

## Sashayin 'Round

# Here's What It Takes To Organize Western Band

By HANK THOMPSON

During the last few years, the country and western field has come into its own in the entertainment business. Today many of the biggest selling records and most popular hit tunes come from the c & w side of the track.

Until four years ago, I booked mainly as a single, working various package shows and units. I felt that some way I was missing the boat by not having a good band to back me up. By having a good band it would enable us to offer the promoters a double bill—an artist that's known by his recordings, plus a top western dance band.

### Several Objectives

In organizing a western swing

band such as Brazos Valley Boys, I had several goals in mind. First of all, musicianship was very important. Too many people have the misconception that musicians in western bands are not as good as in other bands. This is not true.

Some of the finest and most versatile musicians in the country are playing in western bands. I believe I have some of the finest in the business. Some have played in big "pop" bands, college bands, and even symphonies.



Hank Thompson

Western swing, the way we play it, is a combination of country music and a good, modern western beat. We play not only the songs that I have written and recorded, but all of the top country tunes,

the top popular songs, quite a few rhythm and blues numbers, and most of the standard instrumentals.

I've always wondered what Duke Ellington would say about our arrangements of *Take the 'A' Train*, *Perdido*, and many others. Our instrumentation is similar to most western bands. The rhythm section is composed of four instruments—piano, drums, bass, and rhythm guitar. We use five men on the front line—twin fiddles, twin guitars, and one horn, a trumpet. All of the boys in the band sing, and we do quite a few novelty numbers.

### Personality Needed

Personality off the bandstand as well as on is a great asset to us, also. Musicians in western bands socialize much more freely with the money-paying public than do most of the musicians in the big "pop" bands. The whole atmosphere is more friendly, and it pays off at the boxoffice, too.

Along with musicianship and showmanship we try to present an organization that is very flashy and spectacular. Appearance does a lot to sell anything, and we feel

## The Hot Box

George Hooper, who regularly conducts *The Hot Box* on these pages, has been ill and was unable to write the column these last two issues. He hopes to resume it in the next *Down Beat*.

that it even helps to sell music. We have gone to great length and expense to create a certain amount of color and glamour for our organization. So far, we have over \$15,000 invested in western uniforms for the band, not including \$25,000 invested in my own clothes. These are all tailored by the famous western tailor, Nudie of Hollywood.

Radio shows take up a good percentage of our time, also. At the present we have two network shows. One is for a flour company, and is carried five days a week on a network of southern power stations—over 30 in all. It's reported over 3,000,000 families listen daily to our show. We also do a show three times weekly over the Mutual network for a brewing company. These shows, along with many guest appearances on network radio and TV shows, keep us rather busy at times.

More and more western artists and bands are becoming recognized as a big factor in the entertainment world, especially in the dance business with which we are mainly associated.

## Books Noted

*Enciclopedia Del Jazz* (500 pp.; Edizioni Messaggerie Musicali, Milan) is a unique work. Oddly enough, it is the kind of work that has never been attempted on a comparable scale in this country. Its solidly-bound 500 pages, size 6 1/4 x 9 1/2", are augmented by 63 pages of illustrations depicting everyone from Bank to Miles.

In this country, it would be the kind of volume to sell at \$7.50 to \$10. How they produced it to sell at 2,800 lire (little over \$4) is something you'll have to take up with the Italian printers' union.

So much for the quantity. Qualitatively, it's an imposing job in several respects. The first of its four sections offers an esthetic analysis of jazz, fortunately neither too lengthy nor too ponderous, and a small, utterly-inadequate glossary of definitions, both by Gian Carlo Testoni.

### Names Origins

Section Two outlines the popular origins of jazz; Roberto Leydi, the narrator, uses many musical illustrations, mostly from Negro folk sources. Testoni takes over to tell the tale from New Orleans through World War II, after which Arrigo Polillo, one of Europe's most reliable archivists of modern jazz, covers the period 1944-52 in a 65-page story.

Third part is an alphabetical section of biographies; and here's where, even with a rudimentary knowledge of Italian (or Latin or French) the book may be valuable to you. Inevitably, the 500 biographies bring to mind a thousand omissions; but the musicians who did make the roster are discussed as concisely and up-to-dately as possible.

### Discography

Part Four is a discography, not much use to us, as it confines itself to records that happen to have been released in Italy, and, in doing so, reminds us how lucky we are and how meager is the disc diet of many foreign lands.

Taking into account that you'll value the many pages of pictures, and that you can buy an Italian-English dictionary very reasonably, and most particularly bearing in mind that nothing this complete is now available in the United States, you might be well advised to invest in the *Enciclopedia Del Jazz*. Write to Messaggerie Musicali, Milano, Italy.



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