

# SR/ RECORDINGS SECTION

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## The Joys of Jazz

By WILDER HOBSON

THIS is an era of jazz pedagogy and archaeology. I will confess that I myself have been talking on the subject of the music to the Princeton Adult School. And it is typical of the times that my wallet should contain, in addition to cards certifying me as a member of the New Jersey Civil Defense Corps, The American Newspaper Guild, and the Rolls-Royce Owners' Club, an impressive pasteboard describing me to the potential pickpocket as belonging to the "planning committee" of The Institute of Jazz Studies, Inc. This last is a large assemblage of erudite jazzbos gathered together by Professor Marshall Stearns of New York University for the purpose of looking into syncopation.

Now there is some danger in all this that jazz will come to be taken not merely seriously but also solemnly. That would be too bad. I have just received a powerful personal urge in the other direction from a huge load of jazz classics dug out of the files of the Radio Corporation of America. This so-called "X" series of records are elegantly referred to by the company as "vault originals." And when I place a "vault original" on my turntable, what do I hear? I hear the late Mr. Red McKenzie playing the kazoo.

Praise be for that. My point is that while I might have been tempted to review this fine series of reissues

with scholarly weight, the records have stimulated me too pleasantly in this spring weather. Besides, each of the LP's has learned and lively notes by Bill Grauer, Jr., and Orrin Keepnews.

The aforesaid kazoo playing—and the kazoo was a delightfully raucous and somewhat lewd instrument in McKenzie's hands—occurs in "Eddie Condon's Hot Shots" (RCA LX-3005). This is a vigorous Chicago-style compendium, as of 1929, and includes the wonderfully punchy, early-period tenor saxophone playing of Coleman Hawkins with the Mound City Blue Blowers. There is also work by the clarinetist Pee Wee Russell. To aging ears it is amazing how many of the younger jazz enthusiasts fail to appreciate the talents of this man. He is widely regarded as a character with a wry face (which is certainly no libel), but any thoroughgoing familiarity with his recorded history should produce high respect for him, and I have never heard a fine jazz musician speak his name with much less than awe. The record also contains two masters of the stirring "I'm Gonna Stomp Mr. Henry Lee," with notable piano work by Joe Sullivan and the playing and singing of trombonist Jack Teagarden.

At long last there is a reissue of some of the records of 1917 and 1918

which first made jazz famous. "Original Dixieland Jass Band (Vol. 1)" (RCA LX-3007) presents eight numbers by that pioneering outfit. These are, of course, old-fashioned, acoustical recordings. I plead guilty to an utter lack of detachment about them. They are magic to me—the first jazz I ever heard, around the time of their issuance—and I can only say that many others have admired the light, elastic polyphony of the little five-piece combination. The late Bix Beiderbecke learned much from Nick La Rocca's Dixieland cornet; Eddie Edwards's trombone was impeccable tailgate; and Larry Shield's clarinet still

seems to me among the most lyrically delightful playing in jazz history. Since we now have all been told that there were excellent Negro bands operating in New Orleans before the white Dixieland got together, it has become something of a custom to disparage, or at least to discount, the latter's con-

tribution to the music. I have long felt that whatever jazz's origins and lines of development, the musicianship of the Original Dixieland was very special and probably very influential among both Negro and white players.

"Johnny Dodds' Washboard Band" (RCA LX-3006) presents the most famous of all jazz clarinetists in his ripest 1928 and 1929 form. RCA's



