

Your TV and radio guide

Rolf Harris — more popular than ever

THE Americans think he is as mad — their word for funny — and as baffling as Paul Hogan's hilarious Crocodile Dundee. Britons laugh, too — and gently take the mickey with rousing renditions of "The Me Kangaroo Down, Sport".

Bearded, bespectacled and breathlessly energetic, Rolf Harris, OBE, finds it hard to live down the stereotype Aussie image suggested by his first big hit back in the 1960s.

Despite international acclaim as a singer, songwriter, cartoonist and entertainer, the suspicion remains that there is a bush hat with dangling corks in his closet, that offstage he likes nothing better than a quiet beer down by the billabong, mate.

Who is the real Rolf Harris? First, he is not the oldest 25-year-old in showbusiness; he is 57.

Second, although Rolf was raised in Perth, Western Australia, his parents were immigrants — from Cardiff.

Third, his brief but much-sauntered career in the classroom was a necessity rather than a vocation. "I became a teacher mainly because I didn't know what else to do," Rolf reveals.

"There were many different directions I wanted to go. I never thought cartoon-drawing would be the way into a career in showbusiness — I assumed that it was just the fun side of it.

"My original idea was to become a portrait painter, but the entertainment side took over." That was after he came to England to study art in 1952.

Finally, Rolf is a straightforward, self-contained person.

By NICK COLE

more serious than you might suspect. Perhaps it takes someone basically serious to communicate effectively with children. At any rate, Rolf has also been successful in his work with symphony orchestras to increase youngsters' interest in music.

In addition, he is an accomplished photographer who has exhibited pictures in Britain and abroad and lectured to the prestigious Royal Photographic Society.

He has also written books on travel, cats, composing your own pop songs and art (and exhibited at the Royal Academy).

"Your Cartoon Time", his paperback response to constant requests from children for advice on how to improve their drawings, has run into nine reprints since it was published last June.

It has brought only more requests, however: "I get 30 letters a day from kids and try to answer them all."

With a deceptively tired sigh, Rolf goes on: "I keep saying I've got to ease up, but it doesn't seem to materialise."

In fact, he is exhilarated by his lifestyle and the travel it involves between his home in Berkshire and his native Australia.

He reckons Aussie audiences laugh at the same things as Brits, but likes the stories to relate to them: "They're not terribly happy if you tell jokes about other parts of the world."

Rolf is married to Welsh sculptress Alwen Hughes, whom he met at art school, and they have a daughter, Bindi (23).



ROLF HARRIS with furry friend

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