

**NOVEMBER 16, 2018**

**Hal Roach and female comedy teams:**

Due to the success of Laurel & Hardy, Hal Roach was hoping to strike lightning again by creating a female comedy duo.

He began with Anita Garvin and Marion Byron. Of their three films together, the funniest was titled *A Pair Of Tights*. It was the story of two tightwads trying to take the ladies out on a cheap date. The results were hilarious.

When talkies arrived, Thelma Todd and ZaSu Pitts were teamed up in a series that filmed 17 two reel comedies over a two year period until unsuccessful contract negotiations with ZaSu and Hal Roach led to the hiring of another partner for Thelma Todd.

Patsy Kelly was the perfect compliment to Thelma's character. Their series filmed 21 comedies and lasted for 2 1/2 years until Thelma Todd's untimely death in 1935. Pert Kelton was hired to replace Thelma in one film and Lyda Roberti co-starred in the final two films.

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**ON THE LOOSE** - Filmed October 5 though 9, 1931. Released December 26, 1931.

The amusement park scenes were filmed at Santa Monica Municipal Pier.

**Thelma Todd** - After winning the title of Miss Massachusetts in 1925, her film career was off and running. In addition to her five films with Laurel & Hardy, she was featured with Charley Chase,

Harry Langdon, Wheeler & Woolsey and the Marx Brothers. She was a successful dramatic actress as well.

**ZaSu Pitts** - made her stage debut in 1915 and began working in films in 1917. She worked continuously over the next 46 years in movies and television. Her most memorable role was in Erich Von Stroheim's *Greed* from 1924.

**John Loder** - After serving in the British military, he came to Hollywood in the 1920's. His most memorable roles were in *Now Voyager*, *How Green Was My Valley?* and *Sabotage*. He was married five times. His third wife was Hedy Lamarr.

**Claud Allister** - after working as a stockbroker's clerk and serving in World War I, he came to America in 1924 and worked on Broadway. He usually played British bumblers over a 25 year period.

**Billy Gilbert** - plays a somewhat different role than what we saw in *The Music Box*.

**Charlie Hall** - makes another appearance in a Hal Roach Studios comedy, this time as a shooting gallery attendant.

**Buddy McDonald** - In addition to this film, Buddy also appeared in Charley Chase and Our Gangs comedies in the early 1930's.

**Gordon Douglas** - Started off as a child actor and became a gag writer for Hal Roach. After directing several films for Hal Roach, he went to RKO and Warner Brothers to continue his successful directing career. He was the only filmmaker to direct both Frank Sinatra (*The Detective* - 1968) and Elvis Presley (*Follow That Dream* - 1962).

**Dorothy Layton** - we saw her briefly in *Chickens Come Home* with Laurel & Hardy. She also worked in Charley Chase and Todd & Kelly films. She left Hollywood in 1934. In a 2001 interview about her life in Hollywood she said. "I'm never too chatty about those days. I was fond of most of them and often wonder how my life would be had I stayed. Volunteer work gave me a sense of belonging whilst Hollywood was false and phony and really made no sense at all."

**Otto Fries** - started his career as a stage comic, entering films in the early 1910s with Keystone and played in films with Bronco Billy Anderson and Stan Laurel. He later went to work for the Hal Roach Studios in supporting roles for Laurel & Hardy and Charley Chase and James Finlayson. In sound films, Fries played in a number of German-language films as well as playing numerous bit parts in A-list films.

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**WAY OUT WEST** - Filmed August 31 through November 11, 1936. Released April 16, 1937.

Original proposed titles:

*You'd Be Surprised* had to be dropped because Paramount Pictures owned that title.

*Tonight's The Night* was no good because 20th Century Fox had already registered that title.

*In the Money* was out as well due to the fact that Invincible Pictures claimed that one.

*They Done It Wrong* was also a possibility as a play on the title of the Mae West film *She Done Him Wrong*

The film was half way through completion before it received its final title.

There are many films with the title *Way Out West*:

- (1920) Hank Mann Short
- (1930) William Haines MGM feature
- (1935) Cabin Kids - Educational - one reel film

- (1996) TV Movie with James Drury
- (2007) Richard Marshall comedy short
- (2014) Reality TV series

- (1940) Marx Brothers - Go West
- (1925) Buster Keaton - Go West

Stan Laurel recreates Claudette Colbert's hitchhiking moment from *It Happened One Night*.

Notice the tattoo Oliver Hardy's right forearm.  
In a March 21, 1964 letter from Stan Laurel to a fan:

**"Regarding the tattoo on Mr Hardys right arm - yes that was an actual marking made when he was a kid - he always regretted having this done."**

**Tiny Sandford** - was originally supposed to play the part of the sheriff. Some scenes with him were filmed. According to his grandchildren, Tiny Sandford was not good about going to the doctor or dentist. By the time *Way Out West* was being filmed,

Tiny had lost all of his teeth. This would've made it difficult for Sanford to perform in this speaking role. He was replaced with Stanley Fields. Ironically, Stanley Fields and Tiny Sandford worked together in the 1936 version of *Showboat*, just a few months before *Way Out West*.

