

HOWARD  
LAWRENCE

Jazz  
Epistle—2

THE "FREEDOM"  
JAZZ MOVEMENT

WHEN THE FIRST avant-garde discs were released some years ago the reaction of most jazz followers varied from intense excitement to rejection and even scorn. Now it cannot be so lightly dismissed because although the music of the 'freedom' jazz movement is still an experiment, it has developed some very interesting and intriguing things that seem to promise a radical change of the whole form and body of jazz.

Currently the centre of a major con-

HOWARD LAWRENCE, a *Cape Town* journalist, was recently detained under the '90-day' clause of the *General Laws Amendment Act*.

trovery that has raged unabated for about three years the 'freedom' jazz movement has gathered quite a substantial international following and their influence can be felt even in the work of some of South Africa's most promising young musicians, such as Dudu Pukwana, Nick Moyake and Ronnie Beer.

What exactly is this 'freedom' movement and who is responsible for it? Its chief disciples, among others, are Ornette Coleman, Eric Dolphy, Jackie Maclean (The Connection), Jimmy Woods, John Coltrane and Cecil Taylor.

Basically the movement is a revolt against the limitations placed on musicians by (a) conventional chord patterns and it is also (b) rejection of conventional melodic/harmonic usage. This has resulted in the melody determining the harmony in much of the 'freedom' schools music.

The 'freedom' school believe that these conventions rob the jazz musician of the complete expression of his emotions — and believing as they do that jazz should be an aggressive social protest their attitude is understandable. They have now given us a whole new range of tonal coloration and rhythm that often does not, in my opinion, come off.

No doubt, much of the new music is exciting but the fact that it is essentially the music of 'introverts' does not

make it easy for the listener to dig it. The sound is often not pleasing. The work of Ornette Coleman and Eric Dolphy is particularly demonstrative of this with its high-low-pitched, screeching, groaning sounds that often sound as if they were trying to speak the sounds out instead of blowing it.

Nevertheless, although near-violent controversy rages round it the new music is here to stay — the first major jazz revolution since Bop of the early 'thirties. Naturally the 'old guard' of today are kicking against it just as *they* were kicked against by the old guard of the thirties but frankly I don't think they are going to influence the avant-garde to give up their experiment.

What do the 'old guard' think of the 'freedom' movement? Kenny Clarke, one of the Bop revolutionaries who now lives in Paris says the new music is 'formless, empty and meaningless'. André Previn says 'I find that kind of jazz to a greater extent than it should be to be a self-indulgence' . . . 'I don't think that kind of experimentation should be public'.

Dollar Brand says 'it's rubbish', and Kippie Moeketsi thinks it's 'an escape from musical incapability'.

Still, they said all these things of Charlie Parker, Charlie Christian, Miles Davis and Monk.

That was a long time ago—thirty years, to be exact. ●

The headless men need have no heads  
For all who lead are ghosts  
And those who follow living dead  
And all who live are lost.

So I cut off Chaka's head  
And Chaka cut off mine;  
And if we even thought we thought  
Our thoughts were those of swine.

Under my left arm a bloody head  
My right hand too was speared;  
Upon the circle of my neck  
A scarlet cobra reared.

The poison of its soul flowed down  
And coursed in every vein  
In my heart a hate arose;  
I screamed in shame and pain.

We marched along, we sang no song  
We all were grim for battle;  
Our hands were speared, our hearts were seared  
Our cobras played the rattle.

Our hands were speared, our hearts were seared  
We slaughtered every ghost;  
The sands were red with men twice dead  
We fought for freedom lost.

Still many a night we walk the shore  
As cobras play the rattle  
Still many a night in pain once more  
We wage our phantom battle.

For all who live are headless men  
And all who lead are ghosts  
And those who hate shall have no life  
And those who love are lost.