

THE INFLUENCE OF BIX BEIDERBECKE – VOLUME TWO: EUROPE

By Nick Dellow and Mark Berresford

As evinced in Volume One of this CD set, Bix Beiderbecke was the defining interpreter of jazz for many white American trumpet players in the latter half of the 1920s and into the early 1930s. Less well known is the fact that he was also enormously influential in Europe during this time. Although Bix himself never left the USA, his solos were conveyed across the Atlantic through 78 rpm records issued in England, France, Germany and many other countries. Through a combination of word of mouth and reviews in the *Melody Maker* (a British dance band magazine), these records soon became the talk of dance band and jazz circles. As a consequence, a “Bixian” style began to pervade jazz-flavoured dance band recordings across Europe from the mid 1920s, most notably in Great Britain.

Early influences

It was the Original Dixieland Jazz Band (the ODJB) who first brought jazz to the Old World, playing extended engagements in London from April 1919 to July 1920. Their Dixieland music had already proved a hit in Chicago and at New York’s Reisenweber’s Restaurant, and through nightly appearances at the Hammersmith Palais de Dance and Rector’s Club in London – as well as via now rare recordings issued by British Columbia – the band repeated the success they had scored in their home country.

Many other American bands followed in the wake of the ODJB’s success, and for a decade or so after the Original Dixielanders had returned home, Europe proved to be a valuable source of additional income for American bands and musicians who played this new type of popular music, which their European counterparts often found hard to emulate. One such outfit was the Original Capitol Orchestra, who arrived in England in early 1923 and stayed until early 1925, going through various changes of personnel in the process. Their January 1924 recording of *Tiger Rag* attests to the band’s ability to play real jazz, with strong New Orleans-style solos from cornetist **Vic Sell** (not Sells, according to recent research) and clarinettist Tracey Mumma. Indeed, the band had played in New Orleans during the Winter of 1921 and it is known that Mumma had heard Sidney Arodin in the Crescent City. In his excellent book *Jazz Away From Home*, Chris Goddard compares *Tiger Rag* favourably with the Wolverines’ own version of the number, recorded in June 1924 (though unreleased until the 1930s), even going so far as to state that Sell’s playing possessed a laid-back fluidity that surpassed Bix’s more “on the beat” phrasing.

The Capitol Orchestra acquired its name as the result of an engagement onboard the *SS Capitol* steamboat, which conducted pleasure cruises up and down the Mississippi. The *SS Capitol* often landed at Davenport, Iowa, Bix’s home town, and in 1921 Bix was hired to play aboard the steamer as a member of the Doc Wrixon Band, which eventually, through several changes of personnel, became the Capitol Orchestra. Had it not been for Bix’s inability to read music, which led to his being denied a union

card, it is possible that he would have continued playing with the band and eventually journeyed with the Capitol Orchestra to Europe. Jazz history would have certainly snaked a very different course as a result!



The Original Capitol Orchestra in 1924 (left to right) Vic Sell, Richard MacDonald, Les Russuck, William Sell, ? Evans, Leon Van Straten, Tracey Mumma, George Byron Webb, I.V. "Bud" Sheppard (taken at the HMV Studios, Hayes, Middlesex) (Richard L. Mumma collection)

It was in fact a British musician, **Tom Smith**, who committed to wax the first jazz solo in Europe that is obviously associated with Bix. In the Kit Cat Band's excellent version of *Riverboat Shuffle*, Smith takes a muted trumpet chorus that emulates Beiderbecke's solo as heard on the Wolverines' Gennett recording of the Hoagy Carmichael number.



The Kit Cat Band in 1925 (left to right) Tom Smith, Edwin Knight, Alfred Field, Ted Heath, Al Starita, Eric Little, Len Fillis, Sid Bright, Jim Kelleher, George Smith

Although none of the Wolverines' recordings were issued in Europe at the time, it is conceivable that someone brought over a copy of the famous Gennett recording and played it to Smith. However, a far more plausible explanation is that he was reading from a published score that interpolated Bix's solo. Whatever the case, the recording is remarkable given the time and place. Sadly, Smith committed suicide by throwing himself under a train in 1931, thereby consigning himself to obscurity; at least we can now stake a claim on his behalf as the first European musician to be truly "Bixian", certainly on record. Incidentally, violinist Hugo Rignold takes a solo all his own invention on this side, and pretty neat it is too!

