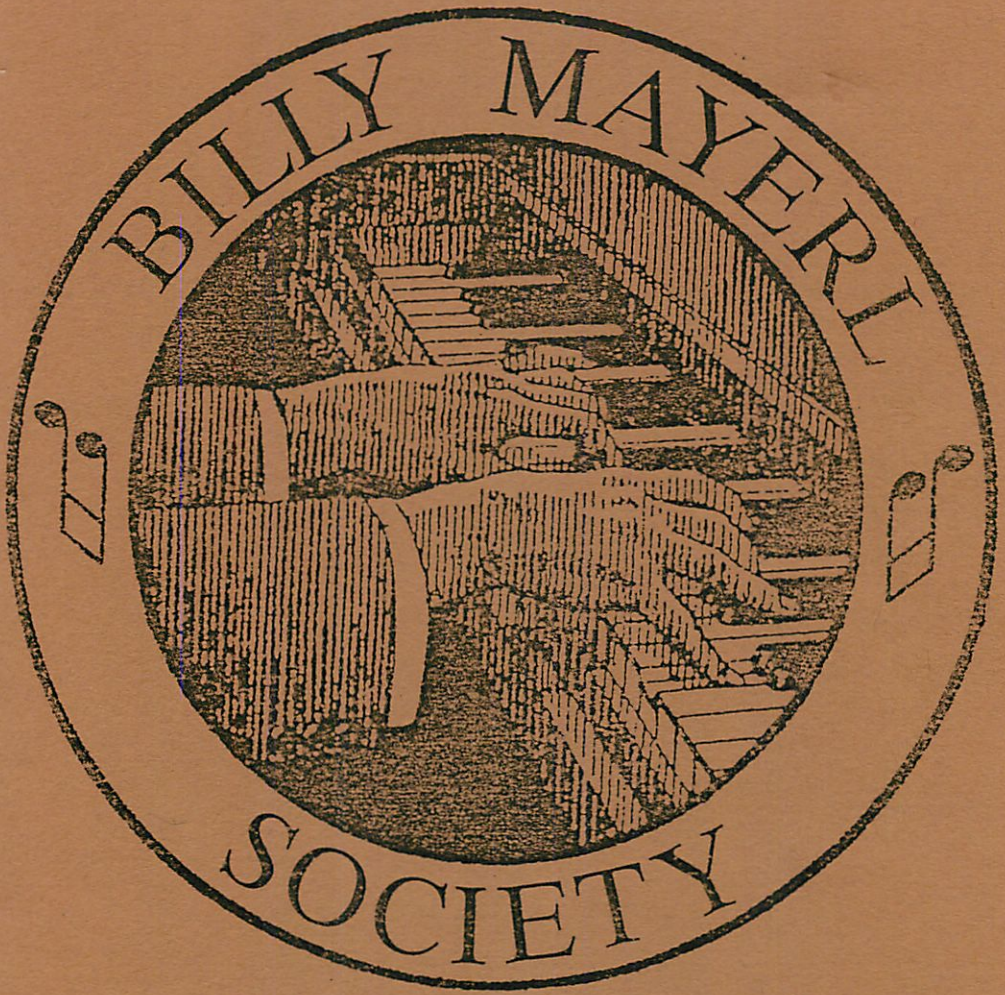


No. 2

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

You will all be glad to know that the Society's membership is steadily increasing, and this without our doing any advertising, which we shan't start until the Music-room at Shellwood is ready for concerts to be held there.

In response to comments, the crossword in this issue of the Magazine has been made a good deal easier. Please have a go and send youreefforts in to the Editor - photo-copies are entirely acceptable.

We have included two rather differently slanted reviews of the new B.M. orchestral C.D. All articles. of course, express the views of the writer and are not necessarily those of the editor or the B.M.S.

You will see in the Letters section that John Smith has raised a number of points arising from the article 'What Went Wrong ?' in our last issue. I have not asked the author of the original article to answer them, since I hope that some others among the membership might like to contribute their points of view to the debate. The Editor welcomes your letters (and all other contributions), so please put pen to paper and send them in. Meanwhile, grateful thanks to all those who have contributed to this issue.

Members are invited to send in details of items they either wish to sell or obtain: these will be printed free of charge in the next available issueof the Magazine or Newsletter.

AN APOLOGY

The Editor regrets that, in the rush to get the last issue of the Magazine to the press, he failed to properly proof-read the text of John Watson's article 'Off The Record'No.1. Pages 16 and 17 were printed in the wrong order, and the illustration of the earlier label referred to was omitted. The two labels can be found together below. It should also be stressed that the violinist is still as yet unidentified.

BILLY MAYERL - BRITISH LIGHT MUSIC SERIES (MARCO POLO)
Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra, cond. Gary Carpenter: piano, Andrew Ball

When I first heard that Marco Polo was bringing out a C.D. of Billy Mayerl, the prospect of hearing some of his orchestral music in modern recordings was very exciting. After all, I'd already bought several others in this British Light Music series and they'd all been excellent, especially the Haydn Wood and Robert Farnon, both of which have superb recordings, plus an excellent selection of music , not just the well-worn predictable favourites.

So what would be on this C.D., I wondered. Surely they wouldn't do the Four Aces or the Aquarium Suite, especially as you can already buy at least two recordings of these. So I was hoping for some such pieces as 'Mediterranean Cruise' or 'Balearic Episode', 'Forgotten Forest' or 'Beyond the Hills', 'Majestic Interlude' or 'Going Places' and so on.

I finally got hold of a copy and looked at the list of contents (why was there two years' gap between the recording and the release dates ?) I was somewhat dismayed to find only two titles I was unfamiliar with, 'Minuet By Candlelight' and 'Waltz For A Lonely Heart'. Nevertheless these were all orchestral recordings on a label with a good track record, and if they kept up the same standard could well be definitive recordings.

First off is our old favourite 'Marigold', performed in fine style, and followed by surely the best track on the disc, 'A Lily Pond'. The flautist especially makes this an outstanding recording.

Next we have the 'Four Aces Suite'. This is in the well-known Rhythmic Orchestration by Ray Noble. Anyone familiar with any of the other recordings of this set (especially Bill's own versions or Raie da Costa's recording of this same version) will instantly notice that the whole suite is played at an almost unbearably slow pace. It makes you wonder whether anyone concerned with the recording did any research in the shape of listening to other recordings, especially those of the period of composition. Fortunately for posterity, Billy Mayerl left behind a wealth of recordings which, allowing for his well-known penchant for speed, give us a very good idea of what he intended. It is difficult not to think that the producer has neglected an essential part of his job here.

