

Hold your breath for this sound of the townships

NOSTALGIA surrounds pianist-composer Chris McGregor's legendary South African orchestra, which hit London with the force of a water cannon back in 1970. Although Chris and his stars — Dudu Pukwana, Mongesi Feza and Johnny Dyani — are long gone, their surging township spirit lives on. Easter Sunday's show, organised by tenorist Frank Williams, who located the best arrangements and assembled a contemporary crew worthy of its famous name, proved that the Brotherhood of Breath is far from its last gasp.

The club was full and the atmosphere warm, with old friendships renewed everywhere. Dave DeFries, now in Spain ("outdoor job, lovely wife, council tax £30 a year") was back, playing lyrical flugelhorn.

His tribute to Nelson Mandela, My Bouya, was top-class and all the arrangements, some far more complex than McGregor's gospel-based originals, were nailed with impressive precision.

Each of the 15 soloists showed great

JAZZ

Brotherhood of Breath

Ronnie Scott's Club, W1

Jack Massarik

character, from the "outside" wisdom of Steve Williamson's tenor-sax ideas to the gruff vitality of Annie Whitehead's trombone, the deft pianistics of Alistair Gavin and the unique wasp-in-a-jam-jar sound of Harry Beckett's trumpet.

In Ernest Mothle the show also had a droll, sleepy-eyed compere and bassist who, with drummer Frank Tontoh and percussionist Tony Maronie, comprised a world-class rhythm section.

This might have been a ghost band, but it kicked like a mule. And the sound-balance was perfect, down to the last bass-note and cymbal ping.

"A kid called Alex from St Lucia handles it for me," said promoter Stuart Lyon. Ronnie's should hire him full-time.

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