

Pure jazz club



The quintet, with Mongezi Feza waiting in the centre and Dudu Pukwana playing solo.

ONLY FOR THE "HIP" AT PRESENT BUT—

FROM THE STREET BELOW the music can be heard as it crashes down a metal fire escape along a narrow brick alley into the Hillbrow night. It takes two blocks for the noise of traffic to build up enough and drown the drone of the sax.

At the top of the firescape the visitor is greeted by a babble of voices as the band on the low platform at the far side of the room takes a break.

The room is nothing more than a barn two storeys above the ground. Padded benches run down

spotlight, and takes up the theme.

This draws attention back to the stand and the audience clap and cheer the saxophonist. Surprisingly no one says anything like "dig that crazy cool horn."

By now a great many people are walking around, some talking loudly. The attitude of the audience is hard to fathom. They act like people with a radio and switch the music on and off as they need it.

The amount of money spent on the place appears to have been small, but no one seems to mind.

Whether the crowd will support the place enough to keep it going is as hard to answer as whether the owners will keep the jazz pure and resist the cash temptation to turn it into another gin-mill.

Whether or not Johannesburg is

deliver the goods with their own emotional interpretations.

The group he leads at the club plays a wide selection of jazz evergreens with a few numbers by African composers thrown in.

Clever switches of tempo and stage-managed duels between trumpeter Mongezi Feza and saxophonist Dudu Pukwana sound something like what might happen if Shorty Rogers and Paul Desmond met at a beer-hall stomp. The quintet sound as though they have made a deliberate effort to throw away the book and blast in to a new, very hot, sound.

Session

Strangely the drummer, Louis Mohole, seldom breaks through the front line brass. Only in the climax of the brass duels does

**By Iain
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two sides of the room and a few tables are scattered around the middle.

Draped along the benches and over the tables is a crowd as

mixed as the variety of bottles being passed around. From bald heads to beards they are here to listen to what a new jazz club has to offer.

A well-built fellow puts down his empty bottle of mineral and sits at the piano to sound off a few cords. From behind a faded red curtain stroll the other four musicians.

The leader swings his head from side to side and with three clicks of the fingers the quintet swings into action and the crowd shuts up.

Twisting

In the audience there's an atmosphere of intense concentration that lasts until the group move in to their second number. Someone squatting in front of the bandstand stands up and moves to the bar for another drink. By the time he has crossed the room the buzz of conversation has grown to a chatter.

A girl in a chic cocktail dress has started twisting with a man in a green sweater and powder-blue jeans. They are joined by others and most of the people around them turn to watch the dancing.

Scattered around are a few "gone-looking" people moving their hands around in short chopping motions in time to the music. But most of the rest just look tired.

Sweet flow

The sweet flow of the sax spirals to the end of a chorus and the short trumpeter in a peaked sports cap moves his horn into the



A feature of the group is brass duels between Mongezi Feza and Dudu Pukwane on the sax.

ready for a jazz club is something else we just have to wait and find out. If it is to survive it will only do so, in its present form, by the drawing power of the music.

Campaign

Chris McGregor has for some years fought a one-man campaign to popularize jazz music through African musicians, who

he allow his sticks to move around.

On the bass Sammy Maritz stands with his back to the audience as though he was there only to swing through a session with his pals. With McGregor, Maritz plays tag through a few sweet passages that end with Feza and Pukwane blasting the smoke out of the room.

McGregor gives them plenty of scope before he pulls them into harness by pounding out a few sharp cords.

The crowd seems to have made a pact not to show too much enthusiasm. But this seems to have no effect on the quintet. They just keep playing and, I suppose hoping that the "mob" will keep coming to hear them. I wonder if they will.



Chris McGregor, the leader, and Dudu Pukwane swing into a new number.

McGregor is experienced musician

CHRIS MCGREGOR lived in the Transkei most of his life before going to Cape Town where he studied music. Since then he has been leading groups in several Cape Town clubs.

With his classical training he is well equipped to give cohesion to the group and develop the potential of his players.

McGregor does not try to make his musicians play anything too sophisticated that needs a lot of control.

At present he is almost more interested in arranging and leading his group than in his own piano-playing.