Fred Elizalde

Had he not been ill due to the effects of alcoholism, Bix may very well have played in Europe later on in the 1920s, in a band directed by Federico "Fred" Elizalde, a talented musician in his own right. Born in Manila, The Philippines, in 1907, to wealthy Spanish parents with sugar plantations and other business interests on the islands, Fred Elizalde, like Bix, demonstrated a natural aptitude for the piano as a child, giving recitals before the age of 10 and gaining a prestigious prize at the Madrid Royal Conservatory aged just 14.



Fred Elizalde in 1928 (photograph by Cecil Beaton)

Despite his precocious musical ability, Elizalde's parents felt that the legal profession was a more appropriate career choice for their son. And so, in deference to his family's wishes, Fred enrolled at Stanford University, California, in September 1924, to study law. However, it seems that he paid scant attention to his academic studies, and instead invested his energies into organising and directing a collegiate dance band. In mid-1926, Elizalde quit the university altogether, to the considerable consternation of his parents, and put together an excellent "hot" dance band that played at the Cinderella Roof Ballroom of the Biltmore Hotel in Hollywood during the Summer of 1926. The band also recorded for the Hollywood label; all the resultant sides – which feature Fred's commendable arrangements – are now mythically rare.

In September 1926, Fred moved to England to join his older brother Manuel, known as "Lizz", who was studying at Cambridge University and also playing first alto in a college dance band called the Quinquaginta Band, which consisted of fellow Cambridge undergraduates. It has been suggested that Fred was sent to Cambridge by his frustrated father in order that he continue his law studies under the watchful eye of his older brother. This may have been the intention of Elizalde senior, but the fact that Fred did not actually enrol at the university and that Manuel was already playing in a dance band at one of its colleges, suggests that there were other motivations that drove the talented but mercurial pianist from California to Cambridge. Indeed, virtually upon his arrival, Fred became the nominal leader of the Quinquaginta Band, and under his musical guidance it became the most talked about college dance band in England, and certainly the hottest. It even changed its name to reflect its newfound impetus, becoming the Quinquaginta Ramblers in honour of the California Ramblers.

The Melody Maker magazine used every opportunity to advance the Quinquaginta Ramblers, and its leader was championed as the titular defender of hot music – the antithesis of the typical dance band leader who, it seemed, cared little for real jazz. The magazine proclaimed to its readers that Elizalde was "likely to prove himself one of the wonders of the age." And so he was!

The Melody Maker

By June 1927, Fred Elizalde had moved on from the Quinquaginta Ramblers to work for the British Brunswick recording company in London, both as an arranger for various Brunswick artists – such as Ambrose – and as a recording artist in his own right. His star was certainly in the ascendancy at this time, and through his success – which, as always, was exalted by the Melody Maker – other dance band leaders began to consider "advanced" hot arrangements in a more favourable light, even if the commercial possibilities were still somewhat limited.

At the same time, the Melody Maker also began publishing a series of articles written by the Elizalde brothers, in which Bix (misspelled as Bix Bidlebeck!) and other American jazz musicians were first brought to the attention of British fans. Even Louis Armstrong is mentioned by the brothers, though his influence, like that of other black jazz musicians, remained negligible amongst white European jazz men until the early 1930s.

Established in 1926, the Melody Maker was an important mouthpiece in disseminating the stylistic developments in jazz and dance music on both sides of the Atlantic. Despite the occasional misspellings and misappropriations, regular reports concerning the whereabouts and activities of Bix, as well as fellow jazz musicians such as Frank Trumbauer, Red Nichols, Miff Mole and others, kept British readers up-to-date with what was going on, at least in the white jazz world. In this respect, the Melody Maker was far in advance of its US counterparts.

