

No.31



Billy & Bogey

Patrons:

Eric Parkin, Susan Tomes

Peter Jacobs

Feb. 2014

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Editorial

It seems the BBC's music channel, Radio 3, are planning an emphasis on British composers in the year ahead and inviting listeners to let them know which are their favourite works by natives of these shores. This seems a good opportunity to remind them that they (shamefully) neglect the lighter side, and so it might be a good idea to let them know your favourite piece of Billy Mayerl, Eric Coates, or even Albert Ketelbey. This country has an impressive portfolio of music meant primarily to entertain, and we shouldn't let it be forgotten, so make your voice heard. They can be contacted via email, text, or snail mail.

And a happy and prosperous New Year to you all from The Editor.

Editor Mike Harth, graphics and design Mike Lorenzini.

Sunday Concerts & Meetings for 2014 at **Shellwood 3-6pm**
 Shellwood, Saint Leonards Rd. Thames Ditton, Surrey KT7 0RN
 tel: 0208 2241521

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

- Feb. 16th AGM followed by a members' meeting
- April 6th Members' meeting
- June 8th Members' meeting
- Aug. 10th **Concert** Ethan Uslan
- Oct. 26th **Concert** Christopher Duckett
- Dec. 14th Members' Xmas Concert (£5 per person inc. Refreshments)

*“Old ones, new ones, loved ones, neglected ones”*³
Brian Willey takes a personal look at the life and times of pianist SEMPRINI



Semprini

Albert Semprini was a friend. I knew him from the day he began his BBC broadcasting career and was responsible for his final broadcast thirty-four years later. I will unravel that tale later, but first let me tell his story from the start.

Christened Alberto Fernando Riccardo Semprini, in later life he preferred to be known as Albert. He was born in Bath, Somerset, on March 27th 1908, the second son of an Italian father and an English mother. The family had moved to Bath in 1906 and settled at 6 Seymour Street. His father Fernando, originally from Rimini, a city and port in North Eastern Italy, was a musician employed playing the horn in Bath's Pump Room Orchestra and the Bath Municipal Band. His mother Elizabeth came from Dudley, Worcestershire, and was a soprano and a former member of the Carl Rosa Opera Company. The youthful Albert attended Bathforum School and was soon to be revealed as a particularly bright and prize-winning scholar. His piano lessons commenced when he was about eight years old and, steeped in music from birth, he proved

to be an exceptionally gifted pupil.

The First World War was to have a material effect upon the family's life. In 1914 Italy had proclaimed neutrality but in August 1916 it declared war on Germany and Austria. Despite living in Britain, Albert's father was still an Italian national and was called up to join the 13th Infantry Regiment of the Italian Army. By early 1917 he was on active service at Trentino on the Austrian frontier.

In response to this blow to the family's income, Semprini's mother advertised for pupils to whom she could give singing lessons at their new address of 22 Stanley Road, Oldfield Park.

Mercifully, Fernando survived the war and, once peace was declared, he decided to remain in Italy and successfully applied for the post of librarian at Milan's La Scala opera house. The result was that the whole Semprini family, by then including three sons, moved to Italy in 1919 and young Albert soon won a scholarship to the Milan Conservatoire. Arturo Toscanini, then musical director of La Scala asked him to

4 play the orchestral piano part of Stravinsky's ballet 'Petrouchka'. It is a particularly difficult score but Albert got the job. He remained at the Conservatoire until 1928 and graduated with a doctorate in music.

During the 1930s he married Brunilde Regarbagnati and had three sons by her while he toured Europe and Scandinavia for concerts and broadcasts with fellow Italian Enrico Bormioli as a popular piano duo.

Italy was very differently placed for the Second World War and in 1940 its then Fascist regime allied itself with Germany and Anglo-Italian Semprini was forced to maintain a very low profile.

In 1945, with the Allies advance into Southern Italy, he got himself to Rome and volunteered for work with ENSA the Entertainments National Service Association and was soon happily entertaining allied front-line troops by playing a piano perched on the back of an army truck. In the audience, on one occasion, was an English soldier who had been an actor before the war. His name was Michael Brennan and, recognizing Albert Semprini as an outstanding performer, offered to be his manager if he ever came to Britain after the war.

Although the invitation was not overlooked, Albert had other ideas. He was intent on working in Spain and in 1947 he made the move and remained there as a concert artist for the next two years.

While there he met and fell in love with a Spanish dancer with the almost unbelievable name of Maria de la Concepcion Consuelo Garcia Cardoso, the daughter of a house painter and decorator. His previous peripatetic life had proved fatal to his relationship with his wife Brunilde and he set about divorce proceedings in order to eventually wed his seniorita.

Albert decided to come to Britain in early 1949. At that same time, I had just been demobbed from National Service in

the RAF and had returned to the BBC as a sound engineer. One of my duties was working on a weekly piano recital, broadcast each Monday at 9.15 a.m. and played by Arthur Young who, a decade earlier had become well-known for leading Hatchett's Swingtette, a band that included Stephane Grappelli in its line-up. All appeared to be well with Young until he unexpectedly announced he was making his final appearance. Apparently he was in immense difficulties with the income tax authorities and had decided to emigrate to Australia rather rapidly, thus leaving a sudden void.

