

Funny Stuff

Silent Comedies and Cartoons

Saturday, July 16, 2011

Grand Ilusion Cinema

The Sprocket Society
Seattle, WA

About Two-Reeler Comedies

In the 20 years before 1914, shorts *were* the show. And even decades after the feature film came along, shorts were a standard – and expected – part of every movie screening.

At first movies were limited to the very short lengths of film that would fit in the camera, less than 1 or 2 minutes. Folks quickly figured out you could glue different shots together, and that you could then string those along to tell a longer story. But it would be some years before movies became more than a series of theatrically-staged tableaux and slice-of-life “actualities,” all filmed proscenium style.

In the earliest days, exhibitors bought film prints outright and would craft programs from them. They’d often go on the road, touring their movie shows with accompanying lectures and music. There were even traveling tent shows. Soon the vaudeville houses also started showing shorts, which fit perfectly into their variety programming format.

By 1905, the Nickelodeon era was in full swing in the US, made possible by moving to a rental distribution model instead of outright sales. Thousands of storefront screening rooms proliferated like mayflies all over the country, and in some cities they lined both sides of whole blocks. Your nickel got you about 30 minutes of mixed reels, with a new show usually every day. Folks would often go from one theater to another, right down the row. The profit was made in the high turnover, and audiences loved it. Even in the fancier movie houses that began to appear, variety programming was king.

Each show was an incredibly rich stew, sometimes called “the cinema of attractions” – melodramas, comedies, serials, romantic scenes, Civil War dramas, westerns and Indian films, current events and prototypical newsreels, scenic views of exotic locales, staged re-enactments and patriotic scenes, “trick” films using special effects, and more.

The universal unit of measure became the “reel”. Since most nickelodeons only had one projector, this inevitably meant a break between films while the next one was loaded (the nicer places had magic lantern slides to help cover these pauses). As a result, stories that completed within that time became the norm. A “reel” became standardized at between 10 and 12 minutes, which could also be fudged depending on the projectionist’s cranking speed. Sometimes “split-reels” were released, with two or more shorter films grouped together, but these were unpopular with some exhibitors of the time.

From the very first, the most popular films were comedies, especially slapstick. Before 1908, they were 70% and more of all releases. A movie-morals campaign during 1908-1911 put a damper on slapstick production, but outcry from audiences and something new called “movie reviewers” led to a resurrection of movie comedies, until they leveled out again at half of all films produced. The nickelodeons and movie houses took care to pack their programs with comedies, often running them literally every other movie.

At was at this moment, in late 1912, that Mack Sennett left Biograph and founded the legendary Keystone studio, which would have an indelible influence on screen comedy and launch several legendary stars. There were many other studios also specializing in comedies, including Essanay and Hal Roach.

Meanwhile, movies started getting longer. By 1911, films of more than one reel were no longer a curiosity, but resistance to them lasted until 1914-15 when the feature film was fully accepted. It was during this transition period that the two-reel length – about 20 minutes – became popular, especially for comedies. For years, two-reelers were the *de facto* star vehicle for most movie comedians – long enough to develop a story, but cheaper (and shorter) than a feature. Only the real stars got features.

Shorts would remain an essential part of film programming for another 40 years, preceding nearly every feature well into the 1950s. As movie economics changed along with audience viewing habits, pre-feature shorts dwindled over time and by the early 1960s even that last holdout, the theatrical cartoon, had faded away. The two-reeler comedy survives today as the TV sitcom.

About Early Cartoons

Today, most commercial cartoon animation is done with computers with magical “tweening” buttons. But for 100 years animation was done by hand, drawing every frame of every movie with brush and ink. These handmade frames were then photographed with special movie cameras, one at a time.

Some of the earlier filmmakers, including Georges Méliès, had shown as early as 1896 that you could achieve miracles just by stopping the camera, moving stuff, and then starting it again. It didn’t take long to realize that this could be done much more rapidly, even just a frame or two at a time, so as to imitate movement by inanimate objects. Among the very first to explore this new idea of “animation” were American filmmaker and showman J. Stuart Blackton, and the French illustrator Emile Cohl.

