

VERY URGENT:

Mongezi Feza (pocket tpt); Dudu Puckwana (alt); Ronnie Beer (ten); Chris McGregor (p); Johnny Dyani (bs); Louis Maholo (d)

London - December 1967

Marie my dear/Travelling somewhere :: Heart's vibrations :: The sound begins again/White lies :: Don't stir the beehive

Polydor 184 137 (36/8d.)

CHRIS McGregor came to England with his group in 1964 and since then he has gradually become a considerable figure, particularly on the local avant-garde scene. This is, as far as I know, the first album he has done over here. He has acknowledged the early influence of Ellington on his work and understandably some of the forms and idioms of South African music; to these there seems now to have been added a fairly heavy influence from Albert Ayler and Cecil Taylor. This sounds like a lot to take in and preserve some originality, so before anyone gets the idea that the music of McGregor and his men is just a mixture of conflicting or undigested styles let me say at once that this is not the case: the music here is handled very cleverly indeed, there is a very high level of group consciousness and through this the ideas of several major figures have been integrated into a fierce and challenging form of expressionism.

The major source of power in the group, I would say, is the rhythm section. This is arguably the most advanced team working in this country today, and most of the time has McGregor, Johnny Dyani and Louis Maholo working furiously at a cascading flow of invention, implying a pulse within a highly complex mingling of lines rather than stating an explicit beat and defining the functions of the rhythm section instruments. Backed by this team the horns play well indeed, showing confidence enough over the rhythmic turmoil to enable them to get out of any strong imitativeness of any other musician into an area where they must begin to create out of their own personalities.

There are four tracks on the album, two of them having doubled-up titles. The first one, Marie my dear/Travelling, is unfortunately a little out of character for the group, with an overlong theme and a fairly steady beat. The rhythm section is not at its best within this kind of style, as the lines required of them are too sparse and clearly defined for them to get the right responses going, but despite this there is some good alto from Puckwana. "Vibrations and "Sound/White lies" both get the group well off the ground, however, and get them really functioning as a group over the now fully organised rhythm section. The final track, "Don't stir the beehive", is perhaps the most interesting of all. Described as 'traditional', it is a long, wandering line recalling - but obviously pre-dating - Albert Ayler's slow tunes, and it's very likely I think that McGregor chose it because of this similarity. The performance is almost completely taken up by loose ensemble readings of the theme, decorated in different ways, the thick ensemble textures fading into brief solos from piano and bass at different

points, at another breaking up into a brief ensemble improvisation, all over the barely controlled turbulence of the rhythm section. It's a spectacular end to the album, and more than redeems its uneven start. This is a record well worth hearing.

Jack Cooke