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THE SONG OF
THE BUSY BEES

by BILLY MAYERL

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Editorial

It had to happen one day.....I mean all good things come to an end. What I'm trying to say is that this is the last issue of the Billy Mayerl Society magazine (unless there is someone out there who is prepared to produce it in the future). After this issue we will notify BMS members by email, phone or post of the dates for meetings and concerts. Our website will also contain the same information www.billymayerlsociety.co.uk.

Because of this new situation it has been decided to give life membership to all current BMS subscribers. New members can have life membership for a one-off payment of 5 pounds. (Life membership means for the life of the Society.) We will continue to have concerts and meetings for the foreseeable future.

Our heartfelt thanks to all who have contributed in the past to the 32 issues of the BMS magazine.

Mike Lorenzini

Editor Mike Harth, graphics and design Mike Lorenzini.

Sunday Concerts & Meetings for 2015 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. 22nd AGM followed by a members' meeting
 April 26th Members' meeting
 June 7th Members' meeting
 Aug. 23rd **Concert** Alex Hassan
 Oct. 25th **Concert** Stephanie Trick & Paolo Alderighi
 Dec. 13th Members' Xmas Concert (£5 per person inc. refreshments)

Sir Malcolm Arnold his life and times

As a working musician, Malcolm Arnold was a trumpeter and, as a performer, he was once described by the critic John Amis as resembling a Disney creature: "When he played a solo he would change colour, turning from pink to all shades of red, through purple to puce then, when finished, he would regard his instrument with disgust, as though it had pooped on the carpet".



He began life in Northampton on 21st October 1921. He claimed he became aware of music at the age of four soon learning the piano, violin and viola and then, being inspired by listening to Louis Armstrong records, he taught himself to play the trumpet. He won an open scholarship to the Royal College of Music at the age of sixteen and studied the instrument under the great virtuoso Ernest Hall - and composition and orchestration with Dr. Gordon Jacob. In 1941 he won the Cobbett Prize and began his instrumental career with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, becoming its principal trumpet two years later. After brief war service and a short contract with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, he returned to the LPO in 1946.

Additionally he became an accomplished conductor but composition was the true love. He wrote a suite, "Sea Shanties", in 1943 which gave him the acclaim he was seeking, to enable him to turn his attention to being a full-time composer.

In 1948 he won the Mendelssohn Scholarship which enabled him to spend the rest of the year studying in Italy, devoting himself entirely to composition. That same year brought us the overture "Beckus the Dandipratt", introduced to the world of music by conductor Eduard van Beinum, and was to secure his future as a master of composition and orchestration. He was immediately dubbed "one of the great hopes of British music" and although, at times, he tended to break with convention he produced music that was tonal, attractive, witty, high-spirited and, above all, superbly crafted - claiming that Hector Berlioz was the greatest influence on his writing. In the main he was an affable chubby chap but could suddenly switch to darker moods, as if at odds with the world. His life has been described as turbulent and emotional and affected his writing so greatly that, in his own words, "All of my music is biographical".

He was first married, in 1940, to Sheila Nicholson. The marriage ended in divorce but it did produce a daughter, Katherine, and a son, Robert. He then married Isobel Grey in 1964, and another son, Edward, was born, but that marriage also ended in divorce in 1979.

During the 1950s his punishing schedule of work for the concert platform and the cinema made him one of the most prolific British film composers. He began in the 1940s with documentary films but was soon to write for the big screen.

Amongst the 80-odd scores he achieved, the notable films were: *The Sound Barrier* (1951); *Hobson's Choice* (1953); *The Sea Shall Not Have Them* (1954); *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957) for which he won an Oscar; *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness* (1958) the theme of which won him an Ivor Novello Award; *The Roots of Heaven* (1958) and then into the 1960s with *Whistle Down the Wind* (1961); *The Heroes of Telemark* (1965); *The Reckoning* (1969) and on into the 1970s.

