

# JAZZ WITH A DISTINCT CHARACTER

THE SHOW: Big Band Jazz (Playhouse).

THE ARTISTS: Chris McGregor leading 15 Africans and White jazzmen.

OPINION: This is jazz—that was.

By RICHARD McNEILL

IT HAS BEEN SAID and suggested before, and indeed, the fact is acknowledged by South African jazzmen and aficionados. But it might be as well to place on record the indisputable fact that South African jazz, in its mood, form and style, is distinctly separate from the American colossus.

This is extremely important. In no other country outside the United States can such a claim to individuality be made.

By and large, the jazz workshops of the world derive their main inspiration from American jazz, and tend to follow rather blindly in the wake of the ideas and developments initiated by American schools.

While admitting the obvious influence of American jazz on its South African counterpart (it is impossible to discount the tremendous impact of Ellington alone), South African jazz has a character and expression of its own—gay, warm, exceedingly good-humoured, uninhibited and vital.

It must also be said that the trail-blazers of this distinctive music are almost exclusively non-White, and that the trail-blazing takes place in that dimly perceived half-world that to Whites is the other side of the apartheid fence.

Having regard to this, Friday and Saturday night's concerts at the Johannesburg Playhouse were memorable in more ways than one.

The show represented a consolidation and expression of this musical force (which I am tempted to call "south-stream" as distinct from the so-called "main-stream" and "third-stream" movements in American jazz) through the medium of the country's most talented and articulate jazzmen, both White and African, chosen at the recent Orlando Jazz Festival.

And what a *tour de force* it was. Every avenue of expression was explored—from swinging "Vortex Special" (composed by pianist and leader Chris McGregor, and becoming a sort of "April in Paris" in the African jazz world) to the moody, reflective "I remember Billy," composed and played with great feeling by Kieple Moeketsie.

On clarinet and alto-sax, Moeketsie is probably the most formidable reed talent on the South African jazz scene.

Other notables in the solo line-up were Nick Moyake, tenor sax, whose brittle clipped style en-

livened the septet numbers, Dennis Mpali and Mongesi Peza—two contrasting trumpet stylists—and Chris McGregor, whose supremely agile piano was the mainstay of both big band and small group numbers. Sammy Maritz also distinguished himself on bass.

It must be regretted that this group of fine musicians are to break up after recording sessions today and tomorrow, for red tape permits all too few opportunities for White and non-White to play together, and fewer for White audiences to see the exciting musical blend.

One hopes, for the sake of "south-stream," that Chris McGregor will be able to re-assemble his Playhouse band one day.

The Star  
23.9.63