



# ROWLF THE DOG **THE MUPPETS' MUSICAL MUTT**



Rowlf the Dog is a founding member of the Muppets whose faithful presence and piano-playing prowess helped propel the group to international fame. Though his furry, friendly face is less familiar than those of Kermit the Frog and other, more talkative Muppets, Rowlf is generally content with his spot on the bench—the piano bench, that is.

Now, with the release of Disney's *The Muppets*, their first theatrical film in 12 years, the Muppets are poised to sing, dance, and charm their way into the hearts of the world all over again. And Rowlf is right there at the piano, keeping it all in almost-perfect harmony.

Rowlf recently sat down (good boy!) at a Yamaha AvantGrand Hybrid Piano for some publicity photos in advance of Disney's *The Muppets*, and was kind enough to answer a few questions about the upcoming film, his long career, and his future musical plans.

THANKS SO MUCH FOR TAKING THE TIME TO ANSWER A FEW QUESTIONS!

Well, thank you so much for asking. It's been a dog's age since I was asked to do an interview. Usually they want to talk to Kermit, which is fine with me. I stay pretty busy playing piano and chasin' cars.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR NEW MOVIE.

The movie is called Disney's *The Muppets*, and that's what it's about: Muppets. The whole gang of us, back together again thanks to a very loyal Muppet fan named Walter and his best friend Gary, played by a very loyal Muppet fan named Jason Segel.

WHAT PROMPTED YOU TO GET BACK INTO FILM? DID YOU HAVE TO DO ANY SPECIAL PREPARATION FOR YOUR PART?

Why get back into film? Well, let's just say you can only chase so many cars before you want to try something new. So I tried chasing motorcycles, and when that got old, I decided to get back into movies. As for preparation: I play a dog named Rowlf who plays piano. Been prepping for this part since the day I was born.



# YAMAHA



YOU'VE BEEN IN THE PUBLIC EYE FOR DECADES—IN FACT, YOU WERE A TV STAR LONG BEFORE THE MUPPET SHOW. TELL US ABOUT YOUR ROLE ON THE JIMMY DEAN SHOW IN THE EARLY '60S.

Oh, you do have a long memory. Yup, being on that show was great. Jimmy was a great country singer, with a real country sense of humor. Him and me would tell each other stories, make each other laugh, and sometimes even sing together. He even introduced me to Lassie. Nice girl. We dated for a while, but it didn't work out. We still exchange Christmas cards, though.

WAS IT HARD TO GET A PAW-HOLD IN SHOW BUSINESS? HOW DID YOU GET YOUR FIRST BIG BREAK?

Well, I got lucky. When I came up in the business, Hollywood was looking for piano-playing talking dogs, and I fit the bill. Guess I'm just a lucky dog.

NOT MANY DOGS PLAY PIANO PROFESSIONALLY ON YOUR LEVEL. DID YOU TAKE LESSONS AS A PUP?

Thanks for the compliment. Actually, I never took a lesson. I started playing piano by ear...then I figured out that it sounded a lot better if I used my paws.

WHAT ARE YOUR BIGGEST MUSICAL INFLUENCES? WHO OR WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO START PLAYING MUSIC?

Good question. Here, let me rub you behind the ear and give you a treat. A question like that deserves a reward. Now, where were we: oh yes, my musical influences. I listen to a lot of classical music; Poochini is a particular favorite. But I like all kinds of music—honky-tonk, jazz, zydeco, reggae, ska, hip hop and, of course, rock & roll, or as we canines call it, rock & rollover.

HAVE YOU DONE MUCH TOURING OVER THE YEARS? ANY FAVORITE VENUES?

I don't tour much, but anytime I'm on the road, I love to tickle the ivories. So if you go somewhere and hear a piano playing or an elephant laughing, that's probably me. By the way, that "tickle the ivories/elephant laughing" part was a joke; hope you don't mind I use this interview to try out new material.

HAVE YOU EVER THROWN A TELEVISION OUT OF A HOTEL ROOM WINDOW? OR IS THAT SOMETHING ONLY BAD DOGS DO?

