



NORMAN TAYLOR

Principal Timpanist with the
Orchestra of the Royal Opera House

4th September 1942 - 11th April 2005

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NORMAN'S BIG BAND BASH

was held in the FLORAL HALL,
at the ROYAL OPERA HOUSE

Covent Garden

on Saturday 24th September 2005

The concert featured the

THE JACK SHARPE BIG BAND

and renowned percussionist **ERIC DELANEY**



The day was a resounding success, with over 400 people attending and enjoying the top line-up of London jazz musicians specially assembled for the day.

Guest star Eric Delaney showed what could be done with four timpani and a set of brushes, Stan Kenton's version of "The Ride of the Valkyries" stole the show and the spectacular finale with eight extra drummers in "Children of Sanchez" lifted the Floral Hall canopy a few inches!

The retiring collection in aid of the ROH BenClub and MU Benevolent Fund raised around £1300.

**THE JACK SHARPE BIG BAND
for Norman's Big Band Bash**

Trumpets :

**Derek Watkins
John Barclay, Noel Langley,
Simon Gardner, Ian Balmain**

Trombones :

**Pete Beachill, Adrian Lane,
Alistair White, Mike Hext, Dave Stewart**

Reeds :

**Andy Mackintosh, Jamie Talbot,
Dave Bishop, Shaun Thompson**

Piano : Dave Hartley

Bass : Alec Dankworth

Drums : Ian Thomas

**Vibes & Percussion :
Frank Ricotti & Tim Barry**

joined by

Piccolo : Philip Rowson

Tuba : Martin Jarvis

French Horns :

**Richard Clews, Simon Rayner,
Chris Davies, Jonny Durrant**

Timpani and percussion :

**Bill Lockhart, David Searcy,
Stephen Henderson,
Nigel Charman, Nick Ormrod,
Michael Doran,
Corrina Silvester**

EULOGIES FOR NORMAN

spoken at his funeral in Margate, 2005

FROM HIS BROTHER – MARTIN TAYLOR

For the benefit of those of you who do not know me I am Norman's elder brother – Martin.

I was born in Hull in 1938 and Norman in 1942 in wartime after Dad had been posted away with the East Yorkshire Regiment to Kenya where he stayed until 1946. Communications were to say the least difficult and a telegram was sent to Dad to tell him of Norman's birth but it got crossed with another, so the one he got read 'Have been decorated'. A subsequent telegram also went astray, and advised that Daughter Jacqueline had been christened.

So Dad arrived back from the war in 1946 believing he had a son and a daughter only to find he had 2 sons and that Jacqueline had become Norman. Dad had been a jazz band drummer and xylophonist as a hobby, in the 30s, so it came as no surprise to him when Norman began using his knife and fork as drumsticks at the table. At the age of 10 Norman had his first drumkit (we'd moved into a bungalow in Hornsea on the coast by then), and very rapidly he taught himself using 78 records of all the Big Bands – Ted Heath - Ken Mac – Eric Delaney – Kenton – Harry James – you all know the line up, it was a wonderful era, aside from the Trad. Jazz bands who all came to the local Floral Hall dances. These included Len Manley, a local band with a great Yorkshire following, which should really have gone national.

Eventually Norman persuaded Len's drummer to let him sit in, and that was I suppose where his destiny began.

Dad as usual knew the local Forces Recruiting Officer, he always knew someone who mattered, and he arranged for Norman then aged 14 to join the Royal Marines School of Music at Deal on a 12 year contract.

I am pleased to see the RMB contingent here to-day as I know that Norman made many lasting friendships during his time at Deal, and the overseas tours they made expanded his horizons.

One of the highpoints of his career with RMB was the Edinburgh Tattoo in 1962. Lt. Col Vivian Dunn O.C. at the time had seen Eric Delaney's routine of jumping on his Timps and drumming with his feet. Lt. Col Viv Dunn arranged for Norman's Timps to be secured on the back of a long wheel base landrover and with the BBC cameras rolling he was driven out suitably harnessed out of the Castle gate onto the parade ground at speed downhill, towards the Royal Mile,

accompanying the Band who were marching and playing. However, when the landrover braked to turn round he very nearly came to grief and certainly could not have tap danced on the Timps.

He never met Eric Delaney, but I did recently, he is 81 and still performing with The Squadronaires Royal Air Force Big Band around the country still playing Skin Deep with his usual gusto. I went to his dressing room at the Pavilion in Lytham St. Annes where we live when he appeared, with the Squads in February to tell him about Norman and that Norman was always grateful to Eric for the publicity he received from the Tattoo experience.

Among the multitude of gigs Norman told us about, after the Marines came a season with Danny la Rue and another with Ronnie Corbett before he joined the Festival Ballet. TV and films included the original Z Cars music, Orient Express, Superman and many others too numerous to list.

And the rest I believe is well known to all of you who worked and supped and ate and laughed and lived with him. Many of you knew him better than I and I shall leave it to you to complete the story.

On behalf of Norman's son Mark, daughter in law Sue and the other members of his family I want to thank all of you who gave him support during the long struggle with his illness and to Jenny for her fidelity care and long vigils until the end.

FROM HIS COLLEAGUE STEPHEN HENDERSON

I'd like to thank the family for inviting me to pay a tribute to Norman, and regardless of whatever I manage to say, the most important thing that I and every one of his musician friends wants you to know and take away in your hearts today is how much we all admired and loved him.

"The most honourable man I've ever known" was how Norman described Alan Taylor and for many years they were an unbeatable double act at Covent Garden - the Two Ronnies of the timpani. But it should not be forgotten that Norman was also much in demand in his own right in the freelance section of the business, playing with all the major symphony orchestras and on lots of recording sessions.

