

# NORMAN PAYNE

by nick dellow...



The amount of really good hot English trumpet players active during the 20s who have left recorded evidence of their ability can be counted on one hand. Jack Jackson, first trumpeter with Jack Hilton's Orchestra, was playing good quality Nichols' influenced solos as early as 1927. Doug Bastin, of Arthur Rosebery's hot little outfit playing at the Kit Kat Club, was another English trumpet player of the late 20s who had developed an advanced hot style. The same is also true of Frank Wilson, trumpeter with Jack Payne's B.S.C. dance band, who left music altogether in the early thirties to join the Salvation Army!

But perhaps the most remarkable of these early English hot trumpet players was Norman Payne. Remarkable not only for his playing, which was distinctly Bixian and almost totally improvised (unlike Jackson), but also for the fact that he was playing so hot at the advanced age of 17! And, what is more, he was already at the pinnacle of his profession as second trumpet player in Fred Elizalde's Savoy Hotel band, the most talked about band in London during the late 1920s.

Today, Norman Payne lives in comfortable semi-retirement in Kingston, just south of London, and is mildly suprised about the fuss collectors world-wide are making of him. In fact, when I first approached him about an interview he seemed just a little disinterested. However, mention of Beiderbecke and Rollini soon set things going in the right direction! His respect for these two geniuses (a word I do not use lightly) had not diminished after sixty years, and the strong influence Bix Beiderbecke, and to a certain extent Rollini, had on him became clear early on in the interview.

I asked Norman how he became interested in jazz and how he got to hear about Bix: "I was encouraged by my brother Laurie, who was four years my senior. He was already playing the saxophone professionally, gigging around London mostly. He brought a lot of records home. I remember listening to the Goofus Five - little did I realise that I would be playing with several of its members within a few years. Then I got to hear about Bix. I was playing in a trio with Ginner Conn on drums and Lionel Clapper on saxophone. Clapper sounded a bit like Trumbauer. One night he said 'You must come back to my flat during the interval. I've got a new record by Frankie Trumbauer called 'Singing the Blues' which you've just got to hear.' Of course as soon as I heard Bix on that record I just went mad and from then on I bought every record he made."

After gigging around London clubs for a year or so, Norman joined violinist Sidney Lipton and his band at Southport Palais in the north of England. In the 30s Lipton led a well known society band at the Grosvenor in London. "I also had an offer to join Billy Cotton's band at that time (he had a very good band at Liverpool - N. D.) but I didn't

want to leave Sidney Lipton and anyway it wasn't long after that I had the offer to join Elizalde."

Fred Elizalde and his Savoy Hotel Music opened at the Savoy on 2nd January, 1928 and was soon established as the most advanced dance orchestra in London. In the Melody Maker, Elizalde described Norman as "my dark horse;" within a couple of months he would be a well trained thoroughbred - and what better training could one have working alongside the likes of Adrian Rollini.

His experience with the Elizalde band has left a lasting impression on Norman. "I had an absolutely wonderful time with Fred and that band. Fred was trying to introduce into England a more modern, jazz influenced type of dance music. Adrian had brought over with him a whole pile of Bill Challis arrangements written for Whiteman and Trumbauer. A lot of the elder dancers couldn't understand the advanced arrangements, but on the other hand we had an enormous amount of young people come in, especially during the Oxford and Cambridge Universities' boat race week. They used to just swarm round the bandstand. Of course, at times like that Fred really let us get going with the jazz arrangements and solos."

I asked Norman what he thought of Elizalde as a person and as a musician. "Fred was absolutely charming. He was always ready to listen and would only get angry when the musicians got out of hand which, being young, we occasionally did! He was a serious musician - a great admirer of Gershwin. He wanted to do a 'Rhapsody in Blue' type of symphonic jazz composition and wrote 'Heart of a Coon' which I remember playing on stage at the Palladium and later recording."

It is well known that Quealey was a somewhat wild character who liked his drink. Did Norman remember him as being like this? "He was yes, every bit of it. Chelsea could be quite nice at times and other times he could be a bit of an introvert. He used to work his solos out, like a lot of musicians at the time. I remember one thing about him in particular. He really was an admirer of Bix, and Bix had the habit of keeping a hip flask in his back pocket. So Chelsea followed suit and had a hip flask in his back pocket too. He did exactly what Bix would have done. Sometimes he'd just take off to Paris or somewhere and not show up."

And what about Rollini? "Adrian was absolutely the most wonderful man you could ever meet. Very friendly, very helpful. He had a beautiful temperament - a great man and a great musician. In his own quiet way he was the driving force behind the band. He used to advise Fred a lot and Fred of course respected him very much. It was Adrian that Fred relied on to bring over Fud Livingston and Max Farley from America in the spring of 1929. Of course, what Fred really wanted to do was bring over Bix Siederbecke, and he also tried to make a deal to bring over Bing Crosby. But it was just then that Bing was making a name for himself with Whiteman. Bix, unfortunately, was an ill man. Adrian told me before he went that he wanted to get Bix and I thought to myself, 'Oh, that would be lovely!' We needed a third trumpet to make up the new enlarged orchestra. Of course, Bix never arrived."

