



# JAZZ AS IT ISN'T

Three movies tried to tell the story of ragtime but missed the up-beat. The lives of Louis Armstrong and Bix Beiderbecke in search of a studio.

**D**URING the movie season of 1941-42, Hollywood officially acknowledged the existence of its fellow American trademark, jazz. And perhaps typically, not as something filmdom had grown up and collaborated with on many a cinematic adventure, but as something culled from books written in a half-understood tongue.

Warner Brothers dramatized its findings in *Blues in the Night* and depicted jazz as an exacting mistress whom men starve and suffer for—and pursue, inexorably, in boxcars. Paramount, with a shrug of the shoulders, decided that jazz was just the kind of screwy thing that would keep Bing Crosby amused for seven reels of *Birth of the Blues*. RKO evidently had read a deep book on the subject, learned that jazz somehow tied in with Africa, and figured that by showing a couple of natives dancing to the beat of tom-toms, it could claim *Syncopation* as a history of jazz.

However, a few points were agreed upon by the different studios, more or less in common: That white musicians learned to play jazz from Negroes—who then respectfully packed their cornets and vanished into the void. That real jazz could only be played by six-piece outfits—who were always getting shot at by gangsters. That jazzmen who tempt fate by playing with large orchestras that include (God forbid!) violins, soon learn that this leads inevitably to nervous breakdowns. And finally, that jazz would just never have gotten anywhere at all (this conclusion found unanimous agreement) without the help of some nice girl.

Of course, Hollywood has long used snatches of wonderful jazz as background for its hoofers and warblers, and has employed scores of name bands, from Duke Ellington down the scale to Kay Kyser, for its countless night-club scenes. There was even a picture called *The King of Jazz* (meaning Paul Whiteman!) of which not much is remembered except that it was a million-dollar flop. And, averred Hollywood, that wasn't going to happen again. This time the casts were peopled with inexpensive bit players (Crosby excepted), and a few six-piece bands were rounded up to supply the jazz for the sound tracks.

*Blues in the Night* may be disposed of immediately, since the only part of it that truly bore any relationship to jazz was the title song written by Harold Arlen and Johnny Mercer. The failure of the other two pictures is more lamentable because they did make some pretensions toward understanding jazz.



The reason for their failure is obvious; the movie makers buried the subject of their investigations in the stenciled story of *Two Boys and a Girl* (or *Two Girls and a Boy*) instead of presenting the drama of jazz itself.

If it was a "period" piece Paramount desired, why did it fail to discover the excitement that attended the emergence of Negro music at the turn of the century and its effect on the music of the period? Ragtime was the result—and ragtime sounded the death-knell for the waltz ballad, changed the dance steps of a nation, took over Tin Pan Alley, and became the popular music of America. At that, Hollywood, with its peculiar standards for measuring success, would probably have concentrated its attention on the fabulous fame achieved by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band; a band of white musicians who transmitted the music of its native New Orleans to the capitals of America and Europe.

**T**HE real story of ragtime goes back to the plantations of the Black Belt where Negroes, without the opportunities for musical instruction or even the acquisition of the white man's cornet, clarinet, and trombone, mastered the foreign instruments by experimentation, diligent practice, and an urge to produce music. They memorized or approximated the quadrilles and marches of their day, invariably altering them by obeying their impulses in the matter of time values, rhythms, and tones. This led to the creation of a new kind of music that inspired composers hearing it to evolve what was to become known as "ragtime" and culminated in the exploits of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band.

What the producers of both *Birth of the Blues* and *Syncopation* failed to indicate was the quality of the music. The ragtime of the early 1900's wasn't the slick, Fifty-Second-Street brand of "New Orleans Jazz" the sound tracks would have us believe. It was brash and rough, but it was aglow with the fire of its youth. When *Syncopation* carried

the story of jazz past its "New Orleans" stage, onward to its "Chicago" period and beyond, to the era of "swing," its storytellers completely ignored the many, many innovations that occurred in that span of years and did not even hint at the revolution that took place in the young art form when Louis Armstrong returned to Chicago after an epic-making stay of one year in New York.

If some picture studio were to set an imaginative writer (with a feeling for jazz, of course) on the trail of Armstrong from the day he arrived in New York with a contract in his pocket to join Fletcher Henderson and his eleven-piece orchestra, that writer could weave a wondrous tale. Not that it would be easy, reconstructing and assembling the events and impressions Armstrong experienced during that stay. Previous biographers have muffed its significance, and Armstrong's own book, *Swing That Music*, gives only the slightest clue; but from that visit sprang a musical style so unique, it is conceded to be the greatest single contribution jazz has received thus far.

