

MO AND HIS MERRYMAKERS

Founded by Roy Rene immediately after the final Stiffy and Mo performance, The Merry Monarchs played the Fuller's circuit for several months before moving on to the Harry Clay Sydney circuit. A few days after Rene and Sadie Gale were married they took the Merry-makers through Queensland for Clay's. Among the artists engaged by Rene and Gale were Billy Bovis, Peter Brooks, Lulla Fanning, Dan Weldon and Irene Vando. After he disbanded the troupe Rene appeared in Frank Neil's Melbourne production of *Clowns in Clover*.

On 8 December 1928, the night after Roy Rene played his very last show with former partner Nat Phillips (as Stiffy and Mo), the comedian debuted his own company, the Merry-makers, at Fullers' Theatre in Sydney. The troupe toured for several months on the Fullers' circuit, presenting a first-part vaudeville and second-part revue. Among the principal members during the Fullers engagements were Rene's fiancée Sadie Gale, Lulla Fanning, Peter Brooks, Hilda Gifford, Bob Graham, Dan Weldon and Valmai Raine. They were later joined by Mayo Hunter (the Hawaiian jazz band leader and multi-instrumentalist).

FULLER'S THEATRE. TO-DAY, 2.30 AND 8.
THE BIG LAUGH SHOW.
MO AND HIS MERRYMAKERS.
ROY RENE AS MO
IN THE
BUBBLING, BOUNCING, BREEZY REVUE,
"A LA CARTE."
A RIOT OF LAUGHTER, DANCING, SINGING, AND BEAUTY.

Here are a few of the Fun Stations stopped at on the Express of Merriment:—
SCHOOLDAYS.—When MO steps out as the happy-go-lucky school kid—what a roar of laughter.
In "JUST MARRIED" he'll appear as the blushing bridegroom. Imagine what a riot this will be.
With MONTE, his boy friend, he'll put the seal on the greatest fun show ever presented at Fuller's.
Among the Chief Merry Makers will be—

SADIE GALE, LULLA FANNING, PETER BROOKS,	MAY DALY, RENE VANDO, DAN WELDON,	VALMIE RAINE, CHAS. MEGAN, BILL MILLER.
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THE GLORIOUS BEAUTY BALLET,
THE SIX BRUNETTES.

DAVE MEREDITH AND HIS MELODY BOYS.

Fuller's Commonsense Prices:—Week Nights: 3/, 2/, 1/. Saturday Nights: 4/, 2/. Matinees: 2/5, 2/, 1/6, 1/. Plan at Theatre.

Mo's Merry-makers debut season

Sydney Morning Herald 8 Dec. (1928), 2.

Around April 1929 Rene accepted an engagement from Clay's Bridge Theatre Company, having ended his association with the Fullers. His contract with Clay's initially saw him tour the company's Sydney circuit.¹ He was later offered the opportunity to tour the company's old North Queensland circuit, where it had returned only once (in 1927) after Clay was forced to cancel the circuit in the wake of the 1919 flu epidemic.

Mo's Merry-makers began its tour only days after Rene and Gale were married, and subsequently the pair spent their honeymoon working. Reviews published in the various regional newspapers indicate that the troupe's shows were met with large audiences, no doubt due to Rene's well-established (almost iconic) status and the fact that he and Phillips had never ventured outside the major metropolitan centres during their eleven years together. "Mo will make his first appearance in Rockhampton," wrote the *Morning Bulletin* theatre critic:

[He] has been credited with all kinds of gags, the same as car gags are hung on to Henry Ford and economic gags on to Harry Lauder. But Mo first and last, is a true humorist, and too clever to stoop to the vulgar gag. The fact of his starring for 15 years in all the principal theatres of Australia should be sufficient guarantee of Mo's entertaining abilities."²

Roy Rene, ca. 1933.

Source: National Library of Australia



¹ *Everyone's* 8 May 1929, 37

² "Mo's All-New Merry-makers," 3.

A few nights later, the same paper noted that "the humour, though undeniably broad, was of the type on which these artists' reputations were gained, and was apparently expected by the crowd."³



