

THIS THING CALLED SWING

America Goes Primitive to Rhythmic Tunes of the 'Cats'

By JOSEPH W. LaBINE

A bunch of the cats were lickin' their chops and friskin' their whiskers, just aching for a jam session. Up on the stage a long underwear gang was handing out sweet and sticky schmaltz while a monkey waved his baton. The alligators didn't like it either.

No, Genevieve, this is not a description of open house at the zoo—it's just a picturesque way of saying that an audience of dissatisfied patrons in a New York night spot are hungry for that indefinable, primitive and captivating type of alleged music called "swing."

The "cats" are swing musicians, rhythm-mad boys who, by "lickin' their chops" and "friskin' their whiskers," indicate a desire for an impromptu gathering of their ilk to play for the fun of it, otherwise known as a "jam session." The "long underwear gang" they despise might be Guy Lombardo's orchestra, famous for its smooth and restful tunes (otherwise, "schmaltz"). Lombardo himself, the director, might be the "monkey."

The "alligators" are several million Americans—mostly younger generation—who play no instrument but have been bitten by the swing bug. And what a bug it is, stinging white man and black man alike, invading Chicago's beer-scented joints and New York's swankiest supper clubs!

A BIT FAMILIAR

To youth it is a new delight but to middle-aged Americans it has a strangely familiar beat, reminiscent of something they heard 15 or 20 years ago, before what is known as "jazz" attained respectability. Those were the days when jazz was "hot," when polite society frowned on it as primitive and uncivilized. It was before George Gershwin wrote "Rhapsody in Blue," before jazz symphonized itself and fell under such artistic control that it was no longer free and natural. When that day arrived it ceased to be jazz, ranking as something unreal and unprecedented, something that had no reason to exist and therefore soon expired.

Swing took its place. And swing is nothing more than the original Dixieland jazz, a second wave of the throbbing, carefree rhythm which New Orleans' shanties and honky-tonks discovered 20 years



THE MASTER OF THEM ALL—Benny Goodman, the king of swing, with the "agony stick" that helped discredit "sweet" jazz and brought America a new era of hot music. Or is it music?

Grofe and Paul Whiteman were at the height of their popularity as exponents of the hated symphonic jazz and "schmaltz."

Goodman played for years with other bands, unhappy because he was forced to restrain himself and produce "commercial" music, sweet and restrained tunes that were popular with the customers but sickening to musicians. In 1931 he tried his own band but it flopped because of the Gershwin-Grofe-Whiteman influence. In 1934, nauseated, he organized another outfit that was fired from Billy Rose's Music Hall in New York. In the nick of time a large commercial radio show picked him up. Next came a Manhattan hotel engagement which closed because the customers weren't prepared for hot music. The skies were again dark until Fate intervened one night at the Palomar ballroom in Los Angeles and swing began an overnight stampede to popularity!

SWING DEFINED

We'll guess with you—what is the mystic element of swing that makes some people stamp their feet and shout, that makes other people sit tensely listening for every note as if life itself depended on it?

Gene Krupa, popular drummer with Goodman's band, says swing is "complete and inspired freedom of rhythmic interpretation." Which means that you don't follow music; instead you create and improvise as

you go along. Any selection from a Beethoven sonata to "Bei Mir Bist Du Schoen" is presumably swingable but we'd just as soon let Beethoven alone.

SPREADING THE JAM

Though critics scorn swing as an "art," the musicians themselves have demonstrated a positively artistic regard for their profession. Swing, unlike Gershwin jazz, will thrive without glamor. Some of America's most able "cats" are found in such small and out-of-the-way places as Chicago's "Three Deuces" night club.

The "Three Deuces," like other swing spots, was once famous for its "jam sessions." Nightly, after other clubs had closed their doors, musicians from world famous orchestras made this dark basement their rendezvous, treating the customers to impromptu swing concerts that made the welkin ring. The Chicago musician's union put a stop to this delightful custom, but it still prevails in many a Harlem night club.

But it remains true that some of America's ablest musicians are swing enthusiasts. Seldom does one find faster or more talented hands than those of Teddy Wilson, Goodman's pianist, nor can many trumpet men approach Roy Eldridge's crystal-clear high notes without using a mute.

What will happen to swing? As the "alligators" become more numerous and historians announce that this primitive music is only a second edition of the early jazz, it becomes increasingly possible that swing may also try to get respectable and thereby kill itself. Swing is already tremendously successful. Already it is appearing in New York's finer hotels, far removed from the smoky atmosphere in which it developed.

WILL IT STAGNATE?

