

No real attempt has so far been made to assess the significance of jazz in Southern Africa. There can be no doubt, however, that jazz music is being made here seriously, that its quality is improving and that its own character is emerging. Few in this country have realized its significance, but overseas it has already made an impact. Writing about the music of Dollar Brand's trio, the only South African group to have reached Europe, Jack Lind in the November 1963 issue of *Downbeat* (the leading international jazz magazine) says: "Such is the social fabric of Brand's background, small wonder that his music reflects alternately revolt, anger and passion; yet he speaks of his native country with little bitterness and even talks of returning to it In this day when so many musicians seem to be copying so many others, a man like Brand is a breath of fresh air, a symbol of musical purity and a reflection of intense emotion. U.S. jazz audiences have much to look forward to. His is honest music."

While he was in South Africa Brand's music went almost unnoticed by the general public. But before he left in the beginning of 1962 he brought together a group whose contribution to South African jazz was immense. Called the *Jazz Epistles*, they played in clubs in Cape Town and Johannesburg and made the first jazz L.P. in South Africa. Lack of recognition and consequent hardship, however, forced them to disband after three months. The musicians split up. Masekela and Gwangwe went to the States to study. Moketsi had a short spell with *King Kong* in London and Brand took the rhythm section to play at the *Club Africa* in Zurich.

Much has happened in South African jazz since the *Epistles*. Festivals are now held annually in Johannesburg; a discography of South African jazz records includes more than half a dozen records. But perhaps the greatest single breakthrough was made one night in September 1963 in a theatre in Johannesburg. From the 1963 Orlando Festival, Chris McGregor assembled 16 of the competing musicians and after only 10 days of rehearsal played music which made two things quite clear.

Firstly the music at the Playhouse concerts was South African jazz, formed in its own right and as distinct from jazz played anywhere else as Kwela is from Rock 'n Roll. "The Star" critic wrote: "While admitting the obvious influence of American jazz on its South African counterpart (it is impossible to discount the tremendous impact of Ellington alone) South African jazz has a character and expression of its own —

gay, warm, exceedingly good-humoured, uninhibited and vital The Show represented a consolidation and expression of this musical force (which I am tempted to call "South stream" as distinct from the so-called "mainstream" and "third stream" movements in American jazz) through the medium of the country's most talented and articulate jazzmen, both White and African."

Secondly, these concerts showed what results can be achieved when a group is built on the individual ability and natural potential of each musician. Chris McGregor avoids the mistake usually made by jazz leaders outside the U.S., of expecting his musicians to play an antiseptic international-type jazz regardless of the particular African urban background of each musician which plays a large part in his particular technical aptitude and limitations. Says McGregor: "I knew everyone in the band as individuals before we formed the band; when I conceived the band I tried to find and emphasize what we all had in common."

McGregor's present group develops these ideas in the more personal way only possible in a small unit. The group was formed with the realisation by each individual musician of a similar artistic aim in the others. McGregor: "We feel that as a group we can tackle problems in music and life not usually faced by a musician who regards himself purely as a soloist."

The individual talents of this group are substantial. Dudu Pukwana is the drama man of the group; his saxophone is aggressive and startling as he attacks and solves his complex improvisations. Nick Moyake's playing on tenor sax is more subtle, but powerful enough to cope with Pukwana's exuberance. Together they cover a wide range of sounds and possibilities. Between them, Mongezi Feza plays an important role. At times his trumpet instigates a saxophone duel, at others resolves their conflict. Sometimes it is a voice on its own, sometimes part of a controlled trio sound. The rhythm section has the swing to maintain these soloists, providing a base from which they can confidently explore. McGregor maintains the control and leads the direction, his own piano solos a vital part of the group's improvisation strategy.

McGregor's group has only been together a few months and already it has developed into a formidable combination. It is part of the tremendous advance that has taken place in jazz in this country and represents one of the most important contributions to the South African cultural scene. If it can stay together, it will be able to demonstrate this advance to audiences here, and hopefully, overseas.

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