



# The Main Feature

Season 40 - Issue 1 - Screening 12 September 2019

Stan and Ollie

USA, 2019

98 minutes

Certificate PG

Director: Jon Baird  
Screenplay: Jeff Pope  
Cinematographer: Laurie Rose  
Music: Rolfe Kent

Cast:

|                   |                    |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| Steve Coogan      | Stan Laurel        |
| John C Reilly     | Oliver Hardy       |
| Shirley Henderson | Lucille Hardy      |
| Nina Arianda      | Ida Kitaeva Laurel |
| Rufus Jones       | Bernard Delfont    |
| Danny Huston      | Hal Roach          |

## STAN & OLLIE



Laurel and Hardy need no introduction for most of us, but for younger club members they were a comedy duo during the early classical Hollywood era of American cinema. The team comprised Englishman Stan Laurel (1890–1965) and American Oliver Hardy (1892–1957). They became well known during the late 1920s to the mid-1940s for their slapstick comedy, with Laurel playing the clumsy and childlike friend of the pompous bully Hardy.

Were they the greatest film comedy duo ever? Some would argue they were. They were certainly prolific - in the silent era they made some 32 shorts; after the introduction of sound, they made a further 40 shorts and 23 full-length features, the first being *Pardon Us* in 1931.

And they had universal appeal. John C Reilly, who plays Oliver Hardy, said “I think that they figured out some secrets about comedy and about the universality of the human experience. They didn’t use a lot of contemporary references – almost none. They didn’t talk about who the president was, or about news stories, or things that were temporary. Their conundrums were eternal conundrums, and the things that they were dealing with, people all over the world can relate to.”

Tonight's film, *Stan and Ollie*, is a retrospective biopic set at the end of their joint career. They were no longer young and not in the best of health. Laurel had been married four times, twice to the same wife, and his



final marriage was to Ida Kitaeva Raphael in 1946. Hardy had been married three times, lastly to Virginia Lucille Jones in 1940. They had finished making films when they returned to the European stage in 1951-52, and their punishing British tours (sometimes 13 shows a week) were painstakingly and exhaustively recorded – partly from Laurel's letters, and partly from interviews with anyone who met them - by A J Marriot in his book 'Laurel and Hardy, the British Tours' on which tonight's film draws.

Portraying such iconic figures on the screen is fraught with danger. John C Reilly said in an interview in *ScreenDaily* "It's just a daunting prospect. Laurel and Hardy films are already so perfect. Why would you mess with their legacy if you aren't going to be very careful and do it correctly?"

He went on "I also had to be convinced that we weren't just going to try to out-Laurel-and-Hardy Laurel and Hardy, because that's a fool's errand. You already have their work. They're geniuses. But Jon Baird, the director said, 'No, our film is going to be about them as people' — what was it like to be or have been in the most popular film duo in the whole world?"

Reilly added "Ageing, and not having any money saved, that would be a nightmare. That's the reality for most of the world, by the way. That's another reason why these guys are so relatable. They never became glamorous celebrities. They were salaried employees through their entire careers, they never got any back end or box office. Once their movies were out of the theatres, they were broke."

Steve Coogan plays Stan Laurel. Speaking to *The Guardian*, he said he started his career doing the voices on *Spitting Image*, so impersonating Laurel came relatively easily (the diffident smile; the precise, flat vowels). "The hard part was digging behind the facade, revealing the man behind the screen image."

Coogan added "It's hard to make a comedy from success. The best ones are about failure and bad luck and inadequacy. And this film is about the transience of all the success that went before. Do you know that film *Anvil: The Story of Anvil*? It's a documentary about a heavy metal band and their glory days are behind them and they're flat broke. And I don't particularly like the music. In fact, I sort of hate it. But what I was really moved by was their affection and unfailing loyalty in middle age. It's only as they get older that they realise they love each other."

Michael Hipkins

## **Tea and buns with Laurel and Hardy: Derek Malcolm on the day he met his comedy heroes**

In the course of a long stint as the Guardian's film critic, I am often asked who was my favourite movie star. The answer is Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy.

My mother had taken me to the London Coliseum to see them perform. It was 1947 and they were in their 50s, with 20 years as a double act under their belts. It was a variety show and they were top of the bill. I can't say that Laurel and Hardy were at their best. Maybe the stage was not their natural habitat, although they were still treading the boards together well into the 1950s. But I was thrilled just to see them and I asked my mother at the interval whether I could meet them. She asked the theatre manager and he came back with a note. It said: "Yes, but don't bring your mother ..."

The manager took me to the door of their dressing room and knocked, but left before Hardy answered the door. "Come in, young man," he said. "We have tea and buns on the way for you. This is Stan, by the way, as you can see by his hat. He seldom takes it off, even in bed."