The more serious side of composition was, however, the great work of his life and his prolific output resulted in nine symphonies; twenty concertos for a wide variety of instruments including the violin, viola, guitar, piano, trumpet, horn, clarinet, flute; five ballets; two one-act operas - *The Dancing Master* (1951) and *The Open Window* (1956); and a huge amount of vocal, chamber, orchestral and brass band music.

There is much of his music that is now well-known and well-loved. The publishers Alfred Lengnick & Co. tried to encourage several composers to write 'English Dances', similar to the 'Slavonic Dances' written by Dvorak. It was Malcolm Arnold who took up the challenge and two sets were written during 1950/51. No. 1 of the 2nd Set, Opus 33, became very familiar to British television viewers as the theme to a long-running newspaper review programme "What the Papers Say", which was first used in 1956.

Both sets of his English Dances were later incorporated into a ballet

entitled *Solitaire* - the story of a young schoolgirl attempting to join in the playground games of the other children, but always ending up on her own. Following the English Dances came Scottish Dances and Welsh Dances, whilst following the overture *Beckus the Dandipratt* two further works were composed in similar vein, *A Sussex Overture* (1951) and *Tam O'Shanter* (1955).

His break with convention often led to unusual additions to works - for example his *Grand, Grand Overture* for a Gerard Hoffnung concert found the orchestra augmented by three vacuum cleaners and an electric floor polisher! He even used Bongos in a symphony!

In the 1960s his work was suddenly ignored and even reviled by the musical establishment as being 'out of phase' with current trends. This led to him becoming withdrawn and an alcoholic, suffering periods of depression, nervous breakdowns and attempted suicides. But not all sections of the musical fraternity had dismissed him.

He continued to write whenever possible and eventually the wheel turned full circle back to acceptance and then reverence. During that time he moved from his Richmond home in Surrey to live in Cornwall - which gave him the inspiration for the *Cornish Dances* and *The Padstow Lifeboat*.

His musical contribution to the county was recognised in 1969 when he was made a Bard of the Cornish Gorseth. He then moved on and the early 1970s found him living in Ireland with his second wife and son.

He received an Honorary Doctorate of Music at Exeter University in 1969 followed by similar honours bestowed by Durham University in 1982 and Leicester University in 1984. He won an Oscar and an Ivor Novello Award for the score of the 1957 film *Bridge on the River Kwai*.

In 1985 he was awarded a further 'Ivor' for Outstanding Services to British Music and a Fellowship of the British Academy of Songwriters, Composers and Authors was bestowed in 1999.

In 1962 Yehudi Menuhin had commissioned a Double Violin Concerto which, in 1991, formed part of his 70th birthday celebration concert in London's Queen Elizabeth Hall. There were also many concerts to mark his 80th birthday, celebrated in 2001. He was created a CBE in 1970 and received a knighthood in the 1993 New Year's Honours list.

Malcolm Arnold finally settled in Attleborough in Norfolk in the care of his companion Anthony Day and used to visit Dunston Hall, a local hotel where he could be found in the foyer playing the piano with his left hand and the trumpet with the right hand, much to the intrigue of the guests who had no idea who he was.

Upon entering his ninth decade he no longer wrote or played, by then suffering from mild dementia and also wheelchair bound - but happy to rest as a much revered legend in British musical annals. He died in 2006 just one month before his 95th birthday.

© Brian Willey 2014

Interestingly, our two recitalists in 2014 would seem to be in some respects polar opposites.

We first heard Ethan Uslan in 2013, and you can judge how impressed we were by our booking him again for 2014. He is a pianist of considerable natural talent, with an easy fluent style that is enjoyable to listen to, but I confess that this time round I was a trifle disappointed. Not with his playing, which seems if anything to have become more fluent, but I got the feeling that he is relying too much on his natural gifts, and paying insufficient attention to such peripheral matters as choice of repertoire and his introductions to the individual items.

