



SILVERSCREEN
PRIMARY
EDUCATION

Laurel & Hardy: A Celebration

*By Adam Pepper
Session 7*



Welcome to Session 7 of this celebration of the life, times and laughs of Laurel & Hardy! This year marks 60 years since the death of Stan Laurel, the English Vaudeville comedian who became part of the world's most famous on-screen double act.

Over these ten weeks, we will journey through their lives, their movies, their highs and lows, and immerse ourselves in the history of their time in Hollywood; a time when movies were only just beginning!

So, adjust your hat, wiggle your tie and let's follow 'the boys' on an adventure...

Session 7:

We can hear you! That's right! As of last week, the boys are talking, and quickly becoming huge movie stars; even though their work is still firmly in the two-reeler section of the movie theatres.

Their voices sound right, the slapstick is still there, and Stan is loving the chance to write gags you can hear as well as see.

But the 1930s bring a new kind of movie to the masses...the monster movie!

Karloff. Chaney. Universal. Carl Laemmle. A whole raft of monsters appear to banish the Wall Street Crash blues, and they're all based on the classic texts of the Victorian times.

But the shorts still have a pull and, as we head into 1932, and Oscar success, the boys have another choice to make. Do we stick with what we know works, or do we join the features gang and see what our audiences do?

As it turns out, Hal Roach will make the decision for them...

Useful information for Session 7:

Charley Chase

Charles Joseph Parrott (October 20, 1893 – June 20, 1940), known professionally as Charley Chase, was an American comedian, actor, screenwriter and film director. He worked for many pioneering comedy studios but is chiefly associated with producer Hal Roach. Chase was the elder brother of comedian/director James Parrott.

Born Charles Joseph Parrott in Baltimore, Maryland, Charley Chase began performing in vaudeville as a teenager and started his career in films by working at the Christie Film Company in 1912. He then moved to Keystone Studios, where he began appearing in bit parts in the Mack Sennett films, including those of Charlie Chaplin. By 1915 he was playing juvenile leads in the Keystones, and directing some of the films as Charles Parrott. His Keystone credentials were good enough to get him steady work as a comedy director with other companies; he directed many of Chaplin imitator Billy West's comedies, which featured a young Oliver Hardy as a villain.

He worked at Henry Lehrman's L-KO Kompany during its final months of existence. Then in 1920, Chase began working as a film director for the Hal Roach studio. Among his notable early work for Roach was supervising the first entries in the *Our Gang* series. Chase became director-general of the Hal Roach studio in late 1921, supervising the production of all the Roach series except the Harold Lloyd comedies. Following Lloyd's departure from the studio in 1923, Chase moved back in front of the camera with his own series of shorts, adopting the screen name Charley Chase.

Chase was a master of the comedy of embarrassment, and he played either hapless young businessmen or befuddled husbands in dozens of situation comedies. His screen persona was that of a pleasant young man with a dapper moustache and ordinary street clothes; this set him apart from the clownish makeup and crazy costumes used by his contemporaries. His earliest Roach shorts cast him as a hard-luck fellow named "Jimmie Jump" in one-reel (10-minute) comedies.

Chase moved with ease into sound films in 1929 and became one of the most popular film comedians of the period. He continued to be very prolific in the talkie era, often putting his fine singing voice on display and including his humorous, self-penned songs in his comedy shorts. The two-reeler *The Pip from Pittsburg*, released in 1931 and co-starring Thelma Todd, is one of the most celebrated Charley Chase comedies of the sound era.

WC Fields

William Claude Dukenfield (January 29, 1880 – December 25, 1946), better known as W. C. Fields, was an American actor, comedian, juggler and writer. His career in show business began in vaudeville, where he attained international success as a silent juggler. He began to incorporate comedy into his act and was a featured comedian in the *Ziegfeld Follies* for several years. He became a star in the Broadway musical comedy *Poppy* (1923), in which he played a colourful small-time con man. His subsequent stage and film roles were often similar scoundrels or henpecked everyman characters.

Among his trademarks were his raspy drawl and grandiloquent vocabulary. His film and radio persona was generally identified with Fields himself. It was maintained by the publicity departments at Fields's studios (Paramount and Universal) and was further reinforced by Robert Lewis Taylor's 1949 biography *W. C. Fields, His Follies and Fortunes*. Beginning in 1973, with the publication of Fields's letters, photos and personal notes in grandson Ronald Fields's book *W. C. Fields by Himself*, it was shown that Fields was married (and subsequently estranged from his wife), financially supported their son and loved his grandchildren.

In 1915, Fields starred in two short comedies, *Pool Sharks* and *His Lordship's Dilemma*, filmed at the French Gaumont Company's American studio in Flushing, New York. His stage commitments prevented him from doing more movie work until 1924, when he played a supporting role in *Janice Meredith*, a Revolutionary War romance starring Marion Davies. He reprised his *Poppy* role in a silent-film adaptation, retitled *Sally of the Sawdust* (1925), directed by D. W. Griffith for Paramount Pictures. On the basis of his work in that film and Griffith's subsequent production *That Royle Girl*, Paramount offered Fields a contract to star in his own series of feature-length comedies. His next starring role was in *It's the Old Army Game* (1926), which featured his friend Louise Brooks, who later starred in G. W. Pabst's *Pandora's Box* (1929) in Germany. Fields's 1926 film, which included a silent version of the porch sequence that would later be expanded in the sound film *It's a Gift* (1934), had only middling success at the box office. The following three films Fields made at Astoria, however—*So's Your Old Man* (1926, remade as *You're Telling Me!* in 1934), *The Potters* (1927), and *Running Wild* (1927)—were successes on an increasing scale and gained Fields a growing following as a silent comedian.

Films to look out for:

The Story of the Kelly Gang (1906) *Frankenstein* (1931)

Fantasmagorie (1908) *The Mummy* (1932)

Habeas Corpus (1928) *The Music Box* (1932)

Helpmates (1932)

The Phantom Of The Opera (1925)

The Skeleton Dance (1929)

Blotto (1930)

Pardon Us (1931)

