

Eden Court Cinema
Tuesday, 2 June 2015
at 7.15pm

Comedy, USA, B&W,
97 mins

Director:
Victor Heerman
Screenplay:
Morris Ryskind, from
the musical play by
Ryskind, George S
Kaufman.

Cast:
Groucho Marx, Chico
Marx, Harpo Marx,
Zeppo Marx, Lillian
Roth and Margaret
Dumont.



Animal Crackers

Notes assembled by Mike Noble

Animal Crackers (1930), the second of many classic Marx Brothers films (their first film was *The Cocoanuts* (1929), also for Paramount Studios), was the last to be taken from one of their stage successes and the last to be filmed on the East Coast on Astoria sound stages before they transferred to Hollywood. The comic madness of the Marx Brothers in this early talkies-era film is typical of all their films - an intrusive and silly plot - an excuse for numerous verbal ad-libs and elliptical dislocations, criticism of sophisticated and affected high-society life, expository dialogues and battles (notably between Groucho and Chico), and downright funny sequences. In this very talkative, lengthy film directed by Victor Heerman, Groucho established himself with the



Plus *The Pink Panther*

character of "Captain Spaulding." This farce was loosely based on George S. Kaufman's hit musical play, and developed from a screenplay by Morrie Ryskind. It contains two memorable scenes among many: Groucho's African safari adventure lecture, and the lunatic bridge card game scene.

Eight films starring the legendary Marx Brothers (Groucho, Chico, Harpo and Zeppo) were celebrated in January in a retrospective at London's BFI. The following is taken from a related BBC News item, on bbc.co.uk:

The 1933 movie [Duck Soup] was controversial for its time. Benito Mussolini banned it from Italian screens, which delighted the brothers.

It opened 10 months after Adolf Hitler was appointed chancellor of Germany, a country where all Marx Brothers films were banned even though their mother was born in Dornum.

When the city of Fredonia, New York complained about the similarly named Freedonia, Groucho wrote back to the mayor: "Our advice is that you change the name of your town. It is hurting our picture."

Although their last film, Love Happy (featuring an early performance from Marilyn Monroe) was in 1949, and Groucho died three days after

Elvis Presley, the brothers' influence remains surprisingly durable in contemporary culture.

Groucho's former co-manager Shep Gordon has no doubt why. "Their movies will always be relevant because it is intelligent, character-driven humour," he says.

"Groucho uses words like a laser surgeon and Harpo is the perfect innocent scoundrel."

Groucho's one-liners and Harpo's physical comedy were allied to straight man Zeppo and Chico's wordplay - younger brother Gummo chose to work only on the stage and not on film before becoming an agent.

They remain loved by leading actors, comedians and directors here and in Hollywood.

Judd Apatow, the director behind *Knocked Up*, *the 40 Year-Old Virgin* and *This is 40*, told **The Wrap**: "The first movie that had an impact on me as a person interested in comedy was *Duck Soup*."

"I was a fanatical Marx Brothers fan as a 10 year-old. It might have been because I loved their rebellion - it seemed like they were flipping the bird to everyone."

Comedy US actor Adam Sandler remembers being woken by his father Stan at 1a.m. because one of their movies was on television.

Director and actor Woody Allen's admiration is more explicit. The opening monologue in his 1977 romantic comedy *Annie Hall* quotes Groucho, his suicidal character in 1986's *Hannah and her Sisters* goes to see *Duck Soup* to cheer himself up.

Allen's 1989 movie *Everyone Says I Love You* takes its title from a song in *Horse Feathers* and ends at a party with Groucho and Harpo lookalikes.

The infamous mirror scene from *Duck Soup* has been pastiched by Mickey Mouse, Lucille Ball and in Seth Macfarlane's *Family Guy*.

The same film also contains a scene where soldiers' helmets are played like a glockenspiel - in *Return of the Jedi*, something similar happens to the stormtroopers.

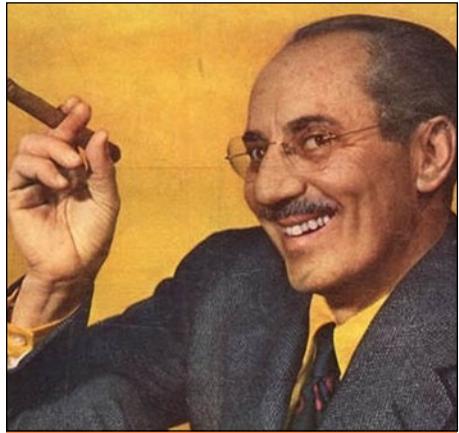
Another surprising fan and friend of Groucho late in his life was rock star Alice Cooper. Both bonded over their love of Vaudeville, the often-outrageous theatrical variety entertainment of the 1880 to 1930s, where the brothers honed their act.

"Groucho used to call me in the middle of the night and ask me to come over," recalls Cooper. "We'd sit around and watch old black and white movies and he loved to point out personal things I didn't want to know about the actors. Groucho was the ringleader of the brothers, sort of like the lead singer in a band. So I obviously really related to him."

Marx brought along friends from the Vaudeville era like George Burns, Mae West, Fred Astaire to see Cooper, who notes that the stars were often less shocked than the audience.

Cooper's friendship led to his then manager Shep Gordon (who was recommended to manage Cooper by Jimi Hendrix) representing Groucho.

"I was 22, a huge fan and had to pinch myself," Gordon tells me. "The first deal I did was with Blades tailors in Savile Row.



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"I gave them the right to do a likeness of Groucho on a sweater for a placement in their front window and a royalty. I always get goosebumps when I drive down Savile Row."

Another infamous London location, the city's notorious private members' club, The Groucho, took its name from his famous line about not wanting to join a club which would have him as a member. A pub in Glasgow's Hope Street is named Rufus T Firefly.

Even in 2015's awards-nominated movies, there is a residual influence. Wes Anderson's *The Grand Budapest Hotel* was likened by one critic to "Agatha Christie starring The Marx Brothers" and in Tim Burton's *Big Eyes*, the screenwriter Larry Karaszewski has admitted he named one character Mrs.



Teasdale after the main butt of Firefly's jokes in *Duck Soup*.

Gordon believes their films will be enjoyed by future generations. "The Marx Brothers' personalities and pure talent, with their amazing sense of humour, will live forever. They will make people laugh for many more centuries."

"Slapstick and situational comedy is alive and well today," Cooper says. "Shows like *Modern Family* have a hint of that same sort of deadpan ridiculousness."

Groucho's quips (for example, "I never forget a face, but in your case I'll be glad to make an exception") are recycled to this day. "It was really after meeting him and hanging out with him when I really came to appreciate his delivery," adds Cooper. "He was able to use words in the same way Errol Flynn used a sword."

One of his one-liners may prove useful for all leaders in a general election year: "Those are my principles, if you don't like them I have others."



**Eden Court Cinema
Tuesday 16 June 2015
at 7.15pm**

**Our next screening...
Norman. Z. MacLeod's**

Horse Feathers

Completing our
Marx Brothers season

Inverness Film Fans (InFifa) meet fortnightly at Eden Court Cinema for screenings and post-film discussions.

For more information and to join us, free, go to:

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The zaniest Marx Brothers comedy of them all with an anarchic finale involving banana peels, a chariot, an elastic band and a whole lot of footballs! Scheming president of Huxley University Quincy Adams Wagstaff, (Groucho Marx) hires two misfits he mistakes for professional footballers to win a game against rivals Darwin University in this anarchic and much loved Marx Brothers Comedy.