Moreover, from its first issue the Melody Maker carried in-depth reviews of the latest dance band and jazz records. Up until the early 1930s, the record reviewer was usually the magazine's first editor, Edgar Jackson. If Jackson was dogmatically partisan in this role, with the polemic heavily biased towards white jazz, he could also

be surprisingly enlightened and informative for the time. His review of Frank Trumbauer's seminal recording of *Singin' The Blues/Clarinet Marmalade*, which appeared in the July 1927 edition, stated:

"Singin' the Blues" by Frankie Trumbauer's Orchestra, is the best of the small-size "hot" combination renderings that has ever been committed to wax, and that says something, for there have lately been a number of very fine examples of this class of thing. Some of you may remember Trumbauer as the "hot" sax player with Ray Miller when he had such a good band about two and a half years ago, which was featured on Brunswick records...He is as delightful and up to date to-day as he was then...In addition, in the combination there is Bix Bidlebeck, also of whom the Elizalde brothers told you. Here is your chance to prove the truth of their statement that he is the King of Trumpet Players. What soul, too, there is in his playing; what beautiful phrases he works out..."

Two months later, the Parlophone coupling of Trumbauer's *Ostrich Walk* and *Riverboat Shuffle* was reviewed. Of Bix's efforts, Jackson was positively poetic, commenting:

"...the laurels must go to Bix Bidlebeck, the trumpet player, who loses nothing when compared with the famous Red Nichols. It may be true that Bix slightly lacks that absolute perfection of tone and technique, which have given "Red" such world-wide fame, but "Red" always seems to me to have something of the coldness, even though he includes the purity, of crystal, whereas Bix has a heart as big as your head, which shines through his playing with the warmth of the sun's rays. He somehow seems more human than "Red" whose perfection always makes me think of snow clad mountains...."

For British dance band trumpet players, who had up until then regarded Red Nichols' more cerebral style as the epitome of hot playing, the sound of Bix – passionate but introspective, exuberant but wistful – was a revelation. For some, like the teenage trumpeter **Norman Payne**, the effect was instant and far-reaching, as he recalled in an interview in the mid-1980s: "I was playing in a trio at the Florida Club in Regent Street, with Ginger Conn on drums and Lionel Clapper on sax. Clapper sounded very much like Trumbauer. One night, he said 'I must play to you a record called 'Singin' The Blues' by Frankie Trumbauer and a lovely trumpet player called Bix Beiderbecke.' Of course, as soon as I heard Bix I just went mad and from then on I bought every record he was on." Amongst the first wave of European players influenced by Bix, Norman Payne perhaps came closest to assimilating his style. He was also the youngest of the European Bixophiles, being just 16 years old in 1927.



The Savoy bands

In late 1927, Elizalde attained a far higher degree of prominence when he accepted an offer from the management of the Savoy Hotel to lead a new dance band at this most distinguished establishment. This was *the* plum dance band job in London; other bandleaders could only look on with envy.



Fred Elizalde and his Hot Music (left to right) Chelsea Quealey, Ronnie Gubertini, Bobby Davis, Adrian Rollini, Fred Elizalde, Len Fillis (taken during a break from a recording session)

With the chance to assemble a band that few others could afford, Fred sent his brother to America in November 1927 to scout for musicians to bring back to the Savoy. Lizz returned with a goodly slice of the California Ramblers – reed player Bobby Davis,

trumpeter **Chelsea Quealey** and the great bass saxophonist (multi-instrumentalist, in fact!) Adrian Rollini. Subsequently, other Americans, including reed players Max Farley, Arthur Rollini and Fud Livingston, joined Elizalde's orchestra at the Savoy. The British contingent included Norman Payne, George Hurley (violin) and Harry Hayes (alto sax) – all good jazz players themselves!