Blackton’s first were basically nothing more than “lightning sketches” photographed so you never saw the artist drawing on his chalkboard. Lightning sketches were a pre-cinema entertainment in which a pattering artist energetically drew curious lines that suddenly congealed into famous faces, or a funny scene. The artist would continue to draw, telling stories to weave it all together.

Cohl’s early cartoons, beginning in 1908, were more advanced – free-flowing constant mutations drawn on paper. Though still primitive, they foreshadowed the surrealistic metamorphosis that became a hallmark of later cartoons. Some his early films employed cut-outs that could be animated separately.

But cartoon animation remained a mild and not-very common novelty until the newspaper cartoonist Winsor McCay, of “Little Nemo” fame, produced his first films in 1911-12. They had his trademark beauty and draftsmanship, and delighted audiences. His legendary *Gertie the Dinosaur* (1914) was such a smash that for decades it was wrongly credited with being the first cartoon ever made. While not the first, there is no denying that McCay’s hit effectively launched the entire genre of animated film.

Yet that beauty took an enormous amount of work. McCay drew every frame in its entirety – the foreground, the background, everything was completely re-drawn from one frame to the next. As others jumped on the bandwagon and began to make their own animated cartoons, they found the process so laborious that most early ones have very limited movement, and primitive backgrounds if any at all. Inevitably, filmmakers worked to find short cuts to make cartoons easier to make.

The “slash” system, developed by Raoul Barré, involved cutting a hole in the paper sheet with the unchanging background and laying that over the moving elements. A later refinement was to tear away the moving part just photographed, revealing clean paper below. The next frame of movement was then drawn, leaving the stationary elements intact. This depended on reliable alignment, and Barré started using punched holes that fit onto pegs to ensure close registration, a technique still used today. In capable hands the slash system worked very well, and was employed well into the 1920s.

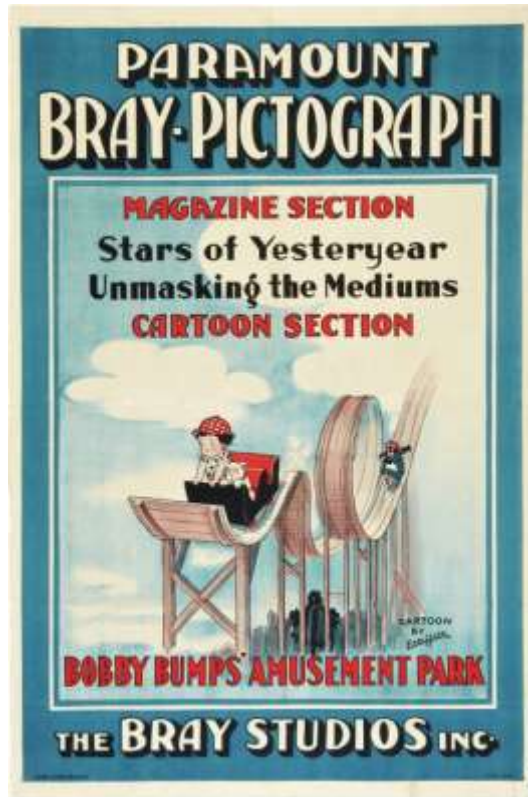
The real breakthrough was the use of clear celluloid sheets instead of paper, a process patented by Earl Hurd in 1914 and discussed further below. This permitted an explosion in the complexity and quality of the art, and quickly became the standard.

Max and Dave Fleischer made the next leap a few years later when they invented a process called “rotoscoping,” in which filmed live action is traced on a light table and used as the basis for animation. This resulted in incredibly life-like movement that stood out dramatically from other work ca. 1919-1920.