By his own admission, although he had played xylophone solos in the Band of the Royal Marines, he regarded tuned percussion as "instruments of the devil" and to stare down at the notes of a glockenspiel was like looking at a row of shiny teeth glaring back, but timpani and snare drum were his instruments and

to hear and watch him play either was to witness a master at work.

Until his final illness, Norman never realised the high regard in which he was held by his colleagues and was amazed and deeply moved by the enormous quantity of messages of love and support he received from so many of them. He would have been equally astounded by the turn out today so I hope he's watching.

"Hello Uncle Stephen it's your Uncle Norman here" was his customary greeting on the phone – Why were we Uncles? Because for some 20-odd years we endured Raymond Gubbay's Teddy Bears concerts together and all the male members of the orchestra were referred to as "Uncles".

I was always so grateful for Norman's calm presence and confident entry on the 2nd snare drum in Bolero and I know there are lots of people here who know what I'm talking about – oh the relief when you finally get to that bit and whoever's playing it comes in right so you finally know where you are!

Norman loved big band jazz and Stan Kenton and the BBC Big Band were particular favourites. He was also no mean jazz drummer himself. Thanks Norman for taking me so often to the Prince of Orange pub all those years ago to experience the excitement of that fabulous lineup of all your musical heroes in the Jack Sharpe Big Band.

Norman appreciated the good things in life. At home, Sunday mornings meant champagne, prawn cocktails were a Norman speciality and oh those unbelievably boozy barbecues in his Walthamstow garden. His meticulously planned 7 week summer holidays to exotic locations were the envy of all those less fortunate musicians like myself, who didn't have the benefit of what he liked to call his "reg'lar employment".

It was in 1991 that he first told me about a Spanish fishing village he had stumbled across quite by accident a few years before. La Carihuela is only 15 minutes by cab from Malaga airport and is a pedestrianised low rise jewel of seafood restaurants and bars tucked away secretly amid the surrounding high rise towns of the Costa del Sol. Kate and I have been going there for short breaks regularly ever since, often coinciding with Norman who always seized upon any free periods in the Garden's schedule to pop over to Spain, get the shorts on and give the famous Taylor legs an airing. Needless to say, the recommended number of daily units were always disregarded whenever we met there. As Norman sadly never managed a final trip to La Carihuela after his illness was diagnosed, I made a little pilgrimage last weekend

to raise a glass to him in all our old haunts. All his English and Spanish friends there have asked me to convey their condolences to Norman's family and friends and are very much with us in spirit today.

Now I wouldn't want to give the impression that it was anything to do with the consumption of alcohol that cemented the Hendo/Taylor friendship or that anyone thought that it did, but for some reason whenever I arrived at the Garden, Nigel Bates never used to bother with "hello" or "good evening" in my case, just "Norman's in the Coach" or "Norman's in Bertorellis" as appropriate – it saved valuable drinking time! How I'll miss all those before, during and after show sessions with my chum.

So Uncle Norman, thanks for your support and inspiration, for the good times we shared in Spain, for your steadfast friendship and generosity, for the sharing of so many good bottles and for always being such good and cheering company.

Norman Taylor – never to be forgotten as a great musician, great friend and great enlivener.

FROM HIS COLLEAGUE NIGEL BATES

I'm going to read a short letter to Norman that I have written with the help of the very many people who have kindly shared their thoughts and memories in recent days. It is a letter that alas can never be sent, and yet I am sure Norman is here with us now, watching and listening.

Dear Norman,

How hard it is for us to know that you have gone, and especially that there is now no longer a Taylor at the timpani of the Royal Opera House. For all of us drummers in particular, you were what we aspired to be both professionally and as a human being, strongly testified to by the demand for your services by opera houses, theatres, symphony orchestras, session fixers and so on. And yet you wore your gifts lightly and humbly, and without demonstration.

There was never a dull moment when you were around – always some anecdote to keep us amused, an impersonation of a wobbly tenor or a famous conductor, Sir Charles Mackerras asking for harder sticks being my favourite. On tour, you would always be the first to lend money to us inexperienced souls who had managed to blow the entire week's subsistence on the first meal – and then you refused to accept later repayment. Generous, optimistic, trustworthy, versatile, reassuring, supportive, understanding – these are just some of the words we

have been hearing again and again since your untimely passing.

And indeed, we have all been asking ourselves why? Why have you gone, aged just 62? Possibly the most likely explanation is that the Heavenly Philharmonic is full of tee-totallers and principal timpanist Alan Taylor just couldn't wait for you any longer. What a reunion you two will be having – after all, you were together at Covent Garden for over 30 years. The Taylor partnership was one of those living legends that we thought would be there forever, and those of us that remain must consider ourselves blessed to have that experience and those memories.

We always marvelled at how you could spot a long weekend in Spain from within the incredibly complicated Opera House schedule, a gift now possessed by only one of the section. As the "keeper of the wages" you would quickly pounce on any discrepancy : last December, even though worn out from undergoing treatments for your illness, you still spotted an omission of a hundred pounds that none of us had noticed.

There is no doubt that you were one of the good guys. We have lost a dear and cherished friend, a true colleague, a world-class performer, and you will be forever in our thoughts. Perhaps today isn't really a final goodbye, but just a longer break before our next session.

A quotation springs to mind : *"If you would seek his monument, look around you."* Dear Norman, your monument is not made of stone, or brick, or glass. It is made of living, loving people – your family and your friends. It is all of us.

Signing off now, with our love and affection -
we will miss you so very much.
