

17 to tell 400 veterans at the University of Maryland that he would halve the US payroll. He also charged "alien labor leaders" in the CIO and PAC had "too often got this country by the throat." He got a barrage of questions from the vets, such as: "What do you mean by alien leadership in the CIO?" and "What is your policy toward Russia?" When he said he meant by "alien leadership" the "leaders of the CIO and PAC who have been cited by the House Un-American Activities Committee," a vet called, "Can you name some?" and there was silence from the general.

Going through the files of clippings on police brutality at the *Afro-American* office, I came across a letter Gov. Herbert R. O'Connor, Democratic candidate for Senator, wrote Feb. 3, 1942, to Mrs. Lillie Jackson, head of the NAACP in Baltimore, in reply to a

request that representatives of various organizations made to see the governor regarding Baltimore police brutality. The Baltimore police are a part of the state organization in Maryland. It was at the time Pvt. Thomas Broadus was killed by Policeman Bender. Broadus was the ninth Negro killed by police bullets in three-and-a-half years. Wrote the governor to Mrs. Jackson: "This is a most serious situation but I must bear in mind that the legal processes must not be ignored. . . .

"You state that it is felt 'that a colored citizen even in the United States Army has no protection.' This statement, of course, assumes that no justification existed for the policeman's act. I feel that we should hear both sides of the matter before reaching our conclusions. . . ." He didn't see the delegation.

But while I found some Negroes who will support O'Connor and even more who favor McKeldin as against Lane, the only candidacy which evokes any enthusiasm is that of Charles A. Reid for the Maryland House of Delegates. Reid, a Republican, is a PAC-endorsed candidate, and all of PAC's ward clubs in the fourth district will concentrate on getting Reid into the state legislature. If he wins it will be the first time in the state's history that Jim Crow in the legislature will have been cracked. Other Negroes have run for the office but Reid has broken away from the Republican Party machine grip to the extent of campaigning on a platform of fighting for "improved housing, social legislation, administration of justice and full citizenship privileges" for all "regardless of race, creed, religion or national origin."

WHAT IS JAZZ?

A discussion of the origin and development of jazz in relation to the national question. People's music versus monopoly domination.

By S. FINKELSTEIN

JAZZ, we now know, is neither merely a dance music nor a music created by some gifted individuals with a talent for improvisation. It is a national music of the Negro people, as were the spirituals and blues. It is also a national music of the white people of America. It has furthermore produced a body of music, through the phonograph record, which—whether created by improvisation, composition or a combination of both methods—now stands as an admirable contribution to American and to world music. And like every other healthy product of American culture, it is now fighting for its life against the forces of monopoly within the cultural world which would smother it out of existence.

Our understanding of jazz has proceeded slowly. The first books to appear, such as Hugues Panassie's *Hot Jazz*, ignored folk roots and leaned heavily upon a flock of modern arrangements which are now ignored as important music. Each book to appear since Panassie has started by exposing the errors of its predecessors, added some new and valuable information, and then itself fallen into a mass of

errors. Rudi Blesh, in his *Shining Trumpets*,* follows the same pattern.

Blesh brings to his study of jazz an equipment full of promise. He has a passionate love for the greatest jazz music, the small band blues improvisations known generally as "New Orleans" music. He has a musical knowledge which enables him to consider jazz in the perspective of world musical culture. Aided by transcriptions made by the composer Lou Harrison, which appear in the appendix of the book, he analyzes brilliantly the fundamental idiom of Negro folk music and jazz, from its African origins to the complex, many-voiced improvisations of New Orleans bands. He hates the exploitation suffered by the Negro people, and sees the progress of jazz as a social as well as musical problem.

All this is to the good. And yet he fumbles in his project, because of a failure to grasp the problems he himself raises. They are the problems of the national question, and of the pos-

sibilities for the growth of a national music in America.