Unfortunately the Slovak R.S.O. sound as if they're at a run-through of a rehearsal with everybody sight-reading their parts for the first time: nor do they appear to have any sense of 'Rhythm'.

Two very nice arrangements (and performances) follow in the shape of 'From A Spanish Lattice' and 'Minuet By Candlelight'. These are followed by a very uninspiring performance of the otherwise marvellous 'Aquarium Suite'. This unfortunately falls into the same category as the 'Four Aces' recording - too slow. At times you feel that the whole thing is going to grind to a halt: is it a spot of self-indulgence by the conductor, or what ? Whirligig, especially, sounds like a 45 r.p.m. record played at 33 r.p.m.

Just as a check on this, I timed Billy's recording of this same arrangement with his orchestra: it takes 10 minutes, 55 seconds. Whereas this Marco Polo version takes 15 minutes 6 seconds. That's approximately forty per cent longer, way outside any acceptable level of variation. Something has surely gone wrong somewhere.

However, the sluggishness of these two suites is forgotten when you come to the very relaxing 'Autumn Crocus', a very exciting rendition of 'Bats In The Belfry', and the 'Pastoral Sketches'. The S.R.S.O. excel in this type of piece, and how great it is to finally get to hear a superb stereo recording when all we had previously was a scratchy 78 r.p.m. version (admittedly conducted by the man himself, but the orchestral recordings of that period are much less tolerable to modern ears that the equivalent paino discs.)

Next is my favourite track on the disc, 'Fireside Fusiliers'. It's hard to believe that this is the same orchestra that crawled its way through the 'Four Aces' so unrhythmically, but to give them their due this is snappy and great fun. To be played very loudly !

'Parade of the Sandwich-Boardmen' is next, and the perfect follow-up to the previous number, but are they actually playing it too fast ? More than one or two mistakes by the xylophonist, but nothing we couldn't live with.

Now 'Waltz for A Lonely Heart': this is absolutely superb. I feel it could hardly be performed better, in fact I would describe this track as faultless. On wonders when listening to this how it was possible that Billy Mayerl could be forgotten for so many years. It would make superb film or television theme music.

The final track on the disc is one of Billy's orchestral novelties, 'Busybody'. I was more than familiar with the old recording by the

Lansdowne Light Orchestra, and couldn't wait to hear a stereo version. I was extremely disappointed. Surely no recording should be issued commercially unless as an absolute minimum all the musicians can play their part accurately: so why did they ever use this 'take' ? The flautist, who plays the melody line in unison with the clarinet, never quite manages to bring off his frequently repeated four bars. Why ? If he was incapable of doing it, couldn't they have got ,somebody in who could ? Surely it can't be the same flautist who plays 'A Lily Pond' so beautifully ? Anyone with a musical ear is sure to be offended. I personally would rather they had omitted it altogether than issued it in a version that makes one cringe.

Full marks to pianist Andrew Ball, but 5½ out of ten is pretty unacceptable when one is asked to pay nearly £15.00 for a disc. As hard as the Slovaks try, they are obviously more at home with classically based music - either that or the conductor needs to research his subject more thoroughly. For this sort of money one would think we could have had the London Philharmonic (conducted by Stanley Black, perhaps ?)

Here was the perfect opportunity to fill a number of glaring gaps in the recorded catalogue. Let us hope there is another recording, whether by this company or another, and that then they choose their pieces better, do some research, perhaps get Adrian Leaper to conduct (if the Robert Farnon C.D. is anything to go by), and change that flautist !

BILLY MAYERL PLAYS BILLY MAYERL - 'THE REAL THING'
(FLAPPER PAST CD 7053)

The latest release of BM transfers is a superb collection of the master's own recordings. The sound quality is generally very good, though not as superb as the 'Happy Days' release where they used the Cedar process to clean up the 78s, achieving a quite unbelievable quality. Nonetheless, we are here given some old favourites available on modern recording systems for the first time since the 'King Of Syncopation' L.P.. They include 'Hop 'O My Thumb', 'Harp of the Winds', 'The Joker', 'Railroad Rhythm' and so on as well as some rarities in the shape of the 'Six Miniatures' and the 'Over She Goes Selection' in the version by the Saville Theatre Orchestra plus many more items. (Incidentally it's the 'Aquarium Suite', not the 'Aquarius Suite').

This is a must for all BM fans, priced reasonably at £10.50

Incidentally, there are now four C.Ds. of BM playing BM yet not one of them has him playing the solo piano version of 'Marigold' or 'Song of the Fir-Tree'. Strange !

During the nineteen-thirties Patricia Rossborough (April 2nd 1900 - Oct 9th 1992) was one of the best- known of the Rhythm Pianists. More famous as a performer than a composer, she made many fine recordings, and our interest here is in the 4 known 78s she made of Billy Mayerl's music.

Patricia Rossborough (Piano Solo)
All recorded in London

Nippy - selection, part 1	(Eyton-Mayerl)	WE 3741-1
Nippy - selection, part 2	" "	WE 3742-2

Parlophone R 791 Recorded c. Oct. 28 1930

Over She Goes - Selection -	(Carter - Eyton - Mayerl)	CE 7850-1
CarelessRapture - Selection	(Hassall - Novello)	CE 7851-1

Parlophone F 579 Recorded Oct 2 1936

Crazy Days - Selection	(Carter - Eyton - Mayerl)	E 8571-1
Crest of the Wave - Selection	(Hassall - Novello)	E 8572-1

Parlophone F 890 Recorded Sept 6 1937

Hong Kong Haggis	(Pat Rossborough)	E 9241-1
Phil the Fluter's Ball	(French, transcr. Mayerl)	E 9242-2

Parlophone F 1166 Recorded July 7 1938

As can be seen, they consist of three show medleys ands one transcription. It is perhaps surprising that she did not record any of Billy's novelty solos. She certainly had the technique and flair to produce excellent performances, as is evinced by her recording of Kitten On The Keys It is possible that she preferred to play them in concerts or broadcasts, if at all.

