Tuesday Dec, 11th: Cecil B. DeMille's THE ROAD TO YESTERDAY (1925) with Joseph Schildkraut, Jetta Goudal, William Boyd; and "Innocent Husbands" (1925) directed by Leo McCarey, with Charlie Chase, Martha Sleeper.

The re-scheduled date for the "Braveheart"/"The Last Performance" program is Tuesday January 15th.

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society November 27, 1962

A Laurel & Hardy Program

"You're Darn Tootin" (Hal Roach-MGM, 1928) Directed by Edgar Kennedy; with Stan Laurel & Oliver Hardy. 2 rls.

The famous, frenzied, pants-ripping and shin-kicking climax to this film so automatically earn it a well-bruised niche in any hall of comic fame that it hardly matters too much that the preceding material is awkwardly paced and spotty in its laughs. At times so dependent on the right use of sound that it almost looks as though it were planned (and perhaps partially shot) as a talkie, it is sometimes also a little bit too methodically developed, even for Laurel & Hardy. The opening frustrations of the orchestra leader would have paid off better if director Kennedy were himself playing the role, and the business of the boys arguing over who plays first in the later street scene certainly fall flat due to the over-length of the scene and the lack of music and effects. But despite not being as good as it should be, it is consistently amusing; the dinner-table scene has some excellent stuff in it, and of course the last third of the film more than makes up for the earlier shortcomings.

"One Good Turn" (Hal Roach-MGM, 1931) Directed by James Horne; with Laurel & Hardy, James Finlayson, Mary Carr, Billy Gilbert. 2 reels.

One of the least known of the team's early talkies, "One Good Turn" takes a more contrived plot set-up than usual, but manages to introduce one or two different twists. For once the worm turns, and Laurel sets about Hardy with an unsuspected ferocity and a sharp axe in the climactic scenes. As victims of the depression (politely begging for "a piece of buttered toast!") they look even seedier than usual, and behave with a corresponding increase in gallantry. There are the extra-hearty falls that we've come to expect, the mutual exchanges of savagery, the collapsing car, and some dialogue that's a little better than usual. Without being an unusual or a top-bracket L&H, it's a fast-paced one that is good fun throughout. The print, unfortunately, likewise seems to be a victim of the depression and a couple of sections in the middle have rather a plethora of splices, but these ragged areas apart, it's intact.

"From Soup to Nuts" (Hal Roach-MGM, 1928) Supervised by Leo McCarey; directed by Edgar Kennedy; with Laurel & Hardy, Anita Garvin. 2 rls.

An laurel & Hardy silent that we haven't run before is a real event, so it hardly matters that this is not one of their best, or even better, comedies. For once they are floored by lack of plot and even of a really challenging situation; knockabout at a society party was old hat stuff in '28, and though there are some individual gags that are excellent, there's just nothing to build to, and thus no climax. The film literally finishes at the end of two reels without really having gotten very far. However, Hardy's superb aplomb as a waiter faced with a never-ending stream of misfortune is as delightful as always, and it's always good to see Anita Garvin in a good-sized role. Edgar Kennedy's direction keeps the camera on the move to overcome the static nature of the story, but he isn't well-served by Len Powers' rather wobbly follow-shots. The "cherry" gag Laurel had done rather better in 1927
in "The Second Hundred Years"; almost all of the rest of it turned up again in one of the last of their Roach features, "A Chump at Oxford". Secondary L&H undoubtedly, but "From Soup to Nuts" still has its moments.

**Intermission**

"BABES IN TOYLAND" ("MARCH OF THE WOODEN SOLDIERS") (Hal Roach-MGM, 1934)
Directed by Gus Meins and Charles Rogers; from the Victor Herbert operetta with book and lyrics by Glen MacDonough; screenplay by Nick Grinde & Frank Butler; camera - Art Lloyd & Francis Corby;
With: Laurel and Hardy, Charlotte Henry, Harry Kleinback (Henry Brandon), Felix Knight, Florence Roberts, Ferdinand Munier, William Buress, Virginia Karns, Johnny Downs, Marie Wilson, Jean Darling, Billy Bletcher, John George;
Nine Reels

Rarely seen in recent years, "Babes in Toyland" was one of those unfortunate films that never seemed to turn up absolutely intact whenever it was revived in theatres or on television. Happily, our print is a full and complete one, even to the sung prologue which always used to be the first casualty.

In many ways, it's the best of the Laurel & Hardy operetta films. Certainly, with its totally studio-bound fantasy sets, it's the most elaborate. And in its emphasis on the musical element, it's the most satisfying in terms of the original work too. Laurel and Hardy certainly fitted easily enough into "The Bohemian Girl" and "Fra Diavolo", and musical and comic elements could be enjoyed equally well, but the dividing lines between those elements were quite clearly drawn. Plot would stop for traditional L&H material, and then we'd be back in Bohemia again. Here, by the very nature of things, the boys are absorbed into the structure of the film and move along with it. This does result in less material being specifically tailored for them than in the others, but the end result is so pleasing that it's not altogether a bad thing. There's plenty of traditional Laurel & Hardy by-play, even if there are less slapstick highlights, and to the really devoted L&H disciples the by-play is usually more rewarding than the all-out slapstick.

On all counts, this version is far superior to Disney's gaudy, cheap and jazzed-up remake, which not only re-arranged the music and re-wrote the lyrics, but added new songs as well. Here, apart from the briefest snatch of the traditional "The Cuckoo" in the main titles, and the use of Disney's "3 Little Pigs" theme, the music is all vintage Herbert - charmingly and faithfully rendered, just the way he wrote it. Not all of the original music is utilised of course - "The Military Ball", "Barney O'Flynn", "Hail to Christmas" & "Beatrice Fairfax" are four of the casualties - but much of the omitted music does appear as incidental music. For example, the original stage presentation featured a battle between a bear and a giant spider, and the music for this is used during the invasion of the Boogie-Men.

Disney obviously studied this version rather carefully before embarking on his remake - viz his two lead comics so obviously and so pathetically inadequately based on L&H - but he came nowhere near matching the charm of this less pretentious version, and even his sadism didn't match the genuine moments of horror that this has to offer. William Buress, Roach's toy-maker, is no great shakes, but he is certainly less imbecilic and offensive than Ed Wynn, and Ray Bolger - a talented fellow admittedly - can never equal the villainy of Henry Brandon's Barnaby. (Brandon was then in his early 20's!) As for Annette (?!), of course she isn't in the same league as Charlotte Henry, the nearest the talkies ever came to a Betty Bronson. Worst of all, Disney had no authentic Victor Herbert -- and no Laurel & Hardy. This 1934 version has an ample supply of both, and if it isn't 100% faithful to Herbert's plot and motivations, it's certainly faithful to the spirit he created.