

✓ **Way Out West (U)**

11th December 2006

Director: **James W. Horne**
USA 1937

Running time: 66 minutes

LEADING PLAYERS: **Stan Laurel** (Stan), **Oliver Hardy** (Ollie), **Sharon Lynn** (Lola Marcel), **James Finlayson** (Mickey Finn), **Stanley Fields** (Sheriff).

SCRIPT: **Jack Jevne, Charley Rogers (story), Felix Adler, James Parrott**. PHOTOGRAPHY: **Art Lloyd, Walter Lundin**. EDITING: **Bert Jordan**. MUSIC: **Various (uncredited)**.

Oh, Mr. Porter! (U)

Director: **Marcel Varnel**
UK 1937

Running time : 84 minutes

LEADING PLAYERS: **Will Hay** (William Porter), **Moore Marriott** (Jeremiah Harbottle), **Graham Moffatt** (Albert), **Sebastian Smith** (Mr Trimbletow), **Agnes Lauchlan** (Mrs Trimbletow).

SCRIPT: **Frank Launder (story), J.O.C. Orton, Val Guest, Marriott Edgar**. PHOTOGRAPHY: **Arthur Crabtree**. EDITING: **R.E. Dearing, Alfred Roome**. MUSIC: **Charles Williams**.

These two films from either side of the water probably represent the epitome, even the best, of their creators' work, and if there can be few who do not know the Hollywood duo, there may be many among our members who are unfamiliar with the British trio of Hay, Marriott and Moffatt.

Way Out West, with the customary punning title from the days of the pair's two-reelers, is just about the best of their feature-length comedies, a spoof western concerning the delivery by Stan and Ollie of some title deeds to a gold mine. It's the last of their great collaborations, drawing energy and charm from the familiar frontier situations, a couple of musical numbers and the comedians' impeccable timing in the deployment of their staple ingredients: slapstick, childish banter and the to-audience reaction shot. Fertile gags include a puddle with a disguised hole for Ollie to fall into, and the inevitable water butt. Also present is Mr James Finlayson, a frequent foil for the team, whose 'double-take and fade away' is legend ('Dohhh!').

Throughout their work Stan was always the child character, sensitive, but given to violent retribution if pushed; Hardy was the parent, paternalistic, patronising and pompous. Both, however, and here was the genius, were equally inept and incapable of reasoning like normal human beings. Stan just got the blame when it all went horribly wrong.

The Hay vehicle, *Oh, Mr. Porter!*, provides an interesting point of comparison, not only because it was made the same year, but because this team's comedy also depended on stock characterisation. The flesh on the bones of this example is a bit more substantial than usual for being a send-up of the well-known theatrical warhorse *The Ghost Train*. In it Hay plays the incompetent station master who foils the exploits of a gang of gun runners posing as ghosts. The film ends in memorable fashion with its cast clinging to the revolving sails of a windmill.

Hay, like Laurel, was a product of the music halls and his archetypal characterisation was that of an inept, slightly seedy, schoolmaster with crooked *pince-nez*, rakish mortarboard and dusty gown. During the thirties he played a series of variations on this role, which was endearing even if it held much of the arrogant quality of Ollie's. He was aided and abetted by the long-sufferingly juvenile Moffatt and senile Marriott, who here play the 'fat boy' and old Harbottle, station attendants.

Ultimately, though, these films are quite different in tone. The British one has that air of theatricality and of insouciance that comes from music hall repartee; the American one, like many American creations, has to be all things to all people.

David Clare