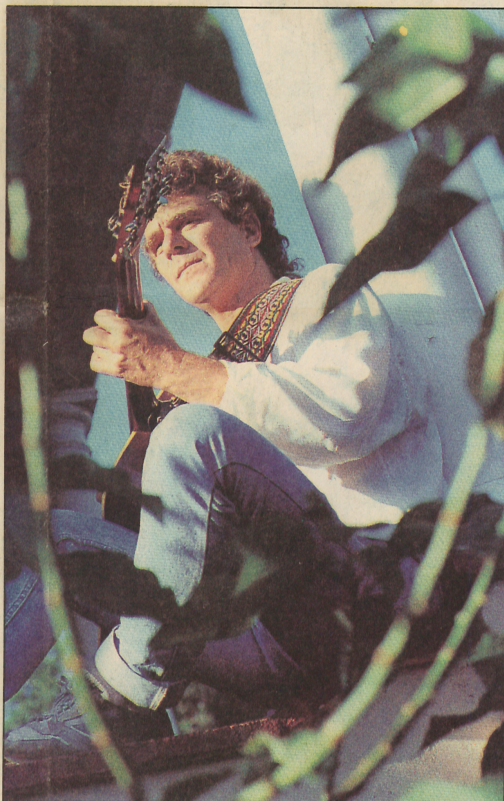


AT HOME WITH ...

DAVE MARKS

Gentle giant of music



HAVE YOU

Musical comedy in the old SA

NOT much convivial conversation has been conducted the last few weeks without the election cropping up somewhere along the line.

The whos and whys and wherefores of who is voting for who and why have been quite a little talking point (and we don't need to wonder why!) So with everyone so awfully excited – and in some cases so dreadfully perturbed – about the future of this emerging new South Africa, it is no wonder that the past hardly gets a mention.

For very obvious reasons most of us are so busy looking forward that there is no need to look back. But how easily we all forget the petty policies of the past that have brought us to the present.

I was reminded of some of them this week when interviewing Durban's Mr Music David Marks (he of 3rd Ear Music and Splashy Fen) and was rather shocked to realise that the ridiculous wars he fought with the authorities happened just a decade ago.

He spoke, among other injustices, about the days when audiences of mixed race were prohibited by law. So when bands like the Flames and Freedom's Children played at the Durban City

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Anyone caught selling the sinful piece of plastic called *The Road is Much Longer* would be slapped with a R10 000 fine or 10 years in jail.

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Songwriter, sound engineer, "alternative" record company director, co-organiser of Splashy Fen Music Festival... for more than 30 years David Marks has been a tireless crusader for homegrown music. With just days to go before the music goes to the mountains, **DEBBIE REYNOLDS** and photographer **ROB GREAVES** caught up with him at his Morningside home

DAVID is sitting on the verandah, Splashy Fen literature scattered around him. His wife Fran is making tea and the kids have just got back from school.

It's easy to see why he has so often been referred to as the "gentle giant of the South African music world". He has that rare quality of quiet determination which, coupled with a persistent passion, means this is one *oke* who just never gives up.

Born in Cape Town 50 years ago, he started life in the infamous District Six and then did the rounds of schools in the Transvaal where he did the "traditional" white South African things like being a first drum major in the cadet band and playing first team rugby.

But his "alternative" heart was just a beat away. "I think the first time I knew I wanted to be a musician was when I was about eight and I heard the penny whistle for the first time."

But before music consumed his life he went off to work on the mines as a learner official. In his spare time he frequented folk clubs where he heard, and was overwhelmed by, the likes of Ian Lawrence and Des Lindberg making music "with one guitar and no microphone."

It was then that he started writing songs, achieving his first success with *Mountains of Men* in 1965 which climbed to number 17 on the LM Radio charts.

Two years later he left the mines and came to Durban to play at the recently-opened

Four Seasons hotel. It was a move which changed his life because it was then that he met the Four Jacks and a Jill and penned the international chart-topping hit *Master Jack*.

Frustrated by the lack of infrastructure for local artists to write and perform their own songs, David was doing sound as an alternative. He moved to the United States in '69, working on concerts with music greats John Lennon, Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis. He was also involved in that epic of music history, Woodstock.

Back in South Africa in the early '70s, he identified the huge gap in the sound market and started the first in a series of music festivals, soon to become the Free Peoples C o n c e r t s, staged at Wits University, which won wide acclaim.

Under the banner of the newly established 3rd Ear Music – and against all the odds, because multiracial audiences were not tolerated

back in those dark ages – David began to expose South African audiences to "indigenous" talent.

It was a brave stand that had him grappling with the Security Police on numerous occasions. In 1976 the Free Peoples Concert was stopped by the Department of Education because "non-whites had been allowed and even invited to attend and according to Government policy mixed gatherings of any kind are not encouraged as a rule".

