

Silent Comedy Show

A word of introduction about tonight's program. The program is compiled mainly from items that didn't make it on to previous all-comedy shows -- not because they were inferior, but because they were a little off-beat -- "odd", if you like - and would have upset the pacing of those programs. It seemed like an interesting idea to collect these little oddities into one show. You won't find, in tonight's compilation, the sustained belly-laughs of some of our previous shows -- but we think you'll find them all interesting, amusing and worthwhile for one reason or another. In the interests of variety, we've added two or three items to the program as announced, and dropped one -- the Charlie Chase "A Treat for the Boys", amusing, but very much of a lesser Chase. Somehow the show seemed to play better with just the one, first-class Charlie Chase ("Limousine Love"), and thus the other one has been held over for another time. Since an additional Laurel and Hardy has been added, we think you'll find the new schedule to your liking.

Program, in order of screening:

"DO DETECTIVES THINK?" (Pathe-Hal Roach, 1927) 2 reels; dir: Fred Guiol.
With Laurel & Hardy, James Finlayson, Edna Marion.

For a long time we've felt that this one, and "Flying Elephants", were just about the weakest of the Laurel & Hardy silents. Yet when we played "Flying Elephants" not too long ago, it was a huge success! Audience response helps a great deal of course -- and we do have a solid backing of Laurel & Hardy devotees - so we suspect that "Do Detectives Think?" will seem better and funnier here than under almost any other circumstances! And it does have some very funny moments, and a nice "sick" sense of humor - ranging from Judge Finlayson sentencing a murderer to the gallows with "...and I hope you choke!" to Laurel running around apparently beheaded. Photographically, it is much more polished than most of the Laurel and Hardy comedies, and our print is a good toned original.

"CAPTAIN KIDD'S KITTENS" (Fox, 1927) Dir: Clyde Carruth; supervised by George Marshall. 2 reels

Although Fox billed this series as "Animal Comedies" (and indeed animals did figure prominently in them) they were really kid comedies very much in the mould of Roach's "Our Gang" -- and often far superior to them. We hope to show one or two others shortly. This is a good specimen of the series; there are a number of very good sight gags, but most of it is carried along by the high-spirited adventures of the kids. Do kids today, I wonder, ever manage to tear themselves away from their tv (and their rumbles) to have fun like this?

"FROM HAND TO MOUTH" (Pathe, 1920) Director unidentified. Starring Harold Lloyd, Mildred Davis, Snub Pollard, Peggy Courtwright. 2 reels.

Since it is comparatively early in the post-Lonesome Luke period, one can forgive "From Hand to Mouth" for not having the polish and speed of "Never Weaken" and "Get Out and Get Under". In spirit, it more resembles the Lonesome Lukes that Lloyd had put behind him -- with some unexpected Chaplin-esque pathos here and there. And the climax, surely, must have given Keaton the inspiration for his subsequent "Cops"? The print is only of fair quality, but appears reasonably complete.

(Reel Change: Not an intermission)

"TROLLEY TROUBLES" (Pathe-Roach-Rollin, 1921) Starring Gaylord Lloyd. 1 reel.

"Trolley Troubles" is a strange little comedy, which we are showing for two reasons. The lesser reason is the purely nostalgic one of its plethora of shots of old Los Angeles streets. The main reason is that we're way overdue to show a Gaylord Lloyd comedy, and although there are dull spots, there are some good gags in it. Gaylord - Harold's brother - is a most curiously unattractive comedian, with some of his brother's mannerisms, but a most unsympathetic personality not unlike the Chaplin of "Tillie's Punctured Romance".

"THE LIFE OF REILLY" (C.C.Burr Production for W.W.Hodkinson release, 1923)
Directed by Gregory La Cava; with Charlie Murray,
Raymond McKee, Dorothy Walters. 2 reels.