These improvements in workflow and technique made cartoons both economically viable and increasingly popular in the 1920s. Soon the better series like Felix the Cat actually boosted attendance and by the 1930s and ‘40s, theatrical cartoons became embedded in world cultural history. All the same, the cost of animated shorts began to become prohibitive during the 1950s as competition from television took its toll, and distributors were unable to get any more money for them from exhibitors. When industry leader Walt Disney was one of the first to cut back, it presaged the ugly decline of cartoons. Despite some excellent later works, by 1961 theatrical cartoons hit their nadir, often nothing more than the low-budget limited TV animation blown up to 35mm film, and then died away.

A new generation of animators kept the form alive in the underground film networks of the ‘60s. Today, short cartoons are seen theatrically only in sporadic feature packages like those by Spike & Mike.

This Evening's Program



Bobby Bumps *Bobby Bumps and His Goatmobile*

aka *Bobby Bumps on His Goatmobile*

(April 30, 1916)
The Bray Studios, Inc. / Paramount Pictures

Directed and animated by Earl Hurd.
Produced by John R. Bray.

Tonight's musical accompaniment:

“Oh! Sing-a-Loo” by Rega Dance Orchestra (1922), and “A Siren’s Dream” by Whittall’s Anglo-Persians with Louis Katzman (1927)

Hilarity ensues when young Bobby goes for a drive about the neighborhood in his goat-drawn “automobile.”

“The Bobby Bumps cartoons...are among the most mature, well-conceived cartoons of the silent era – certainly the best work done in the mid- to late-teens.”
– Leonard Maltin, *Of Mice and Magic: A History of Animated Cartoons*

Tonight’s film was a very early entry in a series of 70 or more cartoons. Bobby Bumps was a popular series running 1915-1919. It was animated by Earl Hurd for John R. Bray’s studio. Initially a kind of rip-off of the hugely-popular Buster Brown character by R.F. Outcault, the pictures developed their own personality and following. They were distributed as part of weekly “screen magazines,” *Paramount Pictograph* and *Paramount Magazine*. In June 1919, Bray broke with Paramount and signed what proved to be a disastrous deal with Sam Goldwyn. It was the end of Bobby Bumps, within a year the big talent had fled, and Bray himself was eventually squeezed out.

Earl Hurd created Bobby Bumps in 1915, when he and his new business partner Bray needed a character to take advantage of their new patent on cel animation. Prior to this everyone was using paper. Hurd’s 1914 breakthrough was patenting the use of transparent celluloid sheets instead. These could be stacked without obscuring any of the underlying art, and each could be animated separately (or just left alone), to make up the entire scene. The process revolutionized cartoon production and became the standard for nearly a century. It also made Hurd and Bray fairly rich thanks to licensing deals, for a time.

Bray (and Hurd) ran one of the best and most prolific animation studios of the era. There were four different units, each producing one cartoon a week in staggered rotation. These were then included in weekly screen magazines Bray produced for the studios. Paul Terry, Max and Dave Fleischer, Raoul Barré, Pat Sullivan, Shamus Culhane, Walter Lantz, and others all did their time with Bray. Characters and series they made included Farmer Al Falfa, Col. Heeza Liar, the original *Out of the Inkwell* films by the Fleischer brothers, *Happy Hooligan*, and dozens of other one-offs and abandoned series.

Charlie Chaplin

Easy Street

(January 22, 1917)
Mutual Film Corporation

With Charles Chaplin, Edna Purviance, Eric Campbell as The Bully, Albert Austin, James T. Kelley, and William Gillespie.

Written, directed, and edited by Charles Chaplin.

Produced by Henry P. Caulfield and Charles Chaplin.

Cinematography by Roland H. "Rollie" Totheroh. Ed Brewer - technical director. George Cleethorpe - property master. Uncredited writing by Vincent Bryan and Maverick Terrell.



