

Peck's Bad Boy

US : 1921 : dir. Sam Wood : Associated First National
prod: Irving M Lesser : scr: : dir.ph.:

Silent : 54 min

[Jackie Coogan](#); [Charles Hatton](#)
Wheeler Oakman; Doris May; Raymond Hatton; Lillian Leighton; James Corrigan;
Gloria Wood; Queenie the dog

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	€	M	⌘	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
3093b	6	6	6	2,222	-	-	-	-	-	No	<i>unseen</i>



Henry Peck (Coogan) coyly assists an early cross-dresser (Charles Hatton) to make his entrance..

Source: The Silents Majority



Doris May and Wheeler Oakman seem less than enchanted by the Puckish Peck

Source: The Silents Majority

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 1996 review:

"Still fresh and enjoyable vehicle for child-star Coogan as a young mischief-maker; clever card-titles written by humourist Irvin S Cobb. ***"

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review - identical to above

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

"Jackie Coogan shines as the mischievous scamp who commits all manner of mayhem upon anyone who happens to cross his path, yet miraculously escapes the lethal designs his victims must harbour. Silent. ***"

Excerpt from **Classics of the Silent Screen** filmography of Coogan:

"...**"THE KID"** and **"OLIVER TWIST"** apart, Coogan made no really important films. Important, that is, in an aesthetic sense. They were most decidedly important to the

exhibitor, who found Jackie a little goldmine whether he was playing a mischievous little brat in **"PECK'S BAD BOY"**, or a pathetic orphaned waif who befriends an old sea dog in **"MY BOY"**.

Jackie's films were unashamedly sentimental. They played mercilessly on the heartstrings of the audience - and they succeeded with a vengeance. They were made for very little, and grossed a small fortune. While movie audiences of today have (to their loss, I feel) outgrown the honest sentimentality of the '20s to such an extent that Coogan's type of film will never be made again, his films still hold up surprisingly well. Their charm is still remarkably preserved, and little Jackie's performances are as moving and effective now as they were well over thirty years ago."

Excerpt from **The Moving Picture Boy** comprehensive entry on Coogan:

"...His follow-up vehicle [to **"THE KID"**] was based on the popular **"Bad Boy"** series of G.W. Peck. Again he wore a cloth cap (though a less decrepit one) and again wowed the nation. In 1921 he got down to the smiles and

tears as an immigrant orphan in "MY BOY"

with Claude Gillingwater, then in



*"PECK'S BAD BOY" was the benchmark for rascality until superceded later in the century by the likes of "DENNIS THE MENACE" and "JUST WILLIAM", both of which were strongly influenced by it. A spanking magnet par excellence, he was the cute little tyke parents were **very** glad didn't live on **their** street.* Source: CVMC webiste

"TROUBLE" was teamed with Wallace Beery (as Jackie Cooper was later to be), and finally played a very under-sized "OLIVER TWIST"..."

The Silents Majority review:

" "It takes four pecks to make a bushel, but only one small Peck to start a riot!" - inter-title introducing Jackie Coogan as little Henry Peck.

A circus comes to a small quiet town where Mr. Peck's bad boy Henry (played by Jackie Coogan) and his dog "Buddy" (played by Queenie) reside. Kids get restless at the drop of a hat, so Buddy, Henry and Henry's best pal (played by Charles Hatton) visit the circus. Their mischief causes a near riot when they

release a lion from its cage. Our darling little hellion, Henry, is adored by his Mamma (played by Lillian Leighton). However, his Papa (played by James Corrigan), the local store keeper (played by Raymond Hatton) and the rest of the town all know trouble's penchant for finding Henry Peck.

In other escapades, Peck's bad boy rescues Buddy and every other stray dog from the dogcatcher. He disrupts Sunday's church service with some naughty "ant"ics played on his own, dear dad. But his biggest prank is saved for his sister's suitor, the young Dr. Martin (played by Wheeler Oakman), that results in his arrest! Peck's bad boy occasionally tries to be a good boy, but he just can't help getting into hot water - or the grocer's displayed merchandise to fill his

hollow leg (fortunately, the grocer keeps a running tab for Mr. Peck!).

