



# THE STORY OF THE RITZ BALLROOM

*(The following is a copy of an account published by The Ritz Ballroom October 1946)*

With all the Glamour, Beauty and Grace which will be apparent on this Great Night, Friday, October 4th, 1946, one must feel that before this objective can be reached a tremendous amount of creative energy has been expended, and one really has to go back to that wonderful night of November 2nd, 1934, when the Ritz Super Ballroom opened its Portals for the first time, the occasion being the Mayor's Hospital Ball, to appreciate what the Ritz has really meant to those who have worshipped at the shrine of Terpsichore in Llanelly during the last 14 years.

That night, Llanelly experienced yet another thrill to those it had already witnessed.

The Town's Prowess in the realms of Sport, Drama, Music, Art and Literature had travelled far and wide, and now, to add to this galaxy of Llanelly's glories, we were able to boast that we had, on this night, seen the opening of one of the finest Ballrooms in the country, possessing everything that every modern, ballroom should have, and its crowning glory being the marvellous lighting effects where brilliant sun effects were being chased away by softer shades of light in ever-changing variety.

Outside the foyer, one had the feeling that this was well and truly a First Night, as the Commissionaires and Page Boys, resplendent in their New Uniforms opened the Car Doors for the patrons to alight, and the gasps of delight that came from those who had come to look upon the beautiful Dance and Evening Frocks of patrons attending the Dance.

The Company present that night was truly representative of all the Industry, Commerce and Civic Life of South Wales, and reflected great credit upon those who organised the function.

Such then is the beginning of our story which will ultimately lead us up to Friday, October 4th, 1946. The Management of the Ritz at this time was in the hands of Mr. J. Plosker, who was also the Proprietor, who, with his other varied business interests, found this new position taking much more of his limited leisure time than he could really spare.

The control of the Ritz, ere long, proved to be such a burden to Mr. Plosker that he decided to lease the Ballroom to the Ritz Ballroom, Ltd., a move that has been most satisfactory to all parties concerned.

And here came the changes that led to many new pastures producing a harvest that meant more than monetary gain in the sense that the Public of Llanelly were now seeing something of which they had never thought of before, being truly of London's Albert Hall in its variety and flavour.

To give a better idea of what is meant by the foregoing, one has only to remember those, wonderful Grocers' Exhibitions presented at the Ritz, the Boxing Exhibitions, the High Class Concerts, at which such artistes as Ruth Naylor, Moisewitch, the celebrated Polish Bass, Marion Zigmont, Eisteddfodau, the Ruddick String Orchestra, the Health and Beauty-Culture Classes, organised by the then Miss Prunella Stack (now Lady Burghley) and the various first class professional Dance Orchestras and Demonstration Dancers which were eventually presented at the Ritz. Concerning Dance Bands, what wonderful memories one has of the first visit of Roy Fox and his Band to the Ritz when the whole of the Tickets were sold out weeks in advance, and his successful return visits to Llanelly.



**Sydney Kyte & His Orchestra**

Following Roy Fox came Sydney Kyte and his Band, and Lou Preager and his Band, who all had a marvellous reception by our townfolk.



**Dorothy Squires**

Then came the Dance Band Championships organised by the Rugby Supporters' Club, which turned out to be one of the finest presented in the Country and here once again, Tickets were very much at a premium, the proceeds of which went a long way towards purchasing the New Stand at the West end of Stradey Park.

Just at this time we presented at the Ritz two acts that were eventually to make their mark in the Entertainment and Variety World.

Undoubtedly our first congratulations must go to that wonderful Artiste who is a "Sospanite" bred and born, "Dorothy Squires," whose songs composed by Billy Reed are the rage of both hemispheres.

Dorothy at this time was the vocalist with the Resident Band at the Ritz, and was determined that however hard the road, she was going to prove to all and sundry that she would make good in the profession of her adoption.

It seems a far cry from singing an occasional song at the Ritz to having a Date book full up for a very long time to come at the very top of the tree, but of such stuff was Dorothy made that she accomplished this.

