

see also 2/16/90

McGregor was more than just an exiled muso

YOU won't find pianist Chris McGregor's music in Cape town record stores. Apart from that brief appearance at the Carling Jazz Festival on Greenmarket Square in 1987, few locals have even heard him perform.

McGregor left Cape Town in 1964, and — apart from his 1987 visit — remained in exile until his death last month.

It is not necessary to have known him personally to share in the sense of loss at his death as we were deprived of some of our best musicians because of apartheid's brutal destruction of creative culture.

McGregor, Dudu Pukwana and others left South Africa as young men.

Today, the exiled musicians who left in the 60s are unknown

to many of our youth. Only those older than 40 may remember them — musicians jamming down at the local club, or playing at a festival at Strandfontein or in the townships.

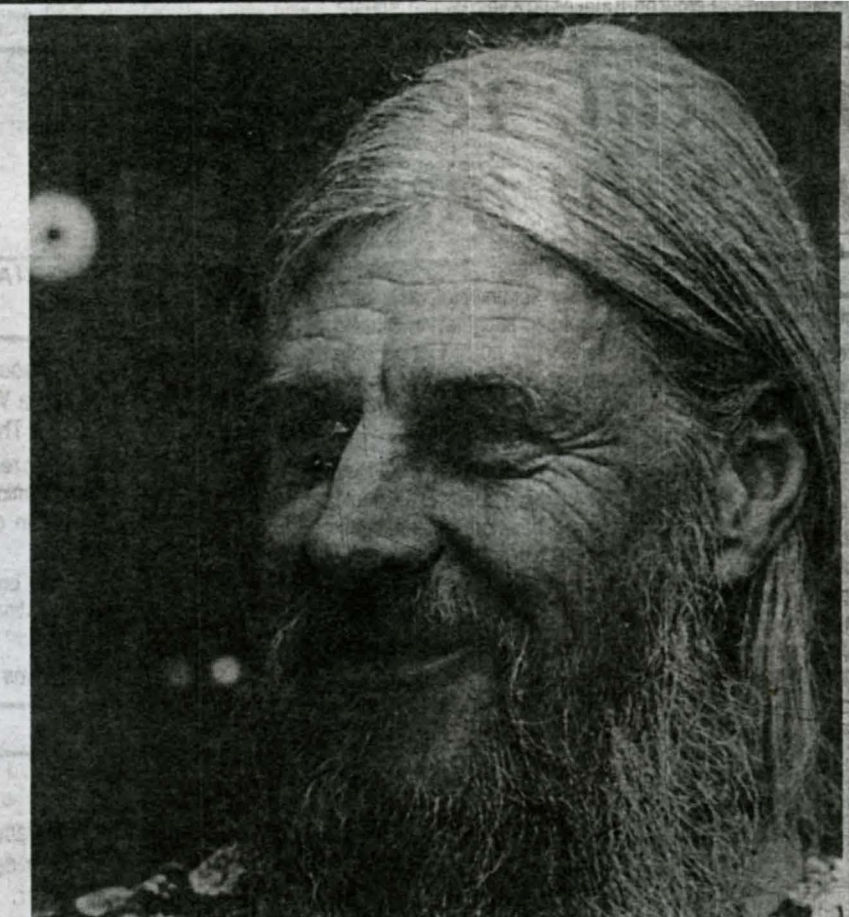
For the rest of us, they are at best "exiles", at worst unknown.

The post-war period and the 1950s was a dynamic period for South African music and culture, until apartheid legislation clamped down.

Speaking to journalist Marc Le Chat in 1987, McGregor described the circumstances which caused him and the Blue Notes — Mongezi Feza (trumpet), Johnny Dyani (bass), Pukwana (sax) and Louis Moholo (drums) — to remain in exile after a tour in 1964.

"I wouldn't say we were victimised, but life was difficult enough. By 1964, we reckoned it wasn't worth the hostility and the world beckoned. We felt our music could reach people elsewhere."

But, while they had been faced with apartheid at home, they found it difficult in exile to build an audience for South African



Chris McGregor died in exile last month

jazz. The first wave of musical exiles in the 60s found they had a major task to break this new ground.

The different circumstances, musical fashions and tastes, climate and psychological adjust-

ment all meant that the musicians abroad had to develop their music in a different context.

McGregor grew up in the Transkei, where his father was a teacher at a mission school.

As Ronald Atkins wrote in the Guardian (London) last week: "Chris was brought up with that mixture of Protestant hymns and African sounds that have dominated music this century." — Steve Gordon