Patrons:
Eric Parkin, Susan Tomes, Peter Jacobs

No. 3

Magazine 3 --CONTENTS - September 1995

EDITORIAL

I must apologise for the length of time it has taken for this issue to appear, but the reason is the slowness with which articles, etc. have been arriving on the editorial desk. My grateful thanks to the few stalwarts who contribute regularly, but surely there are many more members who have something of interest to contribute. Personal reminiscences on any of the areas that the society is concerned with are particularly welcome (such as My lesson With Billy or How I Got On With 'The Modern Course of Syncopation' or even My First introduction to Novelty Piano)

All we need is the raw text: you don't have to worry about spelling, layout or any of those peripherals. It is, however, appreciated if the submission can be typed , word processed, or even sent on computer disc (we can read IBM compatibles, Amstrad PCWs, Ataris and Amigas and text should be in ASCII format - if you've never done that before, all computers and word-processing programs have a facility for conversion to this, as it is a standard basic language they can all recognise).

The Society is very gratified to be able to announce that Peter Jacobs has agreed to become a Patron of the Society. As well, he will be giving us a specially prepared programme for our December soirée, another unmissable event.

These Sunday afternoon soirées are now so well attended that we have had to organise an overflow room: here you will be able to hear the concert and see on a television screen whatever the particular camera in use at that moment is showing (in other words a sort of preview of an unedited version of the video that will be available at a later date). **If you want to be in the main music-room, we advise you to buy your programme early. Bookings close one week before the date of the concert. FOR ERLES JONES CONCERT, CLOSING DATE IS SATURDAY, SEPT 23.**

Enquiries to Hon Sec. , Shellwood, St. Leonards Road, Thames Ditton, Surrey KT7 0RN

Tel: 0181 224 1521

A party of BM members attended recitals by two of our patrons. Eric Parkin's was part of the Chelsea Festival, and at it, beside other British composers such as E.J. Moeran and John Ireland (whose Sarnia was given an exceptionally memorable performance) he played a number of Billy originals as well as some of his transcriptions. Unfortunately the acoustic of the church in which the recital was given didn't provide ideal listening conditions, and we are all very much hoping that he will agree to play in one of our regular series at Shellwood.

Peter Jacobs programme at the Wigmore Hall included some Balfour Gardiner, which some of us may remember from an impromptu performance he gave at one of our meetings, and a number of attractive pieces by Chaminade, some of whose compositions he has promised us in December. Both recitals were full of superb pianism and thoroughly enjoyed by all of us (even though P.J. didn't play any Billy on that occasion).

'Lightning Fingers', the first book on Billy Mayerl ever to be published, is now in print, and those members who pre-ordered copies will already have received them. Elsewhere in this issue you will be able to read a review. The print run is limited, so if you intend to get a copy and haven't done so already, we urge you to do so without delay., as it may be some little time before a second printing becomes available.

The Society is planning to hold its first Annual General Meeting in January of next year. You will be given plenty of notice of the date so that if there are any motions you wish to propose you can send them in to the Hon. Sec. beforehand. This, of course, is the time when we particularly wish to hear your bright ideas for improving the Society - and receive your offers of help.

The Editor

OCTOBER 1 ERLES JONES CONCERT

NOVEMBER 12 REGULAR MEETING

DECEMBER 3 PETER JACOBS CONCERT

ALL CONCERTS ARE 2.30 FOR 3. PM. UNTIL 6 PM

Sid O'Connell's jazz recreations (player piano) as heard at the July meeting now available on cassette. 30 minutes of good fun, only £3.00.

BMS INAUGURAL CONCERT ; SUSAN TOMES

by John Smith

Our eagerly awaited first concert in Mike and Kathy Lorenzini's resplendent new music-room proved worthy of the occasion. It was given by Susan Tomes, whose well-loved recording of a Mayerl collection, 'Loose Elbows', has introduced many of us to, or sometimes reminded us of, Billy Mayerl's compositions. She began with the 'Four Aces' Suite. It was a real treat to be sitting only a few feet away from the piano, so that I could appreciate to the full her natural articulation.

Unfortunately there is a tendency in modern Mayerl recordings for a reverberant acoustic to tone down the articulation: in the fast rhythmic sections or even in whole pieces such as Jazz Master or Punch. This can be a big disadvantage, since one cannot hear minute gaps clearly, and accents and the different weight given to notes are both toned down. Instead of having a blanket acoustic for the whole set, why cannot appropriate and different ones be used for such different styles as, say, 'The Legends Of King Arthur' on the one hand and 'Loose Elbows' on the other? If this cannot be done, or is too much trouble and expense, I for one would always prefer less reverberation and the pianist closer to the microphone.

The Aces were followed by 'Baker's Dozen', a suite of pieces by Willie 'The Lion' Smith, transcribed and arranged by Dick Hyman for a ballet by the Twyla Tharp Dance Company. There was some impressive 'stride' work in this, a technique which most concert pianists seem to find alien. If you like James P. Johnson, I think there's a very good chance that you will like W. T. L. S.