Dorothy, since leaving Llanely, has carved for herself a name that will live long" in the Halls of Broadcasting Fame, and we wish her every success.

Then we presented at our Cabaret Club Dances, amongst hundreds of other acts, two young men known as the two " Rs " who today under the professional title of "Radcliffe and Ray," have appeared in several London and Provincial Music Halls, as well as Broadcasting in "Music Hall," "Navy Mixture," "Variety Bandbox," and other B.B.C. Features.

The Cabaret Club proved such a success that memberships had to be very much restricted, and a waiting list for membership was soon created. What pleasing memories we have of our special Cabaret nights and of the night when the Club Members presented Major Bill Clement with gold watch prior to his departure to Australia on a Rugger Tour.

These were part of the changes that were noticeable from the end of 1936 onwards.

And so, with the change of Management, was born an association between two personalities which has remained unbroken ever since, and the opinion has been expressed more than once, by those who were fully qualified to judge, that here at least was a perfect combination of what was needed to organize, manage and maintain a modern and up to date Ballroom.

The gentlemen referred to here are Mr. A. Rabaiotti, the Managing Director of the Ritz Ballroom, Ltd., who has never yet turned a deaf ear to any appeal for the use of the Ballroom for any deserving Charity, and their number are far too many to mention here, and his Floor and Publicity Manager, Mr. A. E. Morgan who, with his untiring energy and his snappy flair for production and compeering, has added in no small measure his share to the success and popularity of the Ritz.

Mr. Rabaiotti's tenancy commenced on December 24th, 1936, and opened up on Boxing Day, December 26th of that year.



Then another change came.

On June 3rd, 1940, the Ritz Ballroom was requisitioned for Army purposes and it remained so until the 14th March, 1943.

Over this period we must pass, as the writer was in no way connected with the management of the Ballroom, this being under the control of the Army Authorities. After over three years of Army Occupation the Ritz did not wear well, and one saw, and still sees, signs of the need for re-decoration, and until such times as "permits, etc.," are easier, one will have to close one's -eyes to these little deficiencies and hope for the best in the future.

Then in early April, 1943, the Ritz took on another lease of life and reverted to the tenancy of The Ritz Ballroom, Ltd., who, together with Mr. Morgan, again determined to put the Ritz "On the Map."

Those triumphs of the 1940 days, such as the Farmers' Annual Ball, The Police Benevolent Ball, The Holborn Construction Dinner, when well over 1,000 people sat down together to celebrate the completion of the R.O.F. Factory, the grand Military Ball when ham and eggs were served at 4 a.m. in the morning to the Dancers, the strictly Fancy Dress compulsory Dances of the Y.W.C.A. and A.N.A.L.G.O. Dances. The combined Dance, Tea, Bus Tickets issued to men of the R.A.F. Pembrey, the Dance Cabaret Supper in the Cafe, and many other functions, these under Rationing Orders were things of the past, and other channels had to be explored to keep up the reputation which the Ballroom had earned.

A breach had now very definitely been formed, but the management were not long in bringing their creative ability into action.

And into this breach was introduced Elsa Ford, of Arthur Norton's New London School of Dancing.

Elsa (her professional and maiden name was Elsa Bellamy) had recently become the wife of Stan Ford, the well-known teacher of dancing of Swansea, and they, in conjunction with the management, soon formed the Ritz School of Dancing, which had a very successful season, and only terminated when Elsa returned to London to resume her professional career.

The Management saw much that was to be commended in Elsa Ford's suggestion that the finest exponents of Modern Ballroom Dancing should be presented at the Ritz, and the first venture was to present the Authentic World's Champion Ballroom

Dancers, " Arthur Norton and Pat Eaton " at the Ritz who, in addition to giving a practical Demonstration, judged a Local Amateur Competition.

Arthur and Pat were undisputed World's Champions in the season 1936-7-8-9, and still hold that title.

