

"Jazz 'er Up!" Broadway's Conquest of Europe



"If an American shuts his eyes he will find himself wondering if he has really left Broadway."

By T. R. YBARRA

AMERICAN composers of "jazz" tunes and similar lowly but popular outcroppings of the musical art have accomplished in their field something which American "highbrow" musicians, in theirs, have never even come within hailing distance of accomplishing. They have utterly vanquished their European rivals.

In the matter of providing light music for Europe they have forced Europeans to take a humble back seat. They have compelled scores of European composers, under penalty of forfeiting popularity among the dancers and hummers and whistlers of Europe, to produce melodies as much like the genuine Simon-Pure American article as the non-American musical brain can compass. They have dominated music-hall Europe.

In all the length and breadth of the Europe of nocturnal enjoyment, of restaurant orchestras and variety shows and reviews and cabarets and cafés-chantants and dance palaces, the American jazz fraternity are lords paramount. In fact, the only popular composers who seriously rival them are the Spanish and South American manufacturers of popular dance tunes, such as the tango, "paso-doble" and "Spanish schottisch," and what these latter gentry are up against in the matter of competition is enough to make even the stoutest-hearted Castilian musician shimmy—I mean, shiver—with apprehension.

In Paris and a score of other European centres of gayety the words "fox-trot" and "one-step" have become so much a part of the local language that natives have to think twice to remember that the words were originally imported from America and are still members in good standing of the English language. Moreover, the regular European name for a place where you go to practice the terpsichorean art is a "dancing"—used just like that, without any supplementary word like "academy" or "hall"—and Parisians toss off the word with such a Gallic touch in the pronunciation that it might just as well be a bit of classic French, sanctioned by the immortals of the French Academy.

If an American touring music-hall Paris shuts his eyes after being shown to his seat at the Folies-Bergère, the Concert-Mayol or some such place, of supposedly ultra-Parisian entertainment, he will find himself wondering again and again whether, after all, he has really left Broadway. Copious doses of American "jazz," played by the orchestra, assail his ears. From the stage, singers pepper him with song after song which first burst upon a listening world from the jazz-factories of Tinpan Alley, Manhattan. These ditties, of course, are served up to him with French words, just as French chefs serve to Americans in Paris beefsteaks and mutton chops

with mysterious and complicated sauces, but even several thickness of the French language wrapped around a Broadway melody and tied with a stout knot of French irregular verbs cannot rob it of its essentially out-and-out, devil-may-care Broadwayism. It remains as American as a wheat cake.

The number of popular American tunes which are the small change of the orchestras and bands which provide light melody for Europe is amazing. You stray into a place for dinner and you get "Avalon" with your soup, "Whispering" with your roast, "Bright Eyes" with your dessert. After paying the waiter—to the notes of "The Vamp"—you stroll along the boulevard, turn into an inviting-looking music hall, take your seat to the strains of "The Love Nest," and are forthwith regaled, in the course of the evening, with the Parisian conception of four or five more American-to-the-marrow ditties whose Farthest East, you confidently supposed, was Coney Island. All these tunes may be a bit stale now in America, but that doesn't bother the Parisian in the slightest; his passion for American "jazz" is so great that, once he gets hold of a tune that he likes, he will play with it and worry it as a cat does a mouse, and he won't drop it until he has squeezed the last squeaks of life out of it and left it as dead as "Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay."

American tunes which were rampant in Paris when I was here more than a year ago are still doing duty on the boulevards; they are still being whistled, or hummed—with a sauce of French words—by French enthusiasts who simply cannot bear to lose them. There is a saying that Paris is the place where good Americans go when they die. Be that as it may as regards ourselves, it certainly applies to American jazz tunes when they die in America. It is quite a pleasurable sensation when one is walking along the street in Paris to hear suddenly, issuing from the lips of a light-hearted Parisian, an American tune which anybody around Forty-second Street and Broadway would have told you had died—after long and honorable service on some of the hottest sectors of the Broadway cabaret front—in the Autumn of 1917.

There is a music publishing firm in Paris which seems to have something like a monopoly of the job of Gallicizing American popular tunes. In its window are displayed two or three dozen piano or vocal scores of melodies well-known along Broadway, but oh! what a change is there! They have been decked out with covers drawn by French artists, and underneath their English titles they have a translated French version of them—sometimes, in fact, the main title given is French, with the original American title displayed underneath in modest, retiring type. The whole effect which these transplanted Broadway flowers produce upon the American onlooker outside the

show window in which they are displayed is very much like that produced by the American who, after a few months in Paris, is totally unable to remember enough English to keep French words out of his conversation.