The first half concluded with a BM set: 'Postman's Knock', one of the late novelties, 'Canaries' Serenade', dedicated to Geoffrey Clayton's pet canary, Michael, 'Funny Peculiar', 'Lily Pond', and 'Clockwork', this last making an exciting finish to this section. 'Lily Pond', played very expressively, was perhaps the emotional high-spot of the whole concert.

After we had suitably refreshed ourselves, the second half kicked off with some more BM: 'Printer's Devil', 'Jill All-Alone', 'Mistletoe', 'Filigree', 'Shy Ballerina', and 'Crystal Clear'.

'Jill All-Alone' is one of a few pieces that have a wistful quality quite unique to this composer, and I have always thought that Susan is particularly good at bringing out this particular facet. I gave my copy of 'Filigree' to her at a previous meeting which she attended informally, and was delighted when she included it in her Ninetieth Anniversary Mayerl broadcast and very pleased to hear her do it again. It has always seemed to me to be one of the best of the later pieces. When I first heard Susan play it, the rhythmic life she gave to one of the slower passages in particular was something of a revelation to me.

The next group was by other composers in the idiom - 'Promenade', not a piece I would have instantly guessed as being by Gershwin, 'Dreamy Afternoon', by Iris Taylor, who proved to be Fred Hartley in drag: then Zez Confrey's 'Kitten On The Keys', which she played as an encore at her recent Wigmore Hall recital. It was played at a similar speed to that adopted by the composer on his recordings, but I preferred Susan's interpretation: the composer's seems to me to be a bit mechanical by comparison. The other two pieces were 'Nola' and Frank Froeba's 'Church Mouse On A Spree'.

The last group was once more by BM, and consisted of 'Green Tulips', 'Antiquary', and 'Clowning'.

'Antiquary' was taken a good deal more slowly than the composer does on his recording, but I preferred Susan's version. It had a degree of freedom within a rigid framework, an essential quality for this type of piece. The composer's performance seems to me to have reached the stage where it is on the verge of going out of control, though before the lynch party forms I hasten to add that I believe that at his best he is unsurpassed.

The last official piece was 'Clowning' - this was also the last piece in her 90th Anniversary broadcast. It made a rousing conclusion to a thoroughly enjoyable concert. For an encore, she played a piece by Tschaikowsky, 'Troika' from the Seasons suite, since she said that she had used up all her other encore pieces.

The concert was a triumph all round, and I for one can't wait for the next.

For those of you who are interested and were unable to attend this concert, it is available on audio cassette (£7.00) and video (£14.00).

ROYAL OCCASION. Leslie Howard and Tallulah Bankhead appear in this group photographed on the occasion of the visit of the Duchess of York in November, 1928. At rear, left to right, are seen Mr. Herb Williams, Mr. Billy Mayerl, Mr. Bobbie Newton and Mr. Leslie Howard. Seated: Miss Gwen Farrar, Lady Annaly, Miss Tallulah Bankhead and Miss Greig.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear John,

Thank you very much for taking the trouble to discuss some of the points raised in my article 'What Went Wrong, no. 1'. I have to confess to not being an admirer of sonata form. In my opinion the only reason it won general acceptance was because it was used and developed by great masters, not because of any inherent virtues of its own. The notion of repeating the first third or so of a piece as the last third can only work if the material is of high interest in itself, and I confess that when playing sonatas by minor composers such as Clementi I practically always give up when I reach the recapitulation. Rags and novelties have a similar problem. The amount of repetition in your average rag may be okay the first time you hear it, but tends to become wearisome on the fourth or fifth hearing.

However, to get back to sonatas, I feel you have missed the distinction between a tune and a theme - stereotypically, the first subject of a sonata being a theme rather than a tune that one could easily hum, and the second subject more lyrical in style. The main part of the development nearly always concentrates on the thematic rather than the melodic material, classical composers in general, I believe, recognising that the best thing to do with a good tune is repeat it. As an extreme instance, perhaps the only comparatively weak part of the first movement of Schubert's 'Unfinished' Symphony, No. 8, is when he plays around with the famous second subject. It is simply too strong a melody to allow such tinkering, and all Schubert does is diminish it (in the literal, not musical sense).

I agree that one can 'enter into' jazz through ragtime, but it's a journey I don't enjoy taking. I remember some years ago seeing Dick Hyman giving a sort of lecture on T.V. illustrating with his usual brilliance the development of popular styles from early ragtime to the then present day, and I realised that after the period of novelties I tended to dislike each successive development more and more You ask if I can imagine ragtime with other than 'classical' harmonies: interestingly, it seems that some composers can. Though I admit that most of those composing ragtime today behave as if it were still the early nineteen-hundreds, the really interesting people working in this field are much more experimental. For instance, I recently heard a very interesting piece by Glenn Jenks, 'Gymnoraggy', a ragtime version of Erik Satie's Gymnopedies which was both harmonically and metrically quite bold, while possibly the most interesting composer working in the field today, Robin Frost, clearly feels free to use either 'traditional' or more modern harmonies as he thinks fit, and what he produces is quite clearly a modern product that could not have been produced in the main ragtime period.

