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## Songwriter signs a contract, steps closer to his goal

By Laura Ost

EAST PALO ALTO — The road from East Palo Alto to Hollywood is not exactly a freeway. But Robert Roland could write a song about it.

Roland, who was born 26 years ago in East Palo Alto, recently signed a songwriting contract and is moving his family to Hollywood.

Under the contract, Roland must supply at least one song a month to Total Experience Production/Publishing Co. Total Experience controls his publishing, but Roland is allowed to freelance additional songs to other companies or artists.

"Not many" songwriters are good enough to sign contracts, according to Jeffrey Lakes of Total Experience. "A contract means that someone believes your musical talents can be utilized within the industry."

Total Experience is affiliated with Mercury Records and owns a recording studio where the Jackson Five and the team of Billy Davis and Marilyn McCoo record.

The contract is a step toward fulfillment of one of Roland's two lifetime goals. An accomplished athlete at Menlo-Atherton High School, Roland tried out for two major league baseball teams, the Chicago Cubs and the St. Louis Cardinals. He survived several cuts, but was not signed.

So he turned to his other passion, music. He had started writing poetry during his senior year at M-A, and later lyrics. At Tennessee State University, Nashville, he co-founded a poets' and songwriter's association.

After living in the Bahamas for six months, Roland taught songwriting at the Nairobi Institute for Cultural Arts in East Palo Alto for 16 months.

Roland plays percussion, but his forte is writing lyrics. He pays friends to write music for him. His style includes country, rhythm and blues and "island" music.

"If I'd stuck to baseball like I stuck to music, I probably would have signed a contract," Roland likes to be-



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Roland hopes to earn money from royalties (record sales) and as a member of ASCAP, the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers. ASCAP tabulates the number of times a composer's song is played on the radio, and pays him accordingly, about 15 cents a time, Roland said.

If a few of his songs are recorded this year, Roland might earn \$10,000 to \$15,000 from royalties alone, he said.