

ROLF HARRIS PUTS ACCENT ON

TALENT NOW!

says GORDON COXHILL



AFTER a seven year absence from the NME Charts, Rolf Harris is back in the sellers with "Two Little Boys," a Christmassy song he found while visiting an Aboriginal settlement in the Australian outback earlier this year!

Bearded, bespectacled Rolf, who tries hard to give the impression he's an out-and-out lunatic on television, freely admits he's jumping about like a young 'un at the moment, delighted to have a hit follow-up to "Sun Arise," even if it is several years and a few singles late.

"Apart from record royalties," Rolf told me, "having a hit record doesn't do me any good financially. It doesn't make any difference to my performing fee, but for a morale booster, you can't beat a hit record. I still think of myself as a bit of an amateur recording artist, but it helps me reach a new audience which is important for me."

I asked Rolf if he ever despaired of getting another hit record as release after release met with the same ill fate.

"Well, the charts aren't the beginning and end all for me. I like to think of myself as an entertainer. Hits are like cream on the coffee, pleasant but not essential. But the charts do reflect the

big sellers in any one week and true I have been missing for a long time.

"But 'Jake The Peg' is still selling a dozen copies a week and that must be two or three years old. I guess that must have sold more, without ever appearing in the charts, than some of those records that shoot in for a couple of weeks and vanish.

"My first hit, 'Tie Me Kangaroo Down Sport,' is still selling steadily; it must have notched up quite a lot by now. However successful you are, and however blasé you become, the thrill of having a hit never wears off. I'm sure people who have had twenty still feel the same way I do. It's one of those things that never changes."

Luck

Rolf did add, however, that he thought hit records were largely a matter of luck. "It's luck as far as the artist is concerned, and a lot of hard work for the publisher, the record company and agents. They play a large part in making a record into a hit.

"The singer can only sit back and hope. There really is a lot of luck involved; you can't judge a potential hit, however good a song is. I thought 'Bluer Than Blue' was a good record and I felt sure it would make the charts, but as luck would have it, I was in Australia at the time, and of course, I couldn't promote it.

"I suppose a lot of people start worrying about a follow-up as soon as they get into the hit parade. I'm certainly not worried. In fact, it hadn't even crossed my mind, but I don't really expect my next record to be a smash. You see, at the time one would be due

out, early in the New Year, I'm undergoing a course of dental treatment, which I've been putting off and putting off for too long.

"Then I'm off for a long tour of Australia and New Zealand, finishing up at Expo '70 in Japan. I'll be back to England in time to start work on my next TV series for the BBC in September."

Rolf makes no bones about the fact that he is happiest when working with and for children, but I wondered if that didn't limit his appeal.

"Well, I fondly imagine that older people get some enjoyment out of watching my antics, but don't make the mistake of thinking working with children is kid's stuff. I like to try and keep abreast of what they are feeling and thinking. You have to try to get inside their minds, but one wrong move, or one wrong question, and you're in trouble.

"It doesn't occur to them to be polite and show appreciation if they don't want to do it. In that respect, they are a very vicious, yet very honest, audience. You've got to be very real to get through to them. If you can score with children, you can usually do the same with adults."

Sketches

Two of Rolf's trademarks are his instant paintings and his obsession with strange-sounding musical instruments like his wobble-board and the stylophone hand electric organ. "I haven't been featuring the sketches for a while because the producer of my TV shows felt the format was getting stereotyped. But I'm still as crazy as ever about experimenting with sounds. I've often thought it would be nice to be in a group for a while, so that I

could try out some harmony. It's a bit difficult by myself, although I could always do multitracking on records, but I don't really think that's what people want from me."

To do the sort of show Rolf puts on, you've got to have a full quota of confidence, but he remembers a time when he shook with fear every time he opened his mouth.

"When I first came to Britain, I was very aware of my broad Australian accent. Every time I spoke to an Englishman I got the impression he was putting on an extra layer of Oxford accent to make me feel even worse. I spent hours talking to myself, trying to lose my accent. Of course, it seems stupid now, but at the time it seemed very important to me.

Canada

"Then I went over to Canada, almost completely unknown. For some reason, perhaps because they spoke with an accent as well, I didn't feel second class.

"Somehow I plucked up courage enough to march straight up to the manager of the largest night club in one of the big cities and told him I thought he should book me for a week's cabaret. He was a bit taken aback and explained that they booked up acts weeks in advance, but he suggested I try a smaller club nearby.

Bluffed

"I went down there and bluffed my way into a week's trial. That stretched to six weeks, and when I moved on to New York, there was a cable waiting for me asking me to go back because people were asking when I was coming back to the club!

"So, off I went, and that trial week turned into a 32-week season. From then on, I've never bothered about my accent and confidence is just something that grows and grows with every success."

Rolf, after a nervous start a few years back, has certainly hit paydirt. Shrewd too, after all, he's realised that today's kids are tomorrow's adults.

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