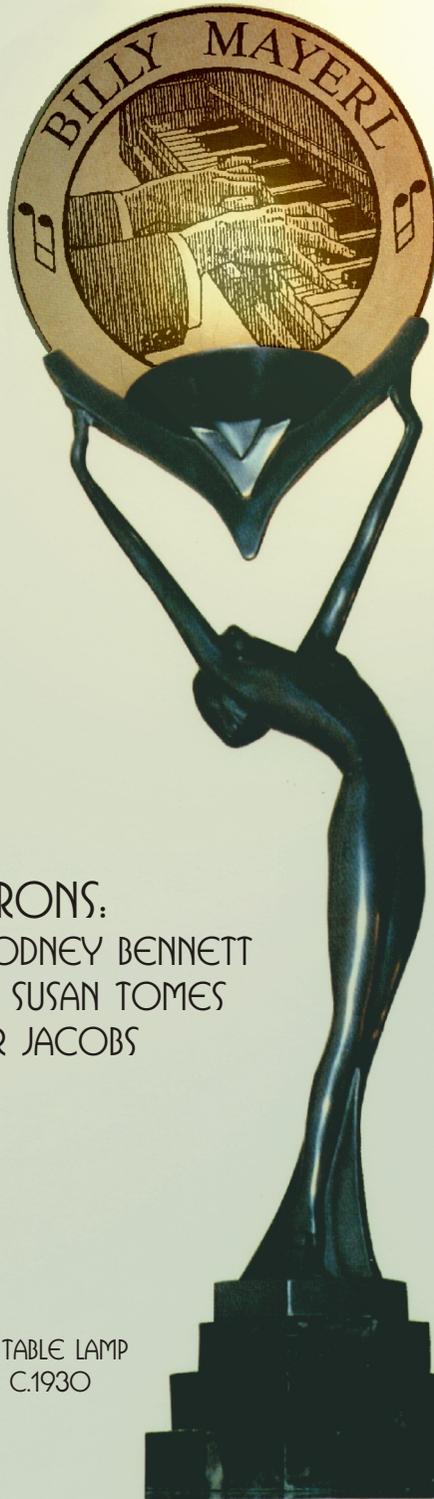


FEB. 2012

No.29



PATRONS:

SIR RICHARD RODNEY BENNETT
ERIC PARKIN, SUSAN TOMES
PETER JACOBS

COVER BASED ON A TABLE LAMP
FROM THE SAVOY C.1930

Ken Russell film maker who promoted Billy on TV John Watson 3
 Ethan Uslan concert revue Mike Harth 4
 The Life & Times & Music of Ray Noble Brian Willey 5
 Rhythm pianists on Desert Island Discs John Watson 7
 Billy's Desert Island Discs interviewed by Roy Plomley Graham Bowler .. 10
 Christopher Duckett Recital review Mike Harth 11
 Richard Rodney Bennett the complete musician A Meredith & P Harris 12
 Obituary: John Smith Mike Lorenzini 13
 British Light Music Part 2 Mike Harth 14

As we start 2012 I can report that the B.M.S. currently has a total of ninety members, most of whom are in the UK with twenty or so members in the EU/USA Australia & New Zealand

Our website www.billymayersociety.co.uk is continuing to attract attention due mainly to the efforts of BMS member Roy Wainwright our esteemed webmaster.

This year will see the facilities at Shellwood include High Definition Video which will help to further enhance the DVDs and YouTubes produced, speaking of which the following are now available .

- Ethan UslanBMS concert 2011.....£10 inc post (UK)
 - Christopher DuckettBMS concert 2011.....£10 inc post (UK)
 - Keith NicholsBMS concert 2011.....£10 inc post (UK)
- Phone 02082241521 or email shell.wood@shellwood.co.uk to order your copy.

We wish you luck with the enclosed Suduko style puzzle which was devised by that fiend Mike Harth...the winner will be drawn from a lucky dip on 28th Feb 2012.

The prize will be a choice of any DVD or CD produced by Shellwood.

Christopher Duckett will be giving a concert at the The Catholic Centre 2 Dukes Ave. Chiswick W4 2AE Sunday 15th July 3.30pm for the Blenheim Music Circle.

Sunday Concerts & Meetings for 2012 at Shellwood 3-6pm
Shellwood, Saint Leonards Rd. Thames Ditton, Surrey KT7 0RN
tel: 0208 2241521

Concerts are £15 inc. refreshments (*payment in advance please*)

- Feb. 12th AGM followed by a members' meeting
- April 15th **Concert** Alex Hassan
- May 27th Members' Meeting
- July 1st **Pianola Concert** Julian Dyer
- Sept. 30th Members' Meeting
- Nov. 11th **Concert** Peter Jacobs
- Dec. 16th Members' Xmas Concert (£5 per person inc. refreshments)

Ken Russell: film maker who promoted Billy Mayerl on television

The film director Ken Russell, who died on 27 November 2011 aged 84, will be remembered not only for his challenging movies but also the controversies they often caused. His interest in music inspired a number of films about classical composers, including Elgar, Delius, Mahler, Tchaikovsky and Liszt, the latter given particularly outrageous treatment.

The flamboyant film maker also made arts documentaries for television. I remember watching a broadcast more than two decades ago entitled “Ken Russell's ABC of British Music” (London Weekend Television, 08 April 1988). This was a special edition of the acclaimed and now lamented South Bank Show which he both directed and presented. Writing for the British Film Institute, Michael Brooke said the programme “fully matches its title, being an alphabetical trawl through both the history of British music and Russell's own likes and dislikes.”

About half way through the programme, when losing interest somewhat, I was startled to hear Ken Russell suddenly announce the name of Billy Mayerl. As I recall, he said something like: “And M is also for Mayerl,” although this could be erroneous for one online source places the item under P for piano. Viewers then saw none other than Eric Parkin sitting at an upright piano placed in the middle of a bare television studio. The renowned concert artist then played just one Mayerl piece. While I cannot be sure which one, I recall it was a lively novelty (possibly Ace of Clubs or Ace of Diamonds) and was a delight to see. It remains one of the very few examples of Billy Mayerl's music on television.

