

Groucho Marx (Julius, 1890-1977)

Harpo Marx (Adolph, 1888-1964)

Chico Marx ("Chick-oh") (Leonard, 1887-1961)

Zeppo Marx (Herbert, 1901-1979)

Gummo Marx (Milton, 1892-1977)

New York City, parents immigrated from Germany and France, Jewish.

Vaudeville, Groucho began singing in 1907. Gummo joined, then Harpo.

Started doing comedy after an interruption to the songs in 1912.

Rose to stardom. Broadway shows (and consequent touring) with

The Cocoanuts (1925-26)

Animal Crackers (1928-29)

George S. Kaufman, playwright, worked on these.

Four Marx Brothers

Paramount contract made films of

The Cocoanuts in 1929

Animal Crackers in 1930

Monkey Business in 1931

Horse Feathers in 1932

Duck Soup in 1933

Zeppo left, became an agent.

At MGM with producer Irving Thalberg

A Night at the Opera in 1935

A Day at the Races in 1937

Post Thalberg

Room Service 1938

Go West in 1940

The Big Store in 1941

Semi-retirement

A Night in Casablanca in 1945

Love Happy in 1949

A Day at the Races 109 minutes (1:49)

Groucho as Dr. Hackenbush, Harpo as Stuffy, Chico as Tony

Margaret Dumont as Mrs. Emily Upjohn

Directed by Sam Wood, Written by Robert Pirosh, George Seaton, George Oppenheimer

Role of director now elevated to the creative leader. However, in this film, and many others of this time period, it was the producer who brought shape to things.

Thalberg died a short time into producing this film. He established the pattern but wasn't on set to make adjustments.

He had *Night at the Opera* and this film tour to multiple cities and collect responses. They carried stop watches to time responses. How long will they laugh?

Thalberg gave them the flexibility they needed and let them learn for themselves what works and what doesn't. The director's role was just to capture them in the act.

Thalberg always had characters fall to their lowest point before recovering. This built sympathy for them, helped the audience to engage. This is done in *Day at the Races*. It is coupled with the song and dance in shanty town. "Who Dat Man". Segregation is clear. This might be an insight into New York/LA differences. Strange and uncomfortable. Only Harpo crosses the line between the cultures/ethnicities.

Core to the Marx Brothers is irreverence. They are best when they attack and disrespect the rich and powerful. They don't let anyone be comfortable.

Traditional narratives All elements are meant to push the story forward, the plot, the characters, the mood or suspense, etc. The role of story in Marx Brothers films is to pace the comedy, to give the audience some breathing space.

They are ABSURD. They are uncontrollable. Trying to fit them into a story is like trying to trap the wind. A clever producer knows that this can't be done, but that the wind can be harnessed. Like blowing a windmill, the windmill doesn't go anywhere, nor do these stories, but it still generates a lot of power.

At our new location (Palliser Building - 2151 Scarth Street) the length of classes is a bit more of a concern because parking options are all on-street and limited to 2 hours. (For facilitators with a U of R parking pass, I can arrange for you to park behind the building in staff parking.) But students will primarily park on the street and be limited to 2 hours, so shorter films will definitely be appreciated by the students. I have currently scheduled the course for 1:00-3:30, but if films can be close to 2 hours or under that will be best. Coffee breaks are also shorter at this new location: we are encouraging students to keep coffee break to a tight 10 minutes. (However, if the occasional film is a bit longer, you could give a bit of a longer coffee break so people can go move vehicles if necessary.)