The producer, Alastair Scott-Johnston, then told me he had recently been approached by a chap named Mike Brennan who was touting the services of a musician he had heard in Italy during the war, a pianist named Albert Semprini, who was now in London and eager to demonstrate his talent. Within days he was invited to audition and immediately selected as the replacement performer for that Monday programme.

On the morning of May 2nd 1949 "Semprini At The Piano" was met with immediate approval by the radio audience and from then on he was seldom off the air.

In 1952 he married Senorita Consuelo and, in the resulting enduring marriage, she was destined to bear him two sons. For a while his new home was a sailing ship named *L'Esperance*, refitted as a comfortable residence, and moored at West Mersea on the Essex coast.

Not only had he become popular on the radio, he was also in demand to tour the country to appear on stage in variety shows. During the tours he and his wife temporarily lived in a caravan naturally complete with a piano which was towed by an old ambulance.

It was then that his phrase, 'Old ones, new ones, loved ones, neglected ones' was coined, and would eventually become familiar to every radio listener throughout the land.

From Sunday Sept. 29th 1957 his solo piano was accompanied by the BBC Revue Orchestra conducted by Harry Rabinowitz in a new show entitled 'Semprini Serenade'. It became so popular it ran for a quarter-century!

In early 1982 Albert retired at the age of 74, having been a major BBC entertainer for 33 years. But his final appearance was yet to come.

The BBC reached its 60th anniversary in that year and I had been commissioned to produce a show for the Royal Festival Hall to reflect musical highlights for BBC radio's Diamond Jubilee. Semprini was a major figure in its history, and someone to seriously consider as an ingredient for the concert. His signature tune- *Mediterranean Concerto* - was a familiar theme, but only ever heard for a few bars at the start of each programme. In full, its duration would be some seven minutes and my plan was a full-length performance with Semprini as the soloist.

I phoned him at his home in Wivenhoe, Essex, and asked if the idea was possible, only to be told that, now afflicted with arthritic hands, he could no longer play to his former immaculate standard and must decline the invitation. For a moment I was stunned and then put a new thought to him: what if he were to conduct the orchestra while a fellow pianist played the solo piano part? This was met with approval and the full score

was posted to me to arrange for the orchestral parts to be copied for the performance. I chose concert pianist Philip Martin as soloist and, with Semprini conducting the BBC Concert Orchestra, his concerto was beautifully played, well received by the audience and he was delighted with his unique farewell appearance.

Albert Semprini died on January 19th 1990 as a result of Alzheimer's disease. Cremated at Colchester, his ashes were scattered in the sea off the coast of West Mersea an area of which he was particularly fond.

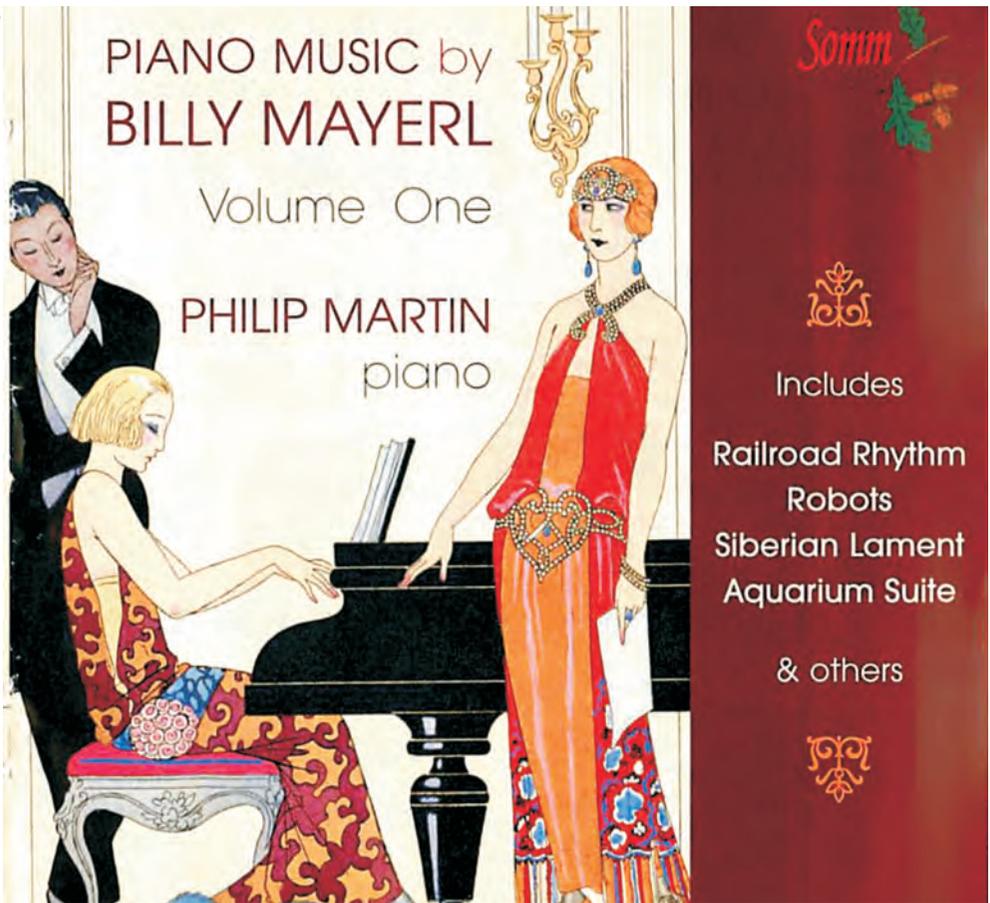
He had led a very full life, having also entertained aboard transatlantic liners; formed and conducted a dance band; been appointed as an Officer of the Order of St John; awarded the OBE in 1983; been adulated by millions of radio listeners; yet had remained a gentle and charming personality and always a pleasure to work with.

