

THE JAZZ FORMULA

ALTHOUGH eminent authorities are unable to arrive at an exact definition of jazz, certain characteristics appear to be essential. One is the use of novel tonal effects obtained by the employment of strange muting devices. It should be remembered that the jazz band is not a band, nor is it an orchestra; it is a sort of combination of both. The trumpets are almost always muted. Occasionally surprisingly beautiful effects are achieved, as when Mr. Whiteman's trombonist loosely inserts the end of a large megaphone into the bell of his instrument. Derbies and tin cans are applied to the trumpets, trombones, and clarinets with amazing results. It is these variations in timbre, this experimentation in unusual tonal effects that constitute the principal contribution of jazz to the science of music.

Another characteristic is the employment of fantastic, often

bizarre embellishments. These arabesque decorations are occasionally contrapuntal and always ingenious, but counterpoint is not of primary importance. "Jazz was originally the introduction of portamento effects on the trombone," says Mr. Henderson. "Afterward the ingenious players of the popular music found out how to produce the wailing, sliding tones on other instruments, and now at last we have such a wizard as Ross Gorman who can evoke the laugh of a hyena from a clarinet and the bark of a dog from a heckelphone." These portamento trombone passages, and, by some phenomenal trick, portamento effects on the saxophone, add that sensuous element popularly called "blue." It is precisely this strongly emphasized sensuous quality that explains the great popularity of this type of music. It also reveals, under analysis, the artistic limitations of jazz.

On the whole, jazz orchestration seems to follow a definite formula. The saxophone is the principal melodic instrument. The piano and banjo supply the harmonic and rhythmic basis. The muted trumpets occasionally "take the lead" and release the saxophones for more decorative purposes. Horns help out with the harmony. Clarinets, tenor and soprano saxophones cut capers, and embellish the general design. This description is not all inclusive. The formula is capable of extension and variation. But on the whole the jazz formula appears to be clearly defined, and the jazz arranger stands out a competent craftsman who has learned his trade well, rather than as a creative artist.

It may be that some composer some day will write great music for the jazz band. Beautiful poetry has been written within the rigid formal limits of the sonnet. But this in itself will not be sufficient to justify jazz as a vital contribution to music. Rather it will be a tribute to the irrepressible skill of the artist in dealing with a given problem.

By Newman Levy

NEW FORMS FOR OLD NOISES

TO designate as "jazz" the syncopated music of today is to make an inaccurate though popular use of that term. Jazz, as I understand it, describes only the first stage in the development of