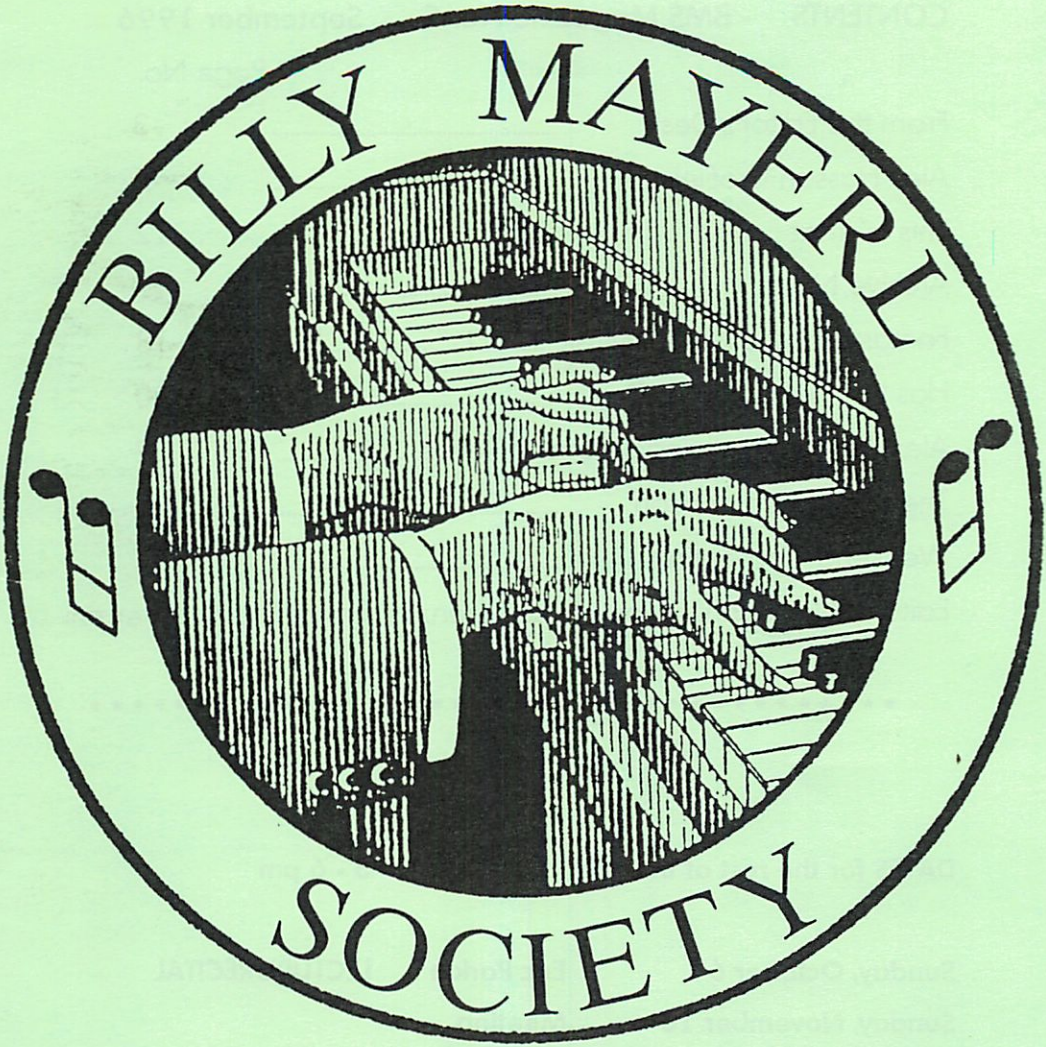

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Editor: Mike Harth, Layout: Mike Lorenzini, Typing: Kathy Lorenzini

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DATES for the rest of the Year: 3 - 6 pm

Sunday, October 6	**Eric Parkin**	**LECTURE/RECITAL**
Sunday, November 10	**Meeting**	
Sunday, December 8	**Roy Howat/ Wendy Hiscocks**	**CONCERT**

Tickets for October 6 and December 8 cost £10.--.

HURRY while there are still some available, so please book your tickets NOW for the two remaining Concerts for 1996.

Please arrive for Concerts by 2.30 pm.

From The Editor's Desk

Bernard Shaw's quip, that the English and Americans have everything in common except language, is a pointer to the huge influence the language we use has on our thinking, since to a considerable extent the grammar and vocabulary of a language controls the ways in which a concept can be expressed, and thus even the way in which it can be thought.

Misunderstandings quite often arise from the fact that the same word is being used to mean different things by different people. For instance, it has happened to me more than once that someone I am talking to tells me he likes sport, and I think that he's not the couch potato I had been assuming he was. Then minutes later I find out he means he likes watching sport, a totally different activity and a totally different meaning of the word sport. Much of this misunderstanding arises from lack of vocabulary: we need two words here, one to mean the playing of sport and the other the watching.*

An even worse situation arises with music. The language has only the one word to describe the output of Mozart, John Cage, Billy Mayerl and rap 'musicians'. With this width of expression a statement such as 'I like music' is practically meaningless.

I would hazard a guess that Alex's remarks, reported elsewhere, about the current state of popular music will strike a chord among a large proportion of our readers. Certainly they do with me, though I confess to being less optimistic about the future than he is. The tragedy is that the young are being brought up on a starvation diet, musically speaking, and don't realise it.

If Gilbert Adair, who a few months ago described jazz in print as 'music for people who don't like music' is correct (as I incline to think), then how on earth can one describe pop ? My answer would probably be that it's not really music, except peripherally. It addresses mainly other areas, and the appeal of any particular number or album is closely tied to its associated video, the particular promotional gimmicks attached to the group or singer, and the physical appeal that they do their best to project. I cannot believe that the appalling Tina Turner would have got where she is without the raunch she puts over, while the appeal of boy bands such as Take That is largely due to the 'cute' factor.

* This was written before I received Terry Wilkinson's article, but I'm sure Terry and I can agree to disagree on the merits or otherwise of football.

Susan Tomes and Peter Jacobs, coming as they do from the classical sphere, gave us a view of Billy's work seen from that angle, though Susan did introduce us to a very interesting suite from the more popular part of the repertoire, Dick Hyman's arrangement of some pieces by Willie 'The Lion' Smith. Her style of playing particularly suits such pieces as 'Antiquary', which I had also heard her play to great acclaim as an encore at a Wigmore Hall recital some months earlier, while Peter showed me how wrong I had been to neglect Chaminade's piano compositions, his performances of which, along with his truly orchestral performance of Sennen Cove, were for me the highlight of his recital.