Down on his luck, Charlie the Tramp makes his way to a Progressive-run rescue mission. Edna, the missionary's beautiful daughter, inspires him to reform and he becomes a beat cop. He is assigned to a Hogarthian slum ruled over by a sadistic giant (played by Eric Campbell) with balletic brutality. Inevitably, The Tramp and The Bully collide in a battle to decide who runs Easy Street.

"Easy Street is an exquisite short comedy, humor encapsulated in the regular rhythms of light verse... The film, incidentally, is the single Mutual comedy in which Chaplin first appears as a true 'tramp,' penniless, hungry, but not wanting a job. He would rather steal from the collection box at a neighborhood mission house than work..."

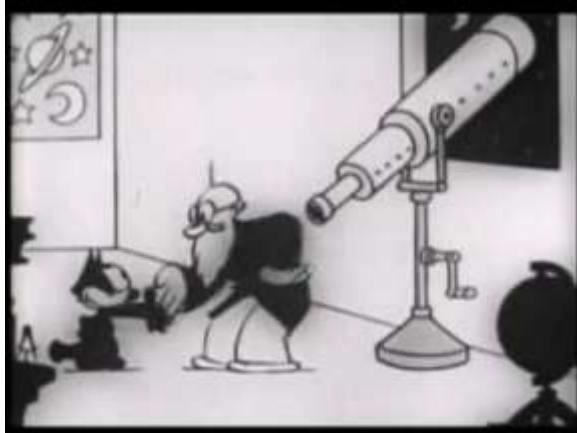
– Walter Kerr, *The Silent Clowns*

When Chaplin made *Easy Street* in 1917, he was just 27. After only two and a half years in the movie business, he was one of the biggest comedy stars in the world, with complete creative control, his own studio, and an astronomical pay package.

At Mutual, he was able to make one two-reeler comedy a month, a very leisurely pace when most were ground out in a week or often less. During his earlier contracts with Keystone and Essanay studios, he had developed the character of The Tramp and established him as a film persona. Now, with box office assured and the executives at bay, Chaplin was able to focus on the craft of filmmaking, storytelling, and directing. The lessons this period afforded him were the foundation for his later films at First National and United Artists, which established him as one of the great film artists of all time.

Working with his own hand-picked stock company and technicians, in many respects Chaplin returned to his roots in stage comedy and vaudeville. More attention was paid to the writing, and interweaving the popular touches of pathos. Sturdy sets were built by real art directors, and Chaplin rehearsed the actors on them as though it were a play. Whole days might be spent developing and rehearsing bits that might last only a few moments on film. The footage was cut and re-cut in the editing room, as Chaplin meticulously worked out the timing to his satisfaction. This quality is especially evident in *Easy Street*, which was a popular and critical success in 1917, and has endured a century later as one of the great and beloved classics of all cinema.

It was the ninth of the 12 films Chaplin made for Mutual in 1916-1917, regarded as among the best comedies of the entire silent era. Nearly all of them have remained classics of the genre: *The Rink*, *One AM*, *Behind the Screen*, *The Floorwalker* and *The Immigrant* among them. After a year with First National, he co-founded United Artists in 1919, producing there for 20 of his most creative years.



Felix the Cat *Futuritzzy*

(June 24, 1928)
Educational Pictures / Pat Sullivan Studios

Directed by Otto Messmer. Animators unknown.
Produced by Jacques Kopfstein and Pat Sullivan.

Tonight's musical accompaniment:

"Best Ever Medley - One-Step" by Paul Whiteman and His Ambassador Orchestra (Victor Records, 1920), and "Gee! But I Hate to Go Home Alone" by Natzy's Biltmore Orchestra, Jack Green director (Okeh, 1922)

A sound-added version was released with music and sound effects, produced either by Copley Pictures in 1929-30 or by Castle Films ca. 1953. It was widely broadcast in TV syndication in the 1950s and '60s, and sold on the home 16mm market.

Felix visits a fortune teller, who sees a future that scares them both. Dissatisfied, he goes instead to an astrologer, who weaves stories of fame, food, fortune, and marrying the girl of his dreams. Happy with this prediction, Felix tips him and struts off...only to find something a little different lies in store.

