their impact on comedy. Lon tells us more:

In 2019, writer and film historian Lon Davis decided to make his next book about the Keystone Cops. Why? A better question might be "Why not?" Of the stacks of film books that have been published in the past sixty years, not one had been solely devoted to Mack Sennett's most famous creation. Lon's concept was to make this long-overdue tribute a compendium of essays by the top researchers in the field of silent comedy. Because Lon personally knows the majority of the individuals who have made their mark in this fascinating study, he reached out to each candidate with a suggestion of what they might cover in their particular pieces.

No one turned him down.

That includes Joe Adamson, John Bengtson, Rob Farr, Paul E. Gierucki, Michael J. Hayde, Prof. Rob King, Tim Lussier, Mark Pruett, Chris Seguin, Randy Skretvedt, Lea Stans, Brent E. Walker, and Marc Wanamaker. During a road trip from his home in Lake Oswego, Oregon, to Los Angeles, Lon paid a visit to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences for a pre-arranged screening. The film was as rare as anything silent comedy buffs can imagine: a 35mm fragment of *In the Clutches of a Gang*, a 1914 Keystone two-reeler featuring the Cops. That is the long-lost film that gave us the iconic image of Ford Sterling, Edgar Kennedy, Al St. John, Hank Mann, and Roscoe Arbuckle, in uniform, and lined up at the station. Lon contributed an essay about that rediscovery as well as an affectionate account of his interview with another Cop in that famous still: Robert (Marvin) Cox.

Pioneering silent film historian Sam Gill contributed a warm and evocative foreword to the book in progress, which is dedicated to Sam's late friend and onetime writing partner Kalton C. Lahue. Co-edited by Lon's wife, Debra, *CHASE! A Tribute to the Keystone Cops* was published by silent film friendly BearManor Media in 2020. It is available on Amazon.com in hardback, trade paperback, and Kindle editions.

More recently, Dave Glass reached out to Lon about the possibility of co-producing a documentary on the Keystone Cops. Lon was receptive to the idea; so too was Lon's friend Barry Thompson, a television news videographer and editor who, along with his tech-savvy son Spencer, agreed to contribute their services to the project. Barry lined up a filming location at the History Museum in Eugene, Oregon. Surrounded by artefacts from the Edwardian era (including a 1913 convertible Model T Ford), Lon offers background on, and introduces clips from, various Keystone comedies, along with some rarities. This raw footage was sent to Dave Glass, a master editor, who cut together and scored the films. The yet-to-be-titled Cops documentary makes its debut at this year's Silent Laughter Weekend.

HØJT PAA EN KVIST (The Mannequins) (1929)

Palladium. Released 26th December 1929 (in Denmark)

DIR: Lau Lauritzen Sr. **SCEN:** Lau Lauritzen Sr., Alice O'Fredericks, A.V. Olsen, Lau Lauritzen Jr. **PHOTOG:** Carlo Bentsen Olsen. **ASST. DIR.:** Alice O'Fredericks.

CAST: Carl Schenstrøm (Pat/"Lighthouse"), Harald Madsen (Patachon/"Sidecar"), Marguerite Viby, Nina Kalckar (the two girls), Bruno Tymot (the boxer), Emmy Schønfeld (the fortune teller), Mathilde Felumb-Friis (landlady), Victor Wulff (the lawyer), Gerda Kofoed (his daughter), Alex Suhr (the clerk), Christian Arhoff (the ballet master), Anton de Verdier (the judge), Lau Lauritzen Jr. (police officer), Asbjørn Andersen (waiting gentleman), Aage Bendixen (counterfeiter), Arthur Jensen (downstairs neighbour)



By the late 1920s Pat and Patachon had cemented their status as Europe's most popular comedy duo prior to their American successors in audience affection, Laurel & Hardy. During this time, they churned out more feature comedies than Chaplin, Keaton, and Lloyd combined, though obviously they never achieved comparable artistic heights. However, after 30 feature films variation was overdue, and they were loaned out for foreign productions in Sweden, Britain, and Austria, appearing under the direction of such well-known names as Hans Steinhof and Monty Banks (Banks also directed Laurel and Hardy, in *Great Guns*, 1941). This strategy provided the necessary shake up and further underlined their international popularity, but also bore the risk of straying from a highly successful blueprint. By 1928's *Filmens Helte*, the "jubilee" 25th Palladium/Lau Lauritzen/Pat and Patachon collaboration, the formula had become both tried and tested but also somewhat tired and stale, yet *Højt paa en Kvist* the following year provided a charming return to old form at Palladium with director Lauritzen. The title roughly translates literally as "High Up on a Twig," a reference to the domestic comedy's setting in an attic flat, conveniently allowing for some slapstick rooftop antics, as well as an ominous prediction by a fortune teller, a mix-up with a brutish boxer, and innocent romance with two pretty dancer neighbors thrown in for good measure. In the process the film greatly benefits from featuring not just one but two odd couples, with Marguerite Viby and Nina Kalckar adding considerable charm as the dancers the comics are smitten with. Another important duo helped with scriptwriting duties: Alice O'Fredericks (1899-1968) would become, teamed with the director's actor son Lau Lauritzen Jr., the dominating creative force in a specific Danish genre, folkekomedie, a warm, gentle and ultimately untranslatable word that literally means "folk comedy," which established Marguerite Viby as a major Danish comedienne for decades.

Having appeared in a handful of Pat and Patachon films before (as well as in Benjamin Christensen's *Häxan*), and having won a scriptwriting competition for *Filmens Helte* O'Frederick made her debut as assistant director in *Højt paa en Kvist*. It is tempting to think that these female contributions in front of and behind the camera can take some share of the credit for the gentleness and charm that marks many of the Pat and Patachon films, particularly this one. It's precisely these qualities that make them, as the DFI's Madeleine Schlawitz proposed, the ideal comedy team for the 21st century, lacking the humiliation and harshness one associates with some aspects of American slapstick that have not aged too well. This is not necessarily a new observation: "They own a gently tempered Danish humor, which compared to American knockabout comedy feels more tame, but also more congenially personable. Even Chaplin can be excessively tart [...]. With the [...] Copenhagen couple, the humor has a homely, sometimes even slow-ish quality to it." (Robert Ramin, *Filmkomik und Filmkomiker*, Wegweiser Kalender. 1931) Arguably, the price to pay for this *modus operandi* was comic timing, precision, and the gag-focused approach of many an American (or British music-hall-trained) slapstick master. Where Laurel and Hardy might expertly revisit, vary, and refine sight gags and comedy routines sometimes even dating back to their solo careers, or where Abbott & Costello basically preserved a catalogue of burlesque routines on film in various permutations, Pat and Patachon focused on a comedy of characterization, through amusing pantomimed reactions, here for instance with their infatuation with the two young dancers, or Patachon's burgeoning appetite for their neighbor's breakfast. Perhaps in that sense they anticipated the deliberate "slowness" of Harry Langdon (and, in turn, his influence on the "Stan" character) much more than echoing the gagmen ingenuity of a Chaplin, Lloyd, or Laurel. This is not, however, to say that Lauritzen's actor/circus clown duo lacked slapstick skills; this is aptly evidenced not just by their popularity, which in many countries was on a par with their more famous U.S. colleagues, but, here, for instance, also in the clumsy yet zany and effective rooftop antics that nicely contrast with the domestic comedy.

The ongoing popularity of the Pat and Patachon films resulted in a number of sonorized re-releases and compilations, sometimes sporting elaborate musical settings and/or dubbing, an aspect of this comedy team's enduring European appeal over decades which offers much promise for further research but also resulted in the loss of the original versions. In the case of *Højt Paa en Kvist*, the re-release benefitted from music by prominent Danish film composer Sven Gyldmark. All Palladium film materials are now with DFI in Copenhagen. However, as with many of the Pat and Patachon features that survive at the archive in reasonably or entirely complete form - which, alas, applies roughly to only a third of their output - this digitization derives from a Swedish nitrate distribution print with a surprising number of changes to the number and content of intertitles compared to the Danish release, as well as several cast names (Carl Schenstrøm is credited as Karl Schenström, Emmy Schønfeld as Emmy Schönfeld, and Mathilde Felumb Fris as Mathilde Felumb).

-Ulrich Ruedel

With thanks to Marianne Jerris and the Danish Film Institute, as well as La Giornate del Cinema Muto for the sub-titles / translations. Notes reprinted, with kind permission, from the Giornate del Cinema Muto Catalogue no 42 (2023)

ANIMATIONS & ILLUSIONS

A spotlight on comedies featuring camera trickery and animations, with a few cartoons thrown in too! Presented by Matthew Ross, who edits the vintage comedy blog and e-zine *The Lost Laugh*: www.thelostlaugh.com

Almost as soon as motion picture cameras were invented, filmmakers were pushing the boundaries of what they could achieve. Soon, an array of playful special effects appeared on screen: cutting could enable characters to appear and disappear as if by magic; double exposure could make the same actor appear multiple times on the same strip of film; the invention of animation allowed impossible worlds to be conjured up. As well as producing startling effects, animations and camera tricks could also be used to elicit laughter. The comedy film industry was quick to capitalise on this, and soon there were comic novelty films; before long, animated effects and camera tricks were used to create some astonishing gags, special effects and plot devices. We don't want to give away too many spoilers about the exact content of this programme, but here are some of the filmmakers featured:

George Méliès (1861 – 1938)



Méliès was cinema's first great illusionist. As a young man he became fascinated with stage conjurors and illusions, and used his profits from the family business to set himself up as a theatre showman. When the Lumière brothers first showed off their new cinema invention in 1895, Méliès was in the audience. He instantly recognised the value of the new technology, and even tried to persuade the brothers to sell him their machine. Though he was unsuccessful in this attempt, he soon acquired a camera of his own from British pioneer R.W. Paul. Less than a year later, he was making films of his own. His interest in trick photography is said to have been inspired by a happy accident, when his camera jammed during filming, creating a bizarre series of juxtapositions as objects and people appeared and disappeared from the street scene he was filming. Soon, he was investigating the possibilities of trick photography, especially double exposure. Just three years after cinema's birth, he was creating sophisticated trick films like *The Four Troublesome Heads*, which we'll be screening today. Also screened will be *The Man with The Rubber Head* (1901).

