

# HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS

Year of release: 1932 • Screenplay: George Wallace and C. J. Dennis; Music incl. George Wallace and Alaric Howitt

Aspiring vaudevillian Tommy Dodds (George Wallace) is infatuated with actress Molly and secures employment as a stagehand to be near her. When a disgruntled fellow employee hits Tommy on the head he finds himself back in the streets of Fitzroy, where two men from Betonia recognise him as the lost heir to their throne. He subsequently travels to Betonia, and is crowned King. After the coronation Tommy, who is totally unsuited to the role of King, creates merry chaos in the kingdom. He appoints an Australian mate to an official position. He also teaches the Prime Minister to roller skate and arouses the ire of Torano, the man who believes he should be King. When King Tommy survives an attempt to poison him he takes control of the palace by playing cards with his footmen and taking Betonia to war. Everything falls apart, however, when the true heir to the throne. After Tommy is ejected from the court by very happy officials he recovers consciousness and finds himself backstage in Australia. The film ends with Tommy resuming his longing for Molly as she leaves the theatre with another man.

Based on George Wallace's revusical of the same name, *His Royal Highness* is the first of the comedian's five feature films, and one of three that he starred in for Efftee Film Productions. The revusical had first been staged by [Wallace's Revue Company](#) in 1926. Under F.W. Thring's direction Wallace and C.J. Dennis made only minor changes to this original stage version. One of these alterations saw Wallace's character changed from a down-and-out, accident-prone pie vendor to a stagehand. Under Thring's direction, too, little was done to modify Wallace's stage routines for the camera, with even his make-up retaining its heavy theatrical look.

Reviews of the film were mixed, with Thring's direction and the storyline coming in for the most criticism. Wallace's performance was generally regarded as a feature, although not as well-received as his second film, *Harmony Row* (1933). The support cast was also seen in favourable light by most critics. The Brisbane world premiere was largely seen as a homecoming for Wallace (with the comedian having spent some time there in the late-1910s), and hence the reviews were mostly positive:



Still from the 1932 film  
Source: Australian Screen

The *Sydney Morning Herald* critic was far from impressed with the film, however:

The humour in Mr. F.W. Thring's latest production, *His Royal Highness*, is of a rudimentary sort. People with simple minds and undeveloped tastes may enjoy the film, but others are likely to find it a colossal bore.

The whole of its appeal depends on George Wallace, who is on the screen almost from the first moment to the last. He wanders to and fro, falls on his head, and extemporises exactly as though he were doing a variety



Source: [www.moviemem.com](http://www.moviemem.com)

In presenting an all-Australian programme for the current week's offering at the Regent Theatre, the management has performed a signal service to its patrons, which was fully appreciated by large audiences on Saturday. It has shown conclusively that talking pictures of a high standard can be produced in the Commonwealth, and that Australian artists are not one whit behind their Hollywood confreres.

The chief item, *His Royal Highness*, is aptly described as a comedy with music, as distinct from a musical comedy. The comedy is there in full measure, and though the few musical numbers introduced are tuneful they are not the essential features. The fun is almost exclusively created by George Wallace, the clever Brisbane comedian, whose success on the legitimate stage is so well known.

The story is the essence of mischievous absurdity.... The situations created are ludicrous in the extreme, but are carried off by Tommy with a smileless nonchalance which is captivating.

Mr. Wallace's facility of expression and his whimsical drolleries, as well as clever dancing, eminently lend themselves to the screen work. He is supported by a capable cast... ("Regent, 15)

turn. The story, which tells of a Melbourne man who dreams he becomes king of a mythical country, is a mere framework for Mr. Wallace's antics...

As to the matter of Mr. Thring's direction, the kindest thing one can say is that he is some years behind the times, when compared with English and American standards. It is irritating to think that a film with such broad characters in it is to be shown abroad as a representative Australian production ("New Films, 4).

Filmed largely in Efftee's studio at His Majesty's Theatre, Melbourne, *His Royal Highness* cost £19,000, with some £7,000 of the budget spent on building the set for the Betonian Palace. Such was the size of the set that an extension to the studio floor at the theatre was required. The film was distributed throughout Australia, New Zealand, and England by Universal. Some theatres claimed that it set new box office records. Renamed *His Loyal Highness* by Universal for its release in the United Kingdom, the film was screened in around 700 cinemas (the average UK feature reached 1,000 or so).

**Pat Hanna** bought the rights to some of the old Efftee catalogue in the late-1940s. The titles, which included *His Royal Highness* and Hanna's own film *Diggers* (1933), were given a revival in suburban cinemas with some modest success. As a result, *His Royal Highness* was still being screened in Australian theatres as late as the 1950s.

- 1932:** Regent Theatre (Brisbane); 1 Oct. [world premiere]  
- 84 min.; black and white; sound  
- **Dir/Prod.** F.W. Thring (for Efftee Film productions);  
**Dir. of Ph.** Arthur Higgins; **Des.** W. R. Coleman;  
**Chor.** Jennie Brennan.  
- **Cast incl.** George Wallace (Tommy Dodds/King of Betonina), **Marshall Crosby** (Alfram), **John Dobbie** (Jim), **Byrl Walkley** (Yoiben), Frank Tarrant (Hozzan), Donalda Warne (Babette), **Lou Vernon** (Torano), John Fernside (Giuseppe), Nell Taylor (Molly), Clem Milton (Prime Minister), Edwin Brett (Asher Marmaduke), **Dan Thomas**, Norman Shepherd, **Mona Barlee**, Cecil Scott, **Billy Maloney**, William Ralston, Charles O'Mara, Nellie Mortyne, Darcy Kelway, Field Fisher, Bill Innes.



### SEE ALSO

[George Wallace](#) • [F.W. Thring](#) • [Efftee Film Productions](#)



## FURTHER REFERENCE

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- ▶ [His Royal Highness](#) (1932) *Australian Screen* (3 clips from the original motion picture)
  - ▶ [His Royal Highness](#) (1932) *Internet Archive* (original film available for free download).
  - ▶ [His Royal Highness](#) (1932 trailer) *Internet Archive* (rare Australian trailer available for free download).
- ▶ See also the AVTA entry for the original revusical version: [His Royal Highness](#) (1926).



Source: *Oz Movies*.

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