I was tongue-tied. But when the tray of tea and buns came in, I tucked in enthusiastically. Whereupon Hardy took a bun from the tray, placed it on his chair and sat on it. It was, of course, squashed flat. I'm pretty sure he did it to amuse me. But you never knew with Hardy, who preferred playing golf to working.

Laurel looked horrified, especially when Hardy offered the flat bun to me. He was the master of most situations and the pair's directors invariably deferred to him on set. It was clear that they were ageing. The cheers that welcomed them at the theatre, which was three-quarters full, were not so enthusiastic when they left the stage, which may be why they were prepared to entertain a young boy so anxious to see them. If so, they gave no sign of that to me.

They were determined to entertain me and they did so royally, asking me about my school, the subjects I liked and whether I preferred the theatre or the cinema. When I told them I often went to the newsreel cinema on Victoria station, which invariably had a Laurel and Hardy short, along with the boring documentaries and songs, they were clearly very pleased.

We spent almost an hour together before they called for the manager, who took me back to my mother, who was waiting impatiently in the foyer. I will never forget that flat bun, or the stories they told me about appearing on television and being informed that they were being introduced to 6 million people: "That will take rather a long time," said Laurel. Another of his gags I recall from that day was: "I was dreaming I was awake, but I woke up and found myself asleep."

But it was never verbal jokes that defined the pair. It was the extraordinary way they dovetailed, almost telepathically. No one did double-takes better than Hardy; and few did weeping at fate's enormity better than Laurel. In one short, the pair sat together in the front seats of an old car that Hardy couldn't start. And, for a full three minutes they managed to make everyone laugh, just by the various expressions on their faces. It was a masterpiece of comedy I shall never forget, and so was the little dance they did together at the end of their Oscar-winning film *The Music Box*. Just meeting them was one of the most cherishable moments of my life.

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/oct/11/tea-and-buns-with-laurel-and-hardy-the-day-i-met-my-comedy-heroes>

## Comments and reactions to: **The Firemen's Ball**

No of reaction slips received = 30

Average score = 6.43

|       |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |   |   |    |
|-------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|---|---|----|
| Score | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7  | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|       | ~ | 1 | ~ | 1 | 1 | 2 | 8 | 10 | 6 | 1 | 0  |

No of reaction slips received = 30

Average score = 6.43

*Still a gem after 50 years*

*A fitting end to the season.*

***Farcical on 1 level, a satire on pervasive corruption on another. No wonder the 'Party' apparatchiks disapproved. For them, it was 'distasteful'! Had tears at times, from laughter.***

*Splendid skit on corrupt system. Well done Milos Forman! Very funny, very central European!*

***The first half was a waste of time.***

***Nice chuckle at end of season.***

*Very funny. A good picture of life in a Czech village.*

***I preferred the film .. I think!!?***

***Uncomfortable viewing at times***

*Pathetic*

*It was a good comic end to the current season!*

***A happy conclusion to a wonderful season.***

***I found this film tedious***

*An amusing bitter sweet look at life. Some nice touches, brilliant band!*

***Absurd, frantic, farcical - but enjoyable!***

***Very funny.***

*A good laugh after the AGM (which wasn't). AGM pity Iain wasn't here and people don't listen and so repetition is rife.*

***Big thanks to the Chairman and the committee who have entertained us with interesting and diverse films.***

| Position | Film                                      | Average score |
|----------|---|---------------|
| 1        | Darkest Hour                              | 8.08          |
| 2        | The Third Man                             | 8.05          |
| 3        | The Post                                  | 7.66          |
| 4=       | Guildford in the Great War                | 7.56          |
| 4=       | The Divine Order                          | 7.56          |
| 6        | Florence Foster Jenkins                   | 7.47          |
| 7        | Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri | 7.40          |
| 8        | Film Stars Don't Die in Liverpool         | 7.21          |
| 9        | The Violin Teacher                        | 7.20          |
| 10       | Revanche                                  | 7.00          |
| 11       | 400 blows                                 | 6.74          |
| 12       | L'homme du train                          | 6.71          |
| 13       | The Firemen's Ball                        | 6.43          |
| 14       | Piccadilly                                | 6.41          |
| 15=      | In between                                | 6.26          |
| 15=      | Death of Stalin                           | 6.26          |
| 17       | The Levelling                             | 5.60          |
| 18       | Phantom Thread                            | 5.16          |

**Forthcoming attraction: 26 September 2019 - The White Crow**

Rudolf Nureyev, constrained by 1950's Leningrad, seeks freedom to dance in the west but has to give the KGB the slip to do so.