

Boy Trouble

US : 1939 : dir. George Archainbaud : Paramount : 75 min
 prod: : scr: : dir.ph.:
Donald O'Connor; Billy Lee; Wally Albright; George Billings; Sonny Bupp; Tommy Tucker
 Charles Ruggles; Mary Boland; Joyce Matthews; Andrew Tombes

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Donald O'Connor earwigging on Charlie Ruggles
 Source: NFT Bulletin

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"A small-towner finds his life upset when his wife adopts two orphans. Sentimental comedy which caused a few tears to trickle."

"Good old hokum with an emotional wallop... Exhibitors can use more pictures of this type."
 - **Variety**

NFT bulletin - July 79 - review:

"Charlie Ruggles is in fine form as a child-hating assistant in a children's clothing store, whose warm-hearted, woolly-headed spouse (Mary Boland) is persuaded that children are what he needs in spite of himself: she acquires an orphan for him. Striving to disembarass himself of this foster child (Billy Lee), he is landed with another (O'Connor). Trouble takes the form of roller-skates, scarlet fever and illicit jam-trading, and this "unpretentious and entertaining" film, as Basil Wright called it, ends in reconciliation."

[no listing in "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001", "Speelfilm Encyclopedie", "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "A Pictorial History of the Talkies", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

The Moving Picture Boy entry on O'Connor:

"His parents were originally circus performers: father an acrobat, mother a bareback rider and tightrope walker. Later they turned to the theatre, with a family act of song, dance and acrobatics which earned them the title of "The Royal Family of Vaudeville". Donald used to be carried on to the stage to wave and gurgle at the audience from his infant wrappings until he was old enough to squeak a song and totter through a tiny dance. It can't have taken long, since at the age of one he is said to have danced a Black Bottom, and been tap-dancing at three.

In the end he became one of the finest hoofers in the business. With his pale, elfin eyes and saucy air, Donald was a natural for the movies. In "**MELODY FOR TWO**" he and two of his brothers did a vaudeville number, and he was then signed up by Paramount. (In "**TOM SAWYER, DETECTIVE**" he played Huck to the Tom of Billy Cook, a boy who wasn't to rival O'Connor's subsequent career.)

A series of Universal musicals in the Forties (notably opposite Peggy Ryan) kept O'Connor in the popular eye, and in the Fifties he was six

times partnered - rather less engagingly - by Francis, the Talking Mule. In the same decade, though, came some of his great dance-and-comedy performances: in "**SINGIN' IN THE RAIN**" (52), "**CALL ME MADAM**" and "**WALKING MY BABY BACK HOME**" (53), "**THERE'S NO BUSINESS LIKE SHOW BUSINESS**" (54) and "**ANYTHING GOES**" (56). Finally he made his sporting but not quite adequate stab at

portraying genius in "**THE BUSTER KEATON STORY**" (57). In a sense it demonstrated his limitations to O'Connor himself. After "**THAT FUNNY FEELING**" (65) he returned to vaudeville, and for years the cinema saw little of this admirable entertainer. Then he turned up in "**RAGTIME**" (81) - as Evelyn Nesbit's dance teacher - and in "**PANDEMONIUM**" (82)."

No further information currently available. Time for the one-hand dance on the seat of the pants again folks.

Donald O'Connor was 14, the same year he made "**BEAU GESTE**". His talents went to waste in standard boy roles that any competent player could have handled. O'Connor was primarily an acrobatic dancer, as he later proved to excess, and perhaps Paramount might have taken more trouble to find a suitable vehicle for his vaudevillean expertise (he made "**SING, YOU SINNERS**" in 38, and "**MILLION DOLLAR LEGS**" in 39). Billy Lee appeared with him in "**SONS OF THE LEGION**" (38) and "**NIGHT WORK**" (39). Lee, 9, started in the movies much younger, and this was his 21st film. As it happens he too was something of a hoofer, and played a tap-dancing horror in his debut at 4 in Our Gang's "**MIKE FRIGHT**". Among his later legacies to mankind were "**TOO MANY PARENTS**" (36), "**SONS OF THE LEGION**" (38), "**THE BISCUIT EATER**" (40) and "**REG'LAR FELLERS**" (41).

See subject index under **COMEDY** and **ORPHANS / ADOPTION**.