All about Jazz

Compiled by Arif Ashraf Nayan

AS a musical language of communication, jazz is the first indigenous American style to affect music in the rest of the World. From the beat of ragtime syncopation and driving brass bands to soaring gospel choirs mixed with field hollers and the deep down growl of the blues, jazz's many roots are celebrated almost everywhere in the United States.

The city of **New Orleans** features prominently in early development of jazz. A port city with doors to the spicy sounds of the Caribbean and Mexico and a large, well-established black population, the Crescent City was ripe for the development of new music at the turn of the century. Brass bands marched in numerous parades and played to comfort families during funerals. Also, numerous society dances required skilled musical ensembles. New Orleans was home to great early clarinetists Johnny Dodds, Jimmy Noone and Sidney Bechet. One of the first great cornetist, Joe "King" Oliver and his leading student and future star, Louis Armstrong hailed from New Orleans along with other influential musicians including Jelly Roll Morton.

Chicago became the focal point for jazz in the early 1920s when New Orleans musicians found their way north after clubs in the Storyville area of New Orleans were closed. Jazz began to gain wider notice as recordings made in the Windy City sold throughout America. Chicago was a magnet for musicians in the Mid-West. Famous musicians who received acclaim for their work in Chicago were Earl Hines, Johnny Dodds, Louis Armstrong and King Oliver.

New York City contributed to the richness of jazz in many ways. The first piano style to be incorporated into jazz was stride which developed from ragtime and was popular in New York. The city was also the center of the music publishing business. Also in New York, James Reese Europe experimented with a style of jazz that involved large orchestras. Many of his early recordings would be considered ragtime, though his later recordings in 1919 clearly show jazz improvisation. In the 1920s, New York City had two pioneering orchestras that would eventually greatly affect jazz history. Fletcher Henderson put together a band that first appeared at the Cotton Club in New York in 1923. Henderson's unit featured future jazz stars Coleman Hawkins and Don Redman but it wasn't until Henderson brought Louis Armstrong from Chicago to play with his group that the band began to develop into a full-fledged jazz group which would help to usher in the swing era.

Duke Ellington moved to New York from Washington, DC in the early twenties and began to develop the skills as an arranger and composer which brought to him the great fame he enjoyed throughout his career.

Another transplanted New Orleans pioneer, Clarence Williams, had a hand in organizing many early jazz and blues recordings in New York. In the late twenties, the jazz center of the United States moved from Chicago to New York City as many musicians did also.

During the twenties and thirties there were many groups known as Territory Bands playing jazz in smaller United States cities. In the late twenties, Kansas City's Bennie Moten Band acquired members of Walter Page's Blue Devils which were formed in Oklahoma City. This group later evolved into the Count Basie Orchestra. Some other cities with burgeoning jazz scenes were St. Louis, Memphis and Detroit.

As jazz evolved, highly arranged dance music became the norm. When white musicians like Benny Goodman added black arrangements for their scores, jazz began to move into the Swing or Big Band period. Large black and white jazz bands toured the United States filling the radio airwaves with swing, a term which became synonymous with jazz. Great African American bands during the swing era were Jimmy Lunceford, Chick Webb, Mills Blue Rhythm and Andy Kirk's Clouds of Joy. It was also a time when vocalists came to the forefront led by such favorites Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday and Fats Waller.

