

# THE ADVENTURES OF ALGY

Year of release: 1925 • Scenario: Beaumont Smith

A romantic comedy/drama starring English-born variety entertainer and self-proclaimed "professional idiot" Claude Dampier, *The Adventures of Algy* was the comedian's second film for director/producer Beaumont Smith<sup>1</sup> and his first to be set in both Australia and New Zealand. Following a series of misadventures in both countries, the film reaches its climax with the opening of an extravagant new revue at a Sydney theatre. It is here that Algy is reunited with his sweetheart. Among the cast were several high profile variety entertainers, notably Lester Brown, Verna Bain, and Hilda Attenboro.



Image sources: Above: Mediasphere, Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision. New Zealand.

Left: Still from the film.

The narrative follows Algernon Allison, a Londoner with a monocle and a mania for crossword puzzles,<sup>2</sup> who travels to New Zealand with his cousin Murray to claim a their inheritance. The bequest involves two parcels of land left by a recently-deceased uncle who wills the better property to the first cousin to claim it. When Murray tricks him out of the better inheritance, a sheep station, Algy is left with a

seemingly worthless piece of land. Competition between the two me increase when they both fall for the beautiful and beguiling Kiwi McGill, a Pākehā and the daughter of the farm station's manager. Thwarted by his social awkwardness and inability to "stake his claim," Algy gives up and sets off despondently to wander the New Zealand countryside. If things weren't already bad enough, Algy is also thwarted by a by a perplexing crossword, in which a word of four letters meaning a popular disease continues to baffle him.

Meanwhile, with her father struggling financially Kiwi decides to help by going to Australia where she hopes to feature her Maori dances in a new revue in Sydney. When Murray finds out he acquires an interest in the show and attempts to use his power to pressure Kiwi into marrying him. When she refuses he has her sacked, leaving her almost destitute in Sydney. After a few plot twists and turns - largely involving the scheming and dastardly Murray - the future for both Algy and Kiwi looks bleak. Then word comes from New Zealand that oil has been struck on Algy's land. When he finally manages to track Kiwi down Algy asks her to marry him. She says yes and agrees to return to New Zealand with him. Through Algy's influence Kiwi makes her debut in the revue. The Melbourne International Film Festival website indicates that the showstopper ending comprises a vaudeville-style amalgamation of dances ranging from ballet, fan, Maori and Cossack.

*The Adventures of Algy* was shot on location in New Zealand and Sydney during the early part of 1925. New Zealand locations included Wellington, Auckland, Christchurch, Dunedin, Taranaki, and Rotarua<sup>3</sup> (notably the hot springs). Wellington's *Evening Post* records, too, that some of the more popular scenes involve Algy chasing his hat along Lambton Quay and trying his luck on the cable tram in Wellington. While in Dunedin he had a shot at canoeing on the Avon and wore a kilt; and "on a wayback farm he dances, complete with monocle, with the Maori damsels."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dampier's first film, *Hullo Marmaduke* (1924), also features his "silly-arse" English stage persona.

<sup>2</sup> *Sun (Sydney)* 19 June 1925, 3. In having his hero fixate on crosswords, Beaumont Smith exploited the recently "revived" adult craze for the pastime.

<sup>3</sup> "Paramount Theatre," 17 Nov. 1925, 10.

<sup>4</sup> "Paramount Theatre," 21 Nov. 1925, 10.

Exterior locations in Sydney included Martin Place, Circular Quay, Watson's Bay Gap, the Palace Theatre, and Sydney Harbour (aboard the ferry Kubu). The scene at the Gap focused on a sensational aspect of the story whereby a young girl attempts to throw herself over the cliff. Interior filming took place at the Rushcutters Bay Studio.

- 1925:** Lyric Wintergarden and Lyceum Theatre, Sydney; 22 June - [joint world premiere]
- 97 min. (6 reels); black and white
  - **Production Company:** Beaumont Smith Films
  - **Dir/Prod.** Beaumont Smith; **Co-Prod.** Lester Brown;<sup>5</sup> **Dir of Ph.** Lacey Percival, Frank Stewart, Syd Taylor, Charles Barton,
  - **Cast incl.** Claude Dampier (Algernon Allison), Bathie Stuart (Kiwi McGill), Eric Harrison (Murray Watson), Billie Carlyle (Mollie Moore), George Chalmers (John McGill), Lester Brown (stage manager), Eric Yates, Beaumont Smith, Hilda Attenboro, Verna Bain, John P. O'Neill.<sup>6</sup>
  - **Distributor:** Australasian Films.
  - As with Smith and Dampier's previous film, *Hullo Marmaduke*, *The Adventures of Algy* was given a joint world premiere at Sydney's Lyric Wintergarden and Lyceum theatres.



*Newcastle Sun* (NSW) 18 July 1925, 9.