There is perhaps some justification for 'original' jazz, but the general process of having a melody, crafted to its fullest expression by a composer of genius such as Jerome Kern, George Gershwin, or Cole Porter, for instance, used as the basis for an inferior musical talent to display its inferiority, is distasteful. When it's someone of the calibre of Tatum or Petersen, one admires the skill without, in my case at least, being convinced by the

result. Of course, we're talking about a question of taste, and of course, as one does, I consider my taste good and that of those who disagree with me not so good. You remark that Billy, when he improvised, was making jazz, but surely the point here is that he didn't inflict these improvisations on us: he preferred to give us his compositions fully worked out in every detail, which is why I strongly resent any tampering with his compositions by performers: I accept that much rag and novelty music was published in simple editions to increase sales, and therefore needs tasteful embellishment, but this is absolutely not true of Billy's works. With the possible exception of those who are at the highest level of genius as composer and performer - the Mozarts and Liszts - spontaneity is not a desirable quality in music. Of course very often the composer or performer will aim to produce an effect of spontaneity which can have considerable appeal, but this is an entirely different matter.

On the piano, jazz, it seems to me, is all head and no heart, and though the same cannot perhaps be said of jazz singers, in my experience they range from the excruciating (Tina Turner) through the merely awful to those one can admire without enjoying (Cleo Laine). To me melody is the soul of music, and this is what jazz lacks. So, please, spare us the Bill Evans and the Erroll Garner and devote your pianistic talents to those worthy of them.

Yours, Mike

WILLIAM DAVIES CONCERT

It was a packed house to listen to William Davies on Sunday, July 2, and the 50 plus enthusiasts were treated to a very full programme. Bill introduced all the items himself and in the process had us laughing at anecdotes about Billy and other musicians of the era. His engaging manner created a warm rapport with the audience, who obviously very much enjoyed his fluent and informal style. For those pieces he had not committed to memory, his charming wife Felicity turned the pages for him.

Among the highlights of his programme were half a dozen toe-tapping renditions of Fats Waller, and other pieces I particularly enjoyed were 'Church Mouse on a Spree' at a cracking pace, his own version of 'A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square' and Iris Taylor's 'Dreamy Afternoon'. He played, of course, a number of Billy Mayerl pieces as well as giving us some of his recollections of Billy, and particularly enjoyable to this member of the audience were his own potted version of 'Balearic Episode', which included some of the minor key material not in the printed version, 'Look Lively' in best BBC style and one of Billy's later pieces, 'Maids of Honour', in quite a different mood.

We were also fascinated to hear him play his own composition 'Stampede' which most of us recognised without having known the title., and another favourite I must mention was his version of 'Tea For Two'. As it was Wimbledon Fortnight he produced a tennis ball and made us laugh when he used it to play part of Chopin's black key study.

A 90 minute stereo hi-fi audio cassette of most of the concert has been prepared and is available at £7.50 inc. pp, or if you want the whole thing including the story of Moisewitch and the orange, there is a 2 hour 10 minute video in stereo hi-fi at £17.00 inc. pp.

(After fifty-seven years, this is) A. E. Turner speaking

by John Watson

I'm sure that many members of the B.M.S. are familiar with the old B.M.Club magazines from the 1930s.They contain a wealth of information and comment as well as Billy's own transcriptions, and are now collectors' items. Perhaps some of you will have read an interesting article and wondered 'Whatever happened to .... ?'

A link with the BM Club of those days exists in the form of one of our members, Mr. Alan Turner of Romsey, who is now eighty-six. His interest in music is still as keen as it was almost sixty years ago, when he was a regular contributor to the Club Magazine. Known in those days as 'The Southampton Rhythm fiend', his writing talents were rewarded with a silver BM Cup, still in his possession.

Although I've only been corresponding with Alan for about a year, his energetic style of writing and general enthusiasm has resulted in our discussing a good number of different subjects, and he has been able to help me with answers to many questions. But before we jump the gun, perhaps we should go back to the start. Alan began taking piano lessons at the age of twelve, but stopped after a year. After that he was completely self-taught. About the same time, in 1922, the BBC began broadcasting wireless programmes, and Alan first heard Billy Mayerl then, playing with the Savoy bands. His playing proved to be an inspiration. It was an exciting time for popular music, and dance bands were evolving very quickly, always ready to promote the latest style. Alan still recalls the impact that Rhapsody In Blue made in 1926. As well as listening to the latest 'hot jazz' records, he was reading the melody maker, and had obviously become hooked on rhythmic music, much as we are today. But all this was not enough, so he bought a kit which enabled him to make his own disc recordings at home. Some of those which have survived capture various broadcasts, and even if the quality is variable, the contents are unique.

In 1935 Alan discovered the Billy Mayerl CLUB and joined at once. His first article, a musical autobiography, complete with an Al Capone style photo, appeared in the March 1936 issue. He went on to write many more, reviewing new sheet music and recommending his selection of the best jazz records. He even made two wireless broadcasts in 1938 on 2IL, especially for Club members. It probably seems to us now that the thirties was a golden age of popular music. Of course, in many ways it was, but Britain then was still pervaded by many old-fashioned values. Alan's whole working career was with Lloyd's Bank, joining them in 1926. However, banks and Jazz were not thought to be a suitable combination, and Alan found it essential to keep a low profile as far as that side of his activities was concerned. He describes the senior staff of those days as 'unbelievably starchy'. It seems that jazz, like snooker, was viewed as the sign of a mis-spent youth. It was bad enough to want to listen it: to venture to play it as well was just too much as far as these people were concerned !

