

Kenton Adds 4 Mellophoniums

Group Appearing at Basin Street East With Jazz Horns

By JOHN S. WILSON

Stan Kenton, whose brassily bellicose bands have been challenging American eardrums for more than fifteen years, brought the latest edition of his orchestra to Basin Street East on Thursday night. There are four more brass instruments than usual in this new group, but Mr. Kenton has chosen them to serve as a mellowing, softening influence as well as to intensify the band's normally piercing brassiness.

The four added instruments are mellophoniums, mellophones whose tubing has been straightened out so that the bell points straight ahead like that of a trumpet instead of being directed back over the musician's shoulder.

Created by Elliott

It was created several years ago by Don Elliott, a jazz mellophonist who had found that solos played on a regular mellophone could not be heard properly unless he played with his back toward his audience. Mr. Kenton added the unusual instruments to his orchestra last winter to remedy what he felt was "a lack of tonal color" in its performances.

At first, he says, he had difficulty finding musicians who were willing to play the mellophonium. Trumpeters and French hornists, who were the logical choices, bridled at the suggestion that they switch to what they looked on as a freak instrument.

But Mr. Kenton, who insists that the mellophonium is no freak and is here to stay as far as he is concerned, was



Stan Kenton

persuasively persistent, and he now has a mellophonium section manned by two former trumpeters, one former French hornist and one mellophonist who had to be weaned away from his past habit of using a trumpet mouthpiece.

Playing as a section, the mellophoniums frequently sound like muted trumpets with a slightly darker tone. They can also create the distant, haunting sound of French horns (Mr. Kenton chose them in preference to French horns, because, he says, they are capable of a stronger attack than the French horn). Both aspects enable the current Kenton band to play slow, moody numbers with a richer, more lustrous voicing than it has had in the recent past.

But when Mr. Kenton lets all the stops out, the mellophoniums also add a full share to

Instruments Lend a Softening Influence to 22-Piece Band

the pandemonium, sailing with surprising agility around and over the trumpets and trombone like exultant Valkyries. Their presence gives the Kenton band more scope and balance than it has had for many years.

Along with Mr. Kenton's twenty-two-piece band, the current Basin Street bill includes Chris Connor, a starkly stylized singer who was once the Kenton's band vocalist, and the trio of Oscar Peterson, who plays the piano with imposingly skillful authority until he gets into very fast tempos, when his authority dissolves into glib virtuosity.

The Less Gaudy Side

A less gaudy side of jazz can be heard in the relaxed atmosphere of the Versailles, a modest, attractive little club on the corner of Avenue of the Americas and Ninth Street. There Knabil Totah, a bassist who bows his instrument with unusually warm-toned fluency, and Benny Aronov, a pianist, play quirkish duets and a blonde pixie named Blossom Dearie sings.

Miss Dearie is not overtly a jazz singer, but her way of phrasing the off-beat show tunes that make up the bulk of her repertoire is seasoned with jazz knowledge. Her voice is light and slightly throaty, with piquant little lifts that lend a radiant charm to virtually any song she undertakes.

Faith Dane, until recently the bugle-tooting stripper in "Gypsy," is also present, offering no jazz but singing, playing the piano, banging on bongos and blowing her bugle with great vigor.