

ALL THE BEST

# JAKE THE PEG

**At 66 Rolf Harris is the only star to have major TV shows on both BBC1 and ITV. GRAHAM YOUNG meets the multi-talented performer.**

**A**GE shows no sign of catching up with Rolf Harris, the ultimate renaissance man. The former champion swimmer is still fighting fit at 66 because he needs to be... The work just never seems to stop flowing in!

Tonight he stars in a one-hour special *Rolf!* (Central, 8pm) and on Christmas Day, his hugely popular *Animal Hospital* is a major highlight of the BBC1 afternoon schedule at 4.50pm.

This show even beat *EastEnders* in the ratings this month and has been voted the best factual entertainment programme in the National Television Awards for two years running, while his latest book, *True Animal Tales*, has been No 1 in *The Sunday Times* bestseller list.

Such is Rolf's continuing appeal that, although his TV special was recorded back in May last year, Carlton were so pleased with it that they've been holding on to it ever since for a special Christmas treat.

And a treat it promises to be for millions of viewers as Rolf turns back the clock to reprise everything from his classic three-legged *Jake The Peg* act to a Russian version of *Tie Me Kangaroo Down*.

He'll also be doing a Wobble Board 'Master Class' with Bradley Walsh, Dannii Minogue, Kathy Staff and June Whitfield, performing Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody* like only he can and playing a duet with didgeridoo player Wallis Buchanan from Jamiroquai.

But the thing many viewers will most enjoy is simply seeing Rolf whip out his giant paint brushes again.

He used to use them to great effect on his shows in the late 60s and early 70s. He did some 78 editions altogether in six different series and Rolf says that even though they were broadcast live he remembers fluffing his paintwork just three times.

"That's not bad, is it?" he says proudly. "And of those three, I remember that only one was a total disaster because I completely ran out of time.

"Everything was live then, so we had to time it just right. When I got it wrong, we had to cut to the music and singing the song and leave everyone standing and thinking: 'I wonder what the hell that's supposed to be?'"

None of the paintings were ever saved, because they were painted on to thin paper stuck with wallpaper glue on to a special frame. The paper ripped easily and, after each show, the painting was scratched off ready for the following week.

This time around, Rolf used a simple

## The Rolf Harris Story

★ Rolf Harris was born on March 30, 1930.

★ He arrived in Britain at the age of 22 with just £297 in savings.

★ He first made his name at the Earls Court rendezvous for homesick Aussies, The Down Under Club.

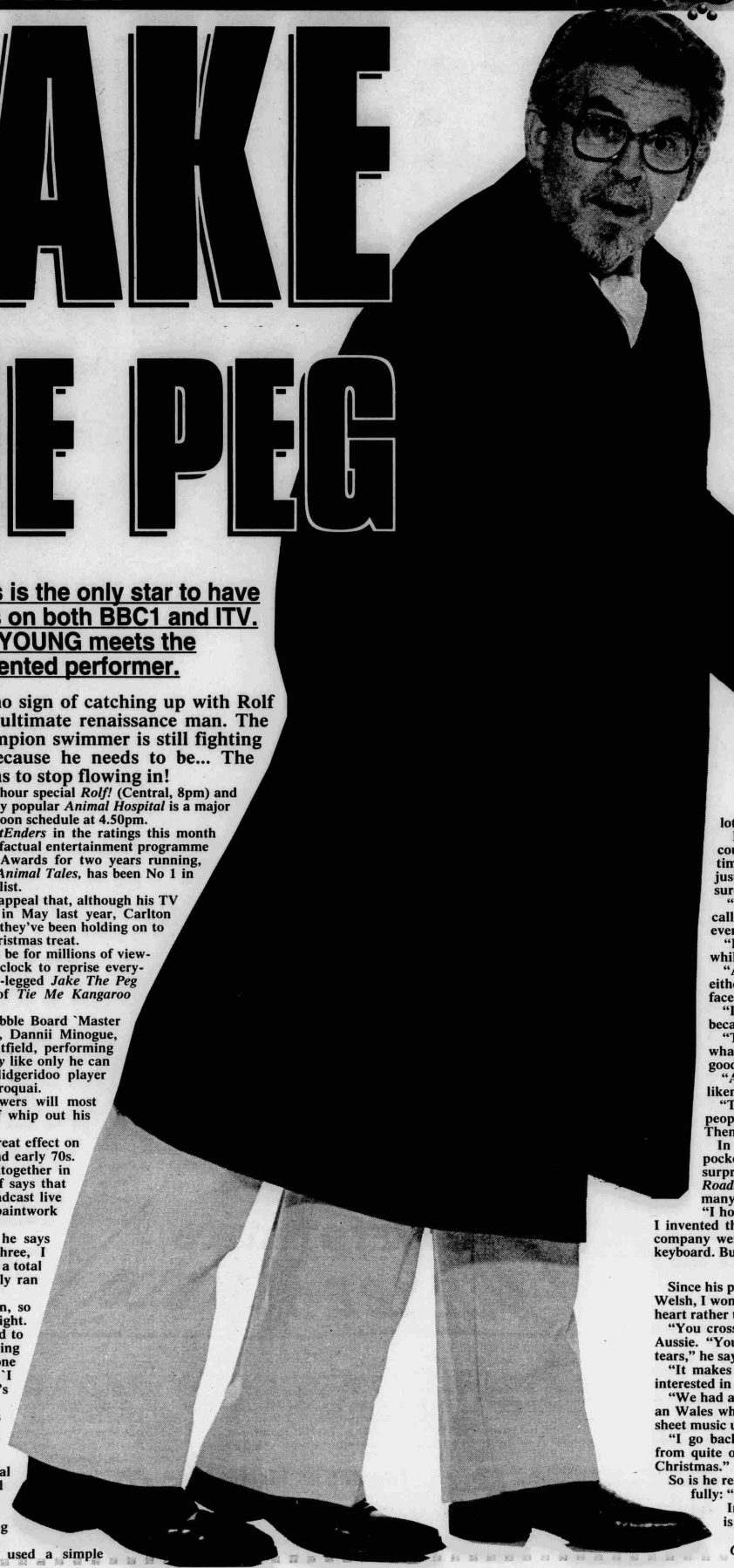
★ His wife Alwen is a sculptress whom he met at art school.