In addition to the main title, the French adapter of these American songs often adds little subtitles to give prospective purchasers a rough idea of what a grand little thing the music hidden within the covers really is. For instance, you will be informed that such-and-such a ditty is "le plus célèbre des fox-trots," or that another, of a wild and abandoned character, is "le véritable shimmy!" This same publishing house, by the way, makes a specialty also of dressing up in French garb the great successes of Spanish light music, so, in American slang parlance, it may be said to "catch 'em coming and going," seeing that it deals in the two kinds of music, which, in Paris, are driving the native article to the wall.

There is something irresistibly funny to an American in seeing a song, an old friend of his in its original American heyday, now dressed up in Parisian toggerly and described as "Le Vamp," just as there is in the talk which one hears on every hand of "le shimmy" or "le fox trot," and in the intention, expressed with astonishing frequency, to repair with as much expedition as possible to "un dancing." These things give the visiting American a feeling of internal joy similar to that which he experiences when, walking along the boulevards just beyond the Paris Opéra, he comes upon a theatre where they are giving the French version of that great New York success of a few years back, "Peg o' My Heart," under the delicious Parisian disguise of "Peg de Mon Coeur." It is to be hoped that no American song with a title including the word "sweetheart" will become popular in Paris and, therefore, expose itself to translation into French, because there is an instance on record of a Frenchman who, in conversing with a young American girl and trying desperately for a French equivalent of "sweetheart," called her, in honeyed accents, "coeur sacré!"

The English, by the way, have not been slow to take advantage of the craze for American music on the European Continent. Having the great advantage of speaking the same language as the creators of American songs, and having, moreover, acquired the craze some time before the Parisians and the rest of the continentals, the English are now in a position to do a considerable export trade not only in "jazz" singers and dancers, but also in "jazz" tunes, English composers being by this time remarkably proficient in the production of fox-trots and one-steps almost impeccably American in character. At one of the leading cafés-concerts in Paris (described to the American visitor, be it observed,

as typically Parisian) there is a dazzlingly pretty young English actress. When she first appears on the stage she starts talking a strange jargon. The American auditor, after paying careful attention and comparing it with what is being talked by the Parisians in the seats around him, suddenly realizes that this jargon is supposed, by the dazzlingly pretty young Englishwoman in question, to be French. But just as he has come to the conclusion that she will stick to this amazing lingo throughout the show, seeing that she is in Paris and bent on pleasing the Parisians, she suddenly turns upon the audience with a fascinating smile and announces that she will sing and dance a "jazz" tune, whereupon she bursts into a ditty with Broadway written all over it, Broadway woven into its inmost notes. And with what zest that young person abandons her Anglo-French—which sounds as if it had had a very rough passage from Dover to Calais and switches into English, dwelling on every syllable with devilish gusto, and how her teeth and eyes flash with joy at being in her own element again! And the Parisian audience shouts its approval. Probably had she failed to give them an American jazz song, in accordance with the true Parisian etiquette, they would have gone out to the box office and demanded their money back!

But, as has been remarked, American composers of popular dance tunes have a group of rivals in Europe. Up to the present these rivals have been unable to compete, in quantity, with the flood of American melody which has been poured across the ocean from the jazz factories of Broadway—but they are formidable, nevertheless. I allude to the composers of Spanish popular ditties and to those who turn out Argentine tangos and other South American dances. The tango experts are sometimes native South Americans; sometimes they are Spaniards, who have always shown great facility in composing according to South American rule, just as North Americans have always excelled in turning out "coon" songs of all sorts; sometimes, again, they are natives of France or some other European country, who have noted the trend of popular musical taste toward Spain and South America; in many cases, finally, they are natives of the United States, where many a tango has first seen the light. But the best composers of South American tunes are native South Americans or Spaniards, and, as for the dance measures peculiar to Spain, it takes a genuine Spaniard to create them—"Spanish" tunes by composers who are not Spaniards are mere imitations, just as European attempts at an American jazz tune are pale and unsatisfactory compared with the genuine Broadway brand.

The tango has never lost its popularity in Europe. In Paris and many another European big city it is still

being danced assiduously, to the typically South American strain of "Pan y Agua," "Lulu," "El Irresistible," "Joaquina," "El Guanaco," "El Reservao" and many other racy Spanish-American tunes, some of which have never become acclimated in New York, where the tango failed somehow to gain a real foothold.

