WHY JASS IS DYING

By Jim Moynahan

A sentence in Mr. Borneman's piece in the June 1944 Record Changer brings, along with a start of surprise, a flood of nostalgic memories. The sentence is: "...we have the third example of a Chicago group producing New Orleans jazz--Kaminsky on cornet, Gowans on valve trombone, and Pee Wee Russell on clarinet..."

The start of surprise I record with mixed feelings. First because the "Chicago" musicians Kaminsky and Gowans are from Boston, and if they don't play "Boston" style, then they play New Orleans style, because we all learned it and played it together, and our models were the Original Dixieland Jass Band, and Louis, and Oliver and Bechet, and the Original Memphis Five and the New Orleans Rhythm Kings. We were playing this jazz, as the accompanying photograph will attest, at least five years before the Chicago style came into prominence with the first McKenzie and Condon Chicagoan records: SUGAR/CHINA BOY and NOBODY'S SWEETHEART /LIZA. I say five years because this picture first appeared as an advertisement in a Harvard LAMPOON of that year. Actually we had been playing jazz since the first ODJB records, except maybe Maxie who would have been a child in 1917. Maxie does not appear in the picture, but he did many a job with us--and in short pants, at that. Even as a pre-nubile youth he played more horn than the available Local 9 field. And he gladly shared Oliver-Louis records with us.

As for Pee Wee--I admit to considerable confusion, because lately I keep coming up against references to Pee Wee as a "Dixieland" musician. I was soundly set right some time ago--after some years' absence from professional music--for letting slip the fact that I naively believed the Chicago group my brother Fred was playing drums with, was trying to play "Dixieland." I won't forget that soon! Chicago, I was told, was Chicago, and Dixieland was something one didn't mention, except in good clean fun!

I've always thought of Pee Wee as a member of the Chicago group, playing essentially Chicago style, if not, indeed, almost being the definitive exponent of it, along with Teschemacher and Mezzrow. I know that when Pee Wee came to Boston in the late twenties, and we worked together (I was playing drums on that particular job) Pee Wee played a style that had never before been heard around Boston---differing most notably in his use of what we used to call "spit" tones because he used to form the tone by vibrating the corner of his lips in the manner a note is produced on cornet, along with the regular clarinet embouchure. This imparted a sympathetic vibration to the reed tone. (Analogous, though not similar, effects are obtained by the jaw vibrato, the tongue flutter, the uvula trill and the chest vibrato or "whinney.")

The point of this piece is to examine jazz in the light of Mr. Borneman's three contributions, and to bring into proper perspective an element which, so far as I can make out, has escaped critics and musicians alike since the word "jass" was first applied to a musical aggregation.

I think I first began to realize what this missing element was when I started hiring musicians in Boston early in the twenties. I could count on Dixieland drums--because my brother Fred almost ruined the shape of his skull by keeping it constantly jammed--from his earliest years--as far as he could get it, inside our orthophonic victrola horn, straining to catch some nuance of Tony Sbarbaro's drumming he might have missed. Brad Gowans--whether on slide trombone, clarinet, saxophone, cornet, or ballad horn--had the same idea. We could count on good piano players--Tom Kerr, Jack Miller, Frank Vigneau, Newell Chase, to name a few--but the nights when we really got off we were lucky enough to have Linc Russell or Maxie on cornet, or some similar happy combination.

We were rebels from the start. When Boston cornetists were raving about Red Nichols we pointed in vain to the records Bix had been making with the Wolverines. On the occasions when we did a club job with another leader, we were admonished not to play too much "dirty" stuff. Even on our own jobs it was not uncommon for outraged matrons to rush flushed and indignant to the bandstand to announce with finality that if we didn't stop "that" music (That's a Plenty) at once and play a waltz, we should have to leave.

Ever hear THAT'S A PLENTY in three quarter time? We probably gave in and played it that way. Not because we were afraid of not being paid, but because it might have meant not being able to keep on playing music--including THAT'S A PLENTY when the matrons left.

And this salient element? Syncopation. The Original Dixieland Jass Band had it. The negro used to have it universally in those days--before the white man's inept attempts to play jazz gradually thinned out the pure essence into something called by the same name but played on an unvarying four beats to a measure, without phrasing, without surprise, without creation, without imagination, without jazz!

Two-beat jazz: Four beat jazz. As long as I have been playing jazz drums--since 1917--I never played either, and I don't believe any good drummer ever does. Listen to the Dixieland drummer--Tony Sbarbaro-- and you'll see what I mean. One measure two beats, next four, next two after beats, next two beats, and so on. It all depends on the accents and phrasing of the tune, and unless drums are played in this fashion your jazz will suffer in proportion.

But it is not enough that the drums should syncopate. I believe that the primary cause of Bix Beiderbecke's discouragement with music was the fact that he couldn't find supporting instrumentalists who understood what he was trying to do, and could back him up with the sort of syncopated interludes he wanted to hear coming in between the pauses in his cornet lead. Bix, like Brad and me, was crazy about the music of the Original Dixieland Jass Band, and he, too, had heard them in person. Over and over he reaffirmed his desire to play like La Rocca, and his hope of being able to get together a Dixieland Band like the original. Like Phil Napoleon, Brad Gowans and others, Bix used to take delight in imitating "Joe Blade"--La Rocca--and because I had an equal fondness for Shields; we used to play cornet-clarinet duets, following the ODJB parts note for note. However, it is a simple matter for any critic to check this for himself. The Bix Vocalion of SORRY/SINCE MY BEST GAL is full of La Rocca mannerisms, many note for note.

According to Paul Whiteman, writing in Collier's, Bix used to say of some cornet players, "They play so many notes--and what do they mean?" That isn't a word for word quote, but it's the gist.

Bix himself, in his later days, was guilty of the very thing he condemned. He did it out of despair, poor guy, filling in, in desperation and disgust, the Shields' and Edwards' parts he should have been hearing and wasn't.

What he heard, instead, was clarinet played on the beat- all eight of them to every measure. And trombone played legato where it should have been staccato, and far more syncopated. And drums played--could it have been "Chicago" style even then?