Soon may come the stagnation that usually seizes arts patronized by the well-to-do. It will be sponsored and supported. Swingmen will, without realizing, develop a codified technique and a set of rules to which all music must conform before it can be called swing.

True exponents of swing will not be frightened by this prediction. When they gather 'round tonight and "go out of the world," watching hundreds of the faithful cock an attentive ear to the music, all fears will be cast aside.

Even though the current swing craze does give way to the respectable jazz of future George Gershwin and Ferde Grofes, it will probably return at a later date. For the New Orleans honky-tonks will always be loyal and the tom-tom rhythm that beats within a negro's breast must find expression. Then will come a third wave, and the "alligators" will be happy again!

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ago. This second wave seems vengeful, determined to punish the faithless first wave which went astray and made itself respectable. In the last two years it has traveled by river boat up the Mississippi to St. Louis, squirmed its way into Chicago night life and spread throughout America like a flood.

Riding the crest of this wave has been a bespectacled young man to whom swing is a semi-sacred Cause, an orchestra leader who tossed it right in the laps of New York's social elect by staging a concert at sophisticated Carnegie hall a few weeks ago!

His name is Benny Goodman, and although the Carnegie hall concept prompted one critic to change the name from Manhattan to "Madhattan," he will continue to play hot music until the Cause is won or the battle lost.

SUCCESS STORY

Though still youthful, Goodman is a jazz man of the old school. He got his start in Chicago with the late Leon Bismarck (Bix) Beiderbecke, great trumpet and piano man of the early days who played with such outfits as Frankie Trumbauer and Jean Goldkette. Beiderbecke's recordings are still coveted by patrons of the hot music school. He died in 1931 when George Gershwin, Ferde

HOW SWING AFFECTS THEM—When Benny Goodman's band appeared at New York's Paramount theater recently the customers were so carried away by the swing music that some of them danced in the aisles. A few, still more intoxicated by the rhythm, swarmed up on the stage where the orchestra gave impromptu exhibitions of the "shag" and other swing tempo dances. In lower picture the conductor is in the left background while Gene Krupa, king of the drummers, plies his trade behind his "suitcase."



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"Monster Out of Hand"

By FLOYD GIBBONS
Famous Headline Hunter

HELLO EVERYBODY:

John J. Boner of Chicago has been firing a locomotive since 1906. He says that in that time he has had many a thrill—as what railroad man from engineer right along to conductor hasn't? But the biggest thrill in all John Boner's railroading career came to him on September 10, 1910, when he was firing an engine on the Milwaukee.

John was working west out of Perry, Iowa, and early in the morning he was called to fire on a double-header coal train. John was on the lead engine, and John Cunningham was the engineer. The train, John says, consisted of forty carloads of coal behind two Baldwin compound engines.

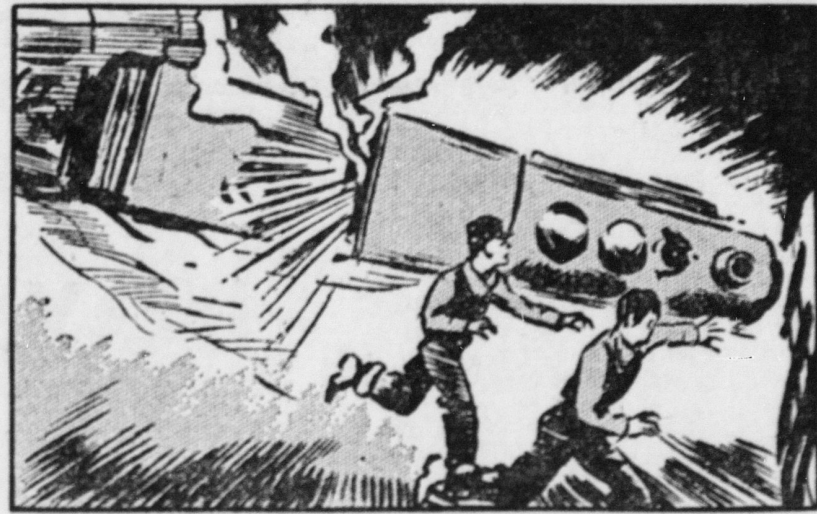
The train pulled out of Perry in some of the finest weather John had ever seen in his life. "The beauty of the day," he says, "seemed to impart something of its zest to our engines, and we made the wheels sing on those forty cars as we pushed the big locomotives along. From Perry to Council Bluffs, the road was all single track and water grades."

Up and Down the Water Grades.

