



# America's Favorite Comedy Acts: The Three Stooges, Laurel & Hardy, Abbott & Costello, and Dean Martin & Jerry Lewis

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- \*Includes the comedy acts' most famous quotes
- \*Includes bibliographies for further reading
- \*Includes a table of contents

There has been no shortage of comedy acts in American history, but the most famous and popular of them all is The Three Stooges, an act that has become synonymous with slapstick. Bring up their name to any American or even ask about slapstick comedy, and invariably, certain images will come to mind, most of which came from the comedy shorts featuring three bumbling but likable fools getting into all sorts of trouble due to their inability to think or behave properly. Moe, Larry and Curly quickly became a hit in comedy shorts on screen, and even as other similar acts like Abbot & Costello went on to make full length films, the Stooges continued to star in shorts, producing the iconic scenes that everyone associates with them, from Larry asking what he did wrong to Moe trying to hit Curly and Curly's efforts to block him.

By the 1920s, English comic Stan Laurel had been in dozens of films and American Oliver Hardy had appeared in hundreds, but it was not until they formed a duo together in 1926 that they began to truly be noticed. Once they did, however, Laurel & Hardy became one of the most famous comedy teams in American history, with a career that spanned 4 decades and included over 100 combined shorts and feature films. Even today, nearly 60 years after their last performances together, Laurel & Hardy are still popular, alongside legends like The Three Stooges and Abbott & Costello, and their routines are still watched across the globe.

Ironically, one of America's most famous comedy duos, and the performers of the country's most famous skit, came together in part because Lou Costello had already failed to cut it in the film industry. In fact, Costello had appeared in a Laurel & Hardy film in 1927 before meeting his partner, Bud Abbott, on the burlesque circuit in New York City. In fact, the two first performed together in 1935 only because Abbott filled in for Costello's usual partner, who happened to be ill one fateful day. Over time, Abbott & Costello perfected their routine, which typically consisted of Abbott playing the straight man while his dimwit partner acted foolishly and interrupted his plans. It was a shtick that also did well on radio, albeit one that required Costello to modify his voice with a higher pitch that not only differentiated his from Abbott but also made him sound appropriately dumber. By 1940, they were not only successful on the radio but also among America's most popular movie stars, a status they held almost consistently throughout the decade and into the early 1950s.

Working as "Martin and Lewis", the team of Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis became the most popular nightclub act in America, commanding huge fees for their appearances all across the country. Perhaps the most ironic aspect of their success is that Dean Martin was not a comedian in any real sense of the word, and even during their act, he essentially served as the straight man to Jerry Lewis. The routine ensured that critics took more notice of Jerry Lewis, who intentionally came across as an awkward figure with a brand of bodily humor that was borrowed from a lineage of Yiddish humor predicated on physical slapstick. And just as Martin benefited from Lewis' comedic skills, Lewis also further developed a singing career thanks to the

more famous Martin's crooning. Though it's often forgotten now, the duo eventually broke up in the mid-1950s because Lewis was starting to outshine Martin in their joint film career.

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