

'The things that are wrong with my race'

"JUST call me an 'abo,'" says Jimmy Little.

The tall, good-looking 24-year-old smiles broadly as he says it. His skin is very dark and he looks very much his race—aboriginal.

But you wouldn't pick him as a rock-'n'-roll singer, which he is.

"I haven't got a chip on my shoulder about the name 'abo'" he says, using that "forbidden" word again.

"Many of my people resent 'abo' because they think it degrades them.

"But that's silly. People say 'abo' because aboriginal is a bit of a tongue-twister.

"They don't mean any harm by it."

Jimmy Little is just as frank and matter-of-fact about most other controversial aspects of black and white relationships in Australia.

As an aboriginal who has succeeded in a white man's field — Australian popular music—we asked Jimmy if his color had ever been a barrier to success.

"Very rarely" he said after a moment's thought.

"I don't know whether it's just my luck—but I have never been involved in a really unpleasant racial incident.

"Maybe it is because I never look for trouble."

Jimmy spoke slowly and carefully, weighing each word he used to make sure it was the right one.

This created an impression of intelligence and maturity far in advance of his 24 years—and his formal education which ceased when he was 14.

We asked him what he thought of the conditions for aboriginals in Australia today.

He shook his head.

"Not very good. They have been pushed so far back into a corner that now they are afraid to come out.

"I hate to sound like a crusader but a lot of what I've accomplished has been done to show aboriginals that they can come out—and match white people in their own skills.

"I want to set a worthy example for other members of my race.

"The government has meant well in providing for their welfare.

"But I am afraid this has caused too many aboriginals to sponge on the community.

"They are afraid to venture out and trust their own abilities. They think it is no use—that they need not even try.

"Frankly many aboriginals are lacking in drive and initiative."

What are the main things

JIMMY LITTLE, the rock-'n'-roll singer who says: 'I'm an ABO and proud of it!'

that tend to hold the aboriginals back?

"One is lack of education," Jimmy says.

"No aboriginal can afford to go to University without financial assistance.

"And the other major factor retarding aboriginals is the practice of separating the black people from white communities.

"The aboriginal should be made to feel a part of things—that he has just as much chance to get ahead as the next bloke.

"If this can be done I think a great improvement in the status of aboriginals would result."

We asked Jimmy if there might be something in the aboriginal character that stopped them from getting ahead.

"Yes," he said. "I don't like to think so—but I guess there is.

"The old aboriginal idea of getting just enough food for one day—of living for the

moment—still exists in many of my people.

"This attitude is not necessarily bad—but it's not much help in the modern world."

Jimmy was born at Moama, in N.S.W. on the Victorian border.

His father was a casual laborer who shifted from farm to farm.

This meant frequent change of schools for young Jimmy. He left the last one—Moruya Convent—when he was 14 to follow the wandering laborer's trail himself.

His parents, sisters, and two brothers are musically talented—and no one was surprised when Jimmy won second place on a national Amateur Hour when he was only 16.

This gave Jimmy his start and by the time he was 21 he was able to give up the pick-and-shovel routine and earn a full-time living as a singer.

Jimmy has recorded more than 20 single discs and one long-playing album.

His biggest sellers have been "Danny Boy" and "Mysteries of Life"—both of which still sell steadily.

Jimmy's biggest break came 18 months back when he was selected to play an aboriginal stockboy in the Billy Graham movie "Shadow of the Boomerang."

This film should catapult quiet, unassuming Jimmy Little into the top ranks of Australian entertainers.

And what does Jimmy think about the heights he could reach?

"I'm happy now," he says. "I have a wife who understands me and my work.

"I earn enough money to live comfortably and I have plenty of friends. What more do I need?"

But isn't there something Jimmy wants that he doesn't have?

"I want to be able to throw a boomerang," he said smiling.

"And I want to learn to play in a gum-leaf band."