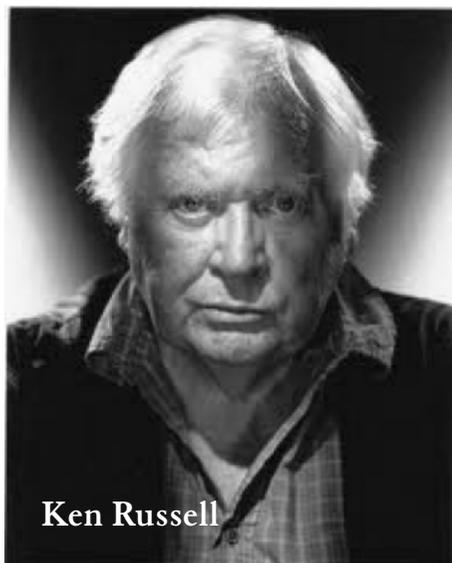
Eric Parkin's appearance on the small screen was timely. The previous year, 1987, had seen the release of his Marigold LP for the Chandos label, the first in a whole series of all-Billy Mayerl albums. Looking back we see that the 1980s was a time of renewed interest in Billy Mayerl's music. The Marigold disc was sandwiched by two other notable all-Billy Mayerl LPs: an earlier one by Peter Jacobs from 1985, and one by Susan Tomes the year after in 1989. All three pianists would become patrons

of the yet-to-be-formed Billy Mayerl Society.³ One group which had been founded that decade was the Midland Gershwin Mayerl Society.

On occasion Eric Parkin was to be seen in person at Billy Mayerl Society events. At one of these I took the opportunity to remind him of his participation in Ken Russell's ABC of British Music and said how much it had been appreciated. After so many years I guessed that only Mayerl enthusiasts would remember it. As I recollect, Eric Parkin smiled, played down the episode and with some amusement said it had become tiring because Ken Russell had cajoled him into playing piece after piece by Mayerl, not for filming purposes but simply because he liked hearing them. I believe the project had come about because they had worked together before, or at least knew each other. Certainly Eric Parkin was the ideal pianist for the task and it would have done his career no harm.

Whatever we think of Ken Russell's films for the cinema, he deserves credit for championing British music on television at time when much of it was unfashionable. Moreover, putting the spotlight on Billy Mayerl by getting one of his pre-eminent interpreters in the studio was an inspired choice which gave some welcome publicity at peak viewing time to a neglected composer who certainly deserved it.

John Watson Nov 2011.



4 **BMS Recital June 5, 2011: Ethan Uslan**

Like so many of the best ragtime/traditional jazz pianists, Ethan studied classical piano, all the while harbouring a secret addiction to this other idiom, and learning to play in the styles of Fats Waller, Jelly Roll Morton et al. He developed his improvising skills while accompanying a theatre group which built scenes up from suggestions given them by their audiences and accompanying silent films. He still does this latter as well as giving concerts, mainly in North Carolina, where he now lives.

We were able to get an idea of his playing from examples on his web-site, so we knew he was on the right wavelength before booking him... he didn't disappoint. His recital started with one of my favourite numbers, *Charleston* by James P Johnson, in a dynamic version which really set my feet tapping. Next he went classical with Beethoven's *Fur Elise*, known to us all, I imagine, though after a few bars it was turned on its head with some imaginative variations, even including a spot of boogie.

Then, in slower tempo and more meditative style, we had *Tin Roof Blues*, named, we were informed, after a famous New Orleans café which at the time of composition was *the* place to be. Hoagy Carmichael's *Stardust* stayed in similar mood, and then we were treated to some Billy, which I imagine had been learnt specially for this recital. *Robots* was well up to speed, and it was followed by Billy's transcription of *Smoke Gets In Your Eyes*, played with a delicacy of touch which demonstrated that he is not just a stomper.

Followed a number from one of my favourite musical scores, *Pal Joey* by Richard Rodgers from the time when he was working with Lorenz Hart, and producing music in a more sophisticated style than his later work with Oscar Hammerstein II: this was *I Could Write A Book*, perhaps the only straightforwardly romantic number in the entire show.

Fortunately the Shellwood Music Room is equipped with projection facilities, and so next we were able to watch one of Buster Keaton's silent comedies, *The Playhouse*, in which he plays a number of parts, including all the members of the orchestra as well as 9 members of a minstrel show, while Ethan accompanied

while of course adding a good deal to films, also involved certain losses, particularly in pace.

After that he gave us a lively and inventive version of one of Gershwin's best numbers, *Nice Work If You Can Get It*, following it with another of my personal favourites, *Let's Misbehave*. This was originally intended for an early show of Porter's, *Paris*, but dropped in favour of *Let's Do It*, they could certainly write them in those days! Ethan's take on it was, I rather think, inspired by memories of his 2 young children!

Inhibition, a 1931 number, was new to me, and I found it interesting rather than memorable, but it made a good foil to the previous number.

The Puppets Suite is one of Billy's best, and Ethan next played two of its three numbers for us: *Judy*, given a pleasantly lazy lilt, and *Punch*, which received the requisite brio (and the *pp* conclusion, which Billy failed to give us on his recording).

Old Rocking Chair made a pleasant contrast, and was followed by Ethan's take on *Classical Syncopation (with apologies to Chopin.)* This of course reminded me of the great days when practically every pianist on the circuit had his version of 'ragging the classics.'

For his concluding number he put together a *Nostalgic Medley* which had distinctly British overtones, so I guess he had done his homework before arriving on these shores. This ended a quite unique recital which gave me much pleasure, and I hope we will hear him again before too long.

Mike Harth 2011



The life & times & music of Ray Noble



When Ray Noble won a 'Melody Maker' orchestral arranging contest in 1926, the success transformed his life and he became one of the most notable of British bandleaders, arrangers and songwriters of the 1930s and 40s.