Consider the facts. Armstrong was only twenty-four years old at the time. True, his talent had already won him respect and admiration, but it was limited to a circle of Negro musicians. As Armstrong puts it: "Out on the South Side, in Chicago, I was beginning to 'feel my oats' and think I was pretty good, more than ever when Fletcher Henderson called me to come to New York . . . but I hadn't counted on New York. In that big town I was just a smalltown boy."

There, in a famous dance hall on Broadway, he sat in for the first time with an orchestra that played its music from scores that had to be followed carefully; and it wasn't only down-home rags and stomps Armstrong was playing this time. On the opposite bandstand sat an orchestra composed of the best-known white musicians in the field playing music that was unfamiliar to him; the musical comedy airs of Kern, Gershwin, Vincent Youmans, and Richard Rodgers. And the town was still buzzing with the success of the *Rhapsody in Blue*, unveiled a scant six months earlier. The social life and the cultural activities of the Negroes of New York also left their impression on the young musician. Nineteen twenty-five was one of the boom years in Negro literature, and as Armstrong observed: "Harlem had the most brilliant and talented artists of our race"—many of whom Armstrong undoubtedly met.

His trumpet playing didn't immediately re-

**GREEN MANSIONS**  
welcomes you to  
its theatre, lounge,  
cocktail bar, sundecks,  
Log Cabin Clubhouse,  
each room with pri-  
vate bath. Private golf  
course, lake, 13 cham-  
pionship tennis courts,  
all on premises.

**LENA BARISH: SAM GARLEN**  
Directors

N. Y. C. office: 11 W. 42nd St.  
Telephone: BRyant 9-1738

Write for Booklet

**Green Mansions**

In the Adirondacks - WARRENSBURG, N. Y.

**BEA SEZ**  
TENNIS  
SWIMMING  
BOATING  
HIKES  
MUSIC  
PLAY-ACTING  
HANDBALL

**DON'T CROSS ANY BRIDGES!**

**COME TO BEACON**  
*The Hudson River Way!*

Begin your vacation with a cool, scenic sail between the Hudson's towering Palisades. Then swim in the beautiful, natural mountain pool, boating too, on Beacon Lake . . . and for sports . . . any and all, from lazy hikes to speedy games.

Entertainment, too, concerts, re-  
vues, and movies. And dancing  
nightly to

**SALLY WALTER**

And Her Band—The Beacon Buddies

**MAKE YOUR RESERVATION NOW!**

Only 50 Miles from Times Square

RATES: \$21 - \$22 wk. \$4.00 day

Come via Hudson Day Line: NY Central or  
Camp Cars (daily) from N. Y. Office

**CAMP BEACON**

**Beacon, N. Y.**

OFFICE: 2700 BRONX PK. E. - N.Y. - OLIN 5-6900

**Camp Lakeland**

Hopewell Junction, N. Y.

**On the Beautiful Sylvan Lake**

("Sports Lovers' Paradise"—Lester Rodney)



Excellent Accommodations  
Top-Notch Entertainment

**CITY OFFICE:**

1 Union Square

Phone: GR. 7-8659

Camp cars leave daily from  
2700 Bronx Park East — OL 5-6900

TAXI and BUS SERVICE  
**MAKE YOUR RESERVATIONS NOW**

**The Woodlands**

**FOR THE SPIRITED:**  
Tennis — handball — swim-  
ming — ping-pong — bad-  
minton — archery — moun-  
tain trails — croquet — culi-  
nary masterpieces — fishing  
— boating.

**FOR THE LAZEBONES:**  
Well-stocked library — Art  
classes — crafts — dark room  
— musical recording; — open  
fireplaces — spectacular coun-  
try.

Rates \$22.50-\$25 per week.  
**SIGGIE GOLDNER, PHOENICIA, NEW YORK**

flect his experiences but he made a tentative start in New York, feeling his way around as he sat in with a small combination Clarence Williams used for accompanying blues singers on records. Softly and 'way in the background, closing up the spaces between the singer's phrases, he essayed a few experimental fillips. Not too many and not very important ones, but it was a prophecy of something to come. It was when he got back to Chicago and the old five-piece band he knew so well that he began to create the most amazing jazz of his time. If Hollywood were to give us that much, we'd be willing to accept a super-doooper montage climax showing his subse-  
quent successes in America, Europe, and Hollywood itself.

**J**azz has another tense drama to offer. This, a more somber one, is the life story of Bix Beiderbecke, whose luminous career was snuffed out in death at the shockingly young age of thirty-two. Beiderbecke blazed a trail with his horn, a trail that led from Dixieland to Debussy, to something so very much his own it was to become known as "Bixology." And in spite of its abbreviation the story of his life contains all the elements of a Holly-wood thriller.