William Davies, by contrast, though of course a fully trained musician, has always tended to concentrate on the lighter part of the repertoire, and is also a very entertaining raconteur, while Erles Jones' speciality, to my mind, lies in the brilliant fantasies he concocts, largely in the style of Raie da Costa, on popular songs of our period.

The most specialised of all, though, is Alex Hassan, who doesn't really perform anything outside the works that he and we are particularly interested in, and, though too young to have known it at first-hand, by dint of what seems like a fairly total immersion in both novelties as compositions and the playing styles they gave rise to is able to re-create the feel of the pianists of the period. In fact I would guess that his playing is the nearest we will ever get to what it would have been like to hear the young Billy live. Added to his enormous collection of music of the period, his arrival was for me the most exciting event of the year. Those who were unfortunate enough to be unable to attend his live recital should hasten to acquire either the video or the audio tape because Alex is truly a phenomenon, and one that might almost have been designed for us.

Incidentally, while he was over here I took the opportunity to record an interview with him, and a transcript of that interview appears elsewhere in this issue.

I have just read an interesting description of rock 'music' by another Sunday Times columnist as 'phatic communication', which apparently means communication without content. Of course this obviously applies to pop as well, perhaps even more, if that were possible, but it also raises some interesting questions about how much music is a form of communication, and what degree of content it has.

Our Society has now held five professional soirées at Shellwood, and I have been struck by the very considerable amount of difference between them. Each one has been quite different from the others, which is a very encouraging phenomenon because it means that we are not, as an outsider might imagine, trawling a limited repertoire where our chief pleasure is to hear again what we already know well. Indeed, one of the excitements of the recitals for me is being introduced to new works - new in the sense that I haven't come across them before. I only wish there were lots of composers producing syncopated novelties today.

* *

Dear Editor,

I was very interested to read again the reprint of Billy Mayerl's views on pedalling and specially the final two paragraphs which are what I did myself over very many years. I hardly ever touched the sustaining pedal and the first thing I would do when sitting down at the piano was to place my foot firmly on the 'soft' pedal and then I would produce all my dynamics solely by careful accenting by my fingers on the keys.

In the case of the popular songs of the day (such as "I'm beginning to see the light") I would play a chorus out of rhythm as a ballad and then start a gentle stride going in my left hand and providing it was not too fast a number, I would play the melody right hand in cleanly but gently accented octaves with occasional "twiddley-bits" between the two octave notes. I would then follow with a single note medley played just below middle C with my left hand gently finding the deep bass note (or octave or tenth) with the second and fourth beats swinging over my right hand to a "cluster" above middle C. This is all straight-forward stuff of course, but what made it effective was the control of dynamics exercised purely by my finders on the keyboard and NEVER by the use of the sustaining pedal. Alan Turner.

* *

ERRATUM

In the book "Lightning Fingers" I erroneously stated that Billy Mayerl was born of Jewish parents. I am grateful to Mrs. Hilda Mayerl for pointing out that they were, in fact, staunch Catholics. This error has been corrected in the recent reprint of the book.

J.F. Archer.

Alex Hassan

I first started on the piano around 8 or 9. My father taught me for five years or so, then sent me to Peabody Conservatory, but he took me out after a year because I was telling my teacher what I wanted to play rather than letting her choose. My father always had a lot of music lying around which I wasn't scheduled to play but I would take a look at, and as I was quite adept at sight-reading after the first year or so I went through a good deal of repertoire, both classical and jazz, seeing what was out there..

My interest in novelties started around the late sixties, though at the time it was more a jazzy sort of stuff, which generally meant folios of transcriptions by such as Bob Zurke and Mary Lou Williams. In the late seventies my mother decided to go back to college to get a teacher's degree, and at the college she attended, Tulsa, I thus had full rein of the music library. I soon discovered with particular pleasure that they had the complete editions of Louis-Moreau Gottschalk and Scott Joplin, which my mother was able to take out for me.

Then in Baltimore, where we were living at the time, there was a music-shop named Schubert's Music, where my mother insisted on calling the proprietor Mr. Schubert even though his name was actually Froelich. This shop had a sort of carousel shelf-arrangement of music, and on this I found a co-production, by the American music publishers Sam Fox with your own Keith Prowse, of a 120-page folio of BM. At the time, of course, I'd never heard of him, but I looked at it and thought 'gosh, this is some of the most ornate popular piano music I've ever seen', so I shelled out the necessary, took it home and thus began a love-affair that has lasted now I guess for over twenty-five years.

These were the first novelties I had taken a serious interest in: the American ones I had seen up to that time had been lacking in both melodic interest and interesting piano style. But in the Mayerl nothing is left to the imagination, and I thought 'how wonderful to show off with', something one is pretty keen to do at that age.

Then in the late seventies Folkways issued an LP of original recordings by BM in not very good transfers, but it contained a number of pieces that weren't in the folio I had and were also fully written out. So I went to the Library Of Congress, asked for their BM box, and my collection

expanded, via photo-copies, probably about three-fold in that first afternoon. Even they didn't have everything, and because of my fluency in sight-reading I'm able to get through a large amount of repertoire. Many, I might almost say most, pianists will take longer over a piece than I will. Of course eventually they will reach a higher standard than I do, but I encompass a larger number of pieces.

The Billy Mayerl catalogue, the latest edition of which I expect most of you will have looked at in 'Lightning Fingers', was started in the early eighties, though the idea of it came from a fellow enthusiast/pianist/collector, Mike Lang, who was a member of the Billy Mayerl Circle, and purchased Alan Turner's collection when he sold it.

Lang listed whatever he owned, as well as a few pieces he'd heard about from various printed sources. I had the Library of Congress at my disposal, and a bit more enthusiasm for the idiom. The result is a catalogue that has gone through three editions, and includes many compositions that Mike Lang couldn't possibly have discovered, given the fact that his home is in the Los Angeles area.

Much of it, needless to say, is derived from visits to England, correspondence with other synco/gluttons, visits to publishers' archives, and perusal of printed sources.

Needless to say, BM was only the beginning: I eventually found out that the novelty idiom was a fairly world-wide phenomenon and that there were a number of composers emulating Billy, so that even though he reigned supreme there was still a fair amount of other worthwhile stuff. I didn't start collecting records of the style, though, until about the late seventies. Because it occupies a nebulous sort of place, neither classical nor jazz, the record companies of the time ignored it, so up till that time I had amassed a voluminous collection, but mainly of more unusual classical music.

