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SEE BACK COVER

against fascism, it is necessary to have the best flying equipment designed. It is necessary to have pursuit planes that can attack the enemy bombers which fly consistently higher and higher. Well, our pursuits can reach any desirable altitude, but the pilots—even equipped with oxygen—cannot function very long at such heights; there is the problem of inadequate pressure on the human body. What to do? There is also the problem of "blackout" when the dive bombing pilot reaches the bottom of his dive and pulls out of it. Centrifugal force here gets in its dirty work.

Errol Flynn, who has rarely been more handsome or more objectionably cocky, is the young flight surgeon who works on these problems. He devises two gadgets (which, incidentally, were devised some time ago and are neither of them too practicable) to counteract these conditions. The search for the devices provides the real drama of the film—not Miss Alexis Smith's search for Mr. Flynn. But there is not enough of the authentic drama and what there is, is attenuated by the film makers' insulting assumption that the public cannot understand these technicalities.

With the color equipment, the technical knowledge at Hollywood's disposal (courtesy of the US Navy Air Service), we could have had a powerful and brilliantly documented film about flying that would contribute to our understanding of the problems of air power. Instead we have a washout—and Miss Alexis Smith.

A. B.

## Blues Piano

A discussion of "boogie woogie" music and some of its artists' recordings.

THE name "boogie woogie" really should be discarded for the correct term, "blues piano." The inaccurate title arose as one of the fanciful names the Negro people gave to their dances. A record called "Pine-top's Boogie Woogie," in which the pianist plays typical rapid figures while he calls out the turns of a dance, gave its title to the whole subsequent piano blues literature. Out of its context, the name is meaningless.

The most striking feature of this type of piano music is its powerhouse bass. It is this which brings the "oh's" and "ah's" from audiences, and which has inspired stupid commercialisms of the "Beat Me Daddy" kind. But it is its right hand, the deep, singing blues, which provides the richness of emotion, its real quality as music.

The art grew up in places like lumber camps and cheap saloons, where the entertainment was by wandering singers of blues ballads and the only instruments available for accompaniment were a piano and banjo or guitar. The pianist had to make up for the lack of many instruments by adding sonorities of his own. Thus a piano style grew up completely different from the usual jazz band or "ragtime" piano, in which the left hand hits

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## GOINGS ON

MARXIST ANALYSIS OF THE WEEK'S NEWS by Milton Howard, member Daily Worker editorial board, Sun., Sept. 14, 8:30 P. M. Workers School, 50 E. 13 Street. Admission 25 cents.

only some few and simple chords. In the blues piano the player really made the instrument sound, by repeated phrases and an insistent beat with the left hand that provided a rich background for the singer, while the right hand added little guitar-like, ornamental "answers" to each verse. And out of this music a self-sufficient, virtuoso piano art arose, in which the pianist played the bass figures, the blues phrases, and the ornamental figures all at the same time; a kind of "three-voice" counterpoint, if you want to call it that, but under any name a grand, sonorous, boldly dissonant, deeply emotional music.

Other influences in developing this art were the square dance, the "rent party"—in which one pianist often had to provide music for a crowded roomful of people—and the "railroad blues." There is an extensive literature of railroad folk ballads, both white and Negro. To the Negro people especially, the railroad became a symbol for travel, for escape, or for the kind of job which provides the thrill of power over a machine. And the accompaniment to these railroad blues inspired the pianist to create a host of effects suggesting the click of wheels, the stops and starts, the whistles (high trills), the swiftness of motion.

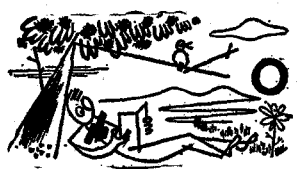
If you want really to know this music, I suggest that you start, not with the more highly touted recordings, but with some vocal records; Jimmy Yancey's "Death Letter Blues" and "Crying in My Sleep" (Bluebird) in which he sings to his own piano; "Roll 'Em, Pete" by Joe Turner and Pete Johnson (Vocalion or Columbia); and, if you can find it, Bessie Smith's "Backwater Blues," with James P. Johnson on piano (Columbia). Listen to the simple, touching, and varied piano accompaniment in "Death Letter," the stirring and powerful piano climax in "Crying in My Sleep." Notice how beautifully Joe Turner's vocal phrases fit into Pete Johnson's rapid and brilliant piano setting in "Roll 'Em, Pete." If you want to add a railroad ballad, a good example is "Riding on that Train Forty-Five," in the "Smoky Mountain" Album (Victor).

When you know these records, then go to the pure piano masterpieces, and see how much blues content is actually hidden in the music, how the seeming monotony disappears, how varied in feeling and richly expressive this music is. Fine, inexpensive, and easily available records are "Yancey Stomp" by Jimmy Yancey (Victor), one of the most massively built and grandest of fast blues solos; "Honky Tonk Train Blues," by Meade Lux Lewis, a masterly "railroad" piece, and the most brilliant of all jazz piano solos (Bluebird and Decca, the latter slightly better); "Yancey Special" (Decca), in which Meade Lewis borrows Yancey's slow bass from "Death Letter Blues"; "Kaycee on My Mind," by Pete Johnson (Decca), a good example of the sweeter "Kansas City" lyricism. Each of these artists has a different personality, and each has something to say. And avoid boogie woogie orchestrations as you would a Hearst paper.

MARTIN MACK.

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