I don't do that sort of thing. And frankly, I never met a dog who did...unless, of course, they were playing "fetch-the-hotel-TV."

WHAT ARE YOUR PRE-PERFORMANCE RITUALS BEFORE YOU PLAY A GIG? ANY UNUSUAL ITEMS ON YOUR DRESSING ROOM RIDER?

Before a performance, I like to take a nap. Actually, I've been known to take a nap during a performance. I do a very, very relaxed set. As for dressing room riders: My only request is that I'm allowed to go up on the couch.

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THE PIANO OVER OTHER INSTRUMENTS?

Simple. You get to sit down. I did try the sousaphone once, but dogs just don't have the shoulders for that sort of thing.

**THE** *Disney*  
**MUPPETS**

In Theaters Thanksgiving

YOU'VE COLLABORATED WITH LOTS OF FAMOUS PEOPLE OVER THE YEARS — PEOPLE LIKE KERMIT THE FROG, MISS PIGGY, JULIE ANDREWS, AND WEEZER. WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR FAVORITE EXPERIENCES WORKING WITH OTHER ARTISTS?

I've enjoyed sharing the stage with all the great stars the Muppets have worked with—but my favorite ones are the piano players: Elton John, Liberace, and Victor Borge. They may not have been dogs, but they sure knew how to play.

Oh, and on that note (piano pun intended): I gotta mention that our co-star in *The Muppets*, Jason Segel, is a fine piano player. During the movie, we jammed together between takes. Boogie-woogie! Jason plays a mean boogie, and my woogie is still wagging, even if I say so myself.

ONE OF YOUR CLOSEST COLLABORATORS WAS THE LATE, GREAT JIM HENSON. WHAT DO YOU MISS MOST ABOUT HIM?

Jim was a part of me. He made me who I am today and I miss him every single day. I smile thinking about the times we spent together, and I got a good feeling he's still smiling 'cause me and the other Muppets are carrying on what he started.

YOU AND JIM RECORDED AN ALBUM A WHILE AGO CALLED *OL' BROWN EARS IS BACK*. ANY PLANS FOR ANOTHER RECORD ANYTIME SOON?

Thanks for the album plug. You get another treat and another rub behind the ears. Keep this up and I'm gonna have to buy you a toy. As for another album: hey, I'm ready to go in the studio anytime...as long as it's not when I'm taking walkies.

FOR THE PAST 15 YEARS YOUR PRIMARY CREATIVE PARTNER HAS BEEN BILL BARRETTA. WHAT MAKES HIM SO FUN TO WORK WITH?

Bill Barretta? That name sure is familiar, but I can't quite place him...Oh, wait a second, is that the fellow who gives me a lift now and then? Sure! Great guy—funny, creative, and I can beat him at cards. What's not to like?

WHAT KINDS OF THINGS CAN YOU EXPRESS THROUGH YOUR MUSIC THAT YOU CAN'T COMMUNICATE IN ANY OTHER WAY?

Well, if I play the really high keys, I can communicate so only other dogs can hear it...but I don't think that's what you're talking about, is it? Hey, there's something about music that touches the heart of everyone, whether you're a human being or a dog. Music soothes the savage beast...and that goes for mutts, too.

HAVE YOU EVER WRITTEN ANY SONGS ABOUT SQUIRRELS? I'M SURE A LOT OF OTHER DOGS WOULD REALLY LIKE TO HEAR THAT KIND OF MUSIC!

Squirrel songs? That's a nutty idea....Heheh, a bit of dog/squirrel humor there. It's a fine idea. After we're done here, let's you and I sit down at the keyboard and see what we can come up with.

ONCE YOU'VE FINISHED ALL THE PRESS FOR THIS MOVIE AND LIFE GETS BACK TO NORMAL AFTER THE PREMIERE, WHAT'S NEXT ON YOUR CREATIVE AGENDA?

Fetching, walkies, more car chasing...and you and me writing squirrel songs. It's a dog's life—and that's the way I like it. By the way, besides "pearl" and "hurl," what else rhymes with "squirrel?"

