



SILVERSCREEN
PRIMARY
EDUCATION

Laurel & Hardy: A Celebration

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Session 4*



Welcome to Session 4 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 4:

This week sees changes in American society as the Roaring Twenties hit our timeline. Fresh out of WW1, America faces a tremendous economic boom...or, at least, most parts of society do! But with boom inevitably comes bust, and more of that in the weeks to come.

Booze is banned with the Prohibition law taking effect in 1920, and right across the country, you are either a 'have' or a 'have not', so the new movie stars who we have begun to follow, as they did in their Vaudeville days, are targeting their movies and their characters on stories of the 'small folk'.

Cue Charlie Chaplin, now a director and producer in his own right, as he moves from two-reelers to features, bringing his Tramp character to perfect realisation.

Even Keaton is getting in on the act with his fantastical escapist stunts.

But what are our boys doing?

Well, Babe is busy earning golf money by appearing in many films as a heavy or villain, while blue-eyed Stan is in the writers room until film enables him to be photographed without 'looking blind'.

But surely somebody will put them together at some point soon...

Useful information for Session 4:

Prohibition

Prohibition was the legal prevention of the manufacture, sale, and transportation of alcoholic beverages in the United States from 1920 to 1933 under the terms of the Eighteenth Amendment. Although the temperance movement, which was widely supported, had succeeded in bringing about this legislation, millions of Americans were willing to drink liquor (distilled spirits) illegally, which gave rise to bootlegging (the illegal production and sale of liquor) and speakeasies (illegal, secretive drinking establishments), both of which were capitalized upon by organized crime. As a result, the Prohibition era also is remembered as a period of gangsterism, characterized by competition and violent turf battles between criminal gangs.

In the United States an early wave of movements for state and local prohibition arose from the intensive religious revivalism of the 1820s and '30s, which stimulated movements toward perfectionism in human beings, including temperance and abolitionism. Although an abstinence pledge had been introduced by churches as early as 1800, the earliest temperance organizations seem to have been those founded at Saratoga, New York, in 1808 and

in Massachusetts in 1813. The movement spread rapidly under the influence of the churches; by 1833 there were 6,000 local societies in several U.S. states.

Conceived by Wayne Wheeler, the leader of the Anti-Saloon League, the Eighteenth Amendment passed in both chambers of the U.S. Congress in December 1917 and was ratified by the requisite three-fourths of the states in January 1919. Its language called for Congress to pass enforcement legislation, and that was championed by Andrew Volstead, chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, who engineered passage of the National Prohibition Act (better known as the Volstead Act) over the veto of Pres. Woodrow Wilson.

Neither the Volstead Act nor the Eighteenth Amendment was enforced with great success. Indeed, entire illegal economies (bootlegging, speakeasies, and distilling operations) flourished. The earliest bootleggers began smuggling foreign-made commercial liquor into the United States from across the Canadian and Mexican borders and along the seacoasts from ships under foreign registry.

Leo McCarey

Thomas Leo McCarey (October 3, 1898 – July 5, 1969) was an American film director, screenwriter, and producer. He was involved in nearly 200 films, including the critically acclaimed *Duck Soup*, *Make Way for Tomorrow*, *The Awful Truth*, *Going My Way*, *The Bells of St. Mary's*, *My Son John*, and *An Affair to Remember*.

While focusing mainly on screwball comedies during the 1930s, McCarey turned towards producing more socially conscious and overtly religious films during the 1940s, ultimately finding success and acclaim in both genres. McCarey was one of the most popular and established comedy directors of the pre-World War II era.

Born in Los Angeles, California, McCarey attended St. Joseph's Catholic School and Los Angeles High School. His father was Thomas J. McCarey, whom the Los Angeles Times called "the greatest fight promoter in the world." Leo McCarey would later make a boxing comedy with Harold Lloyd called *The Milky Way* (1936).

McCarey graduated from the University of Southern California law school and, besides the law, tried mining, boxing, and songwriting before becoming an assistant director to Tod Browning in 1919. It was McCarey's boyhood friend, the actor and future fellow director David Butler, who referred him to Browning. Browning convinced McCarey, despite his photogenic looks, to work on the creative side as a writer rather than as an actor. McCarey then honed his skills at the Hal Roach Studios. Roach had hired him as a gagman in 1923, after McCarey had impressed him with his sense of humour following a handball game at a sports club.

McCarey initially wrote gags for the *Our Gang* series and other studio stars, then produced and directed shorts including two-reelers with Charley Chase. Chase would, in fact, become McCarey's mentor. Upon the comedian's death in 1940, McCarey was quoted as saying, "Whatever success I have had or may have, I owe to his help because he taught me all I know." The two men were especially compatible, as they both enjoyed a side hobby trying to write popular songs.

While at Roach, McCarey, according to later interviews, cast Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy together and guided development of their onscreen characters, thus creating one of the most enduring comedy teams of all time.

Films to look out for:

The Tramp (1915)

Tit For Tat (1935)

The Kid (1921)

The Roaring Twenties (1939)

Lucky Dog (1921)

The Untouchables (1987)

The Gold Rush (1925)

The General (1926)

Putting Pants On Philip (1927)

Duck Soup (1927)