"[Felix the Cat's] Workmanship is wonderful, there is no better entertainment than this to be had."
– *Kinematograph Weekly*, October 15, 1925

"Felix the Cat was not the most lucrative silent animated series, nor the longest-running, nor the product of the largest studio. Nevertheless, it is the quintessential cartoon of the 1920s."
– Donald Crafton, *Before Mickey: The Animated Film 1898-1928*

While producer Pat Sullivan often claimed sole credit for Felix, in reality he had very little to do with any of the creative work after the initial film. Actually, his employee Otto Messmer was the man behind the cat. With his studio of crackerjack artists, including Joe Oriolo, Bill Nolan, Raoul Barré, Al Eugster, Hal Walker and others over the years, Messmer created some of the best animation of the silent era but never received credit until film historians unearthed the tale in the 1960s and '70s.

Introduced in 1919, Felix had no name until the third film. He was mischievous, plucky, and he always landing on top. Felix's adventures and soaring popularity allowed Messmer's crew "to indulge in flights of fancy, rendered by his animators in images verging on modernist abstractions. ...Messmer delighted in this aspect of his cartoons," writes animation historian, Donald Crafton. "Bobby Bumps was beautifully drawn, but plain," Messmer explained later. "Hurd was content to show him climbing up on a roof. Me, I would have him jump off or fly or something. Then people would say, 'You can't do that.'"

It was exactly this super-reality, and Felix's cockiness, that audiences loved. He became a genuine cultural icon, spawning a pioneering onslaught of product tie-ins: dolls, toys, pencils, even cigarettes were sold with his face. In 1923, a comic strip was introduced, eventually reaching 250 newspapers worldwide. There were hit songs (both records and sheet music), he was a military mascot, and Lindberg took a Felix doll along as a good luck charm for his trans-Atlantic flight. In 1927 he was the first Macy's parade balloon, and a Felix doll was among the first images ever broadcast on television in 1928.

More than 180 Felix cartoons were made during the silent era, but the series was doomed by Sullivan's resistance to sound. In 1936, the Van Buren studio obtained the rights and made just three color cartoons for RKO. Between 1958-1961, a dumbed-down TV cartoon series aired on ABC. In 1988 the Oriolo-animated feature *Felix the Cat, the Movie* was released, and a CBS series ran in 1996.

Ben Turpin

Idle Eyes

(1928)

Weiss Brothers-Artclass Pictures

Directed by Leslie Goodwins.

With Ben Turpin, Georgia O'Dell, Helen Gilmore, Billy Barty as the Baby, and Alice Belcher.

Musical soundtrack added in later years by parties unknown.



Ben is a starving bum who can't catch a break. Then everyone learns there's a reward for him when the paper reports that Ben was a scion of wealth who disappeared as a baby. All hell breaks loose. "Ben gets a job in a beauty parlor, shrinks a dog, gets involved in flinging goop, and convinces a homely woman that he's made her beautiful. Everyone is angry at Ben, everyone chases Ben, and they all wind up in the pond."

"We loved Ben Turpin.... Just to see...the cross-eyed Ben Turpin go by on the screen is the very pinnacle of happiness, of purification." – Luis Bunuel

With his famously-insured crossed eyes, Ben Turpin is one of the truly iconic silent comedians. In the 22 years between 1907 and 1929 he made more than 200 films and was among the most popular slapstick clowns. He was probably the first screen comedian to get a pie in his face (in 1909), and by the 1920s he was a highly-paid star with his own fan club. He was not a director, and the comedies Turpin starred in were not works of high art, but they had a rough and tumble anarchism and surreal gusto that sold tickets and influenced comedy and even cartoons for decades to come.

