

4. Profile of Syd Lawrence

In 1967 Syd Lawrence, an established trumpet player with the BBC Northern Dance Orchestra realised that he was not alone amongst his colleagues in being disillusioned with having to play uninteresting arrangements of hit songs from the sixties pop scene. Syd had served his musical apprenticeship working with such bands leaders as Geraldo, Teddy Foster, Nat Temple, Sidney Lipton and Cyril Stapleton and had come to believe that audiences were being denied the live sound of the music they loved and had grown up with. He also believed that the music and songs of the swing era would become, in time, the classic music of the 20th century and continue to appeal to people of all ages.

Keen to revive the music that had inspired him and others of his generation he took it upon himself to establish a rehearsal band of like minded musicians to get together once a week for their own pleasure and play the kind of music they really enjoyed – Big Band Swing! This gathering began in an upstairs room of the Wellington Hotel in Didsbury Manchester, where after a few short weeks the numbers attending the rehearsal sessions had swollen from just the musicians to the wives, families, friends and locals. So great was the support that the band had to move to larger premises three times in eighteen months. In 1969, Syd decided to take the music to which he was so dedicated to a wider audience. He severed his connections with the BBC and took the Syd Lawrence Orchestra on the road.

The first public concert in Sheffield was a sell out and was closely followed by appearances on Granada and Yorkshire T.V. This in turn led to the first recording session for Philips at Strawberry Studios from which an album of Miller classics was produced which quickly hit the 100,000 sales mark. In January 1970 they released “More Miller and Other Big Band Magic”. Soon after these albums were released, Alan Dell, the BBC’s own ‘Mr Big Band’, played the “American Patrol” track on national radio and demand for the Syd Lawrence Orchestra to perform in every major venue across the kingdom hit fever pitch. Within months the orchestra had visited every corner of the U.K. and performed in all London’s major venues, The Royal Albert Hall, Royal Festival Hall, and a Royal command performance at The London Palladium

In 1996 Syd retired, having spent 30 years continually touring with his band, and handed the responsibility of leading the orchestra over to his former lead trombonist Chris Dean.

Syd passed away on 5th May 1998, but in the music library he created for the Syd Lawrence Orchestra he left behind a legacy which continues to benefit future generations of young musicians and music lovers alike.