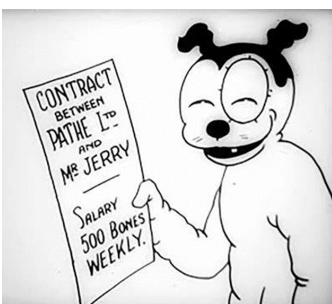
Méliès' most famous work is, of course, *Le Voyage Dans La Lune* (1902), but this was just one of many elaborate fantasy films he made, which often featured gorgeous colour stencilling. As the 1900s wore on, the novelty of Méliès' work began to pale, and he made his last film in 1912. Though subsequently bankrupted and forgotten, the French film industry later recognised his phenomenal contributions to early cinema, awarding him the Legion of Honour medal, and providing him a rent free home for the rest of his life. Méliès died in 1938. His tomb at Père Lachaise cemetery is inscribed with the words "Createur du spectacles"; an apt epitaph.

Ladislav Starevich (1882 – 1965)

Starevich was a pioneer of stop-motion animation. Born Wladyslaw Starewicz to Polish-Russian parents, his early career combined his interests in art and nature. While working for The Museum of Natural History, he attempted to make an educational film about Stag Beetles. Finding the creatures to be unco-operative film stars – they were only active at night time, and frequently died under the hot lights – he decided to try animating dead specimens instead. The success of this effort saw him create many similar films, including *The Grasshopper* and *The Ant*. The dreamlike quality of these shorts still create a magical atmosphere that enchants and amuses.

After the Russian Revolution, Starevich moved to France, where he made films throughout the 1920s. He later moved on to making films using animated puppets. *The Town Rat and The Country Rat* was a playful pastiche of American slapstick comedies, and Starevich paid homage more directly in *Amour Noir et Blanc*, which features a Chaplin puppet.

Sid Griffiths (1901 – 1967)



Sid Griffiths' most famous creation, 'Jerry the Troublesome Tyke'.

As animated cartoons became more popular, increasingly sophisticated films were made. Max Fleischer's *Out of the Inkwell* series pioneered a mixture of live action and animation, featuring the animator interacting with the character he was drawing, Koko the Clown. Less well known are a British series of films modelled after the *Inkwell* shorts by Welsh animator Sid Griffiths. Griffiths created the *Jerry The Troublesome Tyke* films in the mid 1920s; they were included in Pathé's newsreel packages as a bit of light relief from current affairs. Jerry was a cute little puppy, who frequently caused problems for animator Griffiths, who also appears on the screen. This programme will feature *Curing a Cold*, scanned from a 35mm original in The Cinema Museum collection.

Griffiths' later work included creating animations to accompany Stanley Holloway's monologues like *Sam and His Musket* and *The Lion and Albert* in a series of shorts from the 1930s. He also worked on the 1954 version of *Animal Farm*.

Pinto Colvig (1892 – 1967)

The name of Pinto Colvig is best remembered as the voice of cartoon characters from Disney cartoons: he was the original voice of Goofy, as well as Sleepy and Grumpy from *Snow White*. However, he was also an animator himself, and spent much of the 1920s working on animations for Mack Sennett.

Most studios incorporated some animated gags in their films and would have an in-house animator/visual effects whiz on hand to provide some animated drawings for extra comic punch. The work could be fairly pedestrian – stars drawn above a character's head when they were dazed, for instance, or moths appearing from an old suit – but Colvig often created some quite elaborate little gags. In today's programme, animated gags from some prime Sennett shorts show off his skills; playing straight men to the cartoon images are Sid Smith, Harry Langdon and Ben Turpin.

Charley Bowers (1889 – 1946)

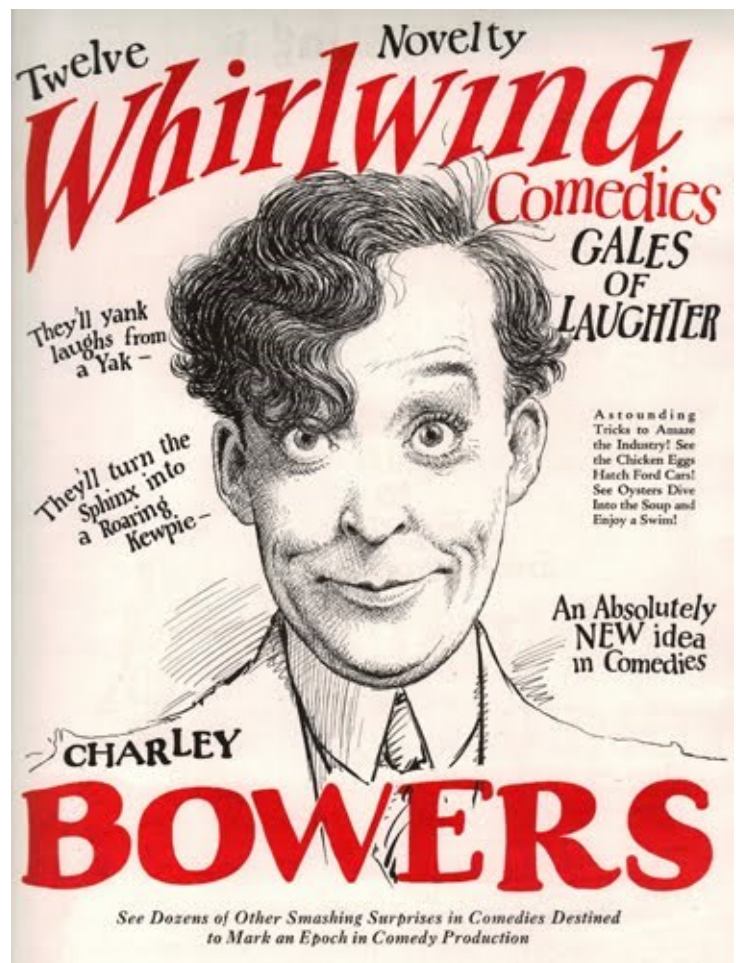
An inventor, animator, illustrator and comedian, Charley Bowers was one of the most unique talents of the silent era. In the late 1920s, he produced a series of brilliantly original short films combining live action comedy with stop motion animation. These shorts turned the traditional silent comedy film on its head, and created a bizarre world that Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear or Salvador Dali would have been proud of.

Bowers' early years are shrouded in myth and mystery, but by the mid 1910s he had fallen into newspaper cartoonist work, and then animation. He worked on a series called 'Pif and Paf', and ultimately worked up to being head animator at his own studio on a series of 'Mutt and Jeff' cartoons, which continued successfully until 1925.

By the mid-1920s, Bowers was becoming interested in the possibilities of using his animation talents in conjunction with live action film. He must have sensed an affinity between his cartoons and the madcap world of silent comedy then blossoming, and seems to have been especially influenced by Buster Keaton's approach. So, in the mid-20s he patented a filming process for mixing the two. To show off his process and perhaps create a wider market for it, he embarked upon a series of 12 'Whirlwind comedies', co-directed with H.L. Muller, and starring himself. Often he played an inventor, whose inventions soon run amok and leave chaos in their wake. We'll be spotlighting two such examples from the series today. An excerpt from *He Done His Best* (1926) shows one of his finest – and funniest – stop motion sequences, set in an automated restaurant. Rounding out our programme is the complete short *Now You Tell One* (1927), one of Bower's most elaborate and far-out efforts – once seen, never forgotten!

Bowers made one more series of shorts for Educational Pictures, and a sole talkie, *It's A Bird*, before heading back to illustration and animation work.

- Matthew Ross



A trade ad for Charley Bowers' first series of two-reel comedies; the drawing is a self-portrait.

RARITIES & REDISCOVERIES

A FATAL FLIRTATION

A Keystone film, produced by Mack Sennett. Released 25TH May 1914. Directed by George Nichols.

CAST: Charlie Murray

One of the threads in this weekend's programme is a spotlight on neglected comedian Charlie Murray. Born in 1872, Murray had a long career, from Keystone through to character parts and starring roles in 1930s features. His half-moon gurn and putty-like nose gave him an instant comic mask, and made him a perfect fit for Sennett's world of living caricatures. A reliable performer, Murray essayed a range of put-upon husbands, angry farmers and grimacing policemen for Sennett through to the mid 1920s. Later, he found work in character parts in features, ultimately appearing for several years as an Irish stereotype 'Kelly' to George Sidney's Jewish 'Cohen' in the 'Cohens and Kellys' franchise. These ethnic comedies are now rather too outdated to re-vive, but were hugely popular in their day, and continued well into the sound era. Murray remained busy until the late 1930s, and died in 1941.

This typically rambunctious Keystone comedy features Murray as a French count who challenges a rival to a duel over the affections of his secretary. Brent Walker, in his book *Mack Sennett's Fun Factory*, sums up the rest of the film neatly: "*Bricks, pies and other objects are thrown along the way*". Today's screening is of a 35mm print from the Chris Bird Collection, scanned by The Archive Film Agency.



HOGAN'S ARISTOCRATIC DREAM

A Keystone film, produced by Mack Sennett. Released 25TH May 1914. Directed by George Nichols.

CAST: Charlie Murray, Bobby Dunn.

The Keystone films were more varied than we often think, and sometimes the brick-throwing and police chases would be laid aside for more subtle character comedy. Take this film, for instance. It again stars Charlie Murray, but the film's pace is quite leisurely this time, the characters quite well-developed, and it even indulges in some fantasy sequences.

Murray appears as a high-class tramp, an essay in shabby gentility. Much of the humour in this short comes from the contrast of his comic haughtiness with his low station in life, and he even has a lackey, played by diminutive comic Bobby Dunn. The eponymous dream sequence takes the pair to a costume drama setting that again challenges our modern view of the Keystone comedy style. This screening is of a 35mm print from the BFI archive.

THE FAKE ALARM

Arrow Comedies. Directed by Eddie Lyons.

CAST: Bobby Dunn.



Bobby Dunn returns! By the mid-1920s, Dunn had become a star in his own right, albeit on a small scale at independent companies like Arrow. After teaming with lanky Slim Summerville at Sennett – a sure-fire comic contrast that also resulted in a lifelong friendship – he appeared in his own starring series. In these films, Dunn appears as the archetypal 'low' silent comedian: small, with bowler hat and toothbrush moustache. One feature uniquely Dunn's own was a glass eye, the result of a diving accident, that gave him a slightly otherworldly appearance.

