

Jazzman Chris feels



blue—and hungry

by Adam Brand

have any..."), fixes accommodation along their route and generally looks after them — "Like reminding them to eat, for instance."

Chris is the pianist, arranger and leader of the Blue Notes.

His sidemen are trumpeter Mongezi Feza, from Queens-town; tenor-saxist Nick Moyaki, from Port Elizabeth; alto-saxist Dudu Pukwana, also from Port Elizabeth; drummer Louis Moholo from Cape Town, and bassist Johnny Dyani who hails from East London.

Chris explains the preponderance of Eastern Cape musicians in his group as no mere coincidence — "It is a fact that the Eastern Cape turns out the bulk of African jazz musicians. Why, nobody knows."

Generally, Chris believes that South Africa is, to use a cliché, the melting pot of jazz in the world today.

"So many things are coming out of this country at the moment — more so, it seems, than anywhere else except the United States.

"All the latent talent and the possibilities are here, but what jazz in South Africa needs desperately if it is to come into its own, is more full-time jobs.

"Even jazz musicians must eat. Sometimes."

What Chris would like to see especially in South Africa is a jazz club circuit to provide openings for professional jazzmen.

dependent on their concert earnings from town to town, Chris and his Blue Notes literally live from hand to mouth.

It is only Maxine Lautre and their indomitable love of jazz that carry them through.

Maxine Lautre? She's Chris's fiancé and self-appointed manager of the Blue Notes.

Tall, dark-haired, she handles the group's finances ("When we

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Kick

Chris says his piano style and his approach to modern jazz, have been shaped by Duke Ellington, Bud Powell, Thelonious Monk—and Dollar Brand, a brilliant Cape Town pianist.

Chris and the Blue Notes will play at the Alabama Hotel tomorrow evening, at St Stephen's Hall, New Brighton, on April 30, at Uitenhage on May 1 and at the Showgrounds Homecrafts Hall in Port Elizabeth on May 2.

Biggest kick that this group of dedicated jazzmen have had for a long time is an invitation to play at the Fifth International Festival of Jazz on the French Riviera in July.

"This could be our biggest break", said Chris wistfully. "You can't go on living on a shoestring and R3 each a week".

He adjusted his dark glasses. "Jazz means everything to us — but we get hungry, too."

• Which leaves us to wish Chris, Maxine and their dedicated jazzmen the thing they long for most — a break.



A study in expressions as pianist CHRIS MCGREGOR and one of his Blue Notes, bassist JOHNNY DYANI, swing together.

YESTERDAY I met the leader of a group of musicians called the Blue Notes, who are pioneering a jazz trail in South Africa and building up a "new sound" in modern music — which may turn out to be the new sound for which the whole world of jazz has been waiting.

Chris McGregor is a tall, lanky-locked, dark-glassed young man of 27.

He breathes, eats and drinks jazz — "Although," as he says mournfully, "there's not much eating in it."

At present Chris and his Blue Notes (five talented African instrumentalists) are touring South Africa in a small bus, playing wherever there is the interest — and a hall.

East Cape

It is the first time a jazz group has attempted this on such a scale, but Chris believes the tour is essential to stimulate more general interest in jazz.

Living on the road and totally

Chris has great faith in African musicians.

"Other people have to teach themselves jazz, but not the Africans. It's just born in them. They're naturals," he says.

"But how some of them manage to keep alive with the meagre work that's available, is a miracle."

To develop a jazz "boom" in South Africa, says Chris, more support for indigenous jazz musicians is also needed from the big record companies.

Exciting

"Why is it," he asked, "that when you decide to become a full-time jazz musician in this country, you have to starve?"

Chris pointed out that jazz — as opposed to classical music or pop music — has a big following in South Africa, much of it, through necessity, directed towards overseas records and artists.

Yet, in many ways, local talent is among the most exciting in the world—if it can find full commercial outlets.

Chris was born in Somerset West and educated at Umtata, where his father was a teacher.

He received his basic musical training from an aunt who found him "intelligently fiddling" with a piano at the age of six.

After school he studied at the University of Cape Town for a Bachelor of Music degree, but gave it up to become a professional jazz musician in 1960.

He formed several groups, culminating in his first Blue Notes who shared first prize at the 1963 South African Jazz Festival in Johannesburg.