★ They have a daughter Bindi who was born on March 10, 1964. He was voted TV personality of the year in 1972.

★ Rolf appeared in the Royal Variety Performance in 1967, 1978 and 1985.

★ In 1968 he was awarded the MBE and in 1977 the OBE. In 1989, he was made a Member of the Order of Australia in recognition of his "unique talents and services to so many individuals."

★ As well as his many well-known talents, Rolf is also such a good photographer, he was invited to lecture at the Royal Photographic Society.



hardboard frame as his canvas.

"I always use emulsion," he says... "because you know where you stand with it."

"It dries very quickly, there's a lot of colours and you can just get on with it."

Had he ever thought of doing a chat show where he could interview a guest and draw him at the same time? I know *Wogan* had legendary difficulty doing just the one task, but then Rolf is so multi-talented surely he could manage it?

"Well, we did do a pilot once with Roger Whittaker, called *Star Portrait*. I thought it worked, but nobody ever took the idea up.

"But it is really difficult to concentrate on the chat while you are trying to paint someone.

"And women don't like to have their caricature done, either, because the best ones are of people with lopsided faces.

"If you try to draw a woman you are in dead trouble because you are on a hiding to nothing.

"They always expect portrait pictures to be generous whatever happens and that you will make them look good.

"Another thing is that many subjects cannot see any likeness, while everyone goes: 'That's great!'"

"The thing to do is to hold it up in a mirror because people are used to seeing a mirror image of themselves. Then they'll say: 'That's better!'"

In the 70s Rolf was famous, of course, for selling the pocket organ - *The Stylophone*. Since it wouldn't be too surprising to see one of them appearing on *The Antiques Roadshow* before long, I wondered if Rolf knew how many had been sold.

"I honestly don't know," he laughs. "People always think I invented them, but I was merely paid to advertise them. The company went broke after four years because Casio invented a keyboard. But it was the first electronic organ."

### Feel a tingle

Since his parents were from Cardiff and his wife, Alwen, is also Welsh, I wondered if Rolf ever considered himself to be a dragon-heart rather than an Australian.

"You cross that border and feel a tingle," he says in his best Aussie. "You hear the voices, and the choirs, and you are in tears," he says, suddenly sounding genuinely emotional.

"It makes me think about mum and dad... they were always interested in singing.

"We had a piano in the house, because they came from Victorian Wales where you all had your partypiece, and you took your sheet music under your arm wherever you went.

"I go back to Merthyr Tydfil where my grandparents came from quite often and I did a recording with a choir there last Christmas."

So is he really a Welshman in disguise, then? Rolf thinks carefully: "I'm an Australian with deep Welsh roots," he says.

In other words, I tell him to much laughter, the truth is out at last - he's really a Welsh Australian!

● Rolf is currently appearing as Baron Hardup in *Cinderella* at the New Victoria Theatre, Woking.