Let me make clear that I'm not including Miff in this. Miff made many records with Bix, and Bix worshipped Miff. I know this because I introduced the Wolverines to Miff back of the Hippodrome, and their awe and amazement and sheer adulation is something I'll never forget. And this brings me to the Original Memphis Five.

Mr. Borneman is quite correct when he points out that the introduction of parallel voicing in harmony--that is, cornet, clarinet and trombone all playing the same rhythmic phrase in harmony--was a step backward in jazz. He rightly points out that it was a reversion to European music.

The Original Memphis Five used to play this way on first choruses-'straight" we call it. There's a reason for it. Playing in this fashion serves as a teaser to excite the patrons. The ODJB used to do it, too, playing their first choruses so softly you could hear the feet shuffling on the dance floor.

When you play "straight" this way, the introduction of a single "jazzed-up" note has an electric effect. By contrast it stands out as startlingly as an oath in a sermon.

The first few "jazz" notes in a num-

bar which has hitherto been played straight are terrifically provocative. But,--it's not jazz until you put those notes in. And what is a "jazzed-up" note? It can be a syncopated note, or it can be a growl or a blues slur, or a bent note, or any of the timbres associated with jazz music.

Now the Memphis Five often played first choruses or verses "straight". But when they let out on the last choruses, they played jazz that was as low-down and primitive as any New Orleans native could ask for. I am sure that their contemporaries among musicians--jazz musicians--who heard them in person, were as unstinted in their admiration as the critics who go out of their way to offer the gratuitous estimate that their records are worth exactly nothing, are niggardly. The Original Memphis Five was one of the first great jazz bands. They were excellent musicians--this seems to be a reflection, these days--and they knew the jazz idiom thoroughly. If they did not succeed in equalling their model--the ODJB--it was because they deviated in the direction I speak of: they tended to play somewhat more on the beat. And while we're on the subject, I may as well go the whole hog and say that I think that even Joe Oliver's band, splendid as it was, would have sounded even better if it had played with less on-the-beat emphasis and with more syncopation.

Syncopation is the salient element which differentiated jazz from European music, in that jazz music contained more of it, and more elaborate syncopations. That was how you recognized jazz music--by the number and types of its syncopations. Take away this element--and the bands which were instrumental in its gradual disappearance are numbered among the top names in jazz--and you rob jazz of an irreplaceable quality.

For those who will listen to no theory which accords the white man any contribution whatever to jazz music--though they do not seem to strain at cornets, trombones, pianos, clarinets, and certain notes in the Western scale--I submit the evidence of my collection of Voudoun, Haitian, and African Negro records. These traditional songs and dances, elements from which New Orleans jazz drew in its formative years, contain far more syncopation than today's watered-down "jazz"--or much of yesterday's, for that matter. This constitutes the loss of a salient characteristic of the music which gave jazz its name. Without this characteristic or with its reduction, jazz becomes diluted and changes its nature. It is still called "jazz" or perhaps "swing", but because the missing element is highly important, the new music is different from the old. And, for that matter, it has returned to what it was before jazz--European music. That is, insofar as its rhythm goes.

Now Chicago style has one marked rhythmic characteristic: its exponents are inflexibly committed to a steady four-beats-to-a-measure drum beat. They used saxophones, or a saxophone, as did the New Orleans Rhythm Kings, and later the Original Dixieland Jazz Band--to their undoing, I regret to say--but the tenor was only part of the story. The real demarcation I believe to be the four-beat on-the-beat rhythm in lieu of the syncopated varying rhythm of New Orleans or primitive negro style. Brad Gowans and I played a saxophone-clarinet duet on Gennett I'M LOOKING OVER A FOUR LEAF CLOVER, by Gowans' Rhapsody Makers, a good copy of which to replace my own sorely "beat-up" version I hope some day to locate. But with a drum background which does not limit itself to the unvarying four beats to a measure, with my saxophone phrasing in the sparing, stop-time fashion of La Rocca, allowing plenty of pauses for Gowans'clarinet to come thru the effect is anything but Chicago.

Dixieland, in short, tends to accent beats 2, 3, and 4, in a measure counted one, two, three, four. It hurries the beat, plays ahead of it, instead of behind it. The dragged effect which plays the note after the beat has been played is by its very laggard nature a sign of musical decadence. The playing of James P. Johnson, for example, is one of the finest possible examples of real jazz at its best. Here the notes are almost invariably hurried, played ahead of the actual beat. (We were going to keep off values and stick to anthropological differentiations, but oh, man! Can't I just break down once and say here that Jimmie's terrific!)

One little point in closing. Mr. Borneman seems to take exception to jazz that puts on funny hats, beards, and wigs to indulge in hokum. This is an integral element of jazz and always has been. Tony Sbarbaro's "Zobo"--don't call it a kazoo--the teddy bear which used to nod with every beat of his pedal, Larry Shields' mincing rubber-legged "grind"--holding the skirt of his coat as he played clarinet with one hand--Louis' jiving and scat-singing, Bix's outlandish atonal "noise" breaks to amuse the crowds, all these are an integral part of the great tradition of jazz, whose function was to entertain not only musically, but in any other possible way.

Mr. Borneman's conception of a big band divided into small sections playing--will it be improvised?--small band-type jazz is certainly stimulating. But before hearing this impressive departure, I'd like, just once, to hear a five-piece band, Dixieland combination, with a cornet that played that frugal, syncopated melody of Nick La Rocca, and supporting instrumentation that played as much syncopation as do today's rhumba bands when they're really in there. If I could record on clarinet with a combination like that, I think they could come for me any time. I'd go quietly.

