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United States Has Secret Sonic Weapon—Jazz

Europe Falls Captive as Crowds Riot to Hear Dixieland

But Vast Propaganda Value Is a Secret to Washington, Too

By FELIX BELAIR Jr.
Special to The New York Times.

GENEVA, Nov. 5—America's secret weapon is a blue note in a minor key. Right now its most effective ambassador is Louis (Satchmo) Armstrong. A telling propaganda line is the hopped-up tempo of a Dixieland band heard on the Voice of America in far-off Tangier.

This is not a pipedream from a backroom jam session. It is the studied conclusion of a handful of thoughtful Americans from Moscow to Madrid.

Somewhere in the official files of one of Washington's myriad agencies all this has been spelled out. Because nothing has been done about it, more than one observant American traveling the Continent has remarked: "We don't know our own strength."

Cash customers were turned away in droves tonight because Victoria Hall here could not accommodate the crowd that wanted to hear "Ole Satchmo" do tricks with his trumpet. The disappointed customers were not Swiss "hep cats" but sober adults willing to pay almost $4 to hear musical individuality.

All Europe now seems to find American jazz as necessary as the seasons. Yet Europeans don't bounce to the syncopated rhythm of Stan Kenton or Duke Ellington and their bands or the still popular recordings of Benny Goodman's quartet. They can swing and sway with Sammy Kaye, but for the most part they find in jazz a subject for serious study.

Theirs is what most Americans would call a "long-haired approach." They like to contemplate it, dissect it, take it apart to see what makes it what it is.

They like to ponder the strength of its individuality and speculate on the qualities that differentiate it from the folk music of any other country. Somewhere along the line they get curious about the kind of people that first contrived it.

This is not to suggest that Europe has turned its back on the symphony and classical composition. Far from it. Wilhelm Backhaus was a sellout here last week with Beethoven's Piano Concerto in C Minor. But not even Walter Gieseking could have caused the recent Hamburg rioting by those turned away when they pulled in the Standing Room Only sign.

It was the same in Paris a few days later when Sidney Bechet and his soprano saxophone drew 15,000 Frenchmen to demand equality of opportunity to share 3,000 seats. Not to be deprived of their chance to demonstrate enthusiasm for his individual artistry, the unseated majority "wrecked the joint," just as the Germans did at Hamburg.

The popularity of jazz and the market for it is a phenomenon

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Louis (Satchmo) Armstrong: He sounds diplomatic note

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that strikes Americans returned to the continent after a long absence. Men actually have risked their lives to smuggle recordings of it behind the Iron Curtain and by methods that the profit motive cannot explain.

A German Swiss of Zurich came closest to the explanation the other day after he had heard Hoagy Carmichael's "Stardust" from the keyboard of Art Tatum.

"Jazz is not just an art," he said. "It is a way of life."

Whatever the essence of the matter, the remark helps explain why the police states give up the attempt to outlaw jazz as the product of a decadent capitalist nation. In the satellite countries particularly, authorities learned the hard way that it was only the promise of a ragtime band later on that kept the radios tuned to their Communist preachments.

Something of the same strength of musical Americana caused uninhibited Moscow children to ask visiting American news men a year ago what they knew of Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra.

More ponderous explanations of the attraction of American jazz are available from those in Europe who have given it a lot of thought. One is that the contest between musical discipline and individual expression it entails comes close to symbolizing the conditions under which people of the atomic age live.

Jazz Specialists on Radio

Whatever the exactions of musical discipline, there can be little question of the appreciation throughout Europe of the individuality of expression involved. Thus, it is not surprising to switch on a radio and hear a jazz band doing a syncopated adaptation of the Cesar Franck symphony or a piece of sacred music heard as written only at the Christmas season.

Tiny Switzerland boasts about a hundred amateur jazz bands, and about sixty of these specialize in the Dixieland variety. The radio station of every good-sized city has its "jazz specialist."

The biggest movie house in Zurich, like all others, was closed last Sunday, but it was packed before noon by the promise of a seven-piece Negro orchestra whose repertoire included "Muskrat Ramble," "High Society," "When the Saints Go Marching In" and "Royal Garden Blues."

Up the street from the movie house is a record shop. The window display mixes such names as Toscanini, Horowitz, and Heifetz with Art Tatum, Sauter-Finnegan and Lionel Hampton. On a counter near-by can be obtained an album with ten monographic studies of Louis Armstrong—the trumpeter, the singer, the person. His genealogy, discography, and so on.

A separate record album contains the "Evolution of Duke Ellington" from his first to his latest recordings, with running commentary on the changes in his music as his own personality and that of his musicians evolved over the years.

"Jazz International" a program of the Armed Forces network, and "Night Train," another network feature from Western Germany, is as familiar throughout the continent as the Ed Sullivan show to American televiewers. Probably the greatest American cultural triumph of modern times was the traveling show of "Porgy and Bess," the American folk opera, which now goes to Moscow.

An Unexplained Question

What many thoughtful Europeans cannot understand is why the United States Government, with all the money it spends for so-called propaganda to promote democracy, does not use more of it to subsidize the continental travels of jazz bands and the best exponents of the music.

The average European tour of a musician like Louis Armstrong and his band is about six weeks. On a profit and loss basis he can play only to the biggest audiences. Small houses mean deficits that not even devotees like 'Satchmo can long endure.

With a small Government subsidy, he might play the smaller intermediate towns and his tour stretched to six months by train instead of six weeks by bus.

American jazz has now become a universal language. It knows no national boundaries, but everybody knows where it comes from and where to look for more. Individual Americans will continue to pack them in and the reasons for this are clear.

The New York Philharmonic-Symphony, London's Symphony and the Boston Pops are no strangers to any European capital. They are appreciated for their versatility as much as for their faithful renditions of the classics associated with European composers over the centuries.

But there is not a wide difference between the best symphony orchestras of the United States and Europe—not where the masses of the people are concerned.

But nobody plays jazz like an American.

That is why Europeans are puzzled when a famous exponent of the art goes unnoticed by the official representatives of American life in Europe, whether embassies or legations or consulates.

Sometimes a private American citizen comes to the rescue with a cocktail party or simply a visit backstage.

But like the still-remembered visit to Vienna of Dick Button, the Olympic figure-skating champion, such unofficial recognition comes only after the rave notices in the newspapers. It is still recalled hereabout that Button was not even given United States commissary privileges or permitted to stay at the Bristol there, then the official American hotel.

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