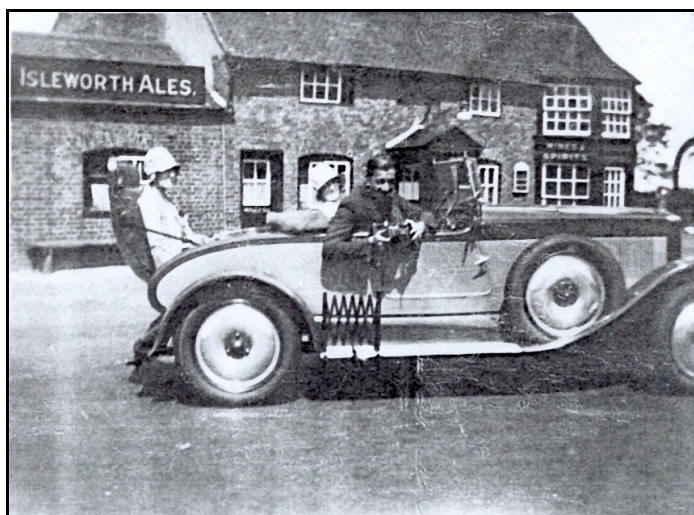
The Americans in Fred Elizalde's Savoy band were of pivotal importance, with Rollini the lynchpin. Elizalde relied on Adrian Rollini both as a musician and as a "fixer". Rollini knew just about everybody who was anybody in the field of white jazz and hot dance music in the USA, and had ready contact with numerous musicians, bandleaders and agents. He knew Bix of course, having played the wonderfully supple, interweaving bass sax heard on the famous "Bix and his Gang" OKeh recordings made in 1927. He had also hired Bix in September 1927 to play in his star-studded but short-lived New Yorkers Club band. Even in the late 1940s, Rollini was to remember Bix as "a great friend".



Adrian Rollini in 1927

The influence of the California Ramblers, and indeed of Bix himself, is apparent in the Elizalde band's recording of ***Sugar***, featuring solos by the US triumvirate of Quealey, Davis and Rollini. Incidentally, this is a Bill Challis arrangement, brought over by Adrian Rollini amongst a batch of Challis charts, and recorded over a month *before* the famous Paul Whiteman version with Bix. The three Americans are also much in evidence on an alternate take of Noel Coward's ***Dance, Little Lady***. This is from a test pressing that was for some unknown reason pressed by Brunswick onto on a flexible plastic material, similar to Filmophone – hence the bumpy start and swishing sound. The solos differ noticeably from the issued take, though the sparse arrangement – possibly by Elizalde himself – is identical.

The Challis influence can also be detected in ***I'm Glad***, though the rather heavy arrangement is probably the work of British saxophonist Phil Cardew. This is yet another recently-discovered test pressing, and, again, is being issued for the very first time, nearly 80 years after its recording.



Adrian Rollini, Dixie Rollini (his wife) and unknown passenger somewhere in North London in 1928 or 1929. Note concertina stand attached to side of car for mounting a still camera or movie camera

In early 1929, Rollini temporarily returned to the USA to look for new musicians to add to the expanding Elizalde band, which was becoming positively Whitemanesque in size, ambition and expense! While in New York, Rollini sought out Bix in an attempt to secure his services, but alas Bix was unavailable as he was recuperating in his hometown of Davenport, Iowa from an alcohol-induced breakdown. When Rollini told Norman Payne that he had failed to bring back his hero, the young British musician was understandably doleful: “It was a shame. Adrian had told me of his intentions before he left for America and I thought ‘Oh Christ, that would be lovely!’”



Fred Elizalde and several members of his band on board a ship bound for Ostend, August 1928. Included are Fred Elizalde (wearing sun visor), Al Bowlly (kneeling in foreground) and Adrian Rollini (kneeling, with hat on)



Fred Elizalde and his Savoy Music in 1928. Included are (left to right, back row) Norman Payne (second along), Al Bowlly (fourth), Chelsea Quealey (sixth), Adrian Rollini (eleventh); bottom row (to the right of Fred Elizalde) Bobby Davis and Harry Hayes

Playing opposite Elizalde's outfit – from the beginning of January until the end of September 1928 – was a new version of the famous Savoy Orpheans, a dance band that had been synonymous with the Savoy Hotel since 1923. Led by violinist Reggie Batten, this version of the Orpheans also contained several important American musicians: the pianist was the talented Irving Brodsky, who was a fine arranger too, and the first trumpeter was **Sylvester “Hooley” Ahola**, who had also played in Adrian Rollini's New Yorkers Club band. Ahola was another musician deeply influenced by Bix, as many of the records he soloed on while in England between 1928 and 1931 show. There are several fine examples on this CD.

