

Jitterbugs News

Volume 1, Issue 5

February 2003

Spike Milligan..

Spike will be one year dead on February 27th. Of Laurel and Hardy he said thus.....

"As soon as they walked out on the screen, I knew they were my friends.

"In the Good Ole' Summertime", was first a bit in 1902

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Oh Liam.....pull the other one !!!!!

Well, well. Another new year.

It's great stuff altogether and I really think we should do that Christmas thing every year.

Good to see Stan and Ollie on our screens again over the festive period, and what about that documentary screened on Jan 15th? Apparently it was brilliant. I did a Laurel and Hardy on it and told loads of people about it and then forgot to watch it myself!!!!!!

It's a three page newsletter this edition. Due to the fact that we are enclosing a print out of an article I wrote some time ago and had published in the last Bowler Dessert

magazine. I think it's quite good and I hope you enjoy it. To those of you who subscribe to Bowler Dessert and have seen it before, tough. If you want, you could always pop it in the post and send it to a Marx Brother's fan or something.

Details about our Dublin meeting, all the usual articles and bits and a nice little piece about Hal Roach, and Harold Lloyd follow in this edition.

We've had a few new members since the last outing and I want to welcome you all. If you enjoy our fun, tell your friends. If you don't like what we do and have a couple of suggestions, keep them to yourself. We don't want to



"Then we floundered in a typhoid"

know.

Do try and make Dublin and we will have a couple of bits and bobs for our display. I am bringing my Laurel and Hardy book collection. One of the biggest in these islands, I've been told. 36 books!!

Liam

Dublin 2003... April 5th @ 7pm sharp

The Jitterbugs Tent will bring Laurel and Hardy to the screen again in April in Dublin. The Academy Hotel in Findlater Place, just off O'Connell St. (Cathal Brugha St. end). Same as last year for those who remember !!!!!!! We hope to see a good turnout this year and if you can, bring a friend. We need all the

admission prices we can get to cover the room rental, so please do come. We can promise a good night in the company of Stan and Ollie. Back on 16mm reels and looking good.

Usual toasts and raffle. Stay behind for a drink, or even drink during the show. Any rowdiness

will be tolerated and in fact it is encouraged. Easy Steve !!!!

Films have yet to be decided, but they will be black and white and contain laughs.

We may show a Chaplin or a Keaton this year, following the success of the Chaplin short last year.

Silents are Golden.....Gerry Dunne

DVD is really taking off now, and many silent classics are finding their way into the new format. I have recently seen Keaton's *College*, together with a three-film set, comprising *The General*, *College* and *Steamboat Bill Jr*, plus an excellent print of Eisenstein's *Strike*, and the eternally spooky *The Cabinet of Dr Caligary*. The DVD version of *Nosferatu* has been around so long now that it is almost as old as Max Schrek himself! D W Griffiths' masterpiece *Intolerance* is also on the shelves. So if you have taken the plunge with the new format why not treat yourself to a few silent classics.

However, as with all things, *caveat emptor* is the watchword — or watchwords: DVD films are only as good as the print from which they are taken. The DVD version of *Flying Deuces*, is frankly awful.

Hal Eugene Roach

Born in New York in 1892, he left home at 16 and worked in construction in the Mojave Desert. He auditioned for a film company and got the job because he was the only person who could operate a roulette wheel. \$5 a day was better than construction wages.

The print is dirty and the film has jumped the sprockets of the projector several times. Whoever was responsible for copying it to DVD should definitely take up other employment. However, when done well, DVD is an excellent format for watching movies.

If you're on the Internet, try typing in Lon Chaney to your search engine. There are several websites dedicated to the great man and his work, including a fiendishly hilarious site, which is dedicated to his 'lost', or 'not-so-lost' classic, *London after Midnight*. This website, just like his films, will keep you on the edge of your keyboard.

And now for our feature presentation!

He played heavy to J. Warren Kerrigan. Around this time he met Harold Lloyd and he was to become Roach's first star when Hal founded his studio after inheriting money from an uncle.

A good although sometimes ruthless boss, he is credited to giving actors and directors a free

Stan and Babe with Edgar Kennedy, Dorothy Coburn and Sam Lutkin.