The idealist critic, wholly subjective, tends to emphasize differences between one music and another, ignoring the growth of one into the other. The mechanical materialist on the other hand tends to emphasize the similarities and ignore the differences, the new complex unities that appear with the process of change. The latter is Blesh's most frequent error. He does an excellent job of analyzing African music, showing how its elements, carried to America, entered into the music of the Negro spiritual. He insists rightly upon an appreciation of African culture for its own high achievements. He shows how the derogation of African culture has been used as a reactionary argument to help fasten the present exploitation upon the Negro.

The fact remains, however, that there is a difference between showing the fruitful use of African elements in Negro folk music, and claiming that this is an African music. Such mechanical theorizing distorts the entire nature of music as an art of communication. Blesh says, "For jazz, regardless of the

* *SHINING TRUMPETS*, by Rudi Blesh. Knopf. \$5.

origin of its melodies, is a *manner* of playing derived directly from the music of the West African coast." To disregard melody, however, is to disregard the most life-giving element of music, the basic pattern which, uniting single notes and accents, becomes a unit of human and emotional communication. A melody must not be confused with a tune, of course. And a melody, or melodic phrase, must be played with the correct manner, with all the nuances of rhythm, accent and timbre, even intonation, that belong to it. But this is as true of a Schubert song or Chopin mazurka as it is of a blues. And it is still the matter, not the manner, which makes music an art involving people's emotions and human relationships.

THE melodies of the spirituals were different from the hymn tunes out of which some of them came. They were also different from African music, however. Both of these origins combined to form a new flowering of music, which was a music that characterized and spoke for the Negro people of America. Blesh, riding his Africa theory, misses much of this quality that spirituals had as a practical, functioning, fighting music, with new human and social patterns. A Negro woman singing a play song becomes to him "the leader calling and the tribal chorus responding; her hands and feet are the urgent, ominous, speaking drums. She is at once the slave and the free uncaptured Negro living still in West Africa."

Throughout his treatment of Negro music, he emphasizes too much this nostalgic character, his style moving similarly from clear and illuminating factual prose into misty poetry. When he gets to the blues, he misses the fact that while the continuity of



Negro culture is present, the amalgamation of fresh elements becomes even greater, and the new melodic and structural forms that result are even more completely characteristic of the Negro as an organic part of the American people, expressing in his music the new conditions of life and social patterns that followed emancipation. This character of the blues music can be seen when we realize how broadly it becomes a national music, used by poor white as well as Negro, sending out roots which divided and flowered into a new, rich and varied American folk music and poetry of the South, Middle West and far West.

He brilliantly disposes of the charge that the blues are connected with degradation and vice, but even in answering this charge falls into a new error. "Steamboat horn and locomotive's whistle; the spiritual ringing and rocking in a bare, small church; the racking sobs of bereaved slave mothers; gay, bright tinkle of ragtime . . . the delicious, yellow, brassy blare of the parade band—in all of this, a lost race is searching for home." The message of this music, however, is precisely that the Negro people are not a lost race. They have a home, which they are trying to make more livable and tolerable, using music as an enrichment of their social life and as a weapon in their struggle. We can see the power of jazz as a weapon when we realize how the audience which increasingly welcomed jazz as an American music became a new and powerful force joining the fight against Jim Crow in all forms of American life. And this struggle in turn has helped jazz itself to discover and advance creative Negro musicians, and provided new opportunities for them to be heard and to make a living.

WHEN we came to the rich flowering out of the blues into the complex vocal and instrumental music of New Orleans jazz, we can see clearly that it was the Negro's home, and the kind of home he had, which gave its form and content to this music. The amalgamation of fresh music and human elements became even richer. Involved in this music were Spanish and Creole songs; the formal structure of rags and Sousa marches, quadrilles and cakewalks; the possibilities opened up by the adoption of new musical instruments, and by freer patterns of living; the sense of national character still

living, and even stronger, in these new social conditions, expressed in the communal character of the collective improvisation of the music, and in the manner in which the listeners reacted to each nuance of the players.

