

YANK

MARCH 25, 1945: P. 19

jazz

Peewee Russell and his clarinet.



Popular music back home hasn't changed much. The same familiar bands play the new hit tunes.

By Sgt. AL HINE
YANK Staff Writer

WHEN a critic in the New York *Herald Tribune* panned Benny Goodman's clarinet playing as "flashy" and "commercial," a neighborly critic in Chicago's *Down Beat* magazine promptly panned the *Trib* man for making the "most asinine remark of the year."

None of which is of any great importance; it is simply typical of the growing popularity of jazz. This popularity is so great now that jazz lovers, who used to stand together ruggedly against the classicists of music, have now split into two fairly large warring camps. One school will listen to nothing but small, spontaneous "Dixieland" combinations; the other favors larger groups and more complicated arrangements.

Such stalwarts of the Dixieland school as trumpeter Muggsy Spanier have gone so far as to forcibly eject (that is, throw out on the can) anti-Dixieland critics from Nick's combination jazz shrine and night club in New York. The anti-Dixieland critics go about their own brand

jazz

of mayhem by writing polite and poisonous articles inferring that all Dixieland musicians refuse even to share kennel space with their mothers.

Fortunately nobody is getting hurt, no blood is being shed, no bones are being broken and the great majority of the jazz musicians you used to like to listen to—dancing or swaying in front of the bandstand with your girl—are still making music. The battle is mostly one of fans and critics.

The leading big bands now are Woody Herman's, Duke Ellington's and Lionel Hampton's. Benny Goodman, who broke up his own band for the umpteenth time, is a featured performer in Billy Rose's super revue, "The Seven Lively Arts," but the maestro is said to be thinking of turning over his Rose job to Raymond Scott and making another stab at the band business.

Ellington has been the stand-out of the year. The Duke, whose "Mood Indigo" you hummed 10 years ago, is going strong both as a composer and a musician. He won the Gold Medal jazz award for 1945, presented by *Esquire* magazine, and accepted it at a concert with all the trimmings at New York's Carnegie Hall.

The Duke's Carnegie concert—the whole length of the stage back of the band was packed with servicemen—was a peculiar combination of straight jazz and jazz dolled up symphony style, presumably for the occasion. The audience—all ages, all sizes—seemed happiest listening to oldies like "It Don't Mean a Thing, If It Ain't Got That Swing" and new popular tunes like "Don't You Know I Care?" They got a little fidgety when the Duke launched into more pretentious numbers—a "Perfume Suite" and excerpts from a musical history of the Negro race, "Black, Brown and Beige." Altogether, though, it was a solid performance, and the Duke showed that his band could absorb the loss of men like Cootie Williams (trumpet, now on his own) and Juan Tizol (valve trombone, now with Harry James) without any serious effect.

Other recent jazz doings at Carnegie Hall have been the concerts of Eddie Condon, dean of Dixieland. Eddie has been making a shambles of the sacred stage of Carnegie since three years ago when he first featured the late Thomas (Fats) Waller on the piano. He draws a less respectful crowd than Ellington, but they represent much the same cross section, maybe this time with their wraps off. There is the same seasoning of GIs in the house, and a few of them sit in with the various combinations Eddie whips together.

The Condon concerts are a very exceptional grab bag out of which Eddie plucks a few choice items—Cliff Jackson on piano, Max Kaminsky on trumpet, Kansas Fields (in Navy blues) on drums, Lou McGarity (another sailor) on trombone and Bob Haggart on bass. Eddie introduces the boys, announces the number to be played, gives a "one, two, three" and settles down to playing with them and his guitar. As soon as one number is finished, Eddie, his bow tie fluttering like the antennae of a rare butterfly, pulls an entirely different group of hot artists out of the grab bag and starts a new number.

The whole business is impromptu and fresh. Condon keeps his selections strictly on the Dixie side—"Muskrat Ramble," "I Wish I Could Shimmy Like My Sister Kate" and suchlike—with a breezy assumption that, if you don't like it, what the hell are you doing at his concert in the first place? His audiences like it and Carnegie shudders, particularly at moments like the last number of his January series when he had three drums, five trumpets, four trombones, three clarinets, four saxes, two pianos, three basses and Lord knows what all else blasting the rafters and the customers at once.