The funniest silent film ever made, full-stop. Well I think so! The plot is simple: if the boys finish building the house by noon they will get a \$500 bonus. However, they must work quietly — there is a hospital nearby, and a nurse (Dorothy Coburn), who can more than hold her own in a Donnybrook. Dorothy, you may remember, played the 'flapper' being chased by Stan in *Putting Pants on Philip* and the girl whose rear is painted by him in *The Second Hundred Years*.

She turns to Edgar Kennedy — playing the usual put-upon cop — for support. However, in this film, poor Edgar takes more punishment than Ollie — and that's saying something. The boys spend more time getting in each other's way, and fighting, than they do working. Ollie's continual swallowing of a mouthful of nails competes with Stan's commendable efforts to measure the length of a plank to be sawn using a stick, his hands, and his hat. Do they manage to secure their bonus — do they heck as like! The first bird of spring landing on the chimney starts the demolition process; the chimney collapses; windows fall out; the owner demands his bonus back; a free-for-all ensues with the bonus being kicked and passed between the boys like an American football. A chase followed by a stone-throwing sequence culminates in the boys truck providing the finishing touch as it careers through the remainder of the house.

Interestingly, two versions of this film were made,¹ one for an American audience and one for a British audience. The (British) negative contained different camera angles and action and it seems that today's Blackhawk Films copy of the American negative combines footage from both versions.

hand while filming.

History will record Mr. Roach with the Laurel and Hardy, Our Gang, Charley Chase and many other fine movies, due to his free hand.

He was awarded an honorary Oscar in the 90's, and when he was giving his acceptance speech, from his table, the microphone failed. Compere Billy Crystal commented that Hal had started in the silent era and now here he was finishing in the silent era

Hal died in 1992 aged 100 years

Soup to Nuts.....Steve O'Connor Vice Sheik

Over the Xmas holiday period Laurel and Hardy once again made it on to the small screen. This short season included their featuring in a 'Living Famously' documentary. An aspect of this documentary was that various 'celebs' gave their thoughts on why they enjoyed, and still enjoy, our heroes. I find it interesting that so many different people give so many different answers to this question; what links these answers is that there is much more to L+H than mere slapstick – the slapstick is simply a symptom of the condition that The Boys find themselves in. Their condition is the human condition, and their interpretation of it goes a long way to explaining their remarkable longevity. Stan Laurel always denied any profound element to his comedy. Interviewed only a week after Hardy's death, he knocked back attempts to get an elaboration on the world-wide appeal of his work. I think we have to take him at his word on this – he had no pretensions about the comedy, he just knew what made people laugh and his instincts and experience were

realised on the screen. Nevertheless, with L+H I think we have a clear case of something that is more than the sum of its parts.

Laurel worked very hard at ensuring that the comedy was character driven. He set limits to their predicaments and reactions, careful to keep the characters consistent and increasingly recognisable. In this he was ably assisted by Oliver Hardy whose brilliance as a comedy actor is essential to the partnership. Indeed, the more I watch L+H the more I believe that Hardy had a stronger appreciation of the characters and what they stood for. Life is a complete mystery to Stan, he is utterly simple and otherworldly and as such life gives him a bye-ball. Oliver, on the other hand, has enough self-knowledge to suspect he is out of his depth but he refuses to accept his lot. He wants so badly to be in control, to be taken seriously. He puts on airs and graces, he signs his name with a regal flourish – he tries to maintain that half-assed dignity. As such, life reserves its special torments just for him. It is Ollie who takes the

ducking, the blow to the head, and, more painfully, the constant blows to his dignity. It is Ollie looking into the camera with fatalistic resignation as he sits in his 'Admirals' uniform in the burnt out shell of his house as it starts to rain heavily. Even in Way Out West, when the twosome have won out against all the odds to return the deed to its rightful owner, the final frames see Ollie disappear into a water hole at the very moment of triumph.