Born on December 17th 1903 in Brighton, he was educated at Dulwich College and Cambridge University. For a short period he then attended the Royal Academy of Music for, having commenced piano lessons at the age of 10 he had long held the ambition to become musically famous, perhaps as a concert pianist even though his father, a distinguished surgeon, was far more interested in his son's education in the medical field.

It was during his classical musical tuition that a chance visit to Wimbledon Palais stirred his interest in modern dance music. Suddenly realizing there was more to popular music than he had previously thought, it eventually led him to form a small group and, writing music for it, gave him the rudiments

'Melody Maker' contest was £10, but with it went such a glowing eulogy about his arrangement that he was offered a job as a staff arranger to the Lawrence Wright Music Publishing Company and that in turn led him to become resident arranger for the newly-formed BBC Dance Orchestra under the direction of Jack Payne. By 1929 he had been appointed staff arranger and assistant recording director for HMV records, and was soon to take over from Carroll Gibbons as HMV's Head of Light Music and conductor of its studio-based recording group known as the New Mayfair Dance Orchestra. Ray Noble's selection of musicians was critical and using only the top players of the time — aficionados would recognize and appreciate such names as Freddy Gardner (alto sax), Max Goldberg and Nat Gonella (trumpets), Tiny Winters (bass) and Reg. Leopold (violin).

He had turned his hand to songwriting back in the mid-20s but it wasn't until 1931 that the first hit emerged *Goodnight Sweetheart*. To say it was an immediate success is putting it mildly — it was a triumph. Naturally its first recording was by the New Mayfair Dance Orchestra, and sung by a young South African vocalist, Al Bowlly. It featured in a stage revue, 'Earl Carroll's Vanities of 1931' and also crossed the Atlantic, where American superstar Rudy Vallée put it straight into the American Hit Parade.

With the success of his HMV recordings, by 1934 Ray Noble had become a big name in America and received an invitation to work in New York leading a star-studded band at "The Rainbow Room", a venue on the 65th floor of the Rockefeller Center. The band's engagement continued until 1936 and, during that time, its personnel included many great personalities who eventually became bandleaders in their own right — such names as Tommy Dorsey, Charlie Spivak, Will Bradley, Claude Thornhill and the now legendary Glenn Miller.

Ray's songs were also a huge success: *By the Fireside* (1932); *Love is the Sweetest Thing* (1932); *The Very Thought of You*

that may be familiar. *Goodnight Sweetheart* and *By the Fireside* were his melodies only, but the other songs had words and music all his own work.

Vocalist Al Bowlly had gone to the States with Ray but in late 1936 Al decided to return to England and his departure heralded the break-up of the New York band. At this point Ray decided to tour the States and then try and break into another entertainment medium in Hollywood but not the Hollywood of the Movies however.

Radio shows were big news in the mid-1930s and, with the tour having made his name a household word in radio entertainment, America's West Coast couldn't wait to receive him as a top musical director. 'The George Burns and Gracie Allen Show' was first to welcome him, then Jack Benny and finally Edgar Bergen - the great American ventriloquist with his famous dummy Charlie McCarthy. This show eventually transferred to television and Ray, who already had a regular speaking part, became even more well-known. He had lived in the States for so long that he was believed to be a native American and his audiences used to marvel at his posh English accent!

Once settled in Los Angeles he formed a new band, signed Tony Martin as his vocalist, and wrote the song *I Hadn't Anyone Till You* for him to record securing yet another standard song that would endure. An idea for a dance band suite based on the names of Red Indian tribes produced five new works, perhaps the best known being *Cherokee*.

Ray retired in the mid-50s and he and his wife, Gladys, settled in Santa Barbara, California. Eventually the lure of their country of birth brought them both back to England but, having become acclimatized to Californian sunshine; they soon decided to make a home in Jersey in the Channel Islands where they lived happily for some 10 years.

During the mid-1960s I was producing a live late-night BBC radio show and on one occasion a Ray Noble song was programmed.

During its announcement the presenter, Brian Matthew, happened to say "I wonder if he's still around and what he's doing now?" never fully believing he might hear the remark. A few minutes later the studio phone rang and a voice said, "This is Ray Noble, thanks for asking, I am still around, retired and living in Jersey and enjoying listening to your programme." We continued a happy conversation for several more minutes, for he was so pleased to have been remembered, and delighted to have heard one of his songs being played on the air some thirty years after it had been composed.

In the mid-1970s he and his wife returned to the States where he became noticeably ill with cancer at the beginning of 1978. At the insistence of his brother he came back to London for treatment, but it was too late. Two weeks later, on 3rd April 1978, he died in University College Hospital at the age of 74.

In 2003 the Brighton & Hove Bus Company named a bus in his honour a modest reminder of one of Britain's great personalities in our world of musical entertainment.

Brian Willey 2011



Ray Noble in the USA 1950s

Sun, sea, sand & syncopation: Rhythm pianists on Desert Island Discs

Desert Island Discs is one of the longest running programmes on BBC radio. First broadcast during wartime Britain on 29 January 1942, its enduring appeal is due to a combination of factors. In particular, the insight into the guest's character revealed in interview, complemented by their personal taste in music. The latter can sometimes be surprising, which makes the show all the more entertaining (for example, concert pianist Peter Donohoe chose Russ Conway's *Side Saddle*). I suspect listeners are delighted when a subject's favourite music coincides with their own.

The Desert Island Discs Archive was recently made accessible online. It contains a wealth of information and has a search facility which opens up new possibilities for research. After a short investigation we quickly realise that people from all walks of life were castaways (as guests are called). Not everyone was famous, but all had some claim to distinction. Many were from the world of entertainment, and here we will look at one small but select group: the rhythm pianists.

Billy Mayerl appeared on Desert Island Discs on 21 April 1958. The 30-minute edition was transmitted on the Home Service. He was interviewed by the show's founder and presenter for many years, the broadcaster Roy Plomley. Billy Mayerl's eight choices are listed below:

- 1 Ravel: Empress of the Pagodas from Mother Goose Suite; Philharmonia Orch./Guilini.
- 2 Anthony Collins: Vanity Fair; London Promenade Orch./Collins.
- 3 Stravinsky: Song of the Nightingale; Cincinnati Symphony Orch./Goossens.
- 4 Roger Quilter: A Children's Overture; London Philharmonic Orch./Wood.
- 5 John Ireland: Sea Fever; Frederick Harvey (baritone) with Orchestra/Philip Green.
- 6 Robert Farnon: State Occasion; Queen's Hall Light Orchestra/Farnon.

