

# Looking at Hollywood with Ed Sullivan



The original Keystone cops, originators of the sure-fire slapstick routine that is returning to favor in 1938 movie productions. Fatty Arbuckle is at the left, and seated in order to the right are Bobby Vernon, Ford Sterling, Chester Conklin, Clyde Cook, Mack Swain, and James Finlayson. The man in front is unidentified. (Acme photo.)



Inset above: Charlie Chaplin just after a custard pie landed. Pies are coming back, says Sullivan.

Katharine Hepburn goes slapstick with Cary Grant in "Bringing Up Baby," a picture that hits a new high in low comedy. Later Cary tears her dress, for what Ed Sullivan calls the loudest laugh in Hollywood preview history.

## Slapstick Is the 1938 Vogue

By ED SULLIVAN

Hollywood, Cal.

THE motion picture wheel has completed the full turn, and the year 1938 seems fated to bring about such a spree of slapstick as cinema patrons have not looked upon since the era when custard pies smeared every other foot of celluloid. In "Bringing Up Baby," previewed here the other night, a thunderstruck movie colony saw haughty Katharine Hepburn lose the entire train and back of an evening dress and parade through a restaurant with her silk panties plainly visible. They saw thereafter Miss Hepburn and Cary Grant tumbling down hills, falling into pools of water, and indulging in out-and-out slapstick devices that the Keystone cops made popular and profitable in the early days of pictures.

Your correspondent, with his ear to the ground in approved Indian fashion and with his typewriter on the pulse of Hollywood, would like to wager a few ducats that before 1938 bows out you will find dignified Edna Mae Oliver throwing a custard pie. Every straw in the wind points to the comeback of the custard pie as a comedy device, because the movies have returned to their infancy.

Perhaps this is all for the best, this return to the elementals. The Keystone cops were a rowdy and friendly group of Thespians. They used one script for the 300 pictures they made, on the grounds that if the one story was good enough for the first audience it was good enough for the rest. The story opened, as your dad and mother will recall, in a police station, where the camera discovered the Keystone cops lounging about the premises. A desk sergeant, always identified by his villainous aspect, would be playing cards, when suddenly the telephone would ring. In silent pictures, of course, you never heard the telephone actually ring, but we were very smart in those days, and when the sergeant reached over and picked up the phone we caught on immediately. The gamut of emotions from A to B would play over his features as he listened to the voice on the phone, and you sensed that some citizen's home was being looted or that the law was being broken by knives.

Immediately the desk sergeant hung up the phone, all hell broke loose in the station house of the Keystone cops. Twenty of them would rush for the door and, reaching there simultaneously, would block up the door as completely as an ice floe. They would then start swinging their clubs on each other's skulls, and



Carole Lombard and Fredric March are soaked for a comedy scene in "Nothing Sacred."

finally, after about five hundred feet of this, they'd all pile into the Black Maria which was to take them to the scene of the rescue. En route six or seven of the Keystone cops would be thrown from the car as it rounded turns. They were always thrown from the car, by merest coincidence, of course, near a pool of muddy water. The pavements, too, always were slippery, and the Black Maria would slither around and around, just missing telephone poles, express trains, and any other menaces which the director inserted as ad libs.

Arriving at the house where crime was being committed, the Keystone cops would chase the culprits to the roof, and the fade-out always showed them sliding off the roof in a twenty-foot fall into a swimming pool.

The movies in 1938 have put the stamp of approval on the Keystone cops, because it is their slapstick, with reservations, that you will see in a ma-

majority of current releases. Carole Lombard, of course, has been making a sizable fortune out of slapstick for some time. In "True Confession" and in "Nothing Sacred" most of her closeups showed Miss Lombard soaking wet, the hair sprawled across the face. Miss Lombard, herself a Mack Sennett bathing beauty in the old days, beat the other glamor girls to the Keystone cop routines because she worked for Mack Sennett.

Dignified Myrna Loy and William Powell went in for slapstick on a broad scale in "Double Wedding." In "In Old Chicago" Zanuck craftily gave Alice Faye and Tyrone Power plenty of slapstick to brighten up scenes which lacked motion. The bou-doir scenes between Alice and Tyrone were of the slapstick pattern. Sam Goldwyn, a shrewd market gauge, saw which way the wind was blowing, and in his Goldwyn "Follies" he



Ford Sterling, a Keystone cop, with Juanita Hansen in a scene from "His Pride and Shame"—a Triangle-Keystone comedy.

counterbalanced Helen Jepson and the ballet dancers with slapstick. The "Pussy-Pussy" num-

ber which the Ritz brothers contribute is a Keystone cop relic, and the audience loves it. In



Cary Grant in another slapstick mood, this time in "The Awful Truth."

"Love Before Breakfast" Herbert Marshall and Barbara Stanwyck did everything but throw custard pies. "Radio City Revels" is jammed with slapstick stuff.

Movie directors tell me that it was none of these pictures that started the slapstick cycle of 1938. It was "The Awful Truth." The box office success of this hilarious slapstick concoction awakened the producers at all studios to the fact that the public had been over-stuffed with drawing room stories heavy with dialog. "The Awful Truth" emphasized the importance of "motion" in motion pictures, and studios called back scripts for reediting and rewriting.

A contributing factor also was "The Bad Man of Brimstone" and its success at the box office. By every M-G-M standard of taste this was a bad picture. Executives of the company hurried from the theater where it was previewed and scurried off into the night—they were that

ashamed of Director J. Walter Ruben's piece with Wallace Beery. A lot of bad pictures had emerged from the M-G-M studios in a row, and "Bad Man of Brimstone" was the straw that broke the camel's back. Yet when the glorified western picture was released it did great business, despite lukewarm criticism on the part of the newspaper chroniclers. The public liked it. Out here the final voice is that of the public, so you'll see more pictures on the "Bad Man of Brimstone" pattern. In fact, studios are making them right now.