Being based in the South Coast and living a very full life ,meant that he wasn't able to get to London to meet Billy Mayerl. However, he did hear Fats Waller when he visited England in 1938, and other visitors he heard included Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington, and later on Earl Hines. Others he saw were Carroll Gibbons and Reginald Foresythe as well as some of the great Dance bands, including

Alan Turner, writing in the 1930's for the Billy Mayerl School Club magazine and (below right) in retirement, December 1992.

THE GOLDEN AGE No. 10

by

A. E. TURNER

Red Nichols' Five Pennies	Brunswick
Washboard Blues	01801
That's no Bargain	2s. 6d.

THIS record presents the first two sides made by the original "Five Pennies" [illegible] Brunswick

The Life Story of a *Southampton Rhythm Fiend*

by A. E. TURNER

1920. Age 11. MY first introduction to [illegible] was that grand tune "Tiger Rag", and I felt my interest in music to be definitely aroused. I purchased the [illegible] and [illegible]

1922. AFTER [illegible] I was [illegible]

1923. 6 P.M. The great B.B.C. [illegible]

1925. IN 1925 I [illegible]

1926. STILL [illegible]

1927. COMMENCED [illegible]

1928. GENERALLA [illegible]

A. E. TURNER speaking . . .

THIS 'N' THAT

by A. E. TURNER

No. 12

IT is with a feeling of regret that I approach the twelfth and last of this series, though I [illegible] for the time being, at any rat[illegible] to co[illegible]

those of Debroy Somers and Jack Payne. He also saw Jack Hilton's Band perform twice and tells me 'I was near the back of the theatre on the Saturday night and in a brief quiet moment I clapped my hands together and called out 'Tiger Rag'. There was a wave of laughter from the audience, and the band obliged immediately. Alan also saw Joe Loss in the forties, but clearly for him 'Hylton was the real maestro.'

About this time he got married and stopped writing for the BMC magazine. But if marriage had caused a change in direction, the outbreak of war in 1939 must have started a new era. After joining the RAF, a three-year posting to India followed, and Alan sailed from Liverpool to Bombay in 1942, a journey which took about three months. It was still possible to play music, and he recounts entertaining fellow airmen with a cut-down version of Rhapsody In Blue. If this was perhaps a little ambitious, still it was a change from the more relaxed cocktail. style. Alan has always shown an interest in new technology, and he used a 9.5 mm movie camera to record details of daily life in India on black-and-white film.

The post-war years of shortages and rationing are usually described as austere and grey. This may have been true for the cinema-going public, but Alan had moved on to using rare Kodachrome 16 mm colour film for his shooting. They were made for the enjoyment of his family, but the street scenes captured are unique and of interest to local historians. Of course colour film was expensive and I don't know what Alan's wife Beryl thought about it all.

During the fifties and sixties there was a revolution in light music. Much has been written about how Popular became Pop, and how rapidly the social climate was changing. The music of such as Billy Mayerl, as well as much of jazz, became 'old hat'. But Alan continued to listen to his lifelong favourites, and during the seventies became part of a world-wide jazz network, swapping tapes with other enthusiasts.

At about this time Quadraphonic (Surround) Sound was being developed, and naturally Alan was there, one step ahead of the rest of us. He began writing again, and had articles published in British and American Hi-Fi magazines. In 1982 Alan first heard a tape made by Robert Parker, an Australian broadcaster. It featured high quality stereo recordings made from original mono 78s. Robert Parker had developed his own techniques to achieve this, and Alan wrote about this and stirred up some interest among the jazz world. A Jazz history called Jazz, The Virus was broadcast by BBB2 and Alan was one of Robert's guest speakers. Things had now come full circle : high-tech CDs being played by lasers to reproduce primitively recorded 78s ! About a year ago I was given Alan's number and phoned him up out of the blue. He was of course delighted to learn of the existence of the Billy Mayerl Society and joined up at once. Age and distance have prevented him from attending the meetings, but he is still very interested in the present-day pianists who play Mayerl. When Billy Mayerl died in 1959 the present writer was still learning to walk, so despite feeling an affinity with the music, it will always remain in a historical context. For Alan, it's a memory. He says 'Jazz has given me the greatest fun throughout my life. It's kept me alive - jazz fans live a long, long time !'

GETTING IT RIGHT FIRST TIME

by Dr. Brian Wharton

Have you ever practised a piece at the piano only to find out later that you have misplaced the beat or left out or misread a note? Of course you have. How long did it take you to unlearn the mistake; in other words, how long before the memory trace was wiped from your brain-record? When sight-reading you may think that you don't really use your memory while playing, or that memory isn't important. If so, BEWARE!