The story in fictionalized form has already been told and is ready for the cameras (*Young Man With a Horn* even has a girl in it), but we want to issue fair warning: the girl is not a nice girl, the young man has won fame before she appears, and the part of the book in which she appears is the only part of the book that stinks. The rest of it, devoted to jazz, is honest and good. This boy too learns to play jazz from Negroes, but they don't vanish. On the contrary, they remain close friends throughout his short life and are present at his death. It is the Negroes who get the young man his first break in the music business by recommending him to a leading white orchestra leader, and they play together frequently in jam sessions. In fact, the one desire that motivates him before he passes on is to form a mixed band.

There it is, Hollywood, waiting for you. Only remember one thing: the memory of Bix Beiderbecke is loved and revered wherever jazzmen gather. Go easy.

ELLIOTT GRENNARD.

## A Squint at History

Lowell Thomas' commentary doesn't help  
"United We Stand."

"UNITED WE STAND" is a gallant title, but not even Lowell Thomas' commentary can bind together the oddly assorted Fox Movietone newsreel shots which make up this film. It needs more than the Camera Eye to give meaning to the thousands of events which led up to the present struggle. Mr. Thomas' ringing voice rarely supplies the required understanding.

Everything is here from Versailles to Pearl Harbor, the speeches and the betrayals, the

**CAMPUNITY**  
WINGDALE 2461

For a  
**JULY-FULL**  
of  
**Summer Fun**

**COME TO UNITY!**

The full summer joys in the fresh Berkshire air . . . all the sports . . . all the games . . . all the delicious food you can eat . . . all your favorite people—await you at Unity.

**FULL STAFF** . . . **ALL SPORTS**  
AL MOSS . . . Swimming  
LAURA DUNCAN . . . Baseball  
ELMER BURNSTEIN . . . Tennis  
ELEANOR BAGLEY . . . Handball  
LILI MANN . . . Peteka Rio  
AND OTHERS . . . **MANY MORE**

**MAKE YOUR RESERVATIONS NOW FOR**  
**Summer Vacations**

Rates \$24-\$25 wk.; \$4.50 day  
Office: 1 Union Square—AL 4-8024

**CAMPUNITY**  
WINGDALE, N. Y. Office 1 Union Sq. N.Y.C. • AL - 4 - 8024

NEW  
DELIGHTFUL  
DIFFERENT

**OAKWOOD**

NEW  
WINDSOR  
NEW YORK

Tel.: Newburgh 4477

Only 53 Miles from N. Y. C.

Charming Colonial Estate. Spacious grounds.  
Unexcelled food. Tennis, Golf, Hand-  
ball, Riding, Canoeing, Badminton. Lim-  
ited Accommodations — Attractive Rates.

ONE HOUR FROM NEW YORK

CENTRAL  
VALLEY  
N. Y.

**Birdland**

Formerly Lewisohn's Estate OPEN ALL YEAR  
225-acre estate. Tennis, Golf, Swimming, Bicycles, Hand-  
ball, Ping-pong, Games, recordings, library, dancing. Ex-  
ceptional company. Excellent cuisine. Every comfort.  
Incomparable surroundings. Tel.: Highland Mills 7895.  
Your Hostess: Fannie Goldberg

**TANGLEWOOD**

WOODSTOCK, NEW YORK

For a vacation or weekend that's somewhat different  
—amidst unspoiled country—wholesome and deli-  
cious food—swimming in a dammed up brook—  
tennis and other sports—for relaxation and a real  
good time—come to Tanglewood—\$24-\$26 per  
week. \$4.50-\$5 per day.

MARTHA BERLIN

Tel. Woodstock 14 F 13

**ARCADIA**

FISHKILL, N. Y.

Phone: Beacon 727

Spend a glorious vacation in 1100 acres of woods, trails and  
scenic wonders. Wood-burning fireplaces. Unexcelled cuisine.  
Indoor and outdoor sports.

Special Rates for Groups

Make Reservations Now

R. R. Station: Beacon, N. Y.

**LOCUST GROVE FARM**

SYLVAN LAKE, HOPEWELL JUNCTION, N. Y.

A "smallish" informal place overlooking miles of scenic  
hills in lower Dutchess County.  
All sports—Barn Dances—Nearby lake—Open all year—  
Just 55 miles from New York.

**LIMITED ACCOMMODATIONS—LOW RATES**

GEORGE A. PODORSON, Locust Grove Farm  
City Phone: SH 3-4716—Hopewell Junction, Phone 42 F 31