

STAN & OLLIE ... Here's another nice mess!

a few thoughts gathered by Tracy M. Tolzmann

The preview for the new British film STAN & OLLIE is out. The film is billed as telling the “untold” story of **Stan and Babe's** final tour of England in 1953-54. Academy Award-nominated actor **John C. Reilly** portrays Babe and similarly honored **Steve Coogan** plays Stan. Reilly makes a convincing Babe and Coogan has Stan's voice down pat. Certain shots and angles show the actors as very good doubles for the 60-something originals.

An intriguing insight to the feature is an apparent “flashback” sequence depicting the making of **Stan and Babe's** beloved “At the Ball, That's All” dance routine outside of Mickey Finn's Palace in WAY OUT WEST. It appears that the routine is followed meticulously, and even the original rear-screen background footage was found to further replicate the classic sequence! (The background scene was not produced by Hal Roach Studios but was “stock footage” from a company that specialized in such material.)



The trailer has raised quite a few hackles among **Laurel and Hardy** buffs due to the inclusion of a short “sequence” that implies that Stan and Babe had some terse words with one another regarding Babe's working without Stan. The trailer includes the following **heavily-edited** “exchange”:

BABE: “We had a good thing going but you had this big chip on your shoulder... (EDIT) ...'cause I did a picture with someone else.”



STAN: “I couldn't sleep for days when they told me what you did... (EDIT) ...you're just a lazy-ass... (EDIT) ...got lucky 'cause you met me.”

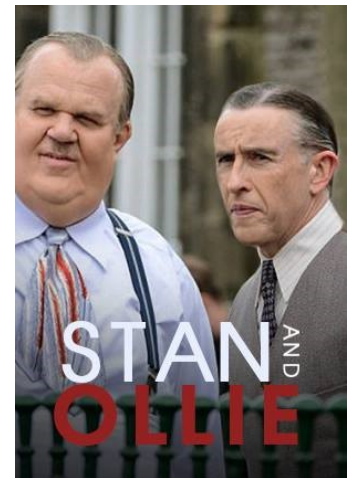
BABE: “Lucky! (EDIT) ...spend my life with a man who hides behind a typewriter?”

STAN: “You betrayed me, betrayed our friendship.”

BABE (poking Stan in the chest): “You're hollow.”

The “exchange” may be from numerous different scenes and much of it is voice-over with many obvious edits. All authorities agree that the sequence is pure fiction. The trailer does go on to imply a “reconciliation” between the boys, but again, may not have ANYTHING to do with the currently controversial “sequence” at all!

Very few people have seen the completed film. Among those who **have** seen STAN & OLLIE are several discriminating members of the Sons of the Desert, including perhaps the number one authority on all things **Laurel and Hardy** and **Hal Roach Studios**, Block-Heads' own Grand Sheik Emeritus and Saint Paul native, **Richard W. Bann**, who has written *volumes* on the history and lives of the boys.



Dick is not one to tolerate errors and misinformation when it comes to film history. His remarks regarding STAN & OLLIE include the following: “I do have reservations, but on balance I do recommend the film. If you go with an open mind, you will be glad you saw this movie. I don't understand fans who either want to boycott it, or won't go (to it) out of some kind of protest. This movie is far from a hatchet job, and anything as well done as this film will only raise the visibility of L&H in the popular culture and that is important. Everyone should patronize the picture.” Dick added, “The trailer way over-emphasizes any conflict between L&H. You need to see the entire film, and I think it will leave a different feeling than the trailer does.”

Commenting on the accuracy of the women portraying Babe and Stan's wives, **Lucille** and **Ida** (pronounced Ee-da), Dick said, “Having known both Lucille and Ida, I think they missed on Lucille, but got Ida for sure.” Lucille met Babe when she was a script girl on THE FLYING DEUCES and soon became his third wife. Ida was an actress of Russian heritage who met Stan in a restaurant and became his fourth wife.

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Dick also has advice for the movie-going audience: "I think the film will work better if one does not see the trailer, as it contains key individual scenes shown completely out of context. I won't spoil anything by saying any more. Yet I realize it is hard to resist watching the trailer. But it's better to not watch it again." He continued, "This particular trailer is not as bad as many. For a long time now, all the best gags and most interesting scenes of any film are almost always chosen for the trailer to better sell it — at the cost of the film-going experience." Dick nailed it when he added, "But Hollywood doesn't care, they just want your admission ticket money."

Initially, it was thought that the offending exchange referred to Babe's appearance in *THE FIGHTING KENTUCKIAN*, which was made following Laurel and Hardy's 11-month tour of the United Kingdom and Europe. Stan himself wrote to a fan in November of 1959, "The **John Wayne** film you saw recently in which **Hardy** was in, was made in '48. (released in '49.) We had just returned from a European tour & Mr. Wayne being a good friend of Hardy requested him to appear alone in this film, so of course I had no objection as I badly needed a rest. After this film we both returned to Great Britain again. Incidentally I never did see this film." Laurel and Hardy author and expert **Randy Skretvedt** said, "He (Stan) was supportive and knew that Babe had to keep making a living (and that Babe would have preferred working with Stan)."



John Wayne and Oliver Hardy in THE FIGHTING KENTUCKIAN, 1948.



Harry Langdon and Oliver Hardy in ZENOBIA, Hal Roach Studios, 1939.

A quick scene in the *STAN & OLLIE* trailer shows Reilly (as Babe) in costume for *ZENOBIA*, along with an actor who is presumably portraying **Harry Langdon**, co-star of the 1939 **Hal Roach Studios** feature. The suggestion that this was the cause for the (fictional) rift between the boys is shot down by **Randy Skretvedt**, who explained Babe's contractual obligation to the studio, "Stan had been terminated by the Hal Roach Studios in mid-August 1938, and Babe's contract still had several months to run. But, again, Stan totally understood the situation and didn't blame Babe in the slightest." Randy continued, "Babe was scheduled to appear on **Jack Haley's** CBS radio program on March 31, 1939 to

promote the picture, and Stan sent him a telegram: 'WILL BE LISTENING AND WISHING YOU LOADS OF SUCCESS. YOURS AS EVER.' Stan addressed this to Babe in care of the Roach studio. No doubt Roach saw this and noted the gesture which was a friendly one to the studio as well as to Laurel's old friend and partner."

In all that has been written and said about **Laurel and Hardy** and their 30-year partnership, NOT ONE instance of their ever having an argument has ever been quoted. Stan's late daughter **Lois Laurel Hawes** always said that they were *closer* than brothers, because brothers had disagreements, but her father and "Uncle" Babe NEVER did!

So, what do we conclude from all this? Certainly that "artistic license" in *STAN & OLLIE* may rankle us for giving a false impression of **Stan and Babe's** relationship. And that we should do as our former Grand Sheik **Dick Bann** suggests and "patronize the picture." U.S. distribution of the film has been acquired by SONY Pictures Classics and the film may start out in limited release in January. There's already "Oscar buzz" regarding some of the acting in the film (**John C. Reilly**, perhaps?), so the film *may* play in the Los Angeles area this December in order to be eligible for the 2019 Academy Awards. And we can hope that the story of **Laurel & Hardy** in a big-budget theatrical presentation will act as an introduction to those movie-goers who have no idea who the real Stan and Ollie are and that they might search out the classic comedies of their "new discovery" and join the ranks of loyal Sons of the Desert everywhere!