"**PECK'S BAD BOY**" was based upon the popular newspaper sketches of *Peck's Bad Boy and His Pa*, by George Wilbur Puck, in 1883. The newspaper series had been adapted into a



Charles Hatton – not in drag this time – shares Coogan's delight at the imminent arrival of the circus. Hippopotamuses were a big draw in the 1920s, as you see. Source: CVMC website

stage play and was a tremendous hit that ran for several years. This film's inter-titles were written by well-known humorist, Irvin S. Cobb.

"**PECK'S BAD BOY**" was Jackie Coogan's first film released on the enormously successful heels of "**THE KID**" (Charlie Chaplin Productions, for First National, 1921), with Charlie Chaplin. Even though the critics were less impressed with the story line, they loved Coogan and so did his fans. The film received favourable reviews.

Variety, on April 28, 1921, stated, " "**PECK'S BAD BOY**" as a picture will not go down in history as a great achievement. It is just a picture, and it is more than likely that the producers of it didn't expect to do more than present simply a picture of Jackie Coogan, and

in figuring that he was enough they were probably right."

Photoplay, in July of 1921, exclaimed, "It is a rare acting talent and a loveable personality that Jackie Coogan brings to the screen. But his directors will be hard put to it to find stories to fit him. Probably never again will he have the chance that Charlie Chaplin gave him in "**THE KID**"."

Harrison's Reports, for April 30, 1921, said, "The young generation and the majority of adults will no doubt enjoy this picture; it is only those who like to be made to think deep that may not be satisfied with it. There are many situations in it, which, although old, create good laughs."

Jackie Coogan related decades after making the picture that he really enjoyed the

experience. **"PECK'S BAD BOY"** was the first film he made fresh from his triumph with **"THE KID"** (Charlie Chaplin Productions, for First National, 1921), starring Charlie Chaplin. The public ate up little Jackie and his engaging personality with a spoon. He integrated his own charms with a bright, acting polish from his tutelage with the great Chaplin. Coogan was the first of the great child stars and the greatest of the silent era.

Wheeler Oakman made his screen debut in 1913 with Selig Polyscope after a stage career. He made about 70 silent feature films and can be seen in **"THE SPOILERS"** (Selig Polyscope Company, 1914), starring William Farnum; **"MICKEY"** (Mabel Normand Feature Film Company, 1918), starring Mabel Normand; and **"OUTSIDE THE LAW"** (Universal-Jewel, 1921), starring Lon Chaney.

Director Sam Wood (1883 - 1949) began his film career after a stint as a real estate broker. As an actor, he appeared in a few two-reelers in 1908 under the name of "Chad Applegate." In 1915, Wood became an assistant director to Cecil B. DeMille and, by 1920, he was a top director at Paramount. While at Paramount, he directed several Gloria Swanson pictures (10 in a row), including the now lost film **"BEYOND THE ROCKS"** (Famous Players-Lasky, 1922), with Rudolph Valentino. He later joined M-G-M and directed such stars as Marion Davies, in **"THE FAIR CO-ED"** (A Sam Wood Production, for Cosmopolitan, released through M-G-M, 1927).

When the talkies arrived, Wood's career blossomed further. He directed many fine films, including some of the best-known classics from the 1930s and early 1940s: **"PAID"** (M-G-M, 1930), starring Joan Crawford; two Marx Bros. films, **"A NIGHT AT THE OPERA"** (M-G-M, 1935) and **"A DAY AT THE RACES"** (M-G-M, 1937); **"GOODBYE MR CHIPS"** (M-G-M, 1939), with Robert Donat; **"KITTY FOYLE"** (RKO, 1940), with Ginger Rogers in an Oscar winning role; and **"KINGS ROW"** (Warner Bros., 1942), starring Ronald Wilson Reagan.

Wood also directed several Gary Cooper films: **"THE PRIDE OF THE YANKEES"** (RKO, 1942), **"FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS"** (Paramount, 1943), and **"CASANOVA BROWN"** (RKO, 1944). Sam Wood was a thorough professional, like a disciplined sentry in a director's chair. Working up to the end of his life, he was only relieved of his post when he was felled by a heart attack.

"PECK'S BAD BOY" (Irving M. Lesser, for First National 1921). Starring Jackie Coogan, Wheeler Oakman, Doris May, Raymond Hatton, James Corrigan, Lillian Leighton, Charles Hatton, Gloria Wood and Queenie, a dog. Directed by Sam Wood. B&W. 5 reels. This video can be purchased on-line through Amazon.com. The Silents Majority is proud to be a member of the Amazon.com associates. Amazon.com will ship videos, books and provide customer service for orders they receive through special links on The Silents Majority's Featured Video and Featured Book pages.