Chris Duckett, who gave our second recital, is a very different kind of performer. His playing of his chosen repertoire is disciplined and authoritative. This is the sixth recital of Billy's works that he has given us, but he has proved entirely equal to its not inconsiderable technical demands, while his mastery of the idiom is not in doubt. It is difficult to find fault with his playing, not that I would want to, but if there is anything I would like to see him add to his already formidable armoury it is a spot of what Ethan has such a rich supply of: spontaneity and an easy relaxedness. If we could find a pianist who combined their several talents, we would have a world-beater on our hands. Mike Harth 2015



Ethan Uslan
DVD now available
£10 UK £14 overseas



DVD now available
£10 UK £14 overseas

Christopher
Duckett



photo supplied by Gerry Langdon

It is just about the eightieth anniversary of this photograph for it depicts ten musicians of the Savoy Hotel Orpheans, all pictured in 1935.

Reading from left to right is Carroll Gibbons who first joined the Orpheans in May 1924 as its pianist, later becoming the musical director and principal pianist in 1927.

The young lady is Anne Lenner, one of six singing sisters, who had become Carroll's principal vocalist in 1934 and sang and recorded with the band for the next eight years.

Harry Jacobson comes next, a fine pianist who came to the Savoy band when Carroll Gibbons re-formed it in the autumn of 1931.

George Melachrino, seen here clutching his violin, had joined the band in 1932 not only to play clarinet and alto saxophone in addition, but also as a vocalist. I am told he could play every instrument in an orchestra with the exception of the piano and harp. You may recall that during WW2 he was conductor and musical director of the British Band of the A.E.F. but, unlike his American counterpart Major Glenn Miller and his Canadian counterpart Captain Robert Farnon, our poor George was only given the rank of Warrant Officer!

Number 5, clutching his clarinet, is Laurie Payne, who also played alto and baritone saxophone and was another 1931 recruit.



Rudy Starita, with the big smile, had joined the band in 1931 as its drummer and also xylophone and vibraphone player. He was one of three Italian/American brothers who all came to London in the 1920s. Brothers Al and Ray both became bandleaders in their own right before returning to the States in the mid-1930s, but Rudy stayed on, eventually becoming known as a virtuoso percussionist.

Bill Shakespeare has his trumpet with him which tells us what instrument he played - he had joined in 1931 as principal trumpet.

Next comes Jack Evatts, who had played the double bass with the band since 1931.

With a violin tucked under his arm another string player reveals himself. To my surprise it is Reg Pursglove, who is positively the odd man out in the group. Although he was a regular musician in the Savoy Orpheans during the late 1920s he then left it in 1930 and formed his own band. He did however become a very active session musician and I am presuming that the picture was perhaps taken when they were recording, at which time he was employed as a deputy.

Finally comes Bert Thomas who had joined the band in 1927 originally as its banjo player before eventually becoming the guitarist.

A rare and wonderfully nostalgic photograph. . . Brian Willey 2015



A Fond Farewell



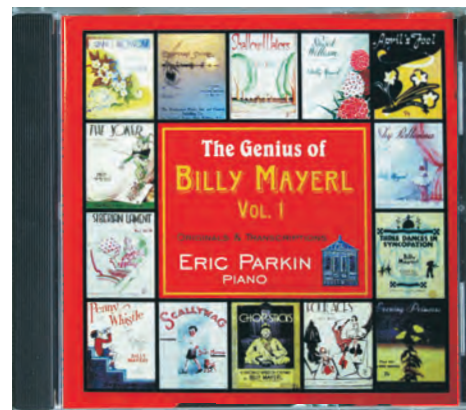
It is sad news that Shellwood Productions has ceased trading, but we can only be grateful that over its seventeen years of existence, from 1997 to 2014, it made available to us and the general public a number of recordings of works and performances that were either not otherwise to be found, or only in inadequate versions.

