

'Fol-De-Rol' Aims For TV's Prime Audience

By CHARLES WITBECK

HOLLYWOOD — Strolling through Los Angeles' renaissance Faire last spring, puppeteer Sid Krofft and beaming Australian Digby Wolfe were taken by the gay, cheerful crowd having a lark in the meadow. The colorful medieval atmosphere loosened tongues and struck a note of empathy with the locals, suggesting a show with a 16th-century Faire background, something the Disney people have overlooked.

Sid and Marty Krofft and Wolfe became carried away by the idea, to the tune of an estimated half-million, and their baby, "Fol-De-Rol," a pilot for a possible prime-time family series, makes its debut Monday on ABC (8 p.m. on Channels 12 and 22) with sportscaster Howard Cosell, Totie Fields, Mickey Rooney, Rick Nelson, Yma Sumac, Cyd Charisse and Ann Southern, all rigged out in Ye Olde English garb.

THE KROFFT brothers are

known around town as saviors to the local midget colony, using them for puppets in their various shows. In "Fol-De-Rol," the midgets are in abundance again, but the main roles go to the fully grown. Howard Cosell chats on as the Storyteller; Micky Rooney and Totie Fields play Punch and Judy; Guy Marks, as the Baron, has a demolition derby with other knights; Cyd Charisse plays a dancing butterfly; Yma Sumac hits those high notes as a sun goddess, and plump Ann Southern calmly takes it all in playing the Queen.

With "Fol-De-Rol," the Kroffts hope to at last break the ice and crack the night-time barrier for a children's show, instead of being limited to the Saturday morning schedule with "H.R. Pufnstuf," "The Bugaloos" and "Lidsville."

"Listen, 'Pufnstuf' goes on in England Saturday nights at 6:45 p.m.," says Marty Krofft. "Adults and kids

dig it. Now, people in Britain are not crazy, and they might be a little ahead of us. I think that is a clue. We could do very well in a prime-time slot."

IN CASTING their Renaissance characters, the producers aimed for performers not seen every week on the tube, and their offers were snapped up by the likes of Totie Fields and Ann Southern, who wouldn't mind working weekly in such a format.

Howard Cosell, the sports grammarian, sensed a good thing in the Storyteller, enlarging his field, besides being ham enough to go for the costume piece. Then, the signing of Yma Sumac, lady of the fabled high notes, turned out to be a stroke of luck. The day before Thanksgiving, Sid Krofft's gardener mentioned that Miss Sumac would be visiting the next day, and the producer fell over himself to meet the singer and ask her to do the show.



FRIVOLITY ON 'FOL-DE-ROL'
Mickey Rooney (L), Howard Cosell

"What we have is basically a variety show held out in a meadow," says Sid Krofft, "and we can go into town if we like, or follow various characters about."