

Father's Son

US : 1931 : dir. William Beaudine : First National : ? min
 prod: : scr: Hope Loring : dir.ph.:
[Leon Janney](#); [Robert Dandridge](#)
 Lewis Stone; Irene Rich; John Halliday; Mickey Bennett; George Reed; Gertrude Howard

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω 8 ∞ M ∞	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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LEON JANNEY, IRENE RICH, LEWIS STONE "FATHER'S SON" A First National Vitaphone Picture

*Janney looks authentically crestfallen as a rambunctious boy whose father little comprehends such organisms.
 Ah well, but mothers always understand, don't they....*
 Source: indeterminate website



Janney is handed the proverbial pistol by exasperated pa Lewis Stone

Source: Warner Bros Story

The Warner Bros Story comment:

“Leon Janney (left), happily indulged in a neat bit of upstaging throughout **"FATHER'S SON"**, stealing all the acting honours from Lewis Stone and Irene Rich as the young misunderstood son whose banker father (Stone) simply does not understand young boys in general and his own son in particular. Little more than a series of adventures indulged in by Master Janney, it boasted a fine performance, too, from John Halliday as the family doctor who brings the youngster back home after he has run away. Mickey Bennett, Robert Dandridge, George Reed and Gertrude Howard were also in the cast; the script (from a Booth Tarkington story) was by Hope Loring, and the sensitive, well observed direction was the work of William Beaudine. There were lots of satisfied customers for this one, which was remade in 1941. (First National.)”

[no listing in "Halliwell's Film Guide", "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 1996", "Speelfilm Encyclopedie", "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Hollywood in the Thirties", "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"]

NFT Bulletin – July 79 – review:

“Based on a Booth Tarkington story, and entrusted to an expert director of children, **"FATHER'S SON"** featured the first popular child actor of the talkies. It chronicles the fortunes of a rowdy boy (Janney) who gets on the nerves of his prim father (Lewis Stone). Abetted by a small negro pal called Vestibule Pullman Johnson (Robert Dandridge, presumably elder brother of the future Carmen Jones), our hero plays havoc with Pop's standing in the community.”

The Moving Picture Boy entry on Janney:

“Leon’s great-grandfather invented the Janney railroad coupler. His mother was Bernice Ramon, a not-too-successful actress who saw in her pretty son a chance to get at least her second name in lights: she gave him the professional name of Laon Ramon.

When Leon/Laon was two they left Utah and he began to do cute things in vaudeville. At five, he was a tiny, tuxedoed emcee at a night-club. By eight, he was Bernice’s sole support. In vaudeville, around 1926, he used to do a ten-minute monologue act; and between jobs, he sold newspapers: but not many, as he was almost continuously in work.

In 1928 his mother – who coached him tirelessly, and incurred some criticism over dyeing his blond curls dark “for Spanish parts”, to go with his romantic name – was persuaded by a numerologist that the name Ramon didn’t really spell the big time, and later that year Laon switched back to plain old Leon Janney.

It worked. After his success in “**COURAGE**”, Warners signed him up for three years with a \$400,000 contract. Altogether, including some Fox animal comedies, he notched up more than 50 films. (His one appearance with “**Our Gang**”, however, didn’t click).

Janney projected hearty good nature and a dazzling smile that sometimes clouded over with the care of premature manhood, as one supposes it must often have done in his own early life. As early as 1931 Leon Janney had worked as a radio announcer (for station STAR, “the voice of Hollywood”), and radio and TV presentation was to become the staple of his adult career and fame. But he still made occasional appearances as a film actor: “**STOLEN PARADISE**” (41), “**THE LAST MILE**” (59). “**CHARLY**” (68). ”



*This shot reminds us that the Janney character is a close relative of **Penrod**, Booth Tarkington’s most famous spank-magnet. Pictured with Robert Dandridge. Source: NFT Bulletin*

No further information currently available, but under the scamp opera antics an intriguing theme – a father who is unable to comprehend boyishness and misreads the signals. [Janney](#) was 14, with several dozen films under his belt already including – according to Holstrom – the “**Boy Adventure**”, “**Brown Kiddies**” and “**Winnie Winkle**” shorts series. He incarnated another Booth Tarkington favourite the following year in “**PENROD AND SAM**”, while Warner Bros remade “**FATHER’S SON**” ten years later with Billy Dawson in Janney’s role and John Litel as the bemused father.

Reading between the lines of Holmstrom’s account, it’s hard not to take a view of Janney’s mother as some kind of pander, keeping her son in constant work to support herself financially. It’s a recurrent tale with child actors, as true today as in the 1930s, despite the phenomenal growth of the child protection industry. This active merchandising of their children by certain grasping parents is an open secret of the film business, but one that’s easily lost sight of while we’re enjoying the resulting performances. Nothing else is known of Robert Dandridge, one *The Moving Picture Boy* overlooked.

See the 1941 remake, and subject index under [BOOTH TARKINGTON ADAPTATIONS, RASCALS & SCALAWAGS](#) and [RUNAWAYS / STOWAWAYS](#).