

## The Laurel & Hardy Silents – Lost Films versus Kirch/Universal/Kinowelt

(I am always interested in updates/additions to the document. Please email: steve at updown dot org dot uk Please note that this document was written (long) before the release of the three "Laurel & Hardy: Year xx, The Newly Restored 19xx Silents" Blu-Ray box sets. I have not viewed these sets but have included a note if I know of any completeness issues.)

This is a comparison of the Laurel and Hardy silent films as presented on the 21-DVD box set ("Kirch") from Universal (in the UK) versus "The Lost Films of Laurel and Hardy" DVD set ("Lost") from Image Entertainment (formerly available in the US). The former restorations were carried out for the German Kirch Group, and supervised by Richard Bann. The latter were carried out by Michael Agee on behalf of Richard Feiner & Co.

As well as the UK 21-DVD box set, the Kirch Group copies also form the basis of other releases from Universal: in Spain, in the Benelux countries, in France, in Italy, and in the Scandinavian countries; and also the releases from Kinowelt in Germany. For the most part, the basic copies used are the same in these releases, although there are slight differences in bitrate and the amount of sharpening applied to the picture. Also some titles here and there seem to have had some digital cleanup applied for their Continental releases (see "Habeus Corpus" and "Sons of the Desert" on Kinowelt for example).

Please note that the "Lost" films reviewed here are from the original "The Lost Films of Laurel and Hardy" release (a private initiative by the latter-day Hal Roach Studios before being made more widely available through Image Entertainment) and not the botched half-assed private attempt by Michael Agee to re-release these films circa 2010 (of which few people, having already paid the money, eventually managed to get copies).

This list is most concerned about the picture quality of each title, and the completeness of the copy used. There is a smaller issue for some people concerning whether the film's opening titles and gag cards are the originals or not, but I think only a purist would endure 20 minutes of a substandard print just to watch the correct titles at the beginning, so I haven't let this issue bother me too much. And, in some cases, nobody seems 100% sure of what the correct titles looked like in any case... Very generally, Kirch *tends* to remake the opening titles and gag cards (usually, but not always, in the style of the originals). Lost *tends* to use the originals, but often freeze-frames these; they also sometimes uses badly done fakes (the one on "Angora Love", for example, is laughable). Another issue for some people is the amount of zooming/cropping of the original picture.

For music, Lost tends to use a period soundtrack compiled from other films of the era. This is my personal preferred approach – however, some people have found that this can get repetitive when the same music is used over and over again. Kirch mostly uses Beau Hunks' tracks (i.e. modern re-recordings of the melodies used on the L&H talkies), although sometimes a ghastly pitch-unstable organ track is used instead.

Seven of the silents were originally released with custom music-and-effects (M&E) disks. The Lost set uses these in 6 cases; the UK set in only 2 (but see "We Faw Down", below).

These comparisons have been done *properly* by watching each DVD played (on decent equipment) in its native PAL (625-line/50Hz) or NTSC (525-line/60Hz) format – beware some (most?) multi-region players available in the US which do appalling standards conversion on PAL material and thus make it worse-looking than it really is!

My "winning" copy in each case is the highlighted one in red. Your mileage may vary...

I have noted in passing versions other than "Lost" or "Kirch" which seem to include footage not on either of these releases.

**The Lucky Dog.** The UK 21-disk set doesn't have this short, so I am looking at the copy on the German Kinowelt release ("In der Fremdenlegion") in lieu of this. The print on **Lost** is a lot better quality than Kinowelt. It does, however, have around 20 seconds missing from it (including the opening few shots) and, to my eyes, play a tad slow. Meanwhile, Kinowelt plays much too fast and is missing the introductory caption: "So broke he couldn't buy the metal polish for a thumb tack. STANLEY LAUREL."

A January 2012 post from LordHeath on the Solo section of this forum states that: "I recently spoke with Randy Skretvedt, who told me he has uncovered (or at least viewed) an extra 30 seconds of previously unseen footage from 'The Lucky Dog' as well." A bit of further digging reveals that this is highly likely to be a description of the same 20 seconds I mention above (which is across two sections), and not anything else on top of this.

Addition (October 2023): the new "Laurel & Hardy: Year One, The Newly Restored 1927 Silents" Blu-Ray box set includes a version of this film with a newly found segment (at the dog show) running about one minute.

