

# Strand Theatre Shelbyville, Inc.

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## Film Preview

Written by David on November, 5 2009

The mirth, madness and mayhem of live-action black and white cartoons will mix with slaps, nyuks, and belly laughs galore Friday night in a double-feature of film's fine messes, extended jokes and bumbling buffoonery. On that night, at 7:30, the Strand Theatre will present films by two of Hollywood's most prolific teams of crowned, clown princes of slapstick comedy, eccentric pantomime, and crazed visuals. This farce-filled evening of vaudeville on the silver screen features the gut-busting humor of the Three Stooges and the semi-surreal, nearly absurdist, extended puns of Laurel and Hardy. Prior to and during the cinematic shenanigans of these classic comedic troupes, patrons of the Strand Theatre may perchance chose to browse about the historic venue and enjoy, walk among and gawk at memorabilia commemorating these legendary, masters of miming movie magic. The funny festivities of Friday night's guffaws opens with the Three Stooges short, "Malice in the Palace", a 1949 film created in the midst of a rather sad, ironic, real-life-family drama involving the three Howard (Horwitz) brothers: Curly, Moe, Shemp, and their cousin Larry Fine. Three years earlier, in 1946, during the filming of another short, "Half-Wits Holiday", Curly (Jerome Howard) suffered a massive stroke and was replaced by on the team by his brother Shemp (Samuel) whom Curly had previously replaced as a stooge in 1932 when Shemp went solo to star in "Joe Palooka" films. Curly was originally scheduled for a cameo in Friday's film "Malice in the Palace," but was physically unable to perform. The first, 1932, reshuffling of "Ted Healy and the Stooges" would introduce the screwball genius of Curly, who shaved his head, stormed the stage and stole the auditions to become a stooge extraordinaire. It was his eclectic improvisations and situational antics that brought both glory and fame to the Howard brothers and their cousin, according to Moe (Moses), the business and creative master-mind of the manic, ever-changing trio of misfits. If we were going through a scene and he'd forget his words for a moment, you know. Rather than stand, get pale and stop, you never knew what he was going to do. On one occasion he'd get down to the floor and spin around like a top until he remembered what he had to say, brother Moe said describing Curly's style: "Nyuk, nyuk, nyuk" and "woo, woo, woo," at you and to you. This stooge style, however, would not blossom until 1937 when after 12-year career as a trio of second-fiddle mimes of violence, the classic Three Stooges were born and would bloom into household names in America and across the world. Eventually, these masters of mirth would make 190 shorts, several feature-length movies, a couple of cartoons, rebirth into the golden land of television and even record several albums of silly songs. All told there would be six stooges spanning a nearly 50-year career of living cartoons. In Friday's film-short, "Malice in the Palace," Moe, Larry and Shemp, parody "Casablanca" to some extent as they serve as chefs at the Café Casbah in a physical farce revolving around a caper about a diamond theft. Friday's feature is also a film wrapped around and made by a classic comedy team seeking to branch out and flex their own creative independence. The "Flying Deuces," (1939) was the first movie made by Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy after their break with Hal Roach Studios. Unlike the family-affair that was the Three Stooges, the initial (1919) pairing of Norvell (Babe) Hardy, a stage singer from Georgia, and Stan Laurel, a British pantomime comic, by Hal Roach produced an unlikely tandem. This under-achieving, un-dynamic duo would 12- years later evolve into the winners of the first Academy Award in movies in 1932 for the short "The Music Box." In an equally strange artistic twist, this comic duos' creation of ordinary, dim-witted guys caught in unfortunate situations often ending badly would eventually inspire the absurdist masterpiece "Waiting for Godot," by Irish playwright, Samuel Beckett. After seeing the bowler-hatted, verbal and visual puns of Laurel and Hardy, Beckett said he conceived his notion of the "Theatre of the Absurd." Of particular notice was the often laconic words and style of Laurel, especially his extended and repetitively circular jokes and puns. Ironically, Laurel, who was trained on the English stage as a 10-year-old understudy to Charlie Chaplin in Fred Karno's vaudeville theater, would come to America and then inspire an Irishman across the sea to absurdly reinvent, provoke and challenge theater audiences around the globe. On a more obvious plane Beckett drew several theatrical tricks from Laurel's unique vision of cinema translated from the stage. For example, Beckett was influenced by the, deadpan, down-and-out, yet eternally optimistic character of Laurel contrasted with the carefree pessimism of Hardy's often serially repeated catchphrase: "Well this is another fine mess you've gotten us into." This refrain echoes across and throughout the 106 films made by these serious clowns who frequently lace their slapstick with strange dark humor. Laurel, who was born, Arthur Stanley Jefferson, wrote and directed many of these short tales which tackle some rather somber themes. Typical of these themes is the repetitive references to reincarnation that run throughout Friday night's movie "The Flying Deuces." Another point to watch for during the movie is the surreal puns that Laurel developed and labeled "white magic." These usually either involve a visual metamorphosis of incongruous images such as lighting his finger on fire then smoking it as a pipe or verbal triple entendres or conundrums delivered with the deadpan voice of a talking mime. In fact, Laurel and Hardy astonished many contemporaries in Hollywood because they could and did successfully translate the pantomime of silent film into such a verbally rich, yet under-spoken continuous and never-ending joke upon "high society," during the trial and

travails of the Great Depression and then WWII. In the clever, yet seriously strange mind of Stan Laurel, America and the globe got to view the tragic-comedic adventures of two kids caught up in a world of grown-ups, a rather uptight, somber existence filled with worries about money, society and war.

This preview does not express the opinion of the Strand Theatre.

Submitted by: Terrance Aldridge

**Images on this post:**

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