Neuropsychatrists who conducted elegant experiments in the 1960s (which have since been confirmed) suggest as a result of their observations that we have to actively forget in order to relearn, and that this is a much more complex activity than learning itself. They investigated a part of the brain, the Hippocampus, (long associated with memory storage and retrieval), using 'split-brain' animals. That is, they used cats who had had their two cerebral hemispheres disconnected from one another. These cats literally have right paws that don't know what their left paws are doing, and vice-verse. (Humans have had this operation with similar effects.) To avoid 'cheating' by using their eyes (to connect up the information coming into either side of the brain), they were trained to press one of two levers with their paws inside a box, to obtain food. Only one lever (the 'rough' one, and not the 'smooth' one) resulted in food arriving, and the geometry of the box allowed only one selected paw to reach the lever through a hole.

The hippocampus is present in both hemispheres, right and left. One side was selected on which to destroy it and the experiments which were conducted gave rise to the following conclusions. It was found that there was no difference in the time taken for such cats to learn to discriminate the food lever using either paw, right or left. However, if the lever's function was reversed, so that it was the smooth one which produced the food, it took the side with the destroyed hippocampus between three and six times as long to relearn how to obtain food consistently with its associated paw. using the correct (smooth) lever. In other words, the hippocampus is involved in relearning more than in learning itself.

It was then arranged for neither lever to produce food. Both right and left paws learned equally quickly not to bother ('extinguished response'), in less than a day.

Then, with some of these cats, it was arrange for both levers to produce food indiscriminately. To learn this new task took the cats much longer: in effect they had to learn to cease to discriminate. It took from 6 to 20 days retraining for the paw associated with the destroyed hippocampus, and on the intact side learning that either lever would produce food still took hours longer than the original discrimination test they had started with.

This, and similar studies since, suggest that active forgetting takes place in the brain, and that it is essential for re-learning. It is more complex and protracted than learning from scratch (no pun intended).

It seems likely then, that the gifted pianist has the talent for getting his playing largely right first time, and this allows him to improve rapidly. Unlearning mistakes slows progress down considerably, with playing as much with anything else. Many musicians spend time looking at the music and playing it slowly and accurately before attempting to perform it. Perhaps we all should.

CLASSIC *fM*

John Playle,
120 Ashcroft Sq.,
London,
W6 OYN.

12 July 1995.

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Dear Mr. Playle,

Thank you very much for your letter 20 June 1995 requesting the broadcasting of Billy Mayerl compositions.

When we started Classic FM, we had NO recordings and are still building up our library. As there is such a vast catalogue of music to cover, I am sure you can understand that it does take some time to ensure that all the great musicians and their works, known and unknown, are suitably represented on Classic FM and we are continually striving to achieve this goal. I have checked our library and, at present, we do not appear to hold any recordings of Billy Mayerl. I have therefore forwarded your letter to Robin Ray, our Music Consultant, for his attention as he selects the records which are programmed on Classic FM so that he can order any compositions directly from the publishers.

Thank you for taking the time to write to us as it is always constructive for us to have direct feed back from our listeners. We hope you continue to enjoy many more happy hours of listening to Classic FM.

Yours sincerely,

K. Smith

Music Department, Classic FM.

The completed music room at Shellwood

CONCERT NEWS

At the time of writing there have already been two very successful soirées organised by the B.M.S. as part of its celebrity series at Shellwood. The third, to be given by Erles Jones on October 1st, is only a few weeks away and looks once again to be a sell-out.

I expect that some of you will have heard Erles in the series 'At The Piano', which the BBC broadcasts on Radio Two. He has made many broadcasts in recent years, and his distinctive virtuoso style of playing his own popular song arrangements is unique. Erles has the ability to incorporate innovative ideas and effects into his playing so that even well-known or hackneyed numbers sound fresh and full of vitality.

I recently met Erles to discuss the programme for his recital and to chat about the music. He told me that one of his great influences is Raie da Costa, a name familiar to collectors of syncopated piano records. Raie was born in 1905 in Capetown, and came to London during the nineteen-twenties. She went on to make over a hundred recordings, as well as giving numerous BBC wireless broadcasts before her tragic death in 1934, aged only twenty-nine. Her style was a mixture of brilliant rhythmic playing and rhapsodic fantasies, inspired by her classical training as a concert pianist.

I expect that most of you have now bought your copies of the Billy Mayerl book 'Lightning Fingers' from the B.M.S. and have been enjoying reading it. Well, it's time to start saving your pennies again, as I am at work with some colleagues on a book about Raie. Her technique was equal to, some would say even surpassed Billy's, and even if her compositions are not as successful as his, the outstanding arrangements which she recorded so brilliantly form a wonderful legacy.

Much research has been done by Society members Peter Joelson and Alex Hassan, while Arthur Badrock, well-known as a discographer, is providing more valuable information. There is still plenty to be done, and I would be most interested to hear from anyone who thinks they might be able to add to our store of knowledge about Raie's life and music.

Raie da Costa also made several excellent recordings of Billy Mayerl's compositions. The most well-known is probably the Four Aces Suite, in the version for piano and band by Ray Noble, and this is available on a CD. Hollyhock and Clockwork are also outstanding examples of her playing, and it is fascinating to compare her interpretations with those of the composer.