**45 Minutes From Hollywood.** Both copies good; Kirch is better by a small amount on picture quality alone. However, the quality of Kirch dives appallingly for the Laurel scenes (about 2 mins); these scenes are also differently edited. Kirch is also missing the delightful establishing sequence (duration: 23 seconds) of the Hollywood scenes, showing a shoot-out in the air being filmed, and including the famous shot of "dinosaurs roaming in the Hollywood hills" in the background. On the other hand, Lost does have a slight scratch/dropout problem on one of the tapes used to compile the DVD and seems to occasionally go into slow-

motion when it feels like it! **Lost** wins overall.

Some third-party versions (e.g. "The Definitive Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy Collection" (UK, Zentertain) and "The Oliver Hardy Collection (Slapstick Symposium Too)" (US, Kino/Lobster)) are sometimes reported (depending on the eye of the beholder) to be a bit better than Lost or Kirch, but these versions do have the Laurel scenes in the same quality as the rest of the film (unlike Kirch). The "Definitive..." set (at least) is also reported to have 2 seconds extra footage of one character chasing another down the hall (just before the scene with Stan) which is not present in (at least) the Lost version.

**Duck Soup.** Both are similar in sharpness, but Lost seems a bit dark and murky to me; **Kirch** is a lot brighter. However, the Kirch copy as used on the UK Universal set has a strange semi-transparent "fold" pattern at the edge of the screen (found on some other shorts in this set too, but not present on e.g. the Kino version of this film). I don't want to mention the authenticity of gag cards in general, but the remade newspaper article in the Lost copy is hideous!

Both Kirch and Lost's versions derive from a 35mm print, but a 9.5mm print also survives and contains 5 additional sequences which have not been available generally on DVD: 1) Medium-shot of L&H on bench (a few frames only); 2) Stan (as Agnes) and couple at door (2-3 secs); 3) 12 extra seconds of "Agnes" and Madeline Hurlock sitting on the sofa (discussing fleas; some sets of subtitles change this to a discussion about Agnes' name); 4) More footage of Ollie showing the husband around (26 seconds); 5) "Agnes" panicking at having to run Hurlock a bath (1 min 25 secs); 6) Altercation between the Colonel and his tenant (10 secs). Of these, the bathroom and sofa/fleas/name scenes (only) were restored for the short-lived/unofficial/grey-market 2010 Michael Agee reissue of the silents – the only DVD release of any of this extra material to date. This 2010 version also seems to have restored *some* of the gag cards (which were rather obvious latter-day recreations on the original Lost) with what *look* like originals. However, for some reason, the text on these "original" cards differs from the recreations. Furthermore these cards also use the name "Ollie" (a name more indicative of the team's later work) casting doubt on their authenticity. To add to the confusion, the text of the gag cards on Kirch are different from both...

One gag card is also missing from *all* copies mentioned here – "My Gawd – she's raw," says "Agnes" as he looks at Madeline Hurlock through the keyhole during the bathroom scene. The original version of this card does exist although it is not certain if it was in the film as released, or was censored.

Extra info – July 2016 (from L&H forum): What is missing at the beginning of the versions on DVD is, just after the introductory title, it fades in to see the colonel and butler walking towards a table. The colonel points to an item on the table, and the butler bows to the colonel. They then walk towards the picture; the colonel admires the picture, and is adamant that it is to be taken down so that nothing happens to it! "I'll take that picture with me--I wouldn't have anything happen to it for the world!" The butler bows to the colonel again; this is the first scene we see in the DVD versions. I have been wanting to restore this film since 2001! It wouldn't have been possible to undertake such a task without the British print. I have a copy of the script that Stan Laurel wrote, but not all of the subtitle suggestions were used in the original film, and some were changed. The version on the Universal DVD has much of the wording from the script.

**Slipping Wives.** **Kirch** a bit sharper but both are rather contrasty. Lost is missing a gag card at about 20 mins in: "I thought you were tired of me, darling – And I engaged him to make you jealous."

**Love 'Em And Weep.** **Kirch** is quite a bit better (sharper) and has more detail in highlights. Lost is also missing 3 sequences: 1) 40 seconds with Stan in the car talking to the old lady, and the start of the Pink Pup scene which follows; 2) 6 seconds in the Pink Pup shortly thereafter; and, 3) a brief shot of the telephone ringing. The Kirch copy dives in quality for the material near these sequences, but at least it seems complete.

**Why Girls Love Sailors.** **Lost** copy is better; Kirch is blurry. However, Lost has around 15 seconds missing when Ollie bursts into the cabin. Kirch is earlier missing a reaction shot of the ship's crew lasting a second or so; it also fades down at the end about 2 seconds early.

**With Love And Hisses.** **Lost** print is miles better than Kirch – one of the most marked differences between the two sets of silents. The use of the phrase "Home Guards" in the initial gag card (on both Lost and Kirch) would seem to point to the source being a British copy.

