

Fringe dwellers move to centre stage



Richard Fidler (left) and Tim Ferguson. Paul McDermott, they say, has chosen to appear as a potted plant seated between them. Picture: ALAN PRYKE

By BERWYN LEWIS

YOU don't have to be mad to like The Doug Anthony Allstars, but it's a definite advantage.

It also helps if you're not sensitive to jokes at the expense of Elvis Presley, Hare Krishnas, communism, fascism, Stalinism and Christianity.

Almost unheard of in its native country, this Australian team of comics and musicians begins a national tour in Sydney in December.

The Allstars are the only Australian act to be nominated for the Perrier Award for the best of the Edinburgh Fringe festival. Their outrageous humour has won them raves from audiences at fringe festivals. In the United States, Canada and England, audiences were turned away at sell-out seasons.

Banned by the BBC, they make regular appearances on dozens of British television shows and they recently picked up The Pick of The Fringe Club award in Edinburgh for the second year running.

Bearing no connection to the former deputy prime minister and leader of the National Party, the Doug Anthony Allstars — Tim Ferguson, 24, Richard Fidler, 23, and Paul McDermott, 24, began performing magic shows at

the age of eight when they met at a school for the children of personnel in the department of trade and foreign affairs posted overseas.

Named after their manager, Doug Anthony, the Allstars say they picked up their theatrical sense of humour on the streets.

Their militaristic look on stage has led people to call their costumes uniforms. They feature Australian Air Force bomber jackets, medals, skulls and oven-shrunk Twistie Packets and are draped in bits of metal, bullets and giant belt buckles. Specialising in abusing each other on stage, and "trashing 1970s songs" the team bounces its smallest member, Paul, around the stage and every night they kick, bite and hit each other.

Most of the Allstars' material is based on images from Christianity, fascism, Stalinism, communism and Hare Krishnas.

One of their songs, I've Got a Krishna Riding Shotgun on the Stagecoach of My Life, is about an Irish Hare Krishna hill tribe which the group met in an ashram outside Dublin. It led to their ban by the BBC when they sang live on air "when Irish eyes are trying to make the Pommies pay, we get Krishna and his shotgun to join the IRA".