Dunn has always been somewhat brushed off as a silent comedy also-ran, but this is unfair. To be sure, he was no A-lister, but he was a capable acrobat, deft handler of visual humour and consistently amusing in shorts like this one. Like Our Gang's *The Fourth Alarm*, this film is a burlesque on the recent firehouse drama *The Third Alarm*. It was directed by fellow Third Banana Eddie Lyons, who also starred in Arrow comedies, and during the previous decade had been part of a comedy team with Lee Moran.

In talkies, Bobby Dunn became a prolific bit player. You can spot him in films made at Sennett, RKO and Educational pictures, as well as several B-westerns. These were frequently insignificant parts, but now and then he would appear in a plum gag role. Many of his best opportunities came at the Hal Roach studio: he's the cross-eyed messenger boy in Laurel & Hardy's *Me and My Pal*, and the persistent shoplifter in *Tit for Tat*. He died, at the young age of 46, in 1937. *The Fake Alarm* exists in a 35mm print from the Dave Glass Collection, scanned by The Archive Film Agency.

ADVENTUROUS AMBROSE

LKO. Released April 17th, 1918. Directed by Walter S Fredericks.

CAST: Mack Swain, Jim Perrin, Molly Malone, Bobby Dunn.

The hulking Mack Swain was a familiar face to audiences right through the silent era. Hit by the theatre bug from an early age – he once stole all his mother's linen to create an amateur circus in his backyard – he formed his own stage company and toured the U.S. extensively. As movies began to steal audiences away from live theatre, he reluctantly joined Keystone studios in 1913. Arriving around the same time as Charlie Chaplin, he quickly became a supporter and friend of the young comedian, appearing with him

in early films such as *Laughing Gas*. Swain created the character of 'Ambrose', a put-upon husband, whose drooping dignity created an amusing contrast with his burly frame.

He was frequently paired with Chester Conklin as 'Ambrose & Walrus', and later took his character to L-KO ('Lehrman Knock-Out' comedies, the imprint of notorious director Henry Lehrman). *Adventurous Ambrose* is one of the films he made there, and details Swain's attempts to run a seaside inn. Look out for Bobby Dunn popping up again as one of the hotel patrons, and Molly Malone—soon to become Roscoe Arbuckle's leading lady—as Swain's long-suffering wife. Previously, only reel one was known to exist of this film, but Christopher Bird has now restored the full film. This new version receives its premiere here today.

Swain later worked with Chaplin again in his First National films, such as *The Idle Class* and *The Pilgrim*. His last, and most famous, appearance with the comedian was as Big Jim in *The Gold Rush*. Swain appeared in many other supporting roles, before his death in 1935. This screening is from a 35mm print from the Chris Bird Collection, scanned by The Archive Film Agency.

HOT SANDS

Grand-Asher. Released 1924. Directed by Herman C Raymaker

CAST: Monty Banks, Bill Blaisdell, Ena Gregory.



The dapper little Italian Monty Banks (birth name Mario Bianchi) made some wonderful short comedies and features, before becoming a prolific and talented comedy director in the British film industry. If you were at last year's Silent Laughter event, you'll probably remember Banks' comedy *Play Safe*, with its death defying runaway train stunts.

Monty made early appearances at L-KO and in Roscoe Arbuckle's supporting company, before appearing in his own independent comedies. By 1924, he had been turning out well-crafted, gag-packed pictures for four years. As you'll see, Banks' style owed a little to Harold Lloyd and Max Linder, but he had his own unique way with a gag. Here he puts his spin on that classic silent comedy subgenre, the beachfront comedy. There's lots to enjoy in this film, not least Monty's version of a routine also used by Max Linder and Charley Chase, where he stages a fight with himself. The seafront scenes appear to be filmed at Venice Beach, the backdrop for many a one or two-reeler.

Playing Monty's rival is his regular 'heavy', Bill Blaisdell. An experienced veteran of comic operas on stage, Blaisdell had appeared in Rolin comedies with Harold Lloyd and Snub Pollard, before he settled down for a regular gig in the Banks unit. Playing a succession of villains, bosses, irate fathers-in-law and other authority figures, Blaisdell would be to Monty what Eric Campbell was to Chaplin and Big Joe Roberts was to Buster Keaton. The leading lady is Ena Gregory, who performed the same duties for Stan Laurel around the same time.

HAZEL FROM HOLLYWOOD

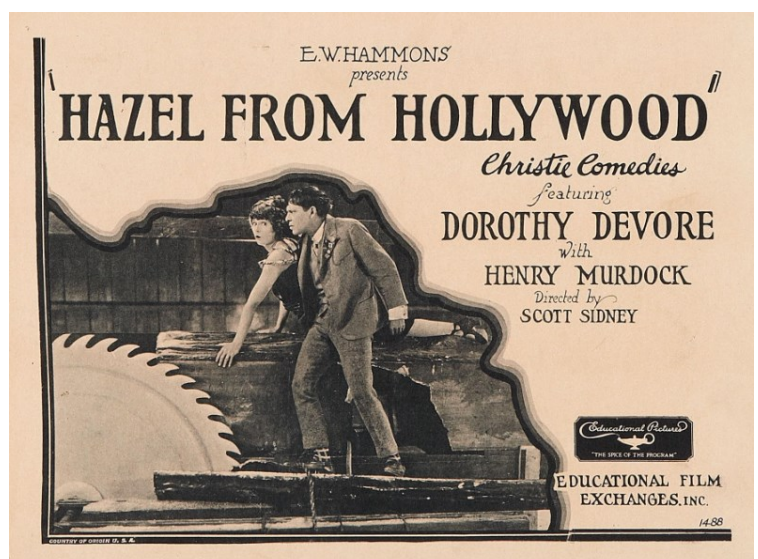
Al Christie/Educational Pictures. Released 1923. Directed by Scott Sidney.

CAST: Dorothy Devore, Henry Murdock.

Dorothy Devore was one of producer Al Christie's main stars between the late teens and mid 1920s. Christie specialised in a more genteel, situational style of comedy; this *modus operandi* provided more opportunities for women to feature than in the slapstick patriarchy of the other studios.

Like Mabel Normand and Wanda Wiley, Devore managed to present a realist, down-to-earth performing style, but didn't shy away from the physical side of comedy, either. *Hold Your Breath* features her version of Harold Lloyd's stunt climbing, and *Hazel From Hollywood* throws her into the madness of silent film melodramas and stunts.

She was promoted to features at Fox and Warner Brothers, but found herself in an iron-clad contract playing second fiddle to canine star Rin-Tin-Tin, and soon longed to return to comedy shorts. She did so in the late 1920s when her contract expired. Her work is sadly hard to see today, but surviving entries such as *Getting Gertie's Goat* and the aforementioned *Hold Your Breath* are most enjoyable. Unfortunately, only one reel of *Hazel From Hollywood* survives, but this rare treat—a 16mm print from the Chris Bird Collection—gives a good taste of Dorothy Devore's talents.



OH! WHAT A NURSE! (1926)

Warner Brothers. Released March 7th, 1926.

Directed by Charles F. Reisner. Written by Darryl F. Zanuck (with uncredited contributions from Syd Chaplin & Charles Reisner), from a story by Bertram Bloch & Robert E. Sherwood. Cinematography by John J. Mescall.

Cast: Syd Chaplin, Patsy Ruth Miller, Matthew Betz, Gayne Whitman, Edith York, David Torrence.

Sydney Chaplin will forever be in his little brother's shadow, but he was a very capable comic in his own right. As a young man, Syd was a featured comedian in the music halls while Charlie was still an obscure juvenile; he had his own touring company in Fred Karno's outfit, and played lead in a number of sketches. In fact, it was Syd who persuaded 'The Guv'nor' to take a chance on Charlie in the first place.

When Charlie left Karno for films and had success at Keystone Studios, the tables would be forever turned, but Syd continued to chase a starring career until the end of the 1920s. A complex man who seemed to frequently run into conflict in Hollywood, Syd's screen career was an on-again, off-again affair, interpolated with work running Charlie's business interests.

His first screen efforts were also at Keystone, where Charlie had persuaded Sennett to hire his brother when he departed. Syd's Keystones mostly centred around the character of Reginald Gussle, a variation on the Edwardian dandy types he had portrayed for Karno. His career with Sennett culminated with the impressive four reel *A Submarine Pirate*; this film was a big success, and even used by the Navy to boost recruitment. However, comedian and producer did not get on, and Syd's contract would not be renewed. His next work was behind the scenes, negotiating Charlie Chaplin's record breaking deals with Mutual and First National, working as gagwriter and generally being a rock for his younger brother. As Lisa Stein Haven notes, "Sydney Chaplin is best known for the work that he accomplished on Charlie's behalf in 1916-18, three short years, really, in what was a very long life. This is either suggestive of his wizardry as a businessman or critical commentary on the rest of his life's achievements". Despite his devotion to Charlie's career in these years, his own performing instincts could not be silenced, and he appears in some wonderful character bits in Chaplin First National films: a lunch wagon vendor in *A Dog's Life*; dual roles as a Tommy and Kaiser Wilhelm in *Shoulder Arms* and no less than three different roles in *The Pilgrim*.



As the 1920s began, Syd began to start giving some serious thought to reviving his own career, independent of his brother. His initial starring feature, *King, Queen, Joker*, was an elaborate comedy filmed on location around Europe, but proved an expensive, and humbling, failure. After this, he was unable to find backing for a starring vehicle for a couple of years, but worked his way up in supporting roles, including *The Galloping Fish* and *The Perfect Flapper*, with Colleen Moore.

The film that eventually broke him through as a starring film comedian was an adaptation of the popular play *Charley's Aunt*, made for Al Christie. The result was a popular hit, and led to Warner Brothers hiring Syd for a series of films, beginning with *The Man on the Box*. Of course, Hollywood loves to repeat a successful formula, and Syd's vehicles played on this by incorporating excuses for him to repeat his female impersonation turn from *Charley's Aunt*. It must be said that the comedian himself seemed to have no reservations about this, and rather relished playing in drag. Syd's performances in skirts draw on the classic English music hall tradition of the pantomime dame; both Chaplin brothers were enormous fans of Dan Leno, one of the finest exponents of the art. Leno's influence certainly comes through in Syd's female characters, as well as those of other English comedians such as Stan Laurel and Lupino Lane. Syd's drag act went right back to the Karno sketches; one in particular, *The Hydro*, was something of a forerunner to this film in that it saw him playing a matronly nurse at a health spa.

