

KENNY RICHES' *STRONGEST MAN* RETURNS TO MIAMI

BY HANS MORGENSTERN

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 24, 2015 | 2 HOURS AGO



Robert "Meatball" Lorie as Beef in 'The Strongest Man'

Courtesy Kenny Riches

Since premiering his latest feature, *The Strongest Man*, at the Sundance Film Festival earlier this year, Miami-based filmmaker Kenny Riches only has had good news to report. His biggest coup: winning a distribution deal with [FilmBuff](#), a national indie distributor that has arranged for a VOD release of the film as well as a limited theatrical release that begins this Friday.

The quirky, briskly-paced movie, about an insecure muscleman from Cuba who discovers himself during a surreal journey through Miami, will open in Los Angeles, Chicago, Salt Lake City, Austin, Tampa, and, of course, a return visit to Miami on June 26. Before its distribution deal, *The Strongest Man* made its Miami premiere at Miami Dade College's Miami International film Festival ([Our own Juan Barquin gave it a rave review](#))

International Film Festival (our own Sam Barquin gave it a **rave review**).

It continues to play at film festivals. "It's still going to international film festivals now that the fall is approaching," noted Riches, speaking via phone from Michigan, where *The Strongest Man* showed at the Cinetopia International Film Festival, which he called a "really fun" experience.

New Times caught up with Riches about keeping up with his movie, and his modest feelings about having shot and produced a buzz-worthy film out his adopted hometown of Miami. (He moved here from Salt Lake City in April of 2012.)

***New Times:* How many festivals have shown the film so far?**

Kenny Riches: Good question. I never counted.

Well, that's a good amount if you've lost count.

(Laughs) Not a crazy amount, but a good amount.

So how was Sundance?

It was very awesome and crazy. It was amazing. It's one of those things that may be a once-in-a-lifetime situation, but hopefully, we're able to get back there, but it was fun being able to just screen the film in my hometown, so there was a lot of friends and family that were able to go, so that aspect is really great. Everyone at Sundance is so supportive and nice. It's nice to be welcomed into that Sundance family, so I have allies and peers there and just meeting other great filmmakers. You don't want it to end, so it's an awesome experience.

What kind of feedback did you get?

Lots of great feedback. A lot of the programmers pulled me aside and talked about it's kind of one of those films that is what Sundance looks for, so it was really great.

You also showed the film at the Miami International Film Festival. What was that like?

After all, that's the festival for the city that inspired you.

That was really, really great. You know, it's always nice to be able to show the film where your friends are at, especially if they've been able to help you along with the process, so it was really good. Everyone in Miami is so supportive and great. I have a lot of friends that are in the art scene there, so everyone lifts each other up. It's a good supportive community, so it was fun. Also, everyone in Miami kinda understands the material and the regional references that people who aren't from Miami don't understand, so those little comments or jokes that are specific to a place that have a large Latin community, stuff like that.

So it makes sense to have a run at O Cinema.

Yeah, I definitely wanted to [have it in Miami]. I mean, if I could, I would run it longer in Miami than anywhere else. Everyone gets it because the characters are human. There's relatable material. But people in Miami especially get it, and I think people are also interested in seeing films there that also aren't the Hollywood version of Miami.

Good for you.

Yeah, I don't know if I'll see any money on it, when it's all said and done, after all these people have to get paid off, but that doesn't matter. For me, the film's already done its job. I just hope that all of my investors get paid back, so I can make another one (laughs).

Do you know what the other one's going to be?

Yes, I am working on a few projects right now. One that I hope to shoot in Utah in the fall, and another one in Florida after that. We'll see about the timing. Miami is a no go zone in the

and another one in Florida later that. We'll see about the timing. Miami is a no-go zone in the summer, so it might be another year before I shoot the Florida one.

The Strongest Man will have a week-long theatrical run at O Cinema Miami Shores, 9806 NE Second Ave., Miami Shores, beginning this Friday, June 26. Tickets are \$7.50 - \$11; o-cinema.org. Riches will host a filmmaker workshop at FilmGate Interactive, 90 NW 29th St., Miami, on July 10 to talk about his Sundance experience. Tickets are \$20 plus fees; facebook.com/events/760382190739694.

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