Like Raie, Erles Jones trained as a concert pianist, and he has given recitals which feature Liszt, Chopin, and other composers of the Romantic era. He is also a composer. 1995 is Raie's ninetieth anniversary, and the B.M.S. is most fortunate to have Erles in concert to keep up the tradition of one of the most demanding styles in the genre. Reserve your programme now!

THE BILLY MAYERL CLUB CUP AWARD

Kathy Lorenzini

A charming lady from Canada wrote to us recently for details of the club after buying one of Eric Parkin's CDs. When she mentioned that her father had taken the BM course our interest was immediately aroused. Subsequent correspondence resulted in an entertaining visit by Mary Tarves (whose father was Martin William Featherstone) and her husband in May during their vacation in the UK. "He switched from Mendelsohn to Mayerl at the age of 40" says Mary.

Mary very kindly donated one of the three silver cups that had been awarded to her father by Billy Mayerl for transcriptions to the Society and the two others were sold to keen members, Phil Legg and John Watson. She also gave the original signed photograph by Billy Mayerl given to her father, which now graces the wall of the music room, and a sketch of her father so we can see what he looked like. The cup (as seen in "Lightning Fingers") was awarded monthly to members who composed a piece of music and Mr. Featherstone won the three cups for a transcription of 'Moonglow', 'Life is a Song' and two original pieces in the style of Billy -'Two Tunes' and 'Two More'. In addition to all that he wrote several articles for the BM Magazines.

TRANSCRIPTIONS by B.M. published in the B.M.C. MAGAZINE

The Billy Mayerl School Club Magazine ran from January 1934 to the outbreak of World War II, the last issue being that of August 1939. Every issue contained a transcription by Billy, together with his own notes on its playing and interpretation, and we thought members might be interested to have the full list in chronological order. Many of them can be seen, of course, in the copies of the magazines in the Society's Archives.

1936

1. Without a word of warning
2. Everything's been done before
3. Without a word of warning
4. Fatal fascination
5. There's a star in the sky
6. You hit the spot
7. Tormented
8. Cheer up
9. Will I ever know
10. Turn on the taps
11. Turn on the taps etc.
12. Darling, not without you

1937

1. A penny in my pocket
2. The Dance goes on
3. I'm in a dancing mood
4. I need you
5. Without rhythm
6. The mood that I'm in
7. Everything's in rhythm
8. My first thrill
9. You're not too bad yourself
10. Sittin' on the edge
11. Sweet
12. So rare

1938

1. I love Cinderella
2. For only you
3. I'm always in the mood for you
4. It's a long long way to your heart
5. Turkey in the straw
6. Lambeth walk
7. Me and my girl
8. Two lovely people
9. My heaven in the pines
10. I'm gonna lock my heart
11. Thanks for the memory
12. Christmas Medley

1939

1. Highland Swing
2. I got love
3. Amoresque
4. There's rain in my eyes
5. Blame it on my last affair
6. Pattycake, Pattycake, Baker Man
7. I have eyes
8. Like a cat with a mouse

1934

1. Weep no more my baby
2. We belong together
3. Close your eyes
4. Masquerading in the name of love
5. You're the reason why
6. Rolling in the hay
7. Oceans of time
8. April in Paris
9. Love thy neighbour
10. Arlene
11. Two hearts on a tree
12. Say it

1935

1. Other People's Babies
2. Imaginary Foxtrot
3. The Continental
4. The object of my affection
5. Sweet and lovely
6. Girl with the dreamy eyes
7. Learn to syncopate
8. Blue Danube
9. Hi-de-hi
10. Honeymoon for three
11. Anything goes
12. I'm at your service

LIGHTNING FINGERS
BILLY MAYERL - THE MAN AND HIS MUSIC

reviewed by Peter Joelson

A symposium edited by Michael Harth, foreword by William Davies, contributions by John Archer, Michael Harth, Alex Hassan, John Watson and Philip Legg, published by Paradise Press, 45 Bisterne Avenue, London E17 3QR.
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"Play two pianos at once! You can't bloody well play one at once, let alone a couple."

If one was asked of whom this was said, Billy Mayerl would be one of the last names to spring to mind. Yet this was said to him by a Liverpool wag at the Argyle Theatre, Birkenhead, when, after several solo items had been greeted in complete silence, Billy desperately announced to his audience that he would do something never before done on the stage, play two pianos at once. One can only imagine what the 24-year-old Mayerl must have felt at this first foray as a solo artist trying the rounds of the music halls. Derisive laughter, followed by a thunderous booing caused the management to bring down the curtain.

Yet the story has a happy ending. Billy, distraught and in tears, was visited by Dan Clarke, the house manager, who congratulated him on his performance. Clarke told Billy not to worry about the reception and to alter his programme for the second half to include items that Clarke felt certain the audience knew and loved. Billy bravely faced the audience again, gave them what they wanted and he brought the house down.

Billy gave the audience what it wanted, and through his School he gave the public the opportunity to learn to emulate his style of playing. In 1939 Mayerl claimed that 30,000 pupils had passed through the School's doors worldwide since the foundation in 1926. Of these pupils, 5,000 had become professional pianists. This was a tremendous achievement. The School, alas, never recovered fully from the effects of the War; the premises had been bombed three times at three separate locations, eventually destroying records and lessons stocks, and the public's tastes in music were changing. Although the School started up again in the early fifties, and ran successfully for a number of years, Billy closed it in 1957, by which time he was suffering increasingly from ill-health.