Oh! What a Nurse! features his most sustained role in drag, and provides opportunities for Syd to essay not just the titular role, but also to play the part of an old woman. The plot features him as Jerry Clark, an Agony

Aunt for a newspaper who turns undercover reporter when he hears about a plot to abduct an heiress. Along the way, he adopts disguises to get the bottom of the matter.

At the helm of this film was the fine comedy director Charles F. Reisner. Syd and Reisner knew each other from way back in the Keystone days; Reisner had also appeared in Charlie Chaplin's films, most notably as a thug in *The Kid*. The pair happily worked on gags together and formed an excellent working relationship. Unfortunately the same could not be said for the film's feminine lead, Patsy Ruth Miller. Miller had already starred in some prestigious roles (most notably as Esmerelda in Lon Chaney's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*) and resented being posted to the Chaplin film. "*I didn't enjoy making it, and I thought [Chaplin] was rather common—sort of a music hall type of comic,*" she later recalled, with more than a hint of snobbery.

Oh! What a Nurse was finished in late 1925, and released in March, 1926. Like most of Syd's other starring vehicles, it received negative reviews but still managed to be a success at the box office. It proved to be the culmination of the comedian's drag roles, and his next part – as the gruff British soldier 'Old Bill' in *The Better 'Ole* (1927) – would be decidedly more masculine.

In her Syd Chaplin biography, Lisa Stein Haven recalls being shown one of two sole surviving prints of *Oh! What A Nurse* by Serge Bromberg, a print so fragile that it required hand cranking through the Steenbeck. M. Bromberg's excellent work in preserving this fragile print has led to the newly restored version we are now able to see. Shown as a work-in-progress rough scan at last year's Pordenone, it managed to be one of the hits of the festival, even in such a ragged form. Thanks to M. Bromberg's kindness, we are delighted to share this incredibly rare film with you this evening. Syd Chaplin may not quite achieve the level of comic brilliance of his brother – who does? – but his films are more than worth reviving, and he deserves a spot in the limelight again. We hope you enjoy this rare opportunity to see him in his prime.

Preceding the main feature are two related short films:

THE MASQUERADER

A Keystone film, produced by Mack Sennett. Released August 27th, 1914.

Written and directed by Charlie Chaplin.

CAST: Charlie Chaplin, Charlie Murray, Mabel Normand, Roscoe Arbuckle.

The younger Chaplin brother also enjoyed some opportunities to act in drag. The popularity of the Tramp costume meant that he rarely employed the device once his fame reached a certain level, (it would have been somewhat difficult to incorporate it while wearing his famous moustache!) but in the early days of Keystone, it was another comic device from his music hall days to draw upon. The half-reel short *A Busy Day* features his brief turn as the harridan wife of Mack Swain, but *The Masquerader* lets him showcase a rather more nuanced and feminine side. In this film, he dresses as a woman to make a fool of the director who fires him from his job at the Keystone studios. This premise also allows for some fantastic glimpses behind the scenes of the studios, and allows several other Keystone players to appear as themselves, including Roscoe Arbuckle and Chester Conklin. Playing the film director is comedian Charlie Murray, who pops up quite a lot this weekend, from Keystone shorts in our *Rarities & Rediscoveries* programme, to the comedy thriller *The Gorilla*.



Chaplin only made one more drag film after this, 1915's *A Woman*. He returned to the movie studio setting a few more times though; see tomorrow evening's showing of *Behind The Screen* for more!

FATTY'S WINE PARTY

A Keystone film, produced by Mack Sennett. Released 25TH May 1914. Written and directed by Roscoe Arbuckle.

CAST: Roscoe Arbuckle, Mabel Normand, Syd Chaplin, Mack Swain, Alice Davenport, Frank Hayes, Charley Chase, Al St John.



Syd Chaplin's very first film is a rarity, but survives in the BFI's collection. As the title suggests, it also features Roscoe 'Fatty' Arbuckle in the cast; however, Arbuckle really plays second fiddle to Syd's antics as a comic waiter. One theory is that this was an audition film for the unknown Syd, with Arbuckle's presence a form of insurance to help turn out a releasable film.

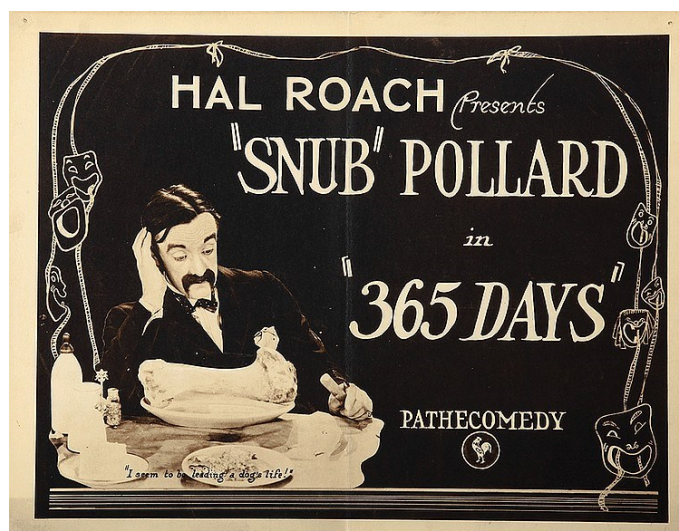
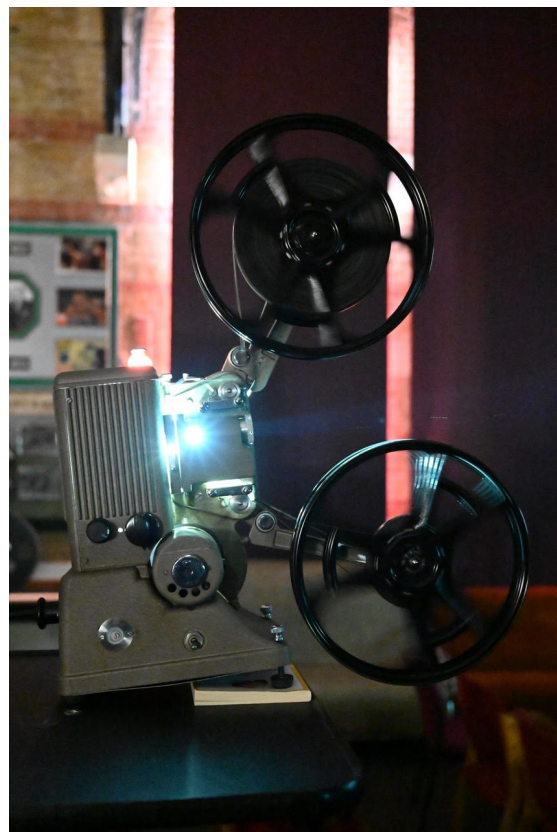
As well as Arbuckle, there is an impressive line-up of other silent comedy talent in support: Mabel Normand, Charley Chase, Mack Swain and Al St John all show up. According to Lisa Stein Haven's Syd Chaplin biography, Roscoe and Syd became good friends, although later had a falling out when Chaplin claimed that Arbuckle stole a story idea from him. This print is a 35mm copy from the BFI.

- Matthew Ross

ONLY ON 9.5mm

Following on from our previous 9.5mm screenings and the *Only on 8mm* presentation at our 2023 Silent Laughter Weekend, Chris Bird introduces a selection of silent comedies on the 9.5mm home movie gauge. For those unfamiliar with the format (and there *must* be at least one or two attending this screening!), 9.5mm was an amateur gauge introduced in 1922 by Pathé in France. It achieved compactness while also retaining image quality by having the frame extend to almost the entire width of the film, which had its perforations in the middle (on the frame line, out of view), rather than being placed at the edge or edges. The resultant size of frame was similar to that of the 16mm gauge that was introduced in America a year later. During its long commercial life, 9.5mm offered prints for sale of an enormous number of films and, being on a safety-film base intended for home use was not subject to the nitrate decomposition that destroyed many of the original 35mm materials. Today's programme comprises some of the best of the numerous silent comedies that are only known to exist in their 9.5mm versions, printed up anywhere from eighty to a hundred years ago. Some will be screened digitally but many will be original prints shown on a 1950s Specto projector upgraded to HID lighting.

Not least because of the fragility of the original 9.5mm prints, programme content is subject to change. At the time of writing the intention is to include some rare Harold Lloyd, many of whose early films were destroyed in a vault fire on Lloyd's estate in 1943 but which, in some instances, have since turned up on 9.5mm (including his first using the 'glasses' character). We hope also to have footage of Harry Langdon, Al St. John, an Oliver Hardy rarity and the first-ever *Our Gang* comedy, produced at Hal Roach studios. This series, featuring an ensemble of children (but most definitely not aimed at an exclusively young audience) was started off in 1922 by director Charley Chase – featured elsewhere as a comedian during this weekend – who at that time was also directing Australian-born comic Snub Pollard, who had graduated to his own series after supporting Harold Lloyd. Roach and Pollard had initially worked together at Essanay, where Pollard was also in Chaplin's films. We hope to include one of the best of Pollard's Chase-directed shorts, *365 Days* (known on 9.5 as *The Fortune Hunters*), which rivals Pollard's more famous *It's a Gift* for its domestic mechanical ingenuity. Also present are regular leading lady Marie Mosquini, comic heavy Noah Young and the perpetual elderly gent Jack Duffy (who was really only in his 40s!). In parallel to Charley Chase, there may also be something with his brother, who as a comedian worked under the name Paul Parrott. We are also hoping to include one of the long-running *Hall Room Boys* series, which was adapted from a newspaper comic strip drawn by Harold Arthur McGill from 1906 to 1923. These films began in 1920 and were produced by Jack and Harry Cohn (later of Columbia Pictures), for release initially on a State's Rights basis, then through Federated Film Exchanges. Directors included Harry Edwards and Gil Pratt. The leading characters, 'Percy' and 'Ferdie', earned their generic name from a favoured hangout, the hallroom of the boarding house in which they live. The stories often concerned their attempts to crash society; Gus Flannigan and Neely Edwards appeared early in the run, with Harry McCoy, Jimmy Adams, Sid Smith and George Williams variously taking over as the series went on. Marion Mack, familiar now as Keaton's leading lady in *The General*, appeared in some of these, which were proclaimed in one contemporary advertisement as 'the most wholesome comedies on earth'. Again at the time of writing, prime contender from this series is *High Flyers* (1922), directed by Alfred Santell. Known on 9.5mm as *Sky High*, this example has Sid Smith and George Williams in the lead roles and shares some common ground – or, without giving too much away, airspace – with *365 Days*. Ubiquitous comedy foil Bud Jamison does a brief bit as a cop. This print also demonstrates the sometime 9.5 habit of saving footage by superimposing some of the narrative titling instead of inserting intertitles.



