

RECORD REVIEWS

AFRIKA TANZT UND SINGT. "*Von Tam-Tam zum Jazz*". Compiled and commentated by Rolf Italiaander. 10" LP, Athena 53137 G. Ariola Schallplatten GmbH, Gütersloh, West Germany.

"From Tom-Tom to Jazz" sums up the contents as well as the ideology of this new record. On the first side are six examples of "Old" Africa's music from Senegal, Mauretania, Sudan, Nigeria, Ubangi-Chari, and Chad, and on the second, six examples of the "New" from Ghana, Tanganyika, Kenya, Angola and the two Congos, briefly and pleasantly commentated by Rolf Italiaander.

It must be said at first that this is plainly a record for the non-specialist, the person who would not take exception to such phrases as "Im Anfang war das Tam-Tam" (In the beginning was the tom-tom); "Die klassische Musik der Neger gehört zur magischen Sphäre ihrer Welt" (the classical music of the Negroes belongs to the magical sphere of their world); "im entlegensten Busch" (in the remotest bush) and many others. Thus it must be considered from the non-specialist point of view. One can further describe the type of non-specialist to whom it is directed: he is the one whose first and often only reaction to hearing African music is to say: "Isn't it wonderful—what wonderful rhythm they have!"

The record exemplifies the "Isn't it wonderful" approach par excellence. From the very start . . . on the first side of the record is Old Africa, on the second New Africa; a natural development from mystic, incomprehensible, repetitious jungle noises to the real music, exciting, modern, "evergreen" (I quote) AFRICAN JAZZ! Unfortunately, the record goes a long way towards confirming this impression of the first side. Firstly, the examples seem to have been chosen for their exotic, rather than their musical quality; secondly, we are not allowed to hear any complexity they may have, through lack of fidelity recording and selective microphone placing; and thirdly, while it is obviously impossible in a record of this size to give full details of all the music it presents, nevertheless introductions that give some sympathetic picture of the circumstances surrounding the music are necessary, when presenting any music to a foreign public. Italiaander's commentary is notable both for its brevity and its stereotyped thoughts about ideal "primitive" peoples. For instance, the main point of interest about the Miango tribe (Item 4, Side 1) is that they still remain today "Nacktgeher" (naked) and, immediately following (Item 5, Side 1), "In Ubangi-Schari leben gleichfalls noch viele Neger in einem ursprünglichen und recht genügsamen Zustand" (In Ubangi-Chari also, many Negroes still live in an original and completely satisfying condition).

Item 6, Side 1, could, I think be a good number, with some interesting changes in the drumming rhythm, but one simply cannot hear what is going on, and the item lasts for over four minutes of continuous noise, which is much too long for the imagination of our average non-specialist, most of whom in my experience cannot listen even to a well-recorded example of African drumming for more than a minute without losing interest.

The second side consists largely of mediocre examples of music that at the best of its type has produced some first class and original numbers. With the huge area traversed by Rolf Italiaander on this side of the record, from Tanganyika to Ghana, one could have hoped for something better. One bright point, however, is one of those fascinating "rhythmic false trail" introductions on a guitar, that starts off Item 6, Side 2.

On the whole one can only suppose that he, like so many other Americans and Europeans, is a devotee of one of the world's newest religious cults, the jazz cult, which, while aiming to create a brotherhood of man in music, is in fact stultifying individual national expression. This is confirmed by a comparison of the first and second sides. This comparison is, however, hard to make, for none of the "New" examples are drawn from the same regions as the "Old", which inevitably weakens the intended effect of contrast, and perhaps progress, between one side and the other.

This European approach to African music is outdated, both technically, in the quality of the recordings, and ideologically, in the evangelistic attitude to "old" and "new", now that so many African states have begun to take the mature viewpoint of their own culture.

Andrew Tracey.

TIME OUT. The Dave Brubeck Quartet. CBS/ALD 6504. 12" L.P.

The record is an experiment by one of America's leading jazz pianists in the use of unusual time signatures, compound time, and in rhythmic counterpoint. As Steve Race remarks on the cover, it is quite astonishing, in view of the experiments in all other directions that jazz has made, that it has never seriously tried to extend itself beyond the 4/4 pattern of marching feet. Brubeck is here said to have combined elements of three cultures—the formalism of classical Western music, the freedom of jazz improvisation, and the often complex pulse of African folk music. Is the result a success? Steve Race apparently thinks so. To a connoisseur of African folk music, however, the music will probably be little more than titillating—at least from its rhythmic point of view, that is, quite apart from any other pleasure that one may derive from one's normal reaction to the harmonies and melodic phrasing of modern jazz.