Billy Mayerl was a hugely popular figure in entertainment, yet he managed to keep his private life private. Writing a biography of such a man can be difficult, and it is not surprising that this is the first attempt to do so. John Archer has given us a most illuminating account of Billy's life, cramming many details into 53 pages. There is scope here for a more detailed look at critics' reviews, and interviews with people who knew him.

Michael Harth has given us a full descriptive catalogue of Billy's music. The sketches about each piece are a very useful aid to the pianist looking for new pieces to play. Billy's contemporaries are catered for by Alex Hassan who has also contributed a chronological catalogue of Billy's works.

The discography and rollography are provided by John Watson; each label type is presented separately, and chronologically with catalogue number, matrix number, title, recording date and composer. Interesting asides are abundant; DX 682 has Billy playing "The World's Largest Grand Piano", made for the 1935 Silver Jubilee by Challen and measuring 11 ft long. The rolls were made in Billy's youth, perhaps in his late teens or early twenties. Would that he had continued making them for a few years more, when his technique had matured. Billy's technique, both playing and composing styles, deserve an article of their own, complete with musical examples.

Philip Legg has written on the currently available CDs and deleted LPs. Susan Tomes' excellent disc "Loose Elbows" is a sad omission from the EMI/Virgin catalogue and is sure to be reissued soon. The notes on the contributors tell us that Philip Legg is engaged in transcribing from recordings to sheet music items by not only Billy Mayerl, but also Raie da Costa and Patricia Rossborough among others. Now that is good news. May I have some requests, please?

"Lightning Fingers" deserves every support from people who love light music of the twentieth century. It has been painstakingly researched, well printed with many contemporary photographs and illustrations, and the result is both informative and interesting.

Cheques payable to

Billy Mayerl Society.

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THE THREE R'S

by Mike Harth

Recently I have done a good deal of listening to the recordings of the three R.'s, Raie da Costa, Patricia Rossborough, and Renara. I imagine we will all agree that they are among the finest rhythmic pianists of their era, and each of them has her own distinctive style, so that it is easy to tell their recordings apart even without looking at the labels.

All three of them have a much more obviously virtuosic style than Billy, who seems quite restrained when compared to them. I imagine it was his years of playing with dance-bands that enabled him to rid himself of the classical baggage he would be bound to have picked up during his training at Trinity College: Raie and Renara, especially, seem much of the time to be applying classical 'tricks' to their material: arpeggios, for instance, are used altogether too frequently for my taste.

Most of their recorded output is in the form of either transcriptions of single numbers or piano medleys. Raie da Costa produced mostly transcriptions, and it has to be said that much of the time she seems to be unwittingly demonstrating that one cannot make the proverbial silk purse out of unsuitable material, for the songs chosen, with a few exceptions, lack true inspiration. When the number is worthy of her talents, the result is pure magic, as evidenced by, for instance, 'I'll String Along With You' and 'Try To Learn To Love', two of my favourite arrangements. She also does wonders with such a saccharine number as 'Many Happy Returns.'

Besides her better-known work in the popular field, she also made a number of recordings of pieces from the classical repertoire, concentrating on those with a strong element of virtuosity. The "Rigoletto Paraphrase' by Liszt, for instance, is not entirely satisfactory throughout, but the final section, which requires repeated chords in the right hand to be played very lightly, display exactly the very loose wrist needed, and so sounds absolutely right, as good as I have ever heard it..

As it happens, two of Patricia Rossborough's best recordings are of medleys from shows by Billy. Her early double-sided medley from 'Nippy' is full of exuberance and excitement and for me at any rate has an irresistible swing that quite carries the listener away. That on 'Crazy Days' a few years later, though unfortunately only one side, is even better and displays greater control.

'Hot Dog' is another irresistible issue, though as I am not one of those strange people who wants to keep hearing performances of the pieces I already know well, I am unable to take much interest in the version of that wildly over-performed number 'Kitten on the Keys' with which it is coupled - for that matter I feel the same about

Billy's version as well. Hot Dog is given an aggressively rhythmic performance which shows off to perfection her rather butch style.

Renara made a comparatively small number of recordings, but they display clearly a very impressive technical armoury, a predilection for fast repeated chords, and a plethora of scalic and arpeggio effects. Her recordings are something of a mixture: 'A Violin in Vienna', for instance, isn't rhythmic in style at all. while in her set of 'Variations on Tipperary' she essays an imitation of Billy's style that seems to show she had never actually listened to his playing. On the other hand, her finest performances, amongst which I would class 'Zing went the Strings', the medley on 'Sweet Adeline' and 'I Was Lucky', are simply superb.

It is very much to be regretted that these highly talented artists are hardly represented at all in modern transfers. What we need is some enterprising producer to dust off a selection, put them through the Cedar process, and re-issue them on C.D.: if they can't have a whole C.D. each, one between the three would serve as a start. Such an issue would be bound to appeal to all lovers of exciting pianism.