- Glenn Mitchell

THE PATSY (1928)

MGM/Cosmopolitan. Producers: Marion Davies, William Randolph Hearst (uncredited), King Vidor (uncredited). Released March 10th, 1928.

Directed by King Vidor.

Story: Barry Conners (play). Screen Adaptation:

Agnes Christine Johnston. Titles: Ralph Spence.

Cinematography: John F. Seitz. Editor: Hugh Wynn.

Art Direction: Cedric Gibbons.

CAST: Marion Davies (Patricia Harrington), Orville Caldwell (Tony Anderson), Marie Dressler (Ma Harrington), Lawrence Gray (Billy Caldwell), Dell Henderson (Pa Harrington), Jane Winton (Grace Harrington)



Plot Synopsis:

The story concerns Patricia Harrington, a girl who "runs second" to her older sister. She is the patsy who is blamed whenever anything goes wrong, and is forced to remain in the background in order that her sister may be presented to advantage. Her father, a travelling man, is on her side. Jealous that her older sister, Grace (Jane Winton), has landed handsome and successful Tony Anderson (Orville Caldwell), Patricia Harrington (Marion Davies) launches an elaborate charm offensive to win his heart. Patricia shrugs off her diffidence and, in the hope that Tony will be drawn to her new persona, tries to carry herself with the self-confidence of the era's silent film stars. When this doesn't have the desired effect, Patricia takes things a step further.

"We doubt Barry Conner's comedy would have made such a delightful picture, but for the magic touch of Agnes Christine Johnston in the adaptation; the fine balance of comedy and drama by Director King Vidor; and the exquisite portrayal of Patsy by Marion Davies. Marion's impersonations of Pola Negri, Lillian Gish and Mae Murray are captivating. An "ugly duckling" story, but clean and amusing." - Photoplay, May 1928

Director King Vidor's talents had been enlisted into assisting the Marion Davies Cosmopolitan production camp by Davies' partner and patron/producer, newspaper tycoon William Randolph Hearst, via his proven merits helming *The Big Parade*, an impressive and favourite film of the pair, and he turned his hand to polish the direction and see completion of Davies' vehicle *The Red Mill* (1927), directed in the main by Roscoe Arbuckle, working under the name of William Goodrich. This association resulted in a successful three-picture run for Vidor and Davies, the final two in silents for both, *The Patsy*, followed by *Show People*, both produced in 1928 and proving to be pinnacles of female-led romantic comedies of the era, followed by one talkie, *Not So Dumb*, in 1930.

"The Screen Premier Comedienne. Marion Davies shines and sparkles, dazzles, and delights. All this in "The Patsy," the best, I think, of her comedies, despite its kinship to the Cinderella yarn. But it has warmth and fun, a gay understanding of human nature, and ironic touches not usually seen in cinema versions of the browbeaten younger sister who wins beautiful, elder sister's beau. Undoubtedly this is because King Vidor directed it. In the course of the picture, for no very urgent reason, Miss Davies offers impersonations of Lillian Gish, Pola Negri, and Mae Murray. They are clever, biting, and immensely funny. Jane Winton is Grace Harrington, the selfish sister, and is beautiful enough to be forgiven anything. Marie Dressler, as Ma Harrington, who sides with Grace, plays with irresistible gusto and, of course, her usual skill, while Del Henderson is poor, sat-upon Pa Harrington, who champions Patsy. Orville Caldwell and Lawrence Gray are the young men involved, both apparently enjoying their roles to the utmost. Mustn't miss this, really." Picture-Play, August 1928

- Michelle Facey

FOCUS ON VITAGRAPH

Another programme of comedies spotlighting a specific studio, presented by Dave Glass and Glenn Mitchell. This ongoing feature of KB weekend events – assuming Dave and Glenn keep it up! – concentrates this time on Vitagraph, one of the earliest film companies and among the foremost in both the comedy and drama fields during the 1910s.

Vitagraph, based in New York, was formed in 1897 by Albert E. Smith, J. Stuart Blackton and William 'Pop' Rock, all of whom were born in England. Rock, from Birmingham, was a billiard hall proprietor who in 1896 acquired rights to exhibit films using Thomas A. Edison's new projection apparatus, the 'Vitascope'. Rock went into business with a carnival showman and tightrope performer named Walter J. Wainwright, with whom he first presented films at the West End Amusement Centre in New Orleans. Again in 1896, Sheffield-born Blackton, a newspaper cartoonist, picked up the rudiments of film when conducting an interview with Edison, who filmed Blackton doing a lightning sketch of him. Blackton was persuaded to acquire a print of the film – along with some others – plus a projector, in order to screen them as part of a theatre act he did with Albert E. Smith. A stage magician born in Faversham, Kent, Smith worked with Blackton and a third partner, Ronald Reader, in a touring show that included conjuring tricks, ventriloquism and, most significantly, magic lantern presentations. The partnership's success with bought-in films led to the formation of Vitagraph when they wanted to produce their own. Vitagraph later established agencies in London, Paris and Berlin; some of the Dutch-language prints in the archives of EYE Amsterdam carry identification for Vitagraph's Paris office on the end titles. They also acquired distribution rights to foreign subjects, notably the French productions of Georges Méliès, another former stage magician who had seen the potential of moving pictures (Vitagraph eventually acquired the US end of his business). Their first 'studio' was on a New York rooftop but a purpose-designed building was later constructed at Flatbush, in the Brooklyn area. Vitagraph quickly established a reputation for trick films – represented in today's programme – and especially for a skilful mixture of drama and comedy. Both elements were found in the films of Florence Turner, John Bunny and Flora Finch, the former Biograph, Solax and Gem actor Billy Quirk and in the situational humour of Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Drew.

By 1917, Vitagraph had also established a studio in Los Angeles, following the migration west of the independent producers who had sought to escape the influence of the Motion Picture Patents Company, an industry trust of which Vitagraph was a member. It was shortly before this move that Larry Semon was hired to write and direct for Frank Daniels, Hughie Mack, Jimmy Aubrey, Earl Montgomery and Joe Rock, representing a shift of emphasis from relatively sophisticated fare into a more knockabout style of comedy. The company logo for these films would vary from year to year, describing itself variously as 'Big V', 'Greater Vitagraph', and so on. Montgomery and Rock were among the comedians making up 'The Big V Riot Squad', a rival to Mack Sennett's Keystone Cops.

Vitagraph was the only member of the Motion Picture Patents Company – and its would-be successor, 'V-L-S-E' – to survive into the 1920s. It was absorbed into Warner Brothers in 1925, though the name survived in terms of distribution, even on some of Warners' cartoon shorts. In 1926, Warner Brothers named their new sound system 'Vitaphone' in apparent commemoration. When they reissued the Mack Sennett comedies they had acquired in 1939, Warners sometimes intercut the material with scenes from Vitagraph's backlog, which in subsequent years may have caused confusion as to where the footage had originated.

THE DISINTEGRATED CONVICT

Released 21st August 1907. Credits unavailable but presumably directed by J. Stuart Blackton.

CAST: Unconfirmed – title role possibly William V. Ranous.

J. Stuart Blackton is known to have experimented with the techniques of stop-motion (i.e. single-frame photography) at least as early as 1900 and is often regarded as the father of animated film, as in his *Humorous Phases of Funny Faces* from 1906. Films like *The Haunted Hotel* (1907) combined this with effects using wires and similar contrivances. In this category, *The Disintegrated Convict* is a clever and sometimes macabre trick film variously using editing, stop-motion and dummies. Vitagraph's trademark appears prominently on screen, a common practice among early film studios to discourage unauthorised copying at a time before films were subject to effective copyright protection.



A TINTYPE ROMANCE

Released 6th December 1910. Directed by Larry Trimble.

CAST: Florence Turner, Leo Delaney, Kenneth Kasey, Adele DeGarde, William Shea and Jean, the Vitagraph dog.

Former child actress Florence Turner joined Vitagraph in 1906 and was known simply as 'the Vitagraph Girl' (rather as her contemporary Florence Lawrence was 'the Biograph Girl') until becoming one of the first named film stars four years later. She and director Larry Trimble subsequently relocated to England, where they made films using the studio facilities of Cecil M. Hepworth (a surviving example, *Daisy Doodad's Dial* from 1914, has been seen at KB). Previously a journalist, Trimble kept dogs as pets and had a gift for training them. He was on Vitagraph's premises when writing a series of articles and was told they needed a dog for a script that was presently on hold. Trimble took a stray dog that had been hiding in a garage and trained it within twenty-four hours. The rescued animal became 'Jean, the Vitagraph Dog' – the movies' first canine star – while Trimble remained to become one of the studio's top directors. This screening is from a scan of a 35mm print from the Library of Congress, courtesy of Ed Lorusso.

THE GOLF GAME AND THE BONNET

Released 26th December 1913. Directed by George D. Baker.

CAST: John Bunny, Flora Finch, Wally Van, Richard Leslie, Roma Raymond, Jack Harvey, Arthur Cozine, Claire McCormack.



