

“Stan and Ollie”

By Helen Lutz

Comedy dates back to ancient Greece with its parody, satire, farce, fantasy and has evolved a great deal over the millennia. Director Jon Baird brings the comedic lives of Stan Laurel (Steve Coogan) and Oliver Hardy (John C. Reilly) to theater screens. Along with the top stars of the era like the Marx Brothers, Charlie Chaplain and a host of others, Stan and Ollie made people laugh in good times as well as bad during the 1930's and 40's. Their antics on stage and film exaggerated silliness and slapstick.



“Stan and Ollie” tells the story of the two friends and business partners. As the film opens we catch a glimpse of them during their heyday. Unlike stars of today, the old time stars were signed by the studios and paid a ‘living wage’; do as you're told, when you're told and don't complain. The studios ruled the roost and made the big bucks.

We watch as Stan convinces Ollie that it's time to ask for a raise and has him totally on board until the conversation with studio head Hal Roach (Danny Huston). Of course the party line is that there is no money for raises and the comedians are nothing without the studio; Ollie caves right away while Stan is kicked to the curb to teach him a lesson.

The film jumps ahead to the 1950's when Stan and Ollie are in their golden years; however, life is far from golden. Stanley has always been the diligent one working on new jokes and gags and even writing movies while Ollie enjoys the lighter side of life. The duo is given the opportunity to tour Europe on a comeback tour. At first the theaters are fairly empty, but a slick promoter finds ways to get the boys in front of crowds and bring paying customers back into the theater seats. Of course, the promoter receives the largest piece of the pie.

All through the tour Stan works diligently on a new movie for the boys designed as a rip off of the Robin Hood story – steal from the poor and give to the rich or something like that. It's devastating when the studio finally breaks the news that the 60 some year old actors just aren't the box office draw that they once were and that there are no financial backers to be found. Between the loss of the movie and Ollie's failing health, it's the end of the comedy duo Stan and Ollie.

Steve Coogan and John C. Riley step into the shoes of Stan and Ollie telling their story. I saw some of their movies when they played on television as a child in the 1950's. They were funny, not as good as Saturday morning cartoons, but then I was only five or six years old. While watching “Stan and Ollie” the characters were so believable that I got lost in their story, felt their problems, learned of their demons and appreciated their lives and all they did to entertain crowds who were dealing with the aftermath of the Depression and our entry into World War II. I forgot that I wasn't actually watching the boys in the Derbys.

“Stan and Ollie” isn't a movie for everyone unless you are a fan of true, clean comedy with a historical twist; however, it does an excellent job of telling the story of two very funny men who impacted the history of comedy. On a scale of one to four Hart Beats I give “Stan and Ollie” ♡♡1/2 HARTS. The film brings smiles to wrinkled faces in the audience while it shows younger people what comedy offered – before the use of profanity.