Norman Payne

Like many top dance band musicians who were good sight readers, both Sylvester Ahola and Norman Payne were able to augment their already substantial wages from hotel band work with further lucrative fees gleaned as freelance recording studio musicians, playing on numerous and often non-descript sides, many of them issued under pseudonyms. As with their New York counterparts, the London recording studio musicians guarded this well-paid work jealously; this was an exclusive club with membership open to a select few.



Jay Whidden in about 1926

It is possible that trumpeter **Max Goldberg** helped to get Norman Payne studio work, at least initially. Goldberg was a well established studio musician, having arrived in England in the mid-1920s as a member of a Canadian dance band. A few years older than Payne, Goldberg had also fallen under Bix's spell. Payne and Goldberg were good friends who practiced together on a regular basis; this is one reason why it is sometimes difficult to tell them apart when they played on some of the studio band recordings that proliferated in the late 1920s. However, there is no mistaking Norman Payne's Bixian work on *A Dicky-Bird Told Me So* by Jay Whidden's band. Here, young Norman is in declamatory mood as he emphatically cuts in on the adenoidal voice of Fred Douglas; the following 32 bars of blistering heat include a veritable cornucopia of Bixian phases and Nichols-like 'tricks' such as half-valving. Goldberg's solo on Whidden's *Louisiana* is more evenly tempered and obviously modelled on Bix's solo in the Whiteman recording of the title. The arrangement here is by Lew Stone, who also wrote many fine scores for bandleader Bert Ambrose before becoming a bandleader himself.



Max Goldberg in the early 1930s

Norman Payne is also much in evidence on *I'm Singing My Way 'Round The World* and *Song Of The Dawn*, issued by the short-lived and unprofitable Dominion recording company. Apart from vocalist Jack Hart, the sidemen are drawn from the pit orchestra put together by Fred Elizalde for an ill-fated revue called "The Intimate Revue", which had a record-breaking short run of just one night at the Duchess Theatre in March 1930 (it was intimate, one wag noted in a London newspaper critique that appeared the following day, because the stage was so small that the dancers' elaborate headsets kept getting entangled with each other, with fairly disastrous results). Elizalde undoubtedly had some personal involvement in this session: he is certainly responsible for the arrangements, and may also be the pianist who takes a brief solo on *I'm Singing My Way 'Round The World*.

By the time these recordings were made, Fred Elizalde was no longer the exalted paladin of jazz in Britain: his star-studded Savoy band had broken up the previous December after two disastrous tours of Northern England and Scotland, and mounting debts led to his bank account being shut down at the same time. Adrian Rollini, astute as always, saw the writing on the wall: "Come on kid, it's time to go home" he told his younger brother Arthur, who had joined the Elizalde band on tenor sax in February 1929. The Rollini brothers withdrew their pay cheques just in time, and sailed back to New York.

Soon after the "The Intimate Revue" debacle, Elizalde also left England – and at the same time bade farewell the world of jazz and hot music, seeking solace in the warmth of the Basque coast of south-west France, where he studied and wrote classical music. Subsequent forays by this once-exulted "wonder of the age" into popular music would be limited to a few piano solos for Decca in 1932 and 1933.

The mantle that Elizalde once held as the leading protagonist of "hot" music in Britain was picked up by Patrick "Spike" Hughes, a bass player, composer, arranger, writer and general hanger-on in jazz circles, who had also been in Cambridge in the 1920s (unlike Elizalde, he was a student, albeit only briefly). Through a series of Decca studio recordings, which lasted from 1930 until 1933, Hughes continued the fight to bring jazz to prominence in Britain, but like Elizalde before him, he was only partially successful in promulgating its virtues to a wider audience than the few ardent and avid fans the music had always attracted. At least Hughes was facilitated in his aims by Decca's relatively progressive, hands-off attitude. Allowed to play in an environment that tolerated informality, Hughes' sidemen were encouraged to loosen their dance band ties. And so we find the still-teenage Norman Payne bursting through the confines of the ensemble with astonishing power, as in *Kalua*.

