

Brotherhood of Breath

SA JAZZ ENSEMBLE

From Malcolm Lawson

LONDON. — Chris McGregor's Brotherhood of Breath, a progressive jazz ensemble quite unlike any other in Europe, has played to a large audience of devoted fans in London's Queen Elizabeth Hall.

Eleven outstanding instrumentalists (three of the five South Africans in it are Black), each capable of inspired and sustained solo invention, were given enormous individual freedom and yet miraculously held together by Chris McGregor at the keyboard.

Which is why the name 'brotherhood' is so appropriate for the Port Elizabeth pianist/composer's band. Only two items made up their programme, each lasting about an hour.

The second half comprised a suite called *God is a Consuming Fire* by McGregor, which was given its first performance. The first half of the concert was saved at the very last moment by an American drum-

mer Barry Altschul, who had never before played with the Brotherhood.

The band's ace drummer Louis Moholo (of Port Elizabeth) was delayed, and Altschul was taken from the audience so that the concert could start.

He managed remarkably well, but the true character of the band emerged only when Moholo was able to take part after the interval.

Only three of the five sections of the suite *Our God is a Consuming Fire* were in fact played, but as with all McGregor's work, it had an extraordinary cumulative effect, rising to climaxes Bruckner would have envied.

The iridescent textures of the wind sounds (five

saxes, flute, cornet, tenor horn and trombone) embroidered on a ground of two double basses (Harry Miller and Johnny Dyani) would have pleased Janacek.

Johnny Dyani came over from Denmark, where he now lives, to rejoin his South African colleagues for this concert, and may yet return to Britain.

Dudu Pukwana was as ebullient as ever on alto sax, occasionally breaking off to give some shrieking interjections on a referee's whistle. It is Pukwana who gives the band its distinctly 'Afro' accent.

Chris McGregor probably plays more notes in an evening's music than any pianist on earth, most of them clustered and as percussive as Bartok could ever want. It was good to hear him playing a true concert piano for a change. He frequently has to put up with third-rate pianos, doing gigs elsewhere.

The Brotherhood will be recording *Our God is a Consuming Fire* later this year, and South Africa will at least be able to hear it that way.

An album to be released before then is their memorial to their brilliant young Black South African trumpeter Mongezi Feza, who died so tragically just before last Christmas.

It will be called *Blue Notes* for Mongezi.