

ABDULLAH IBRAHIM: MEDITATIVE AND HYPNOTIC

by Eric Myers

The Abdullah Ibrahim Quintet

York Theatre, Seymour Centre

Published in the Sydney Morning Herald, February 2, 1980

Such a diversity of entertainment has been presented in Sydney recently under the general banner of "jazz" that narrow definitions of the music are rapidly becoming outmoded. The South African-born musician Abdullah Ibrahim, whose quintet performed last night at the Seymour Centre, has denied that he is a jazz musician. As he is something of an abrasive personality, and openly critical of Western thought and society, it is paradoxical that little of this abrasiveness is reflected in his music, which is gentle, meditative and hypnotic.



Abdullah Ibrahim: something of an abrasive personality, and openly critical of Western thought and society...

Although he has performed before in Australia as a solo pianist, he has brought with him this time four black musicians from New York who perform his music

with great reverence: Carlos Ward (reeds and flute), Craig Harris (trombone), Alonzo Gardner (bass) and Andrei Strobert (drums). At other times there were ruminative gospel-like themes, which were usually stated first on the acoustic piano.

As usual, Ibrahim's solo piano was marked by a sombre air of deep spiritual commitment as he moved slowly through the chord changes. Yet he was likely to pierce this mood with sudden arpeggios or dissonant figures which suggested the spirits of Thelonious Monk or Duke Ellington. Elsewhere, his liking for rolling tremolo chords, beginning subtly in the left hand, led to rich, thunderous passages which he accomplished with a muscular, two-handed, percussive approach. Here the piano rang out like a full orchestra.



Ibrahim: rich, thunderous passages which he accomplished with a muscular, two-handed, percussive approach...PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

On saxophones and flute, Carlos Ward proved to be an exciting player, at times lyrical and singing, yet also able to solo with the savagery of avant-garde players. From the opening tune *Tsakwe*, which Ibrahim has dedicated to his son, the concert was an enjoyable journey through the diverse influences which make up Abdullah Ibrahim's individual style. Some of the songs voiced for the frontline instruments, which often included Ibrahim himself on soprano

saxophone, were simple, happy and Latin-oriented, suggesting the carnival and street music of Cape Town.



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Craig Harris on trombone played with rare fire, even if he was not concerned to show the fluent technique which has often characterised visiting American horn players. His jagged and percussive solos with squeals high up the register, and powerful, guttural roars, continually provoked applause.

At first hearing, the rhythm section of Gardner and Strobert sounded loose and splashy, continually understating the time. It may have sounded rough, especially to those who have been weaned on more bland music. But, once one was drawn into the band's orbit, the energy and dynamism of the playing proved compelling.