Becoming a professional musician wasn't an option I considered seriously. Although I consider myself a passable classical player, there were and are very many others as good or better. What I do best, and therefore have the edge in, is rather peripheral to current musical scene, and earning a living with it would have been precarious, to say the least. So I took an English degree with a masters in library science, and got a job as a reference librarian, which I've been doing for the last 14 years.

The advantage of this is that I am able to pick and choose what I will perform rather than be forced to adapt my programmes to suit whatever particular public would be paying the check at the time. Too many musicians I know are having to prostitute their art simply to provide their bread-and-butter. If I were earning my living by my playing, I expect I'd have to perform Andrew Lloyd-Webber medleys, and as the only idiom I'm really comfortable in is an earlier, so I'd have to take these highly unmemorable scores and try and do something with them in what would anyway be an anachronistic style.

I was very much brought up in an atmosphere of classical and jazz music, mostly classical, with my father as teacher and player and my mother as listener. He could give, for instance, a good account of Fats Waller's 'Ain't Misbehavin', though as soon as he stopped teaching me he started to leave off playing himself.

I'm not sure what it is that attracts me to the novelty idiom: my classical tastes always leaned rather in the direction of the late romantics, with melodic inspiration being the essential, and to my ears even syncopated music is romantic and melodic. Of course Billy's melodic gift was outstanding, but he was writing mainly in an era where there was a profligacy of composers with a high level of inspiration. For me, the era of melody largely ends with the second war: of course there is the occasional oasis afterwards, but by and large the proportion of instantly forgettable stuff became so much higher once the thirties had gone.

I belong to a local ragtime society, though really it's more informal than that: you just show up if you feel like it, there are no membership rolls or dues, except that now they've started asking you to pay for the cost of their mailing you. But then we have the use of a room in a piano warehouse where you could probably stuff 120 people, and we average around eighty or ninety. The organisers use it as a tax write-off, so they're happy if they make enough to cover their costs, which they usually do. That was where I really turned into a performer. I became their principal pianist for a number of years, and it's only recently that I've been sharing the duties with a couple who specialise more in classical ragtime, partly because they aren't really up to the demands of novelties.

Of course we'd like to attract more performing talent: people don't want to come along only to have their eardrums assailed, they want at least a

reasonable level of technique (and musicality, hopefully). In the same way I see here you're putting on four or so professional recitals a year, even though I gather you've got some pretty good amateurs who get their chance at other meetings. Back home, there have been times when I would sit there with my head in my hands wondering when this noise was going to stop, but it doesn't happen often, and as I say the number of attendees who even offer to play is very small. We have a young man who's wheelchair-bound, and he periodically plays something for us on electric piano, which is good to see, but he is fairly limited. Then there are some others with the best intentions, but not enough technique to make a go of it. We did have an elderly woman late in the 1980s, who didn't have much left in the way of fingers, but still enough for you to tell that at one time this was one dazzling performer.

Apart from there, I've played at the Smithsonian Institute, I played with a dance-band that was re-creating the sound of the thirties and forties - very little twenties because people stop dancing when you play something hot from that period. Not, I'm afraid, because they wanted to listen to it so much as that they couldn't relate to it as dance music: the whole feel of the Charleston is lost to them, they think of it as cartoon music. So I gradually lost more and more interest, apart from the fact that the further you get on in time the less the piano is involved in the band anyway.

I've also done a fair amount of what amounted to party work, and I guess those people who might need to know about me do know. Of course this is all mainly Washington based, but I've also played in New York, at the Players' Club at a party given to the remnants of the Gershwin family by some sort of cultural interlink group that calls itself The Bridge. They'd heard me play at a get-together at Dick Hyman's studio on 42nd St. I'd known Dick already for a couple of years because one of his musical gophers was a young Britisher named Kevin who had gone to Manhattan hoping, I suppose, to make a name for himself, though sadly he died while still very young.

Kevin introduced me to Hyman, and it shows you what the musical grape-vine is like because he was in Manhattan and I'm down in Washington, yet he can find out that I'm a BM addict. In fact he heard of me from a collecting buddy of mine in East Grinstead, Malcolm Powell. About a year after Kevin's death, Hyman had a sort of memorial get-

together for people who'd known him, I played there, and the woman who was putting this party on heard me there. At that same party a woman who sat down next to me told me that she is Mrs. Burton Lane, and her husband was standing right behind me, at which I nearly had a heart attack. Frances Gershwin sang along with me while I was playing, Alan Jay Lerner made a speech, - excuse the name-dropping.

Another good buddy of mine was playing with his dance-band in the next room, Stuart Donner and his Nighthawks. He's another musician wedded particularly to the late twenties and early thirties, a really hot dance period. He has the same problems that I outlined to you earlier: if he's doing a wedding or a bar-mitzvah, he has to put rock-and-roll numbers into his programme, or he'll be playing in some restaurant and people will ask for some or other light rock crap, and of course Vince has to make a living. He also has to pay an ex-wife an extraordinary amount of money for a number of years, so he doesn't have any choice.

The craze for ragtime initiated by the film 'The Sting' did make some difference for a while. But then you got people asking for 'The Sting', totally unaware that it was in fact called 'The Entertainer' and written by Scott Joplin, in fact most of them were under the impression that it had been composed by Marvin Hamlisch, God forbid. But that's the masses for you: they like simple stuff, which is of course why Charlie Kunz was so popular.

I hope and believe that things are gradually improving, musically speaking. Surely it's got to happen, there has to be a reaction to all these years of noise and no melody. What direction can the modern pop idiom go ? How can it possibly get any worse ? I know this has been said every year through the last I don't know how many, but it's got to happen. Rap, for example: it's just rhymed talking with a boom beat in the background, and its whole atmosphere is violent as well. So I'm conducting my little crusade, spreading the gospel of our sort of music, syncopation with a dash of romanticism if you like. I regret that this sort of music died out, but musical styles are perpetually changing, not always for the better. Unfortunately in the States novelties by and large lacked the melodic underpinning that they had here and in mainland Europe, so they didn't have the same lasting qualities - I mean you can't imagine a Confrey revival, for instance, but Mayerl, Perl and Fischer, to name only three, produced works that deserve to remain a part of the pianist's repertoire.

Of course over here you had the advantage that by and large the musical public was much better educated, so that Keith Prowse could afford to publish highly technically demanding works like Billy's without having to worry that too many prospective purchasers would be frightened off.

