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ANGY PALUMBO

The Pen Name That Was Real

by Sven Bjerstedt

Senior Lecturer, Lund university, Sweden

In the late 1950s, a march called 'It's up to you' was included in two Swedish detective films. The music was composed by Angy Palumbo. About two decades later, a volume of Edwardian mandolin pieces: 'A Variety of Mandolin Music' (1975), was published with an introduction by Hugo D'Alton. This book included a piece for mandolin and guitar called 'Petite Bolero' also composed by Angy Palumbo. The volume was acquired by the novelist and amateur mandolinist Louis de Bernières, and Palumbo's name found its way into *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*. Alison Stephens and Craig Ogden recorded 'Petite Bolero' for the CD *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*. The CD liner notes actually have nothing at all to tell about the composer: "Another mandolinist about whom we know little is Angy Palumbo. He may have been one of the many hopefuls who left Italy and found only modest success. His name appears on some published works, and it has been speculated that, as was common practice, this is only a pseudonym for a better known player who was unable to publish works under his own name for contractual reasons".

Unknown

The mandolin historian Dr Paul Sparks had been consulted for these liner notes. When I got in touch with him recently, he admitted that Palumbo was still unknown to him:

"I have never come across any

biographical information about him whatsoever in any of the many thousands of late 19th or early 20th century mandolin journals (British, European, or American) that I studied when writing my books and PhD".

According to Dr Sparks, the reason why Louis de Bernières mentioned Angy Palumbo and other composers from the same volume in his novel was, and I quote: "because he thought (erroneously) that they had been well known in their day. Had his novel not become a best seller, I'd bet that nobody would ever have heard the name of Angy Palumbo at all".

Dr Sparks in his charming and thoughtful letter elaborated on the pen name theory. It is a well known fact that many musicians in the early 20th century used pseudonyms for recording and music publishing. Of course, one famous example of a mandolinist who *moonlighted* for other publishers and record companies while he was under contract for another was Mario De Pietro. Dr Sparks concluded: "I can't prove it, but it wouldn't surprise me if Angy Palumbo was simply a pseudonym for someone who had a publishing contract with another publisher but also wanted to get a few pieces published by Clifford Essex (or perhaps he was a *proper* composer who was slightly embarrassed about writing under his own name for such humble instruments as mandolin and guitar). So, in answer to your original question,

it seems that I don't actually appear to know anything at all about Angy Palumbo. Ah well, don't we all go through life answering a slightly different question from the one we were asked"?

When I consulted the British Library online catalogue, I found seven additional compositions (plectrum guitar solos) by Angy Palumbo. They had all been published by Clifford Essex:

Take it easy (1939)

Segoviana (1939)

Marcietta Espagnol (1965)

Penelope (1965)

Party Waltz (1966)

Carminetta (1967)

Lazy Moments (1967)

I noticed that the identity of Angy Palumbo had been discussed on the Mandolin Café Message Board in January, 2005, and that the contributors adhered to Dr Sparks's view: Angy Palumbo was probably a pen name. But so far, nobody seemed to know for certain. There was also, of course, one rather urgent follow up question to be asked - if indeed it was a pen name, then who was its user?

Breakthrough

Then, luckily, I happened to stumble across the name 'Angie Polumbo' in a short Wikipedia article on the English-American banjo player John A. Sloan, b. 1923, now living in Huntsville, Texas: "At age 11, he began to study banjo with Angie Polumbo, an Italian master then living in London." Angy Palumbo, after all, turned out to

be a real name and not a pseudonym. John Sloan responded very kindly to my query about the man who indeed was his teacher in the 1930s. His recollections provided me with a short but vivid and loving portrait of his teacher, he wrote:

“Angy (Angelo) Palumbo was a short heavy Italian who was a cripple. One of his legs was shorter, at least 3 inches. What a fantastic musician he was. He played plectrum banjo in Troise and his banjoliars, also mandolin & guitar in Troise and his mandoliers. They were on British radio quite often. He looked about 55 when he taught me. My father was quite



Peter & John Sloan

impressed when I played one of his compositions called ‘The Hilderino’ which was also in BMG. I never did meet his wife, but

met his very attractive daughter a few times. He gave me a full hour lesson and he was quite bad tempered. After my lesson, often in the winter, he would stand with his back to the gas fire. Instead of asking for his money he would shake his pockets and rattle his money and nobody could fail to pay him. Quite a good system to remind one. He advertised in Hackney Gazette and taught quite a few musical instruments. He lived I believe in Navarino Road, Dalston Junction in London. He told me Troise was his cousin. Looking at his music ‘Penelope and Carminetta’ I wonder if those names were of his wife or daughter? I remember him playing ‘It’s up to you’. It was a 6/8 time march, quite lively. He taught me to play ‘Take your

pick’, which to-day I play fingerstyle with finger tremolo”.

