

THE SAX SECTION

THE evolution of the sax section is the result of the various changes in conception of dance and jazz arranging procedures. The unit has come a long way from the sweet sounds of the twenties. The thirties brought us men with ideas that helped give character to this segment of the orchestra. Ellington contributed a regality and new depth; Lunceford brought an artful preciseness; Goodman brought a close voiced smoothness and lightness; Basie showed how the section could pulsate as a unit; and Miller gave the saxes a distinctive romantic sound.

The forties brought vital changes in music that affected the sax section. There was an all-consuming interest on the part of musicians in the sound and style of Lester Young and the ideas of Charlie Parker.

Arrangers became aware of the masters in their search for more colourful sounds. The latter found typification in the multi-sounds of the Boyd Raeburn band where radical doubling of instruments in the sax section took hold.

Kenton experimented with various ideas to promote more colour for reeds. The Parker phraseology came pouring forth from the sax sections of numerous modern bands. The shadow of Lester was apparent in the sax sound that came to be identified with the Herman band after 1947, introducing three tenors and one baritone into the band. Woody broke the tradition which had set up the two altos, two tenors and one baritone as the sax set up.

As yet, the fifties have not presented anything startlingly new. During this period of temporary stability, arranger Al Cohn was called upon to arrange personnel and music for an LP devoted to the sax section. This quarter-hour programme is chosen from the resulting disc.

"Redhead," "George," and "Blues" feature a "Four Brothers" section, with Sims, Cohn and Wasserman (tenors), Schlenger (baritone), Jones (piano), Hinton (bass) and Lamond (drums). The Basie influence is apparent in "George," while Ellington influenced the "Blues" arrangement.

"Tears" and "Shazam" feature a Goodman style section with Marowitz and Quill (altos), Cohn and Wasserman (tenors), Schlenger (baritone), Williams (piano), Hinton (bass), and Johnson (drums).

There are no brass instruments employed at all for contrast purposes, but the saxes are used in such a stimulating fashion, both rhythmically and harmonically, that interest is easily maintained.

First Playing: Station 2YA, May 15, 10.45 p.m.

Jess Stacey at the Piano

PERSONNEL: Stacey (piano). Accompaniment, when added, provided by Van Eps (guitar), Corb (bass) and Fatool (drums).

Stacey plays with a crisp touch and excellent phrasing as he drives along with power and ideas which always sound fresh. Recorded in 1951, the tracks which comprise this album have only recently been unearthed, and for Stacey fans (include me) this is grand news.

I doubt whether Jess has ever played better and when he is in such form, I prefer him to many other pianists who have won far greater fame. This is a

fine follow-up to the programme "Jess Stacey and the Famous Sidemen pay tribute to Benny Goodman."

First Playing: Station 2YA, May 15, 10.30 p.m.

Session at Midnight with the All Stars

PERSONNEL: Edison, Sherock (trumpets), Carter (trumpet, alto), McEachern (trombone, alto), Smith (alto), Johnson, Russin (tenors), Bivona (clarinet), Rowles (piano), Hendrickson (guitar), Rubin (bass), Cottler (drums).

From these 12 musicians blowing on this informal disc date, we listen in on an old-fashioned but driving jam session. The type of jazz played harks back to the swing era with all its associated advantages and disadvantages. For instance, there are the tiresome ensemble riffs (such as at the end of "Brown"), but then there are excellent solos from nearly all present.

The highlight of the programme is Edison's beautiful opening statement on "Scene," while other passages worthy of special mention are Carter's alto solo on "Brown," Rowles's piano solo with orchestral backing on "Swing," McEachern's trombone solo on "Scene," and Edison's solo (complete with quote from "Surrey with the Fringe") on "Swing." Listen also to Gus Bivona's clarinet throughout—it's good.

Here is a session worthy of your attention, especially of you're a swing fan.

First Playing: Station 2YD, May 23, 9.41 p.m.

Hampton-Tatum-Rich Trio

HERE are three giants of jazz in a superbly relaxed and tasteful set of standards. Everything is full of imagination, ingenuity and wit, and played with a swing that never lets up.

Hampton plays some of his best and most consistently inventive vibes in years. Rich's drumming is light though firm throughout, and wonderfully unobtrusive. (Listen especially when Tatum opens alone and Rich joins in after the first eight or 16. You can barely hear him, but you feel his presence.) Tatum loves those runs and other melodic decorations which he uses unceasingly and which I find tiresome. He is also apt to double on the melodic line when it is being carried by Hampton (especially in "More Than You Know"), but he is so obviously enjoying this session that it is difficult to condemn him on this score.

I do have one real complaint, however, and that is one levelled at Granz, personal supervisor of the session. Vibes, piano and drums are not, because of their very nature, able to lend much tone colour and contrast. For this reason alone, I preferred the dates when Tatum was recorded with Benny Carter and Roy Eldridge. No doubt Messrs Tatum, Hampton and Rich could have carried on recording this sort of thing for days, but I couldn't go on listening to it for days—41 minutes is plenty.

Individually the musicians are at the top of their form, and standing out even more than what they do individually is the way they work together. It is a pity that some contrasting instrument was not added to this trio to make it a quartet.

First Playing: Station 2YD, May 23, 9.0 p.m.

—Ray Harris

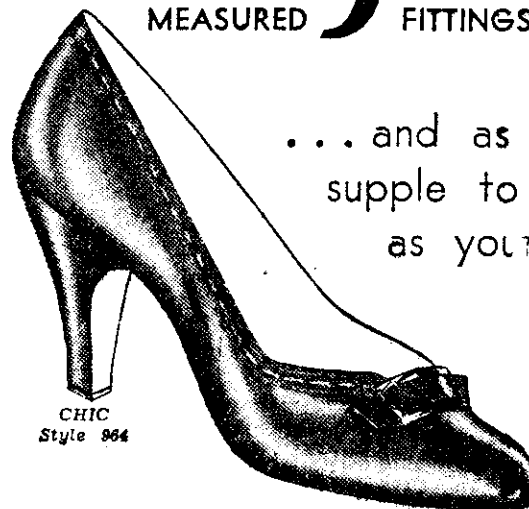
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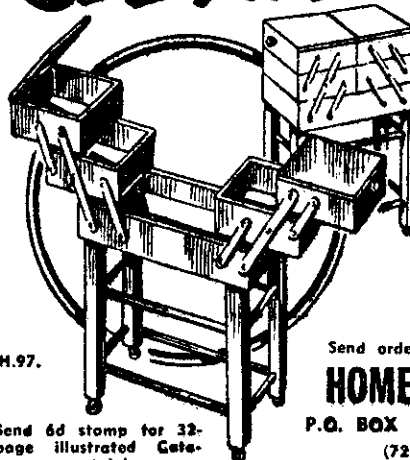
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