## **HISTORICAL NOTES AND CORRECTIONS**

1. In New Zealand the film was known as *The Adventures of Algy (in Maoriland)*.
2. Dampier's second wife and on-stage partner Hilda Attenboro<sup>7</sup> also appears in the film. Their relationship ended soon afterwards, however, when Dampier and Billie Carlyle became involved. They eventually married and went on to establish high-profile careers in England.
3. In the lead-up to the film's world premiere in Sydney, Union Theatres Ltd<sup>8</sup> engaged Princess Rangiriri and her nine Maori maids to appear at both cinemas, and organised "artistic and novel settings, and special lighting effects." The entertainment comprised traditional dances and the haunting, plaintive melodies of the Maori people.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> "Bundaberg Screen Personalities." *Bundaberg Mail* (Qld) 27 June 1925, 2.

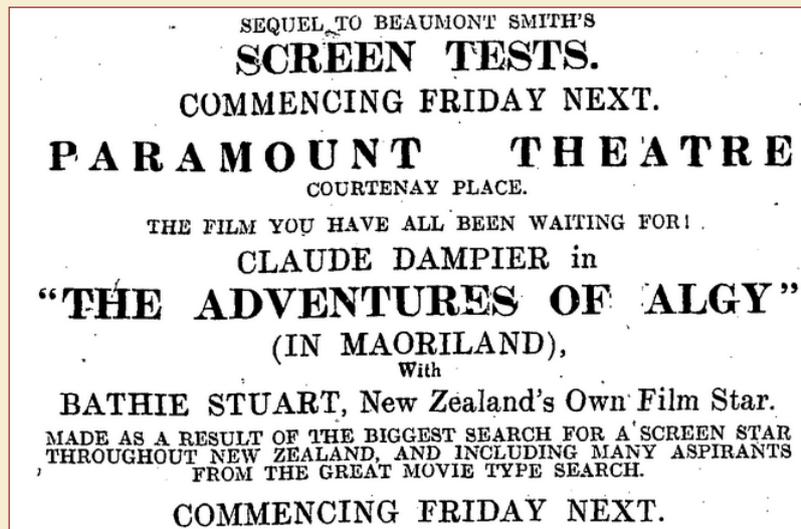
<sup>6</sup> John P. O'Neill features in Beaumont Smith's 1923 films *Townies and Hayseeds* and *Prehistoric Hayseeds*, as well as *Hullo Marmaduke* (1924).

<sup>7</sup> Dampier first came to Australia in 1910 with Irene Vere.

<sup>8</sup> Managing Directors of Union Theatres Ltd were Edwin Geach, W.A. Gibson, and Stuart F. Doyle.

<sup>9</sup> "The Moving Row of Magic Shadow Shapes." *Sun* (Sydney) 21 June 1925, 28.

4. All copies of the film were thought to be lost until a substantially complete print was discovered in New Zealand in the early 1960s. When the remaining lost scenes were found in Australia in 1986, *The Adventures of Algy* was reconstructed to its original form. A new score was written by Dorothy Buchanan, then composer-in-residence at the New Zealand Film Archive, and a new print restored by Australia's National Film and Sound Archive. The film was given its reconstructed premiere at the 1986 Auckland Film Festival. Reviews for the film were generally positive. Film historians Andrew Pike and Ross Cooper write in *Australian Film 1900–1977* that *The Adventures of Algy* "reveals a heavy reliance on titles to propel the insubstantial plot along, and frequently the images are little more than illustrations for the printed text (n. pag.)."
5. Interestingly, Beaumont Smith had become so exhausted with film production by the end of production that he spent the next eight years concentrating on distribution and exhibition. He eventually returned to directing with *The Hayseeds* (1933).



*Evening Post* (Wellington) 16 Nov. 1925, 2.

### SEE ALSO

- [Claude Dampier](#) • [Beaumont Smith](#) • [Hullo Marmaduke](#) (1924)

### FURTHER REFERENCE

- "*Adventures of Algy, The*." *Melbourne International Film Festival*. [Sighted 26/01/2018]
- Hillyer, Minette. "To Dance the Native Dance: Vernacular Modernism in an Australian-New Zealand Comedy Romance." *Journal of New Zealand Studies* 25 (2017), 40-56.
- "In Filmland: An Auckland-Made Picture." *New Zealand Herald* (Auckland, NZ) 11 July 1925, Supp 8.
- "New Films." *Sydney Morning Herald* 22 June 1925, 7.
- "NZ Film Timeline: *The Adventures of Algy*." *Mediasphere*. [Sighted 26/01/2018. Includes 4 minutes of footage from the film]
- "Paramount Theatre." *Evening Post* (Wellington, NZ) 17 Nov. 1925, 10.
- "Paramount Theatre." *Evening Post* (Wellington, NZ) 21 Nov. 192, 10.
- Pike, Andrew and Ross Cooper. *Australian Film 1900-1977: A Guide to Feature Film Production*. Melbourne: Oxford UP, in assoc. with the Australian Film Institute, 1998, 127.

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