Part of the reason novelty has died is to do to with the level of musical education: there are very few pianists today with the ability to play the idiom as it needs to be played. So far as audiences are concerned, I believe that if it was properly packaged it would be perfectly possible to tour with novelty-type recitals, for there is no doubt that practically all the members of an audience that does hear this sort of material, whether as an encore to a classical recital or standing on its own, enjoys it: it's smiles all round. Of course, the problem is to get them to listen to it in the first place, but if you can achieve that I believe that by and large novelties will be able to sell themselves.

Alex Hassan, Mike Lorenzini, Philip Legg

THIS 'n' THAT by A.E. Turner

It is inevitable that after a gap of fifty-seven years, my "THIS 'n' THAT" articles will no longer be able to bring you views on the latest syncopated piano sheet music, but I hope I may be able to interest you with some of my musical memories of the twenties and thirties, which were periods of sharp contrasts between the most joyful music and the supermarket mentality of today. This contrast resulted in the twenties and thirties being periods of comparative poverty. From 1926 I was working in one of the present "big four" banks and one's very small salary meant that you were under contract to work for the bank, if necessary, for 24 hours a day. Thus there were no opportunities to increase your income by working overtime because there wasn't any! Each half year there were periods of a fortnight in June and December when we had to work every night to well after midnight and the only payment we received was four shillings and sixpence each night for a meal and an hour off work to eat it. Thus with my annual salary of £275 when I got married at the age of 29, my wife being 25, there was certainly no spare cash for records, sheet music or anything else for that matter. Of course the purchasing power at the time of that £275 has to be adjusted to allow for inflation, but it was still painfully small compared with today. And yet strange to say there was never any thought at all that one's wife should continue working after marriage. Mind you, the advent of World War II just after our marriage soon put an end to such Victorian ideas and throughout my five years in the Royal Air Force my wife, of course, was working full time. I hope the foregoing does not bore you, but I feel it is necessary to set the scene as it was in those days.

The coming of the 'wireless' in 1923/24 started a process of universal education, which was to transform the relatively unsophisticated ideas of the early twenties up to the very sophisticated population of today. The start of broadcasts by the then British Broadcasting Company (licence fee 10/-) was a wonderful beacon of light in a rather drab existence and the local station, 6BM at Bournemouth brought a joyful interest in life and the world at large. Thus, in 1924 there came the evening when I was listening to 6BM and they announced they were going to tray an experiment that night; they would try to relay the bands from the Savoy Hotel, London (the Savoy Orpheans and Savoy Havana Band) BY TELEPHONE to listeners to 6BM. And so started the wonderful series of

relays from London hotels of such bands as Ambrose, Fred Elizalde, Sidney Lipton, Jack Jackson, Lew Stone, Roy Fox and Harry Roy, all of which are represented on CDS Record No. RPCD 303.

There was a small dance band which broadcast over 2LO in London in the very early days of 1923, but the first dance band to make an impact was the London Radio Dance Band directed by Sidney Firman. This was a small band of about six musicians and they were not particularly effective, although their Columbia 78 of "Castillian Nights" is worth a listen. Also around teatime in 1925 there were relays of dance bands from the Casani Club and the Royal Automobile Club ballroom which were very welcome. But then in June 1926 along came Jack Payne and the BBC Dance Orchestra for the teatime slot and this was the first real "house" band playing from the studio. I estimate it comprised some dozen musicians and employed some of the top men then available in London such as Ray Noble, Jack Jackson, Bob Busby, Billy Scot-Comber, Poggy Pogson and Billy Thorburn.

I must now back-track to the early twenties and the relays of bands (including Varaldi's Tango Band and other tango bands) from the Savoy Hotel. These broadcasts gave the entree to millions who would never have expected to bask in the reflected glory of being able to listen to the dance bands at such "beyond-the-reach" establishments as the Savoy Hotel, to be followed later by visits to the Grosvenor House ballroom, the Mayfair Hotel and many others. But nothing could beat the thrill of those very first "Savoy Bands" relays with, as we well know now, the presence of Billy Mayerl on piano with the Savoy Havana Band.

Continuing with dance bands other than the studio bands we immediately come up against one of the first in Jack Hylton, who hardly ever (with one exception mentioned later) did a studio broadcast. Apart from their personal appearances (and they were phenomenally popular throughout mainland Europe), Jack Hylton relied on the regular issue of 78 rpm records to engender continuing interest in his band. I was in London and saw the Hylton Band at the Holborn Empire just after then had returned from yet another highly successful Continental tour and all over London there were the famous "Jack's back" posters. You could not avoid them, they were on the tubes and everywhere. This poster consisted of an upwardly rectangular poster of a full-length photograph of Hylton conducting, but viewed from behind. Just two words "Jack's

back" were across the bottom right hand corner with a discreet note of where the band was appearing. They put over a highly entertaining show at the Holborn Empire, but I want to tell you of the occasion circa 1933 when the band did a week at the Southampton Empire (no renamed the Mayflower Theatre). I went to the Saturday evening performance and it was one I shall never forget - I only wish I could have had the entire membership of the Billy Mayerl Society with me to share in the quality of the music and the outstanding entertainment element with which Hylton enthused the whole band. Both the Jack Hylton Band, and in America, the Paul Whiteman Orchestra used around thirty musicians on stage and such a number, flat out, were capable of making a VERY loud sound.

Well, at the Southampton Empire the heavy red curtains were lit by the footlights when suddenly the band burst into "Oh listen to the band" only to be greeted by applause from the auditorium which could only be described as thunderous. The red curtains parted a little to show Jack conducting, as in the poster, and then the full band was revealed playing hell for leather and as the tune came to the end the timpani weighed in with the large sousaphone to swell the racket even more! And there was absolutely no pause, with Hylton straightaway into the first number of his programme. Jack Hylton really knew how to play his audience!

