Jews and Jazz
By Joshua M. Brauer.

In Germany the playing of Jazz was recently banned on the grounds that it was the "Judaic abuse of music, and alien to the Nordic idea of music." It was damned as "vile stuff."

It is interesting to study the origin of Jazz, and before we praise or condemn this modern form of music, let us try to understand its structure.

In 1925 that gifted Jewish conductor, Serge Koussevitsky, introduced a form of modernistic music through the Boston Symphony Orchestra. There was a storm of protest. Koussevitsky stood his ground and said that the jazzy music he was playing was the classic music of to-morrow, and argued that Bach and Wagner were the jazz players of the past. A wild controversy raged—and is still raging.

Jazz was the music of the saloons; the vulgar noise that corrupted taste and manners, an escape from the real and a substitute for good classics.

But the critics have accepted it to-day as "a method of playing music" if not an art.

Jazz has educated the public to rhythmic variety. It has made the world music conscious; it has made people appreciate the classics; it has helped people to face the realities of life.

But what has the Jew got to do with Jazz? Isn't it an American development of Afro-American thematic material. Doesn't it belong to the negro?

Jazz is a product of African tribal music, but it has been refined. It has been moulded to suit European taste. The good in Jazz has been cultivated; and in the hands of Jews such as Irving Berlin, George Gershwin and Jerome Kern it has acquired international recognition. But it has reached the symphonic realm, too, and that genius, Aaron Copland, has brought it to the high-brow and the intellectual.

Copland has explained that Jazz is not the melody nor even the single well-pronounced rhythm, but the interplay of rhythmic sound, above and under the melody. He has studied Jazz—and he has appreciated its possibilities. He has also imbued it with old Jewish airs which have greatly enriched it. Modern Jazz is more Jewish in character than negro. And it is absorbingly interesting to know the reason.

Deeper Implications of Jazz.

The sad and almost hysterical psychology of the oppressed race has always found expression in music. The sweet sadness in the cantor's song blends readily with jazz, and the minor mode of the typical "blues" as Isaac Goldberg so aptly puts it, is by no means a stranger to the Jewish ear. "The simple fact is that the Jew responds naturally to the deeper implications of Jazz, and that as a Jewish American he partakes of the impulse at both its Oriental and its Occidental end."

Al Jolson, whose father was a cantor, is known for his "mammy songs" just as Larry Adler is known for his delightful jazz on the harmonica. No art can flourish unless it finds a fertile soil. It is therefore not surprising that Jazz has, because of the Jewishness it has acquired.

George Gershwin.
Progressive jazz does not necessarily flourish in the dance hall. George Gershwin has composed for the world of symphony. His Rhapsody in Blue, his brilliant Concerto in F and his Prelude have found a place in the realms of standard classical music. It is true that Irving Berlin finds a big place in the popular music world, but if one were to analyse some of his works, the influence of the classical school would soon reveal itself.

The story of George Gershwin is told to all. Irving Berlin is a household name, and ironic as it seems some of the "purified" bands in Berlin are still playing his immortal "Alexander's Rag Time Band."

Aaron Copland.

The name of Aaron Copland should be better known in South Africa. This genius was born in 1900, and started his musical career in his thirteenth year. He first studied under Clarence Adler at the University of North Dakota, and later in Paris. He has written his "Music for the Theatre," a symphony, and that jazz owes much to him. The world is richer. But what a Jew got to do with Jazz? Isn't it an American development of Afro-American thematic material. Doesn't it belong to the negro?

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