**Sugar Daddies.** Both are battered prints. **Kirch** wins as it is quite a bit less smudgy (but Lost is cleaner). Kirch also includes 10 seconds of the scene with Noah Young with a gun that are missing from Lost. However, Kirch is missing the introductory gag card: "The story of a millionaire oil man who was married and didn't know it – This will give you a rough idea of what oil men are like." Additionally, it is reported that another gag card - "Another day - another jam" - is missing from *both* Lost and Kirch just after the scene where Stan, Ollie and Fin flee the house (around 6'11 in Kirch; 6'39 in Lost).

**Sailors, Beware!** Not a lot of difference; **Lost** seems to be a bit less grainy, without losing detail, but the speed seems way off at times. However, Lost is missing 2 sequences: 1) A 2-second shot of the "baby" counting money during the dice game at 12'57; and 2) A whole round of the dice game is missing at 13'21, lasting 9 secs (since the dice game is extended beyond tedium, these cuts may have been to speed up the action a bit, rather than footage loss due to damage). The English and French versions on Lost seem to use the same basic copy (apart from the titles, obviously).

**The Second Hundred Years.** **Lost** is better and the tunnelling sequence is tinted, as apparently was the original. However, **Lost** is missing a very brief medium-shot of the two painters at 32'17. Meanwhile, **Kirch** is missing the opening pair of gag cards: "Will Rogers says – 'Being in jail has one big disadvantage –," and, "A man doesn't have to worry about wearing his tuxedo." Also missing from **Kirch** is the establishing long-shot of the cell block. The subsequent gag card describing *Stan* (Little Goofy) is present in **Kirch**, but it is missing the pair of cards describing *Ollie* ("BIG GOOFY – Convicted on purely circumstantial evidence –," and, "They caught him with both hands in the cash register."). Interestingly one of the re-made cards on **Lost** (the one that starts "French Police Chiefs..." seems to have somebody chuckling twice in the background!

In 2016, Jon Mirsalis found a new copy of this film in the old collection of Robert Youngson, later partly owned by the late Gordon Berkow. The **Lost Laugh** website reports extra material as follows: 1) Opening scene: [**Kirch**] introduces *Stan* to us as Little Goofy, but not Babe. This version offers a tiny bit of extra footage of the pair at the outset, as well as an intro for *Ollie* [the cards as mentioned above]; 2) The flooded office: we get a couple of seconds of extra footage, showing Frank Brownlee stepping into the office and falling in the water that has risen through *Stan* and *Ollie's* tunnel; 3) The paint scene: this is the most interesting new bit of footage, as it's a completely new, albeit short, scene of L&H. After *Stan* has painted Dorothy Coburn's behind, the pair run in and out of some parked cars, and the scene fades out, ending the sequence. The Youngson version adds a tag: we fade up on the title: "Four hours later –" and see the cop still in pursuit of the boys in the dark! *Stan* drops his paint can, and the cop ends up tripping over and landing in it. This is where the scene was supposed to end; 4) Finally, there's a little extra footage of the French prison governors as they are introduced, following the scene above.

Randy Skretvedt (in the new edition of his book on p601), whilst presumably referring to the same extra footage, describes it slightly differently: "Trevor Dorman also informs us that we are also missing some footage ... including a long shot of the boys at the very start of the film; a shot of guard Tiny Sandford giving orders to the prisoners; a shot of the warden entering his flooded office; and a brief scene of the boys, disguised as painters, escaping from a cop, who falls into some of the paint."

**Now I'll Tell One.** This was only made available on DVD very briefly on one of semi-professional "The Larger World Of Laurel And Hardy" disks before being pulled just days later, presumably due to copyright reasons. Most copies in circulation are very poor indeed but far better material is also in very limited circulation amongst certain fans but "cannot be distributed" yadda yadda. Addition (October 2023): the new "Laurel & Hardy: Year One, The Newly Restored 1927 Silents" Blu-Ray box set once again omits this film, apparently without explanation.

**Call Of The Cuckoo.** **Kirch** is sharper. **Lost** has 2 gag cards missing: 1) At 9'10, "You wanted a more lively house – you've got it!" and 2) At 13'20, "You entertain the tribes, Momma – I go upstairs an' take a bath."

**Do Detectives Think?** Both are very similar in this case. Perhaps **Kirch** is slightly sharper? There are, however, 2 missing gag cards in **Kirch**: 1) "Midnight – the detectives were shaking so loud it sounded like their cutout was open," (just before they walk to the mansion), and 2) "Where have we seen that face before?" (looking at the picture of Noah in the newspaper). There is also, apparently, a few seconds of footage missing from both copies: When *Stan* and *Ollie* first arrive, *Viola Richard* leaving the living-room to see what the commotion is at the front door (this material is at/near the reel-change point, almost certainly why it is absent). It has been reported that this footage is present in a copy recently broadcast in the US on TCM as well as in the Super 8 print from Collector's Club.