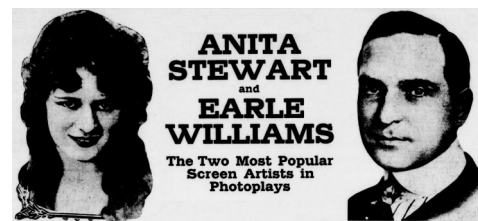
Former stage actor John Bunny joined Vitagraph – taking a considerable pay cut – in 1910. His enormously round frame contrasted effectively with that of his frequent co-star, the angular English-born actress Flora Finch. While they also worked separately, their joint appearances gained sufficient popularity to acquire the nickname ‘Bunnyfinches’. Bunny and Larry Trimble travelled to the British Isles in 1912, where their films included three one-reel subjects based on episodes from Charles Dickens’s *The Pickwick Papers*. Two of these survive, along with a comedy based around a real-life event, *Bunny at the Derby*. Bunny’s fame was truly global. Following his early death in 1915, a studio in Russia engaged a lookalike to continue the series starring ‘Pockson’ (or ‘Poxon’), as Bunny was known in that country. Flora Finch tried to launch her own production company but eventually was seen only in supporting and extra roles (her last was in the 1937 Laurel & Hardy feature *Way Out West*). Today’s print of *The Golf Game and the Bonnet* is from the collection of Chris Bird.

THE RIGHT GIRL?

Released 20th January 1915. Written and directed by Ralph Ince.

CAST: Earle Williams, Anita Stewart, William R. Dunn, Anders Randolph.

Former stage actor and newspaper photographer Earle Williams was regularly teamed at Vitagraph with Anita Stewart, their biggest hit probably being *The Jugger-naut* (1915) for which the producers wrecked a real train. In the same year, they also co-starred in the studio’s first serial, *The Goddess*. Williams went on to star as Maurice Leblanc’s gentleman thief *Arsène Lupin* in 1917. Anita Stewart was the younger sister of Vitagraph star Lucille Lee, who had married writer/director Ralph Ince (their youngest sibling, George Stewart, also acted at Vitagraph). Ince, the brother of actor John E. Ince and producer Thomas H. Ince, was a former animator who had also famously played the role of Abraham Lincoln on screen. Anita Stewart eventually left Vitagraph to form ‘Anita Stewart Productions’ with Louis B. Mayer after having been assigned different directors whom she considered unsatisfactory. There was a court case over breach of contract but her feature-film career continued until the late 1920s. Vitagraph’s policy of destroying negatives after their films’ initial release has led to many titles being lost to posterity. Even those that do survive are often affected by nitrate decomposition and this, sadly, applies to part of today’s copy of *The Right Girl?*, which is a scan from an original 35mm print in the collection of the Archive Film Agency.



BOOBLEY’S BABY

Released 26th April 1915. Produced by Sidney Drew. Written by Paul West.

CAST: Mr. & Mrs. Sidney Drew, Eddie Dunn.



In the 2023 *Silent Laughter* weekend we screened *His First Love*, one of the Metro-produced comedies starring Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Drew. They had previously been known for their series at Vitagraph, which commenced soon after their marriage. Drew, a noted stage actor and uncle of the Barrymore family, entered films with Kalem in 1911 and moved to Vitagraph in 1913. Later that year his wife, actress Gladys Rankin, died and by the end of 1914 he had remarried. His second wife was Vitagraph scenarist Lucille McVey, who also acted under the name Jane Morrow. Their comedies are essentially domestic and situational, frequently – but not exclusively – casting them as a married couple. Without going into sufficient detail to create a ‘spoiler’, *Boobley’s Baby* is a sometimes outrageous departure from their genteel image. Also in the cast is another Vitagraph regular of the time, Eddie Dunn, who plays the tall office practical joker. Dunn is better remembered for his work as actor and sometime director (with Charley Chase) at Hal Roach in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

BULLIES AND BULLETS

Released 8th January 1917. Directed by Larry Semon. Written by C. Graham Baker and Larry Semon.

CAST: Hughie Mack, Patsy De Forest, Jimmy Aubrey, Alice Mann, Eddie Dunn.

Bullies and Bullets is in part an unusual addressing of the war then raging in Europe, albeit with perhaps only a limited idea of the reality of it, prior to America’s entry into the conflict. Eddie Dunn appears once more, as a wounded soldier. Its star, Hughie Mack – real name Hugh McGowan – came from Brooklyn. According to Terry Ramsaye’s pioneering history of the film industry, *A Million and One Nights* (1926), he had been an undertaker whose premises were near to the Vitagraph studio and had joined the queue for extra work out of sheer curiosity. His considerable rotundity led to roles



supporting the similarly-built John Bunny and, later, Bunny's brother George. Mack was subsequently promoted to his own series, directed by newcomer Larry Semon, of which *Bullies and Bullets* is a rare survivor. His later work was in supporting roles at Universal. Jimmy Aubrey was another of the Fred Karno comics from England who were recruited for American screen comedy (in today's film Aubrey comes over as a knock-off of both his fellow Karno comedian Charlie Chaplin and Keystone's Ford Sterling!). Originally from Bolton, Aubrey once had the role of 'The Terrible Turk', a hopeless wrestler, in Karno's sketch *Mumming Birds*. Aubrey had previously been at a New York studio, Starlight, before joining Vitagraph in 1917. Director Larry Semon made his first on-screen appearance in an Aubrey starring film called *Boasts and Boldness*. Aubrey's tenure at Vitagraph was interrupted by a stint at the Smallwood Film Company, where he was directed variously by William A. Seiter and C. Jay Williams. By the end of the 1920s Aubrey was in supporting roles, including two films with Laurel & Hardy, and spent most of his remaining career playing sidekicks in B-westerns (some of them produced by Stan Laurel, another Karno veteran). His last starring series, in the mid-1920s, had been produced by another former Vitagraph comedian, Joe Rock (some of whose concurrent films with – again – Stan Laurel and Monty Banks have been screened at previous KB events). Rock later produced films in England. For a while, he had been teamed at Vitagraph with Earl Montgomery before Albert E. Smith, seeking to double the profits from this successful pair, put them into separate series. We hope to include in a future screening the only starring film of Montgomery and Rock that is known to have survived, *Damsels and Dandies* (1919); for the meantime, both can be seen in the next film ...

TOUGH LUCK AND TIN LIZZIES

Released 22nd October 1917. Produced by Albert E. Smith. Directed by Larry Semon. Written by C. Graham Baker and Larry Semon.

CAST: Larry Semon, Florence Curtis, Joe Rock, Pietro Aramondo, Earl Montgomery, Eddie Dunn.

Mississippi-born Larry Semon was the son of stage magician 'Zera the Great' and, continuing an evident thread of magicians and cartoonists, was drawing cartoons for the New York *Sun* when Vitagraph approached him to write and direct comedies in 1916. Semon directed and scripted (in collaboration with Graham Baker) the comedies of Frank Daniels, Hughie Mack and Jimmy Aubrey for several months before also starting to appear in them, and by the end of 1917 was starring in his own series. Semon's films were action-packed, filled with wild gags and proved immensely popular both in English-speaking markets and in mainland Europe, where his white-faced Punchinello appearance recalled many of that continent's native clowns. Oliver Hardy worked in support of Semon for a lengthy period and recalled that he worked harder on gags than anyone he had known apart from Stan Laurel (who himself had a brief and less happy time working with Semon). The association with Vitagraph was a profitable one until Semon's increasingly lavish expenditure on his two-reelers led to his departure. By the mid-20s he was making his films for a new concern, Chadwick (where Jimmy Aubrey also worked for a time), for release through Educational.



This film is screened courtesy of Harpodeon.com

- Glenn Mitchell

THE GORILLA (1927)

Produced by Alfred Santell for Warner Brothers/First National. Released November 13th 1927.

Directed by Alfred Santell. Screenplay by Harry MacArthur and Alfred A Cohn, based on the play of the same name by Ralph Spence. Titles by Al Boasberg and Sidney Lazarus. Cinematography by Alfred Edeson.

CAST: Charlie Murray, Fred Kelsey, Walter Pidgeon, Alice Day, Tully Marshall, Syd Crossley, Claude Gillingwater, Charles Gemora.



One name that crops up again and again in the title credits of classic Hollywood films is Ralph Spence. Spence wrote scenarios, titles and, later, dialogue for over 120 films between 1917 and 1946. His diverse portfolio saw him working on everything from John Ford westerns and Johnny Hines comedies to later sound films starring Wheeler & Woolsey and Laurel & Hardy. (Incidentally he also wrote titles for Marion Davies' *The Patsy*, screened earlier this weekend). His ability to rescue mediocre films with his witty title cards led one trade magazine to observe that, "When they die, bad little movies go to Ralph Spence". The prolific Spence was also very active in theatrical writing, contributing material to several Ziegfeld Follies shows on Broadway. He once boasted that he was sure he could write a hit play in just three days, and was overheard by producer Al H. Woods; the bet was on! Spence succeeded, and the result was *The Gorilla*, staged on Broadway in late 1925. It was a comedy-mystery-thriller, a variation on the hit plays *The Bat* and *The Cat and The Canary*.

With Spence's connections in the film world, it's not surprising that he soon managed to arrange for a film adaptation to be made. In fact, *The Gorilla* was perfect material for Hollywood in 1927. Both *The Cat & The Canary* and *The Bat* had recently been turned into successful film adaptations, and each studio was looking for their own take on the horror comedy genre. First National took a punt on *The Gorilla*, which went into production in early 1927, directed by Alfred Santell.

Heading the cast was Charlie Murray as one of two comic detectives. Keystone veteran Murray appeared in Mack Sennett films for a decade before moving on to character roles in features (for more on Murray, see the notes for *Rarities & Rediscoveries* in Saturday's programme). Another Sennett alumnus plays the leading lady in *The Gorilla*. Alice Day had appeared as Harry Langdon's love interest in some of his early shorts, before later having her own starring series, including films like *Spanking Breezes* and *Pass The Dumplings*. In 1927 she moved to appear in several light comedies for First National, frequently paired with Jack Mulhall.

The second comic lead was originally meant for Murray's frequent on-screen sparring partner George Sidney. However, for one reason or another, the role fell to Fred Kelsey. It was an inspired choice; Kelsey is the quintessential detective in Hollywood films, maintaining the perfect balance between hard-boiled heaviness and bluffing incompetence. He went on to have a long and distinguished career excelling at such types.

