

THE MUSICAL HISTORY OF JAZZ

WHICH came first, bop or rebop? What is progressive jazz? How did jazz spread and develop? These are questions the newcomer often asks when he is trying to disentangle the complicated story of jazz. Usually he has to go to books for his answer, but recently an American recording company set about compiling a musical history of jazz designed to help the new hand get his bearings and still please those who know their way around. The noted American jazz critic George T. Simon wrote the script and an American TV personality, Wally Cox, reads it. This programme, which traces the history of jazz from the blues to progressive, will have its first New Zealand playing from 2YD on August 9, at 9.0 p.m. Among the musicians featured are Billy Maxted, Rex Stewart, Lawrence Brown, Pee-wee Irwin, Eddie Safranski, Peanuts Hucko. The titles of the numbers they play will be found (in parentheses) below, in the contexts which they illustrate.

"I've heard it said that jazz is just about the truest art form we have," begins Simon. "It is the kind of music that you feel deep down inside you. Sociologists interested in jazz have tried to trace it back to tribal music, but in America it began in New Orleans with the blues." ("Basin Street Blues.")

Most people know about the blues and almost as many will recognise its happier contemporary, ragtime ("Maple Leaf"). Ragtime started on the piano and got its name because at first it sounded like the noise you make when you wipe the keys with a rag. "And so jazz began to sound happier, but still for many people the only real jazz was the blues." The rags, however, had a rhythmic drive that appealed, so in

time the two were merged and the outcome was boogie-woogie, which is still very popular today ("Blues Boogie-Woogie").

In its turn boogie grew into something else. The New Orleans Negro marching bands that appeared for all sorts of occasions, including funerals, took up boogie and used to play a mixture of martial music and jazz. A jazz trumpeter, Wingy Mannone, describes one of these funeral scenes which he saw as a boy:

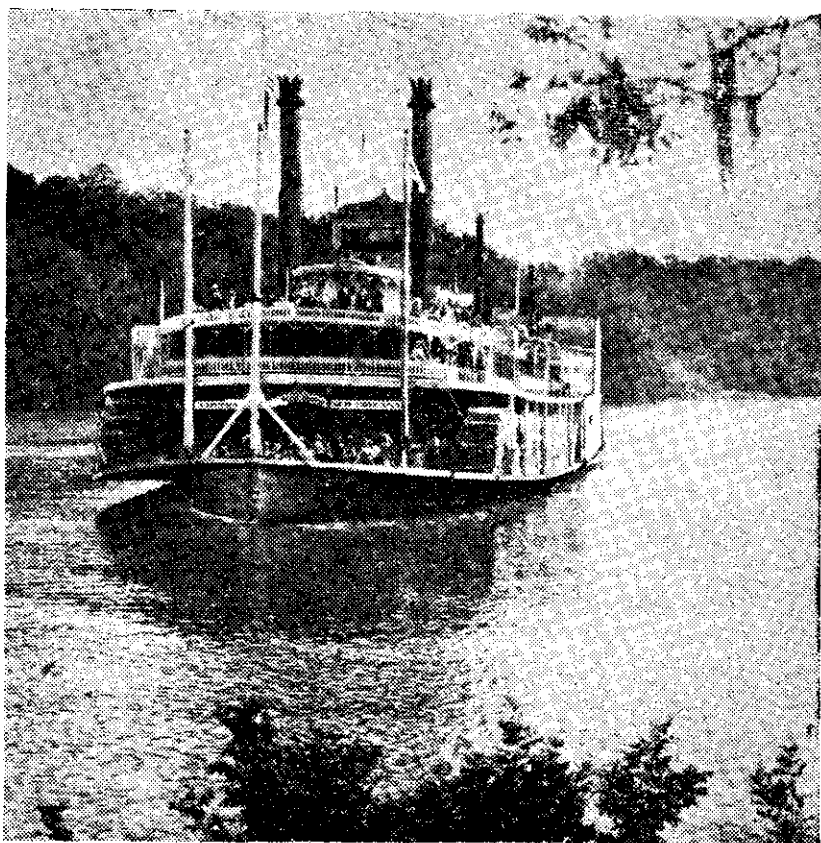
"On the way to the graveyard they all walk slowly, following the cornet player. All the way they just sway to the music and moan. At the graveside they chant questions such as 'Did he ramble?' or 'Did he gamble?' or 'Did he lead a good life until the police shot him down on Saint James Street?' Then they just go back to town and all the way they swing. They just pull their instruments apart. They play the hottest music in the world."

In this kind of music the drums and tuba gave the beat and the other instruments wove melodies and counterpoint around them. Soon the New Orleans marching bands had evolved a distinct and recognisable style known as Dixie ("When the Saints Go Marching In").

