

PICTURE GALLERY

Barbara Bartell and her Golden Edeophone

Introductory Note by CHRIS ALGAR

Our picture gallery features a publicity photo of Barbara Bartell (see Fig. 1), a 1920s-30s 'variety artiste' whom I met in the early 1980s when, well along in years, she was living in a Brixton (London) flat.

I was introduced to Barbara by her former theatrical agent after I had appeared on television, talking about concertinas. Barbara wanted to sell her two instruments, so I went to London to see her, and learned a good deal in the process.

Barbara was one of two daughters of Mr Stephen Bartle (she adopted 'Bartell' as her stage name), who, she told me, had been the 'World Concertina Champion' prior to Alexander Prince. When Barbara and her sister were of an age to perform (six or seven), they were taught the concertina, and, with their parents, formed the Royal Bartle Quartet (a performance before the royal family contributed to the name), which made a reputation for itself in the music halls. Barbara, of course, became an outstanding entertainer in her own right, playing concertina and musical glasses. She also did a lot of pantomime, usually as the principal boy (that is, the role of the juvenile male, customarily played by a young lady).

Both of the Bartle sisters played custom-built Lachenal Edeophones, which were made for them under special circumstances: while the Bartles paid for the parts, Lachenal provided the labour free of charge as a tribute to their father. The instruments were dazzling: amboyna casing, brown bellows, all finished off with gold-plated ends, buttons, and fittings.

I bought Barbara's concertina, along with a miniature soprano that belonged to her father. (Her sister's Edeophone was eventually purchased by one of the Richardson Brothers of Boys of the Lough fame.) And though I kept the instrument for some years, I eventually passed it on to a wonderful young musician in the Lake District who still plays it.

Looking back at the visit, I now have one regret. Though Barbara offered me a trunk-full of musical memorabilia—posters, programs, photographs, etc.—I politely turned down the offer down since I had



Fig. 1. Barbara Bartell and her Golden Edeophone, as shown in a publicity photo from the 1930s (courtesy of Chris Algar, Barleycorn Concertinas).

no way of taking the materials with me. I guess they are now lost forever. I hope, though, that this little Picture Gallery feature will go some way in restoring the names of both Barbara Bartell and her father, who, though rarely mentioned nowadays, were once among the finest players of their generations.

POSTSCRIPT: My good friend Richard Harrison of Ferrybridge, Yorkshire, a concertinist and collector of 78-rpm concertina recordings, has a rare copy of Stephen Bartle playing 'Hornpipe Medley/Under the Freedom Flag' on a World War I-vintage recording issued on the Olympic label (No. 173). It features Bartle on English concertina with piano accompaniment; and, as Richard says, the playing is 'brilliant', even more engaging than that on the many 78s that he has of Alexander Prince.

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