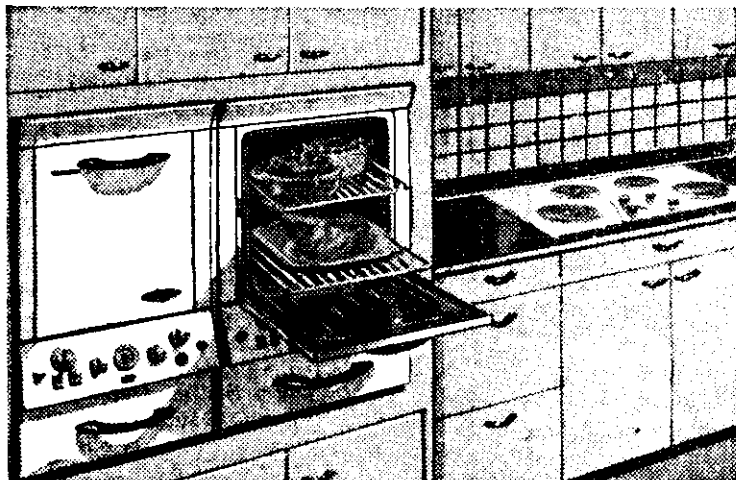


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Jazz in Wellington

THE EIGHTH FESTIVAL

PERSONNEL: Francis, Gibbs, Carpenter, Loper (trumpets); McVior, Cameron, Saker (trombones); Williams, Weatherburn, Lewis, Bernao, Richardson (reeds); Barcham (piano); Hoffmeister (bass); Clare (drums). Added for "Skin Deep" and "St. Louis Blues March" only, Simpson, Little, Waugh and Kyle (drums). Vocalists: Borg and Summers.

I CAN only assume that the directors of Modern Enterprises who present these Festivals of so-called Jazz have concluded that it does not pay at the box office to play jazz in the Town Hall. As elsewhere in this country, the jazz devotee gets little from such a concert and after two and a half hours of



fairly commercial swing with a sprinkling of Dixieland, he is apt to find proceedings pretty boring.

I am informed that the public address system at the Town Hall cannot cope

with the presentation of small groups or piano solos at jazz concerts. Patrons at the back apparently cannot hear. This seems strange, as I have heard numerous classical solo pianists in this hall, and they do not use amplification. I would say that many of the jazz attenders are not interested in music as such unless the soloist or band is practically blowing the listener off his seat with just sheer volume. These people should have been more than satisfied, therefore, with the fare offered on September 24, and now, perhaps, at the next Festival the "cool" and "progressive" schools will hear some of their favourites without disturbing whistling and incessant shouting as background.

The big band played over twenty items during the evening, but not one was an original arrangement. All were recreations of the works of such men as Goodman, Miller, Dorsey, Krupa and Anthony, so naturally I could not help but compare the local finished product with the original. Financially, our boys were successful, the hall was packed; musically, our boys were not in the same class. How could they be?

Soloists were allowed little scope for improvisation, and many of the solos lacked feeling and warmth, some even being played inaccurately from written notation. The worst examples of this were in "Well, Git It," and "In the Mood." Such well-known compositions demand accuracy and assurance.

On the other hand, I was impressed with the ensemble sound produced. Admittedly, many of the items have been played before, and the musicians were at home with them, but I felt that a great deal of work must have been put in behind the scenes getting that fifteen-piece band functioning so smoothly.

I thought the band erred in opening with "Well, Git It," a Sy Oliver arrangement. To attempt to play this as well as Tommy Dorsey has done was asking for trouble when the boys were not warmed up and quite naturally a little nervous. Consequently a number of the solos were not well executed and that final trumpet duet was not a success.

Big band items which did appeal were "Rose Marie" (a Billy May

arrangement), "Begin the Beguine" (as played by Ray Anthony), "Jumping Trumpets" (a Richard Maltby arrangement), "Little Town Jug" and "St. Louis Blues March" (both as played by Glenn Miller).

Special mention must be made here of Johnny Williams's note-perfect role of Benny Goodman in "Clarinet a la King." With fine backing by the band in this unusual Eddie Sauter arrangement, Johnny, although lacking the warmth and conviction of the maestro, played extremely well.

Relief from big band swing was provided by seven or eight of the musicians forming various New Orleans groups and playing jazz in the Dixieland manner. This was extremely popular and one group, especially, had difficulty in being heard above the crowd, which had by this time become hysterical—clapping, stamping and screaming "Go, go, go." When the band ceased playing the applause was deafening. I can't understand this, as little music was audible above the cacophony and I was seated three rows from the front.

Laurie Lewis changed from tenor to alto saxophone to present two items in the Earl Bostic manner, but I much preferred him in his many tasteful solo spots in other groups during the concert. I can't believe that musicians of Lewis's stature enjoy aping a rhythm-and-blues artist in this manner. "Minka" and "Cherry Pink" showcased the trumpet of Mike Gibbs. This young musician has plenty of variety in his style and marvellous control over his instrument, which is well worth hearing. He deservedly received great applause.

Vocalist Johnny Summers did not impress me greatly as his diction was poor, especially in "Inamorata." He no sooner began singing than the bobby-soxers started sighing, so naturally applause was thunderous. His less ponderous "Lipstick, Candy and Rubber-soled Shoes" was much better.

The hit of the evening, however, was vocalist Johnny Borg. Reminiscent of some of Mel Tormé's earlier work, Borg sang six numbers. He obviously puts a lot of thought and effort into his presentation, and it pays handsome dividends. Much of it is showmanship, and of little musical worth, but his "Love Me or Leave Me" and "The Three Bears" were really good.

The future of live jazz in Wellington is mainly in the hands of these men, all of whom are good musicians and should be well above playing only the type of music as presented at the festival. If packing the hall is all they are aiming at, then I feel sorry for them. A great deal of pleasure and enjoyment in life is obtained from a sense of achievement, and at the moment they are achieving nothing. But with a slight change of policy a great deal can be achieved.

At the present time there are thousands in this country who are eager and waiting to be educated to appreciate this music we call jazz. The interest in live jazz is there; it has only to be guided and fostered along the right path.

—Ray Harris