

Lucey's too hot to handle here

This
is my
Beat

By PETER FELDMAN



With his thin, wiry frame and shoulder-length blond hair, Roger Lucey cuts a Bob Seger-type image on stage. His voice is rough and untrained, but an electric vibe flows from him.

He does crazy dances during his performance and is adept at a variety of instruments. But his strongest point, to my mind, is his song - writing.

The numbers he pens are unashamedly political, stirring, angry words welded to an often easy musical structure that belies the urgency of the lyrics.

He doesn't hope to change the world, but he would like to turn a few more people on to his music.

He says firmly: "What I'm learning now is basically the art of communication. I know that I'm a political writer and I've been seen as a writer of social awareness. My basic thing is entertainment. I'm not interested in politics, but I can't help but be influenced by it."

Roger admits Bob Dylan has influenced his style and approach; the telling of a strong story, often without comment, in a song. His "Lungile Tabalaza" is a fine example of this.

Roger's hunting ground has been Natal. Since his move up to the big city more people have noticed him, whether singing his songs backed only by an acoustic guitar at Mangles or performing in concert at Wits.

His wife paid for his first album which, he admits, was done on the cheap. It was a controversial bucket of songs that record companies were afraid to release.

Third Ear Music took the plunge. "Lungile Tabalaza" is noted on the sleeve, but the three - minute song is now blanked out on the disc. It's considered too contentious.

A single from the album, "The Road is Much Longer," is getting some airplay. It certainly won't chart.

The time is ripe for Roger Lucey to take off here. Unfortunately it won't happen. Roger flies to London on July 23 and



● Roger Lucey . . . his big break may be overseas. (Picture by Ruphin Coudyzer).

chances are he is going to join a big British rock band.

In fact, this was the first question I put to him in an interview at his record company offices.

He refused to commit himself: "I'm going to London to see a certain musician about joining his band. I'll have to do an audition and if I'm okay and he accepts me then I'll tell the world."

Fair enough.

Roger cannot quite believe that his little world is beginning to change rapidly.

"At school drama was all

the rage; I only began playing the guitar in my last year. After completing my studies I went over to London and joined a drama school there.

"I was 19 and it was the first time I'd been away from home. So I had a hassle because I didn't understand the culture for one thing and I wasn't ready for the heavy competition I faced. I just couldn't relate."

At least London gave Roger the opportunity to develop some of his musical instincts. He

watched some big bands and put in time of his own busking in tube stations and outside theatres. He also began to write in earnest.

Back in Durban Roger began the rounds of the coffee bars, peddling his new songs and finding an audience.

"I did hotel gigs which I hated because the aim here is to sell booze and not listen to a singer. I had problems forming a band because of lack of money."

Roger came up to Johannesburg and his first

gig was at Mangles as second billing to Colin Shamley.

His songs are very personal. They were written, not with an album in mind, but with providing material to perform so he could develop the art of communication.

He firmly believes rock is a combination of drama and music. He utilises his drama background to communicate with his audiences, and if his gig at the Jo'burg Music Festival was anything to go by, he succeeds admirably. The crowd went wild.

The crazy dance he performs on stage actually has a name. It's called "Petey's Lake Cake Walk."

Roger explains: "After I left school I went to stay at Petey's Lake for six months where I worked in leather. This place is outside Maritzburg.

"After six months of being out there absolutely alone we used to have funny little rituals. Like when the sun came up we'd go out and do a dance. The dance comes from a song by Taj Mahal called 'Cake Walk into Town.' And that's the way we'd envisaged it, loose legs and arms waving in the air."

He said the dance was a cross between the Abafana dance and the movement of Elvis Costello, the new wave star.

Now, with the prospects of becoming a big rock 'n roll star, this dance could go international.

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Lucey shines at music festival

Last night Roger Lucey signalled his arrival as a major performing artist.

His transition from the small solo stage at Mangles club to the concert format was spectacular. He moved with complete confidence, relating equally well to audience and backing band, and presented his lyrically complex songs without ever losing the strong rock 'n' roll feel.

Roger Lucey is one of the few local singer/songwriters to give serious attention to his social environment. Others who do generally remain in the folk club setting forever, preaching to the ageing converted. Lucey could be the first to take that kind of awareness and project it through the popular rock medium.

He sang with an enthusiasm and conviction that infected the small audience, and gathered strength as the set progressed. His songs ranged across vivid contemporary situations, and included some very uncompromising assessments - "you know it's so damn easy/to turn and look away..."

Behind Lucey a hurriedly-assembled band rendered adequate service. He had the good sense to acquire two support-vocals ladies, who reinforced and extended his singing. Together the vocal unit expressed a savage sense of anger and moments of compassion equally effectively.

Considering that Lucey put this set and band together at such short notice, it was a devastating performance.

By comparison, Paul Clingman and band - also a group with serious intentions - lacked charisma.

Clingman has done this set so often his lack of spontaneity was painfully obviously after Lucey's cracking pace. Although Edt Nederlander (lead guitar), Ramsay Mackay (bass) and Collin Pratley

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(drums) are far better known than their counterparts in Lucey's band, they could not get the same flow running.

Clingman sang with only minimal support from Edt, and sounded lonely up front. His lyrics were not clear through the sound mix, and his songs are not naturally melodic enough to survive without that clarity.

Both Ramsay Mackay and Edt Nederlander were disappointingly docile, and it was only when Mackay and Pratley shared a stunning solo spot that some energy came to the team. Pratley drew spontaneous ap-

plause with his visually powerful performance. Thereafter the set improved markedly and if it can be arranged that Clingman's vocals have more strength and clarity, the band should be good for the rest of the run.

Abafana Besishingishane, a tight nine-piece Mbaganga band, delivered a highly energetic show.

Three guitars, drums, and keyboards backed the four front men who danced, jived, and leapt through a sequence of ethnic numbers, which although incomprehensible to the mostly white audience, drew frequent delighted reactions.

This is the first session of three in the Johannesburg Music Festival. If those to come deliver equally varied entertainment, and produce new star surprises like Roger Lucey, they'll be well worth seeing. This session runs until Saturday.

