

TV PROFILE by Matt White

A SOUND like a hippopotamus hiccupping in soft mud rumbled from the main dressing-room of the BBC Television Theatre at Shepherds Bush, London.

It came from a didgeridoo blown by Australian entertainer Rolf Harris. "Bloody beauty," he croaked as he balanced the end of the aboriginal music pipe on his big toe. "I love sounds," he went on. "The scraping of toast, cats lapping milk—I'm going to use them all for the backing of songs one day."

Rolf Harris's seemingly crazy talk and conduct has a comic purity which has endeared him to BBC audiences.

Housewives stop work every Thursday morning to hear his programme on the Light Programme. Children crowd round television sets on Friday afternoons to watch Hev Presto! It's Rolf

"The funny thing is that when I first came to England I was ashamed of my rough Australian accent," he said. "I was told I'd never get anywhere with it."

"Yet quite a few Aussies are doing all right as opera singers at Covent Garden. I think they discovered that we speak way back in the throat, which is the perfect position for singing."

'Awful'

HARRIS, 35 and married with an 18-month-old daughter, Bindi, came to London from Perth, West Australia, thirteen years ago.

"I'd been to university for a couple of years and graduated in table tennis—then they threw me out. I wanted to study serious painting, so I came here. To keep alive I sang in a club for £2 a night."

Harris landed his first TV work when he saw a man on Children's Hour doing sketches. "They were awful so I applied for the job."

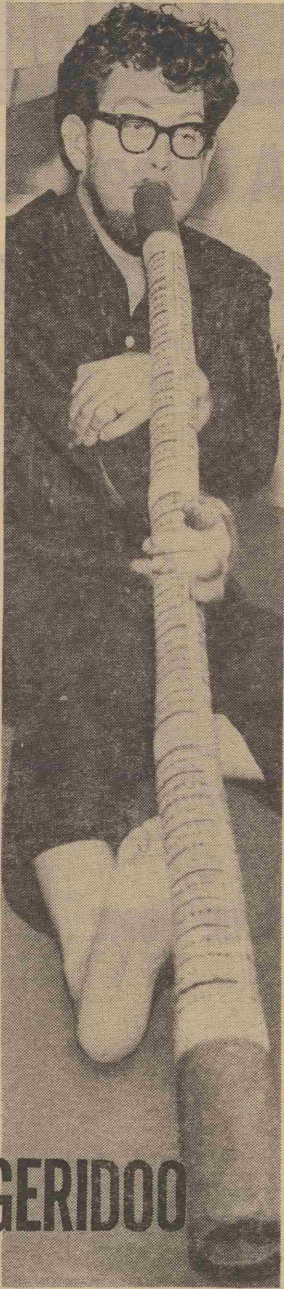
"Some woman at the BBC said I wasn't suitable as there was already a man with a beard and glasses who did drawing on TV and I would confuse the kiddies."

"As she never watched children's programmes anyway, I was squeezed in. But they kept my name out of the Radio Times for six weeks, in case she saw it there."

All this time, Harris was trying to cultivate an English accent. It took him several years to give it up as hopeless.

"At my boarding house I would turn up for breakfast and I'd bawl out to people across the tables 'How's it goin' Beauty?' 'Give us a smile!' Or sometimes I'd shout 'Not bloody marmalade and toast again—Gawd!'"

Yet much of this boisterousness was a cover for basic insecurity. He wrote *The Me Kangaroo Down, Sport*, years before he dared sing it publicly.



ROLF HARRIS

HEY PRESTO!

It's the man with the DIDGERIDOO

It sold over a million records. Next came *Sun Arise*.

His latest is an aboriginal-type number called *War Canoe*. To get the sound effects of paddles in water, he used the sucking noise of a sink plunger.

The week the record came out, Harris discovered that Australian aborigines never had war

canoes. But his feeling is that they should have.

It was the same with the didgeridoo. When he learned that it was played only by tribes in the far north of Australia, he gave lectures to the southern aborigines on the instrument.

Regret

ALTHOUGH firmly established as a cartoonist-singer-entertainer-songwriter-comedian-comper, Harris has one regret.

"I want to be accepted as an adult entertainer," he said.

"My problem is trying to get people to use me on visual adult shows—and they won't. They think of me always as the BBC kiddies' man."