

ANOTHER JOHNNY ROCKS 'EM

● Johnny Chester, 19-year-old rocker, has brown wavy hair drooping over his forehead, and clear blue eyes. He wears a white taffeta suit and a red-and-black-striped brocade waistcoat. Victorian teenagers love him.

AND now that his first record ("The Hokey Pokey," with flipside "That's How it's Gonna Be,") has been released and is doing well — he's becoming a name all over Australia. A second Johnny O'Keefe, they call him.

After leaving school at 14 Johnny worked as a motor mechanic (he's actually a brake specialist) in his father's garages.

He first became interested in rock-'n'-roll at the height of Elvis Presley's pre-Army career about four years ago. He bought Elvis' record "Heartbreak Hotel." "I used to put it on an old record-player and sing with it," he said.

Then Johnny formed a band. "I could play the guitar," he said, "but I was pretty useless at it. So I started singing — and the kids seemed to like my voice."

About 18 months ago he started running a dance at a West Preston church hall. "We used to get about 200 kids to these dances," he said. "We had an old amplifier that distorted everything, but we thought we were mighty."

They must have been pretty good. So many teenagers became regulars that

many teenagers became regulars that Johnny Chester, his band, and all his fans moved to the larger Preston Town Hall.

"I was really working hard, trying to build up the band, organising the dances, and trying to learn more about singing," Johnny said.

At that stage Johnny met Kevin McLennan, manager of the well-known instrumental group The Thunderbirds, and from then on life became easier and more exciting.

Nowadays about 1000 teenagers turn up at the weekly dance.

Johnny's biggest thrill so far was singing in the Connie Francis show at the Melbourne Stadium. "It was my first Stadium show," he said. "I never get tired of singing and normally I'm not nervous, but I was nervous that night."

He needn't have worried. He got a terrific response from the audience, which went on yelling for him even when popular American Johnny Burnette appeared.

Clothes are Johnny Chester's hobby. "I pay about £30 apiece for my suits," he said. "I have seven already and two more are being made."

He admits that in the past four months he has had to spend more than he has earned, but the days of rock-'n'-roll singers wearing any old thing have gone.

"Teenagers are more clothes-conscious now and so are the singers," he said.

Johnny has a reputation for really putting everything he's got into his singing. He sings mainly rock-'n'-roll, but really likes slow ballads best.

"I love to sing," Johnny said. "This is my big chance and I want to do well."