In an interview published in November 1937, as well as stressing the importance of the left hand in syncopated playing, Pat Rossborough said that her right hand part consisted only of chords, in preference to single notes. Her advice to aspiring rhythm pianists was to let the melody predominate in the solo and not cloud it with unnecessary ornamentation. Listening to her records, this style sounds very effective.

The earliest record she made of Billy Mayerl's music is her medley of songs from Nippy. It was recorded by Parlophone about six days after Billy Mayerl's own recording for the rival company Columbia. Like Billy himself, Pat Rossborough could not resist playing the occasional song at breakneck tempo. While one can marvel at the virtuosity, it tends not to add anything musically and to detract from the selection as a whole.

Over She Goes was recorded six years later and shows a refinement in her playing style. This popular show of the day is one of Billy's best and a selection was also recorded by Jack Wilson as well as the composer. This of course gives us a rare chance to make some direct comparisons of their treatment of the same source,material.

Crazy Days begins very up-tempo, then settles into snappy foxtrot versions of Love Was Born and Stranger In A Cup Of Tea, complete with her characteristic virtuoso runs and syncopated breaks. At times it seems she pushes her technique to the limit and this certainly makes for exciting listening.

Her recording of Billy Mayerl's transcription of Phil The Fluter's Ball is played almost note for note (but with a few extra repeats to fill the side up). and is a superb rhythmic performance. It's actually the B side of her own novelty solo, Hong Kong Haggis.

While we can still enjoy her records, it is posterity's loss that for whatever reason she did not record more of Billy Mayerl's music.

BEG, BORROW, OR STEAL

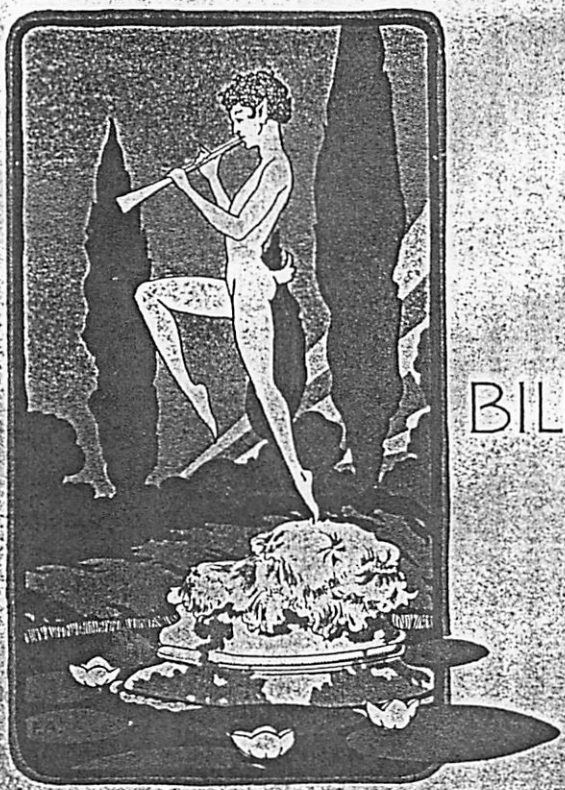
Wanted to borrow : Jazzapation by Edward B. Claypoole

: Tangos, etc. by Ernesto Nazareth

Parlophone

Please contact the Editor

A LILY POND



IDYLL

FOR THE

PIANOFORTE

BY

BILLY MAYERL

OP. 12.

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LONDON AND NEW YORK.

We feel it is time that some public acknowledgement is made of the debt all lovers of Billy Mayerl owe to Geoffrey de Coup-Crank, who is the presiding genius behind many of the recent recordings of Billy's music.

Not only did he devise and produce Peter Jacob's second recording of Billy, which contains a number of unfamiliar pieces and which all who are willing to stray a little off the well-beaten pathways of Marigold and The Four Aces Suite would be bound to enjoy, he organised Eric Parkin's recording of three discs of the transcriptions, which up till then have hardly been represented on disc at all.

These three C.Ds. contain twenty-four transcriptions each, making up a large proportion of these wonderful pieces, and though perhaps the best way to enjoy them is not to play a whole set of twenty-four at a time, they can be dipped into regularly with great enjoyment, while for those of us who are pianists it is very valuable to have some guidance as to how they should be played.

We may mention that Geoffrey financed the production of these recordings, an investment which we gather he does not expect to recoup, which really is a most wonderful example of putting your money where your mouth is.

Although it has only been set up a comparatively short time, we are pleased to be able to report that the Archive already has a sizeable collection of music.

Much of this is in the form of originals that are rather the worse for wear, or photo-copies, and though our first aim must be to possess a copy of everything that Billy wrote, we are naturally anxious also to keep at least one original of everything in good condition, so that those copies in less good condition or photo-copies can be made available to students.

We are particularly grateful to John Watson for donating to the Archive spare copies in good condition from the collection he has built up over many years, and also to two donors who wish to remain anonymous.

Besides Billy's works, we are interested in related material, particularly of other composers who worked in the Novelty idiom, and have a fair amount already.

When every year sees the accumulation of more material, we cannot rely on libraries and other archives to keep actual copies of everything: space restrictions are starting to dictate the necessity for putting everything onto microfiche, and it is highly likely that eventually originals will begin to be thrown out simply because of the cost of storing, both in terms of space and also of maintaining the necessary conditions for good preservation.