QUESTIONS and ANSWERS

by

ERNEST BORNEMAN

All Questions Should Be Addressed
To Ernest Borneman
National Film Board, Ottawa, Canada

I

Jim Moynahan's article, WHY IS JASS DYING, was originally written as a rejoinder to the June installment of THE ANTHROPOLOGIST LOOKS AT JAZZ. However, it raised so many questions, and it struck us as so important in the whole etiology of jazz that we decided to hold it over until at least some of the questions had been more fully answered. A three months' correspondence ensued in which I asked most of the questions and Jim supplied most of the answers. Today we are publishing this correspondence verbatim because we feel that three of the key questions of jazz have been more acutely attacked here than in any previous piece of jazz criticism:

1. The question of jazz vibrato in general and of clarinet tone in particular;

2. The question of jazz syncopation in general and of drum accents in particular;

3. The function of trumpet (or cornet) phrasing in collective improvisation with special reference to Beiderbecke and the white school of jazz.

Here are the letters:

II

22nd July 1944

Dear Jim:

Your article raises four great questions:

1. Pee Wee Russell's tone: Who started this spit tone business? Teschemacher or Mezzrow or who? I don't play clarinet, but I've noticed similar use of lip vibrato in the old-timers. I've heard Bechet and Dodds play that way on records, but I don't know if the effect was produced in the same manner. Armstrong told me once that Big Louis Nelson used a similar effect. He said he learnt it from Tio. On the other hand, Panassie told me that Mezzrow claimed it was definitely a white man's invention and in fact a characteristic and defining mark of "Chicago Style"; what's your opinion?

2. Drum accents: I've played all my New Orleans disks during the last few days, listening mainly to the drummers and the general placing of accents, and it seems to me that there is a great deal of very regular "on the beat" drumming to set the pace for the rhythmic departures of the brass and reed instruments. Especially Baby Dodds seems to set a pace precisely on the beat, neither hesitating nor hurrying. In fact, it is not until tge swing era and the baroque accents of such erratic instrumentalists as Eldridge that I can find any signs of off-beat drumming as practiced by a respectable drummer - and oddly enough, where it does happen, it always happens on the high hat cymbal, an instrument unknown to New Orleans jazz. That seems, to say the least of it, significant of a departure. As to the general use of syncopation including the use of delayed or advanced accents: Armstrong, Dodds, Bechet invariably play slightly after the beat if they are not right on it; the new boys (Eldridge, James in the Goodman days, Red Allen recently) play ahead of the beat, giving a peculiarly nervous and rushed, almost hysterical, effect to their music. As to the other instruments: the only one on which a regular departure from the beat can possibly be claimed is the piano in the blues and the boogie where the same succession of chords tends to be placed slightly after the beat in the first case and slightly ahead of the beat in the second. To sum up: All Negro music, African and American alike, tends to accentuate the weak beat. In New Orleans drumming, this is done by accentuating the strong beats on the bass drum and the weak ones on the snare drum and cymbal. Only the "modern" school has begun to accentuate the strong beats on the cymbal - generally the high hat. In many cases this tends to slow down the beat (Joe Jones), in other cases it tends to speed it up. THE IMPLIED BEAT, HOWEVER, IN NEW ORLEANS AND SWING DRUMMING ALIKE, IS A 4/4 MEASURE BEAT, NEVER A 2/4 BEAT. To me the word "Dixieland" has (rightly or wrongly) the overtone of 2/4 time, ragtime and drearily repeated off-time accents without any of the variety of the colored old-timers - Cottrell, Zeno, Zutty, Baby Dodds, Tubby Hall.

3. Who played clarinet on the beat

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and who didn't? Who plays trombone legato and who plays it staccato? Here I don't get you at all. Please give me a few names and examples so that I can find my way through the argument.

4. If you wish to return to rhythmic variety in the African manner, how do you expect to run your tune and your collective improvisation? One of the reasons for the development of jazz was precisely the abdication of complex rhythmical counterpoint (which can't carry any more harmonic variety than Africans have actually given it) for the sake of the melodic, harmonic and contrapuntal elements which jazz borrowed from the European tradition. You can't have it both ways: Collective variation or improvised rhythmical counterpoint - one sets off the other - the two together don't seem feasible to me.

Yours very sincerely,

Ernest Borneman.

III

July 26, 1944

Dear Ernest,

I'll try to reply to your questions as well as I can on paper, although to explain things out in this fashion takes infinitely more time than would be required if we could get together in my home over a set of Dixieland records, etc.

Pee Wee Russell's tone. There are two kinds of tone I'm talking about. "Split tone" and "Spit tone". The former is a style of playing which--and this is my personal guess--arose from improperly trained reed players who had perhaps taught themselves to play. It is an unsteadiness caused by the player's failing to keep the lips compressed tightly at all times around the reed, except when taking breath. For example: Irving Fazola plays what he calls a "double embouchure". This means that he doesn't put his teeth on the mouthpiece, but holds the mouthpiece entirely between his two lips. To do this the player must develop a terrifically powerful musculature, similar to that developed by cornet players. Now a clarinet player who does not play with this type of embouchure, but uses teeth on the mouthpiece, or a "single" embouchure, will not have such strong lip muscles and will try to hold the tone by his jaw muscles. This causes the teeth to chew into the lip when the player moves the jaw to make the vibrato. To avoid the pain, the player must relax the jaw pressure, thus relieving the pressure of the teeth on the underlip. From this arises the unsteady tone--a playing fault which arises through ignorance of how properly to obtain the tone sought for. Later players, admiring the technical proficiency (fingering) of the artist, copy also his fault--the unsteady bleating tone. Let's lump the Pee Wee, Mezz, Howkins tone under this head and call it "split tone".

"Spit" tone is another thing entirely. The player, deliberately, while blowing a tone, vibrates a corner of his lips at the same time, as you would do in making a raspberry or Bronx cheer. (Scientific parlance, Ernest?) The vibration of the lips which can often be heard vocally as an accompanying grunting sound, gives the notes played a "dirty" effect which is a sort of flutter or rolling sound a little similar to that obtained by a flutter tongue. Flutter tongue is performed by rolling the tongue the way a Scotsman pronounces his "r". There is also the uvula trill, which is done with the uvula at the back of the throat, and which imparts a faster, and to me preferable quality. This latter is to me a really valuable jazz device, and you can hear Bessie Smith use it often in starting a phrase, when it sounds like a "growl". Instruments, of course, imitate the voice. Bechet's tone--by which I mean his bleating vibrato, not any superimposed effect like the "spit" tone--may well be a natural vibrato to his ear, as some negro girl singers can be heard to sing naturally with a very fast vibrato, much faster than our conventional opera singers would use. Bessie, of course, doesn't have this fast vibrato.

