



**Stop Laughing...this is serious**



# Stop Laughing...this is serious

A three-part documentary series narrated by Eric Bana

**Starts on Wednesday, March 25 at 9pm on ABC**



National Documentary Program



# Introduction

**Stop Laughing... this is serious** is a three-part documentary series charting a course through the story of Australian comedy, featuring more than 60 interviews with the men and women who make us laugh. Through a blend of social history, extensive archive material and intimate interviews with some of the country's most loved comedians, we travel via stand up, radio, television, theatre and film from indigenous comedy to new viral media jokers of today, revealing how humour, laughter and comedy are integral to our national identity.

By unpicking our cultural cringe, poking fun at our national identity, confronting hard truths and exploring our taboos, we come to realise that Australians' greatest characteristic is our ability to laugh at ourselves.

Narrated by **Eric Bana**, the series explores the development of Australian comedy through social and political change, examining the way humour has reflected and responded to multicultural Australia, gender issues, and politics. Each episode moves seamlessly through time, weaving contemporary comedy with early comedic performance, featuring insight and anecdotes from what **Barry Humphries** calls "the cheering up business".

The first episode, "**LOOK AT MOI, LOOK AT MOI**" (*Kath and Kim*) looks inwards at the importance of our ability to laugh at ourselves. From **Edna Everage**, the mousy Melbourne housewife, and **Sandy Stone** – the man to whom nothing ever happens, to school kids like **Kylie Mole** and **Ja'mie** and Aussie battlers like **Dad and Dave**, **Paul Hogan** and **Kenny**, we realize that what's right under our very own nose is often the funniest thing of all.



The second episode **"FAARK, FAARK"** (*Graham Kennedy*) looks upwards at those in authority. We have long revered the little guy punching upwards, and we love to celebrate the rebels and rogues who can make us laugh at our situation no matter how grim. From **Graham Kennedy, Les Patterson** and **Magda Szubanski**, via the University comedy Revues to **Tim Minchin** and **The Chaser**, we love a larrikin with a sense of mischief and acknowledge their vital role in keeping the bastards honest.

The final and third episode **"HELLO POSSUMS"** (*Dame Edna*) looks at Australian comedy on the world stage. We examine the transfer of comedic ideas between our nation and the rest of the world, revealing how pioneers like **Barry Humphries, Wendy Harmer, Rod Quantock, Adam Hills, Paul Hogan** and **John Clarke** crossed boundaries with their wit and tenacity. We explore 'online' as a new way of getting comedy to mass audiences and meet some of the next generation in Australian Comedy.

Throughout the series, we will explore how comedy ties us together as a nation, traversing generations and bridging cultural divides. We Aussies love to laugh at ourselves, our politics, our fellow Australians – are there are no sacred cows? Along the way the viewer will laugh but also come to appreciate the craft of our greatest comedians who ultimately reveal important truths about the world in which we live.

Executive produced by Screentime's Jennifer Collins. Written, directed and produced by Stephen Oliver. ABC TV Commissioning Editor: Jo Chichester. A Screentime Production for ABC TV in association with Screen Australia and Screen NSW.

**For further information and interviews please contact Kim Bassett, ABC TV Marketing, 03 9524 2580/0409 600 456 or [bassett.kim@abc.net.au](mailto:bassett.kim@abc.net.au) For images visit [abc.net.au/tvpublicity](http://abc.net.au/tvpublicity)**



# About the production

The title of the series **Stop Laughing...this is serious** is a nod to the iconic Australian cartoon by Stan Cross (1888-1977) - 'For gorsake, stop laughing: this is serious!'

The cartoon published in the 1933 July issue of SMITH'S WEEKLY features two construction workers falling off a building – one hanging by his fingers on the edge of a high rise construction, and the other in full laughter, holding on for dear life and in doing so, has grabbed the trousers of the other, yanking them to his ankles. One mate says to the other, 'For gorsake, stop laughing: this is serious'.

The cartoon tapped into the humour of the Australian public. The cartoon was so popular it was reprinted and distributed throughout Australia and overseas.

