

# The Greatest Thing To Happen

## In Our Jazz



**CHRIS MCGREGOR'S JAZZ FESTIVAL BIG BAND** recording is the greatest thing to happen in our jazz scene since Dollar Brand's *Jazz Epistles* (featuring men like Kippie Moeketsi, Hugh Masekela, Jonas Gwangwa, Makaya Ntshoko, etc.) broke the ice with probably the first modern jazz L.P. recording of original compositions by South African musicians.

The Big Band's album is called *Jazz/The African Sound* on (Gallo NSL 1011).

This well-conceived package has disarming simplicity to which jazz devotees and disciples must respond immediately. It has got a personality of its own and does not lean on derivative stunts.

### Greatest Exponents

Chris McGregor highlights the works of two highly rated jazz musicians, Dollar Brand and Kippie Moeketsi, the greatest exponents ever to come out of South Africa. Coupling their works with his own two originals, Chris shows his abilities as a musician with imagination. His arranging of the works to blend with the playing of a 17-piece band, is superb.

The ensemble plays an authentic sound of its own. It's no Count Basie or Duke Ellingtonian gimmick! The playing is bright, open, clean and simple.

Kippie's alto and clarinet in the spotlight.

Side 1 opens with Kippie's original "Switch". The tune has an arresting rhythmic pattern which serves as an introduction followed by wind instruments repeating the introductory line. Kippie then sets

in with a happy, swinging solo on alto sax. The number winds up with an ending similar to the introduction.

Unison playing of the band in a meditatively slow tempo introduces Dollar's work "Pippie." McGregor's piano repeats the theme. Sammy Maritz (bass) and Early Mabuza (drums) combine in a relaxed mood to back Chris. The smooth combination of the reed section is commendable. Kippie carries on with the lead when he switches to fine clarinet blowing.

The romping number, "Early Bird" written by Chris, brings out a firm, resonant and swinging rhythm section formed by Maritz, Mabuza and Chris. This section definitely inspires the blowers into a stomping ensemble work and fast-riding solos. Drums move into the spotlight.

### Heights of Virtuosity

Moeketsi's mournful "I Remember Billy" starts with lingering piano strains which set the mood for the composer's clarinet. The whole band joins in. The three sections, wailing trumpets, billowing trombones and swarming reeds are notably good. Kippie's clarinet soars high and reaches the staggering heights of virtuosity. Nick blowing an as-good-as-gold tenor sax concludes the work.

The whole rapport is wound up by McGregor's straight-forward, catchy tune "Now." This intriguing track is in the mould of groove jazz. Maritz's bass sets an arresting walking pace against the swarming wind instruments. Nick Moyakhe's tenor is highflown and imaginative, Mongezi Feza's trumpet solo superbly done. The band's

ensemble work is cohesive. The bluesy track is dedicated to Nick.

Featuring leading satellite in the South African jazz galaxy, this handsome package is evidently a product of hard work, inspiration and imagination.

"Dollar's compositions are a repertoire in themselves, and love them all... Kippie doesn't regard himself seriously as a composer but has a very original and personal approach to writing which knocks me out — his things are full of possibilities," says McGregor who apparently is dedicated to these remarkable jazz exponents.



### Abundance Rhythm, Song and Jive

Strike Vilakazi's originals are unmistakably a sure selling package. These 78 RPM records are winners all the way. They have an abundance of rhythm, song, and they are full of jive. They swing in their own wonderful way. Topping them is the New Year Swinger's treatment of "Jabulani" and "Thabazimbi" on (Winner O.K. 135).

Another real swinger, a dazzling Christmas gift is by the Magnificent 7 with Shumi. They render "Kwela Big 7/Lekker" on (Quality T.J. 696).

Sparks Nyembe rocks everybody's nimble feet with rocking "Hamba Njala" (Quality T.J. 695).



A section of the Big Band's warm, melodic reed section — left to right, Ronnie Beer, Chris Colum

of jam, man! back to the camera, khe, two stalwarts of the Big Band, it cool.

ZONK  
JAN '64