- 7 Milhaud, Sumare from Saudades do Brasil, transcribed for violin and piano by Claude Lévy; Heifetz/Arpad Sandor.
- 8 Johann Strauss: Laughing Song from Die Fledermaus; Sari Barabas (soprano) with Nordwestdeutschen Rundfunk Philharmonic Orch./Schuchter.

What is less well known is that other castaways chose Billy Mayerl's recordings to entertain them on the imaginary island. The number is small for in the seven decades following the first broadcast in 1942 only three guests wanted to hear Billy at the piano. They are listed below (broadcast dates in brackets):

Stanley Holloway (12 February 1962): *Railroad Rhythm*; Billy Mayerl. The comedian, actor and singer had known Billy since the Co-Optimists stage shows of about 1930. Almost two decades later, in 1949, he had toured with Billy in Australia. This was actually Stanley Holloway's second time on the show; his first being aired on 4 July 1951 with eight entirely different discs, none of which featured Billy. In conversation with Roy Plomley.

M. M. Kaye (31 December 1983): *Nola*; The Billy Mayerl Rhythm Ensemble. The novelist, who was born in India and spent much of her life there, is the author of *The Far Pavilions*. In conversation with Roy Plomley.

Sir Trevor Holdsworth (17 March 1991): *Marigold*; Billy Mayerl. The industrialist and ex-president of the CBI was Chairman of National Power. He also talked to Sue Lawley about his involvement with British Satellite Broadcasting (BSB).

Another of the top rhythm pianists on Desert Island Discs was Carroll Gibbons. He was featured on the 08 January 1952 edition and picked the following eight records:

- 1 Tchaikovsky: Piano Concerto No. 1 in B flat minor; Philharmonia Orch./Dobrowen, Soloist: Solomon.
- 2 Chopin: Waltz in D flat major, Op. 64, 'Minute Waltz'; soloist: Vladimir de Pachmann.
- 3 Rachmaninov: Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini; London Philharmonic Orch., soloist: Benno Moiseiwitsch

- 5 The Melachrino Strings and Orch.: Charmaine.
- 6 Les Howard: Some Enchanted Evening.
- 7 Robert Farnon and His Orchestra: Great Day.
- 8 Puccini: One fine day (Madam Butterfly); soloist: Joan Hammond.

It is well known that castaways are allowed one luxury item. While a piano is one of the most requested, neither Billy Mayerl nor Carroll Gibbons chose one. Instead their respective items were a “well-stocked bar,” and “music manuscript paper.” Listeners also like to know which book the subject wants, but these were not stated for either.

More imaginatively, two castaways chose not an ordinary piano as their luxury item but a pianola. They were: Rod Hull, the Emu comedian (09 April 1977), and the artist John Piper (10 December 1983). Just to be safe, the former also specified “a supply of piano rolls.” Thus their music making and listening was not confined only to eight discs.

Of all the rhythm pianists, Carroll Gibbons proved to be the most popular. The guests who picked his recordings were: Joan Jay, fashion, glamour girl (19 March 1942), Tom Webster, artist, sports cartoonist (23 April 1942), Leslie Henson, actor, comedian (18 July 1951), Pamela Brown, British actor (13 March 1953), Zena Dare, Music Hall star (28 January 1957), Hubert Greg, actor, playwright, lyricist (04 April 1966), Xenia Field, horticulturalist, editor (12 June 1967), Susan Hampshire, British actor (05 February 1968), Eric Shipton, explorer, mountaineer (22 July 1968), Betty Kenward, Jennifer's Diary columnist (14 December 1974), Jessica Mitford, Mitford sister, writer (06 August 1977), Charles Causley, poet (01 December 1979), Derek Tangye, writer, journalist (01 November 1980), Dennis Potter, playwright, screenwriter (21 February 1988), Lady Soames, author, historian (22 March 1992) and Marguerite Patten, cookery writer (21 January 2001). Note: Descriptions shown after a guest's name are those used by the programme Archive. Guests have been arranged chronologically rather than alphabetically.

The programme broadcast on 21 September 1959 featured pianist, violinist and

composer Peggy Cochrane. Her luxury was a piano and her eight records were:

- 1 Bing Crosby: Have You Met Miss Jones?
- 2 Ravel: Piano Concerto in G Major; Hamburg Radio Symphony Orch., soloist: Monique Haas
- 3 The Ray Ellington Quartet: Things Ain't What They Used to Be
- 4 Patrick Waddington & Peggy Cochrane: Lazy Day
- 5 Jack Payne and His Orchestra: There's a Small Hotel
- 6 Ravel: Daphnis and Chloe, Daybreak; Philharmonia Orch. / Eugene Ormandy
- 7 Wally Scott and Orch.: Westminster Waltz
- 8 Rachmaninov: Symphony No. 3 in A minor; Philharmonia Orch. / Rachmaninov

Recordings by Peggy Cochrane at the piano were chosen by Richard Hearne [Mr. Pastry], actor, comedian (01 April 1952), her husband Jack Payne, bandleader (01 September 1958) and William Hartnell, the first Doctor Who (23 August 1965). The latter two both picked the same piece: the El Alamein Concerto played by Peggy Cochrane with Jack Payne and his Orchestra. Richard Hearne picked Peggy Cochrane playing a Selection of Favourite Tunes.

Since the programme's inception about 67 of all the guests were pianists. There is no space here to list all the jazz and concert pianists, but those in the popular domain not mentioned before include: Winifred Atwell (23 September 1952), Stanley Black (08 December 1958), Steve Race (02 November 1959), Semprini (11 January 1960), Russ Conway (14 March 1960), Liberace (23 May 1960), Kay Cavendish (05 February 1962), Mrs Mills (17 April 1971) and Joe “Mr Piano” Henderson (15 July 1972).

