

Pop before poetry



ATWO-MAN song-writing team in Johannesburg is taking a commercial break from the basic belief that its songs should be not only an agreeable succession of musical sounds, but poems expressing individual emotions as well.

Ashley Parker and Nick Alexander want to promote an art-form they call the song-poem. "It communicates musically; but also lyrically, and poetically — in other words, it's more than just a superficial pop tune."

Says Nick, an advertising copywriter who writes the team's lyrics: "We want our songs to communicate intellectually as well as emotionally. In a year we've written over 100 songs, but can honestly say that there are only about 35 we're not ashamed of."

Naming a handful of musicians who have achieved this art-form, including Bob Dylan, Randy Newman, Joni Mitchell and Leonard Cohen, Ashley Parker, a professional singer, describes the effect of one of their songs on a young

by Maureen Griffin

Ashley at the axe and Nick at the word-smithy. They have a rock opera in the pipeline and hope it will be staged at the end of the year.

Ashley Parker and Nick Alexander have put out a commercial single but their hearts are on higher things

girl in the audience one night.

"She was so moved that she broke down and cried. To us, her reaction was more important than a million sales."

But record companies say the local market just isn't ready for song-poems yet, so the team has brought out a single aimed at the commercial taste. It has *Close Up*, a solid reggae tune, and *Laughter*, a ballad on the flip side.

They plan to make a name for themselves before they have another go at selling their song-poems.

NICK and Ashley teamed up a year ago. Ashley had been singing professionally for some time, Nick had come to South Africa from the UK a year before. They found they had the same tastes in music and decided to write together.

Now they're hard at work

on a rock opera based on a popular cartoon. Says Nick: "We've written a synopsis and about two-thirds of the music, and sent it to the cartoon's authors. Hopefully, the opera will be staged at the end of the year."

"It should appeal to adults and children but we can't tell you more about it because we've been sworn to secrecy."

They're also working on a multimedia show involving poetry, music, satire, films and slides, called *The Unheard, The Unseen, The Unknown And The Unspeakable*.

Nick says: "The title is a reference to talents that have been stifled by the cautiousness of the manipulators of art in this country. The show provides a chance for unknown talents to be exposed and get their ideas across." ■