

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 WEST 53RD STREET, NEW YORK

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900

FOR RELEASE THURSDAY, JANUARY 2, 1941

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART TO SHOW SECOND SERIES OF
 FORTY YEARS OF AMERICAN FILM COMEDY INCLUDING
 CHAPLIN'S IMMIGRANT, PAWNSHOP AND EASY STREET

On January 6, 1941 the Museum of Modern Art will show the first picture of its new series: Forty Years of American Film Comedy, Part II, consisting of twenty-four films arranged in eleven programs, which will be shown in rotation from January 6 through March 30. During the summer of 1940 the Museum showed Part I of this series.

The first film in the new series will be The Thin Man, produced in 1934 by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and starring William Powell and Myrna Loy under the direction of W. S. Van Dyke. The series will conclude with three Chaplin programs of four films each, including some of the comedian's best known early comedies such as The Pawnshop, The Immigrant and Easy Street.

The film programs will be shown in the Museum's auditorium daily including Saturdays at 4 P.M.; on Sundays at 2 and 4 P.M. There is never an admission charge for motion picture programs at the Museum as the twenty-five-cent general entrance fee to the Museum includes film showings as well as exhibitions in the Museum galleries.

In her program note on American Film Comedy, Iris Barry, Curator of the Museum of Modern Art Film Library, writes:

"Nowhere has the art of the motion picture developed with more vigor and originality than in the realm of comedy.... In America, from the earliest slapstick to the latest screwball comedy, the native vitality has created a comic genre as widely delightful as it is indigenous. Its characteristics have been speed, irreverence, unreason, exaggeration, violence, genial vulgarity allied to acute observation and a sharp but never cross humor that delights in mishaps.

"These programs in reverse chronology trace a cross-section through the work of several decades and many men, reviving some half-forgotten pictures as well as others more recent.... Here are preserved many an instructive and surprising glimpse of forgotten fads, trends, social stresses as well as rich source-material on the essentials of humor. Since films of this type also challenge as well as reflect accepted values, they must prove a godsend to modern historians and to psychologists while visitors to the Museum will be newly grateful to the film industry for cooperating with the Film Library to provide this opportunity for re-examining one of the richest veins of American art."

The schedule for the new series beginning Monday, January 6, and continuing through Sunday, March 30, is as follows: (See attached program schedule).

THE ART OF THE MOTION PICTURE: SERIES IX

FORTY YEARS OF AMERICAN FILM COMEDY

PART II

Presented by THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART FILM LIBRARY

DAILY AT 4 O'CLOCK AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, 11 WEST 53 STREET, NEW YORK SUNDAYS AT 2 AND 4 O'CLOCK

1. **The Thin Man, 1934**
Directed by W. S. Van Dyke, with William Powell and Myrna Loy. (Loew's).
Jan. 6, 17, 28; Feb. 8, 19;
Mar. 2, 13, 24
2. **What! No Beer?, 1933**
Directed by Edward Sedgwick, with Buster Keaton and Jimmy Durante. (Loew's).
Jan. 7, 18, 29; Feb. 9, 20;
Mar. 3, 14, 25
3. **Bombshell, 1933**
Directed by Victor Fleming, with Jean Harlow, Lee Tracy, Frank Morgan, Franchot Tone. (Loew's).
Jan. 8, 19, 30; Feb. 10, 21;
Mar. 4, 15, 26
4. **Million Dollar Legs, 1932**
Directed by Edward Cline, with Jack Oakie, W. C. Fields, Andy Clyde, Lyda Roberti, Ben Turpin, Hugh Herbert. (Paramount Pictures).
Jan. 9, 20, 31; Feb. 11, 22;
Mar. 5, 16, 27
5. **Trouble in Paradise, 1932**
Directed by Ernst Lubitsch, with Miriam Hopkins, Kay Francis, Herbert Marshall, Charles Ruggles, Edward Everett Horton. (Paramount Pictures).
Jan. 10, 21; Feb. 1, 12, 23;
Mar. 6, 17, 28
6. **Hands Up, 1926**
Directed by Clarence Badger, with Raymond Griffith, Marian Nixon, Montague Love. (Paramount Pictures).

Two Tars, 1928
Directed by James Parrott under the supervision of Leo McCarey, with Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy. (Hal Roach-Loew's).
Jan. 11, 22; Feb. 2, 13, 24;
Mar. 7, 18, 29
7. **Dream of a Rarebit Fiend, 1906**
Directed and photographed by Edwin S. Porter. (Edison Co.).