It is perhaps curious that Charlie Kunz did not appear on the show. However, six people chose his discs. They were: Lord Charles Hill, broadcaster, doctor (31 December 1943), George Cansdale, Superintendent of London Zoo (07 January 1957), Sir Leonard Hutton, Captain of the England cricket team (07 September 1959), Godfrey Talbot, journalist, reporter (29 August 1960), Joe Davis, snooker player (17 July 1961) and Max Nicholson, ornithologist, conservationist, journalist (17 September 1995).

Edythe Baker had three admirers, each choosing the same disc: My Heart Stood Still. They were: Cecil Parker, actor (17 July 1953), John Betjeman, poet and writer (08 October 1954) and Robert Morley, actor and playwright (23 April 1962).

It is also revealing which rhythm pianists were not chosen. Searches of the Desert Island Discs archive revealed that no discs by such greats of syncopation as Patricia Rossborough, Raie Da Costa or Zez Confrey have so far been requested.

On 30 March 2011, the BBC placed online over 500 episodes from the show's archive to listen again to via the iPlayer. Unfortunately, most if not all of the programmes featuring the rhythm pianists are not among them. More information is available at www.bbc.co.uk.

In conclusion here are some thoughts regarding the programme's future. In the beginning all the music heard on Desert Island Discs would have been on 78 rpm discs. Listeners easily would have imagined the castaway sitting on a tropical beach next to an old-fashioned wind-up gramophone in raptures as their favourites were heard again. But technology moves on, and presumably by the 1990s castaways instead would have been provided with a clockwork or solar powered compact disc player. At least the programme's title still fitted the medium. However, some claim a time will come when Cds

record is. Perhaps then an mp3 player will be needed and the show will have to be renamed, possibly to something like Desert Island Downloads.

John Watson November 2011

This photo is one from a Session Billy had taken by Claude Harris for publicity purposes, the original is currently on sale for \$799.00 go to:

www.historyforsale.com

CLAUDE HARRIS
133-134 REGENT STREET, LONDON, W.1
Billy Mayerl

Billy Mayerl's Desert Island Discs Conversation with Roy Plomley BBC Home Service. Recorded 16th April. Broadcast 21st April 1958

RP Let's go back to the beginnings of your career Billy, you are a Londoner aren't you?

BM Yes, I was born in Tottenham Court Road

R Just round the corner? B Just round the corner

R Were your parents musical? B My father was, yes. He was a teacher of the violin

R Didn't he want to teach you the violin? B He tried awfully hard, but I couldn't hold the wretched thing that way.

R Uh humm ... B I found it much easier sitting at a piano. R Anyway it was a forgone conclusion you'd be a musician?

B Yes, but not a musician, the sort of musician I turned out to be, I was supposed to be a sort of high-brow waller.

R Did he send you to a musical college? B Yes, I went to Trinity College when I was about 8 years old.

R Uh huh. What was your first professional engagement, do you remember?

B I most certainly do. It was at a cinema at Shepherds Bush, "The World Before Your Eye".

Threepence, sixpence, and ninepence. I played from six to eleven every evening.

R Non-stop? .. B Well, excepting for a little ten minute break, during which time I sold chocolates on commission.

R I hope the commission was generous.

B Huh, most generous. One penny commission on twelve bars of penny chocolate.

R Oh dear, what was your salary? B Salary? Ha haaa. I got seven and six a week if that's what you mean.

R Haha. How old were you then, Billy? B I was about eleven.

R So you were doing this job every night from six to eleven after studying at the college all day.

B That's right, and it was grand fun doing it, you see. I could improvise and make up all kinds of bits of music; it didn't matter two hoots whether it fitted the picture or not.

R Hahaha. How long were you there?

- 10 **B** Oh quite a time. Over a year. You see it was so different from college, where I was sort of raised on Bach and Beethoven and Mozart. Oh, and a nasty gentleman called Clementi.
- R** Hahaha **B** Still, my views on music were *wider* than that. I loved ragtime, and I loved the moderns. Chap called 'Stravinsky' I used to adore. I was always studying his scores while I was at college. In fact I can remember my professor saying "Stravinsky. *Dreadful* noises. Out of tune flute players." Well ... I don't know, I've got different views about it. *I like* the moderns.
- R** What was your next job after that first one in the cinema at Shepherds Bush?
- B** Well I messed about in one or two dance bands and then finally I landed the job at the Savoy in the Savoy
- R** When was that? **B** About 1921 Havana Band.
- R** Before the days of broadcasting?
- B** Oh yes, even before the days of broadcasting. I remember going across to Marconi House and doing the experiments that were going on in those days ... which sat in an office and played at a sort of thing sticking out, and used to wear earphones and it sounded just like a banjo instead of a piano.
- R** That was before the days of a regular broadcasting service? **B** Yes, quite a couple of years before.
- R** So you're a real pioneer **B** Haaa, I'm afraid I am, yes. **R** What happened after the Havana Band?
- B** Oh, then I went on the halls. I'd make some sort of reputation because we were on the air about two or three times a week in the old cat's whisker days, and errrr I did very well on the halls.
- R** And since then you've played the piano just about all over the world, except China
- B** Except China, that's right, yes. **R** When did you start composing, Billy?
- B** I started, well, when I was at college. I wrote quite a few sort of little pieces, but errr they didn't amount to much.
- R** Mmmm **B** My first one I did get published when I was about fifteen. It was a suite for piano.
- R** Yes. Since then many piano pieces, including that perennial favourite "Marigold".
- B** Hahaha, good old Marigold, yes **R** How many copies of that have you sold?
- B** Ooof, well over a million now, I should think. It's my bread, my butter, *and* my jam.
- R** And of course you've composed many reviews and musical comedies for the London stage
- B** Yes, there was "Nippy", "Over She Goes", "Sporting Love", "Runaway Love".
- R** The gaiety shows always with 'Love' in the title **B** That's right, with dear old Laddie Cliff.
- R** Which show do you look back on with most pleasure?
- B** Oh I think "Over She Goes" was my favourite. Well you see, I wrote the music, I conducted the orchestra, and Laddie allowed me to have a corn of financial interest, and it was a big success, you know.
- R** Uh huh. You were also an actor in one of the shows, weren't you?
- B** Ha haaa, like that! ... Well, I played juvenile lead, if that's what you mean, in a show called "Shake Your Feet"
- R** Yes, and you danced? **B** I dance. Well yes, I danced, all right. -at the London Hippodrome.
- R** We hear you on the air nowadays Billy and see you on television. Any particular plans for the future?
- B** No, just to go on doing what I'm doing now, that's all. You see, I've moved to a new house in the country and, I just come up to town when there's a job of work to do, and, well, I'm very happy doing that.
- R** Yes, and composing in the garden? **B** Composing in the garden, yes!
- R** After you've mown the lawn **B** Haaa. After I've mown the lawn, yes, I hadn't thought of that... (*fades out*)

