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PREPARED AND DELIVERED BY: J. T. Ruxton.

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Nat Phillips (Stiffy) and Roy Rene (Mo).

Phillip Nathan Phillips was born in Brewarrina, N.S.W. about the year 1880 and first appeared on stage when he was approximately ten years of age before going to the U.S.A. with his partner of that time, Tommy Armstrong. Later they were joined by Nat's wife, Daisy Merritt, who also appeared on stage with him. After four years in the U.S.A. and six years in Great Britain and Europe, Nat returned to Australia and joined Fuller's Vaudeville circuit. He took over the revue company originally run by Alfred Bletsoe.

"Australian Variety" magazine of 1916 stated, "He reorganised the books and business of the various productions, dressed the pony ballet and principals right up to the mark and introduced a most lifelike Australian in the character of Stiffy." Nat Phillips is also credited with bringing the expression "Stiff Luck" into the Australian vernacular. Performing in the same company at the time was Roy Rene specialising in Hebrew comedy.

Roy Rene was born Harry Van der Sluys or Sluice on 15th February 1891 in Adelaide one of seven children of a Jewish cigar manufacturer and an Anglican mother. He is said to have made his debut in 1899 as a bare back horse rider in a school circus and it is claimed that he shared a horse with Peter Dawson in exchange for singing lessons.

At ten years of age Harry won a singing competition at an Adelaide market, the prize being ten shillings or a duck. Harry took the duck and sold it for twelve shillings. He next appeared in 1904 as "Little Roy" dressed in an Eton Collar and singing from the dress circle box in the Adelaide Theatre Royal. He then played in a pantomime, "Sinbad The Sailor", in 1905 at the "old" Tivoli Theatre in Adelaide, becoming known as "Boy Roy the Child Soprano". The next appearances were in charity concerts and blackface singing and dancing acts.

In 1905 when Harry was thirteen years of age the family moved to Melbourne where he was an apprentice jockey for a brief period which however was enough to give him a lifetime interest in racing. The pull of the theatre was too strong and he returned in 1908 to Brennan's Melbourne Vaudeville at The Gaiety Theatre as "Little Roy the Australian Little Tich". While here he spent his spare time at Rickard's Opera House studying stage stars and learning their techniques.