So, the game is fixed, and everything is bound to go pear shaped. The Boys know this at some level, Hardy more clearly, but they never quit and we find ourselves cheering them on as the perpetual underdogs. I suspect then that the basis for their extraordinary popularity is that they remind us of ourselves and that we are all in it together. When we laugh at Laurel and Hardy we are laughing at ourselves and our own attempts to impose order on life's absurdities. They tell us that getting by with a combination of blissful ignorance, half-assed dignity and indomitable optimism may be dumb – but we could do worse.

A Laurel and Hardy Moment

Dimwit of the week

A 21-year-old man has been taken to hospital in Modesto, California, after his head was split open by a brick. Police, who found the man lying on the ground and bleeding from the head, suspected foul play. But witnesses explained that the victim had been trying – at 2am – to see how high he could throw a brick. In the darkness he lost track of the brick and was unable to get out of the way when it fell. "Alcohol was involved," said a police spokesman.

Web watch (ish).....Stephen O'Crowley

Name your favourite silver screen comedy duo – not to hard, the Boy's of course. But what about your favourite solo comedian, now that's a bit harder isn't it? Many (nay most) would plum for Charlie Chaplin. Not really my own cup of tea but still very capable of making people laugh nearly 100 years on (as a recent Jitterbugs meeting proved). What about Buster Keaton – a lot of today's audiences find it hard to sit through even a 20 minute silent short but if you have never seen Keaton in the feature length 'The General' beg, borrow or steal a copy and an hour of so will fly by. Still, Buster wasn't my favourite (though he did say that Stan was better than Chaplin, so that has to be worth a mark or two!!). My own choice is the underrated Harold Lloyd. Born in Nebraska in 1893, Harold Lloyd became interested in acting early on and in 1912 he made the trip to Los Angeles, where he worked as an extra in a film short. He befriended another extra, a certain Hal Roach, and when Roach left to start up his own production company, Lloyd followed to work for him. He tried out a character called Willie Work but later changed to another character, Lonesome Luke, who had more than a passing resemblance to Chaplin's Tramp. 71 Lonesome Luke comedies followed between 1915 and 1917 (most of these prints were destroyed in a fire in Lloyds house in 1943).

In 1917 Lloyd decided to change direction again and invented the 'Glasses Character', the never-say-die, all American go getter, complete with his

horn rimmed glasses. He made simple comedies, often involving acrobatic performances from Lloyd, who unlike Keaton and Chaplin had no vaudeville experience to rely on. The American audience took him to heart and Lloyd retained this persona for the rest of his career. Then, in 1919, disaster struck. Whilst on set, a prop exploded, and blew off Lloyds right thumb and most of his index finger (indeed it also rendered him unconscious and nearly killed him). Lloyd thought his career was over (audiences wouldn't accept him with missing fingers), but Roach and Samuel Goldwyn had a special flesh coloured glove made with prosthetic digits that masked the deformity. Audiences didn't notice and his career flourished (you only really notice the glove on stills), and Lloyd never publicly mentioned the accident again, not even in his auto-biography. He moved from shorts to features and then to sound features, making over 200 'Glasses Character' comedies before again changing track and giving up acting for painting and producing some film scores. He was honoured with an Academy Award in 1958. Harold Lloyd died in 1971.

Lloyds made a lasting contribution to the silver screen and though he made a wide

and varied amount of films he will always be remembered for his stomach churning, high rise building antics and the eternal image is one of him hanging onto the face of an oversized clock on the side of a multi-story building in 'Safety Last'. Critics often complain that he 'borrowed' a lot from other comedians. Whilst this is true, the same can be said also for most of his peers (Stan and Ollie's brilliant 'Liberty' owes more than a passing nod to Lloyd's 'Never Weaken'). While a large volume of his work had been lost, there is still quite a lot left to enjoy. Compilations of his work are available and well worth checking out. Interestingly, Stan was asked once about Harold Lloyd. He admitted that Lloyd rarely made him laugh but stated that he was the best 'straight comedian ever' – high praise indeed from the master. Hal Roach, who knew him better than most, said "*Harold Lloyd was not a comedian. But he was the best actor to act the part of a comedian of any person I ever saw.*"

So, if you are in the mood for something slightly different, as his theme tune said 'Just ring for Harold Lloyd'.....

For more info on Harold Lloyd try:
<http://www.haroldlloyd.com/>