

review

GARY BURTON

by Ronald Atkins

I HAVE heard Gary Burton on record, in concert and on television, but there seems to be no substitute for catching him at the Ronnie Scott Club. The tight interaction between his vibraphone and whoever happens to be playing guitar thrives on the closest possible contact with an audience. The harder Burton works the more percussive his attack, and the more intricate become the cross-rhythms tossed around by his quartet. This is what jazz is all about—an important part, anyway—but for some reason jazzmen have rarely exploited the vibraphone's percussive qualities, even though its African heritage is pretty obvious. Burton has perhaps been forced down this path by the sheer nomenity of his technical command, and it is to his credit that his unaccompanied passages lose little of the momentum built up by the ensemble.

This is not his regular group from the US but a scratch quartet, filled out by members of Nucleus who are also on the bill. John Marshall, Roy Babington and Chris Spedding seem to have fitted in with no trouble, and Spedding's neat guitar solos and expert prodding behind Burton add a great deal to the performance. The newer pieces that Burton plays, several of them written by Keith Jarrett, adapt readily to his updated country blues idiom, and altogether I find him just as enjoyable as ever, even though there is no longer the element of surprise.

The rhythmic impact of Burton's music is such that he does not suffer from being juxtaposed with Mongo Santamaria. Santamaria has been mining the jazz-rock-conga drum field for several years, and his first appearance here has coincided with the belated rise in popularity of this type of music. Compared to such groups as Osibisa, Santamaria's octet is Latin rather than Afro: the soloists are more decisive, and the trend lies more towards individual expression than towards the total collective commitment which links Osibisa to Africa. Santamaria himself keeps the whole thing driving forward, while his fellow conga drummer, Armando Peraza, bursts through occasionally with some incredibly fast hand movements.

Burton and Nucleus remain at the club until July 10; Santamaria only until Wednesday night.

I AM REAL AND SO ARE YOU

by Merete Bates

AT LEAST fine, integrated performances by a gently genial Paul Webster and a cool staccato Katherine Barker, together with clear, meticulous direction by Richard Wilson, catch the drops of acid laughter that drift across Tony Connor's cobweb; "I am real and so are you" at the Library Theatre, Manchester. I doubt if the audience could contribute any more understanding than the author in his admitted bewilderment as to what it's all about. Except despair. This is the negative of life in courtship, marriage, and death: a trap into impotency, boredom, and infinite solitude.

JONI MITCHELL'S 'BLUE' on record

by Geoffrey Cannon

JONI MITCHELL'S new album, *Blue*, is about to be released here by Warner Brothers (K 44128). A large proportion of Joni's most notable songs, to date, have been intensely visual. What she's seen, she has refined; but the songs' images have been those of the eye.

The lyrics of "Blue" are less adventurous than in her previous three albums; on the other hand, its music is less careful. This is a fair exchange. The album is much more about Joni herself, less of scenes she's observed. The songs that stand out, at least at first, are earthy. In "All I Want" Joni wants to "wreck my stockings in some juke-box dive".

She makes it clear that she doesn't care to be construed as dependable. Instead, she insists on being able to be wilful. "Blue" is, I suppose, less

representative of women than Joni's previous albums; but its songs are as marvelously singular, if more relaxed. Graham Nash is the "Willy" of the Joni song of that name. His style is openly confessional; there's a group of singers in California, including Joni, James Taylor, Stephen Stills, and Neil Young, at least some of whose songs are letters to one another. Nash has just released his first album, *Songs For Beginners* (Atlantic SD 7204).

"Songs For Beginners" is yet another album recorded at Wally Heider's studio, with the mandatory star musicians as backers. This overpopulation helped to make David Crosby's solo album a swamp of unresolved sound. By contrast, Nash uses his musicians with focus and economy.

FIDDLERS FIVE at the Palace Theatre, Manchester

by Robert Armstrong

ONCE UPON A TIME there was a grand old lady of English letters called Agatha Christie who wrote a play called "The Mousetrap" when she was 60. This play (or thriller as some called it) ran for ever in a tough theatre jungle called the West End and everyone (especially theatre managers) marvelled and said it was a miracle that one theatre and one play could remain together for ever. The grand old lady was greatly encouraged because she had never really intended to write for the stage, and eventually, when she was 80, and had become a grand old Dame of the British theatre with the help of wicked Tory Barons and the alibi of

further countless mousetraps, she wrote a play called "Fiddlers Five".

This comedy thriller (as some called it) was demonstrated at the Palace Theatre, Manchester, where it was hoped it would succeed so well that another West End theatre could be reserved for ever. It was all about three men and two women who tried to collect a bet of £100,000 on whether a business tycoon will live until he is 70. The trouble is the tycoon dies one week before the crucial date—thus leaving Dame Agatha with the problem of entertaining us for two hours. In this task she proved a three-quarters failure because it was not until the last half hour that anyone

ALWIN NIKOLAIS

by James Kennedy

ALWIN NIKOLAIS, with his "dance theatre," is again at Sadler's Wells, where he was two years ago on his one previous visit to London. On last night's evidence the magic of his very special entertainment—a complex of electronic sound, dancers and, particularly, lighting, gimmicks and "props"—still works, though perhaps a degree or so less brilliantly than when first encountered. This slight diminution in its compulsiveness, for me at least, may have been caused simply by the choice of items for this opening programme.

It began a little scrappily with four divertissements; and the large composition which followed, called "Echo" (two to London, but seen by me earlier in the year when Nikoalis performed briefly in Southampton), is a bundle of fine tricks of lighting, but rather lacking in overall significance. Or it may be that after a while Nikoalis's dehumanisation of his dancers becomes a little wearisome. What is certain is that the dancers matter less than the props which they manipulate and that their movements are significant not so much in themselves but because an elaboration of lighting gives to them so kaleidoscopic an effect.

Nikoalis, we know, can, when he chooses, compose choreography, in a less complicated sense of the word, but he seldom so chooses. His choice is for gimmicks, props, and lighting and with these he is marvellous. His entertainment may have its choreographic limitations, but it is a theatrical treasure store in which other producers particularly of dance, could very fruitfully delve.

seemed to be amused. Some were clearly never amused. Those who don't wish to reserve another West End theatre for ever will rightly observe that the plot of this particular mousetrap lacked credibility, the dialogue was stale, the set was dissipated on a prairie-like stage, and the cast worked hard with little conviction.

Valerie Dane (as Gina) and Margaret Guess (as the air hostess) looked fairly pneumatic and Barry Howard (as the undertaker) provided the one spark of genuine fun. Director John Downing would probably agree that even the great British theatre-going public won't buy this little lot for another 19 years.