

BERT BASSETT (full name Albert Thomas Bassett) was born in London in 1894.



Bert Bassett

By CLIFFORD ESSEX (based on BMG June 1937 obituary with edits by Tony Bryan)

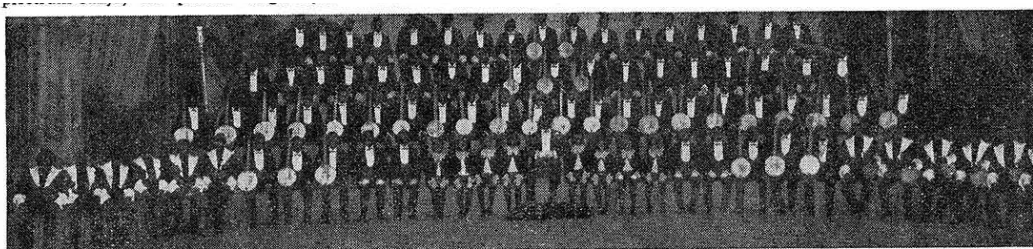
At the moment of going to press, the sad news reaches me of the death of Bert Bassett.

Throughout the winter Bert, who has never enjoyed the best of health, found it increasingly difficult, through bad attacks of bronchitis, to carry out his various duties. At the beginning of April he became a patient at Guy's Hospital, and it was hoped the care and attention that could be given him would put him on the road to recovery, but bronchial pneumonia set in and he passed away in the early hours of April 21st. 1937. He had been in failing health for a long time past, never having had a robust constitution, but his decline towards the end was rapid. He was only 43.

I am sure everyone who ever met Bert will join with the Assistant Editor and me in tendering our heartfelt sympathies to his sorrowing mother and brother.

His passing has been a great blow to me because he had been associated with me since he was quite a little fellow: from the time when his father, who played the banjo, first brought him and asked me to take him under my wing, and for several years he was employed on the regular staff of Clifford Essex.

Bert first appeared in public at a Kensington Town Hall concert in 1905. In 1910 he was prima balalaika player in the Clifford Essex Russian Balalaika Orchestra and, in 1912, became a star artist with Joe Morley, Will Blanche and George Morris in the Palladium Minstrels, which featured a team of 34 banjoists.



THE PALLADIUM MINSTRELS
The 34 banjoists in this impressive gathering (which included such famous players as Geo. E. Morris, Bert Bassett, Will Blanche, W. E. Thomas, V. L. Berrle and Chas. H. Stainer) were led by Joe Morley, who was also featured as a soloist in the show.

He was also teaching the instrument in our studios.

BMG 1911

Bassett, Bert. (B)

4 and 5, Sherwood Place.

Piccadilly Circus. W

In 1913, Bert Bassett appeared at the "Four Hundred Club", now the "Embassy" in New Bond Street, London, in the first dance band in England to include a plectrum-banjo. Playing plectrum-banjo with him in the band was Nicholas Kovac, the clever Russian from my Balalaika Orchestra who is now a leading member of the Classic Guitar Society of New York. (Early in 1895, Clifford Essex was giving lessons in plectring, but it was not until the 1900's that the plectrum began to rival the finger-style for playing the banjo in Britain.) Joe Morley, who was invited to join this band, declined to forsake the finger style. Bert Bassett and Nick Kovacs set the fashion for the new style dance band which was later to have such enormous developments. Up to that time the string band had reigned supreme, but Society took to the new style band from the very first and the "Banjo Boys" as they called them, played alternately with a ten-piece string band conducted by Emlyn Thomas.

In those days, the banjo was used as a combined melody and rhythm instrument and the player was expected to read from current song copies. Special parts for the banjoists were not published until some years later, when the instrument was used solely for providing rhythm - although many bands often featured their banjoist in solo numbers.

Later, Bert Bassett, who was also a fine player of the 'cello and piano, appeared on the Music Halls in a double act with George Morris, the well-known banjoist now with Debroy Somers' band. One of their successes was Morley's "Bagpipe Patrol," in which Bert played a 'cello obbligato to George's solo.

1915 found Bert giving recitals at canteens, entertaining the soldiers, with whom the banjo has always been a prime favourite. A year later became leading banjoist in "La Belle Leonora's Ragtime Band" at the London Coliseum - an act that subsequently went to Paris for a period.

Later Bert was employed at the Admiralty and, in 1917, I got him into Miss Jenkinson's fashionable dance band at Eastbourne, better known as "Jenky's Band".

BMG 1917

Bert Bassett, who is now deeply immersed in naval matters at the Admiralty, is feeling far better in health, he tells us, and certainly looks it. The Government's gain has lost us our best ragtime banjoist; but, let us hope, not for long.

BMG 1917

We regret to hear that Bert Bassett's younger brother, himself a good banjo player, is home badly wounded in the left arm. Here's wishing him a speedy recovery.

BMG 1918

Bert Bassett is still far from well, and is again on sick leave from the Admiralty, we are sorry to hear.



BERT BASSETT

a photograph taken when he was playing with Jack Hylton at the Queen's Hall Roof

In 1921 he commenced what proved to be a long engagement at the Queen's Hall Roof Dance Band .

Private dance band engagements next fully occupied his time and, as Bert was never one to advertise himself, we did not hear much about his activities (except that he had been round the world twice with his banjo) until I heard that he had been in a Herne Bay Nursing Home for six months, leaving there somewhat "under the weather", so I formed the Acton and Ealing Club for his benefit, and he played the bass banjo in this club until the last month or two.