**Stanley Fields** - The broken nose that ended his boxing career gave him a look that led to a long career in Hollywood playing heavies in films such as *Little Caesar* with Edward G. Robinson.

**Dick Van Dyke**, who was a personal friend of Stan Laurel and delivered the eulogy at Stan's funeral said *Way Out West* is his favorite Laurel and Hardy film.

Director **James W. Horne** was the uncle of director George Stevens (*Giant* and *The Diary Of Anne Frank*).

Music was specifically written for this film by **T. Marvin Hatley** and was nominated for an Academy Award for best original score of 1937. That year, the winner was Universal's *One Hundred Men And A Girl* starring Deanna Durbin. According to Marvin, "The most I ever made at Roach's was \$200 a week. We were just a little studio; you had to do everything as fast and as cheaply as possible." In regard to the opening music he wrote for Laurel and Hardy when they are walking down the dirt road with the donkey, Marvin also said, "Mr. Roach was sitting next to the director Jimmy Horne and Roach turned to me and said 'Cute music! Cute music' and that's the only word he said to me while I worked at that studio!"

Laurel & Hardy's opening scene was filmed at Sherwood Forest, just north of Lake Sherwood in the Thousand Oaks area of southern California. This is where Douglas Fairbanks, Sr. filmed

his classic feature *Robin Hood*. The lake seen in this film was man-made by the Hal Roach Studios technical crew.

The town of Brushwood Gulch was filmed at Monogram Ranch which had been making westerns there since 1915. Gene Autry bought the property in 1952 and renamed it Melody Ranch. The opening scene to television's *Gunsmoke* was also filmed at this same ranch. A fire destroyed the property in 1962, but it has since been rebuilt.

Mickey Finn's saloon was filmed at the Hal Roach Studios.

Chill Wills was one of the singers with The Avalon Boys Quartet. Walter Trask is playing the guitar. The other singers are Art Green and Don Brookins.

According to Stan Laurel, the "At The Ball, That's All" dance routine in front of Mickey Finn's was worked out on the set in a half hour.

The song *Trail Of The Lonesome Pine* was written by Harry Carroll and Ballard Mac Donald in 1913. Stan and Ollie sing most of this tune together with Stan jumping in as a soloist to finish it. Stan's solo voices are supplied by Chill Wills (bass) and Rosina Lawrence (soprano). In 1975, a recording of *Blue Ridge Mountains Of Virginia* was lifted directly off the film soundtrack. It was released in England as a single and made it to number two on the pop charts. This tune sold over a half million copies and out sold Elton John, Paul McCartney and Wings at the time.

Closing theme sung by Stan, Ollie and Mary Roberts - *I Want To Be In Dixie* - composed by Irving Berlin and Ted Snyder.

The part of Mary Roberts was originally supposed to be played by **Jacqueline Wells** who had played the lead in Laurel & Hardy's *The Bohemian Girl* one year earlier.

**Rosina Lawrence** was instead cast in this role. As a youngster, a skinned knee that became infected left her paralyzed on her right side. Dancing helped her overcome this and set her on the path to a career as a dancer. Appeared on the same Mexican dinner club bill in 1934 with The Dancing Cansinos. Margarita Cansino would change her name later to Rita Hayworth. Shortly after, the women were chosen as two of the "Four Debutante Stars of 1936." She was discovered by a Fox talent scout in 1934 and eventually found her way to the Hal Roach Studios. She was featured with Charley Chase and as Miss Lawrence, the teacher with *Our Gang*. Rosina also played the part of Sally Manners in *The Great Ziegfeld* in 1936. Hal Roach sent her to Italy to star in a planned co-production of *Rigoletto*. Unfortunately, this project fell through. While in Italy, she met her first husband, an attorney named Juvenal Marchisio. They were married in 1939 until his death in 1973. In Rosina's retirement years, she enjoyed painting and created many wonderful creations. As a widow in 1976 attending a SONS OF THE DESERT function, she met the organization's founder, John McCabe. At a banquet he introduced her as "an exquisite lady." By 1984, their friendship had grown closer and they were married in 1987. This marriage lasted until her passing at the age of 84 in 1997.

**James Finlayson** - film career began in 1916. After working with Mack Sennett, Fin joined the Hal Roach Studios in 1922. Today, a shortened version of Fin's signature expression of frustration, "Doh", has found new life with Homer Simpson in the long running animated television series, *The Simpsons*.

