THRILLS AND SPILLS IN TOP-SPEED COMEDY

When the movies learned to talk, a lot of very talented people suddenly lost one of the prime outlets for their very particular talents. No, we're not talking about romantic idols or glamor queens whose voices didn't match their faces. We're referring to the stunt men -- although it seems almost a disrespectful phrase to use about a profession which is not only the most dangerous in Hollywood, but also one requiring the maximum in calculation, timing, craftsmanship and sheer "know-how". In the silent period, they had two big fields -- the serials, and the two-reel comedies. Sound made no difference to cliff-hanging formats -- but it made a big difference to comedies. Somehow the powers that be thought that it would be better to hear a comic saying something funny than show him doing something funny. Radio was fairly new then, and Hollywood was quick to introduce its comics to audiences who had never seen but who had always just heard them. And of course, many of the essentially vocal comics were great -- W.C. Fields, to give just one example.

But as always when there is any kind of a revolution in entertainment or art forms, there was no happy medium. The change was absolute. Comedies became all-talkie in the strictest sense of the word, and the wonderful, wacky world of slapstick came to an abrupt end. And with it those hilarious sight gags that were slammed over with such gusto by the stuntmen -- car crashes and (funnier still) near-crashes, hairbreadth chases, spectacular falls and furious mayhem of every conceivable kind. xxiixxxixxixxxxixxxxixxxixxxxixxxxxxxixxxixxxixxxxxxxixxxixxxixxxxixxxixxxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxxixxxixxxixxxxixxxixxxixxxixxxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxixxxx
long mourned the passing of the silent slapstick comedy, and has done something constructive about it by producing "When Comedy Was King" in which he brings back many of those classics of the 20's. And not in short clips either, but in lengthy sequences which really allow the gags to build - and build - and BUILD! Needless to say, the stuntman - in all his former glory - is well in evidence, and scarcely a sequence goes by without a daredevil deed of one kind or another. A well-done stunt is always thrilling; but it's doubly diverting if it's funny too. A case in point is a dizzy sequence when a car is suspended over a sheer, steep, and very highprecipice. Only a rope prevents it from crashing to total destruction in the yawning gap below. We forgot to mention that there's a man in the auto -- that long suffering comic, Vernon Dent. Stars often had to do their own stunts in those days, and the camera gets close enough to the perspiring Mr. Dent to prove that there's no double. How does Mr. Dent escape? Not very logically perhaps -- but it's there on the screen, and you can't dispute what the eye can so plainly see!

"When Comedy Was King" is full of high-speed action gags like this one -- many of them carefully constructed by that old maestro Del Lord. No one knew better than he how to time a thrill-gag. He also seemed convinced that stuntmen had at least nine lives, for he always went just a little beyond the bounds of normal human endurance in the things he asked them to do! He asked for the impossible in special gag props too - and got them. And when he needed cars wrecked or buildings demolished -- why, he just wrecked and demolished them. They didn't know how to fake -- and they wouldn't have done so if they did!

All of which makes "When Comedy Was King" a thrilling as well as a hilarious 80 minutes of moviegoing.
All-Time Greatest Cast of Screen Clowns in New Comedy Hit

Nowadays, with Hollywood’s studios more determined than ever to give the paying customer maximum value for his boxoffice dollar, the all-star cast is no longer the novelty that it used to be. Even so, we’ll wager you’ve never seen a cast quite like the one in "When Comedy Was King", a wonderful cavalcade of silent screen humor from 1914 to 1929. For the very first time, all -- or very nearly all -- of filmland’s great clowns are assembled under one roof -- or should we say, in one film can? And between them they run the gamut of every kind of screen gagging -- from slapstick to satire, from the wild to the wildest, and from the fast to the ... well, it's ALL fast, whether the comedy of the moment in knockabout or of a more subtle variety. SPEED was the one thing you could ALWAYS count on in the great days of the silent comedy! And these were the stars, all seen at their best in "When Comedy Was King", that made those comedies roar with life and laughter. Charlie Chaplin, the lovable little tramp -- with more than a streak of the malicious concealed beneath his tatters. Buster Keaton, the Great Stone Face, stumbling through life in a perpetual daze before blundering through to a deserved but quite accidental triumph. Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy -- the greatest comedy team of them all. Wistful little Harry Langdon -- one critic described him as looking like a "baby dope fiend". Pop-eyed Ben Turpin, a unique clown who combined both fast slapstick and neat satire in his two-reel riots. Fatty Arbuckle -- forgotten now, but a screen comic of rare talent. Wallace Beery -- one of the best comedy villains of them all, and one of Mack Sennett's most promising stars -- back in 1916! Lovely, energetic Gloria Swanson -- Beery's victim! Mabel Normand -- a sprite who worked like a horse for laughs -- and always got them. The Keystone Cops -- their name has
remained synonymous with fast, zany action and breathless chases; Charlie Chase -- dapper, well-meaning, perpetually frustrated; Edgar Kennedy -- molehills grew very rapidly into mountains when he blundered on to the scene; and the Sennett Girls. Maybe they weren't terribly funny in themselves -- but they certainly dressed up a scene (if dressed is the right word) and made it tough for the comics they were working with!

