"There Ain't No Santa Claus" (Hal Roach-Fathe, 1926; 2 reels)
  Dir: James Parrott; starring Charlie Chase,
  with Noah Young, Eugenia Gilbert, Hickey Bennett, Kay Deslys.

In our program tonight, you'll see Charlie Chase in three phases of his
career; pre-20's, with Sonett; mid-way through his sound period in the
30's; and most important of all of course, at his peak - with Roach in the
20's. "There Ain't No Santa Claus" is hardly a top-grader from this latter
period, but Chase's personality comes through as always, making the very
most of every gag. Some of it is very funny indeed, and while it is seldom
inspired, it's remarkable how high Chase kept the standard of his "average"
comedies like this one, considering the assembly line basis on which they
were turned out.

"Napoleon Jr" (Fox, 1926) Dir: Mark Sandrich, Lesley Selander. With
  Jerry Madden and Bill Elliott, 2 reels.

Fox's so-called "Animal Comedies" were actually merely an answer to Roach's
"Our Gang" films; animal comedy was usually subordinated to juvenile frolic
and this is one of the few we've seen where the animal stuff is given more
prominence. This was a damned good little series, in many ways superior to
the Our Gang; production values were high, and charm and slapstick were
neatly mixed. Directorially, this one presents a curious collaboration -
Mark Sandrich, later to turn to the Astaire-Rogers musicals, and Lesley
Selander, after 1926 just about the best (and most prolific) director of
better grade F-westerns. Bill Elliott, a prominent Western star in the
30's, 40's and 50's, plays the (unbilled) leading man in what must be one
of his earliest appearances.

"Dixie To Retire" (Warner, 1954) Dir: Robert McKimson. One reel.

In the past we've written quite a lot about the transference of the sight
gag from the comedies of the 20's into the underrated Warner cartoons of
the 40's and 50's. (In fact, we've decided that the cartoon and its
development really needs a show all to itself -- so, it's coming up next
month). "Dixie To Retire" illustrates this point to a degree in that many
of its gags do have an affinity with those in "Napoleon Jr." It has more
story than usual for a Warner cartoon, and a less hectic parade of violence
and sadism.

"Galloping Bungalow" (Jack Sennett-Fathe, 1924) 2 reels. Director: not
  stated, but probably Del Lord. With Dilly Bevan,
  Andy Clyde.

This print, alas, is minus any titles - but apart from the first couple of
minutes, which are a trifle confusing, they're not needed. After some fine
sight gags on a bathing beach, it launches into one of the wildest of the
old Sennett chases -- with some really breakneck stunts, and a few scenes
that call to mind the climactic chase in Fields' "Never Give a Sucker an
Even Break". The negative seems to have slipped in the printer as the
all-important final stunt takes place, but it's quite viewable and no
worse than you're liable to see on television at any hour of the day.

"Up a Tree" (Rko-Walt Disney, 1955) Dir: Jack Hannah

Disney, in his later years, frequently emulated UPA in both style and
content; this however is the only one that I've seen where he seemed to
really try.
be striving for the fast, zany pattern of the Warner cartoons. Unusual for Disney, there’s no real plot - just a single situation, and a succession of fast and very violent gags. If he doesn’t quite reach the high-powered Warner plateau, he certainly tops his own average standard of recent years.

INTERMISSION

"Ambrose’s First Falsehood" (Also known as "In Loving Memory")

For 1914, when most of the Sennett comedies were crude and overburdened with pratfalls and kicks in the behind, this little film is surprisingly good. It has a neat little story-line, plenty to look at, a variety of sets and locales, and a good crew of performers. It is also of especial interest to us in that it would appear to be the ancestor of our feature, "Sons of the Desert". One wonders whether Charlie Chase, who is in both films, mightn’t have provided the basic idea to Frank Craven, officially credited as writer on "Sons of the Desert". An earlier Laurel and Hardy (short) "We Paw Down" also uses the same general story-line, so possibly this was some little private pet story of Chase’s that he refurbished from time to time.