It's interesting that Gregory La Cava, that erratic director who made some wonderfully wacky sound comedies, should be behind this bizarre little work. His silent dramatic work (like "The New Schoolteacher") was often stodgy and dull, but this film certainly shows that he had a keen sense of humor insofar as the comedy of outrage is concerned. Who else but La Cava - or Preston Sturges - could build a whole comedy around the basically tasteless idea of a man trying to assassinate a perfectly adorable little dog by the foulest means available? Thanks to La Cava, Charlie Murray (who, incidentally, does not get star billing) and a wonderful little dog that seems to know all about the art of silent comedy, this tasteless idea pays off quite well.

"LIMOUSINE LOVE" (MGM-Hal Roach, 1928) Dir: Fred Guiol; supervised by Leo McCarey; 2 reels; with Charlie Chase, Edgar Kennedy, Edna Marion, Bull Montana, Viola Richards.

This excellent Chase comedy has, alas only flash titles -- few of which can be read, some of which are quite funny, but none of which, luckily, are necessary to an understanding of the plot once you know the basic situation -- Charlie, on the way to his wedding, accidentally picks up (quite innocently) a nude lady passenger -- who is also the wife of very jealous Edgar Kennedy. It's a completely visual comedy which builds beautifully, and is one of the most unusual Chases we've come across.

**** I N T E R M I S S I O N ****

"THE CLOUD HOPPER" (E.W.Hammons-Educational, 1925) Written and directed by Larry Semon, Norman Taurog and Steve Roberts; with Larry Semon, Dorothy Dwan, Mickey McBann, Frank Alexander. 2 reels.

Those of you who remember "Kid Speed" from a few months ago will need no additional notes on this one. It's a typical Larry Semon, with his usual mixture of dull and obvious gags, and fast and inventive ones. And of course it has outsized Frank Alexander on hand for those messy and violent gags that Semon liked so much. (Well, a fat man covered with goo is pretty funny at that!) It all winds up with a fast and furious road, locomotive and aeroplane chase, with some breathless stunt work and some interesting trick effects where Semon, in closeup, is apparently wing-walking and doing other daredevil stunts high in the clouds. Look closely, however, and you'll see that the landscape far below is not really moving, except for a gentle forward and backward motion. Semon just planted a dummy plane atop a high hill and did his wing walking there -- but the illusion is fine, and he almost gets away with it!

"THE CIRCUS" (Chaplin-UA, 1927/28) Excerpt only.

With the current Chaplin revivals, legal and illegal, around town at the moment, our program would hardly be complete without a passing reference to his work. Since it is some 2½ years since we showed "The Circus", it seemed that an excerpt from that would not be inappropriate -- and so here is the very funny sequence with the baby and the hot-dog, and the chase through the hall of mirrors.

"YOU'RE DARN TOOTIN'" (Hal Roach-MGM, 1928) Dir: Edgar Kennedy; supervised by Leo McCarey; starring Laurel & Hardy. 2 reels.

Perhaps it is a little unfair to accuse "You're Darn Tootin'" of being slow and spotty since we are, after all, seeing the silent version of a sound comedy. The methodical pacing, the foot-stamping routine in the street when L & H can't get started on their music, and of course the band-stand routine at the beginning, all may have seemed much funnier when allied with music, sound effects and dialogue. All-in-all, for a sound comedy of that period, it is remarkably good -- and of course the climactic shin-kicking and pants-ripping routine is one of the funniest pieces of mayhem that the boys were ever involved in. You may recall this sequence as being one of the highlights of "The Golden Age of Comedy". As a director, Edgar Kennedy seemed very much in tune with what Laurel and Hardy were trying to do.

Program Notes & enquiries: Wm. K. Everson, Hotel Bradford, 210 W. 70th St. NYC
Committee: Edward Gorey, Sandra Everson, Charles Shibuk, Dorothy Lovell

Next program - next Tuesday, room 10-C, 7.30.

"THE DROP KICK" (1927) with Richard Barthelmess, Hedda Hopper, Dorothy Revier
"CONCEIT" (1922) with Wm. Davidson, Hedda Hopper, Maurice Costello.
