

Michael Green

“... everything, especially art, is political”



Michael Green grew up in Natal and studied for his BA degree at Durban University, after which he attained Honours in English. He worked as a stoker on the railways to pay his way through university, and was eventually awarded a scholarship to Stanford University in California. On his return from America, he met Roger Lucey. They played together for a time at the Folk Club, but were both outsiders, because they were so lyric-oriented. Michael tends to use a guitar, not play it, and insists on the song-lyric as being very different from poetry. At present he lectures in the English Department at RAU. *Wits Student* discovered his work in a personal interview.

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Q: Owing to the fact that your songs are so political, they obviously have a purpose far wider than a surely personal one.
A: Most definitely. I believe everything is political, and anyone who claims he is non-political is being co-opted into the mainstream of the status

quo. As I said, everything, especially art, is political. I try to be conscious of that, and to make people aware of it.

Q: Your singing style appears to be very similar to that of Bob Dylan. Has he had a great influence upon your music?

A: The first song I ever played was a Bob Dylan number. I also saw Dylan in concert in America, and he has obviously influenced me to a certain extent. But the music I have in my head has far wider influences, including reggae and some elements of New Wave. However, what I'm trying to establish is my own unique style, and that is one which is essentially South African.

Q: I believe you're bringing out an album shortly. Can you comment on it?

A: I'm working on bringing out my first album quite soon, which will be produced by Dave Marks. For me it's so exciting, because I'm fleshing out the music with a group. I'm quite limited doing solo acts at the moment, because much of the music I write has to be perform-

ed with a group. People who have heard the tapes have not compared me to Dylan, which I'm very relieved about. The album will be a very individual sound. I'll be supported by a black group 'Varekweri', and black female vocalists, as well as Kenny Henson, whose contribution to the album has been enormous. The album will be very South African oriented.

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Q: How does your music fit into the contemporary South African music scene?

A: The South African music industry finds it easy to exploit overseas music. In spite of this, I think a local music industry is beginning to develop. I for one experience great problems in writing music in the South African situation. I find there is a void between my westernization and the culture of black Africa. I write about this void and, in so doing, try to work my way through it. Another problem is to write about the problems and issues which are here and which do exist, although many people try to ignore them, without sounding trite.

Q: What has been the public reaction to your music?

A: People have told me that I'm writing about concerns of theirs, which is precisely what I'm trying to do. Some people are bothered by the fact that my music is aggressive, but very often I feel frustrated and aggressive, and I have to express these feelings.

Q: Why do you use music specifically as the means of communicating your ideas and feelings?

A: Music is such an important and integral part of my life. I have written some prose and poetry, but the advantage music has is that it is such an immediate medium. Performing is immediate.

Q: Do you feel at all compromised by having to work within the system?

A: When I was overseas, I could have stayed there, but I knew I had to come back to South Africa. The involvement with the system, which no one in South Africa can avoid, at the same time gives one the right to write about the system.



White Boys

Now some boys get their kicks in hiding from the
boredom of a better deal
And some boys take their kicks in silence,
pretending they don't feel;
And some boys are born to a name and a place
in life's sweet and simple joys,
While other boys just know they're black and they're nowhere
and you don't call a white boy "boy"

CHORUS: Hey, white boy, oh-ohoh (X3)

Now the word's out in the suburbs and the word's
out in the townships
Black boy can grow up to be a man too,
between his factory and garden shifts;
So mother's telling young whitey to go on out and get a
good education
Because the talking-head on the T.V. tells her every night
that her middle class is black boy's new temptation

(repeat Chorus)

Now there's poor whites and there's poor blacks
all trying to reach a better situation,
But it's not quite the same when any progress you make is
officially designated "rising black expectations;"
And it's not easy for white boy either, with his back
under his white man's burden,
But he's too scared to put it down because the justification
for his existence would no longer be certain . . .

(repeat Chorus)

Now there's white boys playing guitars
singing the liberal's lament
And there's white boys playing soldiers
going wherever they're sent,
And it's all in the line of duty
Because each white boy's in the front line,
In his disco shoes and his army boots
he's walking the same thin line;
Between the A.K.'s and the R.I.'s
he's not left too much choice
While Soweto moves and KwaMashu grooves
the township jazz just drowns his voice

(repeat Chorus . . .)