If you were seeing that performance today, two things would strike you about Hylton's Band. Firstly, there were absolutely no music stands so the band movements were flexible and if the whole brass section took a couple of steps forward for a special chorus there were no music stands to trip them up. Of course, the absence of music stands meant the musicians had to learn everything by heart. This was probably no problem for those playing the melody, but the harmony instruments must have had a tough time memorising all the harmony parts. But from the audience's point of view the band were able to appear relaxed and fully in command of the situation. The second thing you would notice would be the complete absence, in the early thirties, of any microphones. As a result when the reeds were playing sub-tone clarinet they used large black megaphones, which had holes in the side for the hands to go through to finger the instruments and there was a small light fitted into the inside of the top of the megaphones so that the audience could see the musicians playing. The effect was adequate sound throughout the

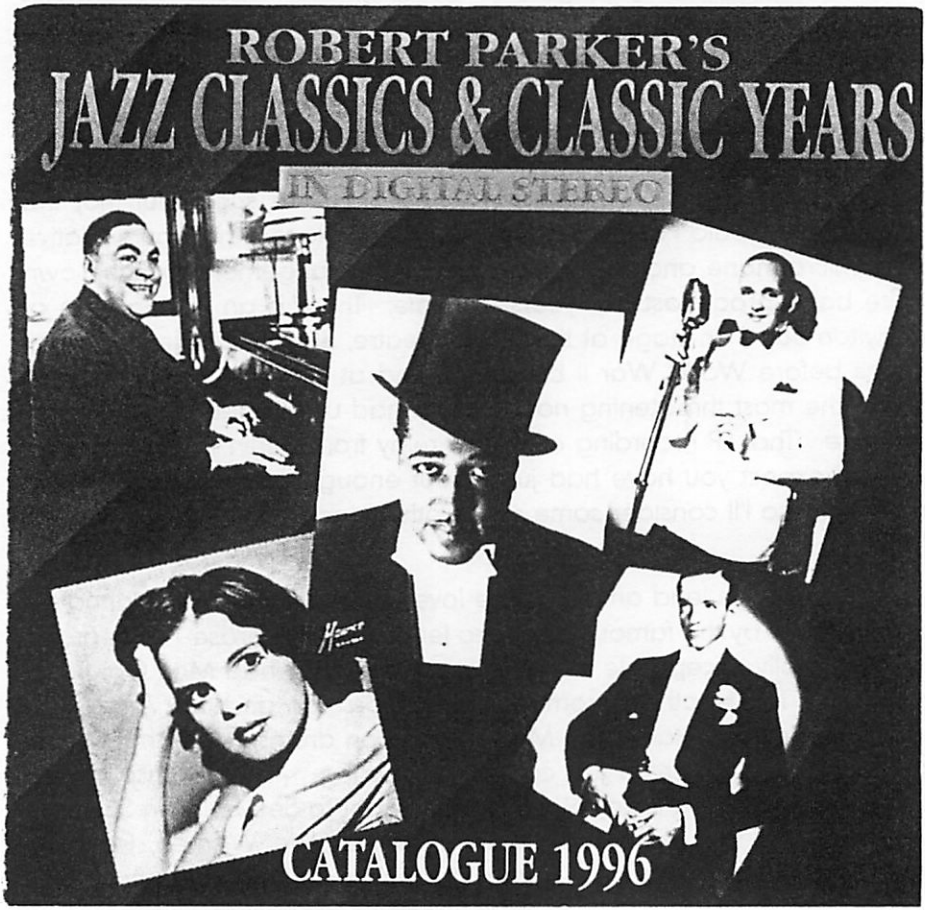
theatre plus a lovely smooth tone to the lower register clarinets. The string section of three or four was also something to wonder at, containing as it did some of the finest classical players around such as Jean Pougnet, Johnny Rosen and Hugo Rignold, which in 1936 Jack, for a while, even had Sidone Goosens on harp! The start turn in the brass section was the trumpet of Jack Jackson, who later led his own band. Jack Jackson would suddenly stand up and do a scat vocal break which surprised and delighted to audience.

The nearest approach to one of Hylton's stage presentations is to listen IN STEREO to his "Choo-Choo" on Robert Parker's "DANCE BANDS, UK", CD number RPCD 303 and in this connection, please refer to my notice in issue No.4 of the Society magazine. The only time I heard Jack Hylton's Band in a studio broadcast was when Jack took the band to Paris for the purpose of recording Maurice Chevalier singing with the band at the studios of La Voix de son Maitre. The records were subsequently issued in Britain on the HMV label. However, over two weekends there were a couple of splendid Sunday lunchtime programmes from the band on Radio Paris on about 1750 metres. These were so successful that the studio staff at Radio Paris noted how Jack had placed the band relative to the microphone and they used that same arrangement for their own dance band broadcasts for years to come. There is an LP available of the Hylton Band on stage at the Scale Theatre, Berlin recorded some six months before World War II broke out and at a time when Hitler was making the most threatening noises which had us altogether worried for the future. That LP recording of a BBC relay from Berlin is on REID RD7. By now I expect you have had just about enough of my enthusiasm for Jack Hylton, so I'll consider some of the other goodies on Robert Parker's CD.

May I suggest you lend an ear to the lovely crisp version of "I Wanna be Loved by You" by the famous orchestra led by Bert Ambrose - to hear this old 78 in really acceptable stereo is a privilege. He had Max Goldberg on trumpet, Ted Heath on trombone, Joe Crossman and Billy Amstell on reeds, Bert Reid on piano and Maxie Bacon on drums. With that sort of expensive talent Ambrose just couldn't go wrong. Another crisp cut on Robert Parker's record is Ray Nobel's "You ought to See Sally on Sunday". Finally, there is the excellent version of "Masculine Women, Feminine Men" by the Savoy Havana Band with either Donald Thorne or Billy

Mayerl on piano. On this fine CD you will also find "Singapore Sorrows" by Fred Elizalde and his Music, "Harmonica Harry" by Jack Payne's BBC Dance Orchestra. The latter put up a very fine show at Southampton Guildhall and, had I not been familiar with the work of Jack Hylton, I might well have regarded Jack Payne as No. 1. But nothing could follow Jack Hylton, except perhaps Paul Whiteman himself. Hylton's "1812" copied from the Whiteman stage version had a dramatic backdrop of Moscow burning and the tubular bells received an absolute walloping.

Well, that more or less covers some of my memories of the British dance band scene of the twenties and thirties. My memories of the solo artists such as Louis Armstrong, Earl Hines, Trummy Young, Carroll Gibbons and Reginald Forsythe will have to wait till "This 'n' That" returns to you next time round. Cheerio.



Phone & fax: 01364 631 253

Archive News by Mike Lorenzini

Philip Legg and I set off to Selsey twice in recent months, each time returning with rare Billy Mayerl sheet music - most notably "Waltz for a Lonely Heart" (piano conductor), "Busybody" (piano conductor), and also an autograph of "What Might Have Been" - in all approxmiately 30 new additions to the Society's archive. All thanks to remarkable Billy Mayerl enthusiast, Richard Head, whose kindness and generosity to the Society is much appreciated.

Richard's connections included Mrs. Gil Mayerl and Harry Nichols, founder of the Billy Mayerl Circle and editor of its newsletter. An article on Richard will be included in the next issue of this Magazine.

The Committee has unanimously agreed to confer honorary life membership on Richard Head and Alan Turner in recognition of their generous gifts to the archive.