The reason for all of this soul searching on the part of the movies is simple. Business has fallen off all over the country. When business falls off you look for the trouble. The movies, rendered acutely sensitive by lowered dividends and complaints from the financiers, now are studying each foot of film that goes out of here. The minute that "The Awful Truth" started running up big grosses the movie pundits pounced upon it as the formula which could be marketed. In studying the picture they agreed that it was the slapstick elements of the film that took it out of the usual class.

Just how forceful the lesson has been was best illustrated when Katharine Hepburn startled the preview crowd at the Pantages theater in "Bringing Up Baby." They never dreamed that Katie would relax her dignity. The yell of laughter that went up when Cary Grant stepped on the back of her dress and ripped it out is the loudest and longest laugh I've ever heard out here. Previously she had ripped his full-dress coat up the back, so it was turn about and fair play.

It is the slapstick element of the Hepburn picture that will make a ton of money at the box offices of the land. Baby, the leopard, easily runs off with the animal honors of the year. The leopard recalls the joke at RKO when they learned that la Hepburn was to work with a leopard. Some one wondered if Miss Hepburn wouldn't be frightened to work with the treacherous cat. "Say, listen," said one of the electricians, "I'll let the leopard have the first bite and bet on Katie to win."

## Voice of the Movie Fan

Letters published in this department should be written on one side of the paper. If you wish a personal reply please inclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Dear Miss Tinée: I enjoy your column very much. Would you please answer these questions for me? Did Robert Taylor actually play the piano in the box car scene with Eleanor Powell in "Broadway Melody of 1938"? Will you also give a description of Robert Taylor and Eleanor Powell? I would appreciate it very much.

Thank you and more luck to you.

RUTH GRAUNKE.

Editor's note: I doubt it. Robert Taylor was born in Fuley, Neb. He's 6 feet tall, weighs 165 pounds, and has brown hair and blue eyes. Eleanor Powell was born in Springfield, Mass. She's 5 feet 5 1/4 inches tall, weighs 122 pounds, and has chestnut hair and blue eyes. Thank you. That good wish makes me feel lucky.

Dear Miss Tinée: My mother and I have read your column for a long time and enjoy you very much. We feel that you are the only one that can help us. We have an argument about Sonja Henie's first picture. I say her leading man was

Don Ameche and mother says it was Tyrone Power. Who is right? Can you please tell us the name of the picture, too? Thank you very much.

Yours truly, TED MACH. Editor's note: "One in a Million" was the title of Sonja Henie's first film, and Don Ameche was her leading man.

Dear Miss Tinée: I have been a steady reader of your column for some time and have been intending to write to you before. I think you are a very broad-minded person and wish to compliment you on your views.

I am a great admirer of Nelson Eddy and, together with all his other fans, rebel at the treatment he has been getting. He has not been given a chance to show his real ability. He has been billed second to Jeanette MacDonald in all of their pictures together, while they should at least be put on equal terms. Of course, to my biased opinion, Nelson should be given first billing. He is the one who really has the operatic voice, but it is Jeanette who always sings the operatic pieces.

And now about "Rosalie." Nelson was given as his leading lady one who has never pretended to sing, when he should have some one who is a great singer, not a dancer.

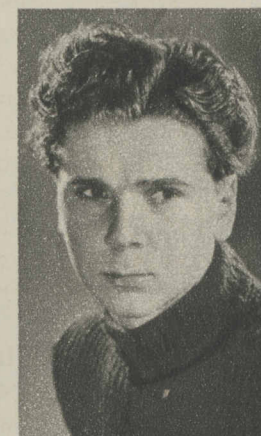
The picture itself was nothing to brag about. The idea of giving a mature actor like Nelson the part of a cadet! It is preposterous. "Rosalie" was not the type of picture he should have been given at all, but he made a very good job of a poor

situation. In her picture which Miss MacDonald recently made without Nelson she was given a promising young actor who is an excellent singer. The difference in the two pictures was appalling. Why don't M-G-M wake up and realize that they have a great actor whom they are not giving a square deal?

I just dare you to print this letter in your column and see how many people agree with me. Thank you for your kindness in putting up with my blustering.

Very truly yours, LOUISE YOUNG. Editor's note: All right. Now let's sit real still and see what happens!

Dear Miss Tinée: I agree with James Norman! Jackie Cooper is one of my favorite movie stars, too, and I certainly like to see him in a lot more pictures. As an ardent Cooper fan I would appreciate it very much if you would print a picture of him in your column. Thank you. L. M. C. Editor's note: Okeh!



JACKIE COOPER Fan wants him to make more pictures.

Dear Miss Tinée: Although I am not much of a movie fan, I read your column often and find it very interesting. But there are two persons who have written to you and have had their letters in your column that I entirely disagree with. They are A. H. and Looney Louie. I have seen Billy and Bobby Mauch in "The Prince and the Pauper" and thought the picture was very good. I think they are so popular because there is not one but two! It is said only their mother can tell them apart. They are natural born actors and little by little they will steal their way into the hearts of the American public. I hope they will continue their fine work as they have and make many, many more pictures to come.

Good luck to them—always. Yours sincerely, RICHARD BURNELL.

Editor's note: Such a nice, friendly boost! The sort we all need and long for once in a while!

Dear Miss Tinée: Last night we saw "The Life of Emile Zola" and think it a most marvelous picture, but couldn't find out who delivered the funeral address at the end. Won't you please state in your column what character and by whom portrayed and oblige me very much. Thanking you in advance, I remain,

Very truly, MRS. B.

Editor's note: Glad to help you out! Morris Carnovsky playing Anatole France in "The Life of Emile Zola" delivered the address.