"GOING EYE EYE" (Hal Roach, MGM, 1934) Dir: Charles Rogers; camera: Francis Corby; starring: Laurel and Hardy, with Walter Long, Mae Busch. Two reels.

Like so many Laurel and Hardy comedies, "Going Eye Eye" starts off with a couple of situations which would seem to be merely an introduction to the basic comedy idea, but which, intentionally or otherwise, wind up being the whole film. In this case however, no one surely can object, since it enables every scene to be thoroughly milked dry of every comic possibility. A lesser-known L & H, and admittedly not a top-drawer one, it is nevertheless a consistently amusing comedy, and a very polished one. Some of the chit-chat is delightful (especially Hardy's explanation for a delay in answering the phone - "Excuse me a moment, my ear is full of milk") and there are two enjoyable scenes where Hardy is listening to a lengthy explanation from another party (Laurel once, Mae Busch on the other occasion) and the changing expressions on his face - dismay, puzzlement, doubt, and finally happy understanding - remind us once again what an accomplished actor, as well as a pantomimist, Oliver Hardy was. Walter Long's villainy and a bizarre finish (a dig at Tod Browning's "Freaks") notwithstanding, this is really Hardy's show all the way.


Although surprisingly uneventful, "Manhattan Monkey Business" comes over much better than many of the other sound Chase comedies that may have had better and more elaborate gags, but were spoiled by uneven pacing. This one, directed by Chase himself, is nicely mounted, moves along smoothly, and scores mainly on Chase's own pleasing personality. The gags are gentle, and there's no violent slapstick; even the climactic gag isn't really played all-out for laughs, and is softened by Chase's pleasant singing of "When I Grow Too Old To Dream".

"BUSY BODIES" (Hal Roach-MGM, 1933) Dir: Lloyd French; camera, Art Lloyd; with Laurel & Hardy, Charlie Hall. Two reels.

We've played "Busy Bodies" before, but until now have never found a really good print of it. Tonight's print is brand new, with several little bits missing from our previous, somewhat tattered print, so on that score alone its revival seems well justified. For pure mayhem and savage slapstick, "Busy Bodies" is one of the boys' best. It certainly lacks the subtlety and invention of many of their others, but makes up for it with gusto and action without sacrificing the all-important methodical pacing. It starts off in typical fashion with LH on a bright, sunny morning, at peace with the world. But in no time they're at Charlie Hall's throat, and almost immediately thereafter they turn on each other with their civilized ritual of increasingly violent give and take. It's all quite exhilarating -- and economical too. It looks as though it took far less time (and trouble) to make this one than usual. For the closing scenes, they just went out into the Roach studio and let the Administration Buildings serve as the set for a rather prosperous looking lumber-yard! - INTERMISSION -
"IF I HAD A MILLION" (Paramount, 1932) Directors: Ernst Lubitsch (Laughton sequence); Norman Taurog (Fields sequence); Stephen Roberts (Ruggles sequence); Norman McLeod (Raft sequence); James Cruze (Wynne Gibson sequence; May Robson sequence); William A. Seiter (Cooper sequence); R. Bruce Humberstone (Gene Raymond sequence)


Starring: Gary Cooper, Wynne Gibson, George Raft, Charles Laughton, Richard Bennett, Jack Oakie, Frances Dee, Charlie Ruggles, Mary Boland, Alison Skipworth, W.C. Fields, Roscoe Karnes, May Robson, Gene Raymond, Lucien Littlefield, with Blanche Frederici, John St. Polis, Barton Churchill, Willard Robertson, Russell Hicks, Fred Kelsey. 9 reels.

For a film that, through the years, has become almost legendary, "If I Had a Million" made remarkably little stir when it was first issued. Not even given a first-run in many cities, it was put out by Paramount as a second feature. Neither reviewers nor audiences were greatly enthralled; as an all-star film it failed to generate the same enthusiasm as had "Grand Hotel," and the attitude generally was that it was little more than a batch of shorts strung together. Of course the high standard of shorts in those days, and the great numbers of them (dramatic as well as comedy) makes this attitude a little easier to understand, and yet, with all its ambition, it's such an expertly made film, and such a thoroughly entertaining one, that it's still difficult to see why it escaped being a big hit.

Paramount probably weren't too concerned, as it must have been an economical film to make. All the directors and stars were contractees, or available at no great expense. Each sequence had its own director and crew, and was probably shot quite quickly. Even as a second feature, it undoubtedly brought back a healthy profit, while in Europe it made the grade as an "A" and did benefit from enthusiastic critical reception.

In later years its reputation grew -- fostered by the fact that it never seemed to be shown complete. Sequences were trimmed, and the Gene Raymond and Wynne Gibson episodes removed entirely on later reissues. The Gibson sequence is still the first one to be cut for television exposure, but it and the Robson story, both by Cruze, represent some kind of triumph of silent technique in the sound media. The most famous sequence -- the Fields episode -- funny though it is, seems no longer to have been over-rated. Fields' dialogue is forced, and the most isn't made of the slapstick possibilities at all. The never-referred-to Charlie Ruggles sequence is, however, a pure delight, and easily the best thing in the picture. All of the sequences maintain a generally high standard, however, with the single exception of the Gary Cooper story, which is disappointingly trivial and lacking in real humor. And its triteness is stressed further by its coming fairly late in the story. All in all however, "If I Had a Million" is quite one of the best of the all-star films of its type; it certainly pays off far better than "Tales of Manhattan", "On Our Merry Way" and other later ones that had far less legitimate framing stories.

Paramount's credits on the film are sparse -- there wasn't even an individual director credit for each sequence. While we have tracked these down, we haven't as yet discovered which of the seven directors doubled up and also directed the framing story. No cameramen at all were listed, though several must have been utilized, and it seems safe to assume that Karl Struss was certainly one of them.

Next show -- Thursday June 22nd -- an evening of melodrama

ROBERT WISE'S "A GATE OF DEATH" (1945); WILLIAM WELLMAN'S "THE HATCHET MAN" (1932)