

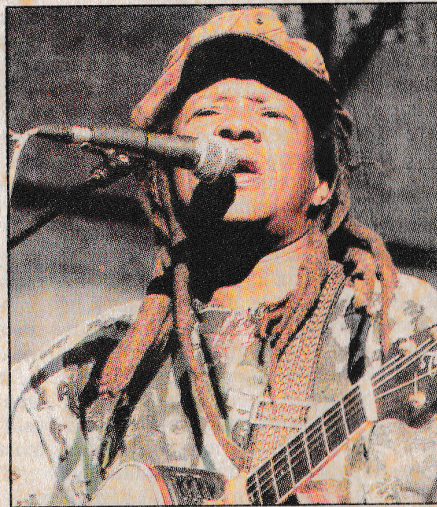
Death of popular musician Mike Smith

GRANT ERSKINE

POPULAR and colourful Durban musician Mike Smith, 50, died on Friday after a short illness.

Mike had been an integral part of the local music scene for decades. Audiences will remember the ease with which he could hold a crowd spellbound, whether it was five people around a campfire at Splashy Fen or on stage in front of thousands of fans. If you weren't a fan at the start of his set you were by the end. His music was both infectious and deep, just like the man himself.

Always humble, he greeted everyone with a warm, sincere smile. Mike was passionate about music, it consumed him, but in a positive way. Steve Fataar relates a tale that illustrates this. "We (The Flames) had just come back from the States and were doing a gig at the



Himalaya Hotel and Mike and his band the Puppets were opening for us.

"So he gets up on stage and with typical enthusiasm plays perfect covers of all the songs off our latest album, exactly

■ The late Mike Smith, one of Durban's most popular and colourful musicians

what we were going to do in our set. Mike never did it to show us up or for any other malicious reason, it was just that he had such admiration for Blondie's singing style that to him it was a mark of

respect. We laughed about that evening for years afterwards."

Steve said he saw Mike a few days before he died. "In typical Mike style he said 'You know Steve, it feels like there are two of me, one wants to go and the other wants to stay.'"

Mike was born in Swaziland and grew up in South Africa. Most of his younger days were spent jumping trains in search of adventure.

One such journey was supposed to end in Johannesburg, but Mike discovered too late that he was actually in Namibia and this is where he got off. Out of that experience came one of his most beautiful songs, *Namibia*.

A celebration of Mike Smith will be held next Saturday at The Tusk Inn in Rossburgh to raise money for funeral expenses. Entrance is R20, music starts mid-afternoon and 17 top local acts will celebrate a very special soul. He is survived by three children.