The Elizalde band rarely appeared outside of the Savoy Hotel during its contract there. The three notable exceptions were the six week summer 1928 stint in Paris and Ostend, the London Palladium concert which took place in April 1929 and the Melody Maker concert for musicians only which took place at the Shepherds Bush Pavillion the following June.

The band opened at the Ambassadeurs Club in Paris in July 1928, and the boys soon found themselves up against some strong competition. "Playing opposite us was Nobel Sissle and his band. They were terrific, and the band featured Sidney Bechet. We all watched him closely!"

Both the 1929 concerts were successful, but it is the Shepherds Bush concert which sticks in Norman's mind, and for a very good reason! "Oh yes, I remember that episode (laughs). Just before the concert Fud Livingston and Chelsea Quealey skipped the country without telling anybody. They didn't give Fred any warning, they just left and went back to New York. That was the way they did things, happy-go-lucky. When we turned up for a rehearsal, Fred said 'We've got no Chelsea and we've got no Fud. Norman, you'll have to take over from Chelsea, and Arthur (Rollini), you'll have to take over from Fud and do all the solos with Bobby (Davis). Funnily enough, it didn't bother me. I thought, 'Good, I'll have a go at it.' We did a lot of rehearsals for that concert." By all accounts, Norman more than made up for the loss of Chelsea.

After Elizalde's contract at the Savoy terminated in July 1929, he took his colossal band (by then it numbered 19 including Elizalde) on a disastrous tour of the north of England and Scotland, where it was met with a mixture of incomprehension and a 'our own bands up here are just

as good thank you' type of attitude. Fred was never a show man (and even less a business man!), and failed to grasp the necessity of being on the same level, spiritually, as the audience. Norman remembers the Northern tour all too well, "The advance publicity was very poor and I don't think the younger generation in those places knew much about what was going on. I suppose Fred thought he could do what Jack Hylton was already doing, but you see we weren't a stage orchestra like Hylton's was."

One of the most impressive performances from Norman during his period with Elizalde is a long solo on "How Long Has This Been Going On", way ahead of any other British trumpet player active at the time.

After leaving Elizalde early in 1930, Norman went back to the Savoy, this time with sax player Arthur Lally and his band. Lally played bass sax uncannily like Rollini, and his work has often been mistaken as Rollini's. A slightly eccentric, highly talented musician, Lally fell victim to deep depression in the late 30s and took his own life during the Second World War.

By the early 30s, the strangle hold the Musician's Union and the Ministry of Labour had over the visiting Americans was beginning to grow uncomfortable and many returned home at the end of their period of contract rather than try to renew it. Now it was the turn of the young British musicians, their minds fresh with imported American ideas, to show London what they had learnt. Both Jackson and Norman Payne took on increased studio work from 1930 as a result of the gap left by Americans such as Ahola. Norman did much studio work in the early thirties with Pat 'Spike' Hughes, the forward looking bassist who secured a long recording deal with Decca. These sides, along with some incredibly rare Worldecho sessions with Jack Hart's band, show Payne at his best, and at his most Bixian. The trumpet chair at the Decca session with Hughes fits Norman perfectly, and this shows in the relaxed yet exciting solo work on these early Hughes sides.

But not all the recording work Norman undertook during the 1930s was so interesting. "I did lots of recordings with various people, but I started to get a bit blasé about recording sessions after a while, especially the commercial ones. It was one session after another. Occasionally we would do some very unusual recording sessions, such as when Ray Noble would call us to do a session at Kingsway Hall. I also recorded with Bunny Berigan when he was in London with Hal Kemp at the end of 1929 - we did a session for Van Phillips at the Columbia studios. The Kemp band was playing at the Cafe de Paris and the other trumpet player in the band was Mickey Bloom. It was watching Mickey play the mellophone that first got me interested in that instrument. I still have my mellophone. I also made many records alongside trumpeter Max Goldberg. Max was a very good trumpet player, especially with a mute, and was always concerned about doing things the right way. We were very good friends."

After serving in the Army during World War II, Norman went into entertainments management with the drummer Jock Jacobson. The business grew and prospered, and to this day Norman is active in this line of work. But does he play anymore? "I only play in the privacy of my own home, just playing along to records, that sort of thing."

When I asked him to sum up his highly successful career as a dance band and jazz musician, he simply said "Hectic but fun." All I can add to that is, "Thanks Norman, for having so much fun!"

Shellac Stack wishes to thank Nick Jellow for this fine piece on Norman Payne, one of the very best jazz cornetists of any time and place.

-Paul Burgess