

JAZZ

The joint was jumping

Three weeks ago at Orlando Stadium, Castle Beer's second Jazz Festival pulled in a roaring crowd, as from all over South Africa, old and new African jazz faces came to demonstrate what could be done. Chris McGregor, white

NEWS/CHECK

27 SEPTEMBER 1963

jazz pianist who played at Orlando, saw this brief assembly of so much talent as an opportunity to create — if only once — the biggest and best African jazz band yet assembled in the Republic. The result was a one-night stand (popular enough to become a two-nighter) last week at Johannesburg's Playhouse Theatre.

Getting going. The ensemble suited the character of African jazz which at Orlando seemed to be aiming — even in small combos — at the big band sound. At the Playhouse, this sound, full and rich, yet with a curious rasp to it that knocks off any of the creaminess of Thirties big-band jazz — swung into 'fat numbers by South African jazzmen that rocked the house and carried off the European audience, many of whom had heard little African jazz, certainly none of this dimension.

Going places. In the sweeping roar, the famous "South African jazz sound" that all the pundits swear they hear, was not evident: the sounds, and despite the authors, the character of the compositions, could reasonably be duplicated from discs. But there is a difference of mood from anything else to be heard — the Africans, even while they fooled around with runs and repetitions in the experimental manner of modern soloists, were backed by

a band which recaptured and held the kind of free-walking enthusiasm that early jazz records or the survivors of early jazz had like they had blood. The form of what these men do is as "funky" as modern tastes demand, but the content turns right away from the introspection that seems often to be blind-alleying American jazz.

The soloists: the young generation — already ageing in the fast development of South African jazz — Kiepie Moe-ketsie, Dudu Pukwana, Christopher Columbus, all of them sax players — dominated the Playhouse and the band. Orlando did not produce that paradox of omission, a good African drummer. But a new star has brightened, and South African jazz has an important trumpeter — 18-year-old, fidgety, high-blowing Mongesi Feza. The Playhouse set out to show what could be done — what that is, is clean, sparkling, tricky — and optimistic as all get-out.