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David Marks, the brain behind the Market Cafe, is also a talented composer (remember "Master Jack"?), a top-rate sound engineer, and he's in the music publishing business as well. He is appearing currently in "Words and Music by Bob Dylan" at the Market Upstairs. TERRY BARON reports.

Go down a gold mine . . . into the cage and down to 46 Level. Then crawl into one of the stopes where the drills are pounding and dust raises a fierce red and yellow in the headlights thrown by sweating miners and you'll be as close to man's concept of hell as you'll ever be.

The noise is indescribable. The men are struggling to bring gold from the depths — so that it can be buried again in the depths of Fort Knox.

It's a weird place for a muse to come and sit on your shoulder, and, even if she did, you'd have to have an exceptional ear to have an exceptional ear to make sense of what she was saying.

And yet that's exactly how "Master Jack," South Africa's best known pop song, happened. Dave Marks was a learner official a few thousand metres underground at St Helena when the drills, the stone and the miners' curses suddenly melded into music.

In 1968 "Master Jack" stayed at the top of the South African charts longer than ANY previous song. It took eighth spot on the USA Billboard and was number one in Denmark, Germany and Australia.

It got translated into 10 languages. It was the biggest thing that has happened, before or since, to any South African songwriter.

To run around the hellish din of 46 Level, scrawling words on jagged rock is about as difficult a way of writing a hit song as you'll find — but Dave seems to operate that way. When things happen plain, straight, NORMALLY it surprises everyone around him.

Once, a few years ago . . . I'd dropped in from Durban. Dave was erecting sound for a jazz festival at Orlando Stadium. We had a rented truck with heaps of gear in it and we were going to collect the speakers at the stadium.

## Getting to music's roots



● DAVE MARKS: sound became a song.

The problem was that the speakers weren't at Orlando where they were supposed to be. Somehow somebody had snaffled them to Jabulani and when we got there a good 10 000 people were busy with a religious festival.

White people feel ill at ease in Soweto at the best of times, but I was downright scared. "These guys are not going to like this one little bit," I thought. "They might be religious people but they're not going to like it when two white guys come busting in and saying 'Can

we have our speakers please?'"

If Dave was worried he never let on. We drove around, through hundreds of people, until we found someone Dave knew. I was to find out later that Dave knows people everywhere but at the time I could hardly believe the scene as a score of robed people took time off their festival to help us load the giant speakers into the truck.

And it goes like that for Dave just about all of the time. Says his close friend McCallum: "I think the thing with Dave is that he won't try anything if it looks easy. With Dave there've got to be 20 obstacles before he reckons it's worth doing."

He's been in music since he graduated from sergeant bugler in the Witbank Technical High band to a rock group called "The Boys." He's done the roadie rout in America where he mixed for John Lennon, worked with the Stones, Three Dog Night and picked up what he could learn from such greats as Bob Dylan, The Band, The Byrds, Joe Cocker, Hoyt Axton. Most of his friends agree he has genius. But when word gets round of the latest calamity to have befallen him most just shake their heads and say, "That guy, it's amazing that he just keeps going."

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And calamities hit Dave more than they hit most people. He was a driving force behind the Troubador... and that folded. The Free People's Concert were a must for all music freaks until the police stepped in because they didn't like a newspaper picture of a mixed couple holding hands.

He started the Ox Box and it folded. Came the Market Cafe and one of the first news stories out of there was that thieves had stolen a few thousand rands worth of equipment from Johannesburg's newest music venue. Now Dave has to pull out of the Market Cafe because it's costing him more than he's making.

Just before the opening of the Bob Dylan show at the Market, where Dave stars as bass guitarist, vocalist and on harmonica, he took off from rehearsals at Sydenham to unload a van full of equipment.

It was a borrowed van and the guy who lent it to him had probably been driving it for years. But, at the first red light Dave stops at, a traffic cop riding behind him almost brains himself because the van has no brakelights. Naturally the cop throws the book at Dave and his friends shake their heads.

"man, when will it ever stop?"  
But come right out with it, ask Dave where his bad luck comes from and you'll get a look midway between astounded and perplexed.

Mac McCallum speaks first: "He takes more risks than most people. He's living on the edge and things are bound to go wrong sometimes."

"It's crazy," says Dave. "People think it's bad luck because the things I've gone into haven't made any money. They don't realise that I've been doing things, getting into what I want to do. They just look at the money angle."

He doesn't have too much money now but there was a time when R20 000 came in from "Master Jack." It's gone now and Dave doesn't like to talk about what he did with it.

He gave money to his parents. He has a letter thanking him for being the biggest private donor to the Limehill resettlement fund — they still get all the royalties from his "Hey Mister."

He bought a car and the rest of the money went on equipment (he has hundreds of thousands of metres of taped South Africana).

Now he has fingers in all sorts of pies, the main one being Third Ear Music. He's widely regarded as the best sounds engineer in the country and he does work for Rod McKuen but Third Ear is as big a love to him as wife Fran, daughter Lisha and son Dylan.

"I've had accountant guys say to me 'Do yourself a favour and declare that company out of business.' But I can't do that. It's not just a company I need money to do a lot of things I want to do — but I hope we'll get it by doing the things we dig, pushing the things we dig."

Music is what Dave digs more than anything. His ear found it down a gold mine and is still finding it everywhere.

"On Van Reenen Pass they've got crickets," he tells you. "I stop there everytime and... I swear... you walk into the veld and they sound like crickets. You walk back to the road and they start sounding like trucks and cars. The city's getting to them too."

He gets impatient with "music as history" and has a lucid explanation: "Beethoven was a great guy. Pure. But when he was working there were no aeroplanes, no oil on the beaches and gas in the air. He's history now and that's why you get some orchestra musicians going crazy... the guys who end up playing violin in their cupboards. They get tired of pushing their esoteric thing."

In South Africa — "where it used to be a sin to sing unless it was a hymn" — the problem is worse. Dave maintains that music should be close to humour and finds that commodity lacking here.

"It's our biggest problem. Music is for dancing. It's roots. We've got to get the joy back into music."

The ordinary South African pop scene is not for him either. Hit him with "What do you think of Rabbit" and he'll give you this honest answer: "They don't make me think."

"They're great on the pop scene. I know Trevor Rabin from the days of Conglomerate and he's a complete musician. But right now they're doing business. I think they're great but they're not for me."

Right now he's working — in among everything else — on an album tentatively titled "When Jeppe was a Two-Way Street."

He's a perfectionist and still not entirely happy with some songs he started writing in 1968 but he's making music which is the only thing he wants to do.

"It's funny," he says. "We've got guys in this country and you talk to them of modern music and they say 'It's a communist plot to take over our minds.'"

He thinks, shrugs: "Maybe they're right. It's changed me... and I'm really grateful for what it's done. I'm a different guy to what I was."