

“SPONONO” AND AFRICAN JAZZ

THE STAR

By OLIVER WALKER

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BETWEEN THE FOLKISH and hymnal choruses from “Sponono” and the blueness of Chris McGregor’s Blue Notes jazz band we had the gamut of African musical expressions in the concert arranged in the University Hall last night by Union Artists.

For my taste I would settle for the "Sponono" songs, and count the rest well lost, for there are aspects of the cult of ugliness in jazz idiom, plus a licence for musical doodling which can irritate as much as they affront.

Evidently, however, these improvised blastings on alto and tenor sax and trumpet, involving the players in weird facial distortions carry a special message to "aficionados" for there were frequent bursts of applause from the large mixed audience after various solo frenzies.

Remembering that the show itself "Sponono" which shortly heads for Broadway depends a great deal on choral accompaniments rather than soloists it was reassuring to find the cast of 25, men and women, in such excellent voice and singing with splendid unanimity and spirit.

Good also was it to be reminded of the very genuine stage personalities of characters like Joe Ngoetjana, and most notable of all Letta Mbulo who, unless my guess is wrong, could be built into as big a star as Miriam Makeba, given the right breaks and guidance.

Here is a big "mike" voice with distinctive flavour and style. It was also possible to detect notes in her voice which would not be out of place in far more exacting music than songs like "A new town is a blue town."

The concert will be repeated this afternoon and evening.