At the time of these Decca recordings, Spike Hughes was also working as a freelance critic for the Melody Maker, using the pseudonym "Mike" when reviewing records. Times had changed since Elizalde had eulogised about Bix back in 1927, for although Beiderbecke's style was still being imitated with reverence by trumpet players across Europe, there were now other influences arriving from America. Hughes was one of the very first music critics to laud Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington in print, in anticipation of their subsequent European tours in 1932 and 1933, respectively. His own recordings became increasingly Harlemaesque in style as a consequence of these

new movements in jazz, though Hughes' admiration for Bix's playing remained undiminished throughout the 1930s.

After recording several of his own delightful compositions in New York in 1933 with a truly stellar band of black musicians, Hughes decided to give up bandleading and concentrate on his other love, that of writing about jazz and classical music. His later 1930s record reviews are delightfully impious, being particularly dismissive of overtly commercial swing sides; Bix's playing is more than once cited as a salutary lesson in the appreciation of artistic endeavour over commercial considerations!

Another recording studio combination that employed the services of Norman Payne – as well as Sylvester Ahola and Max Goldberg – was the house band of the Gramophone Company (HMV), known as the New Mayfair Dance Orchestra. Conceived in early 1928, the New Mayfair Dance Orchestra was initially directed by the American pianist Carroll Gibbons, who had, in 1927, led the Savoy Orpheans at the Savoy Hotel. When Gibbons returned to the USA in mid-1929 (only briefly, as it turned out), the British pianist and arranger Ray Noble took over at HMV. Noble was a consummate arranger; his charts could be harmonically complex yet always remained true to the melodic strain of the tune.

As director of light music at HMV, Noble had the pick of the top musicians, and so we find some of the very best London dance band sidemen appearing regularly on these sides. Norman Payne is at his most lyrical and mellifluous on *Every Day Away From You*, which also features his older brother Laurie on baritone sax and clarinet. After a gap of nearly 55 years, the younger Payne recognized his solo instantly when the record was played to him, and said “After that recording, I commented to Ray how pleased I was with myself”. Who could possibly disagree with him? The influence of Bix is obvious here, as it also is on the lovely *South Sea Rose*, in which Payne drives the brass section with commendable passion, occasionally pointing his horn above the parapet to project short, intense Bixian breaks.

Jack Jackson

Jack Jackson, featured “hot” star of the Jack Hylton Orchestra from late 1927 until late 1929, was another British Bixian player of note. Born in 1906 in Belvedere, Kent (not Yorkshire, as Jackson himself claimed!), Jack began on cornet at eight and progressed rapidly; in his teens, he studied with Britain's most famous trumpet teacher of the time, John Solomon, at the Royal Academy of Music in London (as did Norman Payne, incidentally).



Jack Jackson

Jackson cut his dance band teeth with a number of outfits before briefly freelancing in 1927. One of these freelance dates was a recording session for Imperial, a company still using the old acoustic method of recording when almost every other firm had switched over to the greater fidelity offered by electric recordings. Despite the sonic limitations, Jackson's solo on *Somebody Said* comes through clear enough. His schooled brass band training and dance band experience stand him in good stead here, allowing him to play a polished gem of a two-bar break in the middle of his solo, in which he ascends to the 9th of the chord (the highest note of the phrase) before descending chromatically to the root, followed by the minor 7th – very modernistic stuff! Moreover, Jackson starts his solo off with a direct quote from Bix – specifically, a two-bar break heard in Trumbauer's version of *Riverboat Shuffle*, which had been issued in England by Parlophone just a month or so previously.



