

ROCK & ROLL

THE Rock and Roll brawl that has raged around America and laid low some of London's teddy-boys has not yet created a major disturbance in New Zealand. The "House Full" notices appear regularly outside the Wellington cinema where the film is being shown. youths in the foyer wear snake-proof pants, coats down to the knees and out ragedous checks, and the girls delicately point their ballroom shoes, but of black marias and policemen laying about with truncheons there has been no sign.

"Our audiences are enthusiastic, they stamp and clap, but that's where it stops," said the theatre manager. "Lots of people who hung around waiting for something to happen were bitterly disappointed. One time a crowd of college boys came in like a flying wedge, but we soon got them sorted out."

"I give the youngsters credit for knowing how to behave themselves. If handled correctly they'll respond. I think the Censor should be congratulated on granting the film a certificate. We've screened far more controversial films than this."

If Elvis Presley were here in person, however, how would the scene look then? Some kind of answer to this query may be provided when his first film emerges from the studios of the producer Hal B. Wallis, for Elvis has been signed by Wallis for a long deal.

Elvis confesses (and we quote): "I just don't know nothin' about this here new movie actin' business. . . I never thought I'd turn out to be a motion picture actor. I never did nothing but jump around and sing, 'cause that's the way I feel all the time." Elvis is reported to have arrived at the studio for his screen test with his two famous Cadillacs, the pink and black, and the canary yellow—himself in one and his guitar in the other.

This potential Marlon Brando (the comparison is Mr. Wallis's), whose raw uninhibited jungle singing blitzes his audiences, is the primitive side of the current Rock and Roll craze. Rock and Roll itself has been going longer than Elvis, and has an interesting history. For anyone wanting to learn a little about it a programme by Arthur Pearce ("Turntable") scheduled for broadcast this week by 2YA was just the thing.

"I wanted to go into the whys and wherefores of Rock and Roll," said Mr. Pearce. "I felt a need to present an informed coverage of its background and its purpose, and I illustrate the programme with a few records." "Turntable's" definition of Rock and Roll is "Negro rhythm and blues whitewashed, with the emphasis on the white," and he explains his definition in the following way: "For many years there has existed a type of crude jazz known as 'race music.' This style covers 'blues' and 'stomps,' and was recorded almost exclusively for the coloured market. It was not acceptable to the ordinary commercial market, partly because of the blueness of the lyrics and partly because the music is more or less folk



★ ABOVE: Bill Haley and his Comets —"rhythm and blues" plus a tenor sax. RIGHT: "Itchy feet guided by adolescent fervour"—Lisa Gaye and Earle Barton, dancing stars of "Rock Around the Clock" ★

music. In the years after World War II some of the swing bands were out of circulation, and the younger folk of America, whose itchy feet were guided by adolescent fervour rather than by anything else, had no music to take its place.

"Then a disc jockey, Alan Freed, seized upon the idea of using this 'race music' which had been known as 'rhythm and blues,' in a way which would be acceptable to the young teenagers. He was influenced by a hill-billy group led by Bill Haley, which had had a certain amount of experience in these lines. Haley's group played mostly on the lines of 'cold rhythm and blues,' and was at first merely a string group. With the addition of a tenor sax to his line-up the result was a 'rhythm and blues' style that was performed entirely by a white group. Then came the irrepressible, irresponsible Elvis Presley, also from the hill-billy field, and the panic was on."

"Way back in the 1920s," added "Turntable," "there was an isolated attempt to produce this type of music by a white artist. His name was Seger Ellis—and he was an entertainer in good night clubs. I have a number of his pianoforte solos in my collection which show most of the characteristics of current rock and roll rhythms."

("Turntable's" programme — "This Rock and Roll Express" was scheduled for broadcast by 2YA on November 6, at 9.30 p.m. It will, however, be heard later from other NZBS stations.)

