



**SILVERSCREEN
PRIMARY
EDUCATION**

Laurel & Hardy: A Celebration

*By Adam Pepper
Session 6*



Welcome to Session 6 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 6:

The boys are a team; and a bona fide box office smash, able to pull in crowds just like Chaplin, Keaton and anything else coming out of the Mack Sennett studios. But, while the other performers are pushing their movies into the 'six-reeler' style, Laurel and Hardy are carefully and methodically shaping their personas through a long list of classic silent shorts (two-reelers).

Delivering Christmas Trees in July, heading out on a picnic, or just getting caught in traffic; all of them provide the boys (through Stan and his collaboration with the team at Roach Studios) with ample opportunity to further develop their 'characters' and their comedy style.

That look from Ollie to camera...check.

Stan cries...check.

Ollie is overtly polite to a pretty lady...check.

Stan double-takes at a pratfall his partner has just done...check.

The Derby hats...check.

But the boys are now building a reliable team around them. Who will be the stooges to their comedy? Who will bear the brunt of their innocent stupidity? Let's find out...

Useful information for Session 6:

Edgar Kennedy

Edgar Livingston Kennedy (April 26, 1890 – November 9, 1948) was an American comedic character actor who appeared in at least 500 films during the silent and sound eras. Professionally, he was known as "Slow Burn", owing to his ability to portray characters whose anger slowly rose in frustrating situations.

In many of his roles, he used exasperated facial expressions and performed very deliberately to convey his rising anger or "burn", often rubbing his hand over his bald head and across his face in an effort to control his temper. One memorable example of his comedy technique can be seen in the 1933 Marx Brothers' film *Duck Soup*, where he plays a sidewalk lemonade vendor who is harassed and increasingly provoked by Harpo and Chico.

Kennedy was born April 26, 1890, in Monterey County, California, to Canadians Neil Kennedy and Annie Quinn. He attended San Rafael High School before taking up boxing. After boxing, he worked as a singer in vaudeville, musical comedy and light opera. After making his debut in 1911, Kennedy performed with some of Hollywood's biggest

comedians, including Roscoe Arbuckle, Charlie Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy, the Marx Brothers, W.C. Fields, Charley Chase and *Our Gang*. He was also one of the original Keystone Cops.

Kennedy's burly frame originally suited him for villainous or threatening roles in silent pictures. By the 1920s, he was working for producer Hal Roach, who kept him busy playing supporting roles in short comedies. He starred in one short, *A Pair of Tights* (1928), where he plays a tightwad determined to spend as little as possible on a date. His antics with comedian Stuart Erwin are reminiscent of Roach's Laurel and Hardy comedies, produced concurrently. Kennedy also directed half a dozen of Roach's two-reel comedies.

James Finlayson

James Henderson Finlayson (27 August 1887 – 9 October 1953) was a Scottish actor who worked in both silent and sound comedies. Balding, with a fake moustache, he had many trademark comic mannerisms—including his squinting, outraged double-take reactions, and his characteristic exclamation: "D'ooooooh!" He is the best remembered comic foil of Laurel and Hardy.

Born in Larbert, Stirlingshire, Scotland to Alexander and Isabella (née Henderson) Finlayson, James worked as a tinsmith before pursuing an acting career. As part of John Clyde's company, he played Jamie Ratcliffe in *Jeanie Deans* at the Theatre Royal in Edinburgh in 1910.

The following year (1911), with both parents deceased, he emigrated at age 24 to the United States, along with his brother, Robert. In May 1912 in New York City, he played a detective disguised as a teuchter (person originating from the Scottish West Highlands or Western Isles) in the stage production *The Great Game* at Daly's Theatre. A reviewer in the *Daily Mirror* wrote: "Finlayson had an excellent opportunity, which he did not miss, for developing two characters in his one role—the simple, naive Scotsman and the artful, determined detective. The remarkable thing is that he managed to do them both at the same time."

Finlayson later won the role of Rab Biggar in the Broadway production of *Bunty Pulls the Strings* by Graham Moffat, then dropped out of a national tour in 1916 to pursue a career in Hollywood.

Arriving in Los Angeles in 1916, Finlayson found film work at L-KO and Thomas H. Ince's studio. In October 1919, he signed a contract with the Mack Sennett Comedies Corporation and appeared in numerous Sennett comedies, including with the Keystone Cops.

Finlayson was hired almost immediately by Sennett's rival, Hal Roach, who gave him supporting roles in his studio's Snub Pollard and Stan Laurel comedies. With Roach's biggest short-subject star Harold Lloyd moving on to features, Roach tried to start new series with Charley Chase (successfully) and Finlayson (unsuccessfully). The next step came in 1927 when Roach's *All-Star Comedy* series gave Finlayson equal billing with up-and-coming co-stars Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy, comedian Edna Marion, and others; some studio publicity even referred to Finlayson, Hardy, and Laurel as a "famous comedy trio." But Roach staff producer and future Academy Award director Leo McCarey recognized the great potential of a Laurel-and-Hardy pairing and began developing their characters and expanding their roles. By the autumn of 1928, Laurel and Hardy had their own starring series while the *All-Star Comedy* series soldiered on with other comedians. Nonetheless, Finlayson was still "considered by many to be an indispensable part of the Laurel & Hardy team."

Altogether, Finlayson had roles in 33 Laurel and Hardy films, usually as a villain or an antagonist, in such films as *Big Business* (1929) and *Way Out West* (1937).

Films to look out for:

The Jazz Singer (1927) *Two Tars* (1928) *The Circus* (1928) *Big Business* (1929)

Unaccustomed As We Are (1929) *Perfect Days* (1929) *City Lights* (1931)

