

The Best of the Marx Brothers at BFI Southbank



During January 2015 **BFI Southbank** will banish the January blues with a celebration of the anarchic genius of the **Marx Brothers**. This short but perfectly formed season will feature eight of the Brother's most famous and beloved films including an extended run of the breathtakingly funny ***Duck Soup*** (1933). Born in New York City to Jewish immigrant parents during the latter years of the 19th century, the five Marx Brothers Chico, Harpo, Groucho, Gummo and Zeppo would soon become legends of the vaudeville stage, and eventually (though without Gummo) graduated to cinema.

Their first two films ***The Cocoanuts*** (1929) and ***Animal Crackers*** (1930) started life as Broadway shows; the former tells a tale of skulduggery among the well-heeled denizens of a Florida beach resort while the latter is a stolen-valuables saga, also starring Margaret Dumont, who was, said Groucho, practically the fifth Marx brother. Also screening will be ***Monkey Business*** (1931), in which the brothers play stowaways on a transatlantic crossing, and ***Horse Feathers*** (1932) in which the brothers satirised the American College system. Audiences will get to experience a ***Night at the Opera*** (1935) and ***A Night in Casablanca*** (1946) via ***A Day at the Races*** (1937) as well as their endlessly inventive spoof of war-movie heroics ***Duck Soup*** (1933), which will play on extended run.

These ageless comedy classics were made by the ideal jesters for an era when the wheels had come off the economy and the world was in uproar - and still feel contemporary and relevant decades later.

– ENDS –

Press Contacts:

Liz Parkinson – Press Officer (Acting), BFI Southbank
liz.parkinson@bfi.org.uk / 020 7957 8918

Tim Mosley – Press Officer, BFI Southbank
tim.mosley@bfi.org.uk / 020 7957 8986

NOTES TO EDITORS:

SEASON LISTINGS

The Cocoanuts

USA 1929. Dir Robert Florey, Joseph Santley. With the Marx Brothers, Oscar Shaw, Kay Francis. 96min. U

The brothers brought their biggest stage hit to the screen – a tale of skullduggery among the well-heeled denizens of a Florida beach resort. Amid the ballyhooing of sub-Busby Berkeley hoofers and a yodeling Irish detective, Groucho's proto-Basil Fawlty hotelier offers his staff lessons in the class struggle ('What makes wage slaves? Wages'), while Harpo flexes his pickpocketing skills. A taste-whetting hint of the comedies to come.

Wed 14 Jan 20:50 Studio

Fri 16 Jan 20:40 NFT2

Sun 18 Jan 18:10 NFT3

Animal Crackers

USA 1930. Dir Victor Heerman. With the Marx Brothers, Lillian Roth, Louis Sorin. 97min. U

The brothers' second Broadway transfer is another stolen-valuables saga, this time set in the grand manse of Margaret Dumont's widower. Groucho's Captain Spaulding, famed African explorer, pulls up in a bamboo sedan, debriefs host and secretary (Zeppo) with a volley of ambidextrous abuse, then conducts virtuoso exchanges of non-sequiturs with Chico, while Harpo subverts the laws of physics with his coat sleeves.

Sat 17 Jan 16:10 NFT2

Mon 19 Jan 20:45 NFT1

Wed 21 Jan 20:50 Studio

Wed 28 Jan 20:30 NFT1

Monkey Business

USA 1931. Dir Norman McLeod. With the Marx Brothers, Thelma Todd, Rockliffe Fellowes, Harry Woods. 77min. U

On a transatlantic crossing the four brothers take on the roles of: steamliner stowaways; ship's captain; doctor; Maurice Chevalier impersonators; mob heavies and society gatecrashers... Beefed up by an original SJ Perelman screenplay, this is one of the brothers' most untrammelled delights – from Harpo's puppet play and his and Chico's see-saw moustache snooping, to Groucho's parlour games with Thelma Todd.

Sat 17 Jan 18:10 NFT3

Tue 20 Jan 20:45 NFT1

Wed 28 Jan 18:30 NFT1

Horse Feathers

USA 1932. Dir Norman McLeod. With the Marx Brothers, Thelma Todd, David Landau. 70min. U

Principal Wagstaff's (Groucho) bookishness singularly fails to rub off on his new charges (Harpo and Chico), who are somehow mistaken for the footballers sent to help Huxley College trump their rivals. Naturally, to paraphrase the professor, learning goes out the door when delinquency comes innuendo. The berserk last reel has to be seen to be disbelieved.

