

When our New York correspondent met the King of the Blues recently, he found BB taking enthusiastically about an idea of his that has been in the formative stages for some time...

'On television you have soul music, jazz, "champagne" music - you have everything except blues. I would like to have a regular TV show on which blues musicians - and lots of guys could do it - might demonstrate their different styles. The format would be like a night club, showing us as we are, not as Hollywood shows us, and not political. With a host like myself or Muddy Waters, someone who knows the blues, we could alternate between music and five-minute rap sessions. The closest anyone has come so far to this idea would be the blues concerts at Lincoln Centre (New York City) and the 'Soul!' programme on Channel 13.' (New York's educational, non-commercial television station.)

King's extensive travels have contributed to his conviction that the blues, especially as a native American art form, deserves a more serious consideration in the States. 'After going around the world,' he explained, 'I saw that in most countries the traditional type of music was like history to the people. They *know* it. Also in every country, musical styles are rated, say one, two, three, four, five. Number five should be heard too.' Thoughts such as these have apparently contributed to his desire to have his own television show. 'I've casually mentioned it to some TV people, and I've had a couple of offers on radio...

The conversation drifted to BB's musical growth. 'Do you know that at one time I would get bored because people didn't know me? I got frightened, but I had to keep going.' He includes his stint as a disc jockey in Memphis among the experiences which helped his stage presence, and adds, 'I've learned many guitar techniques, like the use of vibrato to sustain a note; but it's those thirty years of playing, twenty-six as a professional, that makes the difference.'

'There are always outside influences. But if you play the way a classical musician

plays - with study - you'll reach the point where outside influences won't *change* you: they'll *inspire* you. From the beginning, when you get out on your own, you always have leanings. After my first record I stopped playing other people's music their way; later I played their

music *my* way, then not at all. Now the only time I play someone else's tune is when I'm recording.' (King has to his credit 'over three hundred singles and 50 LPs'!)

I asked him what he thinks about while he plays a lead. 'My ideas', he replied, 'are simple. If I could play

'Your ears have to be ahead of everybody else's...'

B B KING

talks to Fredric Fastow



more complicated I would; but *too* many notes may make it not what it is. Lots of people just play a lot of notes without *saying* anything. The melody doesn't linger.

'I listen to bop sax players like Illinois Jacquet. At the beginning they're already leading up to what they're going to do later. They get ready to jump, and they feed it in at the right time. It sounds like somebody talking to you. It's like painting a picture. You find your foot patting. You can keep identifying where you're at by playing, say, the tonic tone, the third or the fifth chord you're in. Your ideas may change, but you're still painting a picture.'

On the subject of his own equipment and how it relates to his style BB informed us that 'Lucille', his Gibson Stereo guitar, was purchased straight off the shelf and has not been modified in any way. 'My amplifier is wide open all the time, and I vary the tone with the guitar's controls. I learned to control a note by hand. Anybody can get feedback, but you have to learn to control it. Find the places on your guitar where the feedback is strongest. Then you can increase and lower your volume. You've got to be quick enough to recognise when you've got a note and not a whistle. Your ears have to be ahead of everybody else's.'

'It's hard to sustain a note at low volume - that's when you're really working. It takes practice. I like to practise without an amp. I used to use Black Diamond strings - they were heavy and loud. Now I use light gauge strings, which make it harder to get a good acoustic tone; so I sometimes use a Pignose amp for practising. When I play something professionally, I've practised it enough beforehand to know what I'll be hearing. But it's like eating: sometimes you bite your tongue!'

Where does BB King place himself in today's music? In a few words: 'I think I'm that link between blues and jazz.' We closed the interview with a question about the three blues guitarists Albert, Freddie and BB King. Are they related? 'No,' says BB. 'I've heard - I say I've *heard* - that Albert's last name is Nelson. I don't know about Freddie. But my last name is King.' ●