FANTASY FOOTBALL – WITH MUSIC

Terry Wilkinson

If you watched the EURO 96 Football Final, some minutes before the kick-off you would have seen and heard (in spite of captions and the monotonous meanderings of Mister Motson), the RAF band leaving the pitch to the sound of the "Royal Air Force March Past". This, together with "Solemn Melody" and the Christmas carol, "O, Little Town of Bethlehem", is probably the only music by which posterity will remember the composer, organist, broadcaster and Master of the King's Musick, Sir Henry Walford Davies (1869-1941).

But wait! Did he not make the wonderful comment - "My favourite composers are Bach, Beethoven, Brahms....and BILLY MAYERL' a statement with which I concur wholeheartedly, with the addition of Edward Elgar. I wonder how many music lovers regard these two English composers as our greatest? Did they have anything in common?

Elgar was self-taught - no musical academy for the young Edward unlike the young Billy - the only Trinity E.E. was exposed to was at the local Roman Catholic Church in Worcester where he played the organ (or deputised, so that the official organist could slip out for a "pint" during the long sermon). Mayerl also can claim to have learned the art that was to make him famous without the College's assistance, so it seems reasonable to think of him also as self-taught. Elgar, when famous, on being asked by the leader of the L.S.O., Willy Reed, "to teach me harmony and counterpoint" replied "I know nothing of such things"! Of course he did - he was a master of both but he didn't want to be a professor.

They had at least two other things in common: both of them gave the best performances of their own music as well as leaving a wonderful recorded legacy for later generations. One interesting point regarding their playing (performance) times : Mr. Lightning Fingers played his pieces faster than anyone else - too fast, say some, and likewise Elgar didn't hang about, as one can see by comparing his recording of his second symphony with a recent issue - Elgar 48 mins., an eminent British conductor - 63 mins. (incidentally "63" is the opus number of this work - is it possible that the conductor got a little mixed up - viz. - opus = time).

In his recent programme, Peter Dickinson described Mayerl's light orchestral music as being "worthy to stand alongside that of Eric Coates."

It must, I think, be conceded when the topic of light orchestral music is raised that Elgar set a standard (starting at about the age of ten) that no one else achieved. I suppose if you have composed great symphonies, concertos, choral works, overtures etc. etc. the miniatures get overlooked (as are his many songs). I suggest to anyone not familiar with the Wand of Youth Suite, Serenade for Strings, Nursery Suite and many more of the lighter Elgar pieces that this is music to be enjoyed - does not "Shallow Waters" have strains of the Worcester composer ?

I do not suppose that Elgar and Mayerl ever met (?), but one wonders whether they were familiar with each others music? HMV supplied Elgar with radios (and gramophones) so he might have listened to the Savoy Hotel broadcasts - is it just possible that Gwen Farrar (described as a 'Cellist in the same mould as Beatrice Harrison) could have played, with Mayerl at the piano, parts of the 'cello concerto? She also had a voice like Clara Butt (stentorian) that could transmit "Land of Hope and Glory" across the English Channel. It is a certainty that B.M. knew Pomp and Circumstance No.1- what else it would be interesting to know.

A final football thought: Elgar was a Wolves supporter; did Mayerl go to White Hart Lane on a Saturday? I did, one cold winter's day in 1960, go to Molyneux to see Tottenham trounce Wolves 3 - NIL, Danny Blanchflower scored one from the half-way line for Spurs. In those days, I'd not heard of Billy Mayerl; Elgar, YES! - Mayerl - NO! However, since 1976 if I've been "weighed in the balance and <u>not</u> found wanting", this is, as it should be.

Question: Three composers called a short piano work of theirs "Merry Andrew". Who are they? all three works are on record.

<u>Footnotes</u>

1. Commercial recording for both composers was to span about twenty years, Mayerl recording a large quantity of his piano music as well as having an occasional session with the baton conducting the Court Symphony Orchestra. Elgar had one piano session in November 1929 resulting in Five Improvisations (never issued on 78's - A.C. Griffiths transferred them to LP -RLS 7132). Elgar conducting Elgar is one of the treasures of the record industry - he was the first major composer to do this. (Is it not a paradox that two Americans, Jerrold Northrop Moore and Alex Hassan should devote so much of their lives to crusade for Elgar and Mayerl - writing, playing etc.? Perhaps English music is the best!).

2. ELGAR ON RECORD by Jerrold Northrop Moore.

* see Page 23

HAS THE PIANO HAD ITS DAY?

John Archer

Perhaps this article would be better titled "The Musings of a Modern Day Musical Luddite". I must confess that from time to time I have found myself pondering this question but two recent experiences brought the subject into a little sharper focus for me. In early May, I had the good fortune to be taken by a friend to visit Finchcocks nr. Goudhurst in Kent. This is, as perhaps some of you will know, a magnificent collection of some eighty historical keyboard instruments including a wide range of early pianos housed in a fine Georgian manor house. The manor is noted for its "dramatic front elevation attributed to Thomas Archer" (no relation - I'm afraid), but I digress.

At Finchcocks one can see and experience at first hand the logical development of keyboard instruments from the virginal to the early piano and follow the constant striving for improvement and innovation to the delightful instruments we take for granted today. This development was driven in part by composers in the 19th and 20th centuries falling over themselves to compose for and perform on the piano and therefore the instrument had to be capable of producing enough volume for a public performance.

It has to be said that those artistically fertile times produced composer/performers by the dozen if not quite in hundreds. The list is certainly a lengthy one and one can 'cite without too much thought such illustrious names as Chopin, Beethoven, Liszt, Schumann, Schubert and so on. They, mostly, had at least one thing in common as composers. They were all innovators to a greater or lesser degree and each of them exploited the piano's seemingly endless possibilities. Thus, Liszt was to raise pianistic standards to great new heights and also to establish, as a result, the solo piano recital as a new and vibrant public entertainment. Chopin and Debussy on the other hand exploited the poetic qualities of the piano whereas moving into more recent times Stravinsky and Bartok, very much the avant garde composers of their day, concentrated on its percussive qualities.

And so it was that composers developed their understanding and technique to exploit the piano's unrivalled range, speed and flexibility of interpretation to an unprecedented degree over the last two centuries. The piano, which was their chosen instrument of personal expression became a thing of beauty, a beautiful beast which required many years

of toil to tame. The feeling of being at the controls of a wonderful creation, the product of centuries of development and innovation is a feeling hard to explain to someone who has never sat at the keyboard of a concert grand piano.

