

# AUDIO: Can you guess who it is yet? Rolf Harris talks X Factor, wobble boards and painting the Queen

**NS** [newsshopper.co.uk/leisure/entertainment/4769910.audio-can-you-guess-who-it-is-yet-rolf-harris-talks-x-factor-wobble-boards-and-painting-the-queen](http://newsshopper.co.uk/leisure/entertainment/4769910.audio-can-you-guess-who-it-is-yet-rolf-harris-talks-x-factor-wobble-boards-and-painting-the-queen)

Matthew Jenkin

December 1, 2009



From didgeridoos to portraits of the Queen, entertainer Rolf Harris speaks to MATTHEW JENKIN about inventing the wobble board and keeping it real.

UNASHAMEDLY munching on a slice of toast and sipping a cup of coffee when I call, the legendary Rolf Harris is instantly loveable.

Best known for his quirky pop songs, paintings and earthy charm, the Australian entertainer who lived in Sydenham for 17 years, has a universal appeal that spans generations.

After settling permanently in the UK in 1962, Rolf was introduced to music producer George Martin, who re-recorded all Harris's songs, and helped him go on to collaborate with the hottest boy band of the time - The Beatles.

Today's pop stars are just as eager to work with the adopted Brit as they were when he first shot to fame in the 1950s and 60s.

He said: "I had Dizzee Rascal saying he would love to work with me doing all my weird sound effects and The Chemical Brothers have agreed to collaborate with me on some songs, but we've never got the time to do it.

"The nice thing is about working with new bands is that it keeps you feeling young."

Despite attention from A-list rappers and pop glitterati, Rolf is returning to his roots with a one-off Christmas concert at Fairfield Halls, Croydon.

The Christmas Cracker show will feature all his old hits, including Tie Me Kangaroo Down Sport and Sun Arise, as well as performances from 1970s crooner Tony Christie and singer songwriter Kiki Dee.

The performer says the industry has changed dramatically since he got his first big break, and not necessarily for the better.

He said: "The big panic about it all is that people are thrust into huge superstardom so instantly.

"On programmes like The X Factor or Britain's Got Talent youngsters are thrust into the limelight and they have to be absolutely brilliant by next week.

"You think to yourself, how do they have time to learn? It's a lottery whether they can come up to scratch in time and learn that rapport with the audience that you need to be a success.

"You have to learn your trade gradually by doing small gigs at first and you go through a sort of apprenticeship."

Unlike recent X Factor nightmares Jedwood, Rolf is in no way lacking talent or entertainment value and can play everything from the piano to the didgeridoo.

But it is because of his small eccentricities and modest shots of brilliance that Rolf has stolen the hearts of the nation.

"It made this wonderful noise and I thought it was marvellous," Rolf says laughing and mimicking the sound of his beloved wobble board.

Made from a piece of hard-board, he created the simple, but instantly recognizable, instrument by accident.

Like a giddy school boy he explained: "I was painting a fellow's portrait and I was fairly broke at the time and couldn't afford a canvas so I was working on a sheet of hardboard.

"The paint wasn't drying and the client was due to arrive in about an hour. It was just awful and I thought how am I going to dry this off?

"So I propped this board just behind a heater I thought, that'll dry it quickly.

"I came back and the board was so hot, I had visions of it catching alight. So I picked it up between the open palms of my hands and just shook it up and down to cool it.

"I did it again and it seemed to have its own rhythm. I had written the song Tie Me Kangaroo Down Sport a few weeks before and it just fitted perfectly. It was amazing."

Having studied at City and Guilds Art School, in Kennington, Rolf initially wanted to follow in his grandfather's footsteps and paint portraits.

In 2005, he was famously commissioned to paint the Queen and although Her Majesty was pleased with the result, some critics were not amused.

Brushing off the controversy surrounding the picture, he says meeting the monarch was an unforgettable experience.

He said: "She was absolutely marvelous and I was as nervous as a kitten beforehand.

"Then she came and she put everybody at ease and was chatting away with me as if we'd been friends forever. It was wonderful."

But most of the Aussie's paintings are not of the rich and famous, but of the beauty in the seemingly ordinary.

Never without his camera, Rolf is constantly capturing the art in every day life and producing paintings and drawings based on the photos he takes.

However, his music is never far away and the two art forms have grown side-by-side with his 50 year career.

At nearly 80 years old, his lasting appeal is a rarity in the fickle world of showbusiness.

So what is the secret to his lasting popularity?

He said: "It is probably because I'm real. I'm a real person and the person you see on the screen or on stage is the same person you see backstage or walking down the street.

"I love people and I've got a great sense of fun. I suppose people respond to that."

In a world saturated by celebrity obsession and manufactured pop stars, perhaps the best advice to those young wannabe superstars comes from a true entertainment great.

Remember to keep it real.

Rolf Harris and Friends' Christmas Cracker. Fairfield Halls, Croydon. December 20. 8pm. 020 8688 9291.