Addition (October 2023): the new "Laurel & Hardy: Year One, The Newly Restored 1927 Silents" Blu-Ray box set omits the *Richard/door* scene. The material was available to the compilers but deemed too poor quality to include.

**Putting Pants On Philip.** Both copies are similar sharpness-wise, but **Lost** is cleaner and better graded (especially once past the opening scenes). However, **Lost** is missing 3 segments present in **Kirch**: 1) At around 8'10 in, it is missing 12 secs of *Ollie* rescuing *Philip* from the crowd; 2) In the tailor's shop, one of the attempts to take *Philip's* inside-leg measurement (lasting about 31 secs); 3) A short shot of a man raising his hat to *Philip* on the bus (at 15'46 in **Kirch**). There is also some difference in editing when the ladies faint after *Philip's* kilt blows up. TCM broadcast a version approaching **Lost** in quality, but including the first two missing sequences. However, it was still missing the "raising hat" sequence (as well as part of a subsequent shot).

**The Battle Of The Century.** **Lost** is a bit sharper than **Kirch** for the boxing scene, but **Lost's** pie-fight scene is a bit soft and **Kirch** wins there! Having said that, **Lost** alone reinserts the gag cards into the pie fight. **Lost** also has an extra reaction shot of *Stan* when *Ollie* gets the first pie in his face. **Lost's** attempt at reconstructing the missing portions is better as they use the script and more photos; however, some of the script portions are unreadable as they are off the bottom of the screen. **Draw - watch the first chunk on Lost, and the second on Kirch!**

Most fans will be aware that the entire 2nd reel was discovered recently (2015). It starts half-way through the scene with L&H on the street, with *Stan* slipping on a banana skin. Reports that only 2 minutes of the film remain lost would seem to be optimistic as the missing footage involves the whole sequence where *Ollie* takes out an insurance policy from *Eugene Palette*, *as well as the first part of the street material.*

**Leave 'Em Laughing.** **Lost** is much better and is tinted sepia and blue as was, apparently, the original release.

**Flying Elephants.** **Lost** is mostly made up of a much superior copy (but has occasional moments which are as poor as **Kirch**). **Lost** has a burnt-in logo in corner which some people will find annoying. **Kirch** is missing a gag card at 9'33: "I ain't been the same

since my operation," (however, for some reason the Lost version replaces this card with: "Forget it – I just cancelled my life insurance policy," though this maybe the result of some US/UK difference or something).

**The Finishing Touch.** Lost is generally quite a bit clearer and less dirty, but quality dives lower than Kirch for brief sections (e.g. 1'41 to 2'22). However, Lost seems to play too slowly at times. Kirch is missing 7 of the gag cards from the second half (i.e. most of them!) **Lost** wins. Incidentally, both Kirch and Lost seem to be based on UK copies; American copies had: "... and finished in the first reader ..." in the initial gag card instead of: "... and finished in the infants ..."

**From Soup To Nuts.** **Lost** is way superior – cleaner, sharper and better graded. Kirch is missing the opening gag card: "Newly Rich – Mrs. Culpepper was an idol to the snobs – And a pain in the neck to everybody else."

**You're Darn Tootin'.** **Kirch** is quite a bit better (if a little over-zealously sharpened!) but quality worsens for the first part of the shin-kicking sequence near end. The shots of the cop in this sequence are also slightly differently edited in each version.

**Their Purple Moment.** **Kirch** quite a bit sharper. Lost is missing a shot, lasting 3 seconds, of the soldiers leaving the dance floor at 11'00.

**Should Married Men Go Home?** Lost a bit cleaner; Kirch a bit sharper, but I'm not sure there's *much* extra detail there. Kirch is missing 6 gag cards (the ones done in the thinner font on Lost) and around 13 secs of the routine with Stan breaking the blind. Kirch also appears to have the sequence with the group walking on the course, with Stan collecting the golf balls, in the wrong place. Hence, **Lost** wins.

**Early To Bed.** Neither is great. With a bit of DVNR, Kirch would have certainly won. As it is, it's a toss-up between grainy-but-sharper (Kirch) or cleaner-but-softer (Lost). Personally, I go for **Kirch**. Lost also has a gag card missing at 9'40: "You've worn me pink – I'm going to bed." Incidentally, both Kirch and Lost seem to be based on UK copies - American copies had "... when financial kings of American affairs ..." in the initial gag card instead of "... when financial kings of the world..."