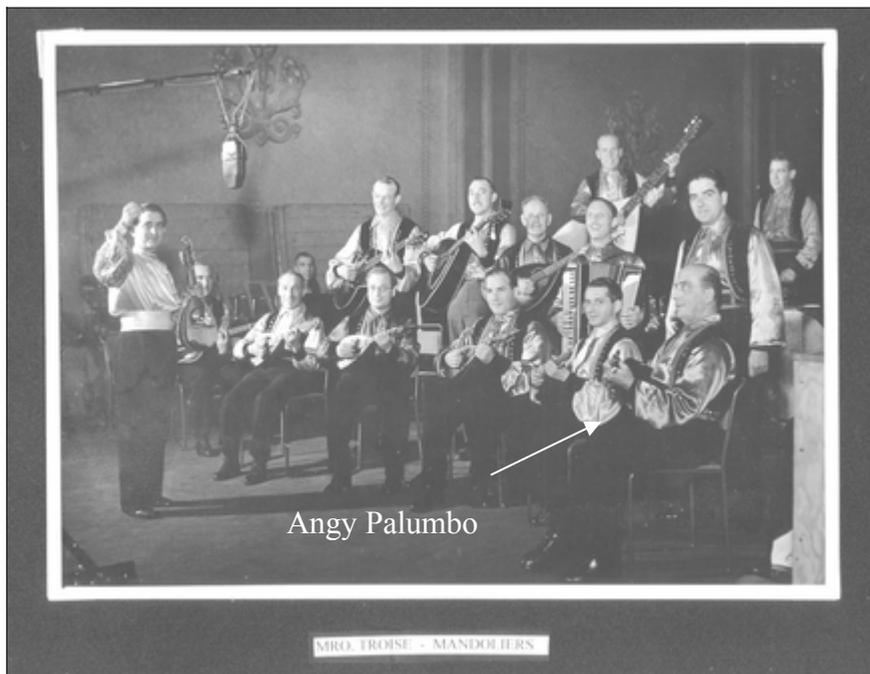
(John Sloan together with his son Peter own one of the most



highly respected b a n j o manufacturing companies in A m e r i c a .

Formed by John in 1959. They are well worth a visit: www.jasloanbanjos.com).

Mr. Sloan kindly identified Angy Palumbo in the picture of Troise and his Mandoliers. He thinks you can even see Palumbo’s club foot in the photograph, one built-up shoe on his right foot.



In the ensuing email communication Mr Sloan told me a few additional details. The Navarino Road room where he took his lessons was below street level. Angy Palumbo used to *grunt* while he played music. He still had a strong Italian accent at the time. Of course, John A. Sloan was only 11 years old when he took lessons from Angy Palumbo. B.M.G. reader Mr. Robert Young has kindly ploughed through several old BMG issues and come up with an 1938 advertisement. It shows

that Palumbo did indeed teach quite a few musical instruments.

19, Main Hill, S.E.19. Phone: Greenwich 286.
*Palumbo, Angy (H.G., B., G., M. & V.) 10,
Navarino Road, E.A. Telephone: Clissold 1117.

The May, 1966 issue mentions Angy Palumbo, playing tenor-banjo, having been among the musicians who backed the Troise Hawaiian Trio.

It will doubtless, in passing, interest mandolinists to hear that backing the Troise Hawaiian Trio were lead-mandolinist Cyril Gaida; Angy Palumbo (tenor-banjo); Troise on guitar; and Eric Sawyer, Viktor Hatek, Jack Mendelsohn and Remo

Many questions remain to be asked. So far I have no information on Angy Palumbo’s birth or death date, and I have been unable to locate his

obituary. I am grateful to Clem Vickery for this opportunity to feature Palumbo and to ask BMG readers for their help. Any contributions of further information to add to these fragments of a composer’s life would be very much appreciated!

The Clifford Essex Music Co are in the process of editing and preparing several of Angy Palumbo’s compositions for publication. His ‘Air de Ballet’ for mandolin can be seen in the music supplement which accompanies this issue of B.M.G.