

chambers brothers



THE Chambers Bros. may well have taken over Blue Cheer's title of the world's loudest group.

Last month they arrived in London on a promotional visit armed with 600 watt amplifiers. The equipment has been specially perfected to give the minimum of distortion at maximum volume, and the amps are to be marketed in Canada under their own name.

Julius, their road manager, demonstrated that the power effectively runs through Chambers' amps for about 10 seconds after they have been switched off. After two concerts from the group their sound was still going through me about an hour later.

The great problem for the group and the pleasant surprise to the casual visitor to the show is that the Chambers Bros. are so much better on stage than on record. It seems that it was not until their recordings managed to capture some of the feeling

of a 'live' performance that they began to sell.

Lester, Willie, Joe and George were born and raised in Mississippi. The Chambers family would all sing in church together — father, mother, eight brothers and five sisters. Today their father is 89 and still looking after the garden, and taking extensive walks around Los Angeles.

Shindig

By 1965 the Chambers Brothers were well known for their shows in California. They made their first television appearance on *Shindig*. And their first record—*Call Me 17*—for a small local label, Vault.

They appeared at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival, and soon after found they had a choice of work between the east and west coasts.

It is only in the last year that they have had comparable success with records. *The Time Has Come Today* album has now been in the

American LP charts for over a year, it being a certified million seller. When a shortened version of the title track was released as a single it spent many weeks in the top 20.

Time is one of the few songs to have sold successfully to two distinct markets of soul music and so-called psychedelic. It is the mind-rearranging climax of their current act, when the amplifiers are given most freedom.

The follow-up single, which also made the U.S. top 50, was a version of Otis Redding's *I Can't Turn You Loose*, with Lester doing a hoarse vocal. In similar vein is the latest—*Are You Ready*—Lester screaming still more than ever before.

This side of their music is primitive. Lester hits a large cowbell with a stick for many numbers, or otherwise helps out with a tambourine. Brian Keenan is the loudest and most ruthless drummer to play with the Brothers. With George on bass, Willie

with a Les Paul Gibson and Joe a Gibson Stereo, it is not unusual to find all the instruments used fairly percussively. And lately, with the arrival of their new equipment the Brothers have been listening to the sounds of their own machines.

The Chambers also sing sweeter songs. With Joe or Willie singing lead and the other brothers harmonising, they produce fine versions of *Love Me Like The Rain* and Jesse Belvin's *Guess Who* and the most meaningful of all, *People Get Ready*. Willie makes some sensitive high-pitched fluttering sounds from his guitar, and Lester's harmonica is at all times remarkable for his ability to breathe while playing very long passages.

Everything they do is basically gospel. All the Brothers sing, and the first songs they learned were spiritual harmonies. The influence persists into every one of their songs today so that each carries its own conviction.

The strength of the Brothers lies in their affinity. The co-ordination many groups must spend a lifetime learning has come very naturally to the four brothers who are just as close off stage as on. Although not particularly adventurous instrumentally, their playing is usually tight enough to allow complimentary exchanges.

Determined

It seems the Chambers Brothers are quite determined to make it in England. For, frustrated by the lack of interest shown them by British promoters, the group decided themselves to finance a promotional tour of Europe.

Bringing with them the Joshua Light Show they played three concerts for the ICA in London, and also several television dates. A *Colour Me Pop* show was taped and should be worth watching. They also promise to be back for a wider tour next September. See you, then.

THE JOSHUA LIGHT SHOW



DAVID EDWARD BYRD 1968

PROVIDING a most beautiful accompaniment to the Chambers Brothers at their London concerts was the Joshua Light Show. This is the group who have been resident at the Fillmore East in New York and have backed all the major English and American musicians to play there. It is not surprising then that their co-ordination of visual effects with musical changes far outshines the displays of other artists in light.

Their secret is simple. Joshua's band builds on the screen in the same way as pieces of music are built. The five members of the show have their own distinctive roles and exercise the same amount of self-discipline in creating light variations as must the musical group with their instruments.

Joshua White is the leader, who says, "We deal with projection of pure visual material, as opposed to flashing lights—the strobe—and ultra-violet light. We set up a series of propositions, each of which can do many things and then listen to the music and interpret it.

"We never jump into it and we wait till we see where it's at—if the number is slow, I usually ask Tom to begin" said Joshua.

Mirrors

Tom Shoemith works mainly with mirrors. He concentrates for the most part on reflecting a bright beam on to the screen and is comparatively isolated from the others who are concerned with the various projections. "Structurally, music is very predictable," Tom told me. "Acid rock is

fairly unpredictable. It used to depress me with a group like The Grateful Dead waiting for their music to change, since I'd produce no major change on the screen. For the Chambers Brothers' *Time Has Come Today* I can employ massive changes."

Bill Shwarzbach projects movements of coloured oils and waters compressed between plates and is also concerned with the more technical problems the light show encounters.

Lois Zelman and Cecily Hoyt are responsible for the cooking and filtering of the chemicals used and a further oil projection.

Use is made of an overhead projector, with film loops, slide projector, dimmer controls and a colour wheel. The resultant light is a spontaneous interpretation of the music.

"What we are doing with the Chambers Brothers is not very typical of our work—except perhaps for something like *Time Has Come Today*. There we have a full musical range and a full light range," Joshua continued. "We are mostly motivated by rock—the beat in this music is extremely important and we'd be fools to ignore it but sometimes the lights are a long way from the beat. I follow the bass quite often but backing jazz, for example, when they are laying down no recognisable tempo and going completely abstract we are not committed to anything.

"Sometimes, if the audience has come to see a particular person more than hear the music, we incorporate closed circuit television. We integrate it physically into the light show."

Trade shows

The Joshua Light Show has not only operated within the world of pop music. Members of the group have provided the light environments for industrial and trade shows, have appeared in a film called "Midnight Cowboy", have presented Berlioz's *Symphony Fantastique* at Carnegie Hall, and managed to throw light some 130 feet at the last Light Olympics.

J.L.S. is a most futuristic business organisation that may sometime find wider application for its talents. In the meantime, wherever it appears it continues to increase the depth of many a musical experience.

C.P.