I feel very fortunate to have known him.

Brian Willey 2013



Enrico Bormioli: composer, pianist and Semprini's 2 piano partner.



Like most light composers and performers of his period, Billy had a sound classical training, and he lapped it up sufficiently well to be invited to join the staff at Trinity College, where he trained. But he had already heard the siren call of ragtime, and from his subsequent career it is obvious he made the right choice.

Nevertheless he wrote a fair number of pieces squarely in the traditional style, and it is clearly no travesty to play his works in that style: whether one chooses that approach or a more 'raggy' style is a matter of personal taste. Similarly, performers vary considerably in their choice, but as I say both ways are valid: what is not is jazzing them up, especially as Billy expressed himself with complete clarity on the subject in the Billy Mayerl Club magazine.

These reflections have been prompted by the disc under consideration, *Piano Music by*

Billy Mayerl, played by Philip Martin, and issued on the Somm label. He is fully equal to the technical demands of the music, which as we know are considerable, while he has chosen to approach them entirely from the classical angle. This approach well suits *Autumn Crocus* and *Evening Primrose*, in his first set, as well as *Weeping Willow*, *Siberian Lament* and *Shallow Waters*, even the *Three Contrasts*, and he plays them beautifully.

Among the other pieces, I am not so sure about *Marigold*, *Robots*, or the *Puppets Suite* in particular. I can't fault the playing, Mr Martin has them completely under his fingers, but I personally would have liked some intimation of their ragtime roots. But at 76 minutes the disc is good value, and as I say if you like a classical approach you're unlikely to do better.

CD available from www.somm-recordings.com

Also on Ebay

Mike Harth 2013

Christopher Duckett concert 28th July 2013

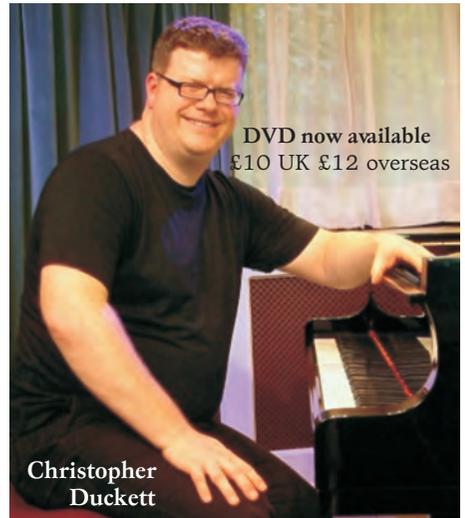
Chris started off this recital with one of Billy's suites, *Pastoral Sketches*. The first two movements, *A Legend* and *Lovers Lane*, are among Billy's most beautiful pieces, and Chris played them most expressively, with plenty of rubato which always felt well-judged. The last movement, *A Village Festival*, started off at a cracking pace: this movement reveals its orchestral origins more clearly than the other two, but it was convincingly handled.

Maids of Honour is one of Billy's later pieces in a neo-classical style, with a French feel to it: restrained but charming. *Shy Ballerina*, following, is in a lighter style but, as we have learnt to expect, there is nothing trite or commonplace about it. Billy actually played this on television with a miniature ballerina dancing on the piano lid. *Elfinette* is a pleasant trifle he arranged from the orchestral version, purely, one imagines, for money, but *Imaginary Foxtrot* is the real Billy, though I wonder why he chose such an odd title.

Oriental is not, perhaps, as exotic as one might expect from the title: certainly there are none of the obvious orientalisms one would have got from, say, Albert Ketelbey. But it makes its effect quietly, though *Chopsticks* is more characteristically Billy. The main section of this is all on the black notes, interspersed with sections more in the syncopated style, the whole making a very enjoyable piece to which Chris gave full weight. *Green Tulips* can seem a bit of a rag-bag, comprising unrelated sections, but here it was held together nicely.

Billy thought very highly of *The Forgotten Forest*, writing in a letter to the conductor Stanford Robinson that he thought it was the best thing he had produced so far. The original is for piano and orchestra, and it definitely sounds at its best in that format, but I fear we are very unlikely to hear it performed in that version, and Chris gave us a convincing rendering of the solo piano arrangement.

The *Egyptian Suite* is something of a



puzzle. It was Billy's first published composition, but it isn't at all what one might have expected, being lacking in obvious popular appeal. The melody of the middle movement, *Song of the Desert*, reappears briefly in the finale, *Patrol of the Camels*, a device he had almost certainly picked up from his listening.

Then the second half of Chris's recital consisted of a selection from Billy's many transcriptions.

The Other Side Of Lovers Lane, though pleasant enough, also gave us an idea why as a composer Carroll Gibbons never approached Billy's level.

Masquerading In The Name Of Love is a more attractive number in my book, and the middle section was particularly sensitively played. *Transatlantic Lullaby* was a famous piece in its day, but it isn't suited to up-tempo treatment, and Billy doesn't change the original much.