This venture was very much appreciated by the Dancing Public, and then in quick sequence followed Jimmy Quinn and Florence Mills (who appeared for Morris Motors' Dance), Charles Thiebault and Doreen Beaham, unbeaten Star Professional Champions, and also present British Champions; also presented at the Ritz were Jill Crompton and Alec Hooper, Bernard Lee and Elsa Ford, Leslie & Sydney Allen (who appeared at the Stampers' Dance) and then more recently Wally Fryer and Violet Barnes, winners of many Championships, being second only to Charles Thiebault and Doreen Beaham in the British Championships this year at Blackpool.

One of the highlights at this particular period was the team match between pupils of the Elsa Ford School of Dancing, Llanelly, and the Mavis June School of Dancing, Cardiff, the latter, although being the much more experienced team, only won by half a point, the Judges being Jill Crompton and Alec Hooper.



This was not the only venture into the professional ranks, as in the year before the War, Cyril Farmer and Adle Roscoe appeared at the Ritz with their team of Dancers and gave Llanelly its first demonstration of "The Big Apple."

In addition to Dancers, well-known Bands have appeared at the Ritz in this new era, such as Jack Jackson and his Band (who appeared for Messrs. Morris, The Realm), David Millar and his B.B.C. Dancing Club Band, Dorothy Marno and Her Ladies' Orchestra, the Jerry Allan Trio, presented by Tommy Trinder, Nat Gonella and his Band, and Oscar Rabin and his Band.



The Oscar Rabin Band

The Management are ever mindful of the many services rendered by the local Police Forces on Gala Nights and also of the Press, to all of whom the Ritz expresses its sincere thanks.

Many thousands of Troops have been entertained at the Ritz during the War years, being drawn from all over the World, and even today many letters of appreciation arrive at the Ritz thanking the management for the courtesy and efforts to please these lads, a great many of them from overseas, particularly from America,-many of whom have become firm friends in the persons of Col. Lewis and Lieut. Collins, of the U.S.A.





Cliff Ward

Royal Engineers, and many officers and men of the R.A.F. And through all this one name keeps cropping up in the writer's mind all the time, and that is "Cliff Ward." Cliff provided the Band on the opening night and has played for the majority of the "Big Dances" ever since (with the exception of his service with the R.A.F.) and is now "Back on the Stand" with his fourteen piece Band, and is doing better than ever.

One must return to the Wally Fryer—Violet Barnes night, for on that night we had our much awaited Broadcast from the Ritz featuring the new B.B.C. Show "Talent Theatre," at which prior to the Dance, Miss Mai Jones, the West Region B.B.C. Variety Producer, auditioned at the Ritz, 207 aspiring broadcasters prior to the Dance.

This was, indeed, a "Day" and a "Night."

And now on Friday, October 4th, 1946, we proudly present our Second Annual Competition for Amateur Dancers at the Ritz, when the Judges and Demonstrators will be John Wells and Renee Sissons, who won the Star Professional Championship at the Albert Hall, London, this year, and that most perfect couple of Exhibition. Dancers of Latin American Dances, "Lyndon and Felicia," featuring the Paso Doble, Samba, Rumba, etc.



John Wells & Renee Sissons

Competition drew Dancers from London, Coventry and Brighton. The Winning Couple being Mr. Jack Styles and Joan Nixon, of London, who have now turned Professional, the second being Mrs. Freda M. Butcher and Mr. A. B. Butcher, of Such is the popularity of the Ritz in London and the provinces it proved that the entries for their last year's Amateur Kenton, Middx. and the third Mr. Jack Watts and Billy O'Riordan, London.

And so, for the time being, our story must be temporarily suspended, in the hope that when the next chapter comes to be written, we shall have risen to still greater heights and have produced "something out of the bag" that even our most hardened supporters would have thought might be beyond us.

Who Knows?

*(Source: The Ritz Ballroom Souvenir Programme - October 1946)*  
*(Thanks to Mr John Walters)*