Silent Comedy–Some Brief Points

Types of Humor (based on Senses of Humor (SOH) research):  Found in *Easy Street*?

1. Disparagement–setting up a one-up, one-down relationship
   
2. Incongruity–a surprising juxtaposition
   a. Visual
   b. Verbal

3. High arousal/Dark humor–shocking or otherwise over-the-top, e.g.:
   a. Sick humor
   b. Black/dark humor
   c. Harmful slapstick/physical comedy

4. Social currency–humor derives from shared knowledge or experiences

The “big three” silent comedians (international!):

1. Charlie Chaplin (1889-1977)–His “little tramp” character became the most recognizable figure in the world (remember *Ballet Mecanique*?). His forte was extracting emotion from the audience. Born in London, he came to the U.S. in 1912, working at Keystone, Essanay, Mutual, and First National before co-founding United Artists with D. W. Griffith, Mary Pickford, and Douglas Fairbanks in 1919.

2. Buster Keaton (1895-1966)–“The great stoneface,” his forte was extreme physical comedy. He started in vaudeville with his parents’ act, graduating to film in 1917 on a film with the already-established Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle. Through much of his silent career, he had his own small studio and released films through such companies as Paramount and Metro.

3. Harold Lloyd (1893-1971)–His character wore horn-rimmed glasses and was a bit nerdy–a “zanily optimistic everyman.” In his films, story and characterization took precedence over physical slapstick (although he is most easily recognized as the man who hung from a clock on a tall building in *Safety Last*).

Two “giants of comedy production” in the silent Hollywood era:

1. Mack Sennett (1880-1960)–according to historian Mast, Sennett’s films “whaled the daylights out of Authority and Pretension with a bed slat.” He started at Biograph with D. W. Griffith, then established Keystone in 1912; there he made the Keystone Cops shorts (“pure motion”). Charlie Chaplin, Fatty Arbuckle, Harry Langdon, and Ben Turpin all got their starts with Sennett.

2. Hal Roach (1892-1992!)–had his own studio by 1915. He teamed Laurel with Hardy; Harold Lloyd got his start with Roach. Roach developed the “Our Gang” series of shorts. He was the only silent comedy giant to “survive” the introduction of sound.