All through the Depression years, prints were framed and hung on walls and workplaces throughout Australia. His humour was that of everyday life, of ordinary Australians. Cross developed into one of Australia's finest black and white artists. His art featured 'typical' Australians from farmers to jackeroos, to diggers and doctors.

Like so much of our comedy, the cartoon reflected the times superbly. On the one hand the cartoon demonstrates the Australian humour found in being caught with your pants down, whilst at the same time, is a statement on desperate times of the early 30s, depression years, where people were falling off and sometimes jumping off buildings. Being able to laugh at adversity is a trait explored over and over in Australian comedy. Taking inspiration, as well as the title from the cartoon, our series also aims to illustrate how our comedy so often reflects the ever-changing world in which we live.

**Executive Producer, Jennifer Collins**

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# Producer's Statement

"A heartfelt thank you goes out to all of the 63 comedians who were interviewed for this series, and for the boxes of photographs, newspapers clippings and archive footage that arrived at Screentime offices. Comedians are natural storytellers and we were fortunate enough to have interviewed comedians who have worked across stand up, theatre, radio, television and film. The deeper we got into the research, the richer the material became. Australian Comedy is interwoven with our national identity. Its current high international regard reflects a long and proud history that has led to an outstanding current crop of Australian talent.

**Stop Laughing...this is serious** is the story of Australian comedy told against the backdrop of our rapidly changing social history – we present not only our golden comic moments, but frame them within the context of what was happening in Australia at that particular time. We explore how comedians used humour to respond to social and political change. We deliberately avoided producing the three parts as a chronological history of Australian Comedy. First and foremost, we knew it would be impossible to cover the full history of Australian comedy in one short series, and secondly we felt that it was the juxtaposition of contemporary and older comedy performance that would best demonstrate the common traits that Australian comedians share.

Hence the series is divided roughly into three themes – **"LOOK AT MOI, LOOK AT MOI"** looks 'inwards' for our comedy, (at our ordinary, domestic lives), **"FAARK, FAARK"** looks 'up' (lamprooning those in authority), and **"HELLO POSSUMS"** looking 'outwards' (to the world, our comedians on the world stage)".

**Executive Producer, Jennifer Collins**



**Narrator** Eric Bana

## **Contributors**

Adam Hills  
Andrew Knight  
Barry Humphries  
Christiaan Van Vuuren  
Craig Reucassel  
Denise Scott  
Garry McDonald  
Glenn Robbins  
Grahame Bond  
Ian McFadyen  
John Clarke  
John Pinder  
Judith Lucy  
Julia Zemiro  
Lawrence Mooney  
Magda Szubanski  
Mary Kenneally  
Mikey Robins  
Neill Gladwin  
Nick Giannopoulos  
Paul Fenech  
Paul McDermott  
Rod Quantock  
Rove McManus  
Sean Choolburra  
Shane Jacobson  
Steve Kearney  
Sue Ingleton  
Tim Ferguson  
Tom Ballard  
Tony Martin  
Wendy Harmer

Andrew Denton  
Austen Tayshus  
Chris Taylor  
Colin Lane  
Dave Hughes  
Frank Woodley  
Gary Reilly  
Graeme Blundell  
Greig Pickhaver  
Jane Turner  
John Doyle  
John Safran  
Julia Morris  
Kevin Kropinyeri  
Libbi Gorr  
Mary Coustas  
Mick Molloy  
Nazeem Hussain  
Nicholas Boshier  
Noeline Brown  
Paul Hogan  
Richard Fidler  
Rodney Rude  
Santo Cilauro  
Shane Bourne  
Shaun Micallef  
Steve Vizard  
Susan Provan  
Tim Minchin  
Toni Lamond  
Tony Sattler

# Episode 1: Look at Moi, Look at Moi

Wednesday, March 25 at 9pm

The first episode, **"LOOK AT MOI, LOOK AT MOI"** (*Kath and Kim*) looks inwards at the importance of our ability to laugh at ourselves and how this has become a quintessential Australian trait. From **Edna Everage**, the mousy Melbourne housewife, and **Sandy Stone** – the man to whom nothing ever happens, to Aussie battlers like **Dad and Dave**, **Paul Hogan** and **Kenny**, we realise that what's right under our very own nose is often the funniest thing of all.

