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EDITORIAL

ONE of the more regrettable tendencies which we have observed during the course of the year, has been the decline in the quality of popular music making within the major industrial regions of southern Africa.

African musicians who live in the larger towns are exposed to a continuous bombardment of music on both radio and records, most of which is of foreign origin of the simplest kind, semi-negro dance music predominating. These items are adapted for their own use by local groups of singers and instrumentalists, and set with vernacular words. The end result can be described as an urban "folk" adaptation of the original. Naturally, with a musically oral people such as the Bantu, the process does not end at that point, but a series of broad adaptations follow, so that a single tune of American origin may be found recorded and published by the several local gramophone companies in a dozen or more different ways, each of them claiming to be an "original" composition.

Imitation of the foreign soon evolves into imitation of the semi-foreign which, lacking the genuine stimulus of indigenous musical craft, readily becomes commonplace, repetitious and uninspired, of which scores of recordings issued of recent years bear sombre witness. In fact, the standard of urban music in most African towns is so poor that it cannot be said to reflect in any marked degree the musical talent of Africa.

In certain places further north, notably in the southern Congo, musicians have retained much of the folk idiom in their new compositions with a corresponding vitality in their popular songs.

It emphasizes, once again, the value of the work and studies being undertaken by the members of the Society scattered throughout Africa and the truth of the saying attributed to George Moore, that

"Art must be parochial in the beginning to become cosmopolitan in the end."

THE EDITOR.