

entertainment



David's play really does stink

IT'S what every naughty schoolboy has been waiting for — a play about pongs called Mr Stink, writes Ron McManus.

The audience are supplied with scratch and sniff cards that allow them to follow the action on stage with their nose, as well as by ears and eyes.

The play is based on the hit children's book by Little Britain star David Walliams, about a child who's bullied at school and finds an unlikely champion in local tramp Mr Stink.

Mr Stink's name is well-earned and his scruffy dog doesn't smell of roses either.

The play, now touring the UK is aimed at the family market.

Some smells from the cards, such as a sweet shop, are quite pleasant but others create quite a pong, from Mr Stink's socks and old bathwater to his flatulence!

Another fine mess as Stan set stage ablaze!

FOR generation after generation, the slapstick antics of Laurel and Hardy have been a joy, with millions all over the world still finding them the perfect way to brighten up a day.

Although Stan and Ollie's capers were filmed in the heart of Hollywood, the ideas behind some of their most famous and familiar scenes had their origins not in America but in the UK.

Stan was born in Ulverston in Cumbria and went on to make his stage debut at a theatre in Glasgow.

But it's a large chunk of the time in between, though, that's the focus of a new book, *The Making of Stan Laurel*.

Author Danny Lawrence was brought up just a few hundred yards away from where young Stan spent a decade of his formative life in North Shields.

"Growing up in the town, I was very aware that was where Stan had lived but it's something that's not as widely known as his time elsewhere," Danny told *The Weekly News*.

"The routes he'd regularly have walked were just at the end of my street and he stayed in the town from the age of about five until he was 15 and his family moved to Glasgow.

by Bill Gibb

"Those are pretty important years in any boy's life.

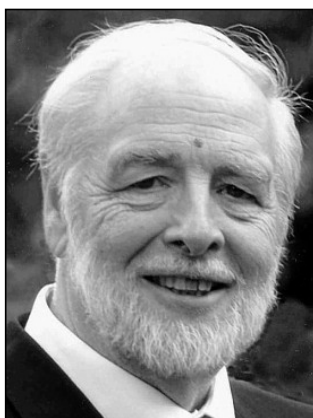
"And Stan definitely developed his passion for making people laugh at that stage.

"I just felt that while I wasn't looking in any way to take away the importance of his Ulverston or Glasgow days, I wanted to make the picture more complete."

Danny, a retired lecturer, dug deep to find out what influenced the young Stan and reckons those can be seen on screen.

"His whole passion to make people laugh developed during his North Shields days," insists Danny.

"His dad was a theatre manager and he hoped his son would follow in his footsteps but Stan was determined to be on the



Author Danny Lawrence.

stage, rather than in front or behind it.

"And that hunger to perform came during those childhood years.

"In fact, he was so keen, he persuaded his dad to get some of the theatre craftsmen to build a little theatre in the family home, which was a very substantial building.

"Unfortunately, in one of the plays, he was having a pretend fight with another lad and they rolled into the lamps being used as footlights and set the place on fire.

"His dad was on hand with a fire extinguisher but Stan still lost his eyebrows and the little theatre burned down.

"He was totally dedicated



A scene from *The Music Box*.

to performing, though, and there are so many things in Stan and Ollie's films that I'm sure have their basis on what he saw here.

"There are echoes of his North Shields days aplenty in the movies.

"One of the most obvious is that there is a very steep set of steps that he would have gone up all the time from the quayside to his house that are almost identical to the ones he and Ollie used for the film, *The Music Box*, which got them an Oscar.

"It's the one where they are

trying to deliver a piano to a house at the top of the steps.

"And there are all sorts of references in the films to fish, sailors, boats and the like and, of course, he was always around those in North Shields.

"And there are boyhood experiences that appear in the films of getting covered in soot, or drunk when he thought he was drinking water."

● *The Making of Stan Laurel: Echoes of a British Boyhood* by Danny Lawrence is out now at £29.95.

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