The Crichton Lyricists (left to right) N Tronny, Syd Roy, Harry Roy, Eddie Collis, Harry Lyons, Tommy Venn

It has been suggested that the alto sax solo on *Somebody Said* is played by Perley Breed, who had recently arrived from the USA. Comparison with Breed's playing on several British recordings in which he is known to have taken part certainly suggests a similarity of phrasing and tone, and it has to be said that very few British sax players were able to improvise in such an advanced manner at this time!

Jackson, like many other dance band trumpeters, had initially taken his jazz cue from Red Nichols. His solo on Jack Hylton's *Oh! What A Night For Love*, recorded in Berlin a few months after he had joined the Hylton band, is a good example of the Nichols-to-Bix transmutation that many players underwent: it has something of Nichols' precision and phrasing, and yet paraphrases Bix-like figures, with some bars reminiscent of Bix's work on Trumbauer's *Ostrich Walk* (another side that had been issued by Parlophone not long before). On *Forget Me Not*, there is an added surprise in the form of a hot – and rather Bixian – solo on oboe, played by Edward “Poggy” Pogson, a long-term member of Hylton's sax section.



Jack Hylton and his Orchestra in 1928. Including Lew Davis (trombone), Jack Jackson (sitting next to Davis, with cornet on lap) and Poggy Pogson (alto sax)

Frank Wilson

Little is known about **Frank Wilson**, whose cornet playing graces the early Ray Noble composition *Nobody's Fault But Your Own* (an unissued take, incidentally), played by Jack Payne and His BBC Dance Orchestra and arranged by Noble himself. Payne's outfit was a hot one, especially compared with the later BBC Dance Band directed by Henry Hall. Wilson has the distinction of being the only musician to have played in both bands!



Frank Wilson in 1928

Frank Wilson's style is certainly Bixian here, but on one or two other sides with Payne's BBC band he sounds remarkably like Sylvester Ahola, though the two never actually played alongside each other.

In the mid-1930s, Wilson suddenly announced to the popular music press that he was leaving the dance band world due to his religious convictions. He had found God and decided to take up the calling, but where the calling took him is anyone's guess. There were rumours that he became a monk or that he had joined the Salvation Army! But to all intents and purposes he simply disappeared from view, leaving just a handful of examples of his stylish playing for us to enjoy.

Sylvester "Hooley" Ahola

The most prolific of the Bixophiles in Europe in the late 1920s and early 1930s – though not European himself – was Sylvester "Hooley" Ahola. As has already been mentioned, Hooley had played alongside Bix in Adrian Rollini's New Yorkers Club band in September-October 1927. Despite the brevity of this engagement, the effect of sitting next to Bix was long-lasting; even in his eighties, Hooley would readily reflect on Bix's influence, stating that "Bix could say so much by playing just a few notes".

Soon after his arrival in London in late December 1927, Ahola came to the attention of bandleader Bert Firman, who had been in charge of dance band recordings issued on HMV's cheaper sister label, Zonophone, since 1924. One of the studio bands he put together at Zonophone was the Rhythmic Eight, an outfit that gave prominence to the solo skills of visiting Americans, many of them – like Ahola – from New England. We are indeed fortunate that Firman possessed the foresight to feature Hooley and fellow Massachusetts saxophonist Perley Breed in such titles as *There's A Cradle In Caroline*. Here, Ahola's scintillating solo combines a phenomenal technique with

Bix-like warmth and phrasing, and perhaps just a dash of his own innate wistful New England charm! And the empathetic interplay between Ahola (open and then muted) and Breed (on baritone and then alto sax) echoes that of Bix and Tram. Many other sides by the Rhythmic Eight are of a similar high order.



Sylvester "Hooley" Ahola in 1928

Some Hauntin' Tune was penned by the Belgium composer and trumpeter Peter Packey (1904-1965), who, with his partner David Bee, specialised in writing advanced jazz-inclined numbers. Other titles of theirs include *High Tension*, which was recorded by Lud Gluskin's band in Berlin in 1929 and by the Luis Russell Orchestra in the USA in 1930. Although the Edison Bell Radio label states *Harry Hudson's Melody Men* (Hudson was the MD at Edison Bell), it has often been assumed that this recording was actually made by *The Red Robbins*, a Belgian dance band with whom Packey played, and which had travelled to London in July 1928 to record for Edison Bell Radio. However, this side is in fact by the regular studio band directed by Hudson, and features Sylvester Ahola in a particularly Bixian mode; the clarinet and lead alto sax heard here are played by Sid Phillips, who was to find fame after the Second World War as a Dixieland clarinettist (he was also a fine arranger and composer).

