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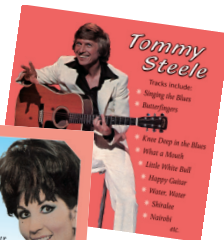
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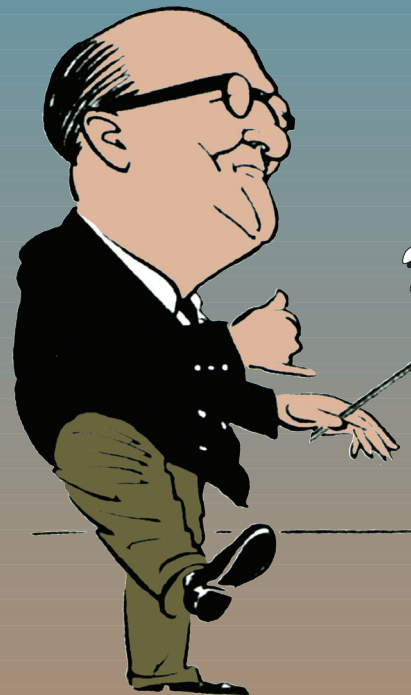
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Featuring recordings made by Billy Cotton selected by Percy Bickerdyke, Music Editor of Yesterday's Music.

Technical Engineer: Eric Holmes. Manufactured under MCPS licence.

All tracks on this compact disc have been re-mastered from old records. Most "needle noise" has been eliminated by modern technology, but some imperfections remain because to erase them completely would destroy the essential character of the original recordings.

# The Billy Cotton Band Show



## Wakey Wakey!

### Tracks include:

- Somebody Stole My Gal
  - Shrimp Boats
  - Big Head
- Friends & Neighbours
  - The Marrow Song
  - The Great Big Saw
- Let's Face the Music, etc.

**W**akey, *wake-aaway!* This was Billy's prolonged opening cry at the start of the irrepressible *Billy Cotton Band Show* which transports those old enough back to Sunday lunch with roast beef and Yorkshire pudding. It was followed by a rousing instrumental chorus of *Somebody Stole My Gal* before he shouted "All right, all right, all right" at which everyone calmed down, the band played a few well-rehearsed raspberries and we were off into a non-stop 30 minute romp of songs and jokes. The programme was first broadcast in 1948 and became so popular it lasted for 20 years, just 12 months before Billy died at the age of 69 while watching a boxing match at Wembley.

His inseparable companion was singer Alan Breeze but while Billy was always involved in amusing dialogues with a vast array of guests, Alan stuck to singing because of his speech stammer. Sadly, some years after the show successfully transferred to television, Billy's son, Bill Cotton junior, who was Head of BBC Light Entertainment, stepped in and decided Alan was too old to perform song and dance routines in public. It was a cruel decision and it is believed both Billy and Alan went home separately in tears. On radio it was quite a different story and Billy and Alan clocked up around 750 performances together, each full of bonhomie, laughter and good taste. They were never short of an idea and never short of a musical arrangement coupled with silly storylines which often had the band members chuckling loudly on air.

Bill was a Cockney who traded on his Metropolitan connections while Alan was able to imitate virtually any accent in the world, which he did to good effect on both radio and record. They were ably supported by various backing groups including the Bandits, High-Lights, Cotton Choir and the all-female Silhouettes whom Billy relished introducing before their song and dance routines, many of which he joined in.

Other regulars included Kathie Kay, Rita Williams and Doreen Stephens. Alma Cogan was also popular and so too were Russ Conway, Adam Faith, Harry Secombe, Cliff Richard, Joe Brown and Max Bygraves while Mrs. Mills the pianist owed her career almost entirely to performing on the show after

being discovered playing the joanna in Jersey. Other memorable guests included Sandie Shaw, Cilla Black, Frankie Vaughan and Bob Hope with Archie Andrews appearing courtesy of Peter Brough!

One guest appearance, however, did not go quite to plan. Jayne Mansfield arrived at the last minute and said she had been in such a hurry she was wearing only a fur coat. Nobody believed her until a twirl too far revealed the bare truth. One intelligent joker approached her afterwards with a pencil and a blank piece of paper. "Autograph" she enquired? "No" came the whispered reply "... your telephone number!"

Billy Cotton had an amazing career including racing cars, playing football for Brentford, driving a London bus, and even flying his own plane — all after surviving Gallipoli during the First World War after he lied about his age to enlist in the Royal Fusiliers. During the Twenties and Thirties his up-tempo band included several members who later formed their own bands, including Sydney Lipton and Nat Gonella. He served with ENSA during the Second World War before re-inventing himself on the radio. Although never a solo musician he knew how to get the best from his band. His radio shows were extremely good but he initially fought shy of television because he knew each show had to be visually different and the amount of time spent rehearsing live material which would be quickly discarded was to him a waste of talent and money. He had a point but eventually ended up on both radio and television at the same time.

Radio never lost its appeal, though, and the programme ran continuously while the rock and roll era came and went — extraordinary. The fact that it attracted many of the top pop stars spoke volumes — that they wanted to return because they enjoyed it spoke even louder.

Billy Cotton was a one-off and it is hard to believe this CD is more than half a century old. It is also interesting to note how well rehearsed they all must have been as some of the songs rattle along at a hectic pace with difficult lyrics dealt with in a most professional manner. So ... **Wakey, *wake-aaway!***

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