This musing brings me to the second event which finally precipitated this article. I recently had the experience of playing for the first time, a latter-day electronic piano, a diminutive Yamaha Clavinova. I was impressed by its versatility of tone, its weighted keys, its portability, the quality of its sampled voices, its ability to adapt to the acoustics of the room. In fact, in purely acoustic terms it gave (to me), a surprisingly good account of itself. However, in purely aesthetic terms it was not very lovely. Where had all that lovely craftsmanship of yesteryear gone? Undoubtedly, a great deal of craftsmanship of a quite different kind had gone into its development but to my mind the result was a clever box of electronic tricks without a soul..

Somehow, it was hard to imagine that serious piano students would feel sufficiently motivated to be prepared to spend many years toiling at the instrument in order to perfect their technique. The paradox of this situation is that I quite happily embrace electronic equipment in all its domestic forms (I even own and play an electronic organ!) but I cannot come to terms with the modern electronic piano. I suppose I must be a Luddite, at heart. It would be interesting to know whether my feelings are shared by others, particularly, younger members, in the Society and also whether serious students of the piano today learn their craft on the electronic instrument.

Moving on, I am also struck by the dearth of new piano works today. Is it because modern composers feel that the piano has already been fully-exploited (or over exploited?) and that there is nothing still left to explore. Has the piano had its day, therefore, as a creative instrument or has it merely gone out of fashion, to return at some future date when it once more comes back into vogue. I think not! We must also consider in this discussion the status of the piano as a popular entertainment medium. We will probably never experience again the piano mania of the early 20th century which was as much a product of the piano's adoption as a status symbol in the average home as to its popularity as an entertainment medium. Nevertheless, in marketing terms, whatever the reason, the market for solo piano music has shrunk drastically and composing it is probably not going to generate even a modest income today so why do it? The piano music of Billy Mayerl which we all revere

was the product of a very commercially-minded composer. Billy is reputed to have said that he never had time to be a good composer, presumably because he was always working to a deadline. Regardless of the esteem in which we hold the bulk of Billy's piano solo compositions, it must be admitted that the sheer rate at which he produced his masterpieces must have been influenced by financial considerations. Does it follow, therefore, that removed from the constraints of time and finance Billy would have produced even greater masterpieces. Probably not, but there again I belong to the School of thought that believes in the merit of a little psychological pressure (a deadline!) in order to produce spontaneous masterpieces.

It is a fondly-cherished thought in many creative fields (journalism, for instance) that given a little more time an undoubted masterpiece would have been produced. Supporting evidence for this theory is hard to find.

However, for whatever reasons, one thing is certain, we will never see his like again. In the mid-fifties Billy was at the forefront of a drive to promote Light Music in this country because he believed that it was dying. The Fifties certainly produced some very fine Light Music but nevertheless the decline was never arrested and today we have to endure a monstrous amount of rubbish, passed off as music, but unworthy of the title.

We members of the Billy Mayerl Society, and countless other similar music societies, are often accused of being obsessed with the past. In musical terms do we really have an acceptable alternative?

Alex Hassan - May 26, 1996 - Review by Peter Joelson

Wow! What a recital! Alex Hassan's playing left me breathless with amazement and admiration. His highly idiomatic playing and witty and interesting spoken introductions have made this concert memorable.

He opened with "You Ought to be in Pictures" by Dana Suesse, transcribed from Adam Carroll's piano roll arrangement. Described as a quintessential song of the 20s and 30s it scintillated and served as the perfect introduction to this recital. Alex has arranged and played a medley of numbers from Billy Mayerl's "London Revue", full of spiky melodies typical of the 1920s. "Igloo Stomp" (or We'll Thaw Icicles") by William Wirges, whose piano playing was not up to his composing, followed with its amusing shivering motif. Billy Golwyn's "Verbena" comes from the early 1930s, more melodic and relaxing. It made a good contrast to the stomp. This was delightfully played and described as Golwyn's "Marigold".

Pauline Alpert, who had a highwire act with her piano, performed "Perils of Pauline" under these conditions. How she did this is difficult to imagine. Alex again displayed his complete sympathy with the idiom in this lollipop. The Belgian swing/stride pianist Jean Duwerx's "Wakin' Hand" (1933) is a pastiche of a variety of piano styles of the period; this blues with some fearsomely difficult right hand passagework is an excellent example of European composition, beautifully executed by Alex. Another Bill Wirges piece "Snow Shoes" (1927) was followed by Alex's masterly Carroll Gibbons Medley, pure delight from start to finish.

After the interval Alex played another Billy Golwyn piece "Butterflies in the Rain" written in a bittersweet minor key. Vladigerov's only venture into syncopated music "Foxtrot" (1926) reminded me of Martinu's "Shimmy Foxtrot" from the ballet "Who is the Most Powerful in the World" (1922), both very much European Jazz. Lothar Perl's syncopated impressions were an unexpected delight. The original copies of the music have the most beautiful artwork and are well worth collecting. "Grasshopper Dance" (1933) has a wistful air to it. Billy Golwyn's "Grasshopper" (1936) was more extrovert. Two more Perls followed, "The Goldfish" and "The Last Mohican" (both 1933) serve to whet the appetite to investigate more of his compositions.

Alex ended his recital with some of this awe-inspiring arrangements. His Burton Lane Fantasy, which he hopes to play later to the composer, was followed by Cliff Hess's amusing piece "Hobby Horse Parade". The last item was Alex's "Wizard of Oz Selection", full of bravura showing his prodigious talent off magnificently. I look forward with enormous enthusiasm to a return visit by Alex Hassan and his masterly playing. In the meantime, look out for his recordings. Soon to appear, I hope, will be a disc recorded at Shellwood and four discs recorded for the Smithsonian Institute.

* * * * * * *

As I'm very grateful to Terry Wilkinson for taking the time and trouble to write an article for this magazine, I hope he won't take it amiss if I remark that I personally find Mayerl and Elgar rather strange bedfellows. Practically the only thing their music has in common is a certain feel of Englishness. Elgar's music is very obviously the product of a deeply emotional man, and much of it is deeply sad: even his light music is rarely truly light-hearted - I except 'From The Bavarian Highlands'. Billy, on the other hand, reveals practically nothing of his inner feelings in his music: occasionally there is a hint of sadness in some of his later works, apart from that everywhere we find classical restraint and no overt emotion.