From the start the decision was taken to use modern technology to the fullest possible extent. So re-issues of performances originally available only on 78s, with all their technical imperfections, were cleaned up, scratches and hisses removed and the sound quality boosted to the extent possible, making them much more listenable to ears trained to modern expectations. This was a decision with which I am whole-heartedly in sympathy: I am not among those who want to hear, say, the sonatas of Beethoven or Mozart played on instruments of the period. Occasionally, maybe, for historical interest, but not for repeated performances, and so there are no fortepiano recordings, for instance, in my CD collection.

I have no nostalgic affection for those heavy, poor quality and easily broken or damaged 78 rpm recordings, and I welcomed the advent of the LP and then the CD, though even these last are currently in the process of being supplanted. But CDs will see our generation out, so let's turn our attention to the Shellwood catalogue. I don't have space enough to comment on every single recording, so I shall pick out those which I find of particular interest.

The series started off with a real winner, *Rediscoveries* played by our good friend Alex Hassan. Not only does this include Billy's earliest (and most difficult) transcriptions as well as Alex's own arrangements of a number of Billy's songs, but we are also given the complete set of *Piano Novelties* by Lothar Perl, without a doubt second only to Billy in his mastery of the idiom, and an indispensable part of the true aficionado's collection.

The second issue was one of two by Erles Jones, and fans of his stylish playing would not want to be without them. Third came the first of numerous recitals by Eric Parkin, whose experience playing in dance bands had given him a feel for the idiom. *Robots* was followed by *Postman's Knock*, and then, most interesting of all, a 2-disc set *The Genius of Billy Mayerl*, one disc devoted to original compositions and the other to Billy's transcriptions.



Some while later he gave us *June Night on Marlow Reach*, a 2-disc set devoted to the piano compositions of Reginald King, though my feeling there was that a single disc would have been sufficient, since though the works were all individually enjoyable and sometimes rather more, there was insufficient variety among them to justify the two discs.

Of particular interest on *Pastoral Sketches*, Peter Jacobs' collection of Billy's pieces, are *Caprinella* and *Blue Shadows*, in which he is joined by violinist Philip Sanderson, while his orchestral style of playing is particularly well suited to the title tracks and *Forgotten Forest*, particularly welcome as there is no available recording of the orchestral version.

SWCD8 was the first selection of recordings by Raie da Costa. Of Portuguese extraction, Raie lived in Cape Town till moving to London when she was 19, hoping to make a career as a concert pianist. Considered to be one of the most talented pianists of her time, her career was cut short on the operating table when she was only 29, though by then she had already made a large number of recordings.

Shellwood made three selections from these, and if I was asked to pick

My favourite I would find the choice⁹ difficult. SWCD8 contains her version of Liszt's *Rigoletto Paraphrase*, a popular virtuoso piece in which she shows herself fully capable of handling its difficulties as well as two examples of her singing, SWCD18 gives us *Moods*, the most enjoyable of the small number of compositions she published, though the version she plays is much more elaborate than the printed arrangement, and SWCD40 contains, among other gems, the *Hexentanz* (Witches' Dance) by the largely forgotten, at least this side of the Atlantic, American composer, Edward MacDowell.

Raie was far from being the only celebrated woman pianist in her field, and another notable was Patricia Rossborough, who had a much longer career, peaking in the thirties. The quality of her performances was more variable than Raie's, and the 24 tracks on SWCD10 are definitely the cream of them, but they do make up one of my favourite discs, and are high among the most frequently played. A particular favourite is her selection from *Nippy*, the earliest musical comedy for which Billy wrote the entire score.





Another notable pianist of the time included in this series is Jack Wilson, a favourite of Billy's, and in many of the tracks here he is accompanied by his Versatile Five as well as the Coventry Hippodrome Orchestra, when he demonstrates his muscular and inventive style. A pianist of a slightly later epoch and in a different style was Cy Walter, another rediscovery by Alex Hassan. Cy was the quintessential hotel pianist, and admired by musical luminaries of the period such as Gershwin, Porter and Rodgers for his stylish versions of their and other numbers.