Blesh's description of typical works



of New Orleans music stands among the best pages in his book. But he is still fascinated by his principle of African continuity, and so denies the values of his own analysis. This music to him is still nostalgic and formless. Yet one of the new qualities of New Orleans music, the music of Jelly-Roll Morton, Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Johnny Dodds and Louis Armstrong records, is precisely an element of musical form. Improvisational as these works may be, they yet emerge tightly organized, with a beginning, middle and end; a rounded out, meaningful, artistic experience.

From this point on, mistakes pile up, and offer a picture of a writer denouncing reaction yet, through unclarity, falling into agreement with it. The white chauvinist claims that jazz is foreign to America—African and barbaric. Blesh, throughout his appreciation of jazz, reemphasizes that it is African, in spite of its century and a half of existence in America in new and productive forms. The white chauvinist claims that white musicians should not mix with Negroes, or play hot jazz. Blesh approves of white musicians playing jazz in principle, but denounces almost all of them—Bix Beiderbecke, Jack Teagarden, Joe Sullivan, Art Hodes—for not playing "Negroid" enough. The chauvinist, academician and snob, claims that jazz cannot contribute anything to a broader American culture of composed and concert music. Blesh says the same thing, except that he tries to build jazz up as an independent music system so wonderfully formless, and so modern,

that it can replace all of Western musical culture.

The snob points jeeringly to the fact that jazz, for all its high hopes, seems to be dying out. Blesh, for all his announcements of a wonderful future, disapproves of every deviation from classic New Orleans principles. All modern forms and textures of jazz are to him dilutions and hybrid products conceived under the disastrous cloud of commercialism. The chauvinist draws a Jim Crow line against Negro musicians in symphony orchestras, concert and opera. Blesh berates all Negro musicians who try to break into this field, because to him they are betraying the genius of their race.

The fact is that jazz is hampered in its progress and growth by the present monopolization of all the means of popular artistic communication, which is destroying the possibility of integrity in popular art, and of the entrance of fresh human and experimental qualities. Commercialism was at first a benefit to jazz and American music. It gave the Negro musicians a market for their wares. It enabled jazz to spread from the South, to Chicago, New York and the West Coast. It brought the great boon of the phonograph record, through which musicians could study their own and other's achievements. It enabled a few of the Negro musicians to rise out of the narrow, poverty-stricken environment in which jazz had been born. It enabled some to get better instruments, and to attain a more finished technique. It brought fruitful collaboration between white and Negro musicians. It gave the Negro artist a chance to assert his right to take part in the entire stream of music, from symphony to opera.

Qualities were necessarily lost. Jazz music, facing the market, had to lose some of its communal folk character, and take on a more individualist set of forms, emphasizing the solo variations and expansions of a melody, the large band, and the use of harmony in arrangements. The Tin Pan Alley tune tended to replace the blues, thus giving rise to the misconception that jazz was only a "manner" of playing, not a musical folk language. It was nevertheless a fresh development, and brought a richly worthwhile new musical literature to the American scene.

To say as Blesh does, for example, that "as for jazz, the Duke has never played it," and that his work is "ridiculous and pretentious," does not make

sense. Ellington's music, as exhibited in a stream of fine records, is wholly of the blues. It is the blues, of course, changed to fit the new textures of the fifteen-piece orchestra of brass, reed and percussion, but the change is carried out with the freshness and inventiveness of a fine artist. Furthermore Ellington, in his struggle against lucrative song plugging, in his continual writing of genuine orchestral music rather than arrangements of Tin Pan Alley tunes, has shown himself a leading figure in the fight against the degradation of popular music. It was certainly better for American music to have such work than to have Ellington's men playing over and over again innumerable "classic" versions of "Dippermouth" and "Winin' Boy Blues."