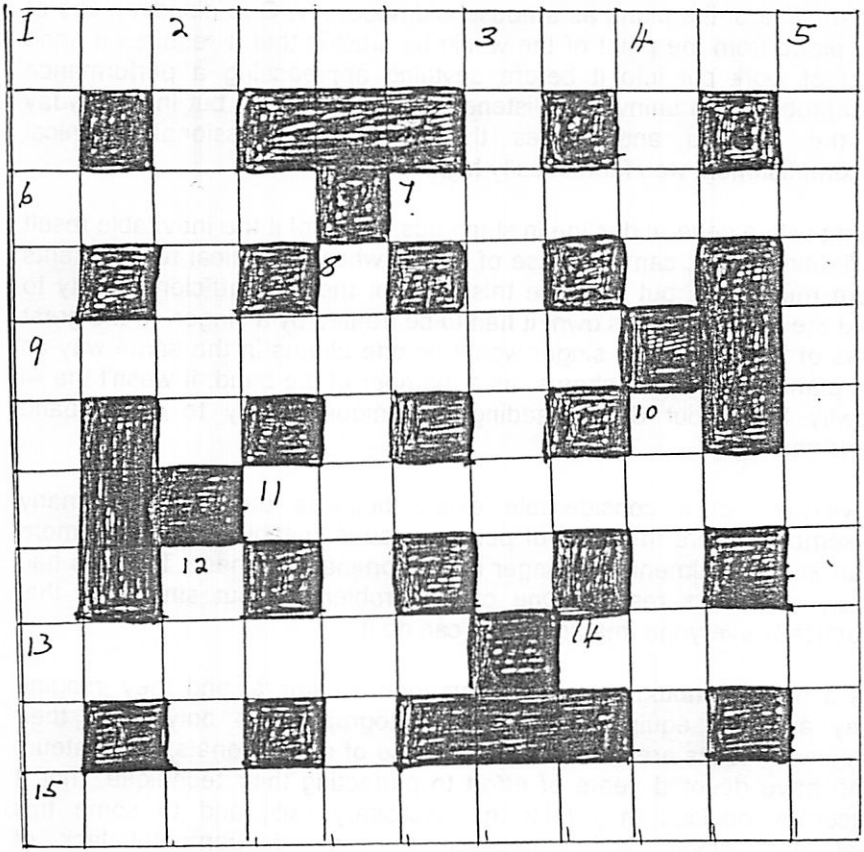
We are of course dedicated to keeping copies in perpetuity, though even more to keeping the name, and the work, of Billy alive, and so we would ask all members to consider us first when they have anything to dispose of, or even, if they will excuse the thought, when making their wills.

All donations and bequests will be acknowledged in the Magazine unless we are specifically requested not to do so.

Questions about the Archive should be addressed to the Hon. Archivist, John Smith, L.R.A.M. It should be noted that pieces cannot be lent out unless the Archive contains at least two other copies. Arrangements can however be made to inspect any piece or recording contained in the Archive, a facility which should prove particularly useful in view of the extortionate charges levied by the National Sound Archive, not to mention how expensive the British Library's photo-copying service is for music.

We would like to point out that the Archive is also interested in anything relating to Billy's life and career: press-cuttings, handbills, theatre programmes, letters, photos, radio broadcasts, personal reminiscences, etc. These last can be written or on tape. We should also mention that the Society does not yet possess a complete collection of the Billy Mayerl Club magazines, so any spares you may possess would be more than welcome.

B. M. S. CROSSWORD NO. 2



Across

1. Top lover ?
6. Who beheaded the flowers ?
7. Did the Devil produce these ?
9. Composer and builder !
11. A cigarette packet in strict time
13. Tearful Tree
14. Hidden away on a Mediterranean Cruise
15. The second one must be the understudy

Down

1. Only one all spring !
2. Touch them right
3. Could the boy produce an adverb ?
4. She's nearly half shy
5. Ups in Devon, maybe
8. Wait there for 11 across in a tangle
10. An insect for the whisky ?
12. She all but lost the e

All clues refer to one of Billy's compositions, and this time, to make it easier, there are no transcriptions!

Solutions to the Editor by January 31st, please. First all-correct solution out of the hat will win a colour copy of one of Billy's covers.

WHAT WENT WRONG part 2

The decline of the novelty piano style was more or less coterminous with the decline of the piano as a household necessity. One disadvantage of the piano from the point of the would-be artist is that it requires a good deal of work put into it before anything approaching a performance acceptable to an uninvolved listener can be produced: but in its heyday in the twenties and thirties the level of professional technical accomplishment was fantastically high.

Along with a general decline in standards, much of it the inevitable result of fighting a war, came the rise of a style whose technical requirements were much less, but because this was not then of sufficient quality to hold the attention on its own, it had to be fronted by a singer. In the great days of the bands, the singer would do one chorus in the same way as the pianist might do a chorus, as a member of the band: it wasn't the Al Bowlly Band, but Bowlly adding his unique quality to many band performances.

Nowadays, to a considerable extent because there are so many ensembles where the level of performance is suitable for nothing more than accompaniment, the singer is the dominant element. This has had many disastrous results. One of the problems about singing is that practically everyone imagines they can do it.

It's a bit like photography: give someone a camera, and they imagine they are fully equipped to make photographs. It's only when their wretched results are compared with those of professionals, or amateurs who have devoted years of effort to perfecting their technique, that it becomes obvious they lack the necessary skill, and to some this realisation never comes because of some fundamental lack of intelligence, visual ability, or whatever.

Similarly anyone can open their throat to make a noise and call it singing, but in very few indeed is it a pleasant one until a lot of effort has been expended to train the voice. At the present day the level of singing technique is not very high, due largely to the fact that there is too much pressure, internal or external, to start performing in public before the voice has been adequately trained, Many of our present-days professionals have no idea that at one time no singer worth his salt would have been allowed by his teacher to perform in public until he had done at least seven years' hard training. One has only to listen to records of singers trained before the turn of the century to realise how far standards have declined; the technique of a Galli-Curci or a Hempel makes what we put up with today acceptable only because we are used to it. What they would have made of a Callas, who had many talents but

neither a beautiful singing voice nor an adequate vocal technique is best left to the imagination.

Many, probably most, of the crooners of our period had been decently trained, and were capable of making at the least an attractive sound. Nowadays singers are largely sold to the public on the strength of their rating as a personality. I cannot imagine anybody listening to Tina Turner, for instance, for musical pleasure: she is selling sex-appeal, not a singing voice. In the same way, it is difficult to believe that the pop groups appeal because of the sounds they make: what is on offer is a total package, in which the visual and stylistic elements predominate, marketing is all-important, and the musical content or talent is negligible. The fact that I personally find it difficult to believe that anyone could find most of the ridiculous spectacles on offer interesting in any way, let alone sexually or stylistically attractive, which is what one assumes a lot of the marketing is based on, can be put down to my advanced age and being out of touch with current fashions. Behind the scenes in the industry, of course, is the usual corrupt world of financial dealing and sexual favours as trade, but I must confess I find it even more difficult to believe that anyone could want any favours of the kind from most the current pop scene.

It seems pretty unlikely that the acoustic piano will make a comeback. Even though many of the new ones are produced by automated machinery, they are vastly more expensive than most electronic keyboards, a simple version of which can be bought for around thirty pounds. Obviously to the parent with a child who displays some musical interest this is a much more viable option unless both parent and child are classically inclined and so will go to the much greater expense of buying or renting a proper acoustic instrument. And perhaps to a generation that grows up accustomed to electronic instruments these will appear quite acceptable: modern sampling techniques have at least got us away from the original totally synthetic sound, but I cannot but feel the decline of the acoustic piano to be a sad loss for civilisation.

