

Stooges hit the big screen

Fans of classic TV shorts await film adaptation

By Nick Thomas
Special to the Advertiser

What do Johnny Depp, Sean Penn, Jim Carrey and Cher have in common?

At one time, all four were considered for roles in the new "Three Stooges" movie, due to hit theaters Friday. And the title, which reflects that of the classic shorts, is one producers clearly labored long and hard over.

Depp, Penn and Carrey would have made an interesting ensemble, but all dropped out. (Chris Diamantopoulos, Will Sasso and Sean Hayes play Moe, Curly and Larry, respectively).

Given Hollywood's woeful history of turning classic TV shows into movies (anyone still have night terrors from film versions of "The Beverly Hillbillies," "Bewitched" and "The Avengers"?), bailing may have been a wise move.

While no one expects "The Three Stooges" to bump "Avatar" or "Titanic" from their top two spots as all-time highest grossing films, hopefully box office receipts will at least surpass the 1986 klunker "Howard the Duck."

When the new film premieres, expect legions of passionate Stooges fans to be standing in line, but it's hard to predict their response.

Many are already outraged at the "sacrilegious" remake, and they may very well embark on a Stooges-like rampage — brandishing hammers, wrenches and picks.

We can only hope they will vent their rage with harmless rubber tools, like their heroes used in the original 190 "Three Stooges" shorts (from 1933-1959) and six feature films in the '60s.

For those uninitiated to the Stooges world, the boys were masters of vintage Hollywood madcap mayhem, famous for brutalizing each other with any heavy object at hand, initiating food fights and flattening their surroundings faster than a professional demolition team.

The original trio of turmoil comprised Moe, the self-appointed, short-tempered boss of the team; chubby Curly, with his high-pitched voice and databank of quirky vocal expressions ("woo-woo-woo!" and "nyuk-nyuk-nyuk!"); and frizzy-haired Larry.



The original "Three Stooges," are Larry, left, Curly and Moe. A movie based on the classic shorts and feature films opens Friday. GANNETT



Will Sasso, from left, Chris Diamantopoulos and Sean Hayes appear in a scene from the motion picture "The Three Stooges." GANNETT

And, as any Stoogophile worth his weight in cream pies knows, Moe, Curly and Shemp (Curly's replacement) were actually brothers, which leads to an interesting question: Can you imagine being raised with one of the Stooges for a parent?

Joan and Paul Howard didn't have to

imagine. Not only was Moe their real-life father, but Curly and Shemp were their uncles.

So did Joan and Paul have to hide household implements and potential food projectiles when they gathered for family events?

"I didn't see any of them behave like

their screen characters around our home," Joan told me in 2011 when I interviewed her (and Paul) for a book project. "I like to tell people that we ate our pies, we didn't throw them!"

In reality, Moe was a gentle and kind man, rather quiet and a bit of a worrier — nothing like his grumpy, on-screen character. Curly was the wild one, with a fondness for women and booze, while Larry loved to party and socialize.

As for Moe's kids, Joan acted briefly in the 1930s and even appeared in an early "Three Stooges" short with Larry's daughter.

She lives on the West Coast. Paul is a talented artist in New York, specializing in caricatures. I contacted them both a few days ago for their thoughts on the new movie and if they had any involvement.

Paul told me he was not consulted, but hopes the film "does well at the box office to help keep the Stooges alive-and-well forever."

No one called Joan, either. But she did contact the producers to ask if there might be a small part for her granddaughter, a recent UCLA graduate in broadcast and journalism. So watch out for one of the nuns in a minor role — that's Moe's great-granddaughter.

A "Three Stooges" movie trailer has been floating around online for some time, and the fake Stooges all seem to have mastered the mannerisms, voices, and classic Stooges routines. I actually laughed (well, chortled really) out loud. And this is from someone who has every Stooges short on DVD.

Along these lines (spoiler alert!), the trailer is worth a watch just to witness guest star Snooki receive a classic Stoogey eye poke.

Joan Howard was also pleased with the movie clips she's seen.

"When I saw the trailer, I thought they had all the moves down pat, but haven't seen the film in its entirety," she said. "I've never met the faux stooges, but hopefully will at the premiere coming up."

I just warned her to be wary of anxious, fellow filmgoers bearing household tools.

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