

THERE ARE SOME CATS, White and Black all over the world who tell you that the White cats, no matter where they are, can't really play serious jazz. They contend that the White cats are incapable of crossing the 'ocean' that cuts West Coast jazz from the East Coast school. "Technically the Whites are better", they'll tell you, "but the Black cats are really the only artists because they're saying something all the time, something from the soul of their being".

There was a time when I too held that belief, influenced no doubt by my nationalism, my belief that the Blacks should assert themselves as Black people because they have never really been given a chance to develop as a group, because they have always been influenced to believe that what came from the White people was Western,

HOWARD
LAWRENCE

Jazz Epistle

Helmut Starke

CHRIS, DOODOO AND ANN (at the top of the opposite page) tempera on canvas, was shown in Helmut Starke's first one-man show in Cape Town in November 1963. His is a fascinating way with people and buildings. The cake sale ladies eat you with their cherry smiles. Christian Salvation soldiers blow up the railway rococo of the station in Adderley Street, Cape Town into a house for grand opera. He sharpens his eye on everyday scenes which end up looking not so everyday and faintly menacing. He has been likened to Daumier though the bite sometimes loses its edge in sentiment. When so many South Africans escape from reality Starke finds vivid patterns in the commercial chaos of Ackermans Bazaars and Cold Castle advertisements tied together with trolley bus wires.

Starke, who came to South Africa from Germany nearly six years ago, works in advertising. The South African National gallery bought one of the paintings from this first exhibition.

HOWARD LAWRENCE, a Cape Town journalist, was recently detained under the '90-day' clause of the General Laws Amendment Act.

Christian and Civilised and that what came from the Blacks was, more often than not 'primitive'. For some of these points there is a strong case, no doubt, but then, on reflection it becomes negated by the realisation that there is a case for the Whites and the Blacks if they prefer to think as Black people and White people but no case when they look beyond to the fact that in the final analysis we are moving towards a universal society of *people*!

When you listen to Chris McGregor's (he's White, for the record) new Big Band disc 'The African Sounds' (Gallo) then you'll know what I'm talking about. Having played with nearly every good musician in the country, White and Black, Chris McGregor gets ten stars for his selection of the best Black and White musicians in the country, the best original compositions by Black and White musicians in the country and moulding this collection of Black and White 'African Sounds' into one of the most fantastic jazz records for *people* that I've heard for at least three years. And he emerges as the undisputed king of arrangers this country has known in the jazz idiom. Even Dollar Brand's fantastic 'Indigo Suite' arrangement is eclipsed by this record which I have no hesitation in calling a piece of African, for those who are interested in such things.

Once again a fact has been proved. That when White and Black meet as equals on the platform of opportunity,



they learn to assimilate the best from each other and end up with the best that people can give each other. Listen to the sound Chris gets from the musicians here. Listen to the Choruses by Ronnie Beer on tenor (he's also White incidentally) and Kippie Moketsi on Alto. When you've listened, you're left absolutely exhausted and doubting that what you've heard was really there and that it was South African.

Kippie Moketsi's dazzling phrases leaves you breathing hard, harder than the time when he rose to the throne of greatness for which he is renowned throughout the world. The last two or three years saw Kippie switching his moods so often that what emanated from his horn left one wondering if he was really as great as one thought him to be at one time. Now the doubt has been completely removed. His furiously energetic brain has at last found that chord of balance that will once again give him the hold he had on genius. If he sticks to stable influences like Chris, even if only for recording sessions and City Hall concerts, then we can all go around town and paint slogans on the walls heralding the fact that 'Kippie Lives'.

CHRIS HIMSELF was never a really outstanding soloist. I say *was* because surrounded by the power of the group he so ingeniously collected around him, he has found greatness as a soloist too. And that goes for Ronnie

Beer, a comparative newcomer to the scene, (from Cape Town, which has produced the best jazzmen in the country, including Chris, Gertze, Dollar, Ntshoko, Cups Kanuka, Columbus etc.). Ronnie's hard work at regular, long rehearsals with his sextet with which I have become well acquainted, has proved another outstanding fact—that practice makes perfect—even in jazz which some stupid people brush aside with a snobbish wave of the hand. Listen to Ronnie on this record and tell me if you can believe that he's been on the scene for about two years only.

When you listen to this disc I am certain you will grieve with me for the state of the live scene. We have the musicians. We have the listening potential. But we haven't got a P.R.O. for jazz in South Africa—something we need very urgently. And I think this is the job of the recording companies.

The apathy of the local recording companies and the local distributors of the overseas companies in the field of jazz has always amazed me. During the last five years the local companies have cut only five worthwhile jazz discs and I have it on authority that very little was sold in this time. That's no fault of the music produced, "Jazz in Africa, Vol. I and II", "Jazz Epistle Verse I", "Sphere Jazz", and now "The African Sounds". It is a tragedy, really a very serious one too. When are the recording companies going to

show some initiative and set up a promotion scene that would not only get the musicians 'live' to the public but also give a tremendous boost to jazz appreciation among the public that would pay tremendous dividends in the record field as well? Obviously they want to sell these discs otherwise they wouldn't press them. So why not spend a few rands on promoting sales by soliciting appreciation through an organised countryside drive? At the moment the musicians have to rely on small scattered jazz clubs that more often than not are reserved for exclusive all-White or all-Black listening and to a few occasional concerts that more often than not are organised on a more or less racial basis (in the choice of musicians, I mean. And then the musicians selected to play at these concerts such as those organised in Cape Town by Gallo are more pop than hip).

Footnote.

A cat's just said to me "Who said Ornette Coleman tried to play like Bird, sound for sound but found he couldn't make so he promptly 'discovered' a new sound—Ornette Coleman. New sound. No jazz. Bad. Bad. Bad. Something new something newer a step away from the Bossanova two steps toward the twist".

How about some comments on Ornette Coleman? I'm sure it would be very interesting to cats the world over.