Ray Turner occupied a different niche: he was the behind-the-scenes pianist when actors appeared to be playing on screen. As one would expect, he was very versatile, and here he plays novelties by Zez Confrey and Roy Bargy as well as various arrangements taken from acetates.

I must not forget the pianola recordings. I have no interest in such a piece of superseded technology: what does interest is the repertoire of arrangements that were created for it, most of them more complex than two hands could ever have managed. The king of this lost art was J Lawrence Cook, and the disc devoted to a few of his estimated 12,000 arrangements is a valuable reminder of those days.

Alex Hassan has made more recordings for Shellwood than anybody, as befits his encyclopaedic range. I have already mentioned his first disc, and this was followed up with one devoted to Ernst Fischer, a German composer of light music whose most active period was the 30s and 40s. Next came Harry Warren, an American songwriter whose name should really be up there with the other greats of the period, but is often overlooked because he wrote almost exclusively for films, followed by Vernon Duke, also less well-known than he should be, and Fats Waller.

I have never been a great admirer of this last: while I recognise his great talent, his unbuttoned style of playing, more entertainer than pianist, was not much to my taste: I greatly prefer the more restrained style of his friend and mentor James P Johnson. Similarly with his compositions: he was a lazy composer, rarely bothering to polish what he wrote. His *London Suite* is a rare exception, showing what he could do when he set his mind to it but Alex's selection, almost entirely from his songs, shows him in a better light than I had expected, and after listening to this CD I rated him more highly.

Alex has another claim on our gratitude: with two teams of singers, he has made a couple of CDs of Billy's songs, and for me these rank particularly high among his



achievements. Though Billy can be counted a successful composer of musical comedies, his songs have never attracted the acclaim they deserve: their musical worth lifts them well above the shows they embellish, as can be heard on these two discs. Most of Billy's other work is now available from other sources than Shellwood, but these discs are unique, and uniquely treasureable. He also organised *New Deal Rhythm*, where he and singer-performer Doug Bowles brought the period to life in song, including the unforgettable *Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?*

Of all the re-issues from 78s, I think the cream is on *Fidgety Digits*. The fact that it contains the tracks from 2 of the 3 records Lothar Perl made alone makes it indispensable, especially as they contain extra sections not in the printed music but of the same high quality.

I don't have the space to discuss the occasional recordings, but I must mention the first recording (at age 10) of Benjamin Grosvenor, who came to a Billy Mayerl Society meeting and impressed us mightily with his playing. Going on to win the piano section of the BBC Young Musician of the Year some months later, he is now, as you will know, an internationally famous artist. Another important first is that of Chris Duckett, the last Shellwood CD, and of his disc I can only say I wish that it had been longer.

This article is already much longer than I expected or intended, and I haven't mentioned, for instance, the discs of miscellaneous pieces from Alex's



Voluminous collection or the Jelly Roll Morton issue, for instance, but I must remind readers that if you notice any CDs you have missed you will have to try eBay or second-hand record shops, don't delay, for I imagine the prices will soon start rising as they become rarer.

Looking back, it is fairly incredible what such a small team Mike Lorenzini, exec producer, Phil Legg, producer & Kathy Lorenzini admin. could achieve. They have enriched all our lives, and we are very grateful.
Mike Harth 2015

BMS Business

We are very pleased to welcome Stephanie Trick and Paolo Alderighi to give us a concert at Shellwood later this year. For those who don't know these pianists may I suggest you enter their names into Google and follow the links to YouTube. They will be playing solos and duets in the light music style we all love.



Our good friend Alex Hassan will be playing in his own inimitable style earlier in the year, don't miss these rare performances Book early to avoid disappointment £15 per person inc refreshments. 02082241521



Alex Hassan