Learn To Syncopate was the subject of a competition in the Billy Mayerl Club magazine, which was won by one of Billy's many students, Wilf Headley. Billy published his own version after the winning version had appeared, and both are attractive.

In *Fools Rush In* the intro and middle section were much more dramatic than the main melody, Rube Bloom's most famous. I particularly enjoyed the second section, with the melody in the tenor register much of the time.

8 *Fatal Fascination* is less obviously appealing and for me the fascination stopped well short of being fatal, but *Cheer Up*, one of Noel Gay's bright and breezy songs, was much more fun.

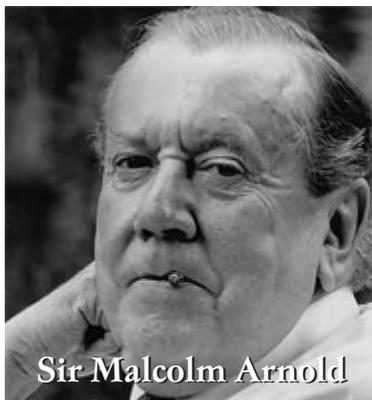
The Bells Of St Marys is one of my favourites among the transcriptions, and I doubt if I'm alone in feeling that way; somehow everything combines to make a truly enjoyable experience. Billy certainly pulled out the stops to produce one of his most delightful essays, while Chris did him justice with a sensitive performance that was also fun.

Weep No More, My Baby maintained the standard, while *Sing You Sinners* provided a lively finale, played with such ease and panache one wasn't aware of the technical problems.

The audience of course wouldn't let him go without an encore, and *Shallow Waters*, beautifully rendered, provided a quiet and reflective conclusion.

This is the third all-Billy recital that Chris has given us: at this rate in a few more years he'll have covered Billy's entire opus, and I don't know of anyone who would or could make a better job of it. Though those of us who have tried to play these pieces are painfully aware of their technical demands, Chris is able to make light of them: listening to him playing one can relax in the sure knowledge that he will do the works justice. This DVD, like the others of his performances, will get regular playing from me.

Mike Harth 2013



Sir Malcolm Arnold

CDs of Sir Malcolm Arnold
"The Collection" 74321/883922

There is an honourable tradition of 'serious' composers also turning their hand to lighter music. We can immediately think of Beethoven's *Fur Elise* or *Minuet in G*, for instance, while such composers as Mozart and Haydn moved effortlessly from one to the other. In more modern times even a predominantly symphonic composer like Sibelius produced plenty in the style, most famously his *Valse Triste*.

Today, however, the idea of writing music designed purely to give pleasure, to tickle the ears, as one might say, seems to be regrettably foreign to contemporary composers, with the result being that I tend to switch off when any of their works are being played. A notable exception to this is Sir Malcolm Arnold, who as well as - I had almost written in spite of - having nine symphonies to his credit did not neglect the lighter side, and so today I thought I'd take a look at a 2-disc collection of some of his lighter pieces.

Disc No 1 starts off with the *Grand Grand Overture* written for the first concert organised by the sadly missed cartoonist Gerard Hoffnung. The orchestra included three vacuum-cleaners, a floor polisher, and 4 rifles, but of greater interest is that as well as being great fun it features one of Arnold's best tunes.

The next item is even more enjoyable. When concert pianist Cyril Smith lost the use of his left arm after a stroke, he formed a 2-piano, 3 hands team with his pianist wife Phyllis Sellick, and they performed a number of specially made arrangements. However, for the 1969 Proms season Arnold composed a *Concerto* for them, and the result is my favourite of all his works. The whole work is delightful: an opening Allegro followed by a beautiful slow movement and rounded off with a hilarious finale.

Arnold wrote several sets of dances during his long career, and next we get the *Four Scottish Dances*, played in an arrangement for brass band. The slow 3rd is particularly beautiful, and the set ends with a rumbustious con brio. The *Serenade for Small Orchestra* which follows is also

concert 15th Sept. 2013

attractive, albeit in a quieter way, and again with a lively final movement.

The first set of *English Dances*, like all the other sets, sounds as if it uses folk-tunes, though in fact all the melodies are Arnold originals, while *The Larch Tree*, which follows, is in pastoral vein. Then in 1965 Arnold went to live in Cornwall, and the following year conducted the first performance of his *4 Cornish Dances*. No 3, hymn-like in style, sounds particularly fine in the brass band sonorities of this arrangement.

Two years later the new lifeboat station in Padstow was inaugurated with his piece *The Padstow Lifeboat*, in which the jolly main melody is constantly interrupted by the mournful sound of the foghorn, while before the reprise there is a suggestion of the threatening conditions the lifeboatmen have to face.

The second disc opens with the *Anniversary Overture*, short and lively, and it is followed by the second set of *English Dances*, as entertaining as its predecessor. The *Guitar Concerto* was written for Julian Bream: its first movement contains a particularly delightful melody, while the slow movement is distinctly atmospheric.

The highlight of the *Little Suite for Brass band No 1* is undoubtedly the second movement, a wistful Siciliano. The *Overture Beckus the Dandipratt* which follows is one of Arnold's earliest works, characteristically lively and entertaining.