You can also whinney into an instrument--the chest vibrato. Some trombone players get a curiously pleasant tone with this monstrous technique, oddly enough. It's done by alternately cutting off and releasing air at the glottis, is it?

Those effects alluded to above, used by Pee Wee, were known rather as "spit notes", instead of "spit tones". As for its origin, the only one I've heard use it is Pee Wee, but I don't know too much about Chicago clarinet players. I've sat in with Rod for evenings, and don't recall his using it. I've never heard Mezz use it, but they could have used it at other times. Who invented it? My guess is Pee Wee, if we're both talking about the same thing. I have no records with anybody else using it.

On the drum accent stuff. I used to be a drummer. I think I can clarify this whole matter by sending you to the ODJB for concrete illustrations of what I'm talking about. It is the sort of rhythm you get in the rhumba and conga bands when they're playing "all out". You can get some idea of it by listening to the currently popular IT'S LOVE, LOVE, LOVE. As a scientist you will, I hope, not bridle when I tell you I think that Guy Lombardo has made a version which has this rhythm approximated. You get it also in IN SPAIN THEY SAY SI SI, in THE PEANUT VENDOR, in SIBONEY, and in Jack Sneed's Decca record of SLY MONGOOSE. Remember, I'm talking about rhythm. These illustrations, lumped together, will give you an idea of what I'm talking about. But to hear it done properly, in jazz, listen to the ODJB's early FIDGETY FEET, particularly La Rocca's cornet where he races ahead playing each note an eighth note ahead of the beat just before the break. Or listen to George Thow's cornet on the Dorsey Bros. HONEYSUCKLE ROSE on Decda. Note how George anticipates the beat in spots. Or note what an improvement would get with any Harlem band of today if you added the fundamental beat of the marraccas--if that's the name of those two sticks you strike together? Perhaps I'm thinking of the gourds with seeds in them. At any rate, I mean the habanera, or Charleston beat. Incidentally, Jelly Roll, accepted by most as the personification of jazz, plays just this very Spanish type of rhythm in his solos, and you can hear it in, I think it's MAMAMITA and TIA JUANA, as well as in many others.

To put it simply, in a nutshell: Jazz has retrograded rhythmically. The trip up north diluted the syncopation more and more as northern whites, unschooled in the Spanish-type syncopations, either played them as written, (which was incorrectly) with the so-called "legitimate jerk", which was where we got the term "corny" (originally 'corn-fed') or tended, when improvising, to omit them and put the accent on the beat. The Red Nichols groups are excellent examples of this retrogression, and even Bix was guilty at times, dragged along in the stream of association. I know I can play infinitely better with men who play this syncopated style than I do with on-the-beat players, and I am sure I tend to play more on-the-beat when I'm working with a band which does, in spite of all I can do otherwise.

Listen to Tony Sbarbaro on AT THE JAZZ BAND BALL on the early Victor on a VERY good amplifier, with plenty of bass reproduction. You will hear the snare and bass drum easily. Note the terrific resolution you feel when after the breathlessness of the break he comes in with everything he's got on the cymbal and bass drum to round out the break. It's band and ragtime drumming, with a touch of negro feeling. A very nice foundation for Dixieland music. Then listen to Tony's kazoo (actually called a Zobo) on I LIVE FOR LOVE, Vocalion, and note well his ahead-of-the-beat phrasing. He plays like Keppard. Or La Rocca.

Doing this by correspondence is certainly doing it the hard way.

In the years I have been reading about jazz I have read some of the damn fool--est arguments about it I ever hoped to read. One of the preeminently silly ones could have been resolved at any time merely by talking to any intelligent jazz drummer. When I explain it to you you will see how inevitable it is. The two- or four beat argument about jazz is almost wholly esoteric. Actually the story is this: you play four beats on slow numbers, two on fast. Two sounds thin on slow numbers, and on fast you can't play four without its sounding cluttered and hurried. Guys do play otherwise--and you listen to them! Just listen! It's the old "Where's the fire?" style.

In parenthesis. While I think of it. Re your question on the origin of boogie woogie. Get hold of an old piece called Dardanella, and play it over. Any inferences you draw are your own.

Johnny Dodds, who tongued clarinet (staccato) played on the beat a little. But Benny Goodman in many of his records plays a stream of eighth notes which are all on the beat. Larry Shields plays a lot off the beat, and that's why I like him. Fazola does, too. You can buy Fazola's solos for 50¢ a series of a half dozen or so. Get the book in a music store and check the number of syncopations per chorus as against some other similar choruses of other clarinet players.

Of course Dodds plays plenty off the beat, but the only way I could show you his work when I like it and when I don't, and how it could be improved to come up to his top standard, would be with the records handy. I play clarinet legato alternating with staccato, which is what Fazola does. Dodds in some records plays a pronounced tongueing staccato style, which is a characteristic of his. I often like to play this way myself on certain types of numbers.

Staccato trombone players are Eddie Edwards, George Brunies, and Brad Gowans on slide (which he plays in the style of the two mentioned) plays a real tailgate style. I hope to get him recorded on slide this winter--unless he gets the idea, after a season on clarinet with the ODJB in the Dunham show this spring, that he's a clarinet player. Now legato. Miff Mole is the definitive exponent of the legato trombone style. Before Miff the trombone was always played circus style--pedal notes, glissandos, slides, and heavy tongued notes. Kid Ory played that way, and you can add his name to the list above. Incidentally, Eddie Edwards at his best played rings around the others. He is a terrific musician and has left plenty of evidence to that effect on records. But Miff changed the style of trombone playing and made it a second clarinet in the band, and while I shall always think Miff is one of the jazz greats, I do think that for ensemble Dixieland his style is inferior to Edwards'. He is best on solos, but for ensemble, the tongued, staccato, bass note style makes the best Dixieland. It's band style, in other words. (And I note you tend to disparage band style. It was the timbre of brass band music which made early jazz so impelling. Where do you think jazz came from? Are you throwing out the second line, the return from the cemetery, the Eagle, Superior Bands, etc? No, Earnest, the band timbre, with its double-forte blasting (to cut the other fellow) plus the whisper-soft style of the bagnio parlour seem to me to be the sources of true Dixieland jazz.)