Sun 18 Jan 16:10 NFT3

Wed 21 Jan 18:30 NFT3

A Night at the Opera

USA 1935. Dir Sam Wood. With the Marx Brothers, Sig Ruman, Margaret Dumont. 91min. 35mm. U

Cherishable for its medley of superlative routines, this first prestige MGM production begins with Dumont engaging Groucho's roguish Otis B Driftwood to grease her entry into society. En route to a thorough demolition of *Il Trovatore*, there's the famous 'stateroom' scene, the Sanity Clause debate, and a wealth of targets for ridicule from bearded aviators to an Irish cop.

Tue 20 Jan 18:20 NFT2

Sun 25 Jan 20:40 NFT2

Mon 26 Jan 20:40 NFT2

A Day at the Races

USA 1937. Dir Sam Wood. With the Marx Brothers, Allan Jones, Sig Ruman. 109min. 35mm. U

Self-indulgence starts creeping in with this overelaborate re-run of the *Night at the Opera* formula. Thankfully though, there's the estimable Dr Hugo Z Hackenbush (Groucho) to ride to the film's rescue – the snake oil-selling horse quack doted on by Dumont's Mrs Upjohn. Chico's under-the-tootsie-footsie-ice-creamstall codebook scam is another skit for the pantheon, and Ruman gets a medical check-up to remember.

Thu 29 Jan 20:45 NFT1

Fri 30 Jan 18:20 NFT2

Sat 31 Jan 20:40 NFT3

A Night in Casablanca

USA 1946. Dir Archie Mayo. With the Marx Brothers, Charles Drake, Sig Ruman. 85min. 35mm. U

This independent production, made to relieve Chico's gambling debts, sparked Groucho's celebrated copyright correspondence with Warners' legal department. In the event, the script's parody elements were jettisoned in favour of tried-and-true Marxiana: Groucho gets his chops round some lipsmacking banter, and there's a lovely roundelay with the trio unpacking Ruman's German Count's trunk as fast as he can pack it.

Fri 30 Jan 20:50 NFT3

Sat 31 Jan 18:20 NFT2

Duck Soup

USA 1933. Dir Leo McCarey. The Marx Brothers, Margaret Dumont, Louis Calhern, Edgar Kennedy. 68min. U

This breathtakingly funny, endlessly inventive spoof of war-movie heroics is the greatest of all the Marx Brothers' films. Freedonia's fraught relationship with neighbouring Sylvania gets rockier still when wealthy worthy Mrs Teasdale (Dumont) appoints the unpredictable Rufus T Firefly (Groucho) as president. Soon two inept spies (Chico and Harpo) are adding to the anarchic chaos, then Sylvania's ambassador calls the President an 'upstart'... This means war! (Besides, Firefly's already aid a month's advance rent on the battlefield.) Gleefully ridiculing patriotism, politicians, military honour, religion and anything remotely tainted by respectability, the film also includes what is surely the Brothers' funniest (and most perfectly executed) scene, involving a broken mirror and Groucho, Harpo and Chico all looking quite identical. An ageless comedy classic.

Fri 16 Jan – Thu 29 Jan

About the BFI

The BFI is the lead body for film in the UK with the ambition to create a flourishing film environment in which innovation, opportunity and creativity can thrive by:

- Connecting audiences to the widest choice of British and World cinema
- Preserving and restoring the most significant film collection in the world for today and future generations
- Championing emerging and world class film makers in the UK
- Investing in creative, distinctive and entertaining work

- Promoting British film and talent to the world
- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences

The BFI Southbank is open to all. BFI members are entitled to a discount on all tickets. BFI Southbank Box Office tel: 020 7928 3232. Unless otherwise stated tickets are £11.00, concs £8.50 Members pay £1.50 less on any ticket. Website www.bfi.org.uk/southbank

Tickets for FREE screenings and events must be booked in advance by calling the Box Office to avoid disappointment

BFI Shop

The BFI Shop is stocked and staffed by BFI experts with over 1,200 book titles and 1,000 DVDs to choose from, including hundreds of acclaimed books and DVDs produced by the BFI.

The benugo bar & kitchen

Eat, drink and be merry in panoramic daylight. benugo's décor is contemporary, brightly lit and playful with a lounge space, bar and dining area. The place to network, hang out, unpack a film, savour the best of Modern British or sip on a cocktail.

There's more to discover about film and television through the BFI. Our world-renowned archival collections, cinemas, festivals, films, publications and learning resources are here to inspire you.

***** PICTURE DESK *****

A selection of images for journalistic use in promoting BFI Southbank screenings can be found at www.image.net under BFI / BFI Southbank / January 2015 / Marx Brothers