The *Fantasy for Brass Band*, one of a number of works originally written for this combination, passes through various moods, and it's followed by another, the *Little Suite for Brass band No 2*, whose final movement is a Galop that evokes a circus atmosphere.

Finally, Arnold turns his attention to some of the creatures that Saint-Saens neglected in his *Carnival of the Animals* with his own set, including giraffes, sheep, cows, mice, Jumbo and Chiroptera, though you really have to strain to detect this last while, in the style of Saint-Saens' tortoise, Jumbo sounds suspiciously like a certain piece by Delibes.

Mike Harth 2013

As a result of getting my dates wrong, I missed this recital, very annoying. Thank goodness the DVD is available so that I can get an idea of how it went, and from the version of *Putting on the Ritz* with which it opens I get the feeling that Frederick had decided to start off by wowing his audience. If that was the case, he certainly succeeded: I am not much of an Irving Berlin fan, but if his pieces always sounded like this I could see me changing my mind.

After that we were treated to three of Billy's pieces. *Chopsticks* is one of this performer's favourites, played here in style, while he gave us his own arrangement of *Marigold*, cobbled together from the original solo, the piano duet version, and the orchestral arrangement, the whole making a very interesting and enjoyable change. *Railroad Rhythm*, another favourite, completed the set, all thrown off with brio.

Then we heard a total novelty, the *Mansell Concerto*, written for a film by a composer whose name and compositions are too little heard nowadays, Kenneth Leslie-Smith. It was just as good as others in the same genre, and why it fell into obscurity is a mystery to me.

Frederick followed with five pieces by Arthur Schutt, who didn't publish many compositions and even those were rarely played. When we had heard them, we could appreciate at least one of the main reasons for this: they are extremely virtuosic, and I would imagine very few amateur pianists would be bold enough to tackle them. *Bluin' The Black Keys*, the first of them, and the only one I'd ever heard before, was one of the few actually published: the rest Frederick had to transcribe from recordings, though he informed us that a recent visit to the British Library had turned up a rare copy

10 of *Rambling In Rhythm*, which came next.

Delirium had only been available in a totally inadequate published version, and there was no piano recording, so that Frederick had to prepare his own version from the orchestral arrangement, while the title of *Piano Puzzle* refers to the problems set for the left hand, not that they seemed to be giving any trouble to the pianist on this occasion. Then *Bringup Breakdown*, again not published, was recorded on a 33¹/₃ record at a time when almost nobody had the requisite player, but fortunately the disc came to the attention of collectors and ended up in the eager hands of our pianist today who, needless to say, made his own transcription.

It was really good to have the chance to hear these rare pieces. Schutt didn't have a great melodic gift, but his figuration and inventive piano-writing are sufficient compensation, so that listening to them is a rare pleasure, though I'm not sure I'd want to attempt to play them.

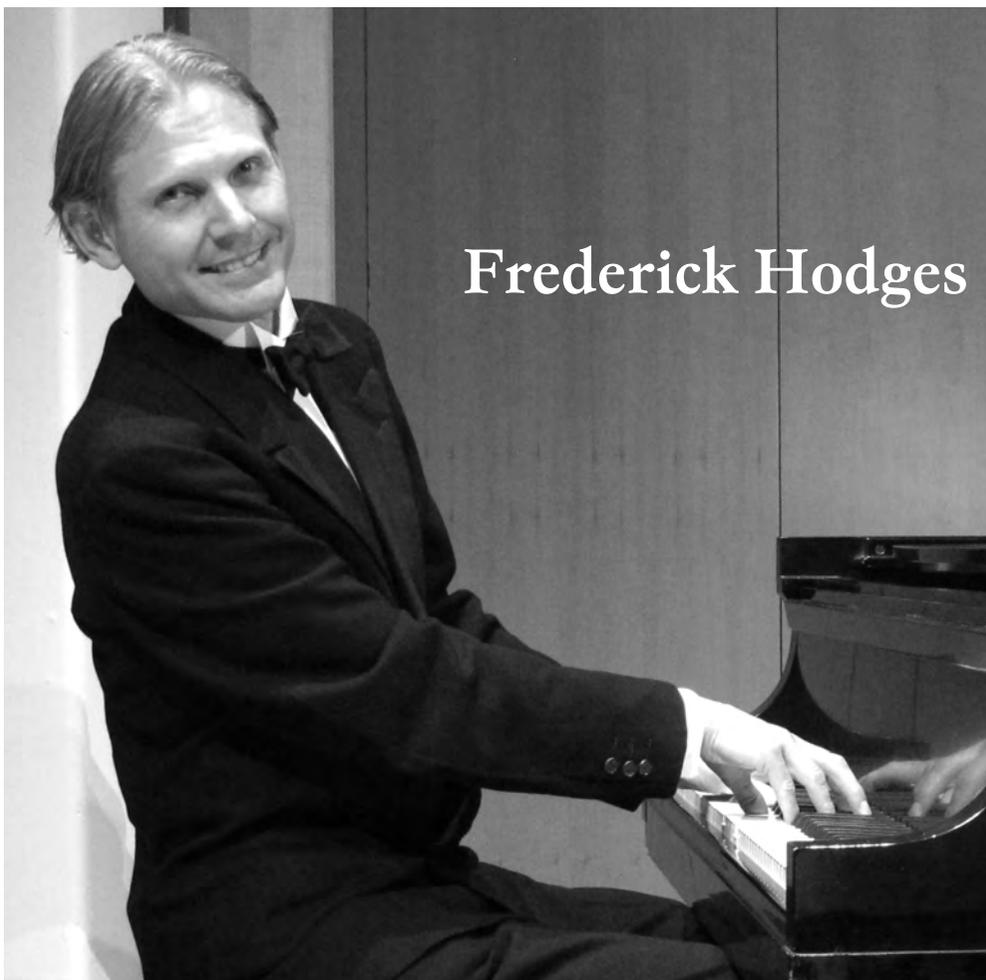
The Grand Fantasy On Showboat was another world. Frederick said it was in the style of Liszt's operatic fantasias on popular operas of the day, though Liszt usually selected a few themes to epitomise the story of the opera, whereas Frederick gave us a sample of just about everything in this show. *Showboat* was a groundbreaking musical, hugely popular both here and in the USA, and also hugely influential, though few of its successors were able to match its quality, and it was good to be reminded of its melodies. I thought *Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man* and *Old Man River* came over particularly well in Frederick's version, while the finale was truly Lisztian in the style of his *Rigoletto Paraphrase*.