Since Miff's style others, starting with Tom Dorsey, Teagarden, Butterfield, and a host of others have played the more

legato style, which got away from the original early band style. I'd call this later style an orchestra style to distinguish it from the former.

On this last question about rhythmic variety, I begin to find myself pawing my way through a sea of musical terms which I am not completely sure I understand. I use them myself, I suppose, but at this point I think I'll go into my Uncle Tom act and ask: "Man, what's them big letters tellin' them little letters?" In other words, you're talking to a man who doesn't read music. I couldn't hold down a first alto chair in a band, and have lost jobs for this reason. I am still an ear player--after a lifetime of playing music. I can read slowly, but this question of yours is a shade involved for me. However, if you want the answer, play over the records of the ODJB. Note how they run the improvisation: melodically, by selecting tunes with whole note melodies, like I'M NOBODY'S BABY, MY BABY'S ARMS, BOW WOW BLUES, wherein the variety is introduced into the extremely simple melody by means of syncopation and by little tags or embellishments. Bix's SORRY, or La Rocca's records will illustrate this. You can't play good Dixieland with a melody that has too many eighth notes. The melody should be mostly whole notes and halves, with just a few quarters, as few as possible. In this way you can leave plenty of holes, pauses for the other instruments to be heard in the interstices--if I may borrow a word from Dr. Johnson.

Remember that THE SYNCOPATIONS OVERLAP. They are laid on like shingles on a roof. The clarinet doesn't play while the cornet is playing, but begins just as he stops. It overlaps his last few notes, stops when he starts. This is loose, of course, not rigid. Don't try to pin me down with specific exceptions, because it's not so rigid as that. Often they play together. But this is the way you try to play, and Ernest, if you'd ever seen it done, you'd never forget it. Because the seeing really brings it home to you. You see the clarinet player take his instrument out of his mouth, speak to the pianist between phrases, and return it to his mouth to play another phrase, and all the while the phrasing he is using seems to be the inevitably best, and any more would be cluttered. It's incredibly relaxed--and anything relaxed is superior to anything tense. If any generalization was ever true, and I don't make them, as a rule, this one is so.

The Dixieland Band did not play three-part harmony. They had three syncopated countermelodies running at the same time; so arranged, or devised, or so improvised, if you will, that there were also three different rhythmic lines running along, but never in unison. You can hear La Rocca, in a number which has eighth notes; playing, in a measure of 8 eighth notes, notes or beats number 2 4 6 8 1. That is, he gets back on the beat by playing the last off-beat note, 8, in the preceding measure, and on the beat with the first beat of the following measure. Hear him do this just before the bread in FIDGETY FEET, along toward the end of the record, in the trio. He gets off this way for several measures, and it's all you can do to hold the beat in your head. I'd be interested in knowing whether you find this passage, and what you think of it.

As for the complex rhythms played together, any rhumba band does it consistently. The retrogression set in with the Memphis Five, who used to play their choruses in 3 part harmony, that is, with the three instruments all playing together, using exactly the same rhythmic pattern for all three--like today's riff music. Except that they might use the original rhythm of the melody as written. But right there jazz started to return to what we'd had all along.

I'll tell you a hot one. I had the ODJB Aeolian Vocalions dubbed to lateral cut acetates, and Gene Williams played one of them, ORIENTAL JAZZ, which is actually Soudan or the Sphinx, I forget which. It more or less struggles along through the beginning clarinet cadenzas, etc., and then it hits into the chorus: And Gene Williams, who is a real purist, told me to my astonishment that he liked that chorus. It has an easy lilt, and is terrifically relaxed, and if you can find a means of hearing it or playing it, you'll see what I mean. It's so relaxed it's baffling. And yet it is the epitome of jazz. Today's hot men knock themselves out trying to get one-tenth the effect.

I feel this explanation on paper leaves a lot to be desired. I wish I could get together with you at my house some time . . .

Dear Jim:

Let me try to sum up all you've said in your article and letter, phrasing it in my own words and adding a few questions to check whether I've understood you rightly.

1. INSTRUMENTAL TECHNIQUE ON REEDS:

a. Split Tone: The legitimate clarinet embouchure was developed for a style of playing which permitted, and called for, little or no vibrato or tremelo effects. In the attempt to adapt this embouchure to the vibrato effects of the jazz idiom, the player's teeth chewed into his lip when he vibrated his jaws. To avoid the ensuing pain, he had to relax the jaw pressure. As a result, his breath escaped around the mouthpiece and the tone of his instrument was "split." Examples of this: Pee Wee, Mezz, Hawkins. Question: How did Dodds, Bechet and the other New Orleans clarinetists avoid splitting their tone? They had a noticeable vibrato too. Was this not produced by moving their jaws?

b. Double Embouchure: To avoid the above, the jazz clarinet player had to develop a new technique. From brass instruments he adapted the method of holding the instrument entirely between his lips, thus dispensing with the need of keeping his teeth on the mouthpiece but requiring, at the same time, a lip musculature as powerful as that of trumpet or cornet players. Example: Fazola. Questions: 1. Who else plays that way? 2. Did Fazola coin the term "double embouchure" or is it a generally used term? Is there another word for it?

c. Spit Notes: Another outcome of the jazz player's need to adapt such Africanisms as vibrato effects to European instruments is the lip vibrato. The brass player first attempted this by vibrating a corner of his lips as if trying to produce a raspberry or Bronx Cheer. The clarinet player, trying to superimpose this effect over the legitimate clarinet embouchure, succeeded in imparting a sympathetic vibration to his reed tone. This gave the required hot or dirty tone to the clarinet timbre. Example: Pee Wee. Questions: 1. Who else played that way? Teshmaker? 2. Can the thing be done with a "double embouchure" too?