THese concert appearances were, naturally, high spots and unusual spots in current jazz. Most people still get their jazz as they always did, in ballrooms and night clubs, flavored with the cigarette smoke and the stale drink smell that are almost a part of the music, or from the radio switched on automatically, while dressing in the morning or washing the dishes in the evening, or from the juke boxes in bars and drug stores.

jazz

The names of the bands in the ballrooms and the clubs are almost the same as the names you saw three and even four years ago. Hal McIntyre, for example, is playing in Chicago and Freddy Martin in Los Angeles. Jerry Wald, who got into big time only a few years ago, is in New York, and so are Jimmy Dorsey, Tommy Dorsey, Erskine Hawkins and, inevitably, Guy Lombardo. Vaughn Monroe is at the Palladium in Hollywood and Woody Herman is at New Jersey's famous Meadowbrook. Miff Mole, Peewee Russell, Muggsy Spanier and Bob Casey are the drawing cards at Nick's in New York, though at this writing Miff is laid up in the hospital.

One reason all these band names are so familiar and no really new band has come into the limelight is the war. Most of the younger musicians are fingering BARs instead of clarinets, and even those who have hung onto their instruments are tootling them in service bands. One of the newest individual stars is Lou McGarity, of the Navy, who still gets an occasional chance to slide his trombone at jam sessions. He plays a strong masculine style, a little like George Brunis (now back with Ted Lewis in Chicago) but without George's clowning.

One new band, launched about a month ago, draws heavily on ex-service musicians. Ray Beauduc, drummer, and Gil Rodin, sax, who served together in the old Ben Pollack band, in Bob Crosby's Bobcats and in the Coast Artillery, hatched this new combo after they were discharged. Gil was thought to be the main organizing brain of the Crosby crew and plays the same



Some people go to Carnegie for jam sessions, but the more usual setting is one like this, with Lee Wiley singing "Sugar," and hubby Jess Stacy at the piano.

He is handling sax for a while but is expected to drop out and concentrate on management once things get rolling. Beauduc's name will be a big draw to fans who remember "Rampart Street Parade" and "Big Noise From Winnetka." The rest of the band is mostly discharged GIs who got their training in camp orchestras and bands. As long as they can resist the impulse to give out with a hot "Retreat" or "To the Colors" they should catch on.

WHERE you will find new names is in the list of song titles all these bands are playing. Screwiness has always been a trade-mark of hit tunes from "The Music Goes Round and Around" to "Mairzy Doats," and the present hit parade is no exception.

j a z z

The Andrews Sisters launched a number called "Rum and Coca-Cola" which is leading popularity lists everywhere except in the radio bracket. One reason for this is that, outside record programs, nobody in radio seems to want to give Coca-Cola free advertising. The song is a calypso-type rhythm, modeled on ditties of Trinidad, and in some versions it gets very sexy indeed. Caribbean GIs will understand.

"Don't Fence Me In," a Cole Porter Western introduced by Bing Crosby, is another leader. And "Ac-Cent-Tchu-Ate the Positive," a moral lesson by Johnny Mercer, is going strong. The squirreliest of current juke-box hits is Spike Jones' "Cocktails for Two," the roughest treatment that sentimental ballad ever got. The Jones version has been popular on the air for some time. Now that you can buy records once more, since the lifting of the recording ban by Musicians' Union leader James Petrillo, it's a retail best seller.

On the conventional and romantic side, the songs you would be most likely to put on your turntable just before you dim the lights on your honey are "Let's Take the Long Way Home" (which has nothing to do with military rotation) and "A Little on the Lonely Side." There are also "I Dream of You," "Saturday Night Is the Loneliest Night in the Week" and "I'm Making Believe." All of these, as you might expect, are chiefly suitable for humming into young girls' ears or for being hummed into your ears by young girls, preferably one at a time.

Just to restore sanity there is a catchy thing entitled "One Meat Ball," all about a man who has only 15 cents and can't get a slice of bread to go with his meat ball in a snotty restaurant. Try this one in your mess sergeant's ears. Some of the little Dixieland bands play "One Meat Ball" and some of the big-name bands play it, and the customers like both of them.

Meanwhile the critics continue to fight over What Is Jazz? and the increasing bitterness of their verbal battling is about the only outstanding change you'll find in jazz as it is this minute.

YANK

(Continental Edition)

OldMagazineArticles.com