

Music in the Air

By DANIEL RICHMAN

Melodic Melange

A HETEROGENEITY of midnight music makers has been available to dial twisters lately, altho unearthing the out-of-the-ordinary bargains has required a bit of shopping around on the networks. In the midst of swing and sweet and style, a surprising amount of novelty has been rearing its unusual head, giving a welcomed lift to listeners who have become slightly jaded by an unrelieved barrage of conventional music styles and stereotyped remote presentations.

Within a few hours this corner came upon such variegated dance programs as a Hawaiian band extolling exclusively the melodic virtues of the paradise of the Pacific, a bucolic group dedicated solely to the marketing of bigger and better corn, an all-girl aggregation so top-heavy with femininity and production values as to be wholly unique among dance remotes, a fashion show of melody during which every conceivable song style was paraded before the customers' eardrums, and an item labeled *Streamlined Rhythm*.

Fashions in Music

For sheer listenability MITCHELL AYRES (Murray's, Tuckahoe, New York, WOR) and his *Fashions in Music* decidedly had the edge in this cavalcade of contrast. Ayres paints his harmonic patterns on a constantly changing canvas. His theme, played in waltz, fox trot, rumba, classical and swing rhythms, sets the mood for the whole broadcast. It establishes the pace for a well-chosen well-played group of numbers that is certain to have the auditor making a mental note to tune in again.

JERRY BLAINE (Arcadia Ballroom, New York, WOR), on the other hand, lives up to his *Streamlined Rhythm* appellation by never deviating from the one straight line of speed as embodied in swing. It's a little rough on those parishioners who favor some slight degree of relaxation in their music, what with the first ballad coming after 20 minutes are down, and something like *What Is This Thing Called Love?* socked out for all it's worth—which is plenty, but not when it's desecrated like that; and the armchair critic has to be pretty fond of swing to stay with such streamlining. If not, Blaine won't appeal for more than 10 minutes.

Half Hour of Charm

During his recent tenure in the Bowman Room of the Hotel Biltmore, New York, PHIL SPITALNY (WEAF) applied the principles of his Woodbury commercial to remote broadcasting, despite the pointed lengthening of the title to *Hour of Charm in Dance Time*, and emerged with a program so laden with arrangements, production trappings, descriptions of the girls' clothes and talents, and so much general excess baggage that it sounded more like the Ford Sunday Evening Symphony than a dance remote. As novel and as different from the average run of late-hour music as it was, however, the too-effortful striving to attain that end proved a boomerang, with the listener wearied by the crowded half hour to the point where it seemed twice as long.

Golden Bantam

With all the corn dispensed on witching hour wave lengths under the guise of modern swing music, it's more than a little refreshing to run across someone like FREDDIE FISHER (Village Barn, New York, WOR) whose stuff admittedly comes straight off the cob. Not the least enjoyable parts of Fisher's remote are his dryly humorous remarks anent his music. This form of self-deprecation always brings forth a favorable reaction from an audience, and in this case it suffuses the program with a homey informal glow that makes a listener sorry the time is up. The broadcast isn't all turkey-in-the-straw stuff either; when the Schnickelfritzers want to swing they definitely can beat it out, possibly not with the finesse of a Goodman but certainly with all the fervor.

Sweet Leilani

RAY KINNEY (Hotel Lexington, New York, WEAF) devotes his remotes exclusively to Hawaiian music, which puts his appeal directly up to the individual listener. If you like the undulating rhythms of the islands, a half hour with Kinney is far too short. If steel guitars and a grass skirt atmosphere are

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The Reviewing Stand

Joe Venuti

(Reviewed at the Glass Hat, Belmont-Plaza Hotel, New York)

IN HIS New York debut at the helm of his own outfit, Joe Venuti displayed a dance band that is exactly that. Disdaining stylized tricks that more often than not cover up an ork's inherent musical weaknesses, Venuti confines himself to delivering first-rate, substantial dance music that is equally admirable for listening or dancing.

The Venuti violin offers just enough novelty to take the band out of the stereotyped pattern its make-up of four reed, three brass and three rhythm would seem to imply. As proficient as he is on the fiddle, however, Venuti offers it only as a condiment and not as the whole meal, thereby tripling its effectiveness. Used as it is in just the right solo and obbligato doses, it adds shading, contrast and color to the band's performance.

Venuti features standards of the *Time on My Hands* and *Ain't Misbehaving* genre in a generally comprehensive library. Injection of other-day favorites like these also adds to the ork's listenability, and is a welcome relief from the usual bombardment of run-of-the-mill pops leveled at dance floors. Ballad vocals are taken by Don Darcy, who does not play an instrument but is concerned solely with the warbling.

Band presents little showmanship during the dance sets, but is capable of putting on a comedy act if necessary. Boys contributed a *Time Marches On* satire to the floor show here, which was not exactly new in content but plenty hilarious in execution. A little more clowning on this order during the straight sets would add the finishing touch to a smooth, polished performance of both swing and sweet rhythms.