Similarly the members of "People's Songs," far from diluting jazz, are trying to preserve, in the light of contemporary needs, the meaningful content and fighting quality of American folk music of which jazz is a part. To argue that because of the greatness of New Orleans music, musicians must go back to it as a pure form, and ignore any dilutions, is to argue not for "classic jazz," but for what must inevitably turn out to be a barren neo-classicism, a reiteration of old patterns until they become platitudes. And on the practical side, for all the distinction between the greatness of New Orleans music and the poverty that surrounded it, a return must inevitably be a return to these conditions of narrow and poverty-stricken life.

Blesh's argument is similar to that of other cultural prophets who lament present-day decadence. Some, in music, place the decadence after Wagner; others after Beethoven; still others, after Bach, or the Middle Ages. But whatever the glories of the communal art of the Middle Ages, and its achievements were truly glorious, the cry to "go back" is a cry to go back to poverty, ignorance and semi-slavery. The history of every successful people's fight for national existence and freedom is one of fruitful collaboration with other peoples fighting for freedom and democracy, employing whatever is living in the national heritage in terms of the full opportunities and new tools brought by a changing world. The case is the same for national cultures, which have grown by using the folk heritages of the past boldly and freely in terms of the most living and suggestive forms offered by world culture.

BLESH's characterization of Western musical form and structure as static and outmoded, compared to the jazz methods of movement and improvisation, is musical idiocy. There is of course the academic musical form which is taught in conservatories, truly barren and hampering to music. But the forms of a Bach, Beethoven, Schubert, Verdi, Moussorgsky, using imaginatively all the lessons of musical knowledge to give their national backgrounds a new and flourishing development, are something quite different. Such forms came into being because they enabled the composer to address a broader public through a functional avenue of social intercourse, like the concert hall and opera house, and to include in his music a richer complex of emotions, thoughts and human characterizations.

Improvisation and formal structure are not, as Blesh imagines, two mutually exclusive worlds. If Blesh examines more carefully the improvised work of all his great jazz musicians, he will find a slow process of composition, worked out from one musical performance to another, until a musical conception is rounded out and finished. Solos and musical conceptions by one artist are played note for note by others, as if they had been written down. Improvisation is a wonderful and necessary process that must be restored to popular music, so that musical performance will again take on a widespread folk and creative character. But to deny the role of knowledge, craft and scientific mastery of materials in music making, or of larger, studied forms necessary to fit broader avenues to an audience, is similar to denouncing the novel and drama in favor of improvised folk ballads, or the modern house in favor of the log cabin.

Jazz, today, does not offer a picture of musical health. Neither, for that matter, does any aspect of dominant American culture. The reason is the new stage of monopolization of all forms of popular art creation. It has destroyed not only the small band, in which a King Oliver, Louis Armstrong, Johnny Dodds, and Muggsy Spanier learned their music, but the independent newspaper, the local theater, the cultural ferment which produced a Mark Twain, O. Henry, Walt Whitman, Thomas Nast and Art Young, and the early Eugene O'Neill. It kept out of the big money, and often drove out of any money, the

very Negro musicians whose musical ideas it adopted, borrowed, diluted and made into a lucrative commodity. Increasingly one standardized product is made in one central office or studio, concocted to fit censored formulas, employing all the wits of the advertising industry for its popularization. The result is a synthetic product which dulls people's sensitivity to the languages of art as a medium for communication of fresh perceptions and honest thought; a pseudo-popular art, which is advertised as "what the people want" but is actually the face, in art, of monopoly capital and its publicity experts.

Mass production has made the commodity cheaper, but rising costs of production have brought the cultural domination of the banks, and made the entrance of the independent producer

increasingly prohibitive. Faced by this monstrosity of our cultural life, not only folk and popular artists but artists of every form and style are engaged in a bitter struggle for their integrity, honesty and right of artistic growth.