SPONSORS REQUIRED

The Society is reasonably happy with what has been achieved so far, but doesn't intend to rest on its laurels. Judging by the response we have received to our early ventures, there is a sizeable market for the sort of material we produce, but of course it all requires a considerable initial capital investment. It would not, for instance, have been possible to get 'Lightning Fingers' published without the generous support of a couple of Society members.

We would like to be able to make a start on some of the other ideas that have been broached and marked for future use, but we don't at the moment have sufficient funds to be able to take the risk involved. If any society members feel able to sponsor (on the basis of getting their money back if/when the project goes into the black) we would be very pleased to hear from them. Of course we're not asking for any kind of blank cheque: you would be able to choose what project your money should go into.

Nor would we expect any one individual to stand all the strain of any one project: all contributions, as they say, would be gratefully received and acknowledged, small and large. If you feel you might be able to help in this way, please talk to the Hon. Secretary.

In the same way, if you have any ideas about fund-raising, or you would like to help us in this matter, please contact a Committee Member.

OFF THE RECORD - a regular column

by John Watson

Regular readers of this column will remember the reference last time to Patricia Rossborough's recording of Phil The Fluter's Ball. This time Off The Record looks at the background to Billy Mayerl's own version. The details of the record are:

Columbia FB 1880 recorded 21 January 1938 in London
Billy Mayerl (piano) with Billy Scott-Coomber (vocal)
Phil The Fluter's Ball (French, trans. Mayerl) CA 16788-1
Billy Mayerl (Piano solo)
Parade of the Sandwich-Board Men (Mayerl) CA 16789-1

Instead of the usual reproduction of the record label, this time we are privileged to see the original Company recording files. One of the most interesting facts to emerge is that while Billy Scott-Coomber was paid the modest sum of two guineas for his singing, Billy Mayerl was paid a massive fifteen pounds! Two years earlier Billy had usually been paid ten pounds per double-sided record. The files show that at this stage the catalogue number was not yet allocated: also to be decided later was which 'take', if any, would be issued. Sometimes a complete session would be rejected and the artist would have to return to the studio again. It is of course a record collector's dream to find an unissued take of a favourite artist and some by Billy have survived, but that is another story.....

An examination of Mayerl's contract files show that he was usually paid a specific sum for each record. Occasionally he was paid a royalty of 1d per record on 85% gross sales, an example being Over She Goes Selections, with the Saville Theatre Orchestra. Record companies also deducted a sum to cover the cost of breakages. This of course was because of the fragile nature of the shellac 78. If this practice was justified in its day, one wonders how it has survived to the present, when the product is now the supposedly unbreakable compact disc!

The files also reveal that BM had to wait fourteen days for payment from the Columbia Company after the recording. Incidentally, the correct date is January 21, 1938 and not March as the recent Flapper label Mayerl CD informs us. Those of you who have this excellent CD can enjoy both sides of the 78.

The record was issued to coincide with the publication of the sheet music and was reviewed by the mysterious 'Turntable' in the April 1938 issue of the Mayerl School magazine. Not surprisingly they raved about it, as they did over all of Billy's new records! It was suggested that Billy's inspiration came from watching the sandwich-board men parade along Oxford Street, because of the way '.... his number cunningly gets the suggestion of the steady, measured tread.' Turntable goes on to remark that Billy plays it at a fairly fast tempo, but to this writer it sounds just about right.

Billy Scott-Coomber's vocal on Phil The Fluter's Ball is described as being "in true Irish brogue". BM sets a typically fast tempo for most of his transcription and BS-C does his best not to get out of breath. As Turntable points out, 'In any case, you will like it.' He was certainly right there.

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ARTISTS DEPARTMENT

INSTRUCTIONS FOR RECORDING.

Date 17.1.38

SIZE.	TITLE OF WORK.	PUBLISHER.
10"	PHIL THE FLUTER'S BALL	E.P.
	PARADE OF THE SANDWICH BOARD MEN	"

To be recorded by BILLY MAYERL with vocal by Billy Scott-Coomber

Friday 21st instant
at 11. 0
Studio 1a.

Receipt "A"

CHEQUE. £	s.	d.	ESTIMATE OF COST.	CASH. £	s.	d.
15	-	-	Billy Mayerl ARTISTE'S ROYALTY only write "ROYALTY")			
			ORCHESTRA.			
			CONDUCTOR			
			ACCOMPANIST (Name and Instrument)			
			CHORUS or CHOIR			
			ORCHESTRATIONS or HIRE of MUSIC B. Scott-Coomber	2	2	-
			HIRE of HALL or SPECIAL INSTRUMENTS			
			EXTRAS			
15	-	-		2	2	-

CHARGE TO (to be filled in when chargeable to an Agent) :—

REQUESTED BY (SIGNATURE) Charlton

THE ABOVE RECORDING IS APPROVED AND EXPENDITURE AUTHORISED

Billy Mayerl's Piano Transcription of the Famous Irish Song

Phil the Fluter's Ball

by W. P. French

CLARKE'S SERVICE

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LONDON, W.I.

The original sheet music to Phil The Fluter's Ball, and (inset) Billy Scott-Coomber, vocalist with Jack Payne's Dance Band.