Ahola also took part on the very first Spike Hughes session for Decca, in March 1930, playing some fine, thrusting Bixian horn, but with his own urgent phrasing also to the fore, as demonstrated on *A Miss Is As Good As A Mile*. Hooley is also in Bixian mode on *In The Moonlight* by the Night Club Kings – a small studio band assembled by Ray Noble over at HMV – but on the other side, *Someone*, he nods a wink to Louis Armstrong, especially in his high note introduction. Such appreciative soundings towards Armstrong reflect the fact that Louis' records were being issued and promoted by Parlophone and its sister label Odeon in Europe at the time. Perhaps the

most important of these was *West End Blues*, issued by British Parlophone in 1929. Through panegyric reviews of this and other sides, Armstrong at last came to prominence in Europe and achieved recognition (even more so than in the USA) as the most important and influential trumpet player that jazz had known. The effect of these Armstrong records on European musicians was as significant as the Frank Trumbauer recordings had been back in 1927.

With some musicians, such as Nat Gonella, the influence of Louis was obvious. Other, more Bixian players, like Norman Payne and Max Goldberg, assimilated elements of Armstrong's style into their own playing while also being influenced by white American trumpeters such as Bunny Berigan and Manny Klein. Inevitably, the influence of Bix began to fade, especially after his death in August 1931. Yet in announcing Bix's passing, the *Melody Maker* presaged his potential for immortality: "Much of the Bix style of trumpet playing will surely survive, perhaps long after its creator's name is forgotten.....".

Philippe Brun and other European Bixian players

Across the narrow channel of water that separates Great Britain from the European continent we find other players under the influence of Bix. The most important of these was undoubtedly **Philippe Brun**, a Frenchman who spent the first half of the 1930s in England as a member of Jack Hylton's Orchestra.



Philippe Brun in 1929

Brun was born in Paris in 1908 and studied violin at the Paris Conservatory of Music. He formed his first band with school friends, and in 1926 took up the cornet. Two years later he was sufficiently proficient to be the featured soloist in a band led by Gregor Kelekian – Gregor's Gregorians. In May 1929, the Gregorians took part in a recording session organized by the British company Edison Bell for its diminutive Edison Bell Radio label. The sides they made were recorded in Paris using mobile equipment, which saved the bother of having to transport the band to the company's main London studios. *Gregorology* spotlights Brun's Bixian style, and also features the Trumbauer-ish alto sax of Edmond Cohanier. The number was apparently composed on the spot by pianist Lucien Moraweck, who must surely have found

inspiration through listening to Trumbauer's earlier small band OKeh recordings such as *For No Reason At All In C* and, more obviously, *Trumbology*.

Other Bixian musicians playing on the European Continent in the late 1920s and early 1930s included **Ragge L  th**, who can be heard on *Minns Du*, Eddie Ritten, an American who played in Lud Gluskin's fine band in France and Germany, and Ray Binder, who was with Ray Ventura and his Collegians in France in 1929.

Later appreciation and reappraisal

By the mid-1930s, the direct influence of Bix on jazz trumpet players, both US and European, had waned considerably. At the same time, however, interest in Bix's original recordings began to grow, thanks to the re-issuing of a number of classic sides from the 1920s. This resurgence in interest led to the initial collation of information on Bix's recordings by young British collectors during the Second World War, and the eventual publication in the late 1950s of several biographies, also by British writers. There have been numerous words written about the man and his music since then, and many more notes played in his honour. As a result, Bix's status has been elevated to that of an artist whose work transcends the ephemeral. And through such discernment, he continues to be appreciated throughout the world – homage indeed to Davenport's most famous son.