



# Sir Cliff Richard

“Retiring is  
*not* in my  
vocabulary!”

At 81, Sir Cliff Richard has a lifetime of musical hits, film roles and more to reflect on. And he has no plans to stop making them any time soon.

WORDS *by* TIFFANY DUNK



## Interview

**W**hen he was 12 years old, Sir Cliff Richard – then known as Harry Webb – sent a letter to a pen-pal he'd made in Australia. "My ambition is to be a famous singer," he wrote. Decades later that same pen-pal gave him a copy during his first tour of Australia. "I don't remember at that early age wanting to sing," he tells *The Weekly*, "but there it was in black and white. So perhaps I did have that feeling! It wasn't until I was about 15, I think, when I first heard Elvis that the desire grew into something that really overtook me. And I'm very happy that it did!"

As he releases a DVD version of his recent *The Great 80 Tour* which was filmed at the Royal Albert Hall, Sir Cliff reflects on his music, his fans, his faith and his dear friend, Olivia.

### Can you give us a snapshot of your life before music?

I got to England just in time for my eighth birthday [from India, where he'd been raised]. I can remember I first went to school in a place called Carshalton, in Surrey. My grandmother said she would put us up for a while, and she did. Of course for that while, possibly a year or so, I got bullied a bit, but I learned how to fight – it's interesting how you learn to survive.

### When did you first realise that you had made the leap to fame?

I realised that we'd made a pretty good start when, at the age of 17, I found myself in Studio Two at Abbey Road recording a song. It's at that moment that I felt "wow". It wasn't that we'd made it, but we had every chance of making it. I think the precise moment I knew was when that song – *Move It* – got to #2 in the British charts.

### How did your life change from that point?

The first thing that happened was getting a cheque through the post for £60 from EMI. I bought my mum and

dad a TV – you can't buy them for that price now! It was a pretty big, positive change, and of course everything happened so quickly. First recording and suddenly going on tour in 1958. I can never really explain how that feels. I would also go on to buy my family a home and have a car myself ... all amazing.

### At one point in the 1960s you thought about giving up music. What changed your mind?

I became a Christian and had a lot of friends who were church members and were very helpful to me in my pursuit for spirituality. I thought, what can I do for others? I'm just a singer. So, I thought I'm going to get out of show business, and ... perhaps I could teach. The reason I changed my mind was that I realised that I can be an active Christian within the career I've chosen. God gave me a name that has become well known all over the world, and I could make use of that privilege to explain things to people.

### You've always had very passionate fans. Do you have any favourite memories?

In the early '60s I was playing in Edinburgh, Scotland, with The Shadows, and I think on the first night, a big box arrived and was brought to the stage door. At that time security wasn't particularly tight, so no one bothered about what might be in that box. I looked at it and thought, "Oh, my goodness, somebody's sent me a TV set." It really was a big box! I opened it, and nearly died! A girl leapt out and said, "Can you sign my autograph book?" Apparently, her boss knew she was a fan and planned it – put her in a box,

