

THOSE HIDDEN years

By PETA LEE

REMEMBER South Africa's Jeremy Taylor? With *Ag Pleez Deddy*?

An interesting snippet appeared in the Washington-based *Juluka* magazine recently. With a readership of 300 000, *Juluka* is a subscription publication selling to expats. Read this:

"Anyone familiar with South African popular culture knows *Ag Pleez Deddy*. In the UK, enough people know the song *Jobsworth* that the term, which defines an indifferent worker, has been accepted into the *Oxford English Dictionary*. But what these songs share is their astonishingly inventive creator, Jeremy Taylor.

"Yet despite his public standing across the Atlantic, Jeremy Taylor has not had an impact in America proportional to his talents. In 1968 I heard some of his songs sung by a cast-member in the Chicago production of *Wait a Minim*, a show Jeremy had co-created in Johannesburg six years earlier. His songs *Piece of Ground* (recorded in New York 1961 by Miriam Makeba and produced by Harry Bellafonte) and *Black and White Calypso* caught my ear and rattled around my brain for the next 37 years until, after three decades of searching, I finally found their composer.

"Our e-mail correspondence eventually led to his recent visit to Chicago where we were able to find more than a dozen venues for his astonishing talents. So in schools, house concerts and churches, nearly 1 000 men, women and children have finally seen his rubbery face, smiled at his menagerie of accents, heard his enchanted pairing of voice and guitar and laughed along with his satirical lyrics.

"Best of all, he has touched the hearts of every audience by presenting South Africa through the eyes of one of its most devoted sons, and has given a human face to a land too poorly understood on these shores. We eagerly await his next visit, next year."

Doesn't it make you feel all warm and fuzzy to know that this great South African has inspired those words? They were written by Richard Ball, a freelance cameraman in the Chicago area.

But where did he track down Taylor in the first place?

It's an interesting story, one told by Durban's Dave Marks, long-time songwriter/musician, producer and music archiver.

Marks (probably best remembered for penning the famous *Master Jack*) who has owned 3rd Ear Music Company since 1969, has established something called The Hidden Years Music Archive Project (Est. 1994)

"Jeremy Taylor and I have been friends for many years - he influenced and inspired me, and is one of the reasons why I became a songwriter in the 60s. Jeremy has really conquered the world, and had toured everywhere except the States. Richard Ball stumbled across our website, which has a whole section devoted to Jeremy - and although he'd never heard his music, he read the lyrics of his songs, like *Piece of Ground* recorded by Miriam Makeba in the 60s. Anyway, he was also impressed by *Black and White Calypso*, so he started looking for him."

When Ball eventually found Taylor, he invited him over to the States, asked him what he needed (and was told, nothing, just a bed), and 65-year-old Taylor went and blew the audience away.

Said Marks: "Jeremy lives mainly in France these days, and commutes between there and Wales. He travels a lot, does plenty of shows at schools and universities and things."

Interestingly, added Marks, "Jeremy used to teach at St Martins in Rosettenville, in Joeys, and Hugh Masekela was one of his pupils."

It's details like this you can catch up with on the Hidden Years Archives website.

"I'm not trying to revive anything, I'm just filling in the gaps," said Marks. And indeed, when you look at the site, there's fascinating information about all sorts of wonderful memorable artistes. More than 300 of them, in fact.

"Through a grant in aid from the National Research Foundation, The Hidden Years Project will be joining the University of KwaZulu-Natal next year, and involve the sponsorship of more than 100 MAs and PhDs to research this through the university."

So what else can we expect from *The Hidden Years*?

"If you want me to namedrop, there's Hugh Masekela, the Lesotho Recordings in 1980, and to go completely to the other extreme, I'm trying to issue the Durban Tattoo from the same year. There's also 50 years of Malombo - I've been involved with them for 30 years and hope to issue their library recordings, and Johnny Clegg and Sipho when they were teens . . ."

Check out the website at 3rdear.com



UNVEILED: A novel website fills you in on those hidden years: Read about political commentator Jeremy Taylor (centre), whose *Pieces of Ground* was later recorded by Miriam Makeba (top). The website also highlights the great Masekela (above)

Pictures: INDEPENDENT ARCHIVES