NAXOS MUSICALS

Sandy Wilson's

THE BOY FRIEND

Original London Cast 1954

Anne Rogers • Denise Hirst
Anthony Hayes

* * *

Julian Slade & Dorothy Reynolds'

SALAD DAYS

Original London Cast 1954

Eleanor Drew • John Warner
James Cairncross

The Boy Friend Original London Cast 1954

Music & Lyrics by Sandy Wilson

Salad Days Original London Cast 1954

Music by Julian Slade, Lyrics by Dorothy Reynolds & Julian Slade

British Theatre in the 1950s was a strange harmony of contrasts. Writers of the calibre of John Osborne and Harold Pinter were bringing a new era of realism to the stage with such plays as Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* and Pinter's *The Birthday Party*, while at the same time the very different but equally noteworthy talents of newcomers Sandy Wilson and Julian Slade were providing a welcome continuation of the long-established tradition of light English frothy musical comedies, *à la* Novello and Coward, which concentrated on entertainment without any attempt at enlightenment.

Wilson and Slade were more or less contemporaries, Wilson having been born in 1924 and Slade in 1930. Wilson attended Harrow and Oxford, while Slade followed the light blue path to Eton and Cambridge. Each got his first experience of writing and acting at university, Wilson writing for and appearing in revues, and Slade writing undergraduate musicals and acting in Shakespeare. Thereafter, their respective careers took divergent directions, but in each case, their growth as writers eventually resulted in their names being in lights in the West End as authors of the hit musicals that are featured in these recordings.

Sandy Wilson's Oxford revue writings resulted in his being invited to contribute material to two 1948 revues at the Lyric Hammersmith, *Oranges and Lemons* and *Slings and Arrows*. This led to his writing the book and lyrics for an entire revue, *See You Later*, at the Watergate Theatre in 1951. The Players' Theatre took note of this new talent, and asked him in late 1952 to write a short musical, set in the '20s, to play as part of their Late Joys 11pm performances. Such was the success of this production, titled *The Boy Friend*, that it had a much longer run than the originally planned three weeks, and Wilson was eventually encouraged to expand it into a full-length musical.

But between the closing at the Players' and the later opening of the full-length version of *The Boy Friend* Sandy Wilson found time to complete, cast and launch a new mini-musical, *The Buccaneer*, which opened at the Watergate Theatre in September 1953 for a short run. It later reopened in 1956 at the Apollo Theatre, but lasted only 29 performances.

The Boy Friend opened at Wyndham's Theatre on 14 January 1954, and ran for five years, racking up 2084 performances. A Broadway production opened on 30 September the same

year, and ran for 485 performances (and, incidentally, introduced Julie Andrews to American audiences).

While nothing that Sandy Wilson subsequently wrote was as commercially successful as *The Boy Friend*, his name continued to shine in the West End with productions that included *Valmouth* (1958, starring Bertice Reading and later Cleo Laine), *Divorce Me Darling* (1964, a bright but far less successful sequel to *The Boy Friend*), and *His Monkey Wife* (1971). In 1959 he also contributed additional material to a revue by Peter Cook, *Pieces of Eight*. Twenty years later, in 1979, he was invited to write a new version of the Christmas pantomime *Aladdin*, which played at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, over the 1979-80 holiday season, with a cast that included Elisabeth Welch.

While this Original Cast recording of *The Boy Friend* features the two-pianos-plus-rhythm accompaniment used in the theatre, The London Orchestra provides its own overture to this reissue, with full, rich orchestral versions of five of the best–known songs from the score. Then Anne Rogers, Denise Hirst and Anthony Hayes lead the listener through a glorious wallow in 1920s nostalgia as the story of Polly Browne and her friends at finishing school in the south of France unfolds, and true love conquers all in the end. There's not a dull song in the entire score, but perhaps the best-known are **I Could Be Happy With You**, **It's Never Too Late To Fall In Love**, **Fancy Forgetting**, **A Room In Bloomsbury**, and the title song. Stan Edwards leads the accompaniment from the piano, with an unnamed pianist and drummer in support.