d. Tongue Flutter: This was another method of producing the hot or dirty tone required by the needs of jazz timbre. It is performed by rolling the tongue as in the Scotch "r".

e. Uvula Trill: To effect a faster vibrato than any of the above methods can produce, New Orleans jazz borrowed the "significant tone" of African and American Negro phonetics and adapted it to European instruments. This was originally done by illiterate Negroes who were quite unconscious of the revolutionary technique thus created. Examples: Bessie Smith and Louis Armstrong in their vocal growl effects; Bechet in his vibrato effects on soprano sax and clarinet.

f. Chest Vibrato: A sixth method of producing vibrato effects is produced by a vibration of the glottis which alternatively shuts off and releases air. It is used mainly by trombone players and is condescendingly known as a "whinney". Questions: 1. Who plays that way? Who else beside trombone players?

2. RHYTHMICAL STRUCTURE:

a. Anticipation: Keppard, La Rocca, George Thow and others on cornet; Sbarbaro on his zobo; James P. Johnson on piano: all played ahead of the beat. Questions: 1. How does this tally with your stipulation that all good jazz should be first and foremost relaxed? It seems to me that the characteristic effect of anticipation is precisely its hurried and unrelaxed quality which, after all, is the very purpose of anticipation. 2. You say "Dixieland tends to accent beats 2, 3 and 4". Do you quote this as an example of anticipation or of what?

b. On-Beat-Playing: Oliver, The Memphis Five, Red Nichols and the later Bix played too much on the beat. This was a retrogression because it entailed a loss of syncopation. Questions: 1. The main effects of syncopation in New Orleans jazz seem to arise from the contrast between the cornet and bass drum which are right on the beat while the snare drum or dymbal mark the weak beats with a terrific effect of exhiliration. In other words, syncopation is an effect of contrast between a stated or implied beat by one part of the orchestra and a deviation from that beat by another part of the orchestra. If both percussion and wind instruments are off beat, you get no more syncopation than when they are all right on the beat. 2. You speak of Larry Shields' and Fazola's off-beat playing: Do you quote them for anticipation? 3. La Rocca, you say, marked beats 2 4 6 8 1 in a measure of 8 eighths. Excellent. But again: What is the point? Anticipation? Syncopation? Off-beat playing?

c. Jazz Drumming: Chicago style drumming, you say, caused a decline in jazz because it marked all four beats in the bar. As opposed to this, African drumming, Afro-Cuban rhythms and New Orleans jazz varied its accents quite freely. Questions: 1. True, but how can your wind instruments syncopate if the percussion is off-beat too? In New Orleans jazz, the cornet played on the beat while the snare drum, like the handclaps in Negro folk music, marked the off beats. In modern jazz, the brass is frequently off the beat (e.g. Eldridge) while the drums state an even more mechanical beat than any Chicago jazz ever did (Cozy Cole, for instance). And however poor modern jazz may hace become musically, it still provides a most potent syncopated, if purely muscular, stimulation. Watch any troup of dancers at the Savoy and there's your irrefutable evidence. The point is that either your leadline or your percussion must be on the beat to provide a framework for the off-beats and syncopations of the other. 2. I attacked two-beat jazz in the Record Changer. You point out, by way of reply, that you play four beats on slow numbers, two beats on fast ones. True, and it needed saying as a refutation of a lot of nonsense that has been talked on jazz drumming, but it really has no bearing on my point which referred to the difference between the heavy regular off-beat accents of ragtime (which survive painfully in nearly all 2/4 jazz since then, especially in the Crosby Band and in Beauduc's drumming) and the rolling rhythm of all good Negro jazz, whether slow blues or fast boogie. It isn't a matter of beats-per-bar but distribution of beats - whether jerky or rolling. 3. You mention Sbarbaro's break in AT THE JAZZ BAND BALL, and I like it as much as you do, but I can't see what it proves in relation to off-beat drumming, number of beats per bar or to any other point you made before. Please explain.

d. Habanera or Charleston Beat: Jelly Roll called it Spanish Bass. Questions: 1. Do you quote this for anticipation or for what? 2. Does Yancey fall into your definition of Habanera beat? 3. What about the boogie players? They seem to me the supreme example of antici-

pation as well as of Spanish bass (a dotted quarter, an eighth and two quarters in 4/4 time, or a dotted eighth, a sixteenth and two eighths in 8/8 time.

e. The "legitimate jerk": Please define. Is this the mechanical application of off-beat accents from a written score, or what?

f. Staccato and legato playing as rhythmical factors: Staccato trombone playing is the original New Orleans tailgate style: pedal notes, glissandi, portamenti, etc. Exponents are: Ory, Edwards, Brunies, Gowans. When jazz declined from collective improvization to solos-against-orchestral-arrangements, the modern legato style developed. Exponents are: Miff, Dorsey, Teagarden. Questions: 1. You call the staccato style "heavy-tongued". Do you refer to the clipping off of notes or to vibrato? 2. Can you see a similar decline from staccato to legato playing in cornet or clarinet technique? You mention Butterfield, Dodds, Fazola. 3. Where would you place Jimmy Harrison? Among the staccato or the legato players?

3. FINALLY SOME ODD POINTS:

a. What are you quoting ORIENTAL JAZZ for? I like it too and I'm not a bit surprised that Gene Williams should like it. Why were you surprised that he did? And what are you trying to prove?

b. I played DARDANELLA half a dozen times. I don't get the point. Please explain. It was in reference to boogie.

c. Why should hokum be part of jazz? Just because the ODJB or Louis or Fats and some more of the great were also good entertainers? Oliver, Bechet, Dodds, Jelly Roll, Ellington were never very good at clowning. It seems to me that you can take your jazz as free and easy as you like without any need of playing down to the public and without any fear of becoming acedemic.

d. I didn't say how much I was impressed with your analysis of Bix. It opened my eyes to a great many things I'd never understood about Bix before. Thanks and congratulations.

