

Improvised vs. Arranged Jazz

By Max Miller, vibraharpist, pianist, band leader and composer

No jazz musicians today are good spot composers. Rather, the best of them reassemble what they have heard, or practiced or played in a jazz session, and that's what passes among jazz fans as improvising. Today, when musicians try to improvise something really original, they are practically forced to give up in despair. Either they themselves or their fellow musicians know it's stale stuff that some instrumentalist already has conceived and played at some time in the past. Just because it is not on a record it cannot be assumed that therefore it has never been played before. All real jazzmen are good on memory, and I say if it's in their head it's the same as being on paper. If they do reach for something which they think is original, it invariably turns out to be sur-realistic in the sense that it is out of touch with reality, a straining for an effect which is technical rather than emotional.

Of course, plenty of jazzmen have fumbled around and created spot compositions of some merit. But to collectively improvise calls for musicians of high and equal caliber and ability and, with that, long association together. This a rare combination. It is unique, too, since the improvisation is lost unless it is notated so that others can play it. Obviously, this calls for paper jazz. Or are we going to be satisfied with the hit-or-miss enthusiasms of our great jazz virtuosi? Do we not want to pass on their greatness to other generations?

Spot composing (improvisation) and ensemble jamming are of great importance to the emotional intensity of jazz. It is this quality which so frequently

is absent from written jazz. The free feeling and expression of the best jazz, however, actually can be attained from notated scores. To do this, of course, call for jazzmen who are willing to forego their egos and interpret what someone else has written. I think most of the confusion between free and written jazz has come from a misunderstanding of the importance of interpretation. To interpret does not mean dry-as-dust playing. On the contrary, life and vitality are essentials of great performances. It takes a highly skilled player to interpret a notated score with the same expressive feeling as the thing himself instead of being guided by written notes. Conventional jam sessions are simply repetitions of ideas which the musicians involved have played many times before. I'd call that a memorized improvisation, and, that's a contradiction in terms. I see no justification for objecting to a musical notation while at the same time applauding a memorized notation. In short, the importance of free jazz style lies in its emotional drive, its guts, the intensity of what is being said. The two together make jazz much more than what it is today.

By Jimmy Hillard, Arranger-leader of WBBM'S Staff Jazz Contingent.

Musicians at a jam session frequently play better than they do on their regular job. When I was with the Scranton Sirens I remember when Benny Goodman sat in; he played Dinah for 45 minutes and with the exception of the rhythm section, we all got off the stand and let him go full blast. With the old Jean Goldkette I recall that we faked about every third

Welcome, Pres. Osmena

In gratitude upon the return of President Sergio Osmeña to his native land, Prof. Hilarion F. Rubio, noted Filipino composer and conductor, dedicates a song for him. This March-Song is based on a Visayan folk-song "Dandansoy" and "Philippine National Hymn", a musical annunciation of the President's tribal origin and his patriotism. It is written completely for a mass chorus in unison with band or Orchestra accompaniment. It will be introduced on the stage soon. The words were written by Mr. Jacinto R. de Leon.

The song is:

When you were in America
Your wish and dream were
always to gain
The liberation from sufferings
Of your most beloved
Motherland.
And now that you have
arrived ashore
How gladdened our orphaned
hearts are
Oh! I live long, you,
President dear,
Patriot and o'r foremost leader.

number. A man would take solo, and we'd fake background; then another soloist would come in, and pretty soon we'd built up a good feeling — yet it was arranged. "Pretty Girl Stomp" was one such tune. That's what an arrangement should do — I mean it should sound as if it were spontaneously conceived. That calls for plenty of cooperation between the musician and the writer. Briefly, then, an arrangement has to excite me and get inside of me so that I want to grab my sax and play.