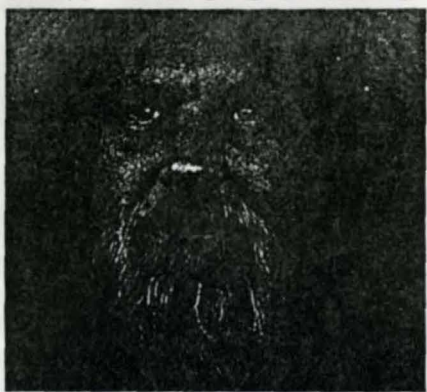


CHRIS MCGREGOR



The death of Chris McGregor, pianist, arranger, composer and band leader of distinction, came as a terrible shock. Avid collector and enthusiastic follower of Chris's Blue Notes and his Brotherhood of Breath, Jack Docherty, rates them as the two of the finest bands ever to play in the UK.

Chris was born on Christmas Eve, 1936, in a Church of Scotland Mission, in Umtata, Transkei Province, South Africa. As a boy he was exposed to a mixture of western music, mostly church hymns, and the ethnic chants of the Xhosa people. He studied 'classical' music at Cape Town University and, in defiance of apartheid, jammed with black musicians at night. He played with pianist Dollar Brand (Abdullah Ibrahim), tenor saxophonist Cup 'N Saucer N'Kanuca, alto-saxophonist Kippie Moeketsi, bassist Johnny Gertze and drummer Makaya Ntshoka. Playing at the Morake Jazz Festival he heard a sixteen year old trumpeter, Mongezi Feza, who was to become a member of the Blue Notes that Chris formed in 1962. The line-up was completed by alto-saxophonist Dudu Pukwana, tenor saxophonist Mick Moyake, drummer Louis Moholo and bassist Johnny Dyani, all black. (Moyake died in Europe of a brain hemorrhage, to be replaced by a white South African, Ronnie Beer.)

EXILES

The Blue Notes, attracting public support and critical attention, brought them under official surveillance. At one gig Chris had to play behind a curtain! An invitation to appear at the Antibes Jazz Festival in 1964 they saw as a means of escape from an oppressive regime. They accepted and became exiles from their homeland.

They were a great success at the Festival and although, for the first time in their lives, they could move freely and were appreciated by the discerning, they found the going hard and often they had to busk in the streets to eat. They moved to Switzerland where they spent a year alternating the Blue Note Cafe in Geneva and another in Zurich, called ironically, the Afrikaner Cafe.

THE OLD PLACE

In 1965 they came to England, still had to scuffle, and eventually finding a haven at Ronnie Scott's Old Place, 39 Gerrard Street, W1, where they truly established a reputation.

Ronnie's partner and manager of the club, Pete King, recalls: 'We kept the Old Place going - at a loss I may add - as a venue for promising bands. We were approached by the Blue Notes. They were really down on their luck - unknowns in a strange country. We happily offered them a meal on the house and their gratitude was quite embarrassing. Chris was a very nice guy.' In 1970 Chris formed the Brotherhood of Breath, the personnel including members of the Blue Notes, the white South African bassist Harry Miller, the Barbadian trumpeter Harry Beckett and the English saxophonists Mike Osborne, John Surman and Evan Parker. They recorded for the Ogun label formed by Harry and his wife Hazel, the latter managing the band. Hazel recalls: 'Over the years of close friendship, as well as a business association managing the Brotherhood of Breath, my life was enhanced by working with such a fine man. I shall long cherish memories of conversations with the South Africans going on until

the early hours - about music, art and, of course, South African politics. They all yearned to return to their homeland.

The stresses took their toll; Mick died in 1965, Mongezi in 1975, Johnny in 1986 and now Chris. (Harry died, following a car crash, in 1983.) At his funeral in Lot-et-Garonne, South West France, on May 29th, it seemed that the entire local population turned out to pay homage.'

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McGregor albums still available include: 'Blue Notes In Concert', Vol. 1 - Ogun OG220; 'Procession - Brotherhood of Breath Live in Toulouse - Ogun 524; 'Blue Notes For Johnny', Ogun 532; 'Blue Notes For Mongezi (Double Album) Ogun 001/2. Other Ogun releases in the pipeline are 'Brotherhood of Breath Live at Willisan', OGRD 001 and 'In His Good Time' (solo), OGCD 003. Also available is 'Country Cooking', Virgin/Venture, VE17 (CD, LP/Cassette).

All the above are available from Cadillac Records, 180 Shaftesbury Avenue, WC2, (Tel: 071-836 3646) or from the specialist shops, Dobell's, Mole and Ray's.

A benefit is to be held at the 100 Club, 100 Oxford Street, W1, on Monday, July 30th at 7.30 till late. It will be all South African evening with Dudu Pukwana's Zila, Pinese Saul's Progress, Louis Moholo's Viva la Black, and the new Brotherhood of Breath. Tickets are £8.00, and £6.00 concessions.

GILL ALEXANDER

Gill Alexander, formerly Gill Lyons, bass and acoustic guitar, piano, leader, arranger and teacher, paints under the name of Gill Levin and currently has an exhibition of her work in the Downstairs Room of the club. A price list hangs with the paintings.



Gill Alexander has been a professional musician in and around London for thirty years. She toured at home and abroad with the Keith Tippett Quintet and Centipede; was a member of the Pat Evans Quintet for many years, Harry Gold's 'Pieces Of Eight', and the Temperance Seven. She ran her own sixteen-piece Jazz Orchestra for 12 years in London. Albums include 'Centipede' and Ivor Cutler's 'Ludo'.

Her trio has backed such musicians as Sonny Stitt, Red Holloway, Jon Hendricks, Al Gay, Don Rendell, Ronnie Ross, Will C. Eddie 'Lockjaw' Davis, Pete King, Eddie 'Cleanhead' Vinson, Theman, Harry Beckett, Roy Williams, Tal Farlow, and Digby Fairweather, and Anne Shelton. She has played regularly in the West End of London including the Dorchester, The Bunny Club, The Hilton, The Inn on the Park, Les Ambassadeurs, The Churchill Hotel, and also in many theatres.

In 1981 she moved to Norfolk and although she still works in London, she spends most of her time playing in her own bands all over East Anglia. She also now specialises in music workshops for adults, children and the handicapped, and is the Peripatetic Double-Bass Tutor for Norfolk. She plays regularly in classical concerts and puts on twice-yearly classical and jazz concerts in her own home in aid of charities.

Her children's under-13 be-bop jazz band called the Jazz Gang, won the junior regional *Daily Telegraph* Young Jazz Award; and she is currently running and performing in two bands - one featuring Digby Fairweather and Bruce Turner; and the other featuring Kathy Stobart, Joan Cunningham and Phil Lee, called the Hat Band.

Gill won a scholarship to Chelsea School of Art in 1951 and studied there until 1956. Since leaving there she has exhibited all over the country and her work has been purchased by private and public collections.