Yet despite this iconic status, Turpin is largely glossed over as the second banana with funny eyes, and today his films are infrequently shown, crowded out by the accepted silent comedy pantheon. He came from vaudeville, and got into movies in 1907, when he was 38. He found his home at Keystone studios, cranking out one and two-reelers for many years. His stock in trade became being cast against type – the handsome Lothario, the dashing captain – in a string of parodies of hit features.

But Turpin was 59 and graying when he made *Idle Eyes*, one of his very last films. The year before, Mack Sennett had shut down Keystone to retool for sound film production. As part of this reinvention Sennett also cleaned house, terminating the contracts of most of his actors and employees, including Turpin. He landed with a one year contract with the low-budget Weiss Brothers-Artclass company, during which he appeared in 10 two-reeler comedies.

Seeing his star fade with changing times, and feeling the aches of an old performer, when the stock market crash came later that year Turpin decided to retire from movies and instead rode out the Depression on his lucrative real estate investments. Eventually he started doing the occasional cameo or bit part, notably in the sound two-reeler reunion *Keystone Hotel* (Warner Brothers, 1935) and with W. C. Fields in *Million Dollar Legs* (Paramount, 1932). His last film appearance was a brief cameo in Laurel and Hardy's *Saps at Sea* (1940).



Koko the Clown *Modeling*

(1921, circa October)
Inkwell Studios / Paramount Pictures

Directed by Dave Fleischer.
Animated by Max Fleischer and Roland “Doc” Crandall, who also appears as the sculptor.

Produced by Alfred Weiss and Max Fleischer.
Part of the long-running *Out of the Inkwell* series.

Music soundtrack added in the 1950s, when it was syndicated to television in packages with other Koko cartoons. The score was written by Winston Sharples.

Max is at his easel playing with ink, drawing from an old fashioned ink well. He draws some blobby shapes, collects them as though they were still free-flowing ink, gathering to form Koko the Clown. As he goofs around, an elderly client with a gigantic hooked nose arrives to pose for his sculpted bust. But the client hates it – “it looks just like me!” Max tries to keep Koko busy so he can help the client by drawing a frozen lake and skates on his feet. Koko flails about the ice in a rotoscoped scene and, after much hilarity, manages to escape the paper world and climb the bust, sculpting it himself. When he gets into a scrap with a lively piece of clay, Koko retreats to his comfy old inkwell, drawing the stopper in behind him.

“Mr. [Dave] Fleischer's work, by its wit of conception and skill of execution, makes the general run of cartoons seem dull and crude.” – *New York Times*, 1920

“Max Fleischer’s cartoons were unique. In the silent era they sparkled with innovative ideas and technical wizardry... [His] cartoons of the late 1920s...can stand alongside the best animated cartoons ever made...”

– Leonard Maltin, *Of Mice and Magic: A History of Animated Cartoons*

Modeling was the Fleischer brothers’ first release after leaving Bray to become an independent studio. In this one they pull out the stops, masterfully combining comedy, three types of animation, and live action into a nearly seamless whole. This inventiveness became a hallmark of the Fleischer brothers.

Koko the Clown came about as a result of a 1919 experiment in a whole new way of animating. Brothers Max and Dave Fleischer invented a technique they called “rotoscoping.” The idea was to film a real person moving about. That was then projected onto the back of a light-table and traced as a guide, frame by frame, using celluloid sheets. As a proof of concept for their invention, Max filmed Dave cavorting about in a clown costume on their New York tenement rooftop, then rotoscoped that footage.

The resulting films landed them a patent, and a contract to produce more clown cartoons for the Bray Studios. During WWI, they worked on a series of rotoscoped training films for the Army. After the war, everything they learned informed their new commercial films. Their technical prowess and East-coast sensibility made Koko very popular, and resulted in some of the best cartoons ever made.

In the mid-1920s, they teamed with Lee De Forest for a number of PhonoFilms, using a pioneering sound process later bought and developed by Fox. These included Koko cartoons with musical tracks, and the wistfully animated *Song Car-Tune* sing-alongs that introduced the “bouncing ball.”