Australian audiences couldn't get enough of the series **Kath and Kim** perhaps because they could see themselves in it. The humour came from the familiarity. Similarly, **Dame Edna** pointed out the minutiae of the every day, making the mundane funny for the first time as she revealed so much about our own lives. With another character **Sandy Stone**, **Barry Humphries** expanded on this theme and found a winning combination of pathos and humour in the spectacularly uneventful life of an ageing pensioner. We see how comedians like **Denise Scott** and **Dave Hughes** continued to celebrate suburban normality in their own stand up routines while hit movies **The Castle** and **Kenny** have made a box office success of championing ordinary people – like us.

We look at the rise of the Aussie battler in our comedy characters – from **The Sentimental Bloke** to **Kenny**, the battler is an ever-popular figure. Epitomised by **Paul Hogan** with his cast of characters in the 1970s, our love of the battler culminated in the heroic **Crocodile Dundee** – as **Mick Dundee**, an exaggerated outback larrikin took the world by storm in the 1980s. **Paul Hogan** also unashamedly presented his own ocker Australian accent on TV – showing us that our own voice can provide humour.

**"LOOK AT MOI, LOOK AT MOI"** continues to explore how our comedy now reflects an inclusiveness about who we are now – a multicultural society, with a diversity of voice from **Sean Choolburra** to **Kevin Kropinyeri**, from **Nick Giannopoulos** to **Hung Le**, **Mary Coustas** and **Nazeem Hussain**.

This first episode of the three part series **Stop Laughing... this is serious** ultimately highlights that while our comedic voice changes and evolves constantly, it always reminds us that one of our greatest assets is to be able to laugh at ourselves, whoever we are.





# Episode 2: Faark, Faark

Wednesday, April 1 at 9pm

The second episode of **Stop Laughing...this is serious** is called "**FAARK, FAARK**" and it looks upwards at the comedy of rebellion and anti-authority. Its title comes from one of the greatest rebels in Australian comedy – **Graham Kennedy**, who as the irrepressible host of **In Melbourne Tonight** in the 1950s invented a "crow call" to allow him to say a word deemed far too rude for television.

Much of our comedy has celebrated the rebels and rogues and laughed along with the larrikins. From **Graham Kennedy** breaking all the rules of television to **Norman Gunston** appearing on the steps of Parliament House during Gough Whitlam's dismissal to the invention of **Les Patterson** and the remarkable story of **Rodney Rude** as a champion of freedom of speech, we love the little guy punching upwards – taking on the authorities and making us laugh.

We look at the comedy of the underdog, including **Basically Black** the first indigenous TV comedy with the heroic character **Super Boong** tackling racism wherever he finds it. We look at the fertile comedy breeding grounds of the university revues and how they spawned many of our favourite comedy shows like **The Aunty Jack Show**, **The D Generation**, **Big Girl's Blouse**, **The Late Show**, **Fast Forward** and **Full Frontal**. We see how anarchic live acts **Los Trios Ringbarkus** and the **Doug Anthony All Stars** raised the stakes by involving the audience in their electric live shows and creating an air of unpredictability.

We explore the rise of political satire with **Australia You're Standing In It** and **The Gillies Report** and its continued popularity with **Shaun Micallef's Mad as Hell**. **Tim Minchin** explains the need for satire to mock the powerful and question the status quo, before **Barry Humphries** reminds us that comedians can set out to change the world, but must never expect to actually do so!



# Episode 3: Hello Possums

Wednesday, April 8 at 9pm

The third and final episode **"HELLO POSSUMS"** looks at how Australian comedy has established itself on the world stage. For a comedian, where you are from is no longer important, it's whether you are funny, period. From **Barry Humphries** to **Tim Minchin** to **Adam Hills**, our Aussie tenacity has shown the world our comedians are funny wherever they perform.

