

A Word With You

By ROBERT CLANCY

They say that music will reveal the mood, manners and morals of the times, the *Zeitgeist*—in a way that is difficult to capture otherwise.

This is true to a certain extent of serious or classical music, though such music has more of a timeless quality. It is popular music that seems to pinpoint a particular period. Surely everyone has had the experience of hearing an old popular song played, bringing back quite vividly a time, a place, an event.

Maybe a "social memory" works thus too. Mark how "Oh, Susanna" and "Mocking Bird" bring frontier and Civil War days to life.

Just now the music of the nineteen-twenties is being revived. We're far enough away from that age to look back on it. It was an ugly decade, so why the nostalgia? Possibly because the music expressed an abandon, a gay irresponsibility in blissful ignorance of disasters ahead. Music like that could not be composed today. We can no longer act as though we were not afraid.

A note of sophistication crept into the music of the thirties—curiously, there didn't seem to be as much exasperation in the music of the depression as there is today. "Life is just a bowl of cherries" was the mood.

Perhaps the reason is that during the depression we at least knew where we were, even if it was low down. Today we don't know. Add to this that when one is slugged for the first time, he is apt to be brave; but when he recovers and is menaced again, he is more apt to go to pieces.

Today's typical "hot" music is jittery rather than carefree, the shriek is from the nerves, not from the blood.

And why the unparalleled popularity of singer Johnnie Ray? Johnnie does openly what we all want to do—cry. This is not the sentimental tear-jerking of olden days—it is the relief of a cry of desperation.

And then there's "Wheel of Fortune" a top song hit, a sigh of disillusion. Not the sophisticated disillusion of the thirties, but a half-sobbed prayer.

If Fortune doesn't answer our prayers, it may be time to use our heads and lift ourselves out of the mess we're in. One current song suggests we may be ready for that. It tells about an old man who built a bridge, not for himself, who might not pass that way again, but for a boy who will come after him.

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