He was featured in the two Gaumont British and Pathe Gazette films when he played with "Raymonde and His Band o'Banjos " and he also recorded with this band on Regal-Zono-phone, playing " Poor Old Joe" as a bass banjo solo with exquisite taste in the "Minstrel Medley" on MR.2404.

BMG 1927

For many years, Mr. Bert Bassett's banjo activities have been devoted to dance playing. He was among the early pioneers of dance playing in this country, when the saxophone was unknown, and a complete dance band consisted of piano, drums and two banjos, or banjo and banjolin.

A little over a year ago Mr. Bert Bassett went with a dance band on a sea trip round the world, partly for the benefit of his health. During the summer months he plays each year in a dance band at Scarborough. A brother - Charlie Bassett - has been playing with an Eastbourne band for the past three years.

BMG 1931

Bassett, Bert (B., Z.B. & T-B)
198 Clapham Road, S.W.9.

In 1933. when Mr. Grimshaw had to relinquish the editorship of this magazine, I offered the post to Bert Bassett, which he readily accepted, and I think readers will say he fully justified my confidence in him. He had a charming nature and a great sense of humour, while in all the years I knew him I never heard him say an unkind word about anyone. He was a most accomplished musician and, in addition to the banjo, he played the 'cello and the piano. His compositions were always refined, and those who liked them liked them very much, although they were never accorded the recognition they deserved .

A very interesting article of appreciation of Bert from the pen of Mr. Tarrant Bailey, an old friend of his, appeared in " B.M.G." (March, 1933):



R. TARRANT BAILEY (left) WITH THE LATE BERT BASSETT

**"OUR NEW EDITOR
BY R. TARRANT BAILEY.**

..... Bert Bassett is a musician of talent far above that of the average performer. In his youth as a finger banjoist he excelled, and had a turn of speed that aroused pangs of jealousy in the breasts of we less sprightly performers. So that we said he played too fast; for the grapes were as sour then as they are today! He loves the banjo. His compositions for the banjo are amongst the best and the real gems such as "L'Automne," "Patagonian Picnic," "Bushrangers," and a few others will live as works of outstanding merit as long as the banjo is played.

He knows as much about plectrum and dance band playing as any banjoist in the world, having been the first to feature this style at the very commencement of the banjo's popularity as a

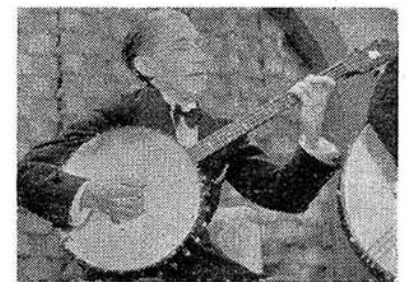
dance band instrument when it took the lead, and the banjoist had to arrange at sight from the piano copy, not only the melody, but four-part harmony.

As a pianist, Bert Bassett extemporising is unbelievably clever, and I have heard him play a suitable descriptive accompaniment to a recitation he had never previously heard.

With the 'cello he has toured the continent, as a finger banjoist he was one of Clifford Essex' Royal Pierrots, as a plectrum banjoist he was in greater demand than any other player, as prima balalaika player he was in Clifford Essex' Balalaika Orchestra and my own, and the piano keyboard he stands no nonsense from at all. On that interesting subject, professional recording, our new Editor can write from experience, as he is a very old hand at this, and those of you who were so fortunate as to corner a few of the "Jumbo" records of his finger-style playing are to be congratulated....."

Bert Bassett was editor of "B.M.G." from March, 1933, to March, 1937.

He made dozens of records for the old Jumbo Record Co., some of the titles being: "A Darkey's Romance"(Grimshaw), "The Kilties"(Grimshaw), "A Gay Gossoon"(Ossman), "Dreamy Eyes"(unknown?), "Goblin Gambles"(Turner), "Mississippi Bubble"(Haines), "Georgian Breeze"(Morley), "Patagonian Picnic"(Bassett), "A Ragtime Episode"(Eno), "Razzle Dazzle"(Von Tilzer), "Torchlight Parade"(Morley), "Plantation Symphony"(Eno), "Honolulu Cake Walk"(Lerman), "Darktown Dandies"(Morley), "Coloured Major"(Henry), "Coon Band Contest"(Pryor), "Whistling Nig" (Grimshaw) and "Whistling Rufus"(Mills). He was a member of "Raymonde and his Band o'Banjos" and played the bass banjo on the Regal-Zonophone records made by this band. In the "Minstrel Medley" he played "Poor Old Joe" as a bass banjo solo. During his career Bert Bassett appeared in two Gaumont British and Pathe films.



BERT BASSETT

A "still" from the Pathé film made by "Raymonde and his Band o' Banjos."

His published compositions for the banjo include: "Admiral Andy", "Bushrangers' March", "Call o'Erin", "Chanson d'Ete", "Coon Slumbers", "Danse Columbine", "Jumbo Rag", "Lazy Rhythm", "L'Automne", "Patagonian Picnic", "Southern Festival" and "Water Lilies".

Letters continue to pour in lamenting his sad passing and by his untimely death the fretted instrument world has suffered a severe loss. He has left behind troops of friends and I am sure he could not have had an enemy in the world.