Richman.

Lawrence Welk

(Reviewed at Chatterbox of William Penn Hotel, Pittsburgh)

HIGHLIGHTING Welk's mastery of the accordion that blends with Jerry Burke's electric organ backgrounds as the style-setting, the "champagne music of Lawrence Welk" is rich, bubble-like dandipation that's sparkling enough to please all degrees of dancers. Band has gained immeasurable class since its first stand here last year, coming in from Omaha, and makes a formidable bid for rating in top ranks.

With Welk out front for the squeeze boxings, instrumentation includes single trumpet and trombone; four sax, tootler Charlie Coffee doubling on xylophone; four rhythm, guitarist Walter Bloom adding vocal force, and organ. Lois Best is the fem decor and is just as strong on selling the songs. Repertory ranges from Schubert to the shag opuses, and the smartly styled syncos are enhanced by occasional glee club chants.

Frank.

Anson Weeks

(Reviewed at Aragon Ballroom, Chicago)

WITH almost an entire new crew filled in thru the past year, Weeks turns up with an ork that has everything a mob of hoofers could ever want. The rhythmical tempos are paced to perfection and the maestro has cashed in solidly on his 16 years in the biz, getting the most out of the band at all times. And the odd thing is that it's not swing and not sweet, but just good music, with arrangements that take the outfit away from the hack class.

Set-up is 12 men split equally among brass, reed and rhythm, with an extra piano for Weeks and a tuba for brass doubling by the bass man. Arranging is done by sax man Bud Prentiss, and his work on the old ditties like *My Gal Sal* and *Do You Ever Think of Me* is right in the groove. Over half of the ork's library is filled with these oldies, and with the smooth style of handling they're very salable. Another bright spot is the work of trumpeter Jackie Hall, who gets away on that horn with plenty of stuff. Anson makes a very personable front man and when he grabs on to that keyboard it's not for nothing. For straight danceability this band has a lift all its own, and to make it more infectious the boys appear appear to have a good time batting their stuff out.

Jack Wells, a tenor, pipes the vocals in a sort of hesitating style which gets off okeh with the band. This isn't an outfit groomed to suit the tastes of any particular group, especially the dyed-

in-wool swing bug, but when it comes to satisfying a cross-section of the country's dance enthusiasts, Weeks has got the goods.

Humphrey.

Joe Sherer

(Reviewed at Missouri Valley College, Marshall, Mo.)

WITH young musicians from the Kansas City area, Sherer has been playing in and out of the Kaycee corner the last two years. Line-up includes four saxes, two trumpets, a sliphorn, bass fiddle, drums, piano and Sherer's own clarinet.

Standouts from the crowd's viewpoint are Eddie Phillips, a tasty stick handler with a solid beat on his drums; Bryant Meehan, trumpeter; John Loftus, keyboard caresser and vocalist, and Sherer himself, whose clary stylings are good but are not featured enough. The outfit is best on the hot ones, having a tendency to slide along listlessly on the pop ballads. Sax section sometimes is sloppy and the brass emits a clinker too often, but on the whole, for a young band selling at a low price, it's a showmanly and danceable combination slanting its offerings toward collegiate terpssters.

Long rehearsals and continued hard work on dates with the enthusiasm now being exhibited by Sherer's gang may bring its reward. The leader does the arranging, sings occasionally and plays piano when Loftus is canarying at the mike. But even so, he should feature his blackstick to better advantage, inasmuch as it's the real feature of his ork's rhythmic style.

Dexter.

Nat Towles

(Reviewed at King's Ballroom, Lincoln, Neb.)

WITH 15 colored people, Towles, coming three years ago from New Orleans, has become one of the surest-fire box-office bands playing the Iowa-Nebraska-Missouri territory. Swingy assembly, its makes a roll call of all the jitter-inclined terpsists. Following the trend, band has softened the noisy brass and brought out melody in its later sessions, altho it used to have the rep for the greatest array of cast-ironed lungers who blew out all night. Tendency for smoother writing, but staying in the same groove is the setting now.

Band's make-up includes five in the brass, four on reeds and four on rhythm. Towles fronts, a paunchy, good-natured colored boy, whose sole duties seem to be to wave baton and look happy. Duke Groner, male vocalist, is frequently before the mike. Voice is good. He also makes the third man in a trio with T. W. Pratt and Bernie Cobb. Top tootling goes to Lorenzo Coker, L. H. Tally and H. Johnson, who come front with trumpet, trombone and clarinet, respectively.

Outfit dresses well, but not showily. Rostrom conduct is excellent. Altho their music is strictly danceable, to the point of making everybody bounce whether on the floor or not, the band stand always attracts a great deal of attention and dancers stop in clusters to watch and fight "in place."

Oldfield.

