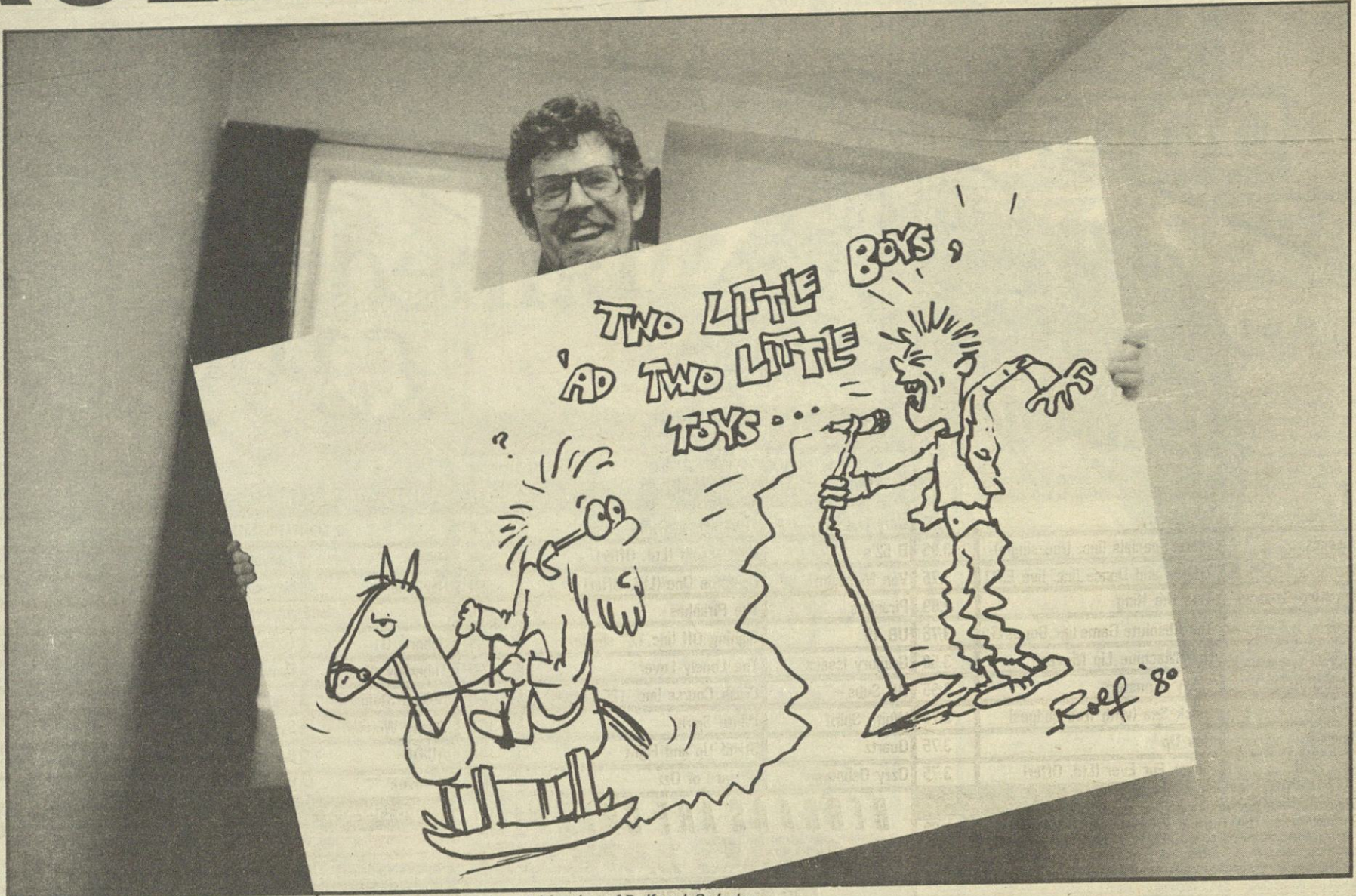


# ROLFNESS ABOUNDS



ROLF HARRIS with a signed original commemorating the historic combination of Rolf and Splodge