So far jazz had been centred in the south of the U.S.A. It spread north when bands began playing on the riverboats. These Mississippi paddle wheelers were expected to provide entertainment at the stopping places en route, and jazz musicians started moving up-river to St. Louis and Chicago. In Chicago it really got a hold, and white musicians began to settle there, where they could listen to the coloured bands all night long if they wanted to. They copied the coloured styles, added the saxophone to their bands, and started playing jazz versions of tunes popular in the twenties ("Sunday"). The bands grew in size until they had from ten to fifteen pieces in them, and arrangements became necessary. Paul Whiteman started this movement in the twenties and he was followed by Goodman in the thirties. By then, arranged jazz had come into its own. It had become smoother and because it swung lightly from bar to bar was given the name of "swing" ("Take the 'A' Train").

Until now there had been many rhythmic progressions in jazz, but very little harmonic change. With bop and its derivatives—bebop and rebop—jazz began to grow harmonically, and this came about largely through the efforts of a group of good musicians who had studied classical composition techniques. They began to place less emphasis on the driving beat which had dominated jazz until now, and started using more complicated rhythmic patterns ("Ornithology," by one of its originators, Charlie Parker).

Although bop was the beginning of modern developments, it more or less sealed its own fate in America by becoming a cult. Its devotees and musicians started wearing berets, heavy horn-rimmed glasses and other outlandish garments, so that gradually it faded out. Dope is said also to have contributed to its downfall. It was succeeded by a movement known as progressive jazz, which carried on bop's experiments in jazz harmony. Simon says that "little of the raw basic, emotional effect is left, and the result usually appeals more



MISSISSIPPI STEAMBOAT

"Jazz spread north when bands began playing on the river-boats"

to the intellect. It has come to be called 'cool jazz,' and much of it takes more than one listening" ("Progressive Calculus").

This is as far as jazz has gone, but it is a long way when one considers its short life of just over fifty years. Although Simon has had to simplify his story in parts his version of the jazz story is a clear one.

For those interested in the modern jazz scene, a new English book* has recently reached us which covers developments since 1939 in detail. Its authors, Alun Morgan, an architect, and Raymond Jorriks—a former civil servant, now a Decca "blurb" writer—survey modern jazz in America and Europe. An interesting foreword by Britain's premier jazz soloist, Don Rendell (tenor sax), shows the attitude of the best modern practitioners to their art.

"When I play jazz," he writes, "I try to create beautiful things for my own satisfaction and enjoyment. I play because I want to. If I play merely to impress people, then the solo is forced and the natural enjoyment is excluded."

Modern classical composers and jazz composers sometimes seem to be after the same effects and the book has some interesting things to say about this. They quote from the New York jazz man Quincy Jones: "There has been a tendency lately in the States to stress a classical air in many jazz works.

In doing this a lot of jazz musicians have missed the message (or never had it in the first place). In short, when we stop swinging, we're competing with Ravel, Bartok, Stravinsky and a lot of other brilliant musicians . . . and they outdo us."

The book is the best current history of jazz, treating it seriously but never dully. To the authors, jazz, like other art forms, needs time to grow. "The feeling for jazz is always a natural thing, but the power to express it clearly and fluently is a quality of gradual development."

In New Zealand the chief problem with jazz is to hear enough of it. Infrequent jazz concerts and short jazz programmes do not satisfy the demand, and it is left to the individual record collector to make good the deficiency. An interesting experiment was recently made by the Community Arts Service when it sent a group of five jazz players on tour. They played a representative type of concert—dixie, drum solos, piano and instrument solos, winding up with a jam session. C.A.S. already sends out operas, plays and concerts of classical music, and it was a good sign that a new and younger audience was attracted to the jazz.

*MODERN JAZZ
—A Survey of Developments since 1939, by Alun Morgan and Raymond Jorriks; Victor Gollancz, English price 15/-.



JAZZ STYLES IN BRIEF

BLUES AND RAGTIME: Blues were short twelve-bar themes based on minor or sad sounding chords. The singers often made up the words as they went along. Ragtime developed along with the blues, and at first was rough and clumsy, but with a strong rhythmic drive.

BOOGIE: A merging of the blues with ragtime. The blues theme was taken by the right hand and the left hand doubled the tempo, playing eight to the bar instead of the usual four to give it a rhythmic drive.

DIXIE: Grew out of boogie as played by New Orleans Negro marching bands. The beat was given by drums and tuba and the other instruments moved around it. The second and fourth beats became emphasised as this was the natural time for people to clap to it. Flourished in Dixie.

SWING (arranged jazz): White man's interpretation and arrangement of existing jazz forms, with the saxophone added. By the 'Thirties swing was more subtle with a more even beat. It swung lightly from bar to bar.

BOP: Started around 1945 and exploited harmonic aspects of jazz with the driving beat subordinated to more complicated rhythmic patterns.

PROGRESSIVE: This is still developing, especially harmonically. Tends to be more intellectual than emotional.