Of course the current level of technological wizardy puts all sorts of amazing effects within the reach of anyone with sufficient technical knowhow, but that does not alter the fact that to produce anything acceptable to the musical ear you need to be musical yourself, and I am afraid the percentage of those so gifted does not seem to me to be enormously high. I have listened to professional performers who seem to me to have adequate technique but lack true musical feeling, and this is of course even more common among the amateurs, where one learns to dread the would-be performer who is a pianist first and an artist a long way after, if at all.

Some years ago Anna Russell made a very entertaining record, the theme of which was The Decline of the Popular Song. One of the points she made was the change from the brash self-confidence of the age of John Philip Sousa and Ragtime to the whining self-pity of later eras. The Blues, too, are understandable as the expression of a reaction to the oppression under which the black population of the American south suffered, but nowadays they have degenerated into maudlin self-pity. I think one of the attractions, certainly for me, of ragtime and the novelties that succeeded it is this same cockiness and physical exuberance. We can't bring it back, but we can certainly mourn its passing.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Mike,

I read with interest your article in the first issue of our magazine entitled 'What Went Wrong ?' It is intending to speculate why the Novelty style died out. Perhaps the 'stride' left hand limits the scope for harmonic and rhythmic development. Perhaps the style was too clearly defined. Could it have died out for the same reason that ragtime died out ? Can you imagine ragtime with anything other than conventional harmonies ?

In your comments about the piano sonata, you dismiss those written after the last Beethoven sonatas until the Liszt sonata as 'not adding anything of significance to the concept or store of music.' Most musicians, I think, would disagree with you on this point - what about the Schubert sonatas from D784 and the Chopin sonatas in B flat minor and B minor ? I understand that you used to be a member of the Liszt society: are you dismissing Liszt's Dante Sonata as well ?

Far from being a new lease of life, the Liszt sonata (1839-49) seems to me to be a final great flowering. When I try to think of piano sonatas written afterwards that have entered the standard repertoire, my mind goes a bit of a blank. All I can think of is the 6th and 7th sonatas of Prokofiev, the latter, I believe, being the only piano sonata written after the Liszt B minor to have achieved the status of 'war horse'.

I know that you are not a jazz fan, but a great lover of ragtime. One possible entry into jazz seems to be to be via ragtime. If you listen to James P. Johnson in chronological order, it takes one straight from Ragtime to Stride piano. James P. Johnson leads to Fats Waller, Fats Waller leads to Art Tatum. It is perhaps not too fanciful to see something in common between some novelty piano solos and some Fats Waller piano solos.

There seems to be a contradiction when you say that jazz has enriched the general musical vocabulary and then go on to call it a 'back-alley'. Perhaps you would care to give us your definition of jazz. Although it has some styles imposed upon it, I tend to think of it as a process rather than a style - five minutes' music conceived in five minutes. I feel convinced that Billy must have spent many hours improvising for his own pleasure - what he was really doing was indulging in the jazz process.

When you refer to the jazz player's bag of tricks', are you referring to the large repertoire of melodic, rhythmic, harmonic and pianistic devices that a good jazz pianist would have ? The important thing is surely how these devices are used and executed, rather than how many there are,

A great pianist, I think, can be recognised just by the sound he makes. With classical pianists you have the Horowitz sound and the Rubinstein sound.

With jazz pianists, you have the Art Tatum sound, the Bill Evans sound, the George Shearing sound... Miles Davis once described Bill Evan's sound as 'like crystal notes or sparkling water cascading down some clear waterfall.'

I gather you consider jazz a 'performance art.' The real 'performance art' seems to me to be that of the classical concert pianist.

I read that you are someone who would 'rather hear a good tune than someone using it as a basis for messing around.' When you listen to a sonata, do you listen to the first and second subjects and then switch off when you come to the development ? In 'Song of the Fir Tree' Billy seems to me to be 'messing around' with the tune in the Introduction and towards the end of the second page. Naughty old Billy - but I love it !

In an interview with Marian McPartland in 1978, Bill Evans said 'Sometimes when I love a melody, I just feel that's the best thing I can do - just play it.'

See you at the next meeting.

Yours
John

P.S. My mother prefers listening to me rather than Bill Evans - there's no accounting for taste, is there !

P.P.S. There's rather a lot of messing around with themes in the Liszt B minor sonata - it gives me Desert Island-type satisfaction !

The Challen Multitone Piano Orchestra

by

John Archer

Prompted by the recent acquisition of a copy of Challen Music Lovers' Magazine (undated but advertised in the BM School Magazine for March 1939) and a reference to the Challen Multitone Piano Orchestra therein, I thought it might provide a suitable subject for a short article.

In 1938, probably spurred on by the tremendous interest generated by the Hammond Organ, Challen developed what they called a "Multi-Tone" attachment which could be fitted to their upright pianos. This attachment enabled various tonal effects to be obtained and thus the sounds of a harp, harpsichord, banjo and mandoline respectively could be reproduced in addition to the normal piano sound. Always on the lookout for something new and innovative, Billy became quite excited by the immense possibilities of the Multi-tone and foresaw that a group of pianos fitted with these attachments would in effect form a piano orchestra. Under Billy's direction, therefore, five Challen Pianos were adapted and thus the Challen Multitone Piano Orchestra was born. This rather grandiose title for the combination seems to have been used interchangeably with the shorter and snappier title of Billy Mayerl and his Claviers depending on the occasion.

Billy then set about creating special arrangements for this unique combination of instruments, a long and tedious task even for one so gifted. Once the arrangements were complete the team of performers had to be selected. In the event, Billy's handpicked team was chosen from among his pupils and they included Dorothy Carless, the well known singer of BBC fame and Billy Mayerl discovery, Marion Payne (later to find fame as the jazz pianist, Marion McPartland) and George Myddleton, a strong and flamboyant pianist. Rehearsals took much longer than usual and were, in fact, spread over several weeks. This stemmed from the fact that the performers had to become accustomed to playing what were for them new instruments as a result of the Multitone device. Billy himself alternated between playing a Hammond Novachord in the Orchestra as well as the Multitone piano. This made available to him a great variety of extra sustained voices. Finally, the Claviers were ready and a nationwide tour of variety theatres, concert halls and cinemas was planned.