Jay McShann

(Reviewed at Martin's, Kansas City)

RATING among musicians as the most promising young colored pianist in the Greater Kansas City area, Jay McShann is a personable, talented Oklahoma product who got his start playing an organ in a Negro Baptist church. About three years ago he moved northward into the Kaycee corner to succeed Count Basie as the town's most skilled Steinway stroker. He's been a success from the start.

The band includes, besides the McShann baby grand, three saxes, string bass, one trumpet and drums. Bob Mabane, tenor sax, and Gus Johnson, a thoroly grounded skin-thumper, are the singers along with Selma Long, recently added as femme canary. They do their work well. Gene Ramey's bass work and William Scott's solo tenoring also add up solidly, Scott proving doubly valuable for his arranging ability. Library leans to swing ditties, but the boys can shell out the pops okeh when requested to do so. Appearance good; showmanship high. Playing this class South Side spot, McShann's outfit has proved a definite draw, hyping biz greatly in the dozen weeks it's been on deck. Leader should feature his keyboard style more, otherwise it's a socko little combination.

Dexter.

Off the Records

By M. H. ORODENKER

Good-Mania

WADDLING in the plush environs of the Waldorf has detracted none from the solid swingo that has so endeared Benny Goodman to the hop-skip-and-jump coterie. And for the Goodman wax followers, who must be legion, its Victor waxing in Benny's best manner for the standard pieces, *My Honey's Lovin' Arms* and *Farewell Blues* or the stumpy *Topsy*, Edward Durham and Edgar Battle credited for the note designs, and Fred Norman's *Smoke House*. Both doubles pack plenty punch, the trumpet-reaching-for-the-ceiling on the *Farewell* side making for the more exciting whirlings. For Goodman at a moderate tempo and temperature, there's enough rhythmic appeal to make it desirable in *I Must See Annie Tonight* and *Kind'a Lonesome*, Hoagy Carmichael's lilting lullaby from the *St. Louis Blues* film.

Nor is Goodman alone in his platter glory. Lionel Hampton, using a slap-together gang, produces an attention-getter vehicle on Victor for his two-fingered piano tricks, *Down Home Jump* and *Rock Hill Special*. It's meaningless riffing as far as the compos are concerned, Lionel takes the composer credits, but it's a honey for the Hampton fans. The *Rock Hill* side duplicates his instrumental wizardry on the key-boards. And with two fingers, no less. Plattermate gives the whiz a chance to shine on vibes and drums. And if nothing else, this is one time they didn't "force" Lionel to sing (?). His running mate, Teddy Wilson, has only a mild get-together on Brunswick with pop fare, *They Say* and *Say It With a Kiss*. Billie Holiday sings and you have to like Billie Holiday, else you're stuck with these sides with Wilson's pianology the only redeeming feature for your six bits.

In considering Goodman, it's natural to stack Count Basie in the same company. And in considering his *Jumpin' At the Woodside* for Decca, it's putting it mildly that it'll make your turn-table jump. The tempo is traffic-stopping and covers all degrees of torrid. Backed by *Dark Rapture*, but that flicker song fails to toe the mark set by its plattermate.

The Singing Sides

THE honeyed drippings when Frances Langford gives forth vocally are captured completely in *Hurry Home* and *At Long Last Love*, a Decca disk. For the peppy piping, Dolly Dawn is heard at her best in *Where Has My Little Dog Gone?*, a contagious ditty in *Tisket pattern*. And it's a swiny thingy Miss Dawn makes for *I Found My Yellow Basket*, tho the sequel as such is quite sorry. George Hall makes the musical setting for this dandy Vocalion double. It's a righteous groove the maestro digs, keeping up with Miss Dawn unto the last note.

Scanning the Race listings, Georgia White lends herself to violent voiced blues singing for *Dead Man's Blues* and *Love Sick Blues*. The gal really weeps for her man and for Decca.

Barry Wood gives romantic outpourings in the bary range on Brunswick for *Day After Day* and *It Serves You Right*. His song selling brushes against fem ears the right way and the ork backing matches the mood of his singing. However, Wood confines himself to the first chorus only and it's a long and tiresome journey to the end of the disk. Should certainly jump in with his pipes on the release to make for a better-balanced and more appealing platter. Tony Martin goes native on Vocalion for the swing hulus, *Rhythm of the Waves* and *The Island of Maui Hula*. Manny Klein adds trumpet zing to the steel strumming. Unfortunately, it all adds up to nothing. And for firesiders, Donald Novis blends his lyric tenoring with Eddie Dunder's organ to make sombrous Decca sides with *Trees* and *The Song of Songs*. In the least, the effect is sobering after a jump session with Count Basie.

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DECCA RECORDS boom a new boy-belle singing duo in Bob Hope and Shirley Ross. Screen starlets make their platter preem with *Two Sleepy People*, repeating their flicker singing.