

# Putting the Music Into the Jazz

By HELEN BULLITT LOWRY

JAZZ music is passé in the best Broadway society. The whine of the saxophone—the raucous shout of "O Boy!" to instill a little pep into a flagging couple—the barnyard clatter of the whistles will soon have gone the way of the original hour-glass figure of the queens of burlesque and the wicked split sheath skirt that was producing its shocks and drawing its anti-vice sermons some eight years back. But don't for an instant think that jazz has been reformed by earnest missionaries in the Broadway mission field. Jazz music is passing because something better is happening. Something has happened from the inside looking out, instead of from the outside looking in.

The new trick is that of orchestrating syncopation by the rules of harmony. And the prophet of the new cult has been Paul Whiteman.

Have you chanced to be in an expensive dance place this season? One of those new "club" places where the lure of the exotic is added to the old-time obvious revelries? Then you have noted the change in the music? Long, soft passages occur, more dreamy than an old-time waltz—to be followed by throbbing moments of excitement when the music has become a maddened rhapsody. Suddenly the flexible saxophone supplies a gay note of humor—but there is no tossing of instruments in the air. Nobody calls "O Boy!"

Instead, color and contrast and rhythm are playing on the senses of the dancers by the perfectly good scientific rules of music. Now enters in plaintively a theme from "Madame Butterfly." Strains from the Indian lyrics of Cadman sway the emotions like a moonlit Summer night. And through all of it the syncopated time stirs memories of the tangos that have come out of Spain through the Argentine and hark back to the gypsies and the East—entangled with dreams of veiled desert women, their strings of gold coins clinking. Echoes of phosphorescent jungle nights are there, too. But the raw jungle emotions are clothed now in the glamour that distance lends. Jungle music is undergoing a refining process under the fingers of sophisticated art.

Jazz, "as she was spoke" in New York, played only on the primitive senses. This new dance music plays on the esthetic senses as well as on the primitive. And for that reason it is more subtle, more insidious than the jungle screechings of the saxophone two years back. At least so the reform-bent people will tell us. That is a matter of opinion. The matter of fact is that the music played by the dance orchestra now is arranged and written as for a symphony—each player must be a trained musician, who would probably be a member of a symphony orchestra, save for that God-given trick of being a master of syncopation that has taken him out of the mere highbrow financial class and into the \$250 a week up class. Each player does the part allotted to him—and on more.

In the old jazz band the boy who wielded a wicked "sax" was improvising a solo. That band was made up of half a dozen men doing separate solos to the same "tune"—while the man at the traps thumped out the time and held them together after a fashion. Usually this traps man was the genius of the crowd—with feet, hands, elbows, lips and larynx called into play—a baby rattle of silver bells attached to his head—dropping a pair of sticks and picking up a flywhisk in the interval between two eighth notes.

The fact remains that the jazz band as known in white man's land has produced discords, for the very good reason that the blues were more apt than not to hit it off together. Therefore jazz was offensive to the trained musical ear. The new dance music does not produce discords, because it is constructed in accordance with the laws of harmony. It might be called good music in slang—as O. Henry was good literature in slang.

Twenty years ago and dance music was as tidy and accurate and un-slangy as an article in the Encyclo-

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paedia Britannica—and just about as exciting and dance inspiring. A "piece" was published from a music publisher, ready to wear, and was played as written. And maybe it was good enough for the waltzes and stilted twosteps of the period, over which as much sentimentality of the Older Generation has been squandered as on the fast-vanishing steely ribbed corset.

It was just about twelve years ago that the ragtime began to make itself felt—that first inspiring influence on staid American dance music—through the strains of the darky cakewalk. To rag a tune meant that you destroyed its rhythm and substituted a two-four or a four-four time. You could rag any tune—from "Greenland's Icy Mountains" to the "Lament" from "Pagliacci." Indeed, three-fourths of the popular songs of the last decade consist of a theme stolen from the realms of good music and then "ragged" by a composer who usually played entirely by ear—as the records of the copyright infringement suits will indicate. And yet the ragtime tune had life, where the dance music that preceded it lacked life.