Julian Slade's contributions to the Cambridge Footlights Amateur Dramatic group included two musicals, *Lady May* and *Bang Goes the Marriage*, but his aspirations as an actor led him in 1951 to study at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. The following year, in between spear-carrying stage assignments, he wrote incidental music for the Bristol Old Vic's production of *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, which led to his becoming musical director of the company. For them he wrote two Christmas musicals, *Christmas in King Street* and *The Merry Gentleman*, with actress Dorothy Reynolds as his co-writer.

Over the next two years, Slade wrote scores for *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Sheridan's *The Duenna* and *She Stoops to Conquer*, and incidental music for a Stratford production of *The Merchant of Venice*. The turning point – and, as it turned out, the peak – in his career came in early 1954, when he and Reynolds were asked to write an end of season summer show for a three-week run in May at the Bristol Old Vic. They came up with a fantasy story about a newly-married young couple, and a magic piano that made everyone dance, and wrote a series of catchy, lilting melodies with simple yet memorable lyrics that together made *Salad Days* something much more than an end-of-season romp.

What had originally been devised almost as a throwaway piece of froth suddenly became a hot property, and within a few months *Salad Days*

had transferred to London's Vaudeville Theatre, where it opened on 5 August 1954 for what proved to be a run of 2,288 performances over five and a half years. In the process, it overtook *Chu Chin Chow*, *The Boy Friend* and *My Fair Lady*, to create a new record run for a British theatre musical – a record which held until Lionel Bart's *Oliver* set a new record ten years later. A US production opened at the Barbizon-Plaza theatre in New York in November 1958, but only lasted for eighty performances.

The London success of *Salad Days* naturally made Slade and Reynolds much in demand, and in June 1957 their new musical, *Free As Air*, opened at London's Savoy Theatre. While written in the same light, simple style as *Salad Days*, and with a fourteen piece orchestra instead of just two pianos in the pit, *Free As Air* never really caught on and closed in a year after only 417 performances.

Next, Slade and Reynolds resurrected their score for the Bristol Old Vic's *Christmas in King Street*, and expanded it into a new musical for the West End, titled *Follow That Girl*, which opened at the Vaudeville on 17 March 1960, but ran for only 211 performances. Undiscouraged, the duo returned to the piano and the score paper, and on 20 December 1960, *Hooray for Daisy* opened at the Lyric, Hammersmith, having previously had a two month run at the Bristol Old Vic. Unfortunately, the Slade/Reynolds magic was beginning to wear a little thin, and *Daisy* had only a very short run.

Nothing daunted, Julian Slade and Dorothy Reynolds were back at the Vaudeville with their final collaboration, *Wildest Dreams*, in which Reynolds starred, and which opened in August 1961 after a brief out-of-town tryout at the Everyman Cheltenham, and ran for only 76 performances. Thereafter, and until his death in 2000, Slade continued to write musicals and incidental music for others' productions, but with only modest results.

Slade had his first smash hit when he was only 24, and nothing he wrote in the ensuing years came anywhere near achieving the same sort of popularity. In later years, he was reported to have said that it could be "depressing always to be known as the *Salad Days* man".

He could however be justly proud of the twelve songs that are heard here, both in their original form as performed by a talented cast that includes Eleanor Drew, John Warner, James Cairncross, Michael Meacham and Christine Finn, with pianists Edward Rubach and Robert Docker, and in his own two-piano versions with (probably) Arthur Sanford and an unnamed drummer. Common to both sets of performances are five of the most memorable songs from the show: **We're Looking For A Piano**, **I Sit In The Sun**, **Oh, Look At Me**, **It's Easy To Sing**, **The Time Of My Life** and **We Said We Wouldn't Look Back**.