As well as featuring Hollywood's #1 flatfoot, *The Gorilla* also features the industry's foremost Ape Man! The actor who is crucial to the film, but remains unseen – at least in his human guise – is Charles Gemora. Gemora was an expert make-up man who was persuaded to try and create a gorilla suit when the filmmakers' plan to use an ape from the circus fell through. He did such a convincing job that he set himself up for life with a job portraying all kinds of simian creatures: if you see a man in a monkey suit from a 1930s film, it's most likely him. Comedy buffs today best remember Gemora from his appearances with Laurel &

Hardy in *The Chimp* (1932), as well as the beautifully surreal sequence from *Swiss Miss* (1938) where the two comedians encounter a gorilla mid-way across a narrow bridge in the Alps ...while trying to deliver a piano!

Spence's play went on to have just as long a career as Gemora. First National remade this film as a talkie in 1930, and it was revisited for another film version starring The Ritz Brothers in 1939. The stage play itself also saw regular revivals; Buster Keaton even appeared in a touring version in the late 1940s. However, for many years it was impossible to see this original version, considered a lost film. It turned up a couple of years ago, and was restored earlier this year. We're very proud to be able to present the UK premiere of this new restoration; many thanks to the Cineteca Milano for making today's screening possible.

- Matthew Ross



Also screening with *THE GORILLA*....



THE PILL POUNDER

Produced by C.C. Burr. Directed by Gregory La Cava. Released April 22, 1923.

CAST: *Charlie Murray, Clara Bow, James Turfler.*

The Pill Pounder is another recent discovery, one that fits neatly beside *The Gorilla* as it also stars Charlie Murray. Unlike most of Murray's comedies, *The Pill Pounder* was filmed in Long Island, NY. Part of a series made while Murray was moonlighting from Sennett on the East Coast, it was directed by the talented comedy director, Gregory La Cava, who later helmed two films with W.C. Fields, as well as light comedies with Richard Dix and Bebe Daniels. However, it is most notable for one particular East Coast talent in the cast: Clara Bow.

Born in Brooklyn in 1905, Bow had become besotted with the screen, and had recently won a nationwide 'Fame and Fortune' contest. The judge's summary of her talents was published in the January 1922 issue of *Motion Picture Classic*: "She is very young, only 16. But she is full of confidence, determination and ambition. She is endowed with a mentality far beyond her years. She has a genuine spark of divine fire." Clearly, the star qualities she later exhibited were already in evidence.

The Pill Pounder captures Bow in transition between worlds. It was a turbulent time in her career, and her personal life. She had filmed what would become her breakout role, in *Down to the Sea in Ships*, the previous year, but the film didn't go on release until March 1923. In the meantime, her mother – whom she had a close but troubled relationship with – died. Ploughing her energies into her screen career, Bow sought other roles, such as in this film. By the time *The Pill Pounder* was released, in April 1923, notices for *Down to the Sea in Ships* were coming in, and singling her out for praise. Bow was shortly to leave New York for Hollywood. Soon, she would be on her way to becoming "The It Girl", and life would never be the same again.

In the wake of her enormous success, *The Pill Pounder* was forgotten. After many years as a lost film, it turned up in a job lot of films at an auction last year. After the titles were reconstructed, the film re-premiered at the San Francisco Silent Film Festival.

Many thanks to the San Francisco Silent Film Festival team for allowing us to host the U.K. re-premiere of this long unseen film.

- Matthew Ross

CHARLEY CHASE

Charles Parrott adopted the surname 'Chase' on commencing his starring series at Roach in 1924 (he continued to use 'Parrott' for directing credits). To facilitate a return to regular performing, he stood down from his role as Director-General of the studio (in which capacity he had directed many of the best Snub Pollard comedies and, as noted below, commenced the *Our Gang* series), a position he had reached after years working variously at Keystone (where he had appeared with Chaplin), King Bee (with Chaplin imitator Billy West and future Roach colleague Oliver Hardy), Bull's Eye and Educational, where he directed Lloyd Hamilton. Chase modelled his new screen character on Hamilton's behaviour, believing that using someone as physically different as possible as a template would create something new and worthwhile. It did. This one-reel series was promoted to two reels after only a year (and fortunately jettisoned Chase's character name of 'Jimmy Jump' in the process) with Leo McCarey continuing, for a while, as director. Chase himself would direct many of his future films, along with studio regulars such as Fred Guiol, James Parrott (Charley's brother), and others. Chase's character matured into a man-about-town who was vulnerable to often embarrassing situations, a motif that served until age prompted him to adopt a more mild-mannered approach as the 1930s progressed. Today's programme is presented by film historian and Chase expert Richard M. Roberts.



ALL WET

Hal Roach/Pathé Exchange. Released 23rd November 1924. Directed by Leo McCarey. Photographed by Len Powers. CAST: Charley Chase, William Gillespie, 'Tonnage' Martin (aka Martin Wolfkiel or Wolfkeil), Jack Gavin.

Held over – reluctantly! - from Kennington Bioscope's weekend event in April 2024, *All Wet* is one of the best of Chase's early 'Jimmy Jump' series. Describing its central gag would be too much of a 'spoiler', so suffice to say it was reworked by Chase into a 1933 talkie, *Fallen Arches*. Some earlier filmographies mistakenly list Oliver Hardy in the cast, but the fat man seen here is Martin Wolfkeil (or Wolfkiel), generally known in the business as 'Tonnage' Martin, seen in our April show in the Will Rogers short *Big Moments From Little Pictures*. He worked in a few of Stan Laurel's solo films and later tried to suggest he had been Hardy's forerunner as Laurel's team-mate, a considerable exaggeration.

US

Hal Roach/M-G-M. Released 26th November 1927. Directed by James Parrott. Supervised by Leo McCarey. Photographed by Len Powers. Edited by Richard Currier. Titles by H.M. Walker. CAST: Charley Chase, Margaret Quimby, James Mason, William Orlamond, May Wallace, Emma Tansey, Jackie Combs, Dorothy Coburn, Evelyn Burns.

The biggest news story of 1927 was the pioneering trans-Atlantic flight made by Charles Lindbergh in his custom-built, single-engine, single-seated monoplane *The Spirit of St. Louis*. Lindbergh would refer to himself and the plane as 'we', prompting this tale of aviation – involving a nervous Charley Chase and a female pilot – to be called *Us* (a succinct but less descriptive replacement for its working title, *The Birdman*). Leading lady Margaret Quimby was more usually in light comedies at other studios and is thought to have been cast as replacement for series regular Edna Marion. *Us* has scarcely been seen since its initial release. Robert Youngson used footage from it in his 1970 anthology *Four Clowns* and this is itself now a rarity, owing to rights issues. We are therefore delighted to present this new restoration from the Sprocket Vault release of Charley Chase comedies from 1927.

WHAT WOMEN DID FOR ME

Hal Roach/Pathé Exchange. Released 14th August 1927. Directed by James Parrott. Photographed by Len Powers. Edited by Richard Currier. Titles by Reed Heustis. CAST: Charley Chase, Lupe Velez, Eric Mayne, Caryl Lincoln, May Wallace, Viola Richard, Broderick O'Farrell, Gale Henry, Al Hallet, Frank Whiteen, Bob Gray.

In many ways *What Women Did For Me* is the archetypal Charley Chase comedy of the 1920s: our shy hero at the mercy of numerous attractive women. The new professor at a girls' finishing school is hopelessly shy of his comely pupils and they exploit his weakness to their full advantage. A weekend trip to a snowy retreat, intended to help his condition, brings him into even more embarrassing contact with pursuing women. Future star Lupe Velez – remembered particularly for RKO's *Mexican Spitfire* series – made her film debut in this short, one of two Hal Roach comedies in which she appeared before obtaining her first feature role in the 1927 Douglas Fairbanks vehicle *The Gaucho* (directed by F. Richard Jones, who had recently left the Roach studio). *What Women Did For Me* was reworked into Chase's first sound short, *The Big Squawk* - its premise also underlying a subsequent film, *Girl Shock* – and was long available (though still seldom seen) in a print missing a large middle section, bridged by a title card; this new restoration from the Sprocket Vault set uses instead a complete 35mm British reissue print, from the same early revival package of Pathé comedies that included the near-pristine material on Laurel & Hardy's *With Love and Hisses* that was presented at a KB weekend in 2023.

- Glenn Mitchell

Also screening in this Charley Chase programme, is a related Hal Roach rarity, the *Our Gang* short **DERBY DAY**...

DERBY DAY

Hal Roach/Pathé Exchange. Released 18th November 1923. Directed by Robert F. McGowan. Photographed by Harry W. Gerstad. Edited by T.J. Crizer. Titles by H.M. Walker.

CAST: 'Our Gang': Ernie 'Sunshine Sammy' Morrison, Allen 'Farina' Hoskins, Mickey Daniels, Jack Davis, Joe Cobb, Mary Kornman, Jackie Condon, Billy Lord, Sing Joy and Dinah the Mule; William Gillespie, Wallace Howe, Richard Daniels, Charles A. Bachman.

As the then Director-General of Hal Roach Studios, Charles Parrott – aka Charley Chase – supervised the first several *Our Gang* comedies, starting in 1922, with Robert McGowan and Tom McNamara as credited directors. McGowan had settled in as regular director by the time of *Derby Day*, one of the best of the *Our Gang* silents. *Derby Day* follows a pattern common to a few series entries of the period, whereby the kids in the Gang see something in real life – in this instance a horse race, as expertly filmed as anything one might see in a dramatic feature – before going off to construct their own, rather more ramshackle equivalent (in *The Sun Down Limited*, from a year later, they build their own train!). *Derby Day* circulates in copies varying both in quality and in titling; one of these is a TV print called *Little Jockeys*, identifying the Gang as 'The Little Rascals'. Hal Roach had originally intended them to be known as 'Hal Roach's Rascals', but it was the title of the first film in release, *Our Gang*, that instead caught on with the public. Roach compromised for some time by billing them as 'His Rascals' with 'Our Gang Comedies' elsewhere on the titling, before eventually capitulating and allowing them to be known simply as 'Our Gang'. Ironically, Roach later relinquished ownership of that name to distributors M-G-M (who took over the series from him in 1938), forcing him to create a new name, 'The Little Rascals', when his own films were revived. Today's copy of *Derby Day* is the premiere of a new restoration by kind courtesy of ClassicFlix, whose first volume of restored *Our Gang* silents is about to be released.

- Glenn Mitchell



MINIATURE MASTERPIECES

A programme of wonderful—but less often screened—short comedies starring the great silent comedians.