Best regards,

Ernest Borneman

V

Dear Ernest;

Your letter was at once revealing, disconcerting, appalling and humbling. I'm afraid I was too sketchy, tho I felt at the time that to explain these things in words instead of illustrating them on the spot with the clarinet or with records, would take interminable time and patience. Semantics is got us, man! It scares me when I see casual things elevated to the dignity of categorized designations. Jazz musicians take these things for granted. They do them automatically, and no other way, and they have no formal names for some of them. When you try to classify them scientifically, I am somewhat disconcerted, because they're just stuff you pick up and do. You're not taught. No saxophone teacher ever gave formal lessons in slap tongue, say, and the same thing goes for Pee Wee's spit notes. They're just a funny noise, not musical even. Just a gag to amuse the audience. To dignify them by a dissertation confuses me. Besides, with the best intentions, we didn't get together. You and I are apparently still talking about two different kinds of sounds.

Double embouchure is apparently legitimate clarinet technique. Fazola learned it from an old Belgian, I think he told me. It is essentially an old European school of playing. Personally I think everybody tends to play that way a little bit. Ask a clarinet player who is playing to relax his lip muscles completely and see what happens to his lip. Unless they're tight he bites his lip. You can try it yourself. Put a pencil in your mouth and try it.

You seem to think that some instrument in the band must define, must be playing the beat, on the beat, that is, at all times. This isn't so. Once the tempo has been set, all the instruments of the band can, and frequently do, play off the beat. The beat is implied. That is, if you play by metronome, the metronome will continue to tick off the beat, on the beat, when every other instrument is playing off the beat. Clear? Once the tempo has been set, the beat is there whether you play it or not. You tap your foot to it, even when you're playing off it or ahead of it. Get it?

The initial theme of Dardanella is a boogie woogie figure. Play the bass.

Who told you the musicians you name weren't good at clowning? They don't clown now, maybe, but all jazz musicians have had to clown on some jobs in their career. By the law of averages I'll bet you any one of those guys will tell you of jobs he used to have to clown on. You don't need to clown to make sounds. But clowning and hokum is part of the jazz tradition. That's history. It's historical fact. It was widespread.

I note one other point. All jazz or other syncopation must be one of two kinds--before or after the beat. Anticipation, or retardation, say. Most of it, practically, proves to be anticipation, in any kind of jazz. Anticipation, syncopation, off-beat playing, ragtime--they're all one. In the Spanish bass the first note is on the beat, the second just ahead of it, an eighth ahead, to be exact. One, two AND three four. "One, and."

Jim Moynahan

VI

Dear Jim:

"Jazz musicians take these things for granted," you say. "They have no formal names for them." And you say that you are a little disconcerted to see them dignified with a dissertation. All right then--I've been disconcerting musicians in just that manner for the last ten years. It's the only way jazz will ever be analysed for posterity. If we, the historians and musicologists look a little ridiculous in the process, that's just too bad, but it can't be helped--and I, for one, will gladly feel the laughter in my wake if I can get the information in exchange.

1. I've never heard of "double embouchure" as legitimate clarinet technique. The mouthpiece, in legitimate playing, is always held with your teeth, never with your lips alone. I can't see an earthly reason except the jazz vibrato which might justify or require a lip embouchure.

2. I've played through my whole stack of New Orleans jazz, white and colored, and I can't find a single example of all players being off the beat simultaneously. Theoretically I can see you point--in practice I've never heard it.

3. About drums again: What I noticed in the course of playing all that New Orleans jazz while listening for syncopation was this: All the Negro drummers play more regularly on the beat than any other drummers, white or colored, Chicago or New York, ever since. Only the ODJB fellows play off beat in other sections than breaks. In fact, I would almost reverse your argument after having checked it: There has never been more regular and less syncopated drumming than in New Orleans jazz. Why? Because they need that rigid framework to set off their instrumental flights away from the beat. It's like a frame around a painting--the more violent its dynamics, the more urgently does it require a stabilizing element.

Yours,

Ernest Borneman

VII

Dear Ernest:

A deaf man is watching a metronome.

The normal pulse of the human heart is 72. In your wrist is a vein you can watch which will register a shade over a beat a second. The metronome swings its arc, clicking once a second, but the deaf man hears nothing.

Over in a dance hall, a jazz band is playing the JAZZ ME BLUES, but the deaf man, who knows it is by Tom Delaney, does not know the band is playing, because he can't hear anything, not even the clicking of the metronome.

Now it just so happens that the metronome clicks in time with the band. The musicians come to a break, stop, but due to some misunderstanding no one takes it. During the two measures the metronome continues to click in time with the unplayed, but implied beat of the band. The deaf man watches it. The beat, therefore, goes on even though nobody hears anything. And across the street, while no musician plays a note for two measures of the missing break, the implied beat still goes on, too.

This somewhat surrealistic explanation is by way of explaining to you what I mean when I say that a whole band can be off the beat at once. What the musicians did during those tacit two measures had no effect on the metronome beat. Similarly any other rhythm they might play, straight or syncopated, would not affect that beat, and they would have to come back to it eventually. That's how a whole band can play off the beat at once. The beat, played or implied, goes on all the time like the metronome.

On thinking over syncopation, it seems to me all syncopation must be anticipatory, that is, ahead of the beat. Count--"one, two, three, four. . . two three four. . .two three four. . . ." in the same steady rhythm as if you vocalized the unspoken count "one". You will see that the "one", while not spoken tends to be sensed, or felt. That is syncopation, anticipatory syncopation, Dixieland rhythm, whatever you prefer to call it.

While the cornet players who play Dixieland play ahead, they also play in short spurts--a very good way to explain it, as contrasted with guys like Bobbie Hackett on EMBRACEABLE YOU, which isn't even jazz, and which is excellent improvising, something Bix would have gotten a kick out of. So, while La Rocca played ahead of the beat--perhaps because, out of breath, he finished the phrase or note by racing ahead of the actual written note---that gave him time to catch his breath between phrases, and to relax there. For all this, I would urge you to listen to, and study the interplay of rhythms on those ODJB records. Listen to FIDGETY FEET and MARGIE. Note the skeleton phrasing of the melody on MARGIE. It is almost as written, outside of rhythmical distortions. There are few deviations from the melodic line. And note the spaces between phrases. Now listen to Bix on SORRY and SINCE MY GEST GIRL.

