

STRIKE ME LUCKY

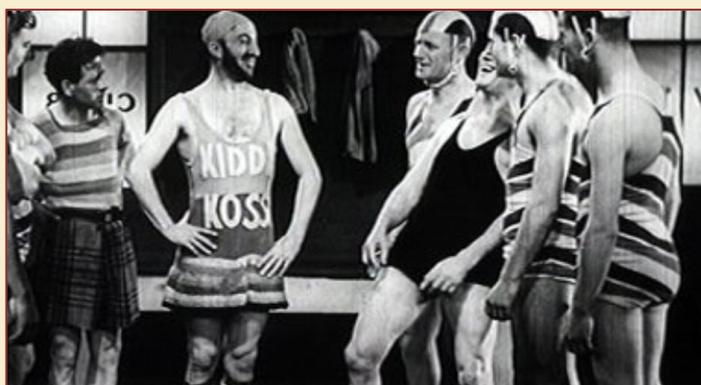
Year of release: 1934 • Screenplay: Vic Roberts and George D. Parker • Music: W. Hamilton Webber
Lyrics: Vic Roberts (additional material)

Given his huge appeal with Australian theatre audiences, Roy Rene was expected to have a hit with his 1934 feature film, *Strike Me Lucky*. The production company, Cinesound in fact almost doubled the size of its studio to make the film.¹ However, as Rene later admitted, the lack of audience interaction, the repetition and the sterile film production sets made the work much less stimulating, and the result was a rather lacklustre performance.² Originally produced under the working title "Swastikas for Luck," *Strike Me Lucky* was also the first Cinesound film that had not been based on a pre-existing story. As a consequence the plot entailed a complex weaving of situations that provided too little in the way of dramatic organisation. These factors combined to make *Strike Me Lucky* a box-office disappointment, despite taking £1,817 in its first four days (beating *On Our Selection*).³ In this respect it was the only one of Ken G. Hall's films to not return a profit.

Subtitled "A Farce with Music," the storyline centres on the friendship between Mo McIsaac, who is broke and behind in his rent, and Miriam, a young girl who claims to be an orphan, but who is in fact the runaway daughter of a rich aristocrat, Major Burnett. Mo is unaware that a large reward has been offered, but gangster Al Baloney and Mae West impersonator Kate plot to take the girl from him in order to get the money. While Mo and his sidekick Donald undertake a series of disastrous attempts at finding employment, they inadvertently thwart the kidnap attempts. Miriam eventually leads Mo to the mansion where she lives but he is blamed for her disappearance and flees with Donald into the bush on a bicycle. During their quest to find an old goldmine, the pair undertakes various adventures, including being attacked by a tribe of Aborigines whom they take for cannibals. When they finally make it back to the city, they find that they have been cleared of any charges and the major throws a spectacular ball in Mo's honour. A subplot involves a romance between a young couple. The production also includes a Busby Berkeley-style spectacle complete with 150 dancers.



Source: Josef Lebovic Gallery



Source: Senses of Cinema.



Australian Women's Weekly 4 Aug. 1934, 20.

Typical of the reviews published in Australian newspapers following the film's release was the *Sydney Morning Herald's* critique of 19 November:

¹ The expansion was also undertaken with the anticipation of a boost in film production following the introduction of a film quota. The film was refused registration under the quality clause of the New South Wales quota act, however.

² Ctd. Andrew Pike and Ross Cooper. *Australian Film 1900-1977* (1980), 168.

³ See *Everyone's* advertisement below (21 Nov. 1934, 18-19). See also "Mo Smashes Attendance Records." *Everyone's* 21 Nov. (1934), 7

One must, in fairness, record the fact that...[the] audience... seemed to enjoy the film immensely. Every new exploit by "Mo" created a running fire of laughter.... [But] He is a good deal less funny than before. On the stage he gained most of his effects through a partly extempore style. He would play straight at the audience, and wait patiently, wearing his inimitably grotesque expression, until each roar of mirth had died away. But... the cinema audience and the figure photographed on celluloid exist in different worlds. Picture-goers can scream their heads off, yet the film sweeps onward heedless and detached. That is why the antics of "Mo" now seem rather artificial, not to say forced. An experienced director of Hollywood farce could perhaps have reshaped the comedian's style to fit the new medium; but Mr. Ken Hall has made only an amateurish job of things... all the actors have the air of novices in a suburban repertory show. As for the plot and the dialogue, one had best relapse into a resigned silence.... Brings in kangaroos and emus and incredible burlesque aborigines for the mere sake of showing them. A good deal of American influence comes in, too. For no discoverable reason Miss Yvonne Banvard goes through her part in exact and avowed impersonation of Mae West. The gangsters all talk American slang (6).

