

1979. Dave Marks is fighting windmills again. He's recording **another** local musician with a 0,1% chance of airtime and a 99,9% chance of a banning order.

Marks is a raving lunatic. How does he expect to go on, year after year, promoting the likes of Amagugu S'Manje and Roger Lucey. Get real! Third Ear Music has one more year, max. Marks has destroyed himself. You can't take on the industry like that, you can't get political and say rude things to the SABC and expect to live. Like the rest of us, Dave Marks will have to take on international labels to survive...

Two decades ago the articulators of these opinions, basically everyone in the industry except for local musicians themselves who regarded Dave Marks as the conscience of the whole greasy show, expressed this view quietly, like they were scared of unleashing a banshee if they scoffed to his face; they demonised him behind his back because they couldn't understand him. *Dotty Dave. Mad Marx.*

I met him and couldn't understand the fuss, nor could he. Here was this private, likeable man in specs who spoke like a witty hippy and who seriously had no big beliefs about saving the world through his actions. He explained his approach to recording thus: 'I believe if it moves, record it.' A refreshing, rational approach, in an industry so swayed by hype, trends and dogma that you could miss the plot if you were off sick for a week. I thought he was cool.

If you're older and brighter than me you'd have figured out way before the late '70s just why the industry was so in awe of Dave Marks. It wasn't so much his sharp tongue, but rather his sharp pen. Marks, as it turns out, had Undeniable Skills.

He was the bloke who penned 'Master Jack' in '67. I knew the song, of course, who didn't? I just didn't know (a) that it was about Verwoerd and (b) that Dave Marks had written what went on to become South Africa's biggest ever international single (and might well still be). And (b) is why the industry feared Marks.

Before that there was 'Mountains of Men'. As a kid this song (the version sung by Des Lindberg and Ian Lawrence) was probably right up there on my personal Top 5, alongside Jeremy Taylor's 'Northern Side of Town', Jeremy Taylor's 'Hennie von Saracen', Jeremy Taylor's 'Confession' and Jeremy Taylor's 'Lift Girl's Lament'.

So how come Dave Mark's name didn't register until he drew attention to himself as the most eccentric producer in town? Was I particularly stupid or was this the way it was supposed to be?

Maybe it has to do with how he sees himself, how he projects himself: part of the scene, a contributor. In his words in the love song on this album, "*just a messenger in this harmony of sound.*"

What's really awesome about Dave Marks, I discovered in the late '70s, is that he's so humble about his achievements.

He's worked with **everyone**, but to him they aren't 'artists'. They're people with names and stories to tell. Dave feels for them because most of them were considered a threat to the state and never got to tell their stories. He's started gathering them together for 'The Hidden Years' compilations, of which this one is the first and probably the most special because here Dave Marks gets to sing his own compositions with help from the people he's spent the last 30 years helping, in turn, to be heard. You'll find them all here, some famous, some notorious, styles that should clash but don't: Hugh and Edi and Godfrey and Simba and Roger and Joseph and Madonsini and Joe and Alan and Eckie and Vusi and Jennifer and Aaron and Pedro and Ray and Nico and Manfred and Johnny. And the family. Aaaaaand...Evita.

Dave Marks had no pretensions about music. "*A record isn't art, it's a memento,*" he once said.

I'm glad he said it, so I can use it now. This first volume of 'The Hidden Years' isn't art, it's a memento. It's a living souvenir, a joyous journey through influences, sound and rhythms, political and musical history, growth of consciousness and humour (and seedy decline of the same, at times). It's subjective, sad and funny. You'll hear searing guitar solos reminiscent of the Abstract Truth era, you'll remember the days when Dave Marks played Malombo to white audiences behind curtains, you'll hear 'ho-hums' a la Johnny Clegg, snippets of Hugh's unmistakable horn, the Salvation Army brass, country, rap, a love ballad. You'll find yourself in a warm jazz jam and listening to unexpected sounds from plumbers' pipes. It's all here, an abridged autobiography which is, like Marks himself, candid and surprising.

Who else but Dave Marks would come up with a blues version of *Sarie Marie*, for Chrissake?

There are two things left to say:

1. Comrade Dave survived, so did Third Ear. Most of the doubting Thomases didn't.
2. I never knew he could sing. It's an earthy voice, untrained and slightly untamed. But like its owner, kinda sexy and ever so cool.

Muff Andersson

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