Summary of this release:

Picture quality: good-very good

Picture contrast: good-very good

Titles: legible

Sound quality: excellent

Musical score: appropriate

Sources: *The World Film Encyclopedia*, by Clarence Winchester and *The Film Encyclopedia*, by Ephraim Katz."

– review: John DeBartolo

"50 Years of Looking at the Movies"

CVMC video retail/rental website review:

"The Peck's son of roughly six years of age, Henry (Jackie Coogan), is the terror of the town, just can't seem to keep himself out of trouble. If not unleashing wild animals from their cages or gobbling up food at the local grocery store, the tyke is busy trying to avoid a good-old-fashioned paddling from dad, who he derives the greatest pleasure from tormenting.

Jackie was quickly swept up for this role following his success with **"THE KID"**; **"PECK'S BAD BOY"** was released just four months later. In the lead, Coogan is a lot of fun, here gets a chance to display his talent to its fullest with Chaplin out of the picture. Had to have been an influence on films such as **"PROBLEM CHILD"**. Based on the cartoon sketches by George Wilbur Peck, which were turned into a play before a film. Lots of fun. Recommended!

Rated NR: no questionable content

Categories: Boy Films, Little to Preteen, Comedy

Silent with organ score. This is an older print which includes some minor "speckles"; it is actually in decent shape, though."

[no listing in "Hollywood in the Twenties", "A Pictorial History of the Silent Screen", "Silent Movies: A Picture Quiz Book", "Halliwell's Film Guide", "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-

89", "Radio Times Guide to Films", "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" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]



Cooper and Hatton lie in wait for another dupe of their pranks.
Source: *A Pictorial History of the Silent Screen*

It's heartening to see that some at least of the vast catalogue of silent features languishing on studio shelves are finally beginning to seep out on video and DVD. Of Coogan's early work, this title, "**OLIVER TWIST**" and of course "**THE KID**" are currently available, but one senses they're still regarded – non-slapstick silent titles that is – merely as novelty items for a fringe market. 95% of the extant material will remain in the archives and film museums as obsolete relics of historic interest only.

Charles Hatton (possibly a kid brother of Raymond Hatton) is not listed in *The Moving Picture Boy*, and nothing else is known of him. Coogan was just 6, and producers evidently were scratching their heads to find suitable vehicles for such a tiny star. He was arguably too young to play "**PECK'S BAD BOY**", just as he would be too young for "**OLIVER TWIST**" the following year. Coogan's dilemma (aside from a selfish exploitative mother) was that his fame came too early for him to tackle any of the classic dramatic boy roles. Chaplin had milked the child's winsomeness for all he was worth in "**THE KID**", and the studios saw no reason to deviate from that pattern. By the time he was old enough to play "**TOM SAWYER**", his thespian limitations were becoming more apparent, and audiences were hungry for new faces.

The two sound remakes in 1934 and 1938 seem to have allowed some interference with the original concept, as well as casting older boys (Jackie Cooper and Tommy Kelly) in the part, so that sheer unbridled naughtiness evaporated to reveal only good-hearted clumsiness. The same was done with all TV and big screen personifications of "**DENNIS THE MENACE**", "**PENROD**" and Britain's "**JUST WILLIAM**". Film producers seem to hold that parents (who were certainly amused by the original stories) would react unfavourably against the filmic re-enactment of mischief-for-the-sheer-hell-of-it. It's notable that this early example of the type revealed no such misgivings. A scene from a vaudeville production of "Peck's Bad Boy" appears in "**YANKEE DOODLE DANDY**" (41), with Douglas Croft as the young George Cohan playing the title role.

See subject index under [CIRCUS / FAIRGROUNDS](#), [COMEDY](#), [COMIC BOOKS / SUPERHEROES](#), [DOGS](#), [RASCALS & SCALAWAGS](#), [SILENT CINEMA](#), and under

WOMEN AS BOYS / GIRLS AS BOYS for a *small* sub-section on boys dressed as girls (Coogan himself appeared in drag as a traditional Dutch milkmaid in one scene of “**A BOY OF FLANDERS**”).

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