Billy and Bogey

Picture: courtesy of BMS Member Robert Howarth

The Piano Transcription - A Personal View by Alex Hassan

(Reprinted with kind permission of Terry Wilkinson from the MGM Magazine 35)

For a good number of years now, I've been of the (to some) somewhat blasphemous opinion that the successors to the great piano transcribers/arrangers of the 19th through early 20th centuries: Liszt, Tausig/ Thalberg/ Moszkowski through Godowsky/ Rosenthal/ Grunfeld/ Friedman/ Rachmaninoff were some of our very own 1920s and 1930s syncopators! 1925-40 was - and this is fairly incontestable - the Golden Age of 20th century popular music, both (for purposes of this article) in the US and England. The great songsmiths of our countries; Berlin/ Kern/ Gershwin / Rodgers / Schwartz / Warren / Porter etc.for the US; Mayerl / Ellis / Coward / Novello for England produced an unsurpassable outpouring of melody during these few years. Is it any wonder that the more memorable of these melodies, the "art" songs of the time, would find themselves championed by some of the finest musicians of the said period.

Could Jack Strachey have imagined, after penning his timeless "These Foolish Things", that it would be given a Liszt - Godowsky - Rachmaninoff concert/ rhythmic treatment, soon after, by virtuoso syncopator Arthur Sandford, replete with cadenza - like passagework, countermelodies and abundant chromaticism? Similarly, could 19th century composer, Stanislaus Moniusko have written the national opera of Poland, Halka, with young Liszt rival Karl Tausig in mind? Of all the marvellous transcriptions that I've encountered, Tausig's Halka Fantasy is the most forward-looking of his time. Folk melodies and rhythms abound. With a few synco-devices thrown in, it could easily be an example of 20th century popular piano writing. Seek it out, though stamina and technical requirements are nothing less than daunting!

Now, I'm not suggesting that comparisons are, generally, much more than philosophical. The popular recording pianists (NOT jazz pianists; arrangers, not improvisers) did not have the time to create the elaborate arrangements of their predecessors. Raie da Costa, the single most gifted rhythmic song transcriber, averaged over a record a month, the seven or so years she spent with Parlophone and HMV. None of her stunning, rhapsodic arrangements were committed to paper. She was too busy working out new transcriptions (in her head - or is there a cache of manuscripts yet to be found?..) of the latest hits, to spend the requisite

time notating them. Of course, the stratospheric technique of RCD would have been unapproachable for most mere pianistic mortals!! (It is worth noting that, the remarkable Sandford "These Foolish Things", the most elaborate popular transcription of the period, was not recorded by the transcriber. Almost shocking that it got published at all - a real throwback!! Congrats, Boosey!! Or did Arthur have too much time on his hands??)

Billy Mayerl offered the finest group of PUBLISHED popular song transcriptions to be found any where in the 20s - 30s (and later). They don't have the supreme virtuoso elements of da Costa (or her successors, Renara and Pat Rossborough) but make up for that shortfall with clever harmonies, arranging imagination and rhythmic variety. They are, above all, ELEGANT. For comparison's sake, da Costa's virtuosity hearkens back to Liszt, Tausig and Rosenthal, whereas Mayerl might belong to the Friedman, Grunfeld, Moszkowski salon school - decidedly NOT a put down in my book!!

North America had a host of virtuoso popular pianists as well: Frank Banta, Pauline Alpert, Arthur Schutt, Willie Eckstein, Phil Ohman, et al - all of whom had the wherewithal to "do up" a tune - but in the end run, few recordings and fewer published arrangements exist in this time and place than in England (or the Continent), and most of the published scores are original novelties - transcriptions arrive years later in America. Stylistically, it is more difficult to place these pianists in a transcribing genealogy. Recordings reveal a typical American PIZZAZZ, with wonderful novelty licks and bluesy harmonies. What is lacking is elegance, and ultimately, imagination pales next to some Transatlantic counterparts. Moszkowski is the most obvious direct descendant of the Americans, as it was he, more than any other 19th century pianist/composer, who developed the novelty "break" (though he couldn't have known it at the time!). Splitting thorny passages between the hands, one of M's trademarks, to simplify execution, at the same time creating exceedingly virtuosic SOUNDING effects (How did he/she do that??), was also standard fare with the Americans. Pauline Alpert utilised this pianistic device to great effect, as is amply demonstrated in the first disc of Pearl's "Keyboard Wizards of the Gershwin Era" CD series. I am supplying 78's as well as programme notes for some of the discs, for what is the most notable reissue project ever, covering some of our favourite rhythm pianists. This is a plug - DO NOT LEAVE RECORD SHOPS WITHOUT THEM!!

Your Committee is now in the early stages of planning a **weekend Convention**. Initially we are thinking of a Friday evening to Sunday afternoon event, probably some time in **October 1997**, at a suitable venue. We would hope to include a couple of recitals as well as a period-style dance with a band that can play the right sort of music. This will hopefully give members who live out-of-town a chance to meet other members as well as attend live events, and we anticipate there will also be a fair amount of swapping, buying, and selling of BM. pieces as well as other works of the period.

At the moment we are in negotiation with a three-star hotel which has been visited by two committee members and found satisfactory. The cost per attendee, including full board from Friday evening and including Sunday lunch as well as all the entertainment, is likely to be around £130.00, which we think represents very good value. For this first venture (which we hope will be the first of what will become a regular event) we are looking at a fairly small hotel, so that accommodation will be limited. We would be very glad to hear from any member who would intend to attend. **********

The Billy Mayerl Society would like to draw your attention to the following organisations:

City of London Phonograph & Gramophone Society Hon.Sec., Miss Suzanne Lewis, 51 Brockhurst Road, Chesham, Bucks HP5 4EP

Robert Farnon Society Promotes enjoyment of light music and music of Robert Farnon in particular. Hon. Sec., David Ades, "Stone Gables", Upton Lane, Seavington St. Michael, Ilminster, Somerset TA19 0PZ

The Historic Record Magazine on wide range of gramophonic matters. John R. Wrigley, 185 The Wheel, Ecclesfield, Sheffield S30 3ZA

In Tune Magazine Info. on record stars of 1935-60. Editor/ publisher: Colin Morgan, 12 Caer Gofaint, Groes, Nr. Denbigh, Clwyd, LL16 5YT

Memory Lane Magazine covering popular & jazz scene of the 78 rpm era. Details from 226 Station Road, Leigh on Sea, Essex SS9 3BS

Nostalgia Magazine covering Dance Bands, Vocalists, Light Music, incorporating the Al Bowlly Circle. SEA to Charlie Silwon, 39 Leicester Road, New Barnet, Herts

Vintage Light Music Society 4 Harvest Bank Road, West Wickham, Kent BR4 9DJ

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