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ANGY PALUMBO

The Pen Name That Was Real - A Few More Glimpses

by Sven Bjerstedt

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In a recent article I put forward a few pieces of evidence that Angy Palumbo – the composer of “Petite Bolero” and other pieces for fretted instruments – was indeed a real person and not just a pseudonym, as has sometimes been assumed (“Angy Palumbo – The Pen Name That Was Real”, *BMG*, Winter, 2009). The English-American banjo player John A. Sloan, b. 1923, kindly provided his recollections of Palumbo, who was his banjo teacher in Navarino Road, East London in the mid-30’s. Unfortunately, however, I had very little information to add, apart from a few snippets from old *BMG* issues, including Palumbo’s teaching advertisements.

In order to try to gather some more information, I contacted the local newspaper. The *Hackney Gazette* kindly included a short article on Palumbo on November 19, 2009. After a few days, Mr Norman Penney contacted the reporter involved and claimed to have studied with Palumbo in the late 50’s. I called Mr Penney on the phone and we had a very nice chat. He told me that as a young man, after seeing a teaching advert in Angy Palumbo’s window in Navarino Road, he studied with him for a short period. According to the advert, Palumbo taught a great number of instruments. Mr Penney studied plectrum guitar with him and got to play a few Palumbo compositions

(such as “Seguidillas” ?) that had been published in *BMG*.

Mr Penney was about 22 at the time and thought of Palumbo as *very old* - meaning, perhaps, in his 70’s – and seemingly quite lonely. Palumbo chatted a bit about his cousin Troise; Mr Penney thinks it was in the past tense. (Troise died in 1957.) He isn’t quite sure when this happened: only *about 1958*. He studied with Palumbo once a week for maybe 3 to 6 times and remembers him as a *matter of fact* teacher, concentrating on plectrum techniques, but always really nice to him. During his visits with Palumbo, Mr Penney didn’t see any other family members. After about a month he received a letter from Palumbo’s daughter informing him that Palumbo had died. Mr Penney regretted that he didn’t have very much to share apart from these recollections.

As yet I have no idea when Angy Palumbo passed away. “*About 1958*” seemed to be a good enough clue for looking for an obituary in *BMG*. Unfortunately, none surfaced. During this research I have received very valuable help from Mr Robert Young, who has generously performed the time-consuming task of ploughing through old *BMG* issues, looking for any mention of Palumbo. One interesting finding of his seems to modify Mr Penney’s recollections with a couple of years. In the November, 1960

issue of *BMG* the editor writes in response to a letter from a reader: “*No doubt Mr. Palumbo would be willing to write out a piano accompaniment to his solo. Drop him a line. (His address is in our Teachers’ Pages)*”.

The address is still 10, Navarino Road. Angy Palumbo is still listed as a teacher of plectrum guitar, banjo, tenor banjo, mandolin, and violin, and is noted as an examiner for *BMG* diplomas.

It would seem, then, that Angy Palumbo was still alive in November, 1960.

Going backwards in time, the September, 1946 issue of *BMG* informs us that Palumbo’s violin had been stolen:

“*On July 27, Angy Palumbo (the East London fretted instrument teacher) was visited by burglars who stole his George Panormo violin made in St. Giles in 1835. Mr Palumbo tells us that the instrument is valued between £200 and £300 and is easily identifiable. If any teacher or dealer is offered this instrument for sale, he should at once communicate with the police.*”

The month before, *BMG* included a letter from Angy Palumbo telling about his participation in concerts led by the Russian-American conductor André Kostelanetz (1901–1980).



It is a charming letter and I quote it here in its entirety; it is, after all, the only written document by Palumbo that we have come across so far:

Dear Sir,

I must write and thank you for recommending me for the concerts given in this country by André Kostelanetz at the Davis Theatre and the Royal Albert Hall, before Her Majesty the Queen.

I had a very interesting time indeed and Mr. Kostelanetz was most interested in my tenor-banjo and stood chatting with me for a while before introducing me to the part I had to play; explaining how he wanted it played. In the symphonic poem "Porgy and Bess" he particularly impressed upon me that he wanted no chords. I was also required to play in a symphonic arrangement of "Show Boat".

I must admit that I felt out of place sitting in that fine orchestra and for the first time in my life felt nervous. I should have felt more at home playing my violin. However when the time came for me to play my solo passage I was amazed to hear how the instrument stood out above the orchestra of ninety players. Kostelanetz was satisfied at the first rehearsal and afterwards, as I was putting my instrument away, he came over and said: "Banjo very good."

It was an experience I shall never forget.

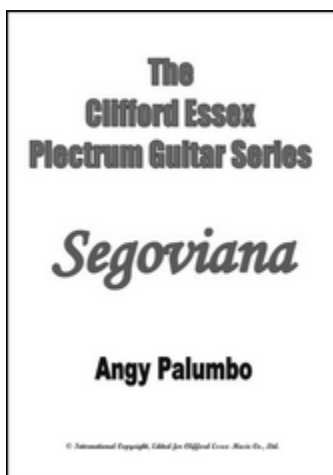
Yours faithfully,

ANGY PALUMBO

A very favourable and rather detailed review – including printing corrections – of one of Palumbo's compositions was included in the June, 1941 issue of BMG. The plectrum guitar

solo 'Segoviana' was complimented on its ample direction marks, as well as on having "a purpose", having colour, and making full use of the guitar without being technically difficult. The inspiration of Andres Segovia had been put into an original composition "without slavish imitation or exaggerated idiom." Jack Whitfield, the reviewer, found in it "a rather solemn main theme in which the composer uses his bass to excellent effect without dwelling too much on hackneyed minor runs. He uses minor runs, but for the sake of his composition; not his composition for the sake of the sequences.... I enjoy playing 'Segoviana' and (what is perhaps a better criterion) I enjoy hearing myself play it. We cannot have too many of this sincere, tuneful and untechnical type of composition."

I am very grateful to Norman Penney and Robert Young for their invaluable contributions and to Clem Vickery for this second opportunity to feature Palumbo. Still, we have but fragments of this composer's life. Any further information would be very much appreciated!

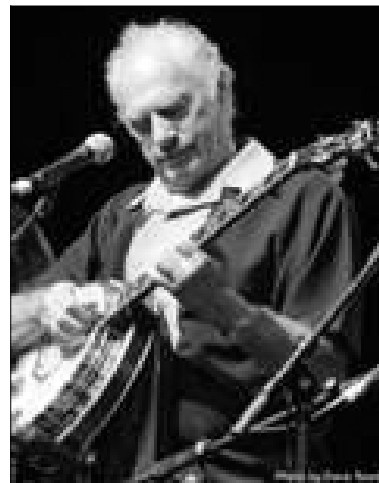


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Eddie Adcock

Bluegrass on the Brain

Banjo player Eddie Adcock underwent brain surgery to correct a hand tremor that interfered with his ability to play his instrument. He was awake



during part of the surgery and played his banjo during the operation. This was necessary to locate the relevant nerves. Eddie Adcock is regarded as one of the most talented bluegrass banjo players. His fast picking and distinctive style made him an innovator of bluegrass. In recent years his performances suffered as he began to experience mysterious shakes in his right hand. Doctors diagnosed 'essential tremor' - an involuntary trembling that affects millions.



The pioneering operation was hailed a success and Eddie is now playing better than ever. There is no known cure that fixes the technique of banjo players who never practise.