

of escape from this vale of woe into the sweet by and by, a better and brighter world. This awoke an exact echo in the Negro mind. Hence the harmonies of the early Negro songs are those of Anglo-Saxon church music. So far, it is a folk idiom. They are the common people; uncultivated, unlettered, expressing themselves freely, unconsciously, and communally in song. The songs were of two kinds—roughly, religious and secular, the first vocal only, and reflecting the deep nostalgia of a race without a home. These are the spirituals, perhaps the best known of all Folk Songs. The second had discovered the banjo, and to a barbaric, twanging ground bass, the nigger minstrel told of work, play, love, and the sun. So far they are purely local in origin, character, and influence. But the world was too much with them; others began to sing the spirituals and dance to the banjo. Negro music was soon less Negro than American, less American than international. By 1900 the spirituals had become the "blues" and the banjo songs had become ragtime, the barbaric, sophisticated. The elements which made up these early blues and ragtime were now diverse. It was far less negroid than Jewish. For the Negro melancholy was a Jewish melancholy also. Both were exiles, though what was relatively recent for the Negroes was a deeply ingrained pattern for the Jews. After centuries of dispossession from the land, and enforced urban life, they are now the most cosmopolitan of all peoples. Their sophisticated urban melancholy



grafted on to the Negro elements in ragtime gives us modern jazz.

At this point the movement acquires status, and splits into two schools. First, the "sweet" school maintains and develops the Jewish tradition and becomes the "blues" music of the late "twenties" and "thirties," with its Debussy harmonies, crooners, and ever-recurring laments of poverty, depression, and lost babies. Second, the "hot" school preserved the Negro spirit. It stemmed mainly from Memphis and New Orleans, each developing an authentic style. The Memphis style was similar to the old air and variations. A chorus would be played simply, then each man in turn would play a solo variation, the others improvising an accompaniment. In New Orleans it was similar, except that everybody improvised at once, giving essays in spontaneous orchestrations never written out as a score. This was a reversion to something of the folk spirit. The 1920's restored improvising as an art, and while much of it had little value, some, in the hands of Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong, was of a remarkable quality, brilliantly alert, poignant, and simple. The attempt to bring something of this quality into polite tea-dance music resulted in swing.

But is it folk music? I think not. Because, first, it is popular art music. When "popular" means "of the common people" it is easy to equate popular