When the world turns its attention down under, we know how to make them laugh as **Roy and HG** did during the Sydney Olympics with **The Dream**. In mockumentary series **The Games**, **John Clarke** shows that behind the scenes shenanigans organising the Olympics is also ripe for comedy.

Our Aussie accent and language has also developed into a tool in our comedic armoury as pioneered by **Paul Hogan** and followed by **Dave Hughes**, **Adam Hills** and You Tube sensations the **Bondi Hipsters**. We show how Australia got over the cultural cringe, which was lampooned in 1960s political satire **The Mavis Bramston Show** and how **Norman Gunston** gave overseas visitors a baffling and hilarious introduction to the land down under in the 1970s. **Magda Szubanski** explains how exporting the soap opera **Neighbours** laid the cultural groundwork for **Paul Hogan** to become the most Aussie overseas with his box office smash **Crocodile Dundee**.

Meanwhile, the live comedy scene has been evolving constantly, with Australian duos **Los Trios Ringbarkus** and **Lano and Woodley** both winning the coveted Perrier Award in Edinburgh and returning to great acclaim in Australia. Edinburgh has seen many Aussie comedians pass through its numerous venues, not least the indiscreet arrival of 50 antipodean artists led by **John Pinder** and **Rod Quantock** landing in 1988 – an invasion known as Oznost. **The Doug Anthony All Stars** were wreaking havoc round the UK at the same time with their own brand of edgy, dangerous live comedy while **Wendy Harmer** was also tackling UK audiences.

Finally, **"HELLO POSSUMS"** explores the new ways comedy can find an audience with so many talented performers publishing their own comedy online, often leading to more mainstream success, both in Australia and overseas. The future of Australian comedy is looking rosier than ever as we enter an exciting new dawn of globalized hilarity!



# Jennifer Collins

Executive Producer & Head of Non-Fiction at Screentime

One of Australia's leading entertainment executives, Jennifer Collins is Screentime's Head of Non-Fiction. During a substantial career at ABC TV, Collins worked across multiple genres of production including documentary, arts, entertainment, comedy, sport and events, overseeing the development, commissioning and production of programming across ABC1, ABC2 and online.

As ABC TV's Head of Entertainment, Jennifer commissioned **Julia Zemiro's Home Delivery**, **The Agony of Life**, **Gruen Nation Live**, **#7 Days Later**, **Comedy Up Late**, **Adam Hills Tonight** and the **Fresh Blood** Comedy Initiative.

Prior to her appointment as Head of Entertainment, Jennifer spent three years as ABC TV's Head of Factual where she commissioned hundreds of hours of factual and documentary programming including **Poh's Kitchen**, **Who's Been Sleeping in My House**, **Dream Build** and one of the network's most successful shows of 2013 – **The Checkout**.

At Screentime, Jennifer was executive producer of **Flying Miners** and **Felicity's Mental Mission**, and she is currently Executive Producer on **Outback ER**.

# Stephen Oliver

Writer, Director & Producer

Stephen has written and directed documentaries for many of the world's most prestigious broadcasters, garnering widespread critical acclaim for his films on all manner of subjects from polygamous pop stars to Islamic extremists and even the odd heroic marsupial.

Stephen has often displayed an unusual lightness of touch in his factual work, such as the witty and irreverent **Chateau Chunder – A Wine Revolution** (ABC1/BBC4 2012), the revealing **Secret History of Eurovision** (SBS/RTE/More4/WDR 2011) and the delightful **Skippy: Australia's First Superstar** (ABC1/BBC4 2009), which won the Sydney Morning Herald Best Documentary Award.

Stephen has also made hard-hitting investigative series, such as **What's the Catch?** (2014), which exposes the complex truth about Australia's seafood and has launched a political campaign to change the law regarding seafood labeling. In the UK he won a Foreign Press Association Award for **Boiler Room** – his undercover investigation into illegal share trading for Channel 4.

He also occasionally directs commercials and his ad for MJ Bale, the official tailors of the Australian cricket team, went viral and won numerous awards including two Gold Lions at the Cannes Advertising Awards in 2012.

Stephen speaks four languages (English, Australian, Spanish and French) and also likes tennis, chorizo and dogs.