THIS situation cannot be combatted by demanding, as Blesh does, that artists go back to pure folk patterns as they once existed, nor is it possible even to restore the freer market and more independent production of two and three decades ago. A study of the past is of the utmost importance, but only in using whatever the past offered in human and communal cultural values in terms of the needs of a society far greater in its possibilities of widespread human intercourse. One of the great qualities of folk and popular art is its boldness, its adaptability, its germinat-

ing power capable of producing the most surprisingly new and useful art patterns. The great national cultures of world history grew by assimilating their folk materials, with their human content and new structural ideas, to the great international formal traditions of the arts, using these traditions with the utmost boldness and imagination so that what arose was not an imitation but a fresh structure. Such was the national art of the Elizabethan drama, of the Irish drama and poetry, of Russian literature and music; such is the achievement of an Ives or Bartok in our own day, assimilating folk material to studied musical structures so that a new set of forms arises, with a new social, communicative content. Such is the significance of a Paul Robeson in American life, at once a leader of the Negro people and a leader in the international fight for democracy and the freedom of all peoples.

Folk qualities as they existed in the past must be revived, but cannot alone suffice for a democratic culture. Such a culture must include the moving picture, radio and newspaper, the symphony, opera and mural painting; the most highly organized and complex forms of art. The struggle must take the form of art production sponsored by people's organizations, of the breakdown of Jim Crow in culture, of government sponsored art projects, and of the insistence by artists on the right to honesty and artistic growth even when working for a boss.

By barring the door to education, to formal structure, to the development of finished technique, to the healthy intermingling of many national backgrounds, Blesh in his enthusiasm actually closes the door to progress. He insults many Negro artists of our own day, both in jazz and in other fields, who are asserting their right to take part as equals in the entire stream of contemporary cultural life. He treats with contempt many white jazz musicians who are fighting to keep jazz healthy, and bring to it musical and imaginative qualities of their own. He does a most valuable job in showing how infinitely greater a true people's music is than the businessman manufactured product passed off as popular art. But he flits up and back between an enthusiasm for national freedom, in culture as well as politics, and a romantic nationalism that, because of its unreality, can do harm if taken seriously.



"Tap-dancer," sculpture by Nat Werner.

A. C. A. Gallery.

THE WISE MAN, THE FOOL AND THE SLAVE

A Fable by
LU HSUN

Lu Hsun, who was born in 1881 and died in 1936, has been called the Gorky of China because he declared war on the feudal traditions which enslaved her people. This fable is from the collection "Wild Grass." It exposed the serflike mentality of the unawakened people and the emptiness of liberal scholars who only talk but really despise the common man. Lu Hsun's "fool" is the new hero, ready for self-sacrifice and action.

Since Lu Hsun wrote, China has had less slaves and more "fools." Because he was the forerunner of this change in the sphere of literature, Lu Hsun will remain immortal. Mao Tse-tung, who has led the Chinese people in fighting slavery on many fronts, once said that "Lu Hsun is the road for modern Chinese culture." Lu Hsun's realism, he declared, is conscious and militant. It is the solid foundation for the new democratic culture.

A SLAVE always complains and seldom does more. Once there was a slave who met a Wise Man.

"Sir!" he said with deep grief, the tears running down his cheeks, "as you



Irving Amen.

already know, the life I lead is utterly inhuman! I am not sure of even one meal a day, and if I do get it it is made of coarse grain husks which even a dog or a pig would not touch. And there is only one bowl, and. . . ."

"That is really pitiful!" said the Wise Man with a sad expression.

"Isn't it?" The slave's face lighted up.

"I have to work all day and all night without any rest. I carry tubs of water in the morning and cook in the evening. At noon I have to go to market and at night I push the rice mill; when the sun shines I have to do the washing and when it rains I have to carry an umbrella for somebody else. In winter I stoke the furnace and in

summer I have to wield a fan for my master. At midnight I have to cook snacks for him and his friends while they gamble. And they never tip me. And sometimes I am beaten with a leather whip, and. . . ."

"Oh, oh," sighed the Wise Man. His eyes became pink and tears began to roll down his cheeks.

"Sir! I cannot go on like this. I have to find some other way. But what is the other way?" cried the slave.

"I think things will soon get better," said the Wise Man softly and sympathetically.

"You think so? I have never stopped hoping. Even now, when I have unburdened myself to you and