Graham Bowler 2011



Stereo 78 player!

BMS Recital August 7, 2011: Christopher Duckett

There's a saying that you don't always appreciate what you've got on your own doorstep, and I sometimes wonder if we realise how lucky we are to have Chris Duckett playing for us. This is his third annual recital, and each time he has featured a different collection of pieces. If I live long enough, I may be able to hear him in the entire BM repertoire!

He started off this time with *The Jazz Master*, whose title always reminds me of the days when I, for one, didn't reach for the off switch when jazz was being played the meaning of the word has changed a lot in its hundred or so years. From his performance one would hardly realise how difficult, and exhausting, it is to play. It was followed by *The Pompous Gremlin*, one of Billy's numerous arrangements of orchestral novelties, and then came *Weeping Willow*. Billy wrote a considerable number of pieces with botanical names: this one always reminds me of *Lily Pond*, their middle sections in particular having a similar feel to them, especially harmonically, and also they are among his few pieces with a touch of romanticism. None of that in *Minuet for Pamela*, one of his later pieces in neo-classical style, while *Fireside Fusiliers*, in which for once the title came first, is in altogether jollier mood.

White Heather seems to me to show a definite Scottish influence not only in the charmingly syncopated version of *Annie Laurie* which forms the centre-piece but also in the opening section. *Wistaria* continues the floral tradition, with a particularly enjoyable B section. *Sussex Downs* is very much in the English pastoral style: it also feels as if it was first composed as an orchestral piece. Chris gave us some particularly delicate playing here.

Postman's Knock, one of Billy's later novelties, is also one of my favourites. Very short and very fast, it gives the impression he is racing on his round rather than walking. *Minuet by Candlelight*, the other of the two late minuets, is perhaps the more attractive of the two, with some deft harmonic touches. Then *Loose Elbows* is another of the early novelties, and as fiendish as its companions, but it gave Chris no problems in fact, he made it look easy.

At the time when Billy wrote his *Head Over Heels* selection, the piano was king and it was standard practice for the record companies to issue recordings of piano selections from musicals of

The day. Of course, the pianists had something¹¹ worthwhile to work on: I can't imagine piano selections from *Phantom* or *Les Miserables*, for instance, being particularly popular. This piece is of especial interest because Billy recorded it note-for-note as his published arrangement. *May I Have The Next Romance With You* is perhaps the most famous song here, but it is full of attractive numbers. One can't help wondering what went wrong to produce the present dearth of memorable songs.

After the interval, the inner man or woman being duly refreshed, Chris started his second half with another selection, this time from one of Billy's own shows, *The Millionaire Kid*. This was not a success, being taken off after a week, and the songs are perhaps not up to Billy's top standard, so that perhaps he wasn't particularly inspired by the show either. Nevertheless, there are plenty of tuneful and catchy numbers, with *Thank You Most Sincerely* perhaps being the most memorable, and it was good to have an opportunity to hear them.

Body and Soul is a number which can easily be, and often is, vulgarised, but Chris gave us a most delicate and subtle reading. He followed it with three less well-known transcriptions which demonstrated clearly what a master Billy was of this particular art and what excellent taste he had: he obviously knew when less is more, always leaving us feeling we would have welcomed a little more. Of these three, I perhaps enjoyed most the first section of *Chasing Shadows*, while *Deep Henderson* does anyone know anything about the provenance of its title? in lightly rhythmic style, was as good as I've ever heard it.

Alabama Bound is one of four early transcriptions all of which are quite brutal in their demands on the pianist. Chris, of course, came though with colours flying. He followed it with a number which has claims to be the most beautiful melody Billy ever wrote, *There's A Star In The Sky*, from the film *Cheer Up*, giving us tenderness without sentimentality.

Tormented is a blues, and as such not a favourite of your hard-hearted unsentimental reviewer, but Chris gave it perhaps even more than it deserved.

The *Highland Swing*, containing more syncopation of Scotch songs, certainly swung, while in Billy's transcription of Fats Waller's version of the old nursery song *Patty-cake, Patty-cake, Baker Man* it was interesting to detect trademarks of both composers.

Then for an encore Chris gave us perhaps my all-time Billy favourite, *Honky-Tonk*, played perfectly. One can ask for no more.

BMS Archivist

The BMS Archivist John Smith died in June 2011. He finally succumbed to pancreatic cancer after a long fight bravely born. He confounded the doctors by living two years longer than they predicted. A good pianist, he played both classical and jazz, and of course Billy Mayerl. His other passions were cycling and gardening. His front garden was always a riot of colour in summer. In his will he left his sheet music collection to the BMS. His depth of musical and gardening knowledge and gentle manner will be missed by many.



This photo of John, taken when he was 38, is from a local newspaper interview on the occasion of a London to Brighton charity bike ride for the British Heart Foundation.

He is shown here with his “Wind Cheetah” tricycle nicknamed Speedy.

Mike Lorenzini 2011



The duties of the Archivist are now jointly handled by Mike & Kathy Lorenzini, with the archive copies and originals being stored and catalogued at Shellwood.