The first public performance of the Claviers was on the occasion of the Billy Mayerl Club's Annual Dance and Cabaret at Pagani's Restaurant in Great Portland Street, London on the 26th March, 1938. Apparently, the reception

they received as part of the Cabaret at this event convinced Billy that they would be a successful commercial proposition. Things were starting to happen for the Claviers and on the following Wednesday, March 30th they broadcast in a BBC Band Waggon programme. Just over a week later they would be on tour, opening at the Theatre Royal, Norwich on the 4th April. The Claviers on this occasion consisted of Kathleen Heppell (who also sang) and Marion Payne together with George Myddleton and Billy.

On the 1st April, 1938, Billy took his Claviers into the recording studio where they cut two records for Columbia. They were FB1937 and FB1968 and the track details are as follows:-

FB1937 The Toy Trumpet /Clavier Rhapsody (Minuet, Bunch of Roses & Czardas).

FB1968 Billy Mayerl Memories.

N.B. Dorothy Carless replaced K. Heppell for these recordings and for the subsequent nationwide tour.

For the tour the services of a large van were needed to carry the rather precious cargo of five special pianos from town to town. The orchestra was an immediate success wherever it went. In Bristol, Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, Glasgow and in every town of any size the half hour programme was greeted with tumultuous applause. The tour involved a week at the British Empire Exhibition in Glasgow where they appeared week commencing 4th July, 1938. Billy then had to leave the Claviers behind, the following week, so that he and Dorothy Carless could fulfill a week long engagement in Dublin. The logistics of shipping the five pianos across the Irish Sea on the intervening Sunday had proved impossible to resolve! The Claviers were however, reunited in Aberdeen for week commencing July 18th where they played the Tivoli Theatre and the tour finally ended at the Shakespeare Theatre in Liverpool during the first week in August.

A film was made by Pathe of the Piano Orchestra and it was subsequently screened in 1000 cinemas. It isn't known whether prints of it still exist.

The Claviers were revived in 1939 for the run of Billy's last musical show "Runaway Love" which opened at the Saville Theatre, London on November 4th after a provincial tour, for which they provided the accompaniment. This time, however, they carried the altogether grander title of Billy Mayerl and his Challen Multitone Piano Orchestra. The personnel at this time were Mary McEwan, Irene Ashton (Editor of the School Magazine June '35 to September '36), Christina Nelson and Christine Grosvenor. They made just one recording for Decca on the 10th January, 1940; a selection from Runaway Love on F7375. The show folded when a government order closed all theatres for a short time in the Spring of 1940. This effectively ended a quite unique and novel episode in the history of popular piano playing in Britain. –

Record Review - British Light Music - Billy Mayerl

Andrew Ball (piano) - Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra - Gary Carpenter. MARCO POLO 8.223514 74 minutes.

Contents: Marigold. A Lily Pond. Four Aces Suite. From a Spanish Lattice Minuet by Candlelight. Aquarium Suite. Autumn Crocus. Bats in the Belfry. Pastoral Sketches. Fireside Fusiliers. The Parade of the Sandwich Board Men. Waltz for a Lonely Heart. Busybody.

This delightful CD contains 21 tracks consisting mainly of orchestral versions of Mayerl's novelty piano pieces. The orchestrations are the work of several people including Billy, himself, who arranged 8 of the pieces. Other arrangers of note include Ray Noble for the now obligatory *Four Aces Suite*, Hubert Bath for *From a Spanish Lattice* and Herman Finck for the *Pastoral Sketches*. Most of the items are likely to be familiar to anyone conversant with Mayerl's piano repertoire but it is pleasing to see three pieces included from his later period, *Minuet by Candlelight, Waltz for a Lonely Heart and Busybody* which are seldom heard let alone recorded.

I have to say that the quality, verve and overall standard of performance of the Slovak (Bratislava) Symphony Orchestra is, in my opinion, nothing short of brilliant and the soloist is a worthy newcomer to the ranks of Mayerl interpreters. The whole recording sounds strangely nostalgic recreating, as it does, the sound of a large theatre orchestra such as it must have sounded, I imagine, back in the Thirties when Billy was conducting his own Shaftesbury Theatre Orchestra. Not only is it well recorded but for the most part Gary Carpenter has managed to capture successfully the idiom of Mayerl's music. If I wanted to be supercritical I would have to say that the orchestral pieces are marginally better played than the dance band items but this is only to be expected. However, it is nothing short of remarkable when one considers that it is doubtful whether any of the players in the Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra would have heard of Billy Mayerl let alone played any of his music, prior to rehearsals.

This CD is pure magic and should be in every Mayerl lover's record collection. My only gripe is the price which is a bit hefty at around £13.50!

JFA

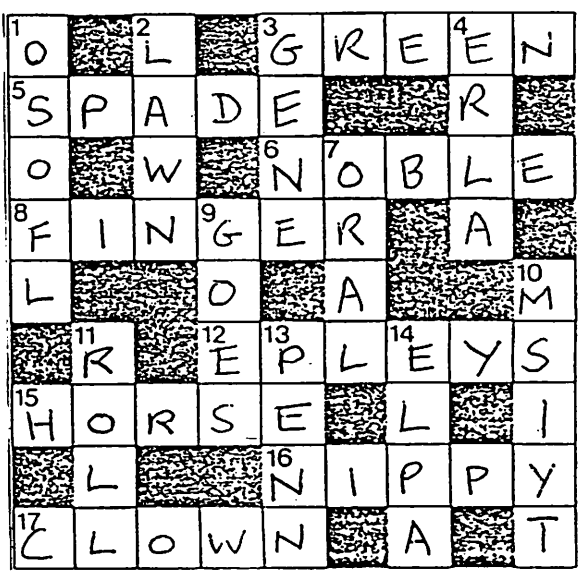
Solution to Crossword No. 1 : Notes

Across

3. Green Tulips
6. Love Locked Out by Ray Noble
8. Jack Wilson was the Gentleman Nimble-Fingered
15. Dancing Horse (The Big Top Suite)
16. Remember Lyons' Corner Houses ?