Time signatures such as $2 + 2 + 2 + 3/8$, $5/4$, $3 + 3 + 4 + 4/4$ and $6/4$ look promising, and some of them turn out to be fascinating. What I really miss, however, is the *combination* of different rhythms or time signatures which is the hall-mark of African instrumental ensemble music. Once established, for instance, on a pattern of two bars of $3/4$ followed by two of $4/4$, Brubeck and group remain fixed inside that pattern, in a way that is, oddly enough, rather *unlike* traditional jazz with its additive and over-the-bar-line phrasing. Africans would probably jump at the opportunity, if using a similar pattern, of adding up other simple groups of time units, such as two, three, or four, in a shifting pattern that would continually contrast with the regular 3-3-4-4 of the background. In fact I find the keenest appreciation of this record when creating my own background pulse, be it of two, three or four time-units, and moving regularly to mine, while taking in the other at the same time. For this reason, this new direction in jazz may lead to renewed interest in jazz dancing. Only in rare spots on the record, notably in "Kathy's Waltz", does the group create this feeling of tension between rhythms, or phrase a melody over their agreed barlines.

The record could be criticised from other viewpoints too, such as the choice of a saxophone for second solo instrument—would not vibraphone or guitar, as more rhythmical instruments, have been more suitable for experimenting with time? Nevertheless, one welcomes this sign of interest in African music on the part of jazz, because modern classicists, such as Stravinsky and Varèse, who have used the most complicated and exotic rhythms in some of their works, have yet failed to capture the spirit of African music-making, and this seems to me to be the only Africanism that jazz still retains today.

Andrew Tracey.

AFRICA, Music and Life of Today. Vol. 1. 45 r.p.m. EP, Columbia SEYJ 101 & 2. E.M.I. (South Africa) (Pty.) Ltd.

A pretty rural scene on the cover . . . inside, eight bouncing numbers of Johannesburg African jazz; the contrast, together with the claim that this *is* "African Music and Life of Today", mirrors the average European commercial approach to Africa. It is slightly ridiculous, if not shameful, that Europeans in South Africa are still able to consider this as a true reflection of what African music and life of today really is, now that we know how intense and artistic the music-making is in the South African countryside. This record is yet another proof that most of us are still in the stage of deafness to indigenous African musical talent, the standard being of course the degree of similarity to accustomed forms of European music.

The music is Johannesburg township concert music; four items are jazz numbers with the usual saxophone/trumpet/bass/drum combination, and four with penny whistles/guitar/bass. What is remarkable about the jazz numbers is that they sound so similar to African/Negro jazz from other parts of Africa and America, notably the West Indies, in such characteristics as the modal playing of the saxophone, the repetition of short, short phrases, and (to musicians) the utter unoriginality of musical invention. Enthusiasm they have, and a driving beat which appeals to the lowbrow, both black and white, but this cannot make up for lack of ideas.

The penny whistles, on the other hand, while sharing possibly all the faults of the jazz-men, yet have something which is uniquely South African and original. The effect of hearing them can be compared to hearing early recordings of New Orleans jazz: here is a new and exciting sound (I think it is the contrapuntal sound effect that is important, rather than the notes played) which, crude as it still is, has something to offer to the field of musical expression.

I wonder if the recording company was aware that what it hoped would be new hits were in fact old tunes reworked. Johannesburg music has a folk tradition of its own; very few musicians are musically literate, and the majority of music is passed on orally. Thus hundreds of versions of the same tune are possible, each given its own name by the group that plays it. "Jumping Jack Special" (SEYJ102/1/1) is actually the umpteenth recording of a song that was composed and became popular in 1955 and 6, when Sophiatown was abandoned and the inhabitants moved to Meadowlands. The words, whose melody is played by the flutes, are (in the Tswana language): "*Utlauthwa makgoa are, ariyeng koMeadowlands*" (You will hear the white men saying, we must go to Meadowlands). Similarly "Dark City" and "Bomma" (SEYJ 102/2/1 & 2) are a Xhosa school song, dating from the early nineteen forties, and a traditional Xhosa wedding song, to be sung by the old women. The words of the first are: "*Duda, dada, Nonkala, nanku Xam iyisbata*" (Dance, dance, Crab, there's Iguana getting married), and of the second: "*Walil' umntan', ublatywe ngameva. Asingomeva, yitlofuya*" (The child is crying, it's been pricked by a thorn. It's not a thorn, it's a prickly pear).

The interesting thing about the first song "*Utlauthwa . . .*", is that the melody follows the speech tones of the words, and as such is immediately recognisable by any Tswana who hears it. The flutes in the background can even be heard to be "saying": "*KoMeadowlands . . . koMeadowlands . . . koMeadowlands . . .*" The melody of "*Duda, dada . . .*", being a school song, does not follow the word tones, so here the song is recognised simply from its melody. The words, and tune, of "*Walil' umntan'*" are used as a background over which a flute counterpoint is woven. Some of the ideas are clever, some funny, but in general the enthusiastic playing has to make up for much unoriginality in musical ideas. No doubt