



**SILVERSCREEN
PRIMARY
EDUCATION**

Laurel & Hardy: A Celebration

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Session 5*



Welcome to Session 5 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 these 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, wiggle your tie and let's follow 'the boys' on an adventure...

Session 5:

Hey, we have a team! Two men, both from performing backgrounds, both with different styles, appearances and talents; but together they are two halves of a perfect pair!

But how does Hal Roach and the team refine, polish and package these guys for sale? After all, what they need is box office sales and distribution.

So, what do we need to create to compete with the likes of Chaplin, Keaton, Fatty Arbuckle, Harold Lloyd and Harry Langdon?

Well, in Stan you have the creativity, the ideas and years of experience in getting a laugh.

In Ollie, you have a strong sense of teamwork and politeness; he is game for anything!

You have a 'look' which has clearly worked for Chaplin.

And in Hal Roach and directors like Leo McCarey, you have the men behind the camera to bring it all together.

As we hit 1927 and 1928, there is a new double act on the block, and they are here to stay...

Useful information for Session 5:

Priscilla Dean

Priscilla Dean (November 25, 1896 – December 27, 1987) was an American actress popular in silent film as well as in theatre, with a career spanning two decades.

Dean made her film debut at the age of fourteen in one-reelers for Biograph and several other studios. She was finally signed on to Universal (then called IMP) in 1911. She soon gained popularity as the female lead in the comedy series of Eddie Lyons and Lee Moran.

She was propelled to stardom after she appeared in *The Gray Ghost* in 1917. Following this film, she became very successful in her work. However, when the age of sound dawned, Dean's career was severely damaged. She continued to do several low-budget films for minor independent studios during the 1930s, but never regained the popularity she had earned in silent films.

Dean died at her home in Leonia, New Jersey at the age of 91 on December 27, 1987, from injuries related to a fall she had suffered the previous September.

The Marx Brothers

The Marx Brothers were an American family comedy act known for their anarchic humour, rapid-fire wordplay, and visual gags. They achieved success in vaudeville, on Broadway, and in 14 motion pictures.

The core group consisted of brothers Chico Marx, Harpo Marx, and Groucho Marx; earlier in their career, they were joined by younger brothers Gummo and Zeppo.

They are considered by critics, scholars and fans to be among the greatest and most influential comedians of the 20th century, a recognition underscored by the American Film Institute (AFI) selecting five of their fourteen feature films to be among the top 100 comedy films (with two in the top fifteen) and including them as the only group of performers on AFI's 100 Years...100 Stars list of the 25 greatest male stars of Classical Hollywood cinema.

Their performing lives, heavily influenced by their mother, Minnie Marx, started with Groucho on stage at age 14, in 1905. He was joined, in succession, by Gummo and Harpo. Chico started a separate vaudeville act in 1911, and joined his brothers in 1912. Zeppo replaced Gummo when the latter joined the army in World War I. The brothers performed together in vaudeville until 1923, when they found themselves banned from the major vaudeville circuits owing to a dispute with E. F. Albee. Failing in an attempt to produce their own shows on the alternate Shubert circuit, they transitioned to Broadway, where they achieved significant success with a series of hit musical comedies, including *I'll Say She Is*, *The Cocoanuts*, and *Animal Crackers*.

In 1928, the brothers made a deal with Paramount Pictures to produce a film version of *The Cocoanuts*, which they filmed at Astoria Studios during the Broadway run of *Animal Crackers*. *The Cocoanuts* was released in 1929, followed shortly thereafter with a film version of *Animal Crackers*. The brothers decided to devote their careers to film, and moved to Los Angeles, where they made three more films for Paramount: *Monkey Business* (1931), *Horse Feathers* (1932), and *Duck Soup* (1933). When their contract with Paramount expired, Zeppo left the group. The remaining brothers were signed by Irving Thalberg to make movies for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. It was there that they made *A Night at the Opera* (1935), which they considered their crowning achievement.

During the production of their next film, *A Day at the Races* (1937), Thalberg died. While they continued to make films, they felt that the quality of their work, and their interest in it, declined. After briefly moving to RKO to make *Room Service* (1938), they went back to work at MGM, making *At the Circus* (1939), *Go West* (1940), and *The Big Store* (1941) before declaring that they were retired.

They briefly came out of retirement twice. In 1946, they made *A Night in Casablanca*, reportedly because Chico was running out of money. In 1949, they starred together in *Love Happy*; originally intended to be a solo vehicle for Harpo, producers felt the film would be more successful with all three brothers. That was to be their last film as a trio. Groucho went on to a successful career as a game show host, while Harpo and Chico continued to make guest appearances in television and on stage.

Films to look out for:

Why Girls Love Sailors (1927)

Slipping Wives (1927)

The Battle Of The Century (1927)

The Finishing Touch (1927)

Their Purple Moment (1928)

Leave 'Em Laughing (1928)

Should Married Men Go Home (1928)

Duck Soup (1933)