**Two Tars.** **Kirch** is a little bit sharper, but where Lost loses out (as with some of their other titles) is that the copy is a bit murky – the movie is set on a bright summer's day!

**Habeas Corpus.** Kirch much better quality (even though some bits – e.g. 2'01 to 2'33 – seem to come from a lesser-quality source). Lost print has a logo in corner throughout and is a worse print. Lost is also missing 2 gag cards: 1) At 7'45 ("You go in and dig – I'll stay here and protect you!"), and 2) At 20'15 ("Where's the remainders?") However, Lost does have the original M&E disk track; Kirch doesn't. Kirch is also missing the 2nd gag card ("That the human brain has a level surface – In some instances practically flat.") **Kirch** for me, on balance, but chacun à son gout.

**We Faw Down.** **Kirch** is better quality, but both have a double-image/defocus thing going on. The German Kino release *only* (not the UK Universal) of this has the original M&E disk track, so that is ultimately the version of choice.

The cutting continuity for this short (a list of all the shots in the, supposedly finished, version of a film) seems to suggest there may have been a scene involving Edgar Kennedy (as an angry neighbour complaining about the noise) just after Stan tells Kay Deslys she is too fat, and before One-Round Kelly comes in. This would have occurred at/near the reel-change point and so might have disappeared due to damage at some point. Note the positions of objects on the table suggests there was definitely extra footage in there at some point, but whether it was cut before or after release is debatable.

**Liberty.** A common finding – Kirch is sharper but has more dirt; Lost is cleaner but softer. Lost seems to have had rather too much noise-reduction applied, leading to smearing on motion and other artefacts. Both Kirch and Lost have the original M&E disk track. Lost has around 20 seconds on the skyscraper missing at around 10'30 (the reel-change point?) I go for **Kirch**. Forum contributor Trevor D reports further missing footage from both Kirch and Lost: "...a shot of L&H on the skyscraper, due to decomposition a shot of the street scape scene is duplicated to cover the missing footage to keep the print in sync with the track. Apparently the bootleg copy titled "Criminals At Large" has this few seconds," - can anybody supply exact details of this? Most likely this is during the badly decomposed section around three-quarters of the way through?

**Wrong Again.** **Lost** print is much better. Both have the original M&E disk sound (though the copy of the sound on Lost is better too). It is reported that both have one gag card missing: "Time out – while I think," as Ollie tries to work out how to get Blue Boy onto the piano.

**That's My Wife.** **Kirch** quite a bit sharper but has 2 gag cards and about 4 seconds of footage missing (starting 3'49): "I'm going to set you up in a fine new home," and: "If you are happily married." Both Lost and Kirch have original M&E disk soundtrack. Both copies have some material missing at the start, with Ollie dejectedly hitting keys on his piano (before he starts pacing the room). This includes the loss of two cards: "There had been a serious misunderstanding in the Hardy family," and "Mrs. Hardy was leaping from crag to crag." A card (original or not?) which reads: "Mr. Hardy's house had become less and less a home since Mr. Laurel joined the family," is present, however.

**Big Business.** **Kirch** better. There seems to be a slight editing difference between the two versions where the tree gets stuck in Jimmy Finlayson's door. Also, out of interest, there is a difference in one of the gag cards (9'11 in Lost; 8'45 in Kirch) – Lost has "Give me the patrol wagon!" (following US copies) but Kirch has "Give me the ambulance corps!" (following UK copies).

**Double Whoopie** (both Lost's silent and "new talkie version"). Lost print is very clean but also quite soft. Kirch is sharper but grainier. Which is best is probably down to personal preference, but I would go for **Kirch**. However, Kirch is missing a gag card at 9'06: "I've been robbed!" As an aside, at 11'41 Lost has the gag card: "Give the boy his quarter!" (following US copies) whereas Kirch has, "Give the boy his money," (following UK copies).

**Bacon Grabbers.** Both versions are substandard (given the quality of other films made around the same time). Kirch slightly better picture-wise (from the look of the two copies, it's clear they are close relatives), but Lost has the original M&E disk sound. Thus more or less a draw, but if you twist my arm... **Kirch**.

**Angora Love.** Lost draws material from (at least) two sources: mostly very good, if a little smeary (too heavy on the DVNR) but, in any case, far better than Kirch). But the original M&E disk track only on **Lost** makes this one of the most obvious winners. Damage at the end of the Kirch copy seems to have led to the loss of a few seconds of footage and a gag card: "Won't her husband be surprised?"