Down

3. Valse Eugene
7. Past-oral
9. Anything Goes by Cole Porter
11. Rolling in the Hay
13. Sweet William



RECORDINGS OF INTEREST

The Mighty Wurlitzer; Joseph Seal, organ.
Contains Bats In The Belfry and Look Lively, as well as another 22 pieces, including Warsaw Concerto, Song of Paradise, and Nights of Gladness.
issued by Castle Communications, MAT CD 245, £4.49

That's Entertainment : John Mann, organ.
Contains Marigold among such other favourites as Temptatioon Rag, Roses of Picardy and The Grasshoppers' Dance.
issued by Grosvenor Records, PLAT CD 3918 at £6.79

Music While You Work
This contains two items by Billy Mayerl and his Forte Fingers, 'Sweet Nothings' and 'Canadian Capers'. Other artists on the disc are Percival Mackay and his Orchestra, Troise, etc.
issued by Empress on RAJ CD 819 at £5.29

All the above are available at H.M.V. in Oxford Street
(thanks to John Playle for the information on the above)

BILLY AND ME

Like so many of us, I got to know Billy Mayerl's music through 'Marigold'. I was fourteen or fifteen, and after getting on for five years' lessons, beginning to make some headway at the piano. My mother bought the piece for me. She and my father both knew it - from the radio I imagine - but neither of them knew any other of Billy's pieces.

My teacher was catholic in her tastes and quite happy for me to try something different in between the Beethoven sonatas and Chopin waltzes, and so Marigold became a subject for study and I had to try to get it right. I blush when I try it now, though I appreciate its subtleties more. I was quickly drawn to this sort of music in the way I was drawn to Debussy's 'Minstrels' and 'Golliwog's Cakewalk': the sheer breathless exuberance of it, I suppose.

Even as long ago as the early fifties Billy's music was thin on the ground - at least in Heckmondwike, West Yorkshire. I still managed to track down 'From a Spanish Lattice', and took great delight in its languid sensuousness. (I can think of no other Mayerl piece that has this exotic, almost erotic quality. A side of Billy that he perhaps chose not to encourage ?). Then a bit later I found 'Song of the Fir Tree': dreamy, introspective, and reminiscent of Grieg. But by then I was deep in A levels, university beckoned, and the piano had to take a back seat.

Some years later, in 1961, I set off for North America with all the confidence you have in your twenties. I took just a few pieces of music. The three pieces I've mentioned were among them, plus a transcription 'Transatlantic Lullaby', which I had somehow acquired, though I can't remember how or when. I recall enjoying its sophisticated swing and early thirties elegance.

The New York YMCA had a piano you could book for practice sessions. Looking for a job and a place to live, and not being able to afford to go out much, I happily took up practising again. One day another pianist, waiting to take over the piano, commented on the Mayerl pieces I had been playing, the like of which he'd never encountered. Flattered, and sensing a possible convert, I offered to lend them to him. I never saw him or them again - my first North American lesson.

For two years after that there was no Billy. There was precious little music of any kind: I seldom had access to a piano and, when not working, I was indulging my new passion, travel.

Years later, happily settled in London with my own flat and an upright piano - acquired in the Mile End Road - I discovered the Bell Street book and music shop. I cheerfully endured many coughing fits in its dusty basement for the chance of unearthing some new delight of Billy's. Then there was Travis and Emery in Cecil Court, in the centre of town: cleaner, better organised, and rather more expensive.

As well as my old favourites, I found quite a few new pieces - to me - as well as one or two issues of the Magazine and an Instruction Manual. The extent of the Mayerl oeuvre was opening up. And what a visual treat some of them were too. I remember the sludgy blue-greens and dull orange of the 'Pianolettes ' series: the lavish Art Deco typeface of 'Autumn Crocus': the pink and icing-sugar-green of 'Balalaika': the crazy figures on 'Bats in the Belfry'. Some of these I couldn't even begin to play: it didn't matter. I was happy just to have them around.

By the mid-eighties I was living in Wandsworth and the proud owner of a grand piano. Friends had surprised me with the Flapper 'Versatility of Billy Mayerl' double L.P., but I still thought I was solitary in my admiration. Then, wonder of wonders, I encountered a new piano tuner and he turned out to be a Billy Mayerl fan. For the first time I had found someone who shared my enthusiasm.

Peter Starr introduced me to the big EMI Mayerl book - by restricting my searches to second-hand shops I had missed this re-issue - and the Richard Rodney Bennett L.P. which had the added bonus of one side of

Gershwin. (I was gratified to read on the sleeve that Bennett considered Mayerl 'fiendishly difficult'. I never felt so bad about my own feeble attempts after that.) Between us we went on to discover Eric Parkin and Peter Jacobs.

Shortly afterwards - perhaps the greatest step forward - came the two Mikes and the Billy Mayerl Society. More delights tumbled out of the magic box in quick succession: orchestral works I never knew about: Billy on film: copies of the old B.M. Circle newsletters: further transcriptions from yet more magazines: the incredible Alex Hassan: and a whole host of delightful people bound together by this passion. And we didn't even have to lock the doors to indulge !

There are yet more delights. Over the last year, while working for an American publisher of part-works on 'the great musicals' (part-works consist of a magazine accompanied, in this case, by a CD or tape of the musical in question) I have discovered something of the extent of Billy's work as a composer of theatre music. I had acquired a couple of piano selections (Nippy and Runaway Love) and Mike Harth had mentioned other shows - somewhat dismissively - but I had no idea of the extent of Billy's work in this sphere.

In July, while doing my statutory 6,000 words on, this time, 'Mr. Cinders' (Vivian Ellis, 1929) I discovered that the original heroine, Binnie Hale, had starred in Billy's Nippy. I had no time then to do other than make a few notes. Later, researching 'Bitter Sweet' (Noel Coward, also 1929) I came across a few more leads and the following entry in Gunzl's 'Encyclopedia of British Musical Theatre' :

Mayerl: (1902 - 1959) born Joseph William Mayerl.
A composer of whom personal datas are scarce. An intensely shy and introverted man who would never take part in any publicity for his musicals. He could barely bring himself to utter 'Good night' at the end of his performance.

I now have a note of seven shows for which Billy composed the music and some others to which he contributed. They were mainly musical farces, and they starred some of the biggest names of the thirties - Stanley Lupino, Arthur Rigby, Adele Dixon, Joyce Barbour, and Lupino Lane. I intend to pursue this further, and should be very grateful for any information anyone else may possess.

For over forty years Billy Mayerl has provided me with a continuous voyage of discovery. The knowledge that there's more to come fills me with delight.