As the silent era closed the Fleischers developed a new character, the irrepressible flapper Betty Boop, and Koko faded into occasional guest appearances. Their later sound cartoons include some of the most revered and influential in history, including Popeye and their stunning Superman series, as well as the Color Classics series and two features that, while beautifully rendered, failed to capture the old spark.

Laurel and Hardy

Big Business

(April 20, 1929)
Hal Roach Studios / Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM)
Added to the Library of Congress National Film Registry in
1992.

With Stan Laurel, Oliver Hardy, James Finlayson, and Tiny Sanford.

Produced by Hal Roach.
Directed by James Wesley Horne and Leo McCarey.
Written by H.M. Walker and Leo McCarey.

Cinematography by George Stevens.
Edited by Richard Currier.
Car customizer: Dale Schrum.
Props: Tom Mintz and Ham Kinsey.



Laurel and Hardy are Christmas tree salesmen whose salesmanship in sunny California is not producing very concrete results. Even following up a turndown by trying to get advance orders for the following year doesn't work. They take refusals in their stride, but when James Finlayson's obstinacy becomes a little too firm they determine to make him a test case to prove their salesmanship. Soon Christmas trees are forgotten, and in the battle royale that follows, his home and their car are totally destroyed. All of this is watched by a growing number of curious but passive neighbors and passers-by, including a bewildered but cynical policeman.

"The apotheosis of all Laurel & Hardy films... [T]he funniest two reels on film, *Big Business* is one of the comedy classics from any star, any country and any period."

- William K. Everson, *The Complete Films of Laurel & Hardy*

It's almost as if by smashing every last trace of the house and car, they were also stamping out the old ways of silent film – in one last glorious swan song – as they prepared to reinvent themselves for sound. Their first talkie, *Unaccustomed As We Are*, was released just two weeks later.

Big Business was shot in only eight days in December 1928, using locations in Los Angeles and Culver City, CA. One long-standing legend about the production (not true) is that the film crew showed up at the wrong address, and the studio had to pay off some poor sap for his accidentally-destroyed home. In reality, producer Hal Roach bought the house (ahead of time) from a studio worker.

Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy were only two years into their partner act, but the duo were already major stars. Laurel (born Arthur Stanley Jefferson in 1890) had started in British music halls, joining Fred Karno's troupe in 1910, where he worked with Charlie Chaplin. Moving to the US in 1912, where he adopted his final stage name, his first film appearance was in 1917. He made comedies with various studios including Essanay and Hal Roach, then eventually settled in at the Roach studio. By 1926 he was also directing, writing, and working as a gag man.

Hardy (born Norvell Hardy in 1892) got first into the business as a ticket taker and projectionist in his Georgia hometown. In 1913 he left town, hired on with the Lubin studio and made his first film appearance the following year. He signed with Roach in 1924, but wasn't paired with Stan until 1927.

Unlike many, they not only gracefully made the transition to sound but became even bigger stars as a result. As arguably the greatest partner act in movie history, they made 107 films together, including 32 silent shorts and 23 feature films. Their last film together was in 1951. *Big Business* was inducted into the Library of Congress National Film Registry in 1992.

