

# Is There an Antidote for Jazz?

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**J**AZZOMANIA is not a disease—it is a symptom. The disease to which it is a mere accessory is the dancing mania. The modern dance has gripped such vast numbers of our people, and they abstract so much pleasure out of its conventionalized sensuousness, that anything associated with it becomes fixed as a necessary complement to the fundamental feature. Jazz music seems to lend itself so peculiarly well to the complex rhythm of close-contact dancing that it is likely to remain with us as long as this type of dancing continues to hold the centre of the arena in the world of commercialized amusements.

The only kind of treatment that would seem to have any power of restoring the jazzomaniac to any semblance of sanity and health is the modification of the condition that precipitates this modern form of madness, namely, the ever present dance hall. To effect this desideratum will be a gigantic social undertaking, and all weak brothers and sisters of the race will naturally shrink from undertaking it.

Think of it—road houses and dance halls everywhere, as ubiquitous as filling stations, both gaseous and **gastronomic!** Up every canyon on the eastern front of the Rocky Mountains, where this note happens to be penned, are half a dozen to a score of roadhouses, and car after car of folks respond to the sonorous summoning of the saxophone. So also in among the snow-capped peaks of the Cordilleras, and down its western slopes out to the water's edge of the Pacific—road houses, road houses, road houses. And if you turn eastward over the wide stretches of the great plains, under every lonesome cottonwood at a cross-roads is a roadhouse. Penetrate the lake region of the Upper Mississippi, or pass down the Great Lakes into the forests of Michigan, and continue across the valleys of the Ohio, the Cumberland, and the Tennessee to the Florida coasts, and then up along the board walk at Atlantic City, and along the sidewalks of New York into picturesque New England—road houses and dance halls everywhere.

The remedy? College people are more to blame than any other group for this condition, and they could redeem this country from the siren call of the saxophone if they would. Either they must do this by finding a more wholesome form of social amusement if we are ever to get rid of the jazzomaniacs, or else they must surrender the

moral leadership of a great nation, and suffer the disgrace of failure in the presence of a compelling opportunity.

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**P**ERHAPS no term so commonly used is less clearly defined than "jazz." In general it conveys a notion of noisy confusion, the characteristic of certain types of music and dancing, since these are the media through which most often this boisterous bewilderment expresses itself.

Jazz is really a quality of mind that appears not alone in music and dancing but in literature, dress, and manners. Its essence is always a violent forcing of attention through the unusual, the noisy, the bizarre, and even the offensive. In music the jazz effect results from breaking in upon the orderly rhythm by imposing a new accent, and continuing this new accent long enough to *command recognition for itself* and not long enough to supplant entirely the old rhythm; in the graphic arts jazz secures its effects by distorted images or vivid, patchy splotches of color that break up the canvas and prevent integrated, coherent interpretation of beauty; in manners jazz expresses itself in the ultra-unconventional, the risqué, the shocking; in literature, and especially in poetry and drama, it chooses eccentric themes and thought expression is disconnected, incoherent, and inchoate.

Contrast the subtle touch of comedy that ancient and modern masters of art so skilfully introduced to relieve the heavy gloom of tragedy with the harsh intrusion of the bawdy dance and the vulgar hits of modern jazz; the latter brazenly smites and shocks one into attention, the former steals luringly into the consciousness of the audience and gives delightful respite.

Perhaps the most violent expression of jazz yet exhibited—and that, too, on a national scale—was experienced on that memorable Armistice Day of 1918; it was a fantastic rebound from the repressions and mental agonies of the war, a striking example of what may happen when the group mind, held taut to the breaking point for too long a period of time, becomes not quite sane and balanced and expresses itself in unaccountable, bewildering ways, such as chaos once knew.

To sum it all up, the object of jazz is to force itself obtrusively upon the attention by dissonant noise, by broken rhythm; by wild activity, by unusual behavior, by flashy color and outlandish modes. Whether its modern vogue may be attributed to an unconscious recrudescence of the