pix by ROSS HALFIN

## The cultural figurehead of the Punk Pathetique movement grants a rare audience to GARRY BUSHELL

**T**HE RICH and universally uplifting culture of

Australia lies buried deep in the breast of today's teenage legions thanks to the tireless pioneering of such luminaries as Skippy (the bush kangaroo), Edna Everidge, Frank Ifield, Jenny Agutter in *Walkabout*, Bon 'after you with the Off Licence' Scott and the Monty Python 'Bruce' sketch (aka 'No poofers'), not forgetting of course the playground popularity of various ballads immortalising jolly swag men, Ned Kelly and Botany Bay.

But to the diligent observer there can be little doubt that the one man who really makes the Australian Myth tower miles above the drab anonymous folk-lore of such cess-pits as Finland and Sri Lanka is ROLF — Rolf Harris, defender of the digeridoo, inventor of the wobbleboard,

irrepressible wall-painter, TV playmate of Coojeebear and Shamus O'Sean (the leprechaun), and above all singer of some of the absurdest songs ever to take the country's kindergartens by storm und drang.

How the people remember: 'Tie Me Kangaroo Down, Sport', 'Jake The Peg', 'Sun Arise' (later covered by Alice Cooper) and of course Rolf's finest moment — his poignant treatment of the old American Civil War song written at the turn of this century, 'Two Little Boys', which was number one for seven weeks for him in 1969 selling a staggering 976,000 copies in its first fourteen weeks of release.

But amazingly it's taken Splodge's cover of 'Two Little Boys' and the self-styled 'Rolf Rebel' tendency amongst Pathetique Punks to drag this seminal silly figure back into the pop-world eye. All of which begs the question: what did Royal Harris think of his young upstart admirers?

I tracked the man himself down to his agent's office in Regent Street last week where I begged an audience with this furry-jowled figurehead of the Pathetique

Movement. Rolf accepted without hesitation and was quite clearly bubbling over about his new devotees.

"The Splodge single is great," he enthused, "I love it, it's a real stormer. I saw it on *Top Of The Pops* and enjoyed it immensely. Max really goes mad. The way it'll work, y'see, is all the kids who learnt the song when they were little are all 16, 17 now and they all know it and love it and they're buying it in its up-dated form.

"People keep phoning me up and saying it's appalling, but I think it's diamond, they've given the song a new lease of life. I just wish I'd written it.

"But it's not the first cover of it y'know. I've got a country and western version at home, bloody good it is too. It's by the Kinsman or something and it's a beauty (starts singing song C&W style). Ummm. It's got terrific guitars and gorgeous duo harmonies..."

Had he ever met Splodge I wondered.

"No, no. I got a phone call — dunno where they got my number from — but I got a call from them in the middle of the night about a year ago and they said they weren't a joke, they were a real band and would I play digeridoo on their record. I said yeah, but when the time came I was away in Australia.

"I've gotta meet these guys (subsequent to our natter he did — See pic below).

I've only got one complaint about them — they keep telling people I'm doing things and never telling me, so when I don't do it it makes me look the idiot. They told this girl I was doing *Top Of The Pops* with them and I would have loved to, I could have played the digeridoo or something, it would have been a stormer, but they never ever asked me. It's sad cos there's so much bloody good will here goin' to waste..."

Do you listen to much punk then, Rolf?

"I don't really. I don't really listen to a lot of records. I

prefer the Radio Four discussion programmes. When I'm driving I'm usually trying to learn songs of my own, I don't like to have music on..."

Did you really turn up at that Rolf Night in Ilford last month?

"You bet, it was marvellous. I actually went the wrong night, I went a day early. Someone gave me the cutting from your magazine at that House Of Commons do and I thought 'yeah, that sounds bloody good, I'll see if I can get Roger Whittaker



PROPHET and Pilgrim: Rolf with your humble scribe.

to come down with me', but he was away in America. So anyway I thought 'bugger it', I'll turn up on me own'.