Pip Wedge
Former Assistant Editor, NME, TV Exec (UK and Canada); current Canadian Rep, Robert Farnon Society (www.rfsoc.org.uk)

1. **'The Boy Friend' – Selection** *5:49*
(A Room In Bloomsbury—Fancy Forgetting —It's Never Too Late To Fall In Love— I Could Be Happy With You)
The London Orchestra
HMV B 10787, mx OEA 18095-2B, 18096-2B
Recorded September 1954, London

The Boy Friend
Original London Cast 1954

2. **Overture** *1:17*
Instrumental
3. **Perfect Young Ladies** *1:09*
The Girls
4. **The Boy Friend** *0:49*
Anne Rogers, the Girls & the Boys
5. **Won't You Charleston With Me** *1:39*
Denise Hirst & Larry Drew
6. **Fancy Forgetting** *1:55*
Joan Sterndale Bennett & Hugh Paddick
7. **I Could Be Happy With You** *2:48*
Anne Rogers & Anthony Hayes
8. **Sur Le Plage** *1:28*
The Girls & the Boys
9. **A Room In Bloomsbury** *2:44*
Anne Rogers & Anthony Hayes
10. **It's Nicer In Nice** *1:37*
Violetta, the Girls & the Boys
11. **The Riviera** *1:40*
The Girls & the Boys
12. **It's Never Too Late To Fall In Love** *3:03*
John Rutland & Maria Charles
13. **Carnival Tango** *1:23*
Instrumental
14. **Poor Little Pierrette** *1:51*
Joan Sterndale Bennett & Anne Rogers
15. **Reprise: The Boy Friend—I Could Be Happy With You** *1:24*
The Company

Stan Edwards, piano, with unknown second piano & drums
HMV DLP 1078
Recorded February 1954, London

16. **Music From 'Salad Days'** *5:26*
(We're Looking For A Piano—I Sit In The Sun —Oh, Look At Me—It's Easy To Sing— The Time Of My Life—We Said We Wouldn't Look Back—Oh, Look At Me)
Julian Slade, piano, with rhythm accompaniment
Parlophone R 3927, mx CE 15128-4A, 15129-2A
Recorded 8 October 1954, London

Salad Days
Original London Cast 1954

17. **The Things That Are Done By A Don** *1:27*
The Company
18. **We Said We Wouldn't Look Back** *3:38*
John Warner & Eleanor Drew
19. **Find Yourself Something To Do** *1:06*
Timothy's Family
20. **I Sit In The Sun** *3:26*
Eleanor Drew

21. **Oh, Look At Me** *3:08*
John Warner & Eleanor Drew

22. **Hush-Hush** *3:01*
James Cairncross

23. **Out Of Breath** *3:18*
The Company

24. **Cleopatra** *2:31*
James Cairncross

25. **It's Easy To Sing** *3:10*
John Warner, Eleanor Drew & Michael Meacham

26. **We're Looking For A Piano** *3:08*
Eleanor Drew, Christine Finn, Michael Meacham & the Company

27. **The Time Of My Life** *2:48*
Eleanor Drew

28. **The Saucer Song** *1:50*
James Cairncross, John Warner & Eleanor Drew

29. **Reprise: We Said We Wouldn't Look Back*—It's Easy To Sing—I Sit In The Sun—We're Looking For A Piano—The Time Of My Life—Oh, Look At Me** *7:05*
*John Warner & Eleanor Drew; The Company

Edward Rubach & Robert Docker, pianos
Oriole MG 20004
Recorded c. September 1954, London

Transfers & Production: David Lennick • Digital Restoration: Alan Bunting
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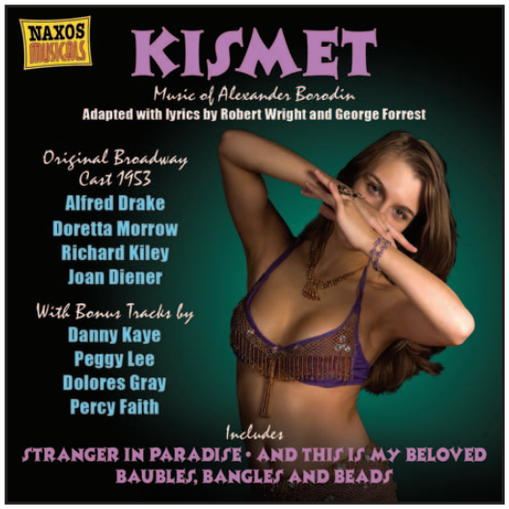

