

The "Kelly Blues" Sums up Story of Dixieland, Plus

By BOB FOSTER

About fifteen years ago when we were a member of a small musical group, we used to enjoy sitting around the musicians' union hall talking to the old-timers. These men, who were the artists of yesterday, members of the old Dixieland bands, loved to tell stories of the glorious days of American music. Some of the stories may have been on the "tall" side, but they were most interesting to a young would-be-musician, such as we were.

We remember, listened intently ... usually with mouth agap... to their fabulous tales of speak-easy life, all-night jazz sessions, bootleggers, beer barons, gangsters and of course, Kansas City. It seemed Kansas City in those days was the top spot for the low-down Dixieland music makers.

All those memories, passed on to us from these great artists, have been wrapped up in a half-hour radio show, "Pete Kelly Blues," which has replaced the "Halls of Ivy" on the Wednesday night 6:30 pm., KNBC spot.

This show is brutal, hard boiled, and almost cruel, but it is filled with authentic Dixieland music, bringing to the radio speakers a realness seldom attained in the art.

With a locale of Kansas City, Writer Jim Moser, an ex-San Franciscan, has taken the lingo of the jazz music world, the brutal stories of gangland and the "roaring twenties" knitting them into one of the most unusual and outstanding half-hours we have heard for a long time.

Jack Webb, another former San Francisco radio actor, who is heard regularly in several radio crime dramas, has been called on to do the acting chores for this one and comes through admirably. In fact, it would be difficult to imagine anybody else in the role.

"Pete Kelly Blues" is, indeed, a powerful and direct answer to those who would say radio is dead or dying. It combines the best in crime drama, toe tapping Dixieland music and, as we have already said, suspense. But, it definitely is not for the kids. The 6:30 p.m. airing time is not for this show.

Moser's fine writing really makes this show stand out from the other mystery thrillers. As usual, his script is salty and colorful. For instance he leaves little doubt as to the gal's character in this piece when he comes up with the following description. "She was pretty, but that was long ago, she used to be the fastest freight in town, but somewhere along the line she ran into a bunch of Wednesday weekends." Another classic was "It's all backward, you don't hang up your pants before you take them off."

At present, the show is unsponsored, but we don't see it going without an "angel" for long. This show has plenty, and NBC should be proud, for this is radio at its best.

Vic Calheart and Matty Matlock have been successful with the interpretation of the music and you'll get to hear some mighty fine Dixieland as the series goes along.