The *Wizard Of Oz Fantasy*, which opened the second half, was similarly encyclopaedic, containing a considerable amount of music that I had forgotten,

while the treatment of *Over The Rainbow* was particularly delightful. Frankie Carle, a pianist-composer whose fame was largely confined to the States, was the talented composer of *Estelle*, in which we are well into the world of novelties that we are used to. *Pick Yourself Up* by Jerome Kern was played in Frederick's own arrangement, after which it was back to novelties, this time a rare piece by the pianist-composer Frank Banta. He is pretty much forgotten today, at least on this side of the Atlantic, though some years ago Pearl issued a CD of recordings by three pianists, of whom Frank was one. I don't remember who the other two were. For their own reasons these were put out in their original state, without any of the cleaning-up that Shellwood, for instance, does in its re-issues, and the result was not, to my ears at least, satisfactory, but it still made me want to hear more of him, though I've had to wait till now to have my wish gratified.

Laurette proved to be a charmer, and it was followed by Richard Rodger's *Lover*, given the five-star treatment. Then Frederick demonstrated his versatility by singing an amusing Eddie Cantor number, *Ever Since The Movies Learned To Talk* from the show *Whoopie*, about the early days of the talkies, when a number of stars were dropped because their voices didn't match their image.

Back to Billy for a favourite of our artist (and me) *Parade Of The Sandwich-board Men*, and this was followed by three Adam Carroll numbers. *Racing Down The Black And Whites* is a slightly odd title because most of the racing is done exclusively on the white keys: that apart, it is great fun. *Syncoptude* was commissioned by a French pianist when he visited the States, and it proved a great success when he played it back in France. But it was never published, so Shellwood may well have been the scene of its British debut. Lastly, *Nanette*, Carroll's



Frederick Hodges

famous and widely played piece, but all three were highly enjoyable and played with panache.

The final excursion to Mayerl country was *Bats In The Belfry*, full of energy, and then to the closing piece, Gershwin's *Rhapsody In Blue*. I confess this is not something I have any desire to hear again, but Frederick gave us a tastefully controlled performance so that even the big tune was quite tolerable. Then for an encore we were given the same composer's *I Got Rhythm* in a virtuoso arrangement that I presume was his own. I can't imagine, after all the previous

playing, where he got the energy from, but it was, putting it mildly, full of brio.

Even after two hours of high-voltage playing, he looked as if he could have gone on for another hour, while at no time was there any feeling of strain or excessive effort. Mr Hodges is something of a phenomenon, and we in the Billy Mayerl Society are very lucky to have had the pleasure of experiencing his talents.

Mike Harth 2013

DVD now available £10 Uk £12 overseas

12 Alex Hassan : concert Oct. 27th 2013

There can't be many musicians in the whole wide world who have a wider knowledge of the popular music of our period than Alex. He regularly comes up with numbers I've never even heard of, let alone heard, and yet are worthy of being rescued from the obscurity into which they have fallen, which makes one realise there is a considerable element of luck in which numbers achieve fame and those that fall by the wayside.

For this recital Alex produced yet more rabbits out of a seemingly inexhaustible hat, starting with a charming Sammy Fain number that was new to me, *By A Waterfall*. A couple of minutes into that and it was evident that his playing has now reached a level of fluency that makes it appear effortless, and so *You Are Worth While Waiting For*, which followed, more than lived up to its title.

The next item, a *G & S mini-overture*, was a real treat, though tantalisingly short somehow Sullivan's melodies always come up fresh. Then back across the Atlantic for a *Rube Bloom Fantasy*. The only number I recognised was *Fools Rush In*, but the others were nearly as good, and I particularly enjoyed the final one, where Alex let himself go with a few fireworks.

As Long As You're Near Me, by Burton Lane, was a charmer, while during the next number, *Sous le Ciel d'Afrique*, I found myself imagining it being sung by a French chanteuse, though I doubt if she could have coped with the rhythmic finale Alex gave us.

