

All-race concert organisers bow out of permit battle

ONE of South Africa's biggest annual music festivals, the Free People's Concert, has been abandoned.

The organiser, Mr David Marks, has lost interest in fighting a losing battle for permits to keep the concerts multi-racial.

For seven years he has been in the driving seat. Each year the authorities have got tougher.

"I'm scared to push any harder," Mr Marks said this week. "The hassles involved get bigger every year."

"I'm interested in music, not politics. The original idea behind the concerts was to get unexposed, inexperienced musicians across to a sensitive audience."

The concerts, held at the University of the Witwatersrand, have raised R1 200 for an African education fund started by a Johannesburg daily newspaper, and three carloads of cloths for a clothing scheme.

However, the authorities began flexing their muscles.

Two concerts were held in 1973, the first in conjunction with Nusas and the second with the Phoenix Players. About 20 000 people saw them, but behind the scenes it was a desperate on-off-on situation.

"The authorities didn't like what we were doing," said Mr Marks.

Three more concerts were held, the last in 1975.

Each had an audience of

plications for multi-racial permits were refused.

Mr Kevin Centner, who made the application for this year's festival, said:

"The Department of Community Development didn't even bother to put their refusal in writing. They just phoned back with a flat no."

ment, Mr Louis Fouche, said: "It seems most unlikely that we would give a telephonic reply in a matter of this nature."

Inquiries at the department's Johannesburg office were referred to Pretoria, where a spokesman said: "The application was refused on March 4. The Johannesburg office was notified of the decision."



David Marks . . . losing battle.

Report: WYNTER MURDOCH
Picture: JAMES SOULLIER

"As far as I am aware there was confusion about the address to which the refusal was to have been sent. I think this is why the organisers may have been phoned. The letter was posted at a later date."

It is department policy not to divulge reasons for the refusal of an application.

Mr Marks says the death of the concerts leaves very little outlet for local talent, and believes musicians will suffer.