Richard Rodney Bennett

The Complete Musician

Anthony Meredith with Paul Harris

Omnibus 2010 ISBN 978.1.849.38.545.9

At long last we now have a long overdue biography of Sir Richard Rodney Bennett one of our patrons.

Apart from an out of date catalogue of his works with a modest biography, it is unbelievable that this important and versatile musician has been neglected. Bennett, who celebrated his 75th birthday earlier this year, has been a prolific composer with 300 commissioned concert works to his credit and over 70 film and television score including - *Murder on the Orient Express*, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *Equus* and *Four Weddings and a Funeral*.

This is very much a biography and contains musical commentary rather than analysis (there are no notational musical examples) when discussing the works. We learn much about Bennett's relationship with his family, friends, colleagues and, of course, his critics.

The writers draw on the draft of a book from the mid 90s about Bennett by the late Mike Seabrook. Whilst his published biography of Peter Maxwell Davies was enjoyable our subject has definitely been served far better by Meredith and Harris. For those who desire some 'private life' there is much chit-chat about matters that would and could not have been talked about let alone written about and published in their day. I know from discussion with Richard during the preparation of this book that he found their approach to be sensitive and not invasive. The writer's talents had already been admirably demonstrated and honed in two previous tomes on Malcolm Arnold and Malcolm Williamson. Bennett reveals himself predictably a less dry candidate for exploration than the two just cited because of the diversity of his musical involvements. This said I could nonetheless barely put down and rest from reading 'A Mischievous Muse' their biography of Williamson.



Sir RRB

The 22 chapters generate just over a 1000 footnotes housed in a separate section at the end of the book and so 3 hands or 2 bookmarks working in tandem are advised. With a list of works, discography, bibliography and index, this behemoth, weighs in at just short of 600 pages.

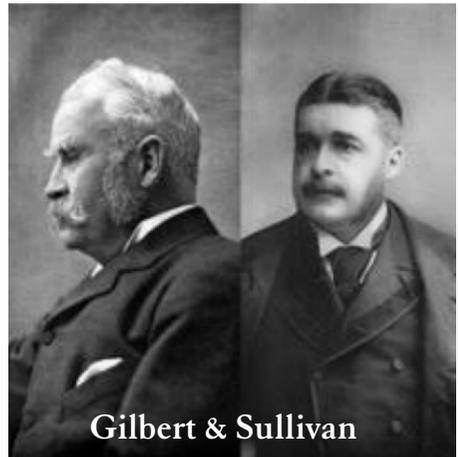
There are a few errors and 'typos' including a discussion concerning the power of lyrics using 'I've (I) got rhythm' as an example. There is greater irony in this error if you are familiar with Bennett's own cabaret song 'Words and Music'. In the credits I guess Pinky Waters may wish to be known as Pinky Winters.

Richard Rodney Bennett's lifelong enthusiasm for the music of Billy Mayerl provided us with a fine recording on the EMI label issued in the mid 70s and subsequently re-released with other British piano music on CD. He arguably started the resurgence of interest in Mayerl's music and propagated a renaissance we have all been able to enjoy. This is a magnificent biography.

Paul Roberts 2011

It is interesting that Wikipedia says '*Light music is a generic term applied to a mainly British musical style of "light" orchestral music*', so it would seem I'm not being unduly chauvinist choosing to write about British composers. This time round I thought I'd better start with the King of British Light Music in fact, he has a good claim to be regarded as the king of light music period. I'm referring, of course, to Sir Arthur Sullivan.

His greatest claim to that position is undoubtedly the series of 14 operettas he composed to Sir William Gilbert's libretti. The weakest of them from the musical point of view is *The Sorcerer*, where the libretto quite clearly was uncongenial to Sullivan: even the music he produced for *The Grand Duke*, to far and away Gilbert's worst libretto, was better. But let's forget the failures and the half-successes: fortunately there's plenty left to celebrate.



Gilbert & Sullivan

Their first collaboration, *Thespis*, was not a great success, and they went their separate ways for a time. Fortunately for us, they were given another chance in the form of what was originally intended as a curtain-raiser to Offenbach's *La Périchole*, on its own not long enough to fill an evening's entertainment. This was *Trial By Jury*, an exception to all their other work in that it has

14 No spoken dialogue. A little masterpiece, it soon became the main attraction of the evening, and led on to the great series of Savoy operettas.

The Mikado is generally regarded as the outstanding masterpiece of the series, with both the collaborators on the top of their form. *The Mikado*, *Ko-Ko the Lord High Executioner* and *Poo-bah the Lord High Everything Else* are classic creations and numbers such as '*The Flowers that bloom in the spring*' are part of the national consciousness.

My personal favourite, though, in a very close field, is *Iolanthe*, almost as fresh today as when it was composed in 1882, as I was able to verify in a recent production at the Savoy Theatre. *Princess Ida* is the only one in 3 acts, and the third act is something of an anti-climax after the brilliant second act, but the music is some of Sullivan's finest, much of it in its delicacy reminiscent of chamber music. It is rarely performed today, because it is largely a satire on female emancipation, now very much out-dated.

The Pirates of Penzance is one of the weaker ones, no doubt partly because it was a rush job to foil American pirates, but the double chorus – a Sullivan trademark – '*When the Foeman bares his steel*' is perhaps the finest of all of them. Then *Patience* has in *Bunthorne* one of Gilbert's most brilliant creations, while both the words and music of the comic duet between him and *Lady Jane* are a total delight.

The Yeomen of the Guard, less light-hearted than its companions, successfully evokes the period, but the note of melancholy running through it means that it is not one of my favourites. Then the last of the great ones, *The Gondoliers*, is perhaps the finest of all from the musical point of view, and interestingly enough there is an Italianate feel to the music (Sullivan had Italian as well as Irish blood in his ancestry.)

For those who are interested, one of Sullivan's operettas written after the break-up of his partnership with W.S. Gilbert, *The*

overtures as fill-up. While not up to the standard of the best Savoy operas, it was one of Sullivan's greatest successes financially, and is certainly worth hearing.