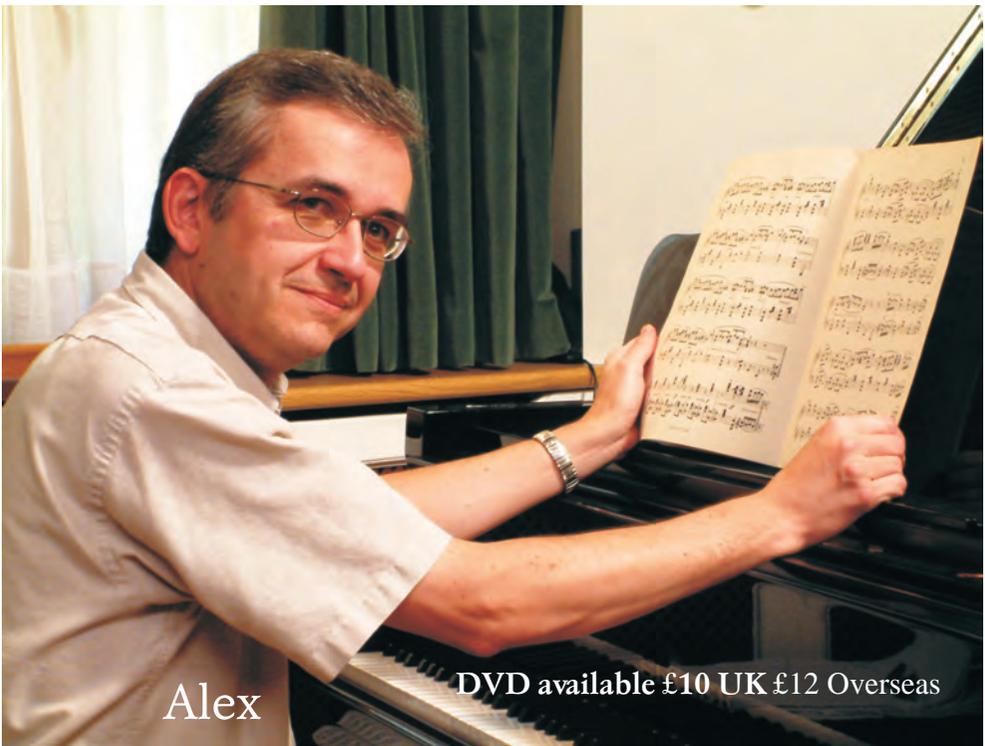
Even the name of the composer of the next piece, *Somebody From Home*, was new to me, but the song was good enough for me to make a mental note to look out for more of his work. *Rio Cristal* was similarly unknown, but its composer, Vernon Duke, certainly isn't, and the melody had that touch of class that he imparted to all his work.

We were on more familiar ground with the *Selection from Runaway Love*, Billy's last musical, which contains one of my all-time favourites of his numbers, *Like A Cat With A Mouse*, and given the Hassan treatment it certainly sparkled.

The *Frederick Hollander Fantasy* was of course dominated by the number Dietrich made famous, *Falling In Love Again*. I have to confess she was far from a favourite actress of mine, though I have friends who faithfully went to see her whenever she did a season in the West End in her later years - I'll be a gentleman and not say in her dotage. Whereas if it had been Garbo, I think I'd have been happy to just watch her staring into space, as she did so memorably as the end of *Queen Christina*.

Enough of this maudlin reminiscing: another fantasy followed on, and this time the composer's name was familiar to me as the unfortunate involved in the notorious flop, *Whitebirds*, in which Billy appeared - (he also recorded a double-sided selection from the show). Alex started with probably Meyer's best-known number, *California, Here I Come*, made famous by the ghastly Al Jolson - why he became so popular is a complete mystery to me. The other numbers were also enjoyable, good second-stringers, one might say.

Zombie, by Xavier Cugat, was written to accompany a fairly dreadful lyric that Alex kindly read out to us. It sounded to me as if the composer had ignored the lyric, probably the best thing to do with it. With *Your Sunny Southern Smile* we're in the fondly remembered hands of Harry Revel, while it seems *I Touched A Star* was written to accompany an exhibit named Gay New Orleans at the New York World Fair. Unfortunately it didn't mean what one might have thought, or I'd have been looking up the next flight.



Alex

DVD available £10 UK £12 Overseas

You Opened My Eyes by Felix Bernard was written to accompany a slapstick-style comedy, though one couldn't have told that from the tune itself. In the *Over She Goes* selection that followed, the comedy element was more pronounced. This was Billy's favourite of his shows, though I suspect its success and the concomitant financial rewards were pre-eminent there, since I think the score of *Crazy Days*, which came next, is finer, but its run was cut short by the untimely death of Laddie Cliff.

The *Jerome Kern Fantasy* featured many well-loved melodies by this most musical of American songwriters. In the early part of his career Kern wrote a series of musicals with Guy Bolton and P G Wodehouse: one of them, *Very Good, Eddie*, has been on in the West End quite recently, while I used to have a recording of *Leave It To Jane*, another of them.

They are quite different to his later works, more lively and without the romantic element which characterises the later shows and all his best-remembered melodies.

Emmerich Kalman was, I believe, of Hungarian extraction, and his best-remembered show, *Countess Maritza*, certainly has a mittel-European ambience, but *You Are My First Love* sounds American rather than European. Then as an encore Alex gave us some Harry Warren: as a songwriter certainly, up there with the greats, but not nearly as well known, a punishment, no doubt, for spending his most productive years in Hollywood.