"SONS OF THE DESERT" (MGM-Hal Roach, 1934) Dir: William A. Seiter; associate director, Lloyd French; story by Frank Craven; starring Laurel and Hardy, with Charlie Chase, Mae Busey, Dorothy Christy, Lucien Littlefield, John Elliott, Charles Hall, Stanley Blystone- and Hal Roach as an extra in a montage sequence. 7 reels. (Also known, in Europe, as "Fraternally Yours").

In many ways, "Sons of the Desert" is perhaps the best of all the Laurel and Hardy features; it's certainly the best as a film, the most polished, and the best directed. It does lack the sustained and spectacular slapstick of "Way Out West" and some of the others, and perhaps because of this it has been sadly under-rated through the years. (It has been particularly under-rated in Europe, where audiences have no understanding of or sympathy for American conventions, and thus miss the point of much of it.) Without minimizing for an instant the work of Laurel and Hardy themselves, a great deal of the credit for this one must go to director Seiter. He had made some of the most sparkling and likeable silent comedies - particularly Denny's "Skinner's Dress Suit" - and that same touch is evident here. It would be too much to expect to find charming domestic comedy in a L & H vehicle - but there are certain human little touches in the marital scenes that give them an appeal denied to the customary L & H households, where the wives are invariably depicted as grasping, bullying tyrants. There are more situation gags and less purely slapstick ones - but when the slapstick comes, it's beautifully handled, and more severely controlled than usual. Watch, for example, the beautiful timing of the scene with the hot bathtub fairly early in the picture - and the complete absence of any "milking" of this or other scenes. Since milking a gag, or building it too ponderously, has ever been a Laurel and Hardy failing, one must assume that the lack of it here (in the only L&H film directed by Seiter) is attributable to Seiter’s control. The use of silence and pantomime in the opening sequence makes one wish all the more that Laurel & Hardy had collaborated with Seiter on far more than just this one film, for each seemed ideally suited to the other.

In other respects, the film shows more care than usual too. The dialogue is brighter, with less reliance on puns. And the Hal Roach stock-music library --which seemed to consist of about three selections only -- puts in a very
belated and even then only spasmodic appearance. One does miss some of
the Roach reliables in the cast, but Charlie Hall is on hand of course —
and Charlie Chase is great in his regrettably short portion of the film.

Our print is in pretty good shape, though with a number of splices which
account for it being a minute or two shorter than the original running
time. However, apart from an extension of the scene where Charlie Chase's
eye is blacked, and more of the "Honolulu Baby" number, nothing seems to
be missing.

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**A 3-reel postscript**

We had announced "Broke in China" as being a part of our program tonight,
but the print that we were able to obtain unfortunately contained no titles
whatsoever. Since a good deal of the humor of this subject depends on these
titles (written by A.H. Giebler and David Weissman), it does fall a little
flat without them. It seemed a pity to upset the balance of the program
proper by showing it -- and yet, having announced it, it seemed even more
of a pity not to show it. So we've compromised by putting it at the end —
after the regular show — for those who care to stay for it.

Directed by Eddie Cline for Mack Sennett in 1927, it stars Ben Turpin, Ruth
Taylor and the formidable Louise Carver. It seems to be an attempt to lampoon
some of the French avant-garde films of the period - those "mood" pieces
set in Marseilles dives - and how successful it was, one can hardly judge
without the titles. It certainly has some very amusing moments even as is,
and the denouement is quite wonderful.

Finally, even though it isn't comedy, but because the print is only in our
hands for a few days, we're winding up with a "Screen Snaps" that has some
exceptionally interesting shots of silent personalities - the Gishes,
Sidney Olcott directing Eartha Wheat, Doug and Mary, etc., etc.

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**Program Notes & Enquiries:** Mr. K. Everson, Hotel Bradford, 210 W. 70th St.,
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**Next program:** April 19th. Programs for April to be announced in our
next mailing.