ASSISTANT WIVES

Hal Roach/Pathé Exchange. Released December 4th, 1927. Directed by James Parrott. Photographed by Len Powers. Edited by Richard Currier.

CAST: Charley Chase, Edna Marion, Eugene Pallette, Anita Garvin, Noah Young, Kay Deslys.

Here at the Bioscope, we think that Charley Chase more than merits a place alongside the other all-time greats featured in this programme. His perfectly plotted farce comedies feature some of the most delightful situation humour and sight gags ever committed to film, delivered with warmth and perfect comedy timing. This newly restored film, which hasn't been screened in the U.K. for almost a century, features Charley at the top of his game, in one of his typical domestic comedies. Misunderstandings and comedy of embarrassment rule the day, as Charley ends up having to host his boss (Eugene Pallette) for dinner, with an ornery waitress (Anita Garvin) dragged in to stand in for the absent Mrs Chase.

Aiding and abetting Charley are a cast of skilled comedy veterans. Eugene Pallette was a one-time leading man who settled into comedy roles as middle-aged spread claimed him. In the sound era, his gruff voice only added to his appeal, and he became one of Hollywood's favourite character actors. The physical opposite of Pallette is petite Edna Marion, who plays Mrs Chase. Marion was leading lady to Charley in most of his 1927-28 season of films, developing a nice chemistry with him as well as appearing in other series at the studio. Best of all is the joyous Anita Garvin. Miss Garvin brought sass, flair and fantastic comic skills to every film she appeared in, and remains a favourite of Hal Roach devotees for her performances with Laurel & Hardy. Her work with Charley Chase was no less excellent, as you'll see in this film. *This print will be introduced by Richard M. Roberts.*

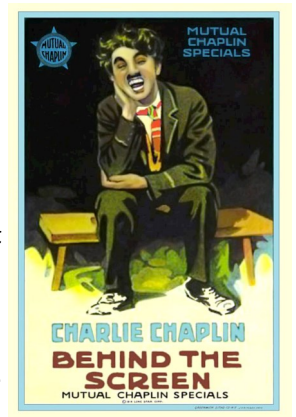
BEHIND THE SCREEN

Mutual Corporation. Released November 13th, 1916. Written and directed by Charles Chaplin. Photographed by Rollie Totheroh.

CAST: Charles Chaplin, Edna Purviance, Eric Campbell, Henry Bergman, Frank Coleman, Albert Austin.

The twelve short films that Chaplin made for the Mutual Corporation in 1916-17 are unquestionably some of his funniest, most joyous comedies. Chaplin himself said that fulfilling his Mutual contract was "the most personally and professionally fulfilling time of my life", and that is reflected in the results on screen.

On paper, *Behind The Screen* has rather standard silent comedy setups and routines – set behind the scenes of a movie studio, it climaxes in a pie fight – but against these pedestrian backdrops, Chaplin weaves myriad subtle touches and inventive gags to create something uniquely his own. For instance, here are some of his finest and funniest manipulations of props, from the rolled carpet he turns into a tightrope, to the stack of cane chairs that transform him into a sort of human hedgehog.



Chaplin had made films set in movie studios before: *A Film Johnnie*, *The Masquerader* (screened during yesterday's programme) and *His New Job*. *Behind The Screen* is the culmination of these meta comedies, and shows Chaplin's development as comedian and filmmaker. Compared to the earlier efforts, there is much improved gag construction, and a more sophisticated, satirical approach. From spoofing the historical epics of the *Intolerance* ilk, to mockery of pie throwing slapstick (sarcastically referred to as "a new idea" in a title), *Behind The Screen* is a sly time capsule of filmmaking in 1916, refracted through Chaplin's idiosyncratic lens.

Mention must also be given to Eric Campbell and Edna Purviance as villain and leading lady, respectively. In these roles, the pair were cornerstones of the Mutual series. Campbell's billing as 'Goliath' to Chaplin's David in this film is a perfect summation of their on-screen relationship.

NEVER WEAKEN



Hal Roach/Pathé Exchange. Released October 22nd, 1921. Directed by Fred Newmeyer. Photographed by Walter Lundin. Edited by T.J. Crizer. Story by Hal Roach & Sam Taylor. Titles by H. M. Walker.

CAST: Harold Lloyd, Mildred Davis, Roy Brooks, Mark Jones, Charley Stevenson, George Rowe.

As time compresses our view of the silent era, Harold Lloyd has become ingrained as "the comedian who climbs buildings". Anyone who has seen even a handful of Lloyd movies knows that this makes up a very small part of his oeuvre, but the image still sticks in the collective consciousness, and with good reason. His thrill comedies are certainly some of his most memorable work.

Lloyd's building climbs reached their apotheosis with 1923's *Safety Last*, but he had developed the theme in several preceding shorts: 1918's *Look Out Below*, 1920's *High and Dizzy*, and this film. These high-rise thrill comedies were perfect for the era of skyscraper construction, and *Never Weaken* is the comic equivalent of those iconic shots of construction workers on the skeleton of the Empire State Building. It is tight-rope walking for the jazz age.

The high-rise shots were cunningly filmed by constructing the skyscraper building above the Hill Street Tunnel in downtown Los Angeles, creating an illusion of even greater height. Thus, the distant cityscapes far below Harold are genuine, even if he doesn't have *quite* as far to fall as it first appears. The stunt scenes are still risky though, and doubly impressive when you consider the fact that Lloyd had lost half of one hand in an accident the previous year (an injury concealed on-screen with a special padded glove).

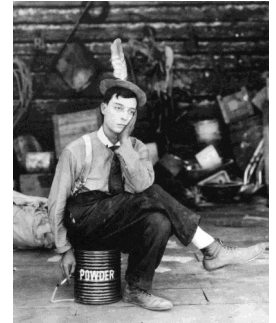
Mildred Davies plays Harold's girlfriend in this film. In one of Hollywood's rare happy endings, they married in real life, remaining so until Mildred's passing in 1969.

THE PALEFACE

Produced by Joe Schenck. Released January 1922. Written/directed by Buster Keaton & Eddie Cline.

CAST: Buster Keaton, Joe Roberts, Virginia Fox.

Of all the silent comedians, it was Buster Keaton who best made use of America's great landscapes. In his feature films, we find him caught in the rapids of the Truckee River, plodding through the Arizona desert, diving in the crystalline waters of Lake Tahoe and, most famously, steaming through the forests and glades of Oregon aboard *The General*. Something about his stoic demeanour seems particularly at home amidst the craggy unpredictability of nature, and at the mercy of the elements.



A keen follower of outdoor pursuits in real life, Buster loved using a location shoot as an excuse for an expedition. His later outdoor epic comedies are hinted at a couple of times in his short films. *The Balloonatic* sees him trying to master the basics of backwoods camping, while *The Paleface* places him on a Native American reservation. Unlike the typical Cowboys-overcome-the-natives fodder, *The Paleface* takes a surprisingly mature look at the plight of the native American in the 1920s. Well, surprisingly mature for a two reel comedy, anyway.

Keaton's ultimate nemesis, Big Joe Roberts, is seen as the formidable chief of the tribe. An old Vaudevillian friend of Keaton's from his stage days, Roberts memorably menaced our hero in all but three of his short silent films, as well as his feature *Our Hospitality*. He would probably have continued to perform this function throughout Keaton's independent filmmaking career, but suffered a stroke during filming of *Hospitality* and died soon afterward. Leading lady duties fall to Virginia Fox, who was on hand for the majority of Keaton's silent shorts. She doesn't get much opportunity to show her acting skills among this film's whirlwind of chases, but she is crucial to the film's charming closing gag.

The Paleface is somewhat in the shadows of Keaton's best known shorts, like *Cops*, *One Week* or *The Playhouse*, but it has much to offer. There are hair-raising stunts, some wonderful sight gags and a freewheeling energy, all set against the grand backdrop of California's rocky canyons. *The Paleface* is classic Keaton, full of kinetic energy and imbued with a dusty, widescreen beauty.

LEAVE 'EM LAUGHING



Hal Roach/MGM. Released January 28th 1928. Directed by Clyde Bruckman. Photographed by George Stevens. Edited by Richard Currier. Titles by Reed Heustis.

CAST: Stan Laurel, Oliver Hardy, Edgar Kennedy, Charlie Hall, Dorothy Coburn, Viola Richard, Otto Fries.

In late 1927, Laurel & Hardy were on a roll. After a year of working together, they had settled on the characters which would bring them immortality, and had just enjoyed their biggest success to date with *The Battle of The Century*. Hal Roach's new distribution deal with MGM gave their films a bigger budget,

backed up with huge publicity campaigns. So, in November 1927, they went into the making of their new film with confidence. The tentative elements of their earlier films were left behind, and from the opening scene they are wholly, completely, the Stan and Ollie archetypes we know and love. This confidence in their characters is shown in the leisurely pace of the scenes; the gags are small scale and simple, but it is the utterly natural conviction with which they are played that gets them across.

Like *The Battle of The Century*, *Leave 'em Laughing* has a strong three-part structure, each one a simple situation totally milked for humour. Act one has Stan nursing a toothache; Ollie's home remedies are, naturally, disastrous. Act two moves us to the dentist, where the pair overdose on laughing gas. Finally, they make it out on to the streets of the city, where their attempts to drive home while incapacitated with laughter bring traffic to a standstill.

Making his debut at Hal Roach studios in this film is the wonderful character comedian Edgar Kennedy. His slow-burning ire is perfect for the role of the beleaguered traffic cop, who is only enraged further by Stan and Ollie's helpless laughter. In the director's chair was Clyde Bruckman, best known as a top notch gag man for Harold Lloyd and Buster Keaton. And speaking of Buster... 36 years later, Keaton still remembered the climax to *Leave 'em Laughing*; he can be seen reminiscing about it in the documentary *Buster Keaton Rides Again* (1964). Keaton acts out the traffic scenes, and marvels at the duo's ability to spin out a simple situation into a whole picture. "All they ever needed was something like that," he marvels.

Today's screening of *Leave 'em Laughing* is from a brand new restoration, soon to be released on the *Laurel & Hardy: Year Two* set. Our thanks to Serge Bromberg for supplying the print.

- Matthew Ross