

# ON WITH THE DANCE

FANNED by the warm, tropical air, the thermometer on the sun-deck crept reluctantly downward from 86 degrees to 83. The phonograph beat its hot rhythm into the warm breeze. A group of passengers watched, silent but not unmoved. Hips rotating, challenging, the dancers undulated toward each other, their sandals scuffing the deck rhythmically in answer to the pervasive beat. The girl leaned backward, archly, her dress clinging wet to the perspiring muscles of her back. The boy crouched, shoulders hunched, arms drooping, feet pawing the deck.

"Blimey!" breathed an onlooker. "Africa, 'ere we come!"

A youth, reclining in Edwardian boredom, sniffed. "They think that's Rock 'n' Roll!" Disgust overcame him. "Ruddy ballroom stuff!"

The jungle tension broke. Suddenly the dance was less exciting; more civilised; safe. A name could be put to it: a name everybody knew. The dancing symbols of universal Man and Woman became again two youthful British migrants, killing time on the long voyage.

Not only the atmosphere changed. Rock 'n' Roll or African jungle; whatever the title, the dance was already old hat. The heavy, tom-tom beat was giving way to a lighter, less primitive rhythm from Trinidad. The dance would follow suit. Calypso was already a music to reckon with. Add to it the steps of the Rumba and a few new names like Cha Cha or Meringa, and you have the

certifiably newest fashion. Rock had gone perhaps once round the clock. The Banana Boat was coming in.

Most young people will welcome the change. Some will hold aloof for a time. The new craze is seldom quite as good as the old. A few—"the eccentrics who refuse to get off the last band-wagon but one"—will be downright annoyed. They will be found in remote corners

## CAKEWALK



## CHARLESTON

Jack, each of which owns only one song and one tune. Even Rock 'n' Roll is in a similar plight, no imitation of the original tune having equalled or surpassed its exemplar.

In both cases, however, the differences between the fashions are more noticeable than the similarities. According to Bob Bothamley, in charge of NZBS jazz, most dances are variations of the four-beat rhythm, or of the two-beat march rhythm, as in Dixieland. Rock 'n' Roll simply emphasises the off beat. Superficially, it is more muscular than most, but older people who have performed the Cakewalk or the Charleston—or even the square dances of a few years back—might challenge that.

The Cakewalk, for instance, was a high-kicking dance in which elevation, form and endurance were all factors in attaining excellence. Like many dance fashions it was accused of almost everything down to and including undermining the church, but its passing was almost certainly due to the fact that it was (in the middle of the "gay nineties") the most demanding and exhausting dance of all time. In those days, of course, people still danced to the music. It was not till later that the notion of going to a dance simply to listen to the band took hold. Strange, perhaps, when one considers that the Cakewalk's popularity was so great it even attracted composers of the quality of Claude Debussy, who wrote the "Golliwog's Cakewalk" as part of his *Children's Suite*.

As muscular, if not more so, was the Charleston, the craze which swept the world in the mid-twenties. In *Show Biz* it is reported that "in Boston's Pickwick Club, a tenderloin dance hall, the vibrations of the Charleston dancers caused the place to collapse, killing 50. The following year saw a Charleston marathon at Roseland Ballroom on Broadway, which lasted 22½ exhausting hours."

The American Square Dance—New Zealand's craze-before-last—drew no marathon performers, but nevertheless called for hard muscles and soft arteries. To hop and leap and cavort to the swift, traditional melodies after a day's work required stamina of a high order. The dance seems to have arisen among hardy farming communities, where it was common for a working "bee" on a

## WALTZ



of dilapidated dance halls, moving to unsuitable music in the difficult steps, now dignified by time, of the Jive. With them will be the loyal shades of even older enthusiasms—the Lambeth Walk, the Lindy Hop, the Square, the Raccoon, the Black Bottom, the Kangaroo Hop, the Turkey Trot, the Cakewalk, and, of course, the late, great Charleston.

One or two of the old timers are still in fine fettle; in particular the Foxtrot and its half-brother, the Quickstep. Few of the remainder are more than nostalgic memories in the minds of the middle-aged. Occasionally one will be found in the repertoire of some country dance orchestra, and the young will sit and stare at their elders' animated rendition of Under the Chestnut Tree, the Conga, or Booms a Daisy. Whether they are allowed to do so or not seems to depend finally on the musicians. Dances linked to particular tunes die immediately the professionals tire of the music. There is enough variety to keep the Waltz, the Foxtrot, the Quickstep and perhaps the Rumba going for generations to come. Not so with the Lambeth Walk, for instance, or Ballin' the