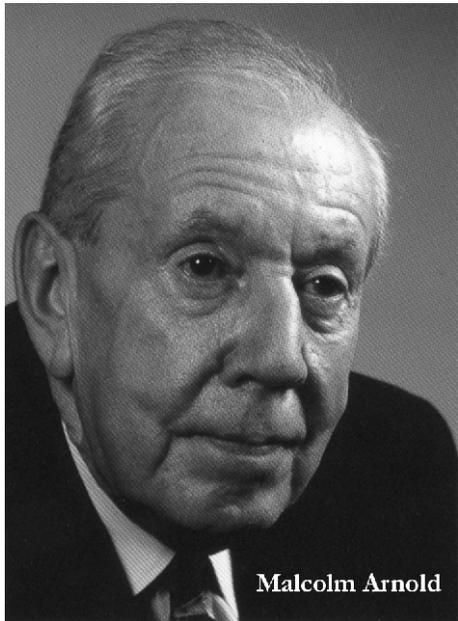
Unfortunately for him, Sullivan was not content to be a supreme composer of light music. Subscribing to Victorian values, he wanted to be recognised as a 'serious' composer, though in that area he was nothing special. He wrote an early symphony when he was 23, charming if very derivative, several oratorios, and a 'serious' opera on a libretto from Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*, as well as a deal of incidental music for theatre productions. In some ways the most interesting of these works is the very impressive music he composed at the age of 18 for Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Much of this music can be heard as fillers to recordings of the operettas. I particularly recommend the *Overtura Di Ballo*, a real masterpiece, with Sullivan in top gear.

Now I'm moving to a name that might come as a surprise to some of you, since he is a serious composer with a number of symphonies and concertos, in particular, to his credit. I'm referring to Malcolm Arnold, one of the few contemporary composers who had no inhibitions about turning his hand to the lighter side. In this he is following an honourable tradition, since for example Beethoven, Mozart, Sibelius and even that old stodge Brahms all did the same: in fact it is only comparatively recently that we have this divide between light and serious.

There is a 2-disc set of his music, entitled '*Sir Malcolm Arnold The Collection*' which I recommend, since it contains much of his most entertaining music, starting with the *Grand Grand Overture* he composed for the first Hoffnung Concert, which I had the pleasure of attending. As well as a full symphony orchestra, the score contains parts for 3 vacuum cleaners, a floor polisher, and four rifles. More to our purpose, it also features a typical Arnold and highly memorable tune.

Then there are altogether four sets of dances, two *English Dance Suites*, one *Scottish*, and one *Cornish* in 1965 he had

moved to Cornwall. Another 'Cornish' piece is *The Padstow Lifeboat*, written (and played at) the inauguration of the new lifeboat station there. The lively march is regularly interrupted by the lugubrious sound of the foghorn, obviously representing that ever-present danger to fishermen, but having to my ears more of a comic effect.



Malcolm Arnold

Malcolm Arnold

My favourite of all his works, though, is the *Concerto for Phyllis and Cyril*. When the concert pianist Cyril Smith had a stroke and lost the use of his left hand, he formed a 3-handed partnership with his wife Phyllis Sellick, who was also a concert pianist, and Arnold wrote this piece for them to play in the next Prom concert. All three movements are delightful and immediately enjoyable, but the high spot is the last, an irrepressible rumba with only one fault - it's too short. Finally I must mention another piece written for a Hoffnung concert, this time the 1960 Hoffnung Memorial Concert. It's a sort of addendum to Saint-Saens' well-known *Carnival of the Animals*, including half-a-dozen creatures Saint-Saens neglected: giraffes,



Phyllis & Cyril Smith

cows, mice, sheep, elephants and bats. All the music on this disc - there is plenty I haven't mentioned, including a guitar concerto written for Julian Bream - is worth listening to and requires no great effort to enjoy, so why not try it?

For our third example we'll make a more conventional choice. Frederic Curzon was some sort of musical prodigy: when only 16 he got a job as pianist in a London theatre orchestra, and by the time he was 20 he had his own orchestra, and was also writing music for silent films. But he decided to concentrate on playing the theatre organ, and spent twenty years touring, playing in halls all over the country. Later he was for some years head of the Boosey and Hawkes Light Music Department as well as a stint as president of the Light Music Society.

Mike Harth 2011



Sir Frederic Curzon

<u>January</u>							<u>February</u>							<u>March</u>							
Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su	
						1			1	2	3	4	5				1	2	3	4	
2	3	4	5	6	7	8	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	
16	17	18	19	20	21	22	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	
23	24	25	26	27	28	29	27	28	29					26	27	28	29	30	31		
30	31																				
<u>April</u>							<u>May</u>							<u>June</u>							
Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su	
						1			1	2	3	4	5	6					1	2	3
2	3	4	5	6	7	8	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
16	17	18	19	20	21	22	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	
23	24	25	26	27	28	29	28	29	30	31				25	26	27	28	29	30		
30																					
<u>July</u>							<u>August</u>							<u>September</u>							
Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su	
						1			1	2	3	4	5						1	2	
2	3	4	5	6	7	8	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
16	17	18	19	20	21	22	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	
23	24	25	26	27	28	29	27	28	29	30	31			24	25	26	27	28	29	30	
30	31																				
<u>October</u>							<u>November</u>							<u>December</u>							
Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su	
						1				1	2	3	4						1	2	
8	9	10	11	12	13	14	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
15	16	17	18	19	20	21	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
22	23	24	25	26	27	28	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	
29	30	31					26	27	28	29	30			24	25	26	27	28	29	30	
														31							

Sunday Concerts & Meetings for 2012 at Shellwood 3-6pm
Shellwood, Saint Leonards Rd. Thames Ditton, Surrey KT7 0RN
tel: 0208 2241521

Concerts are £15 inc. refreshments (*payment in advance please*)

- Feb. 12th AGM followed by a members' meeting
 April 15th **Concert** Alex Hassan
 May 27th Members' Meeting
 July 1st **Pianola Concert** Julian Dyer
 Sept. 30th Members' Meeting
 Nov. 11th **Concert** Peter Jacobs
 Dec. 16th Members' Xmas Concert (£5 per person inc. Refreshments)