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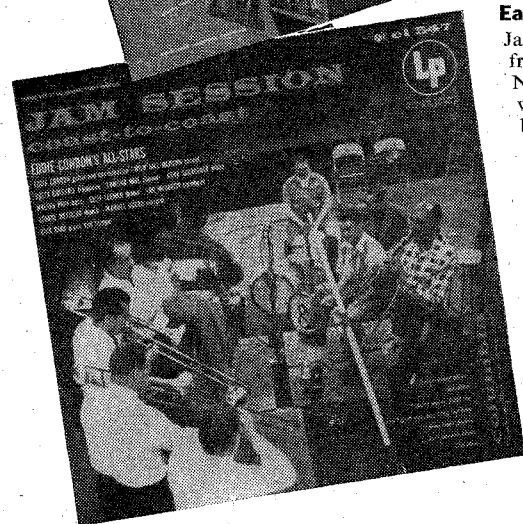
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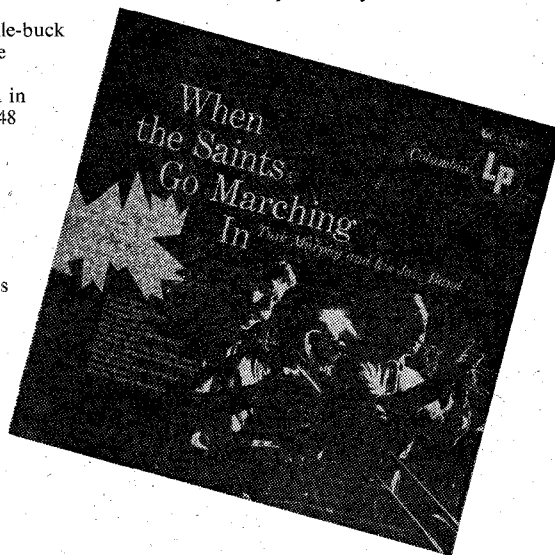
One side of this new release contains no less than 63 choruses of the blues theme, Huckle-buck—a feat made possible by the long playing record. Buck Clayton and an all-star group especially assembled for this memorable session present their improvisations on Huckle-buck and Robbins' Nest. The electrifying results are captured by Columbia in highest fidelity. CL 548

**East Meets West**

Jazz from both coasts! Musicians from Eddie Condon's Club in New York and from Hollywood's Rampart St. Raiders back-to-back in some coast-to-coast Dixieland favorites. Columbia's high fidelity brings you all the ad lib excitement generated by these extraordinary groups. CL 547

**All Time Jazz Favorites**

The San Francisco band of Turk Murphy belts out some of the great jazz standards. Among others in this anthology are the ever-popular When The Saints Go Marching In, Bill Bailey Won't You Please Come Home, and I Wish That I Could Shimmy Like My Sister Kate. CL 546



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hall of fame continues with "Jelly Roll Morton's Red Hot Peppers" (RCA LX-3008), which many devotees consider the finest classic jazz band of all time (I would still opt for Louis Armstrong's Hot Five and Hot Seven). There is another fine program of piano blues and boogie by the warm and stately "Jimmy Yancey" (RCA LX-3000). And I had positively forgotten what muscular, varied music was to be had from "Bennie Moten's Kansas City Jazz (Vol. 1)" (RCA LX-3004) of 1926 and 1927, and from "Jimmy Lunceford and His Chickasaw Syncopators" (RCA LX-3002) dating from 1930 and 1934.

These two LP's have one thing in common: they both represent early stages of organizations that went on to higher musical finish and much wider repute. Bennie Moten's band evolved into the Count Basie organization, and Lunceford shone out lustreously under his own name. But, as so often happens with jazz revivals, I find that these early works have a spontaneous heartiness, an experimental fervor which are distinctive values in themselves. If the children are sometimes awkward, they are full of beans and it is hard to take one's eyes off them.

There are other things to be said of RCA's resurrection of Lionel Hampton band numbers from the late Thirties: "Hot Mallets" (RCA Victor LJM-1000). Hampton's band was a glitteringly finished troupe from the start. I have the impression that in recent years Hampton has indulged in a good deal of loud and flashy exhibitionism. But this revival of a dozen prewar numbers is full of beautiful playing by a throng of masters. In the interests of space I will merely



—Bill Gottlieb.