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THE BOY FRIEND

Music & Lyrics: Sandy Wilson

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1. 'The Boy Friend' – Selection **The London Orchestra** *5:49*

ORIGINAL LONDON CAST RECORDING 1954 • STAN EDWARDS, PIANO, WITH SECOND PIANO & DRUMS

Anne Rogers POLLY BROWNE • **Anthony Hayes** TONY • **Joan Sterndale Bennett** MADAME DUBONNET
Larry Drew BOBBY VAN HUSEN • **Denise Hirst** MAISIE • **Hugh Paddick** PERCIVAL BROWNE
Maria Charles DULCIE • **Violetta** HORTENSE • **John Rutland** LORD BROCKHURST

2. **Overture** *1:17*
3. **Perfect Young Ladies** THE GIRLS *1:09*
4. **The Boy Friend** POLLY, THE GIRLS & THE BOYS *0:49*
5. **Won't You Charleston With Me** MAISIE & BOBBY *1:39*
6. **Fancy Forgetting** MME DUBONNET & PERCIVAL BROWNE *1:55*
7. **I Could Be Happy With You** POLLY & TONY *2:48*
8. **Sur Le Plage** THE GIRLS & THE BOYS *1:28*
9. **A Room In Bloomsbury** POLLY & TONY *2:44*
10. **It's Nicer In Nice** HORTENSE, THE GIRLS & THE BOYS *1:37*
11. **The Riviera** THE GIRLS & THE BOYS *1:40*
12. **It's Never Too Late To Fall In Love** LORD BROCKHURST & DULCIE *3:03*
13. **Carnival Tango** *1:23*
14. **Poor Little Pierrette** MME DUBONNET & POLLY *1:51*
15. **Reprise: The Boy Friend—I Could Be Happy With You** COMPANY *1:24*

SALAD DAYS

Music: Julian Slade • Lyrics: Dorothy Reynolds & Julian Slade

16. Music from 'Salad Days' **Julian Slade, piano, with rhythm accompaniment** *5:26*

ORIGINAL LONDON CAST RECORDING 1954 • EDWARD RUBACH & ROBERT DOCKER, PIANOS

John Warner TIMOTHY • **Eleanor Drew** JANE • **Michael Meacham** NIGEL • **Christine Finn** FIONA
James Cairncross UNCLE CLAM; THE MANAGER OF THE CLEOPATRA; UNCLE ZED

17. **The Things That Are Done By A Don** COMPANY *1:27*
18. **We Said We Wouldn't Look Back** TIMOTHY & JANE *3:38*
19. **Find Yourself Something To Do** TIMOTHY'S FAMILY *1:06*
20. **I Sit In The Sun** JANE *3:26*
21. **Oh, Look At Me** TIMOTHY & JANE *3:08*
22. **Hush-Hush** UNCLE CLAM *3:01*
23. **Out Of Breath** COMPANY *3:18*
24. **Cleopatra** THE MANAGER *2:31*
25. **It's Easy To Sing** TIMOTHY, JANE & NIGEL *3:10*
26. **We're Looking For A Piano** JANE, FIONA, NIGEL & COMPANY *3:08*
27. **The Time Of My Life** JANE *2:48*
28. **The Saucer Song** UNCLE ZED, TIMOTHY & JANE *1:50*
29. **Reprise: We Said We Wouldn't Look Back*—It's Easy To Sing—I Sit In The Sun—We're Looking For A Piano—The Time Of My Life—Oh, Look At Me** *TIMOTHY & JANE; COMPANY *7:05*

Transfers & Production: David Lennick • Digital Restoration: Alan Bunting

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Total Time 76:16

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