Sources and Suggested Reading

- Keystone: The Life and Clowns of Mack Sennett* by Simon Louvish (Faber and Faber, 2003) – Illustrated. An excellent, lively yet scholarly history of Sennett and his legendary studio, liberally peppered with quotes from original correspondence, press coverage, scenarios, and other primary sources. Includes two chapters on Ben Turpin.
- The Silent Clowns* by Walter Kerr (Alfred A. Knopf, 1975; Da Capo Press, 1990) – Lavishly illustrated, learned but approachable. Written at a time before home video, when the chances of seeing many films were few and far between.
- The Complete Films of Laurel & Hardy* by William K. Everson (Citadel Press, 1967) – Illustrated throughout. Capsule summaries and histories of each film, written by one of the great silent film historians.
- The Transformation of Cinema 1907-1915* by Eileen Bowser (University of California Press, 1990. Volume 2 in the series, *History of the American Cinema.*) – Illustrated throughout. An excellent, fascinating, scholarly but not over-long history of an incredibly fertile and creative period in US film history. Written by one of the foremost film archivists and scholars of early cinema.
- My Autobiography* by Charles Chaplin (Simon & Schuster, 1964)
- My Father, Charlie Chaplin* by Charles Chaplin, Jr. (Random House, 1960)
- I Never Smoked the Grass On My Father's Lawn* by Michael Chaplin (GP Putnam's Sons, 1966)
- Before Mickey: The Animated Film 1898-1928* by Donald Crafton (MIT Press, 1982; University of Chicago Press, 1993) – Profusely illustrated. Considered the authoritative history of silent-era animation.
- Felix: The Twisted Tale of the World's Most Famous Cat* by John Canemaker (Pantheon Books, 1991) – Lavishly illustrated throughout. The “biography” of Felix, written by a highly respected animation historian who is also a respected animator and documentarian.
- Of Mice and Magic: A History of American Animated Cartoons* by Leonard Maltin (Plume/Penguin Books, 1980. Updated editions in 1987 and 1994.) – Illustrated throughout. Say what you will about him as a critic, Maltin knows his animation history and he tells it splendidly in this book. Covers both silent and sound eras, through the end of the theatrical short cartoon era. Later editions include an epilogue about developments in animation since original publication in 1980.

Home Video

- Chaplin Mutual Comedies - Restored Edition* (Image Entertainment, 2006) 4 DVD + DVD-ROM – All 12 shorts restored from original 35mm prints, with new scores, documentaries, booklet, etc.
- Turpin Time: Ben Turpin Comedy Classics* (Alpha Video, 2011) DVD – Four increasingly rare two-reelers: *A Harem Knight* (1926), *Broke in China* (1927), *Why Ben Bolted* (1917), and the excellent *Yukon Jake* (1924). Retailers new for a measly \$6 and worth every penny, despite Alpha's typically careless transfers of 16mm prints. <http://www.oldies.com/product-view/6549D.html>
- Slapstick Encyclopedia* (Kino Video, 2002) 5 DVD set, originally a VHS box set (2000) – Now scarce but available for rent nearly anywhere, 10 excellent volumes on five discs survey the history of American slapstick movies from 1909 to 1927.
- Max Fleischer's Famous Out of the Inkwell* (Inkwell Images, Morley, MI) DVDs volumes 1-4, 1919-1927 – A “bonus edition” combines all 4 volumes. Each disc includes around 7 or so cartoons. Good transfers, and some rare films. Highly recommended. <http://www.inkwellimagesink.com/>
- The Original Felix the Cat (1922-1930)* (Reel Classic) DVD – Includes 13 rare later-period cartoons, many with some of the best, most surreal animation of the series. Direct via <http://reelclassicdvd.com/>
- Tom Stathes' Cartoons on Film – An indie DVD imprint offers many anthologies of silent-era cartoons, including Bobby Bumps, the Bray studios, Paul Terry's Farmer Al Falfa, Mutt & Jeff, Felix the Cat, Walt Disney, and more. Order direct via <http://cartoonsonfilm.com/>



FUNNY STUFF

SILENT COMEDIES & CARTOONS

Ⓜ️ **CLASSIC TWO-REELERS** Ⓜ️

Laurel & Hardy in "Big Business" (1929)

Charlie Chaplin in "Easy Street" (1917)

Ben Turpin in "Idle Eyes" (1928)

Ⓜ️ **PLUS RARE CARTOONS** Ⓜ️

Felix the Cat ~ Koko the Clown ~ Bobby Bumps

Saturday, July 16, 2011 ~ 7:00 PM Only!

Grand Illusion Cinema

1403 NE 50th Street at University Way || Presented by The Sprocket Society