Coleman Hawkins—"wonderfully punchy."

impart that the vibraphonist is to be heard with such trumpeters as Cootie Williams, Rex Stewart, Jonah Jones, Dizzy Gillespie, Henry Allen, and Ziggy Elman. I was especially touched by the rolling tenor saxophone of the late Choo Berry, and by Jess Stacy at the piano.

**W**E now leave the RCA preserves and consider some of the competition. There is a "Jam Session Coast-to-Coast" (Columbia CL 547) which features an augmented Eddie Condon group from the Atlantic littoral and a Hollywood studio constellation under the name of The Rampart Street Paraders. Mr. Condon, who is credited with "guitar and conversation," has made things challenging for some of his regular boys. Trombonist Cutty Cutshall is faced with the rival Lou McGarity. Clarinetist Edmond Hall is up against Peanuts Hucko. "Wild Bill" Davison competes with the part-time trumpet playing of the pianist Dick Cary. Cary must contend with Gene Schroeder at the keyboard, and George Wettling with Cliff Leeman at the drums. The result of this scrambling is some excellent traditional jazz. At one point Mr. Condon's conversational powers prompt him to loud praise of Mr. McGarity, in which I heartily concur.

The Hollywoodians on the reverse include such practised men as tenor saxophonist Eddie Miller and clarinetist Matty Matlock. There is also Abe Lincoln. For a good many years now—more than I like to think have passed—I have engaged in a chilly altercation with Professor Marshall Stearns of NYU on the subject of Abe Lincoln. When it all began Professor Stearns was not at NYU. If I remember correctly he was attending the Yale graduate school, preparing himself for a career in the study of Chaucer. My insistence that there was a slide trombonist named Abe Lincoln was received with the kind of lordly dismissal which all neophyte scholars give to anything they cannot verify in a concordance. But I had heard Lincoln delivering himself at a debutante party at the Brooklyn Heights Casino, and his message seemed to me as memorable as the Gettysburg Address. He plays "The Sheik" on this LP, and his staccato wallop will undoubtedly delight the Professor's heart.

His good friend John Hammond has organized a musicale in which a gifted group improvise on a single tune for the full length of a twelve-inch LP. On one side of this "Buck Clayton Jam Session" (Columbia CL 548) the tune is "The Huckle Buck" and on the other it is "Robbins' Nest." I have never cared for the first theme, but



Eddie Condon—"guitar and conversation."

find the second highly agreeable and most of the playing on both sides of high quality—with many modern touches. Sir Charles Thompson is certainly one of the most engaging jazz pianists—subtle, economical, highly inventive. The other players in the all-star cast are the veteran Buck Clayton, a poetical trumpet player; Joe Newman, who has taken Clayton's place in the Count Basie band; trombonists Henderson Chambers and Urbie Green; saxophonists Lem Davis, Julian Dash, and Charlie Fowlkes; and the original Count Basie rhythm section—Freddie Green, guitar; Walter Page, bass; and Jo Jones, drums. They provide, as always, superb motive power.

I was late in arriving at "Ellington Uptown" (Columbia ML 4639) and apologize to the admirers. After many periods of lush overelaboration and rampant colorism, the Duke Ellington band seems to me today to be in remarkably robust form. It remains, of course, possibly the most sheerly dashing of all jazz combinations, with as much poise as the dandies of Dégas. This LP is particularly notable for the version of Billy Strayhorn's hymn to the New York subway system, "Take the 'A' Train," with a bewitching scat singing chorus by Betty Roche, and for Juan Tizol's grand old "Perdido," with lovely trumpet arabesques by Ray Nance. There is also a drum specialty by Louis Bellson, a long mood piece called "A Tone Parallel to Harlem," and a new treatment of "The Mooche."