Hum them over as you recall them—that first batch of rag tunes—"Camp Meetin' Time," "Down in Alabama," "Alexander's Rag-Time Band" a few years later—that the turkey trot should follow on them was as inevitable as that Summer should follow on Spring. The cakewalk demanded that you raise your feet in the air. "Everybody's Doing It Now" left your shoulders no choice but to be "tossed in the air." Somehow there was something in that first bunch of rags and of turkey trots alike that kept the movement up and down.

Syncopation was still confined to its native haunts—to the demi-monde of New Orleans, to the tango of the Argentine, to the enticing music of old Spain, with its haunting Moorish strains, and—why not be frank?—to Brahms and to Wagner. Not yet had the American ragtime kings learned to let the accent fall on a beat other than the given place for that accent—which, by the way, is about as near as untechnical language can come to saying what syncopation is, just as untechnical language must be content to describe "The Blues" as "stirred syncopation."

But the present writer is merely the dance public, instead of the musical public—so she can only describe what syncopation does—instead of why it does it—what "those blues" do to your feet when they take them away from your own control and into the control of the music—even as the turkey trot rhythm did things with your shoulders. These "Blue Danube Blues" make you take a step—but before that step is quite finished begin to give an undertow. There are cross currents in the music as well as the up and down currents of the old turkey trot or the cakewalk.

But we are getting ahead of the story—the dramatic story of getting these Dangerous Blues into society. Remember that the Argentine tango had come and gone without leaving

a trace of its peculiar quality of syncopated time on American dancing or upon American dance music. Most of the tangos of our tango period, eight years ago, had consisted of just "fancy steps" by partners who stood in the "tango position." Most of the music had consisted of just a fancy brand of slow rag time.

And so, after all, it remained for the African jungle to furnish the native birthplace to our modern dance music instead of the more respectable birthplaces we might have chosen for it. Syncopation can't laugh it off. Up the Mississippi to back saloons of Chicago—across the deserts and mountains to the Barbary Coast, Jazz had gone first, long years before there was more than a hint of syncopation in the negro dance orchestras that played for New Orleans' gay social world. And again more years passed before the first real "jazz band" migrated from New Orleans and began creating its far-famed furor on Broadway. That was just five years ago—the date set by all our reformers as the year that marks the final disintegration of American morals—the fatal day when the jazz got in and began its rapid spread to the furthestmost hick town of our Country. 'Tis of Thee.

From that time on the highest compliment you could pay to the music at the party has been to mutter admiringly, "That's a low-down band."

As to the morals that have resulted—well, I'll refer you to any of our warmer Sunday morning sermons, to the "resolutions" of women's clubs and to the bills introduced into our State Legislatures. Jazz has become a state of mind—the emblem of the insurgent Young Generation. As for what jazz did to the music of the country—ah, that is something more specific—and, unlike sermons, resolutions and bills, a matter where facts can be brought in as evidence instead of mere theories.

In brief, the white man's jazz has developed into copying the negro musician's technique without his special gifts. Something born inside the players kept the negro jazz band from making discords. I happened to have been reared in a Southern town where my yard stretched back to the side windows of a negro church. Summer Sunday evening after Sunday evening I sat on a bench down by the back fence and listened to the volume of melodious song from utterly untrained voices—gloriously peeling forth in some rhythmic old hymn like "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot." Each Sunday morning I partook of the Caucasian quaverings of the Presbyterian Church, reducing "Jerusalem the Golden" to its final ignominy. So is there nothing born inside of a white jazz band to keep it from making musical discords.

Nevertheless, jazz was the style—so all our busiest musicians began to produce it. And no sadder sight have I seen or heard than some staid settled old dance orchestra trying to "jazz it up" to suit the taste of that omnivorous Young

Generation. Jazz came to mean pep—well, then, yell "hot dog." Let the cornetist hang an old hat over the bell of his instrument, the cellist rise up and sit down and rise again, the clarinet be crossed in the air and caught on the head, as by a juggler. Full many a flagging orchestra has given similitude of musical pep by such a noble burst of physical pep. So also has personality been a factor in putting across jazz music—and that is why any typical jazz record on a phonograph is monotonous. You grow weary of dancing it before a ten-inch record is played out. The personality and the humor of the leader and of the musicians are not there to conceal the poverty of the music. At best the jazz orchestra had abandon and exuberant pep and rhythm. At worst the jazz orchestra had synthetic pep and discords. And the thunder of sermons rent the land.