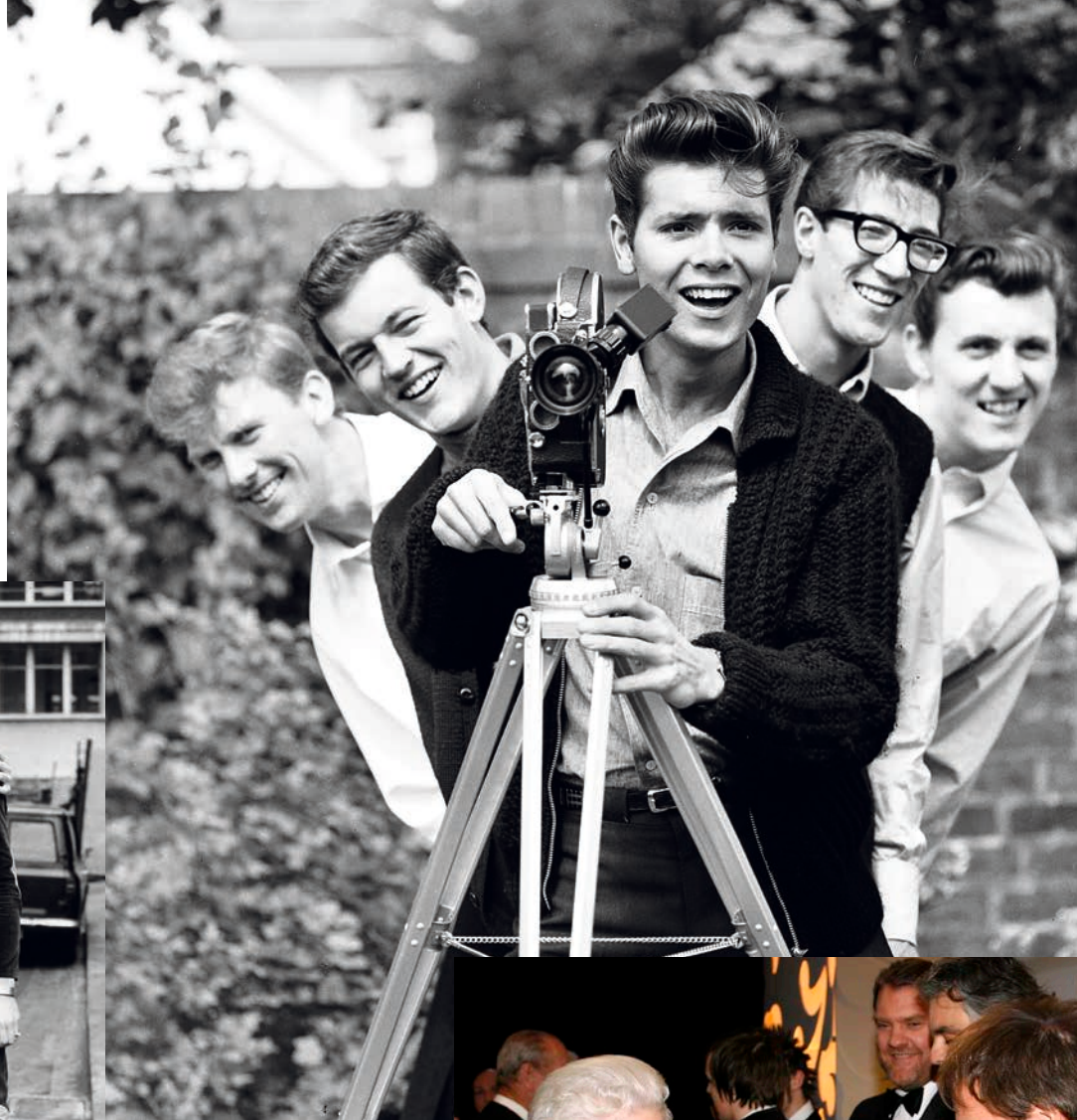
**"It wasn't until I was 15, when I first heard Elvis, that the desire really overtook me."**



delivered it himself and I nearly died of shock. That really was quite a unique thing that hasn't happened again!

### You've performed duets with some of the most amazing musicians in the world. Is there one who particularly stands out to you?

Olivia Newton-John, because we weren't just singers, we are friends. Olivia first came over from Australia with her friend, Pat Carroll, and they were my vocal backing group. I was the first to introduce her on TV with



Clockwise from far left: Cliff rocking out in Sydney in 2010; Cliff first met Olivia when she came on his show as a backing singer, and they are still friends; Cliff & The Shadows in the 1960s; receiving a knighthood from the Queen in 2005 was one of Cliff's greatest achievements.



her song *If Not for You*. She came to do one song, and she stayed for eight shows – I couldn't get rid of her!

### How would you describe your friendship with Olivia?

I can only say that our relationship still lasts. When I talk to her on the phone I always hear, "G'day Cliff, how are ya?" and she's always on an 'up'. She's one of the most stalwart people I have ever met because (as we all

know) she doesn't like referring to her cancer as a battle. She says, "I'm just getting rid of something I don't want." Her strength is absolutely fantastic and should be an inspiration to anyone who's sick in any way. I am so happy that she is a very, very close friend, and we love each other.

### You've toured Australia many times.

Do you have a favourite memory? I always remember something that

the band said to me: "If ever you're asked to perform in Australia and you can't afford to pay us, we will come for free!" When the band and I went to Australia, it was always in those gorgeous summer months of January and February and we enjoyed playing tennis during the day and being on beaches. We had great restaurants to go to and by the time we got to the gig, we were so relaxed and happy that I think it must've showed in our performances.

### Have you plans to retire, or is there more still to come?

Well, I don't know if I ever want to retire. I don't mind stopping. Fortunately, in 2021, I did get to perform *The Great 80 Tour*. I was 80 when I started it, but when I finished, I was 81! Stopping would mean that I could absolutely change my mind any time I wanted to, or phone my

office and say, "Can you get us a couple of nights at the Royal Albert Hall?" So, retiring is not in my vocabulary, but stopping is good for me – I can work whenever I want to, if I want to!

### Which of your achievements are you most proud of?

There are two achievements – both of them I couldn't have expected. The first is receiving the knighthood from the Queen. It wasn't on my radar. Knights and

Lords – those titles were given to businessmen, politicians, actors, but a rock and roll singer? Nah, it couldn't happen. The second one is the Official Charts Record of a Top 5 album in eight consecutive decades. Is anyone else going to be able to do that? I've just got my fingers crossed that my record is not broken in my lifetime! **AWW**

*Cliff Richard: The Great 80 Tour is out on DVD and Blu-Ray on March 9.*