A substantially shortened version was released in England through Cinesound's associated company, British Empire Films, but attracted little attention from either audiences or critics.

ON OUR SELECTION RECORDS SMASHED ON OPENING DAYS!

VELL "STRIKE ME LUCKY"

Facts and Figures that "Shout" for Themselves!

"ON OUR SELECTION." (Prices 4/- Top)	"STRIKE ME LUCKY." (Prices 2/5½ Top).
Friday (12-8-32) 5310 Persons Paid £466	Friday (16-11-34) 6596 Persons Paid £478
Saturday (11-8-32) 6411 Persons Paid £582	Saturday (17-11-34) 7575 Persons Paid £586
TOTAL FOR 2 DAYS: 11721 Persons Paid £1048	TOTAL FOR 2 DAYS: 14171 Persons Paid £1064

Despite Reduced Prices, "Strike Me Lucky" Smashes Amazing "Selection" Records. What a Picture! What a Performance! What a Box-Office Tonic for the Industry!

Get in for your share - **MAKE MO-NEY WITH MO!**

14,171 CASH CUSTOMERS BEHIEGE CAPITOL FIRST 2 DAYS!

All the Really Big Ones Come from BRITISH EMPIRE FILM!

Cinesound's KING of KOMEDY Now BOSS of the BOX-OFFICE

Everyone's (Sydney) 21 Nov. 1934, 18-19.

- 1934:** Capitol Theatre (Sydney) 16 November 1934 [world premiere].
- 87 min.; black and white; sound
 - **Dir.** Ken G. Hall; **Prod.** Ken G. Hall (for Cinesound Productions); **Dir of Ph.** Frank Hurley and George Heath; **M Dir.** W. Hamilton Webber; **Ed.** William Shepherd; **Des.** Fred Finlay (Art Director).
 - **Cast** incl. Incl. Roy Rene (Mo), Yvonne Banvard (Kate), Lorraine Smith (Margot Burnett), John D'Arcy (Larry McCormack), Eric Masters (Al Baloney), Alex McKinnon (Donald), Dan Agar (Major Burnett), Pamela Bevan (Miriam Burnett), Molly Raynor (Bates), Bert Le Blanc (Lowenstein), Les Warton (Bull), Harry Burgess (Mike), Fred Kerry (castaway), Marie D'Alton (Mrs Huckleberry), Arthur Dodds, Charles Wheeler, Jack O'Malley, Charles Keegan, Nellie Small, Eva Sheedy.

HISTORICAL NOTES AND CORRECTIONS

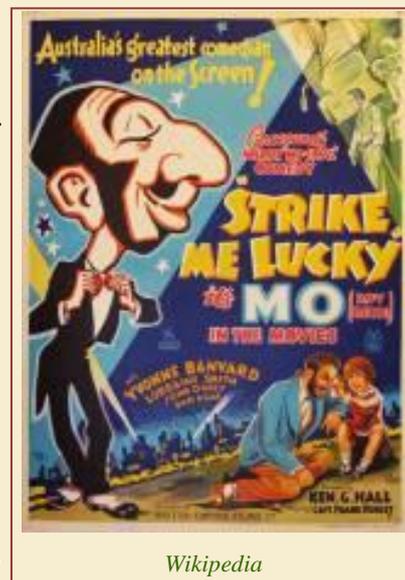
1. In 2006, while researching Rene's life for a forthcoming play and a biography, Sydney actor/director/playwright Jon Fabian discovered missing scenes from the film. Totalling some twenty-six minutes, the footage is on vulnerable nitrate stock and will need to be transferred to a more stable medium before it can be viewed. Fabian's research, which includes interviews with former associates of director Ken G. Hall, suggests that the missing scenes comprise ad lib performances by Rene and a specialty act performance by Ron Shand (famous in later years as Herb Evans in the television soap *Number 96*). [For further details see Frank Van Straten. 'Lucky Strike' (2006) - publication details below]
2. In a brief article published in Brisbane's *Courier Mail* in 1934 Hall indicated that he had had particular difficulty in obtaining a working scenario for *Strike Me Lucky* and that the film was the result of three scripts.⁴

⁴ "Stories for Motion Pictures: Director Gives Hints." *Courier Mail* 18 Aug. (1934), 11.

3. The film was shot over seven weeks during June and July 1934. Rene was paid £70 a week during the production, the third highest salary for an Australian actor to that time - and third behind [Bert Bailey](#) and [George Wallace](#).
4. 'Baby' Pamela Bevan, who played Miriam Burnett, was only five years old at the time. She was often referred to in publicity as "Australia's Shirley Temple."

FURTHER REFERENCE

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- [Strike Me Lucky](#) (1934) *Australian Screen*. 3 clips.

