

A S H L E Y P A R K E R

ASHLEY PARKER started his musical career, like most ambitious amateurs, at high school. Plucking imitatively, occasionally and occasionally inventively. But thanks to an intensely purist vocal training as a choirboy, three-string enthusiasm soon became supplanted by more concrete self-confidence. By the time he went to Wits to read Sciences, he had helped form and sung with two promising, even relatively successful bands, and freelanced fanatically with others. By 1969, disillusioned by the dearth of any valid current band music, he became inveigled into such non-South African household names as Dylan, Cohen, Rodriguez and the neglected kings of blues.

Soon he found himself edging dramatically away from the big-band-noise and drifting into more introverted and subtle areas of folk/rock/blues and began composing his own material.

With a BSc and a starring role in a documentary film featuring three of his own compositions behind him, he blew all his money on the best 12-string he could buy, and hawked his wares around town.

After several unsatisfactory venues, his reputation began to spread seriously from a rewarding 18 month run at the Crest Hotel. He then took a break overseas to immerse himself in techniques, styles and attitudes of overseas artistes both recognised and unrecognised. Some of these made lasting impression on his work.

He returned to South Africa to play at the House Tyrol Restaurant. It was then that he met Nick Alexander who suggested an idea for a song. The idea impressed ASHLEY and they composed their first song - TURN OUT THE LIGHTS, START THE SWEET MUSIC ROLLING.

So the partnership began. Every spare minute they had, they met, talked and composed. Nick, an English immigrant with an Oxford degree, was copywriting for advertising agencies during the day, between writing lyrics. ASHLEY was still playing nights between composing melodies.

Then EMI decided to record their first seven single, which ASHLEY and Nick devised as reggae and called it 'Close Up' and a ballad on the B side called 'Laughter'. 'Close Up' reached no. 18 on the Top 20 and remained on the charts for four weeks. The record is now on national release and will be distributed worldwide by EMI. ASHLEY, with four successful Bandbox appearances behind him performed the numbers live on David Gresham's Pop Shop for SATV.

In the meantime, ASHLEY gained experience by working for the Southern Suns Devonshire Hotel. He proved so popular that he was then asked to stay for a further three months. He was also among the stars who appeared at the Rand Daily Mail music festival at the Great Hall of the Witwatersrand University.

The Cafe Wien then asked him to come and play at their Cafe in Rosebank and then in Hillbrow. When that contract finished, ASHLEY moved on to the Crest Hotel.

After a successful run at the Malibu Hotel in Durban, ASHLEY did three months at the Los Angeles and then came back to Johannesburg for another season at the 747 Bar at the Crest Hotel.