And so the great god Jazz spread over our fair land—until the very electric pianos bowed their allegiance. Every dance hall in Harlem had its whining saxophone, and every telephone operator in South Bend was doing the shimmy.

Meanwhile, on the western coast of California something was happening. A young musician in the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, by name Paul Whiteman, was deciding that he wanted to get married, and that two not only could not live as cheaply as one, but could not live at all on his symphony salary. It was dance music for him or pas de marriage. Thus came a thoroughly trained musician into the world of jazz—into the realm of dance orchestration. His father had been the Supervisor of Music of the Denver schools for a lifetime. He himself was an accomplished violinist—as well as conversant with other instruments.

By the Spring of 1920 the entire coast of California was feeling the change in its jazz like the quiver of an earthquake. California was shimmying without discords. In the Summer of 1920 the Whiteman orchestra came East—a Summer in Atlantic City, and then at last its début into New York's night life, and the start of the train of circumstances that seem destined to alter the very strains of our "National Anthem."

For a year now the dance orchestras of New York have been modeling themselves on the Whiteman plan—which means playing to music arranged for orchestration—which naturally means that better and better musicians are becoming necessary. To give just an idea of how these arrangements are made—take any popular piece depending for its appeal on one good melody, and after that mere repetition. If the author has more melodies than are needed for one verse and the chorus, he saves his other ideas for another song—being usually a thrifty body. This one melody is the same thing as the theme of classical music.

Now the Paul Whiteman idea is to take this melody and build in the gaps between its occurrence with

counter-melodies—instead of with improvised "fake stuff" and gymnastics. An introduction is usually given to the piece that the first strains of the melody proper may be approached dramatically—while each time the melody is reached throughout the number it is arrived at through an entirely different "counter-melody"—sometimes through breathless moments of rhapsody—again through a plaintive love lament, or a theme from a Chopin mazurka may be used as a counter-melody to give buoyancy to the spirits of the dancers.

There is no secret about the "method." It is not patented. No does Whiteman claim to be a composer. He frankly says to other dance orchestra leaders, "You can do it, too, provided you are a trained musician instead of a trickster."

Moreover, the phonograph records of this new dance orchestra have been spreading the knowledge of the new kind of jazz broadcast—until already one important result is manifest. A demand is coming into music publishing houses for jazz compositions "arranged" for a four or a five or a twelve man orchestra, until the publishing houses are beginning to employ a musician to turn out these arrangements for the out-of-town trade, by perfectly good Sears, Roebuck methods. Counter-melodies are now kept in stock.

Nor is the ambition of the reformer of jazz yet realized. The Metropolitan Museum of Art has taken industrial art under its left wing—then, "Why," he asks, "should not some philanthropist endow a dance orchestra? No symphony orchestra could exist without an endowment—for a commercial concern has to follow public taste instead of to lead it. Dance music is wrong if it creates nasty steps. Then certainly it should be a matter of grave concern to the country that our dance music should not be wrong." Such an endowed orchestra, he explains, could be given the leisure to spend on "research" on how to refine dance music. (One somehow visualizes the laboratory scene, where the effect of a good "Blues" is being tried out on the couple chosen to act as guinea pigs.)

Nor is this a task that good musicians should scorn to be concerned in, goes on Mr. Whiteman. All classical music consists, in the final analysis, of the folk themes of peasants which have been built into sophisticated art. "Our dance music, with the possible exception of MacDowell and Cadman, has thus far been America's one original contribution to the music of the world. Our other music has been the direct result of European influences. And Europe gives us credit for our one contribution."

Anyway, when the Marshal Foch commission was in New York one of the be-decorated Generals slipped away from the formal dinner to hear the one sound that he had yearned to hear in our so-marvelous country—the strains of Paul Whiteman's syncopated orchestra, of which he possessed the phonograph records.