

**Lloyd Vernon Hamilton was born in Oakland, California, on August 19, 1891. His father owned a real estate company and his mother worked at home as a wife and mother. Hamilton came from a prestigious lineage. His paternal grandfather was the Probate Judge of Calhoun County, Michigan. His maternal grandfather was the City Attorney of Detroit. His great grandfather, Silas Hamilton, was a physician and Revolutionary War hero. No one in the family's history had ever been an actor. Certainly, no one had shown a crucial interest in being a slapstick comedian. But Hamilton was different.**

Hamilton was discovered in 1914 by a distinguished young filmmaker, Marshall Neilan. Neilan cast the heavily built comic actor as a calamitous, bewhiskered behemoth opposite a diminutive and ebullient sidekick, Bud Duncan. The pair, known as Ham and Bud, became one of the most popular comedy teams of early cinema.

Hamilton made radical changes in his acting style and physical appearance to pursue a solo career in his later series, including the Sunshine Comedies, Mermaid Comedies and Lloyd Hamilton Comedies. Four films on this disk, Dynamite, The Simp, Moonshine and April Fool, are part of the first series of Mermaid Comedies produced by Astra Film Corporation.

Hamilton has rightfully been compared to Charlie Chaplin. Like Chaplin, he brought an intelligence and warmth to his comedy. Behind the scenes, he was known to be as studious in his labors as Chaplin. He wanted to fully understand the mechanics of film comedy and he was willing to strive tirelessly to improve his work. But he developed at a more gradual pace than Chaplin, who took dramatic strides in his development within his first three years as a film comedian.



Chaplin's advancements in the short comedy form were astonishing as the comedian moved from his Keystone series in 1914 to his Essanay series in 1915 and to his Mutual series in 1916. Hamilton also astonished observers with his steady and profound development, but this did not occur within three years. Hamilton gained his footing in short comedies while working at the Kalem Company from 1914 to 1917, he progressed remarkably well in the way he designed stories, crafted gags and defined his comic character during a busy period from 1917 to 1920, and he could finally be

seen at the peak of his powers from 1921 to 1924. This DVD showcases Hamilton during the final days of his middle period, just before he donned his trademark checkered cap and came before the public in his classically refined form.

Hamilton created comedy by placing a timid, delicate and methodical young man into the middle of a chaotic, fast-paced and hostile environment. It was an engaging conflict model. Introverted individual vs. extroverted society. Hamilton was an oversized babe toddling through a wild forest. In April Fool, he is accidentally snatched up by a derrick crane, which dumps him into the hole of a global steamer. Trapped on board for an ocean voyage, he serves as the cabin boy to a belligerent captain. He recounts the ship's voyage in a letter to his mother. He is so intensely focused on writing the letter that he is unaware that a leak is causing sea water to slowly fill his cabin.

You cannot examine the origins of the comic man-child without talking about Hamilton, who was the original full-fledged comic man-child of Hollywood cinema. He came along before Harry Langdon, before Curly Howard, before Lou Costello. Hamilton, sweet-natured and well-mannered, had a little boy's charm. He expressed his immaturity in his social awkwardness. He was shy with peers and ungainly around women. The actor was strikingly adept at expressing the befuddlement and apprehension felt by an inexperienced and vulnerable child.

Lloyd was an exponent of reaction comedy, which operated under the premise that a comedy situation could be made much funnier by a character's particular reaction to it. This distinction established Lloyd as a precursor of Laurel and Hardy, who took reaction comedy to its highest levels. Norman Taurog, one of his directors, would say of Lloyd: "He was a funny man. He didn't have to do terrifically broad gags - just a look, and the way he would react."

Lloyd could draw human comedy from improbable situations. When donning a coat, he fails to notice that he has not completely removed the coat from a rack. Consequently, he carries the entire rack on his back as he strolls down the street. He becomes bewildered, then distressed and then embarrassed as passersby confront him and break out in laughter.



Everything that made Hamilton great can be found in the films on this disk. The man-child comedy. The embarrassment comedy. The reaction comedy. These were areas in which Hamilton excelled and in which he laid the groundwork for future comedians.

Anthony Balducci  
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Boy Comedian of Silent Cinema'