

# Saturday LIFE



## Dancing for Joy

Riverdance stars say it's great to be paid for doing what you love

- Pages 18 and 19



WEEKEND TV - CENTRE PAGES

OONAGH ARMSTRONG - PAGE 18

# How an Aussie OAP became a youth icon

**H**E MAY be the oldest wobbleboarder in town - but Animal Hospital presenter Rolf Harris has found himself an unexpected niche in the youth market.

The 66-year-old Australian entertainer, famed for his paintbrush skills and didgeridoo technique rather than his hip music, has become a cult figure among university students, performing gigs in front of roaring crowds up and down the country.

And his guest appearances with the Geordie boys of pop, Ant and Dec, have boosted his street cred with a good number of teenage fans.

His popularity has risen further with the success of Animal Hospital, while his latest book True Animal Tales is in the top 10 best-sellers.

He's even got prime slots on both channels over Christmas, with Animal Hospital Goes West on BBC1 on Christmas Day (the programme travels to Los Angeles), and Rolf, a one-hour special on ITV on December 23.

So how has this roving pensioner done it? How has the man who brought us Jake The Peg, Two Little Boys and I've Lost My Mummy cast off his "square" image?

Rolf reckons it all stems from when he re-released his own version of the Led Zeppelin classic Stairway To Heaven three years ago. It reached number seven in the charts.

"It gave youngsters of that university age group permission to actually say they like Rolf Harris be-

By **Hannah Stephenson**,  
PA Features

cause up until then it had been a very square thing to admit.

"All the songs of mine they remembered from their childhood, and all of a sudden here I was doing rock stuff. I came out with an album called Rolf Rules OK and was doing all the standard rock'n'roll gear. All of a sudden I'm not so square after all.

"When I go out and do these university gigs, everybody sings every word of every song, from Tie Me Kangaroo Down and Sun Arise to Jake The Peg and Two Little Boys. It's like a gigantic sing-along at fever pitch.

Isn't there a chance that he's actually being ridiculed by the audience when they join in?

"No, it's all good-natured. It's never vicious and if they tried to be vicious I would treat it as a big laugh and go along with it, mock myself and say 'I couldn't agree with you more'. It defuses any nasty attacks."

He also recorded his own version of Queen's classic hit Bohemian Rhapsody earlier this year and ad-

mits he would like to get back into the pop scene.

"When you get something in Top Of The Pops, it's almost as if your name is put before a whole new group of people who've never heard of you before. And it's like, 'Who is this old bloke doing this wonderful song?'"

"They've never considered you as that sort of person before. They've always thought of you as doing cartoons or doing Animal Hospital or whatever."

In the future, he hopes to record his own version of the smash hit folksy rock song One Hand In My Pocket by Alanis Morissette.

"I've been doing that on these uni' gigs and getting great reaction to it with my own version."

Rolf is probably enjoying more high-profile success now than he has done for some time. The amiable Antipodean has lived in England since the age of 22, when he arrived here from Perth to study art, before breaking into TV as an artist and storyteller and enjoying his first hit in 1960 with Tie Me Kangaroo Down Sport.

★ Rolf Harris presents Animal Hospital Goes West on BBC1 on Christmas Day. His book, True Animal Tales, is published by Century, price £8.99.

