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"Dudu's Ghost" and the Dedication Orchestra at the 100 Club

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Left: Dudu Pukwana Above: Johnny Dyani Below: Mongezi Feza Below Right: Harry Miller Above Right: Chris McGregor



The Dedication Orchestra
is a group of contemporary
English and South African musicians
formed in honour of the memory of
the Blue Notes, the seminal
South African jazz band who found
a home from home in London during
the early 60s.



he Orchestra's gig at Oxford street's famous 100 club last Wednesday night was held to raise funds for a variety of jazz-related projects as well as for Dudu Pukwana's gravestone.

Pukwana, who died 3 years ago, was one of the original members of the Blue Notes and arguably one of the finest alto players ever to have emerged from South Africa.

Had Dudu's ghost been hovering around the edges of the crowd last week he would have been amused by the reassuring familiarity of the scene before him. For all the beards and pipes and braces we could have been in Soho in the mid-sixties, quaffing lager and being hip, sort of like entering a period tableaux of the kind you find in American museums. Despite the period effect and the nostalgia waiting in the wings, Dudu's heart would have been warmed by the turnout and the response from the audience; he couldn't have failed to notice his old friend and drummer (and the last remaining Blue Note) Louis Moholo, chasing the rhythm and leading the Orchestra; he couldn't have failed to have noticed the contributions from some of the finest exponents of free jazz currently playing on the English scene, and he couldn't have failed to have noticed that the Dedication Orchestra only play original Blue Note material - thus keeping the South African jazz tradition alive and in so doing paying homage to the talents of a generation of South African musicians.

The memory of the Blue Notes certainly needs to be kept alive. Not only did the band (with Chris McGregor on piano, Johnny Dyani on bass, Mongezi Feza on trumpet, Louis Moholo on drums, Dudu himself playing alto and Nick

Moyake on tenor) re-vitalise the English jazz scene of the 60s, but they also provided inspiration for players like Steve Wiliamson and Courtney Pine, musicians who have gone on to be almost household names here in England.

Their memory needs to be kept alive for another reason too: we shouldn't forget that exile (as well as the precarious existence enforced by the life of a jazz musician) usually has a horrible human cost and the Blue Notes, unfortunately, have become synomymous with the tragedy of the exile experience: Mongezi Feza (or Mongs as friends called him) died of double pneumonia aged 30; Johnny Dyani died before he could celebrate his 40th birthday; Harry Miller died in his early 40s, and finally, in 1990, both Dudu and Chris McGregor passed away, aged 52 and 54 respectively. As Louis Moholo says in the sleevenotes which accompany the Dedication Orchestra's first album "Spirits Rejoice", they are "gone but not forgotten". They are still with us these Blue Notes, just like Dudu's ghost, hovering around the edges.