

Slick face of the jazz age

By IFAN PAYNE

REVIEW

WHEN the three-piece-suit brigade in the form of the Hefty Jazz Sextet walked on to the stage of St David's Hall on Monday evening, one might reasonably suppose that we were in for more politeness than perspiration for the concert, which was billed as *One Hundred Years of Dixieland Jazz*.

In the event, far from encompassing 100 years the music remained fairly narrow in focus. The concert was pleasant enough entertainment and sparkled quite brightly when George Chisholm took the stage with his trombone and his reminiscences.

Chisholm is of course a genuine link with jazz greats such as Louis Armstrong and Fats Waller, but early jazz was a vernacular and a high personal art.

It was unusual in that it was dependent upon the individual performer and the inspiration of the moment.

Early jazz of New Orleans and the deep south-east of the United States was all too often based on the barest of notated or agreed chord sequences or on eight bars of blues.

There were exceptions like Scott Joplin whose piano rags were published, and several subsequent musicians made an income from the sale of sheet music.

But many of the early Dixieland tunes have been transcribed, written down note for note from early 78 records and from piano roles.

This poses a dilemma. Should the performer remain faithful to the letter — produce in other words the musical equiva-

lent of painting by numbers — or should he or she re-create the music in their own personal contemporary style.

In performing a Fats Waller solo *I've Got My Fingers Crossed*, pianist Mick Pyle re-created a captivating and incisive memory of a great pianist.

Similarly Pyle and Ron Drake on clarinet produced an attractively authentic sound for Jelly Roll Morton's *Shreveport Stomp*. A word also about Harvey Weston's elegant bass playing throughout.

At the other extreme the archive walls came tumbling down when George Chisholm and the group reminded us of the current interest in Latin American music with a bosanova version of Jack Teagarten's *Jumping With Mr T*.

Another Fats Waller tune added to the historical confusion in that the performance of *I've Got My Fingers Crossed* was introduced as "The First Jazz Waltz."

Well, 20 or 30 years earlier Scott Jopkin had composed his *Bethena Waltz*.

Not jazz you say? Ragtime?

But 100 years of jazz goes back to 1886 and that encompasses ragtime.

Perhaps I male too much of the innocent pleasures of *One Hundred Years of Dixieland Jazz*. Jazz below the Mason-Dixon Line reflected not only happiness and celebration but also great sadness and poverty in a milieu which, for the lives of the musicians was far removed from the world of the three-piece suit.