On the off the beat question. Many arrangers will write a two measure passage with all instruments off the beat or often one measure. I don't mean the band is off the beat throughout the entire number. Did you think I meant that? They might all be off the beat, in unison, for a measure, or even two. In JAZZ BAND BALL you can hear La Rocca play cornet breaks where he goes off the beat, and no one else is playing. After the first flutter note, he goes off the beat, dropping down in thrids. The flutter note, say is E. Then he plays E, E, C, A, descending. The last four notes are anticipated. They are played before the note should be played, an eighth note's space of time earlier. Thus he finishes that much earlier, and can catch his breath.

"Legitimate jerk" comes from playing dotted eights and sixteenths as written. Jazz should be written in slow thirds, as I have seen it explained. I think Wilder Hobson tried to write this out in his book. But I can show it to you in a second with a clarinet.

Staccato style trombone which I called "heavy tongued" is tongued heavily. That is to say, the notes are played staccato, not run smoothly into each other, but

given a distinct separation. Like the playing of Eddie Edwards on the ODJB records. As contrasted to a singing style of trombone like Tom Dorsey when he's playing getting sentimental over you. Good playing alternates slurs and tonguing. Smooth phrases broken up by tongued noted.

Jazz didn't need hokum to be great. But hokum is part of jazz, as it is found with it and is so intermingled with it that it can be said to be inextricably mixed with it. You can't see much hokum over the air, or on records, but think of the hokum you hear recorded. LIVERY STABLE BLUES, the comedy of Pee Wee's spit notes, which always gets a laugh. Bix's funny noise breaks. I can give you endless examples.

Double embouchure is not concerned with vibrato. On the contrary. It is used originally by symphony players who played without vibrato. But if you play vibrato, as you do in jazz, your tone doesn't crack so readily if you use a double embouchure. You don't get the wheezes or squeaks all of us dread.

I've made a bunch of sides with a six piece dixieland combination, using string bass. Maybe you can hear them when you come down, and see how this theory of mine works out in actual practice.

In order to go into the question of "split" tone, spit notes, growl notes, etc., further, we'll have to get together in person. I'll bring along my clarinet and play all these for you. I'll imitate Pee Wee, and show you how Fazola plays. Incidentally, the other night at Cafe Society Downtown, I was talking with Prince Robinson, who plays Albert System clarinet. He told me he plays double embouchure, and added that Bigard, I think he said Bennie Carter, and some others did also. And he says Johnny Hodges does on alto. He says it's old European technique and essentially legitimate. By the way, with it you get the opposite of a shaky quavery tone. Since the cushion of the lips is even, the tone does not crack, and remains liquid, fluid, and pure throughout. Like Fazola's or Larry Shields's. Unless you wiggle the instrument so badly with your hands or fingers that you still can't play clean. Nervous ameteurs do this in their tenseness. They grip the clarinet too hard, and beat it with their fingers as if it were a piano, instead of covering the holes, much as a woman who doesn't understand a vacuum cleaner runs it rapidly across a carpet, confusing it with a broom.

I don't know how Bechet's tone gets that quality. To me it has a very fast vibrato which is probably more pleasing to the negro than to the legitimate white man who prefers a slower vibrato. But some colored girls sing naturally with a vibrato just like that. Parenthetically, I consider Sidney Bechet one of the greatest figures in jazz, and one of the purest sources, in direct line, of the jazz idiom. He is one of my favorites for phrasing. And his rhythm is terrific. Sidney is jazz. But I don't try to copy his tone. I try to copy Fazola's, Larry Shield's and that of the guy, E. Kanter, who plays on Ben Pollack's SONG OF THE ISLANDS on Decca. Get a load of that guy's tone. Terrific. More vibrato than Fazola, and more like Shields. Though Kanter can't improvise or phrase as well as Fazola.

Most of the tone you hear which is not legitimate reed tone arises from: shaking the instrument involuntarily thru lack of proper schooling or lack of development of lip musculture through ignorance, using too soft reeds, or imitation of other players' faults, in the latter case a deliberate imitation of a playing fault.

Jazz players don't use double embouchure. They may use it by virtue of having learned legitimately, but most jazz players who pick up the instrument play with the teeth touching the mouthpiece. Most teachers teach this way, too. Go to the library and get out all the books you can find on this subject and you'll perhaps locate a resume in some of the old foreign methods, such as Carl Baermann, Jr. Get the German edition, if possible, as it will probably be more complete. They also give an embouchure with the reed on top. No one plays that today.

Pee Wee's spit notes are almost noises, and are too fast a vibration to be called a vibrato, which simulates the human voice. This is his so-called "Dirty" tone. It is more distorted even than a growl. It is something I have heard only Pee Wee do. If you heard him on the Saturday concerts today, he did it a lot. It will be heard on a new Spanier record of MEMPHIS BLUES of which Muggsy played me the test yesterday. He does it by blowing a note on the clarinet and at the same time making a sound with his lips exactly the way a cornet player does into his mouthpiece. The vibration of the lips is transmitted to the reed, utterly distorting the tone, and giving it a rasping, rattly, discordant, hoarse, distorted tone like the sound of a clarinet player heard on a badly out-of-order radio whose volume has dropped due to a broken condenser, plus a bad tube.

The dirty tone of Pee Wee doesn't have any embouchure distinction between single or double. It's hard enough to keep any tone going with all that air escaping. You just blow the reed and squeeze your side of your lips and blow out through the tightened lips until you get a sound--any sound. That sound will distort the pure reed tone into what Pee Wee sounds like when he's really dispensing.

Anybody who plays a wind instrument may use a chest vibrato or whinney. I can't give you examples. Try it yourself on a horn. You can easily see how it's done. Evan a fourth of july horn will do. Or a kazoo, or a comb and paper. It's the sound kids make today imitating a machine gun.