



Laurel & Hardy: A Celebration

*By Adam Pepper
Session 3*



Welcome to Session 3 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 the next 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, avoid the banana skin and let's follow 'the boys' on an adventure...

Session 3:

So, here we go with Session 3 and, after the emergence of Charlie Chaplin last week, we start to look at the steady stream of movies and movie stars that excite those first cinema-goers in the late 1910s and 1920s.

Cinema is fast taking over from theatre as the place to spend an evening and there is no shortage of films being made to entice them in.

Sure, there are hundreds of the comedy two-reelers (like we saw Stan and Ollie starting to appear in last week) to see, but film-makers are starting to get ambitious in the stories they tell now too.

Looking to the classic science fiction texts of Jules Verne and Mary Shelley, we get some exciting 'magic tricks' telling incredible stories. We get epic three-hour features like the 'problematic' 'Birth Of A Nation' (1915), but we also get documentary footage from The Great War to shock and dismay the cinema-going public too.

With so much to see, it is only inevitable that people start to get their favourites, and the MOVIE STAR is born...

Useful information for Session 3:

DW Griffith

David Wark Griffith (January 22, 1875 – July 23, 1948) was an American film director. Considered one of the most influential figures in the history of the motion picture, he pioneered many aspects of film editing and expanded the art of the narrative film.

To modern audiences, Griffith is known primarily for directing the 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation*. One of the most financially successful films of all time and considered a landmark by film historians, it has attracted much controversy for its degrading portrayals of African Americans, its glorification of the Ku Klux Klan, and support for the Confederacy. The film led to riots in several major cities all over the United States and the NAACP attempted to have it banned. Griffith made his next film *Intolerance* (1916) as an answer to critics, who he felt unfairly maligned his work.

Together with Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford, and Douglas Fairbanks, Griffith founded the studio United Artists in 1919 with the goal of enabling actors and directors to make films on their own terms, as opposed to the terms of commercial studios. Several of Griffith's later films were successful, including *Broken Blossoms* (1919), *Way Down East* (1920), and *Orphans of the Storm* (1921), but the high costs he incurred for production and promotion often led to commercial failure. He had made roughly 500 films by the time of *The Struggle* (1931), his final feature, and all but three were completely silent.

Mary Pickford

Gladys Louise Smith (April 8, 1892 – May 29, 1979), known professionally as **Mary Pickford**, was a Canadian-American film actress and producer. A pioneer in the American film industry with a Hollywood career that spanned five decades, Pickford was one of the most popular actresses of the silent film era.

Beginning her film career in 1909, Pickford became Hollywood's first millionaire by 1916, and, at the height of her career, had complete creative control of her films and was one of the most recognizable women in the world. Due to her popularity, unprecedented international fame, and success as an actress and businesswoman, she was known as the "Queen of the Movies". She was a significant figure in the development of film acting and is credited with having defined the *ingénue* type in cinema, a persona that also earned her the nickname "America's Sweetheart".

In 1919, she co-founded United Artists alongside Charlie Chaplin, Douglas Fairbanks, and D. W. Griffith, and was also one of the 36 founders of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in 1927. She was awarded the second Academy Award for Best Actress for her first sound film role in *Coquette* (1929) and received an Academy Honorary Award in 1976 in consideration of her contributions to American cinema.

In 1999, the American Film Institute named Pickford as the 24th-greatest female star of Classical Hollywood Cinema.

Douglas Fairbanks

Douglas Elton Fairbanks Sr. (born **Douglas Elton Thomas Ullman**; May 23, 1883 – December 12, 1939) was an American actor and filmmaker best known for being the first actor to play the masked Vigilante Zorro and other swashbuckling roles in silent films. One of the biggest stars of the silent era, Fairbanks was referred to as "The King of Hollywood". He was also a founding member of United Artists as well as the Motion Picture Academy and hosted the 1st Academy Awards in 1929.

Born in Denver, Colorado, Fairbanks started acting from an early age and established himself as an accomplished stage actor on Broadway by the late 1900s. He made his film debut in 1915 and quickly became one of the most popular and highest paid actors in Hollywood. In 1919, he co-founded United Artists alongside Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford and D. W. Griffith. Fairbanks married Pickford in 1920 and the couple came to be regarded as "Hollywood royalty". Primarily a comedic actor early in his career, he moved into the adventure genre with the 1920 film *The Mark of Zorro* and found further success in films including *Robin Hood* (1922) and *The Thief of Bagdad* (1924).

Fairbanks' career rapidly declined with the advent of the "talkies" in the late 1920s. His final film was *The Private Life of Don Juan* (1934), after which he retired from acting but continued to be marginally involved in the film industry and United Artists.

He died in 1939 at the age of 56.

Films to look out for:

Frankenstein (1910)

A Lodging For The Night (1912)

Birth Of A Nation (1915)

The Battle Of The Somme (1916)

20,000 Leagues Under The Sea (1916)

Cleopatra (1917)

The Butcher Boy (1917)

Safety Last (1923)

The Thief of Baghdad (1924)

The Paperhanger's Helper (1925)

Them Thar Hills (1934)