High and Dizzy, 1920
Produced and directed by Hal Roach, with Harold Lloyd and Mildred Davis. (Harold Lloyd).

The Navigator, 1924
Directed by Donald Crisp and Buster Keaton, and featuring Keaton. (Loew's).
Jan. 12, 23; Feb. 3, 14, 25;
Mar. 8, 19, 30
8. **He Comes Up Smiling, 1918**
Directed by Henry McCluny, with Douglas Fairbanks.

A Modern Musketeer, 1918
Directed by Allan Dwan, with Douglas Fairbanks. (Douglas Fairbanks).
Jan. 13, 24; Feb. 4, 15, 26;
Mar. 9, 20
9. **Charlie Chaplin: Four Essanay Comedies, 1915:**
A Night in the Show
Work
A Night Out
Carmen (reels 4 and 5 only)
Jan. 14, 25; Feb. 5, 16, 27;
Mar. 10, 21
10. **Charlie Chaplin: Four Mutual Comedies, 1916 (RKO Radio Pictures, Inc.):**
The Count
The Floorwalker
Behind the Screen
The Pawnshop
Jan. 15, 26; Feb. 6, 17, 28;
Mar. 11, 22
11. **Charlie Chaplin: Four Mutual Comedies, 1917 (RKO Radio Pictures, Inc.):**
The Cure
The Immigrant
The Adventurer
Easy Street
Jan. 16, 27; Feb. 7, 18;
Mar. 1, 12, 23

A NOTE ON AMERICAN FILM COMEDY

By Iris Barry

THAT film comedy has been largely underestimated is apparent to anyone scanning the literature of the motion picture to date. Much has been written about Chaplin, perhaps too much for his own good: otherwise, the whole wealth of humorous cinematography seems to have provoked less comment and celebration than it deserves. Greatly to the public taste and defiantly the product of the people themselves, screen comedy has reached down for its sources into elemental situations and beliefs. It is for this reason, as well as for its mastery of tempo and situation, its inventiveness in character and gag, its flashing comment on human weakness and folly, that it richly deserves the study and re-examination which, until now, have not been possible.

Nowhere has the art of the motion picture developed with more vigor and originality than in the realm of comedy. Because the film is a profane or popular art, "comedy" on the screen has usually implied clowning, charades, spontaneous play and a whole repertory of fantasy and caricature, markedly unlike that of modern stage comedy, though it has borrowed freely from the theatre both in themes and in actors. In America, from the earliest slapstick to the latest screwball comedy, the native vitality has created a comic genre as widely delightful as it is indigenous. Its characteristics have been speed, irreverence, unreason, exaggeration, violence, genial vulgarity allied to acute observation and a sharp but never cross humor that delights in mishaps.

These programs in reverse chronology trace a cross-section through the work of several decades and many men, reviving some half-forgotten pictures as well as others more recent. Generally, the main roots of American screen comedy stem from the work of Mack Sennett and the films made under his guidance after he left Biograph to become the undisputed and instinctive master of the comic in films. Sennett was inspired by French farces of still earlier days like *Fun After The Wedding* and there is a nice descent from these wild improvisations through his Keystone comedies via Chaplin to René Clair and back again. It was Sennett, however, who *invented* American film comedy and gave us the great tribe of film grotesques and zanies enacted by Chester Conklin, Ford Sterling, Ben Turpin, Louise Fazenda and the rest. His, too, were the heroic posse of highly unstable cops, bathing maidens, hail of harmless revolver-shots, climaxes of catastrophe involving property, ocean, traffic, dignity and the law but never human life. Traditional humor from earlier periods often survives in this realm with its irate fathers, helpless blonde heroines and the old serviceable jokes concerning underwear, burst plumbing, dog-bites, drunks and babies. But mingled with them in a heady stew of merriment come also abbreviated bathing-suits, pesky automobiles, perilous skyscrapers and an exasperated struggle with mechanical contrivances very characteristic of our time and used with indomitably inventive humor.

Here are preserved many an instructive and surprising glimpse of forgotten fads, trends, social stresses as well as rich source-material on the essentials of humor. Since films of this type also challenge as well as reflect accepted values, they must prove a godsend to modern historians and to psychologists while visitors to the Museum will be newly grateful to the film industry for cooperating with the Film Library to provide this opportunity for re-examining one of the richest veins of American art. The first series of comedies was similarly restored to view in the fall of 1940.