Guitar-Picker Defines Jazz

By BARNEY KESSEL

Jazz — like all great ideas — is many things to many people. There are those who play it and others who hear it. Some analyze it; others react to it. Some sell it; others buy it. And finally — some love it and some hate it!

What Is Jazz?

Any answer to the question "What is jazz?" is bound to be affected by one's relationship to it. This is the reason for so many different and, at times, controversial comments on the subject.

My relationship to jazz is that of a jazz player. As you read on and agree or disagree — please keep in mind that the comments are based on my relationship to jazz.

A Mood

Jazz is a means of personal expression through music. It is improvised and conveys a definite mood — any mood.

There is no limit to the number of participants. When it is performed well, it could be compared to extemporaneous conversation between brilliant minds. It is possible for the jazz player to make an eloquent musical statement through inspiration — a statement which he has never quite made that way in the past and will never make quite that way again in the future.

Unconfined

Jazz is not confined to any geographical location, race, personality or school of musical thought. The best jazz is created when the player has mastered the principles of music and uses his instrument to serve as a vehicle of his expression — and plays with inspiration.

Once again comparing a jazz solo to an extemporaneous speech: what is being said is more important than how it is being said.

No one is really sure where jazz came from, but from what I can piece together these seem the logical beginnings:

Tribal Chants

The Negro brought over here from Africa sang tribal chants as he worked — chants that had been handed down from generation to generation. As the Negro learned to speak English and began to absorb some of the customs of his new country, the chants became modified until they were songs with English words, still retaining some or all of the original melody.

"Work" Songs

From this, the Negro gradually evolved more spontaneous and extemporaneous songs which had a practical view in mind. Some songs were made up to make work easier and time go faster: these were called "work" songs. Some songs were about the miseries of this country and home-

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sickness for Africa: these songs were the first "blues." Those who were converted to Christianity sang of their love for God — and these songs are our "spirituals."

Jazz Standards

The Negroes made up songs about all their experiences. These songs, which began as improvisations, became more polished and set with each performance — until they were finally accepted without further alternations. Thus, they became standards in the repertory of jazz.

Many of the songs, especially the spirituals and blues, were constructed in such a manner that one voice would improvise while others sustained the harmony or stated a subordinate melody — until, at the end, all would join in and conclude en masse.