The trombonist Wilbur de Paris, never a man to be trite, offers in "New New Orleans Jazz" (A440 LP AJ503) a small-band program of neo-

(Continued on page 51)

# A Colleague's View of Major Armstrong

*In "Major Armstrong: An American Tragedy" [SR Feb. 27] the career of the inventor of FM radio was characterized by R. D. Darrell as an instance of the "common tragedy of the heroic individualist in present-day society." Herewith SR presents a dissenting opinion from C. B. Fisher, a long-time professional associate of Armstrong, who is president of Radio Engineering Products Ltd., one of the leading manufacturers of electronic equipment in Canada.*

By C. B. FISHER

**M**AJOREDWIN H. ARMSTRONG was the greatest inventor of our time, perhaps of any past time. He was also, beyond all question, a man of fine mental powers, unflinching courage, massive strength of character, unceasing industry, and simple charm. As a young man he earned, and thereafter wisely spent, a large fortune. Unequaled fame and honors did not deflect him into egotism. These things make hero worship easy for minds with reverence for greatness. They hardly justify the myth of American tragedy which R. D. Darrell offered in RECORDINGS of February 27.

There was, one guesses, private tragedy in Armstrong's life, perhaps more than in most lives of sixty-three years' duration; certainly he drank uncommonly bitter hemlock at the end. Of this I have no special knowledge, nor do I wish it. We do know, however, that his career as an inventor was a great triumph—American if you like, although his first and perhaps greatest invention was made in France—unparalleled by any great creative mind that one can easily recall.

I knew his work and the man for twenty years, and he told me much of his earlier life. During that time I saw no sign of the struggle which Mr. Darrell rightly deems tragic, which he says men of high talent commonly wage nowadays with the society of their fellows.

For nearly forty years Armstrong was regarded as one of electronics' greatest minds by all the thousands of men with knowledge adequate for a real judgment. For thirty years past, and as far as we can see into the future, hardly a piece of electronic

equipment did not or will not use one, two, or more of his inventions. From his early manhood earnings from his inventions made Armstrong wealthy beyond the spending ability of any sane man. For the last twenty years he was praised to the point of adulation in the technical press and engineering conferences of the world. Governments honored him with almost extravagant praise; famous universities offered him more degrees than he cared to accept; learned societies made unprecedented claims on his behalf; a great army recorded his importance in winning a global war. Could the world, in all reason, have done more for him, or done it earlier? Would more money or more praise (more recognition was not possible) have been of any real value to him? I do not think so, and I am sure Armstrong did not think so.

Armstrong loved to battle human inertia. Like all true inventors, he often professed to believe that any decision against immediate adoption of his inventions was dictated only by stupidity, cynicism, or greed. Thus, while he won all his wars, and gloried in the victories, he became heated about a few lost skirmishes. All the

years I knew him, he spoke bitterly about only one major engagement—the only one he lost. This was a twenty-year legal struggle, not with one of Mr. Darrell's "cooperative quasi-anonymous research teams, dominated by large corporations," but with Lee de Forest, another great individual inventor. They disputed priority of invention of the regenerative electron-tube circuit, and the courts ruled in favor of De Forest. It is true that the Bell System had purchased De Forest's claims (for a very substantial sum) and their lawyers handled the case. But Armstrong had at his command resources of literally hundreds of thousands of dollars, partly derived from royalties paid by his opponents.

Many competent observers felt that he could not reasonably have hoped to win a clean-cut decision over the powerful case which De Forest advanced. Actually, the Bell System (and most other large corporations in the field of communications) recognized all his patents and paid large sums for their use. Armstrong was a close friend of the senior General Electric executives, who backed frequency modulation from its earliest days and supported Armstrong's crusade in a spirit more of chivalry than self-interest. Armstrong told me that he was at one time the largest single holder of RCA stock. On another occasion he said that General Sarnoff had offered him complete control of all of RCA's vast engineering and scientific activities, with salary to match. [EDITOR'S NOTE: This statement is denied by RCA sources.]

**O**N A SUNDAY early in September 1939 I had breakfast with Armstrong in his apartment in New York. We had planned to spend the day discussing ways and means of establishing frequency modulation in every corner of the Canadian electronics industry. But early in the day news came of Britain's declaration of war on Germany and we knew that Canada would not honorably stay out for more than a few days. It seemed the

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