

Chris McGregor

CHRIS MCGREGOR'S Brotherhood of Breath rely so much on ambiance and self-generated inspiration that one can never take them for granted. At their best, few ensembles can touch them; yet the balance which McGregor maintains between pre-set routines and individual and group improvising is so finely poised that you must expect chaos and aimlessness as well as the moments of high ecstasy. It took a long time for them to warm up. They are never the same without Louis Moholo, who alone gets the spring and lift out of the repetitive rhythms on which the music depends.

The amplification at the QEH, was, as usual, very poor and some of the microphones were slow to function. Little of interest happened at first, though towards the interval we heard invigorating solos from Evan Parker and Elton Dean, and various members were starting to huddle together to produce those exciting counter-melodies which give the Brotherhood its character.

The omens for McGregor's new piece, *Our God is a Consuming Fire*, were better: the amplification system had been bolstered during the break and Moholo was now in his rightful place at the drums. Mark Charig's opening fanfare made electrifying use of the extreme registers of the trumpet and this was followed by an equally expressive trombone solo from Radu Malfatti. Then came a typical ballad for the saxophones, led by Dudu Pukwana who as usual squeezed every microtone from his instrument.

Before this he had been conspicuous mainly for blowing a whistle at strategic points. A freeish duet between Mike Osborne and Evan Parker, with Moholo thundering in the background, also stood out. Perhaps the piece relied too much on a single motif, and there were passages at the beginning and end which went on too long. These, however, were few compared to the many moments of magic.