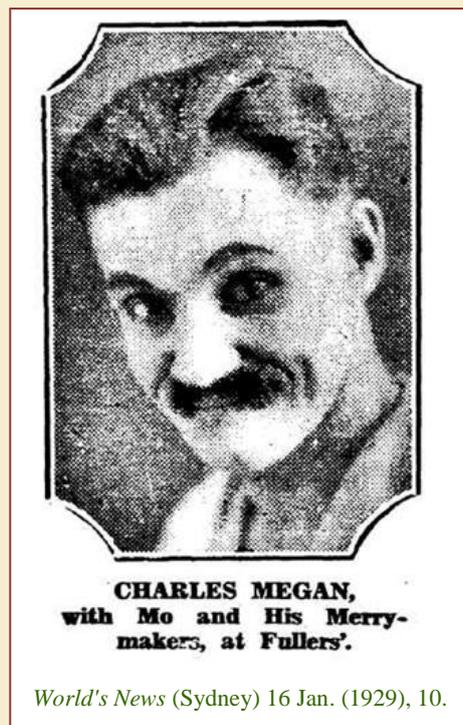
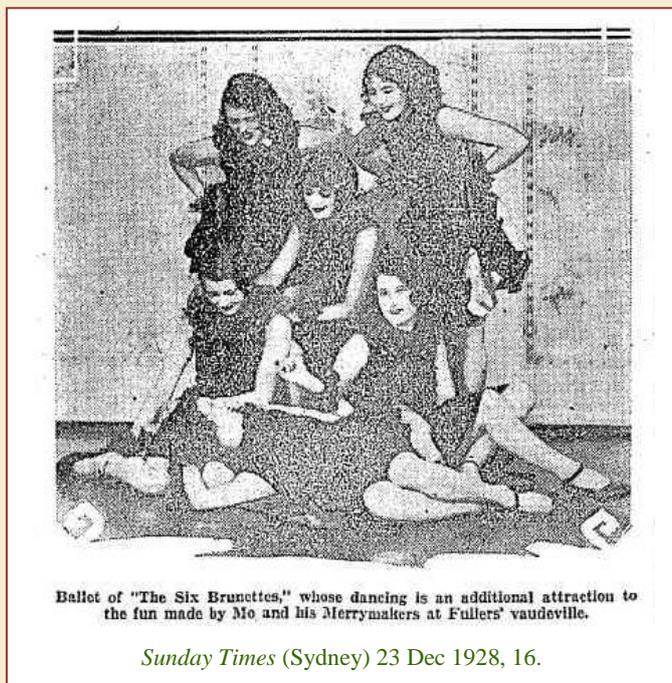
Although the critics deemed the tour a success, Rene's biographer Fred Parsons claims that, overall, the tour was disappointing for its star performer. According to Parsons, Mo had been "unfavourably compared with George Wallace, who had [once] cut cane up there for a living and that this rankled with [him] especially as George had been Sadie's first boy-friend."⁴

After the conclusion of the Queensland tour, Rene and Gale disbanded the troupe and travelled to Melbourne to appear in Frank Neil's production of *Clowns in Clover* at the King's Theatre. While on stage in early January 1930 Rene collapsed from peritonitis and was rushed to hospital where he almost died. According to a number of reports he'd first begun displaying symptoms of the affliction during the latter stages of the Merrymakers Queensland tour.

Rockhampton
Morning Bulletin 17 Sept. (1929), 2.

HISTORICAL NOTES AND CORRECTIONS

1. Rene and Gale also married only a few days after Rene's divorce from his first wife was settled. The divorce was apparently much publicised and humiliating for the comedian. According to an *Everyone's* article that highlighted the divorce proceedings, he and Gale were then receiving £70 per week on their contract with Clay's. Referred to as Harry Vander Sluice, Rene is said to have told the registrar (in opposing an alimony increase from £10 to £15) that he held the fear 'that when his Clay contract finished there would be difficulty in him securing remunerative employment because of the talkies.'⁵



³ "Mo and His Merry-makers," 3.
⁴ Parsons, 27.
⁵ *Everyone's* 31 July 1929, 39

PERSONNEL

Artists with 'Qld' beside were members of the 1929 Queensland touring company. Several or all of these people may have been a part of the Sydney/New South Wales company, which has not yet been fully identified.

1. **Performers:** Binns and Alma (Qld), Bera Benson, Billy Bovis (Qld/NSW), Peter Brooks, Clyde and Yvette (Qld), Stella Collier (Qld), May Daly, Sadie Gale (Qld/NSW), Hilda Gifford, Lulla Fanning, The Four Rainbows (Qld), Bob Graham, Little Lorna, Mayo Hunter, Alex McKinnon, Charles Megan, Ben Miller, Sonny Milton, Valma Raine, Robert Raymond (Qld), Irene Vando, Dan Weldon,
2. **Musicians:** Dave Meredith and His Melody Boys.
3. **Additional Notes and/or Historical Clarification:**
 - **Ben Miller:** Sometimes referred to as Bill Miller
 - **Irene Vando:** Sometimes billed as Rene Vando.

FURTHER REFERENCE

Djubal, Clay. "**Mo and His Merrymakers.**" *AustLit* (2007).

--- "Harry Clay and Clay's Vaudeville Company – 1865-1930." MA Thesis, U of Queensland (1998), v. pags.

"**Mo's All New Merry-Makers.**" *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton) 17 Sept. (1929), 3.

"**Mo's and His Merry-Makers.**" *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton) 23 Sept. (1929), 3.

Parson, Fred. *A Man Called Mo*. Melbourne: Heinemann, 1973, 27.

"**Victoria Theatre.**" *Newcastle Sun* (NSW) 12 Aug. (1929), 7.

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