In addition to the regular tango, various variations of it, as well as other South American dances of the same family, have swept through the dance halls of Europe in an irresistible wave, actually daring to raise their heads in competition against the ubiquitous overlord of present-day dancing, the Broadway jazz tune. In this audacious revolt the languorous semi-Spanish melodies of South America are ably backed by those of Spain herself, "la madre patria," the mother-land of Spanish America, the land which, in the eyes of Spaniards and many non-Spaniards as well, is the real home of dance music.

At the most up-to-date dance halls of Paris nowadays you are sure to hear one Spanish "paso-doble" in every four or five pieces played by the musicians, and you are also practically certain to be regaled with a Spanish schottisch, the latest importation from Madrid, which is sweeping, by way of Paris, all over the European Continent. This invasion of Europe by Spanish dance tunes may be new to Europe in general, but there is nothing new about them to Spain. The Spaniard, who is supremely indifferent to other countries and what they think of him or his amusements, has been composing "paso-doble" and "schottisch" tunes, and dancing to them for dozens of years. The former are the darling of the bull-fighting public; no bull fight is complete unless a rattling, ultra-Spanish "paso-doble" is played as the bullfighters march into the ring, unless another is blared forth by the band every time there is a lull in the proceedings. There is a raciness, an originality, an irresistibly barbaric verve about a true Spanish "paso-doble" capable of causing the most confirmed pessimist, or the most uncompromising partisan of "highbrow" music, to start humming and beating time with hands and feet in helpless abandon.

The Spanish "schottisch" is the pet dance of the lower classes of Madrid and has been for decades past; to see it in all its glory it was necessary, a short time ago, to go to the "tough" dance halls of "La Bombilla," just outside Madrid. But now you can go into any Parisian dancing emporium, high or low, and see flocks of dancers laboriously attempting to dance it as the Spaniards do. They don't succeed—that goes without saying—a Spanish dancer is born, not made—but they have a mighty good time, apparently, and what more can one ask? An idea of the extent to which the Spanish

(Continued on Page 17)

Broadway's Conquest of Europe

(Continued from Page 3)

"schottish" has forced its way into Paris may be gained from the fact that the most popular of all present-day French tunes, "Mon Homme"—well known in America as a fox-trot—is one sale in Paris arranged as a "genuine Madrid schottisch"!

One reason for the great popularity of Spanish ditties just now in Europe is the tremendous hit made in Paris during the last two years by Raquel Meller, a Spanish singer, who is freely compared with Yvette Guilbert and the rest of the best singers of popular songs. Although she sings in Spanish, the Parisians have been flocking in crowds to hear her; they never seem to get tired of hearing her rendition of Spanish songs which, formerly known only to Spaniards, are now played in Paris and all over Europe. Raquel's most famous song, the one that infallibly bowls her audience over, is "El Relicario." She was singing it fifteen months ago in Paris. She is singing it there now. I have heard it played in Madrid, Vienna, Budapest, Rome, Stockholm, Berlin and Copenhagen. Its composer, Señor Padilla, who enjoyed a modest fame in his native country before "El Relicario" resounded from one end of Europe to the other, must be rubbing his eyes in amazement and wondering what has happened to him.

"Know any other Spanish tunes?" I asked a violinist at a leading Berlin restaurant. Without a word he launched into the wild strains of "Alma de Dios," one of the best of the songs of that clever Valencian, Serrano, and a dozen Teutons in the dining room took up the refrain. The last time I had heard it was in a Montmartre resort

several months before, along with the "paso-doble" composed in honor of Gallito, the greatest of Spanish bullfighters, who was killed by a bull last year.

"El Relicario," by the way, is also a "paso-doble," so that Raquel Meller, in singing it, has done her bit toward further popularizing that typically Spanish dance measure. And she is helping along the vogue of the Madrid "schottisch" also by treating Parisians to "Ay, Cipriano!" which is so essentially a "schottisch" that I doubt if it could be warped or twisted into being anything else even by the cleverest of musical adapters.

Popular as Spanish and South American dance tunes are all over Europe, they are but a poor second to American "jazz." The most that can be said for them is that they materially aid the latter in chasing away the native article in whatever countries they appear. If you ask what the latest production of Christiné or some other popular Parisian composer is you are almost sure to be told that it is a "fox-trot" or a "Spanish schottisch."

Now and then some Frenchman turns out a waltz that reminds one of the good old days of French waltzes, and, of course, Franz Lehár is still busy composing Viennese waltzes, and Leo Fall is still on the job. But an unmistakable air of mustiness seems to cling to them. The waltz, somehow, reminds you of grandma. And only at one place in Montmartre can you still witness the dancing of the genuine Parisian can-can.

Hail, Broadway! Viva España! To them it is that Terpsichore today pays allegiance.