

Laurel & Hardy - September 14, 2018

SONS OF THE DESERT - Filmed October 2 through October 23, 1933. Released December 29, 1933

Working Title: Fraternally Yours

This is one of three Laurel & Hardy films named to the National Film Registry. As of December 2017, there are 725 films named on this list.

- Big Business - 1992
- The Music Box - 1997
- Sons Of The Desert - 2012

Directed by William A. Seiter who also directed the Marx Brothers in Room Service and Astaire and Rogers in Roberta. He broke into movies with Mack Sennett in 1915 as a member of the Keystone Cops.

Starring Stan Laurel, Oliver Hardy, Mae Busch, Dorothy Christy, Charley Chase and Lucien Littlefield.

Opening theme music was from MGM's stock library and also used in the opening of Marion Davies' film Blondie Of The Follies and the Tallulah Bankhead film titled Faithless.

During the start of the convention scene for a quick second, you can see a very young Ellen Corby who at the time was married to director/cinematographer Francis Corby.

T. Marvin Hatley, who wrote Laurel & Hardy's Cuckoo theme, also wrote the tune Honolulu Baby which is highlighted in this film. Marvin said Honolulu Baby only took 20 minutes to compose. He can be seen in the background playing the piano during this number. The tune is

sung by Ty Parvis who at one time was a dancing partner of Betty Grable. Young lady dancing with Ty Parvis is named Charita.

Charley Chase plays a "good time Charley" conventioner with Laurel & Hardy. Before Laurel & Hardy, Chase was the top comedian at the Hal Roach Studios with his own series as star and director of several other comedy series.

Robert "Bob" Cummings, best known for his roles in Saboteur and Dial M For Murder, plus The Bob Cummings Show on television in the 1950's, can be spotted as an extra wearing a tan suit in the crowd scene at the steamship company. He was 23 years old at that time.

The voiceover in the scene is performed by Billy Gilbert whose voice is best remembered as "Sneezy" in Walt Disney's Snow White And The Seven Dwarfs. Hal Roach Studios animal trainer, Tony Campanero can be seen over the left shoulder of Mae Busch at the dock.

During the filming of this movie, Oliver Hardy was dating Lilian Deborba, the mother of Our Gang child star, Dorothy Deborba. Lilian can be spotted sitting directly in front of Mae Busch in the scene in the movie theater.

Notice Stan and Ollie after coming in from the rain soaking wet, their clothes are completely dry.

This is the story of Stan and Ollie trying to pull a fast one over the wives only to be eventually caught in a lie.

- The idea for this film dates back to 1909 with Mack Sennett in a short comedy titled A Wreath In Time for Biograph. Mack tells his wife he is taking a "business trip" on a train. In reality, he wants to be with his buddies. When the train has a wreck, the truth comes out.

- This idea was also the main subject of the John Bunny - Flora Finch comedy *A Cure For Pokeritis* in 1912 by Vitagraph. John Bunny tells his wife he has been selected for membership to the Sons Of The Morning and must attend all meetings to avoid a ten dollar fine. The truth is John is playing poker with his pals and eventually gets caught in his lie.
- Keystone comedy released by Mutual - *The Tale Of A Black Eye* (1913). A man tells his wife he received a black eye while trying to save a baby from being hit by a car. A movie newsreel tells a different story due to the husband's flirtatious ways.
- Three of Laurel & Hardy's previous short comedies followed the same concept: *We Faw Down*, *Their Purple Moment* and *Be Big*.

Patsy Kelly was originally cast to play Stan's wife. Hal Roach had loaned her out to MGM to appear in the Bing Crosby-Marion Davies film, *Going Hollywood*. When the film ran over schedule, Patsy was replaced by Dorothy Christy, who according to her son, "would never own a rifle and especially go duck hunting".

Stan Laurel's first choice for Mrs. Hardy was Anita Garvin. She had been in ten Laurel & Hardy films before this and played Stan's wife in four of them. Anita had worked with Stan Laurel during his solo film days. Since she was not available, Mae Busch got the part.

Warner Bros. released a feature two weeks before *Sons Of The Desert* hit the theaters called *Convention City* starring Joan Blondell, Adolphe Menjou and Dick Powell. It was the story of the annual sales meeting of the Honeywell Rubber Company. Most of the conventioners are determined to get drunk and have sex, not necessarily in that order.. The prints and negatives of this film were ordered destroyed by Jack Warner during the 1940's due to its lewd and raunchy content as he

did not want to antagonize the Hays or Breen Offices with censorship concerns.

Words and music to the Sons Of The Desert song were written Frank Terry aka Nat Clifford. During his lifetime he was a former boxer, pimp, bigamist, songwriter, card shark and overseas escaped prisoner. Occasionally he did acting roles (despite being a wanted man) with Laurel & Hardy as the safecracking burglar in THE MIDNIGHT PATROL and Oliver Hardy's butler in ME AND MY PAL. In 1919, he accidentally handed the prop bomb to Harold Lloyd that was live after all and tore away half the comedy star's hand. One other occupation: In a 1961 letter to friend and author John McCabe, Stan Laurel explained, "He suddenly took up religion and became a missionary in Hawaii. For a while he was a chaplain on a Leper Island Colony there, then he opened up a little mission house in Honolulu."

The entire movie was filmed at the Hal Roach Studios with the exception of the house seen in the background when Stan and Ollie arrive home in a taxi cab. The same house was also seen in Charley Chase's short comedy Luncheon At Twelve. An apartment building now stands on that location at 3676 Clarington Avenue in Culver City which was owned at that time by Roland C. Wilson. The rooftop scenes in the rain were filmed past 1:00AM on the studio backlot in a controlled environment.

Mae Busch - The on again off again love between Mack Sennett and Mabel Normand was set to result in a wedding on July 4, 1915. A few days before the wedding, a friend told Mabel that Mack was in a hotel room with another woman. When she arrived, the other woman turned out to be Mae Busch. One version of the story is the fight between the two women ended when Mae picked up a glass vase and threw it at Mabel, hitting her in the forehead. Another version has Mae, the stronger of the two women, banging Mabel's head against the wall and window casing causing lacerations to Mabel's scalp and gashes on her

cheek. Mabel was hospitalized, surgery was performed and she almost died. Eventually, Mabel recovered. This incident was downplayed for the press as an accident in the studio. The reason for this story is because Mae gives Oliver Hardy the same treatment in Sons Of The Desert.

References:

Laurel & Hardy: The Magic Behind The Movies by Randy Skretvedt

Mack Sennett's Fun Factory by Brent E. Walker

Commentary by Richard W. Bann from Laurel & Hardy: The Essential Collection DVD set

Mabel Normand:

The Life and Career Of A Hollywood Madcap by Timothy Dean Lefler