

JAZZSCENE

MELODY MAKER DEC 27TH 1975

pays tribute to two
stars who died recently

Mongs: unique stylist

THE friends of Mongezi Feza had his body flown back to the South African townships last week. For the first time since 1964, Mongs was going home.

Somehow, it's very hard to believe that the trumpet star of the Brotherhood Of Breath is really dead — that all that energy and rush of ideas that was Feza on stage is stilled forever ... it's unthinkable.

But a memorial service was held at St Paul's With St. Luke's, Camden Square, NW1, on Sunday morning, where the Brotherhood and a South African Choir gathered to play Mongs into the next world.

Mongezi Feza. a pocket-

sized trumpeter playing a pocket-sized trumpet, came wailing into Europe with Chris McGregor's Blue Notes in '64, wiping out the Antibes Jazz Festival, before settling in Britain as a key member of the Chris McGregor Sextet, getting his sound down on vinyl on McGregor's "Very Urgent" album for Polydor.

The McGregor group built up a regular following via weekly appearances at Ronnie Scott's old place in Gerard Street, London, and finally got a chance to play to a large audience at London's Festival Hall in a presentation called Jazz Scene '68. At this point the band featured Mongs alongside McGregor (piano), Dudu Pukwana (alto), Ronnie Beer (tenor), Johnny Dyani (bass) and Louis Moholo (Drums).

Lack of work inevitably meant that the McGregor

group, despite rave reviews, broke up. The Brotherhood Of Breath were formed in June '70, an RCA contract secured and all should have been plain sailing — except that, inevitably, record company support was almost a token gesture. Work was still sparse, causing trombonist Nick Evans to remark "it takes the first set just to say hello to the other musicians."

To fill the gaping holes in the Brotherhood's schedule, Mongezi and fellow South

Africans Pukwana and Moholo formed Spear — a band as nebulous as it was exciting. Spear's line up fluctuated endlessly although the nucleus remained pretty constant and the music by turns could be anything from funk to free, to the kind of Ellington miniatures that are one of the Brotherhood's specialities.



MONGEZI FEZA: invigorating

At their most commercial, and at the height of the Osibisa-dominated Afro rock boom, Spear mutated, briefly, into Assagai, recorded a couple of albums for Vertigo and even made it into Top Of The Pops.

Come to think of it, it was always on the unlikelyst gigs that Mongs shone the brightest — one of the most bizarre sights I've ever seen anywhere was that of several thousand mud-spattered, dew-soaked hippies rising from sleep to the sound of the Brotherhood blowing up a storm at the Bickershaw Festival in 1972. 9.00 a.m. and Feza was on form, hollering fit to bust.

And their whole series of Spear gigs at the Torrington and at the Phoenix that have just merged into one joyous shout-up in the memory. I'm sure there was plenty of sensitive delicate playing too, but it's the sight of Mongs high stepping like a circus pony, spluttering lightning-fast lines while Moholo cracked snare rimshots, that remains.

For a guy who always seemed completely unself-conscious on stage, Mongezi could be surprisingly reticent when off.

As he once confessed to Valerie Wilmer, in an interview in 1970: "I'm happy playing with Chris but really I'd like to be able to play with everybody. Somehow, though, I'm too scared to go up and asked people if I can

Ultimately, of course, Mongs got dragged into sessions — guesting on Robert Wyatt's two solo albums, a couple of Slapp Happy records, Jabula's first album — and appeared on stage with Wyatt, Symbiosis, Centipede, Elton Dean's Nine-sense and more ...

Even so — it's hard to associate any degree of hesitancy with a trumpeter who'd watch the second set of the night from the Brotherhood sitting at a table in, say, the 100 Club until he felt inspired to play, whereupon he'd stand up in the audience and exchange blistering solos with Harry Beckett, Mark Charig, or whoever else happened to be in the trumpet section.

Mongezi's favourite trumpeter was Don Cherry — the original inspiration behind his use of pocket trumpet — but after a few formative years of trying to imitate both Cherry and Miles, Mongs realised he'd have to find his own voice. That he did, there can be no doubt. His playing became, in a very short space of time, one of the most distinctive and invigorating sounds on the London scene.

He will be sorely missed.

STEVE LAKE