



LINDY HOP

new barn to be followed by group dancing therein, accompanied by a fiddler or two, and directed by a "caller." The latter's hoarseness, rather than the dancers' exhaustion, usually signalled the end of the fun.

Together with their athletic and musical similarities, the dance fashions of yesterday hold one other point in common with the fashions of today. They attract dire prophecies of social and moral decay from those who either can't dance or think they oughtn't. Rock 'n' Rollers may be pleased to know that their parents and grandparents endured almost exactly the same accusations of moral degeneracy. Apart from the Cake-walk, already mentioned, the Grizzly Bear seems to have attracted much of this kind of attention. Other variations of the dance were known as the Turkey Trot, the Crab Step, Kangaroo Dip, Fish Walk and the Snake. Most involved a crushing embrace, arching the lady's back to near-breaking point. This apparently distressed some onlookers more than it did the ladies involved. A New Jersey court once jailed a young woman for 50 days for Turkey-Trotting, and in 1914 the Vatican officially came out against it.

A similar, but less sweeping, inhibition overtook the English when the imported American Black Bottom swept the Charleston from the boards in the late twenties. *Show Biz* reports that "the name was supposedly derived from the muddy bottom of the Swanee River, and the movements suggested the dragging of feet through the mud. London took to the dance, but balked at the name, which had a different significance in England. They presented it as the Black Bass, or Black Bed. Actually, no one in America, either, believed that the 'Bottom' of the name referred to anything but the spot slapped by the dancer."

Ballroom dancers who eschew the more violent manifestations of the primitive urge to dance may be interested to know that even the stately Foxtrot attracted its share of attention. Cincinnati's *Catholic Telegraph* declared in indignant tones that, "The music is sensuous, the embracing of partners—the female only half-dressed—is absolutely indecent; and the motions—they are such as may not be described, with any respect for propriety, in a family



SQUARE DANCE

newspaper." It continued with a suggestion as to what kind of houses were appropriate for such dances; conclusions which we, in our turn, might regard as improper in a family newspaper.

The march of progress has not led to any modification either of Puritanism or of the adjectives it employs. Only a month ago the secretary of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, Mr Shepilov, took time out from his non-cultural activities to give his countrymen the line on some recent products of the decaying west. Boogie Woogie, and Rock 'n' Roll were denounced as "a chaos of meaningless sounds, a wild shrieking, squeaking, sighing, wailing, roaring . . . the braying of asses, the amorous croaking of an enormous bullfrog . . . a wild cave-dweller's orgy." Some of the west's *bourgeoisie* may be found to agree with him. But the dancing proles never have been readers of edicts by the Secretary of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party. They carry right on, toeing their own moving, but comparatively changeless, line.

So far, it seems, the dance crazes have in common their rhythm, their strenuousness and their critics. We were

to discover yet another—surprising—similarity, linking the Cake-walk with the Lambeth Walk, the Charleston with Rock 'n' Roll, and the Lindy Hop with Jive. It is, the steps. Our informant was Jimmy James, a Wellington dance teacher who began his professional career after his brother, the Charleston champion of Athens, introduced him to the steps, and gave him the itchy feet which perhaps brought him to New Zealand. How, we asked, did he learn the latest craze, in order to hand it on to his pupils? Simple, he said, it was all in the book. Professional teachers subscribe to a service which keeps them up to date with the latest steps. But surely some of the steps are unique? Not at all; there's nothing you can do with your feet—or body either, for that matter—which professionals have not noted and recorded years ago. "In a sense," Mr. James told us, "we've been doing Rock 'n' Roll for 10 years—but doing it as Jive."

Most of the short-lived fashions in dance, he said, owed their appeal first

to the music, which may become popular for a variety of reasons (Bob Bothamley attributed Rock 'n' Roll's warm appeal to reaction against increasingly "cool" jazz), and to the simplicity of the steps. Anyone can go on the floor, after one lesson, or even none, and perform a dance of the jitterbug genus. There is no set routine, no complicated steps, to be learned. The dancers can move as the music takes them.

Likewise, according to Mr James, there are two reasons for the survival of such long-run favourites as the Foxtrot, Quickstep and Waltz. First, they require considerable effort to learn and are consequently less readily abandoned than those which come easily; and, secondly, they are, he thinks, intrinsically more beautiful, graceful to watch, and satisfying to perform.

Of course, there is, too, an economic advantage to the hardy perennials. For its short duration Rock 'n' Roll packed as many as 500 or 600 pupils a week into his studio, he said. But the steady hundred or so a week, who came to learn the Foxtrot went on and on while crazes came and passed. Voted most likely to survive were Foxtrot, Quickstep, Waltz, Samba, Rumba. Jimmy James's own favourite among the Latin Americans is the Tango, but it is a skilled dance and, he says, orchestras are playing it infrequently, an ill omen for any dance.

In one way only do the recent fashions of Rock 'n' Roll and the contemporary (at time of going to press) Calypso break with the pattern of recent years. They appear to have re-established intimate relations between music and dance. After about 1910 the publishers of popular music increasingly insisted that new songs be also danceable tunes. The trend persisted through the '20s, but in the '30s, as jazz became more complex, and in some ways more interesting musically, there arose jazz clubs, which eschewed dancing and catered for an audience as serious and attentive as that of any concert hall. Today the trend of 1910 seems to have reasserted itself. Jazz may have grown out of its dancing childhood, but, if Rock 'n' Roll indicates anything, the human race has not.

ROCK 'N' ROLL

