
The "Music Box" exempted, Laurel & Hardy's 3-reelers never seemed as good as the bulk of their 2-reelers. For the most part there seemed little reason for the added reel, and the protracted development of what was already very measured pacing, proved a serious drawback. While this flaw is certainly present in "Chickens Come Home", it is nevertheless one of the best of the 3-reelers. While there is some typical and ultra-violent slapstick, it has more plot-substance and situational comedy than usual, and some of it is up to their very top standard -- particularly Hardy's attempts to keep his wife out of the bathroom in which an old flame is ensconced, and Laurel's dim-witted sabotage of Oliver's almost successful strategy. A remake of sorts of a silent Laurel-Finlayson comedy for Roach, it's not top L & H fare, but it's still good and very funny secondary bracket material, which should certainly be good enough for anyone.

"BUZZING AROUND" (Vitaphone-WB, 1932) Directed by Alf Goulding; photographed by Edwin DuPar; starring Patty Arbuckle, with Al St. John, Donald MacBride. Two reels.

Patty Arbuckle's series of talkie comedies for Vitaphone in the early 30's was short-lived and markedly unpopular. Few people today even remember that he made them, and it was quite a fair well up on film history often overlook them, placing Arbuckle's own song in the industry in the late 20's, when he was directing 2-reelers as William Goodrich. It is probable that "Buzzing Around" is one of the best of this series; Warmers revived it in one-reel form in later years, minus the original sound track, and with music and narration that suggested it was an old silent -- despite the street scenes, cars etc. giving the lie to that. Presumably for it to have been selected for such treatment, it must have been considered one of the best of the group, and the others may well have been inferior. Be that as it may, this one is a constant delight, even though the best gag routine consumes the first half of the picture, and the latter half is more conventional slapstick. Arbuckle looks good, has a pleasing voice, and performs extremely well in that good-natured manner of his that came through so often in the better Sennett -- usually the ones that he directed himself. There is something tremendously likeable about the man, and it is a pity that this quality of his is so less familiar to most audiences than the ultra-aggressive and crude humour of his earliest Keystones. Al St. John, his team-mate in so many Sennett's, plays up well too, but it is Arbuckle's show all the way, although the gags themselves are fast and inventive and tinged with a healthy vulgarity here and there. Alf Goulding, always a low-budget comedy director, has so seldom approached this standard in his other comedies that one assumes Arbuckle himself did at least a good percentage of the directing. It's hard to understand this kind of comedy not going down in the 30's, but perhaps its mayhem just lacked the sophistication of Laurel & Hardy. Basically, the humor here is vintage Sennett -- which is why it pays off. With their clownish clothes and breakaway props, Patty and Al do seem to belong so much to the silent era that they may have seemed dreadfully old-fashioned in 1932. Nothing seems quite as "old" and an embarassing as the fashion of only six years ago. But quite apart from the comic aspects, "Buzzing Around" has tremendous added interest and nostalgia in that almost all of it was shot in the streets of Brooklyn -- primarily right in the immediate vicinity of the Vitaphone studio by the Avenue M subway station. It's rather odd to see the Brooklyn streets being used as casually for chase and chaos as had the Hollywood streets in Sennett comedies of the prior decade. The few studio scenes are rather obvious in their use of painted backdrops etc., but for some reason Vitaphone never took too much trouble in providing their Brooklyn-made shorts with studio production values -- viz the Floyd Gibbons one-reelers, which had some painfully inept studio "sets". But for the most part, "Buzzing Around" keeps outdoors. In any event, it's a delightful rediscovery and grand fun throughout.

"MR. JERKYLL'S HIDE" (Warner Bros-1953) Director: I. FrelingOne reel

The Jekyll & Hyde theme has certainly been a boon to cartoon makers, and especially Hanna and Barbera's "(Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde", "Jekyll & Hyde Out", "Hyde and Hare", etc) and this is another pleasingly savage addition to the group. In this instance, the two main protagonists are a couple of middle-class British mutes, fitted out with marvellous Mel Blanc voices, who (no doubt coincidentally) rather suggest Victor McLaglen and J.N. Kerrigan in "the Informer".

Intermission

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Like "Marcus" and "The Green Goddess", "The Man Who Played God" was a remake of an earlier silent Arliss film that in turn had been based on a successful Arliss stage vehicle. "The Man Who Played God" also saw service a few years ago as "Sincerely Yours", with Liberace!) As with "The Green Goddess", it's a surprisingly un-stagey film considering the preponderance of dialogue, although no attempt is made to conceal the stage origins, and one can easily discern just when the curtain must have fallen. Some of Arliss' old stage associates are well in evidence too, most notably Ivan Simpson, who was also in all the stage and screen versions of "The Green Goddess" with Arliss.

"The Man Who Played God" is one of Arliss’ best — and one of his least exciting, depending how you look at it. It's very much of a "vehicle", but it's also a darned good story on its own. Probably recognising this, Arliss doesn't tackle it in the same spirit of fun as he did "The Green Goddess". The performance is only occasionally larger than life; the bravura style is largely limited to the earlier scenes; for the most part Arliss is subdued and immensely effective. This may disappoint those who find Arliss "a lot of fun" but not much else; it may also remind them what a first-class actor he could be when he took a role really seriously. It's a poignant and moving story for all its contrivance, and Arliss does full justice to it. The supporting cast is full of veteran players or young up-and-comers like Bette Davis and Ray Milland. Davis is exceptionally good and makes one wonder anew why she was so good in her first few films, and so bad (usually) and unattractive for a lengthy period around 1934-5.

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NEXT PROGRAM — FRIDAY OF THIS WEEK — ADELPHI HALL, 7:30 P.M.

SENTIMENT AND MELODRAMA : 1931

"SKIPPY" (directed by Norman Taurog) with Jackie Cooper, Mitzi Green
"EAST OF BORNES" (directed by George Melford) with Charles Bickford, Rose Robert