For the benefit of us lubbers who don't know what a water grade is, John explains it to us. Those water grades get their name from the fact that a water tower is always set on the top of a hill whenever possible, so a train, after stopping to take on water, can get up momentum again by coasting downgrade. Water grades were just a series of ups and downs in the track, and with a heavy train you go as fast as you can turn a wheel down one hill in order to get up the next.

They cleared half a dozen of those grades, and everything was going fine. The train topped a hill east of Manning, Iowa, and John Cunningham opened the throttle and the train roared downgrade through a series of curves, gathering momentum for the next climb.

They were rounding the last curve, a mile east of Manning, when it happened. John was tossing a few scoopsful of coal into the firebox,



The Lead Engine Took a Nose Dive.

when all of a sudden he saw John Cunningham go into action. "He was grabbing for the whistle—grabbing for the brake valve—grabbing for the reverse lever," says John, "and it seemed to me as if he was grabbing for all of them at the same time."

Off the Track at Full Speed.

"I jumped to the left cab window. I was just in time to see a section gang scattering to the fields—and in time to get a shower of ballast full in the face. We had struck a hand-car loaded with iron rails."

John reeled back under the force of the blow he had received. For a second or two the big engine seemed to be riding the rails. Then John felt the wheels bump off onto the ties. "The emergency brake," he says, "was almost useless. We had been tearing downhill and around those curves with the throttle as wide open as it was safe to have it on that particular stretch of track. Our speed was almost forty-five miles an hour at the time, and behind us were another locomotive and forty heavy carloads of coal, shoving us along with the momentum they had gathered in that downhill run."

There was no hope of stopping that train, and John says that there wasn't any possibility of jumping, either. The big engine was rocking and swaying so badly that neither John nor Cunningham could stand long enough to jump. "All we could do," he says, "was to grab whatever we could get hold of in the cab and hang onto it."

All that happened in just a couple of seconds, and things were happening so fast that John didn't even have time to think.

But afterwards he could recall vividly sensations that he wasn't even aware of at the time. "Was I scared?" he says. "I don't know. Things were coming so fast that I don't think I had time to be frightened. For more than forty feet we rode the ties, and then bumped out on a trestle bridge. We ran sixty more feet out on that, and then the lead engine—the one I was in—took a nose dive to the right, keeled over on her side and began sliding down a thirty-foot bank."

He Got Out Just in Time.

John and John Cunningham were still in the cab—still fighting for equilibrium—for a foothold that would give them a chance to jump. The engine slid down the bank and came to rest in a hog wallow beyond the right-of-way fence. The minute it stopped, John was at the window and on his way out, with John Cunningham crowding behind him.

They were out the window so fast that it seemed as if both of them had gone through together. But at that, they weren't a second too soon. Just as they cleared the cab, a steam tube let go—burst with a roar that cleared the cab out as clean as dynamite could have cleaned it, and two hundred pounds of steam pressure flooded the spot they had just left with hot, scalding death. Only a second's delay and both John and Cunningham would have died back there in the engine cab—cooked to death in an instant by the jet of live steam.

"The second engine," says John, "bumped into our tender and turned off to the left, but the crew escaped injury in almost the same miraculous manner that we did. None of the coal cars piled up on top of either engine, as they usually do in such accidents, and that was almost another miracle. Since that time I've had many a spill and been in many a wreck. In some of them I've sustained injuries. But none of those close calls ever gave me anything like the thrill I got out of this one in which I wasn't even scratched."

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England's Smallest Inn

England's smallest inn is the Smith's Arms in the Dorsetshire village of Godmansstone. It has a thatched roof and measures about 10 by 20 feet. Built in the Sixteenth century, it was a blacksmith's forge until about sixty years ago.

Won Prize for Clock

In 1713, the British government offered \$100,000 to any one who could make a clock that would not lose more than three seconds a day. The prize was collected some years later by a clockmaker named Harrison.

Van Diemens Land

Van Diemens Land is an old name for Tasmania, the large island south of Australia, which constitutes one of the states of the Australian commonwealth.

Ancients Explain Rose Odor

The perfume of the rose is thus explained by the ancients: "Love, at the feast of Olympus, in the midst of a very lively dance, upset, by a stroke of his wing, a goblet of nectar which, falling on a rose, embalmed it with the rich fragrance it still retains."

Caribbean Days of Week

Days of the week in the Spanish-speaking countries of the Caribbean are: Sunday, Domingo; Monday, Lunes; Tuesday, Martes; Wednesday, Miercoles; Thursday, Jueves; Friday, Viernes; Saturday, Sabado.

First Oil Painter

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Watch Your Kidneys!

Help Them Cleanse the Blood of Harmful Body Waste

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