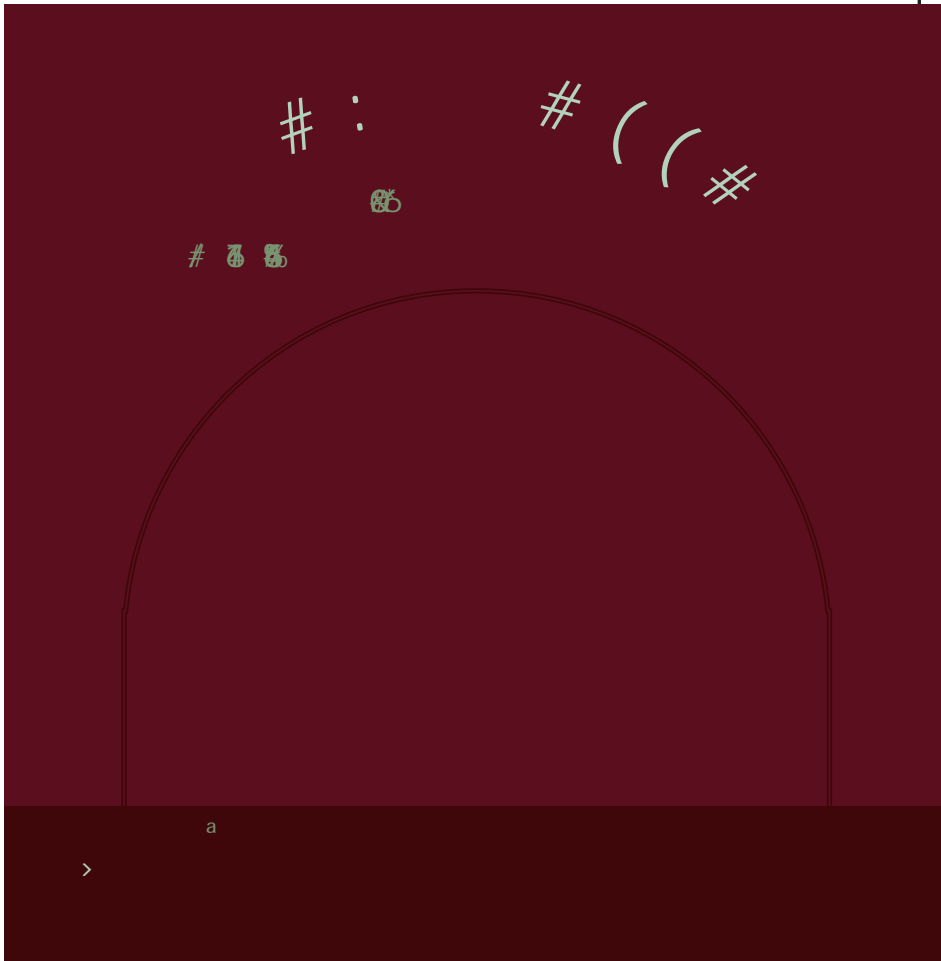


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A Londoner born of Jewish immigrants in 1911, Max Jaffa was given a violin for his 6th birthday. The die was cast and when he heard Jascha Heifetz at the Queen's Hall, Jaffa junior was blown away and set his heart on becoming a professional violinist. While attending the Guildhall School of Music he raised some of his fees by playing in small groups at night, then at cinemas and at a Joe Lyons Corner House on the Strand. Next came the prestigious Popular café known as the "Pop" from where he was promoted to the Trocadero where he succeeded the great Alfredo Campoli. The "Troc" was a top venue where Max's hero, Albert Sandler, also appeared. After a round voyage playing on a liner to South America he bluffed his way into leading the band for four years at the Piccadilly Hotel, in succession to yet another famous violinist, de Groot.

Within a short time he knew all the top band leaders and his first broadcast came in 1929. Just for a joke his quintet attempted the first movement of Beethoven's *5th Symphony* but it proved more difficult than they imagined so were surprised to hear a round of applause from three men who turned out to be pianist Alfred Cortot, cellist Pablo Casals and violinist Jacques Thibaud, who enjoyed it so much they had tears running down their cheeks. When Max discovered Fritz Kreisler was sitting in the hotel, however, he was terrified, even more so when he was summoned to his table. But an apology for murdering Kreisler's repertoire was brushed aside with the helpful advice "Young man — always give a performance".

After a season leading the Scottish Orchestra, in 1931 he was head hunted by band leader Jack Harris and the rest of the decade was one huge social whirl both at home and abroad, rubbing shoulders with King George V and the Prince of Wales, plus band leaders Ambrose, Carroll Gibbons and Joe Loss. He also took part in films with Louis Levy and Richard Tauber. When the war arrived he trained as a pilot on Spitfires and Blenheim bombers but his flying career ended abruptly when he crash landed his burning aircraft into a Wellington bomber, destroying them both! When hostilities ceased he suddenly discovered he was completely unable to play the violin any more and it took a full twelve months before he regained his touch.

After joining Mantovani he deputised for Lew Stone in the long-running musical *Annie Get Your Gun* at the Coliseum, and also recorded with Ray

Martin, Norrie Paramor, Sidney Torch, Bob Farnon, Ron Goodwin and Wally Stott. Now an outstanding player of light music in the palm court tradition he was contracted to the BBC as one of the versatile London Studio Players but then opted to go it alone with the Max Jaffa Trio. With Reginald Kilbey on cello and Jack Byfield on piano, they were rarely off the radio, especially the Light Programme which dished up a menu of light popular music which brilliantly entertained the nation almost without anyone realising it. The same was true of television because when the Trio began *Music at Ten* in 1954 it was such a success it was expanded to include guests. The BBC often came up with novel ideas but when the Trio dressed up as tramps and busked to the queue outside the Albert Hall before a Prom they nearly caused a disaster. With only a few minutes to go, the orchestra manager frantically appeared hollering "Where are my musicians?" It turned out half the BBC Symphony Orchestra were so intent on watching the fun outside they had lost track of the time. Later TV programmes included *Look Here*, *Max Jaffa Presents*, *At Home with Max Jaffa* and *Music With Max*. In 1958 *Woman* magazine published an article about the Trio inviting readers to send in their requests. The list grew so rapidly it formed the basis of what later became *Your Hundred Best Tunes* on Radio 2.

His stardom was enhanced when he succeeded Jean Pougnet, another former dance band violinist, as leader of *Grand Hotel* and although Reg Leopold took over long term (see *Evergreen* magazine Autumn 2007), Max was associated with the programme until its official demise in 1973. Originally broadcast live from the Grand Hotel in Eastbourne, it later moved to London but also featured several provincial locations, among which was Scarborough where Max held sway for more than a quarter of a century during which time he never missed a single summer season.

In 1982 he was awarded the OBE for services to music and as he nervously approached the monarch, the Scots Guards struck up with the *Grand Hotel* theme tune, *Roses from the South*, which the Queen immediately recognised and chuckled. During the Eighties he led a brief revival of *Grand Hotel* when light classics had all but disappeared from the airwaves. Happily, it was not to be the last hurrah because by the time he died in July 1991, aged 79, light music was making a most welcome comeback. The maestro would have been delighted.

EDMUND WHITEHOUSE