

The New Popularity Of Jazz

continued

to that status) on the radio and in the movies.

Considering its origin, how can we account for the appeal of jazz among urban, middle class, intellectual whites? There have been a variety of answers to this question. Some writers claim that jazz has a rhythmic vitality and tunefulness that is superior to that of commercial music, and hence attracts the more intelligent person who has listened to popular dance music. Others go further and see in jazz the expression of our turbulent, quick-paced twentieth-century life, and say that consequently, jazz has a natural appeal for us. It has been argued, also, that urban sophisticates find a new kind of musical thrill in jazz because its folk origin answers some deep need in ourselves for an identification with the folk in an age of complexity and thorough-going social change. Finally, some students insist that the conditions of insecurity and oppression which characterized the lives of the Negroes who developed jazz is now characteristic of the lives of most of us, and the intelligent person is the first to recognize this feeling and to react to it in the form of appreciation of jazz music,

Whatever the reason, jazz has continually belied the critics who predicted its decline. The first of these predictions came from writers who considered jazz to be nothing more than a child of the "flaring twenties" which in turn they believed was but a transitory period in our national development. Yet jazz enjoyed renewed popularity during the 1930's and again in the present decade. Between revivals, too, jazz was never dead, for it survived in New Orleans, Chicago, and New York, as well as in isolated spots and in recordings.

In connection with recordings and the interest in jazz, mention must be made of the "collectors," those jazz lovers who devote much time and energy to the collection, exchange, and cataloging of records, and whose concern with the music

never flags. They are its unfailing supporters in good times and bad. The practice of collecting has developed into a science of discography, and also has assumed many aspects characteristic of religious and political cults, with special rules of conduct, esoteric interests, special literature hardly comprehensible to outsiders, and a good measure of evangelism.

The common belief, still prevalent, that jazz is a child of the twenties ignores two or three decades of jazz playing before that. Nevertheless, it is true that while jazz was born long before the twenties, it was given a powerful impetus during those years by the emergence of some great Negro and white musicians. The considerable migrations of Negroes from the South to the North, just after World War I, transplanted both the jazz musicians and a substantial part of their audiences to new areas. At the same time, two external conditions conducive to jazz were present in many places during that decade.

First, as Frederick Ramsey, Jr., once aptly put it, "Jazz... needs the intimacy of small halls." It is not merely the size that is meant, but chiefly the informal atmosphere. The players of Jazz are unceremonious men, not encumbered with tradition in manner of preformance. Jazz is not customarily played by men in boiled shirts and white ties, with the accumulated precedent of centuries of the concert stage and music chamber. It grew up in a very informal atmosphere, the small saloons and dance halls where people went to relax and throw off convention and dignity. In the speakeasies and dives of the post World War I era, then, jazz found the same informality and intimacy in which it had originally flourished.

The second external aspect of the growth of jazz was the community of interest between players and listeners in a familiar atmosphere which, too, was characteristic of the small clubs of the twenties. In New Orleans most of the early jazz men, great and small,

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