"So I went on the wrong day and promised I'd be back on the right night, except I had to go somewhere else first and it really dragged on and on. I didn't get there till ten to ten and I walked in and they were playing 'Sun Arise' and they gave me the mike to sing along over. And the owner said no this ain't good enough and he brought his own speakers in and blew the system.

"Well I'd brought a digeridoo and a wobbleboard anyway, so we had a big singsong without a mike. All these fellers had been fans for years and they knew the songs better than me..."

How does it feel to be a cult hero again?

"It's a nice feeling. Y'see I've always tried to be very real sort of bloke rather than the sort of larger than life personality that show biz presents you as. I've never put on a false front, I've always been meself. I still

feel the same way I did in the early sixties. I've still got the same zany sense of fun and I've still got the same enthusiasm and childish wonder at nature that I've always had."

**I**T'S HARD to believe listening to his thick accent that the Rolf has been ensconced in the Old Country for over 20 years now and that he probably feels more at home in Sidenham, Kent, than Sydney, Australia.

Sadly the glorious days of British TV history and Shamus O'Sean (the leprechaun) are now behind him forever, although a new series of *Rolf On Saturday* has been lined up for the new year even if experts acknowledge that this'll probably never recapture former glories.

In the meantime when he's not doing magnanimous charity do's like the imminent Telethon cash-raising sprint, Rolf whiles away his time in his humble country home stocked full of wobbleboards and no less than twelve digeridoos of different pitches and one that's multipitched, having been fitted with a brass tube.

But didn't he ever wish for a return to his grand old days of chart supremacy, I wondered. After all it seems like ages since the Rolf was

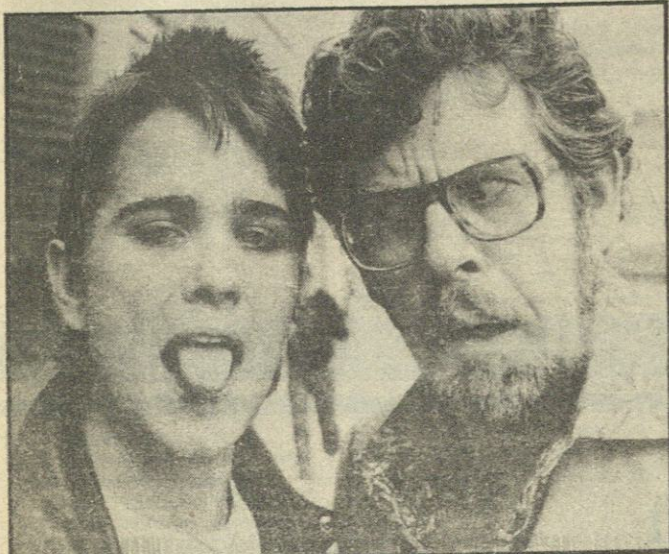
treading the *TOTP* boards...

"Yeah, it's a real shame," Rolf shakes his head, "I put out a single last Christmas and it was a bloody stormer. It was called 'Stuck To The Ice' and it was bloody knock-out, I thought it'd be a smash. But when it came out I was in Australia and this cartoon we had lined up fell to pieces at the last minute. Bloody shame that was.

"But I'm hoping to put out a song I've got out in Australia soon, but I can't tell you what it's called cos it's a cover version and they might re-release the original if I let on."

Call it premonition, call it just guessing, but I'm certain this'll be a cover version of Splodge's 'Two Pints Of Lager' though sadly we won't know for definite till Christmas and I certainly wasn't gonna badger this grey-haired hero into spilling beans he'd rather keep tucked down his trouser leg.

Nah, I just shook his hand and asked him to autograph the treasured Rolf collection of *Sounds* messenger Richard and his mysterious mate Skinny. Then, still overcome by the close encounter with real mega-stardom I'd experienced, I tip-toed back out into the hurly-burly of Regent Street and the drab world of ordinary morals, happy yet still strangely stunned by the genius whose presence I'd just shared.



PROPHET and Protegée: Rolf with Max Splodge