

book bogs down in the process, losing much of its intended purpose and nearly all its narrative cohesion.

—Jonathan Pearl

Chris McGregor and the Brotherhood of Breath

By Maxine McGregor

(244 PP., BAMBERGER BOOKS, PB. \$17.00)

Pianist and bandleader Chris McGregor exiled himself from South Africa at age 27 in 1964, playing and composing away from his homeland until his death in 1990. His father was a missionary schoolteacher and young Chris spoke the Xhosa language before he did English. A prodigy, McGregor equally embraced South African, classical and jazz musical influences. As a young adult, he played in racially integrated bands, but increas-

ing apartheid restrictions eventually made gigs of this sort highly problematic or outright impossible.

Working initially with black South African musicians as part of the Blue Notes, McGregor performed and recorded sporadically in England and Europe. Always ambitious, he later organized several big bands known as the Brotherhood of Breath. These were multi-cultural ensembles in keeping with his philosophy of an orchestra being a musical village in which the members engaged in rhythmic and harmonic conversations.

McGregor was fortunate to have the support of a strong, understanding wife throughout his career. Maxine McGregor at times acted as his publicist and manager, as well as raising their children and maintaining small farms in England and France.

Biographies of spouses written by their widows or widowers too often lack objectivity. A trained journalist, Maxine McGregor avoids this by skillfully blending her own narrative material with the views of others, achieving

an insightful balance between musical, societal and personal topics at all times.

—Jonathan Pearl