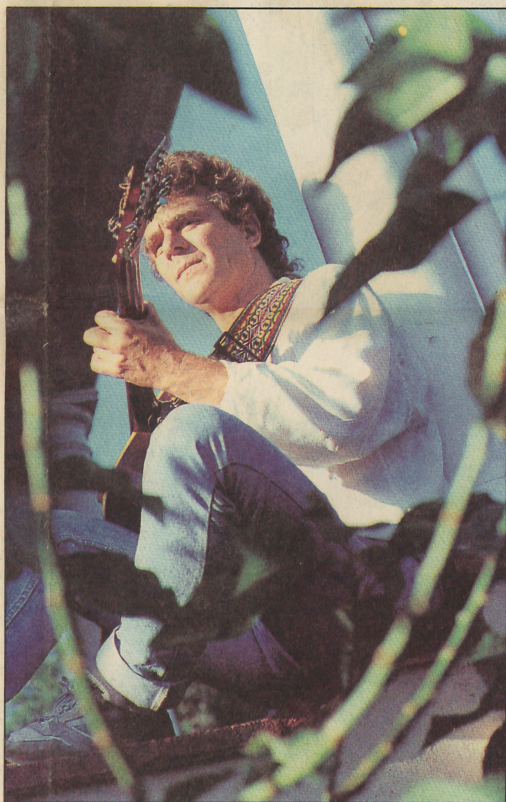
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FACT FILE

BORN: 12 February 1944
FAMILY: Married to Fran with four children
FAVOURITE FOOD: Anything Fran cooks
FAVOURITE RESTAURANT: Jam & Sons
FAVOURITE MUSIC: Bob Dylan, John Oakley Smith
FAVOURITE MOVIE: Anything with Charlie Chaplin
FAVOURITE TV PROGRAMME: The News

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"I never considered myself a political animal but I did get politicised while on the mines. I suppose because I came into contact there with people who were not white and (heaven forbid!) made friends with them. The perception was that I was a

radical and an agitator but my only intention was to give local artists of all races a platform to perform."

Next on David's varied career path came stints running music venues in Johannesburg, including the Market Cafe and the Chelsea Underground Theatre, before he decided to settle his family in Durban.

"My focus then was to keep 3rd Ear Music going, build my music library and create the infrastructure necessary for music in Durban," he says. "It's quite ridiculous that 78% of SA music comes from Natal yet we only have two recording studios as opposed to more than 300 in Johannesburg."

And then around five years ago Splashy Fen was born as an outlet for artists - most of whom will never have a

chance to record - to perform original material.

With David and his co-organisers Bart Fokkens and Peter Ferraz at the helm, the attendance at the five-day music festival has grown to around 5 000. And this year's festival, from April 28 to May 2, is expected to draw even larger crowds, not only because music is great. Shawn Phillips will be performing but because of the election.

"People have asked how we can hold a music festival at such a crucial stage in our country's history but we see it as a celebration - the celebration of a new nation."

And because David has aspired - and contributed - to the dream of that new nation for so long there is absolutely no doubt he will be partying up a storm in the Drakensberg next week.

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LEISURE EDITOR

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He spoke, among other injustices, about the days when audiences of mixed race were prohibited by law. So when bands like the Flames and Freedom's Children played at the Durban City

Hall there had to be one show for "coloured people" and another show for white people.

Even more outrageous was that white and "coloured" musicians in the same band were not permitted to play on stage together. The way around that one, explained David, was for the "coloured" musicians to play behind a curtain when they were entertaining a white audience. And when the audience was "coloured", well of course, the white musicians hid behind the curtain.

"The continual harassment by the long arm of the law certainly made us inventive," chuckled David, recounting the time a young Johnny Clegg (white) and Sipho Mchunu (black) performed together. Because The Law had threatened to pay a little courtesy call, the plan was this.

Johnny and Sipho would go on stage but next to Sipho - available at all times - would be a bucket and mop. When The Law arrived (and the spies were always in place to give ample warning) Sipho would grab his equipment and furiously start mopping the stage. "A black man and a white man performing together? What are you on about, officer? Yes, the white man is singing but isn't it perfectly obvious even to a total idiot that the black man is just cleaning up!"

It's been a long road ...

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"Although the record is not very clear and the words of the songs are often drowned by the music,

the committee is of the opinion that seven of the eleven songs are harmless. The other four are definitely dangerous for the safety of the State and create a climate of protest against the Police and the present order of the State."

... The song *You Only Need Say Nothing* is equally dangerous in that the Police are again shown in a very bad light. A climate of grievance and protest is being built up and especially as the words are accompanied with the beat of African rhythm to enhance the impact of the words, the song can incite people towards insurgency. . . .

So when you're raving on down at one or other of the Election parties happening around town next weekend beware "that beat of African rhythm". It might just incite you to have a good time.

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