DISCOVERING BILLY'S MUSIC

I have always liked music that is so tuneful and melodious it gets firmly embedded in one's memory provoking such joy on hearing it played and being able to recall it from memory. It was this liking for well-written light music that led me to take such an interest in Billy Mayerl. During the nineteen-fifties I came into possession of one of those three-speed record-players, just a simple valve model, nothing elaborate. At this period 78s were still being churned out (L.Ps. and 45s had only made an appearance on the market a short while previously) so not seeing any L.Ps. of Billy Mayerl available I began hunting for 78s.

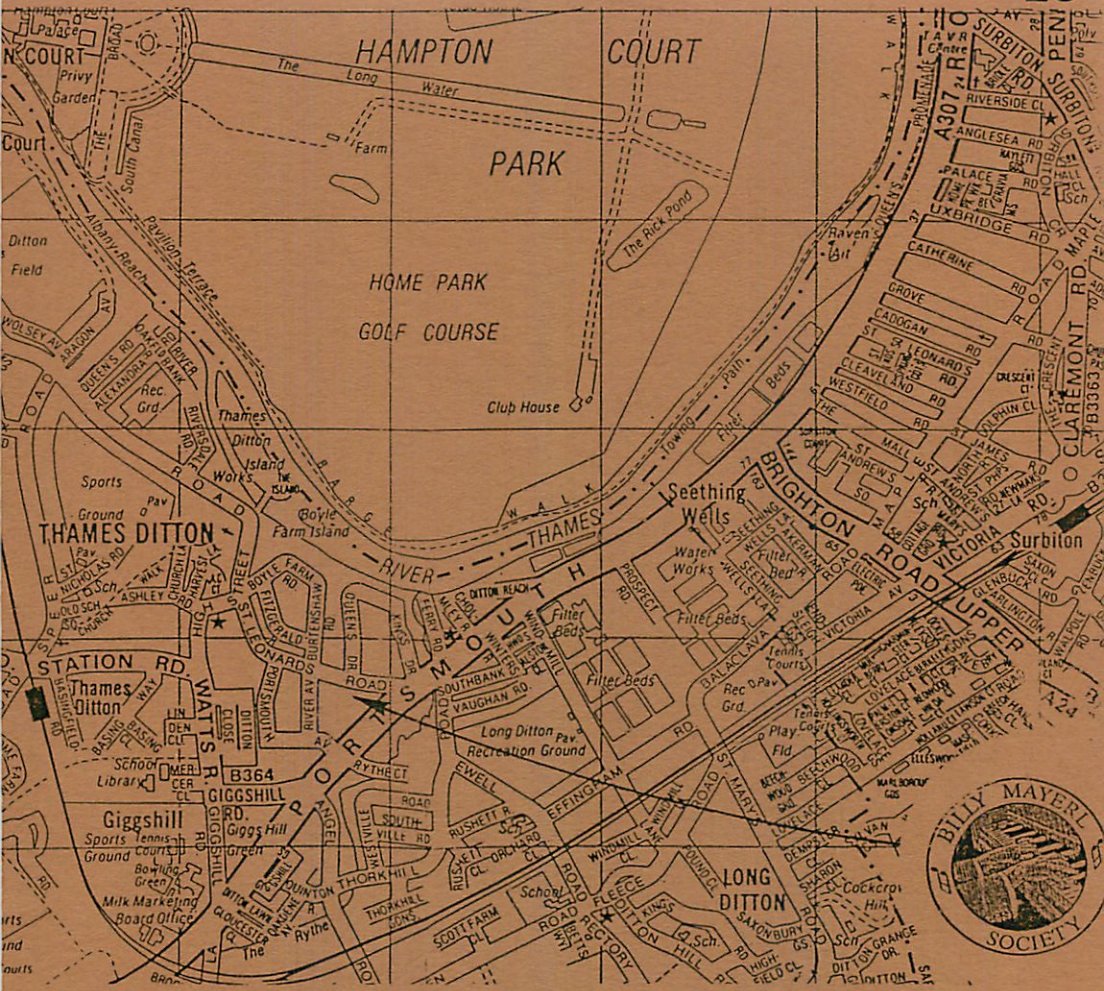
Then some years later Nick Nichols of the Billy Mayerl Circle that then was noticed my ad in the Exchange And Mart for Billy's recordings, and as I had recently purchased a Phillips four-track reel-to-reel stereo tape recorder he offered to put recorded items of the Master on my own tape free of charge.

When I got the tape back it proved to contain a mixture, from the early syncopated pieces to the light orchestral novelties of the nineteen-fifties.

The Billy Mayerl Circle was unfortunately disbanded some years later when Nick Nichols died and nobody could be found willing to take on the task of keeping it going. Fortunately I still had these recordings on tape, supplemented by some seventy-eights in my own collection, and they all got pretty frequent airings.

Then while I was reading the Gramophone magazine in Hammersmith public library my eye was caught by an advertisement placed by one Terry Wilkinson of the Midland-Gershwin-Mayerl Society, and on writing to him and receiving details of membership I joined immediately. Since then there has been a good number of concerts and soirees, and I've thoroughly enjoyed all those I've been able to attend, and I very much appreciate all the effort that is put in to make such concerts a success.

When the Billy Mayerl Society was formed in London, I had no hesitation about joining, especially as it was, so to speak, on my home patch. I am very happy to act as the society's Hon. Treasurer, and I hope it will go from strength in the years to come.



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY 1995

Sunday, January 22
Sunday, March 5 3 - 6 P.M.
Sunday, April 23
Sunday, June 4

Meetings to be held at Shellwood, St. Leonards Road,
Thames Ditton, Surrey KT7 ORN Tel: 0181 224 1521

LIGHTNING FINGERS

As you will see from the accompanying illustration, the new book on Billy Mayerl is nearly ready.
This will contain a biography, articles on his compositions, a complete catalogue, a discography and rollography, and an article on other contemporary British composers working in the same idiom.
It is the first book on Billy Mayerl ever to be published, an outrageous gap in the literature that the Society is proud to be instrumental in rectifying, and it will be on sale in the early part of 1995 at £11.99.

However, the Society has been able to arrange a special pre-publication price for members of £10.99, or two copies for £21.00, both prices post-free. Orders, accompanied by cheque or postal orders, should be sent to the Secretary as soon as possible, as the number we can supply at this price is limited.