It is many years since I first had the pleasure of hearing Alex: he doesn't seem to have slowed up either in productivity or virtuosity, in fact he now seems to me to be at the top of his form. I look forward to his next visit.

Mike Harth 2013

14 Lionel Monckton: Songs from the Shows

I have written before about Monckton, but as he is by far the finest melodist of his period, and I am a sucker for a good tune, a new disc of his numbers exerts an irresistible attraction. It is something of a surprise to find Catherine Bott as the featured soprano, as she is better known as an early music specialist, but her light and pure tone suits these numbers and she does us proud here, while the baritone, Richard Suart, though not possessing a voice of comparable quality, certainly knows how to put over a number.

The recital opens with *Charming Weather*, a little too obviously inspired by a similar scene in *The Pirates of Penzance*. But the melody is so catchy it's hard to cavil, while *All Down Piccadilly*, which follows, also from *The Arcadians*, one of his greatest successes which ran for 809 performances on its original run, is just as irresistible. A change of tempo brings us to *Under The Deodar* from *The Country Girl*, one of only two shows for which Monckton wrote the complete score, another success, notching up 729 performances. This beautiful melody is joined by 2 other numbers from the same show in more lively style, *Yo-bo Little Girls* and *Try Again, Johnnie*.

The Sly Cigarette reminds us of a period when cigarettes were about to become a fashionable accessory - at the same period dates Wolf-Ferrari's opera, *Susanna's Secret*, the secret being her smoking! Then *The Boy Guessed Right* comes from the same show, *A Runaway Girl*, while *When I Marry Amelia* and *Keep Off the Grass* both come from *The Toreador*. *Maisie* and *Liza Ann* are respectively from *The Messenger Boy* and *The Orchid*, while *My Cinnamon Tree* and *Pearl of Sweet Ceylon* appeared in *The Cingalee*, a word which means a native of Ceylon or, as it is now, Sri Lanka.

Yet another of the seemingly endless stream of shows with 'girl' in the title, *The Circus Girl*, was host to *A Simple Bit Of String*,

while *Beautiful Bountiful Bertie* came from one more, *The Shop Girl*.

The Arcadians was followed by *The Mousmū*, somewhat less successful, but which included *The Temple Bell*, and then we have three numbers from the other show for which he wrote the full score, *The Quaker Girl*. Though it only ran for 536 performances, it is an excellent show which was still being toured in the mid-1900s I saw a professional performance of it in Bournemouth around 50 years ago. *A Bad Boy and a Good Girl*, *The Little Grey Bonnet*, and *Tony from America* are among the highlights but don't exhaust them, as those of you who have heard the Bel-Etage recording will attest.

Two Little Sausages comes from *The Girls of Gottenberg*, and the selection is rounded off by 2 numbers from *Our Miss Gibbs*, the last show he wrote with Ivan Caryll, who reportedly was fed up with Monckton's contributions always being the more popular, and decamped to America. *Mary* wants to be known as Miss Gibbs, while *Moonstruck*, with little if any relevance to the story, was nevertheless the big hit of the show and remained one of L M's best-known numbers for many years.

I should also mention that Monckton wrote many of the lyrics for his songs ten of those on this recording. They are all, usefully, included in the booklet, and you may well, like me, find them even more at odds with his austere, rather forbidding appearance than his music.

Monckton's collaborator on *The Arcadians* and his later shows was Howard Talbot, but for some unknown reason their last joint work, *The Boy*, seems to have been totally forgotten, even though it was very successful in its day, with a total of 801 performances, just a little less than *The Arcadians*. The book was based on a successful play, *The Magistrate*, by Pinero, a foremost dramatist of the day, and is about the title character's 'night on the Town' and its consequences. It was later

Made into a film under the title *Those Were the Days*, giving Will Hay his first starring role, and in the music-hall scenes showcasing the veteran Lily Morris, performing two of her numbers.

Having played through the piano score, it seems to me well up to their best standard, and I would love to hear some of its numbers. Perhaps one day? Then those of you who possess computers might be interested in turning to YouTube and looking up the entries under Monckton, when you will not only find period recordings of a few numbers, but also a much abbreviated version of the *Act One Finale* from *The Quaker Girl* performed by an enthusiastic amateur operatic company. This ends with what is my favourite of all Monckton's numbers, *Love, You Are Lord*, a truly beautiful piece which also rounds off the third act.

Mike Harth 2013



Lionel Monckton

BMS Business

As you will see from our calendar of events we have Ethan Uslan booked to play for us this year. Some of you will remember his previous visit from the marvellous silent film accompaniment he played to a Buster Keaton film. Ethan will be playing a new programme plus another silent film extravaganza utilising our new bigger screen and HD projector.

Later this year Christopher Duckett will be wowing us with a new programme of music played in his inimitable style. The third concert is yet to be decided, but you will be informed by email/phone/post.

I'm sad to say Roy Wainwright, a BMS member and our Webmaster, died in May 2013. His support and expertise will be sorely missed.

Alas we are down to 80 members. Age is exacting its toll, but there are still enthusiastic members to conjure with.

Our thanks go to Mike Harth and Brian Willey for providing articles for this mag.
No CD this time (we are running out of appropriate material).

Costs inevitably rise, but the BMS is still solvent thanks to music sales and gifts from generous well-wishers.

Mike Lorenzini chairman BMS