

Rolf rules OK, say the happy youngsters



Mike Carter tries out one of his new sounds on Rolf Harris before their show.

EXPECTING to meet a healthy, sun tanned Australian, coming face to face with Rolf Harris came as a bit of a shock.

Here was a man who looked unwell. He was pale, haggard, and looked very tired. His 51 years really showed.

"Don't come too close. I have got a shocking cold. I don't want to spread it around," he said, those dark eyes behind the owl-like glasses beginning to twinkle.

His brown eyes are so piercing that when he is on stage you know he is looking at you, writes **Frank McNaught**.

I had just seen him in action and one would not have guessed how poorly the chap was feeling.

He had just demonstrated he was the life and soul of the Rolf Harris on Tour show—a fact that was sheer star quality professionalism.

'More time'

The show came to Cleethorpes having already done a dozen performances around the North of England, and with his heavy cold, Rolf was obviously beginning to feel the strain.

But he liked doing it better than television shows he explained because he preferred the stage, it gave him more scope.

"It is really great, the audiences are great, and it gives me more room to

manoeuvre. I can add a little here, and skip something out there, whereas on television things tend to get narrowed down a bit to keep it within bounds of the medium."

Rolf has a gift which many fathers envy, a perfect rapport with children, and one can imagine he would have made a fine school teacher.

His extraordinary talent, or rather combination of talents, come over in his shows. Singer, musician, artist, and a man of considerable imagination. Few could produce a fine tune from a couple of bits of wood or a piece of cardboard. It is not surprising that a man who can make a wooden doll come to life is adored by the youngsters.

"I love the children in the audiences, but I like to see their parents there as well," he said. "No way would I face an audience of just children. There are always some little demons who would just take over," he said.

He makes all his own props. The wooden leg for his three-legged sketch, the wooden doll, and some of the funny costumes he uses.

Facing a blank canvas and producing a large painting on stage with decorating brushes and emulsion paint has become an integral part of the Rolf Harris shows.

'So popular'

He explained that he was once an art student, but did not seem to be getting any-

where with it so became an entertainer.

He was doing a children's television show in Australia and it was very much a one-man band affair. He had to design and paint the scenery, and on one occasion they included this aspect in the show.

"It proved to be so popular that it became part of the show, and I carried it on from there," said this man who has had paintings exhibited at the Royal Academy summer show.

He has never had a stage painting go wrong, though he said some were certainly better than others. "Tonight's was a real cracker," he exclaimed with contentment.

In his dressing room was a small painting he had just completed, quite unconnected with the one on stage. He was doing them for members of the cast.

Asked if he would love to do nothing else but paint, he said he would rather do woodwork. "You can really go at that, working and working until you are exhausted."

Which is what he was looking like near the end of this tour, but looking forward to doing a similar one soon in Australia. "They welcome me there like a prodigal son," he said. "And I certainly can do with some sunshine," he deliberately cracked.

When he gets there he will also indulge in his favourite sport, swimming. He used to

be the junior backstroke champion of Australia as a teenager.

"I have always enjoyed swimming, it is great fun, and can save your life," said Rolf who recently promoted swimming lessons on television.

"Thousands of young people every year lose their lives by drowning, and it is such a terrible waste," he said. "Everyone should learn to swim. It is just a matter of gaining confidence."

What is so apparent about him is his own great confidence in his entertaining, confidence in his action painting, and confidence in his audience.

As he quipped on stage: "Don't do anything on impulse unless you have organised it first." Which is exactly how he works.

Amazing sounds

Co-star in the show, Mike Carter was also suffering from a heavy cold, which he claimed he had caught from Rolf.

This was causing Mike some problems because he works his vocal chords hard not only impersonating people, but also imitating sounds.

He can imitate anything from an underground train to Concorde, a steam engine or a high speed train. You name it, he can imitate it to perfection.

Such is his attention to detail that when he is doing one of his aviation impres-

sions you can tell the Rolls-Royce Merlin engine of a Spitfire, the BMW engine of a German aircraft, and the combined Merlins of the four-engined Lancaster.

His impression of a jet airliner taking off has to be heard to be believed, and he does it all without using any aids.

Mike is also a good singer, and when he is not himself, he can range from Gene Pitney to Mario Lanza.

Mike started his showbiz career because his remarkable voice cost him his job. He worked at the Gloster Aircraft factory and one day imitated the work's hooter and some 30,000 workers went home an hour early.

"I had to leave after that and decided to turn my hobby of doing impressions into something worthwhile," he said.

Since then he has carried off some top awards in showbiz, including the National Variety Club's award for the specialist act of the year.

His career was enhanced earlier this year when he astounded everyone with his impressions—when he appeared on Parkinson's TV chat show, and this week Mike is off to Australia to appear with Parkinson there.

In case you have never heard him, you will soon have a chance to hear this man with a remarkable voice, as he will be appearing in the Summer Show on Cleethorpes Pier, where I am sure he will be a great hit.