These great names only represent a fraction of the clowns brought back in "When Comedy Was King". Snub Pollard is there too, as are Stuart Erwin, Andy Clyde, Chester Conklin, Al St. John, Jimmy Finlayson, Billy Bevan, Mack Swain, Madeleine Hurlock, Vernon Dent, Bobby Vernon and Keystone Teddy, the Wonder Dog. But go along and have fun for yourself, spotting the names we may have missed.

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Remember "The Golden Age of Comedy"? Chances are that if you saw it two years ago, you're still laughing at it. Since then the whole world has been laughing at it -- with the exception of the Iron Curtain countries -- and it has proven such an instrument of good-will for the United States that one hopes it will even find its way into those territories too. Even a country hopelessly antagonistic to the United States would undoubtedly soften through the humanising effect of laughter -- especially laughter produced by a nation laughing at its own weaknesses, and tweaking its foibles. In England "The Golden Age of Comedy" was a fabulous success -- in France too, where it was purchased and released by that master of sly gallic witm Rene Clair. And in India, 20th Century Fox found they had in it their biggest grossing success of the year -- despite a plentiful supply of real blockbusters on their schedule.

If you missed it, we won't torment you by going further. But cheer up -- smile -- and get ready to laugh out loud. 20th Century Fox, impressed with the reaction to his first comedy cavalcade, contracted with producer Robert G. Youngson to release his sequel -- "When Comedy Was King". From all accounts, it's even funnier than the original, and with Buster Keaton, Charlie Chaplin, The Keystone Cops, Laurel and Hardy, Mabek Normand, Ben Turpin, Edgar Kennedy, Gloria Swanson, Wallace Beery, Fatty Arbuckle, Charlie Chase, Snub Pollard and the Mack Sennett Girls heading (not comprising) the greatest starcast of clowns ever assembled, it's no wonder.

Harvard man Youngson, a slightly rotund and pertually jolly man in his early forties, has made a spectacular career out of silent films -- even though he entered the film industry only in the 1940's. Clever editing of newsreel footage produced a fine series of historical documents covering the years from 1900 through the thirties -- a wonderful, living chronicle of our times. Titles like "I Remember When", "Those
Exciting Days", "It Happened To You" and the feature "50 Years Before Your Eyes" may well be familiar to you. So also may Youngson's work in the adapting of silent films to modern day audience requirements; thanks to his enterprise, Rin Tin Tin and John Barrymore have been re-introduced to current audiences. That mighty spectacle of 1929, "Noah's Ark" -- as re-presented a couple of reasons ago -- was another landmark in Youngson's championing of the best of the silent screen. His work in this field has earned the young producer two Academy Awards already, and many Award nominations.

"When Comedy Was King" was compiled from the very best comedies of the 1914-1929 era, as produced by Mack Sennett and Hal Roach. Over 2500 reels of film were carefully screened and re-screened by Youngson, many of them being rescued just as they were about to decompose -- and thus vanish for all time. All of the material selected for possible inclusion was tested before audiences, and laugh response used as the criteria by which the final film was assembled. All of it was funny -- but Youngson wanted only the material that was great -- and personal preference can sometimes be a tricky thing, especially if colored by a minute knowledge of the period. On the whole however, the producer was happy to find that the sequences that he liked best were also the ones that his guinea-pig audiences liked best too -- and these sequences were compiled into the 82 minute "When Comedy Was King".

Leaving nothing to chance, Youngson also tested his finished film before varying types of New York audiences -- all to 100% enthusiastic response. Perhaps you may have been at one of these "sneak" previews. If you were, you may have noticed one laugh a little above the rest -- booming out clear, resonant, obviously utterly captivated by the gems of comedy on the screen,
enjoying the shared laughter of others, and in the throes of sheer delight.

That would have been producer Youngson. Laughing not because he was enjoying his own picture, but because he's probably the country's No.1 fan of silent comedy!