**Sharon Lynne** - (Lola Marcel) was born D'Auvergne Sharon Lindsay in Texas. She worked in films with Wheeler & Woolsey and Bing Crosby. *Way Out West* was her second to last film and was paid \$500 for this role. Her dance at the beginning of this film appeared to be a take off on the Anna Held mirror dance from the Ziegfeld Follies. She was definitely challenged to keep a straight face during her physical scene with Stan Laurel. Thanks to careful cutting, each time she was about to lose it and smile, the scene changed.

**Flora Finch** - her film career began in 1908 where she performed in 265 roles. She is best remember as John Bunny's wife in over 200 short comedies over a five year period. She and Bunny were recognized as the cinema's first popular comedy team.

**Tex Driscoll** - can also be seen in *Swiss Miss* and *Block-Heads*. He appeared in both the silent and sound versions of *The Squaw Man*. His career also continued into television with roles in shows such as *The Jack Benny Program* and *Perry Mason*.

**John Ince** - His two younger brothers, Ralph Ince and Thomas H. Ince, were also in show business, with Thomas being the most well-known of the three, having been a pioneering producer/director who built the first complete movie studio, containing everything from sound stages to processing labs to standing permanent sets, known as Inceville. Ralph also became an actor/director (many contemporary critics believed him to be a better director than Thomas and a better actor than John), but his reputation off-screen tended to overshadow his on-screen accomplishments. In addition to being an actor, John directed quite a few two-reels for his brother Thomas' studio, along with a few features. He also acted in many of his own films. One of his



more bizarre productions was a Thomas H. Ince drama based on a real-life murder, in which the actual murderer, Clara Smith Hamon, played herself!

**Vivien Oakland** - Her role in *Way Out West* was originally promised to Stan Laurel's friend Ethel Sykes, who played the maid of honor in Frank Capra's *It Happened One Night*. She lost the part to Vivien, who we've seen in *Scram* and *We Faw Down*. She also played the wives of Leon Erroll, Andy Clyde and Edgar Kennedy in short comedies at RKO.

**Harry Bernard** beginning with Mack Sennett in 1915, he appeared in 150 films including 26 with Laurel & Hardy.

**James C. Morton** - he appeared in Broadway musical comedies from 1910 to 1931. In addition to 11 films with Laurel & Hardy, he worked with Charley Chase, Thelma Todd and made 11 films with The Three Stooges.

In one of the film's many running gags, when Stan turns his hand into a flaming lighter by flicking his thumb, Laurel explained he used a false hand made of asbestos. At Hal Roach Studios, following Harold Lloyd's accident, they knew all about false hands. Laurel got this idea on the set one day watching a gag man struggle with a cigarette lighter which wouldn't work.

One visual gag was the very effective traveling shot of a huge cloud of dust, supposedly kicked up by Stan, Ollie, and their burro Dinah as they scurry to beat a retreat out of town. The shot is made by moving a powerful wind machine toward the camera. There are blowers and trays of loose dirt mounted on a dolly, all of which are hidden by the cyclone of dust created in the machine's own path while advancing toward the camera. Then

the action is reversed to create a startling illusion on film. In the words of Jimmie Finlayson, "You can't see 'em for dust!"

Ollie's hat, that Stan was forced to eat, was made of licorice.

A dummy is used when Ollie falls from the rope with Stan.

Stan Laurel was also asked about the scene where Ollie's neck is trapped between floorboards. Stan seizes Ollie's head, twists it around, the head snaps back, then Stan pulls Ollie's head up until his neck is about four feet long. Babe was standing on a turntable underneath the trap door. The head was made to spin around then the footage was optically printed backwards. The head Stan lifted and stretched was made of rubber.

Roy Seawright remembered this story about Ham Kinsey on the set of *Way Out West*:

"One day they were wiring up the set for the gag where the donkey was going to go flying on the pulley, with the block and tackle. Well, instead of the donkey they put poor ol' Ham up there! They put the wire belt around him and hooked him up to the block and tackle thing, hoisting him there! And instead of just pulling him up to the balcony that held the donkey, they kept pulling until Ham was up at the top of the soundstage. Then Stan said, 'Okay, gang, let's all go to lunch.'

So they tied off the rope, walked off the stage and closed the stage doors -- and left Ham tied on the rope, 30 feet in the air. Well, Ham is up there, yelling and screaming. And Stan and the crew were outside, laughing like hell. You could hear Ham screaming through the stage door. Finally, one of the grips came in and got Ham down. Now the poor guy was so upset that they took him in the dressing room, and called a doctor in. Apparently,

he hadn't been able to breathe, and damn near suffocated up there. And then, of course, Stan couldn't do enough for him; he kept apologizing. He just didn't seem to realize the embarrassment that Ham went through so Stan could have everyone on the stage laughing and happy all the time. It made Stan look good, but Ham took the brunt of it.”

## **REFERENCES:**

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