

JACOBSEN, THOMAS CHARLES ('Tommy Twinkletoes') (1921 - 1973), musician, artist and entertainer

Name: Thomas Charles ('tommy Twinkletoes') Jacobsen

Date of birth: 1921

Date of death: 1973

Gender: Male

Occupation: musician, artist and entertainer

Area of activity: Performing Arts

Author: Rebecca Eversley-Dawes

Tommy Jacobsen was born on 28 April 1921 in Capel Street, Pillgwenlly, Newport, Monmouthshire, the eldest of seven children of Charles Henry Jacobsen (b. 1900), a dockworker, and his wife Nellie (née Hoskins, b. 1898). Tommy (as he was known by his family and friends) was born without arms. His mother claimed this disability was brought on when she was frightened by a horse during her pregnancy (a common belief at the time). His ability to compensate for his lack of arms was first revealed when as a baby in his cot he placed a dummy in his mouth using his toes.

Tommy started his schooling at Bolt Street School in Newport and was then transferred to a school for children with special educational needs on the south coast of England (believed to be the Chailey Heritage Craft School in Sussex). It was there that Tommy learned the art of calligraphy. He began signwriting using his calligraphy skills and enjoyed painting. Family and friends would collect cardboard for Tommy to paint on and he would sell his work.

Tommy Jacobsen had an extensive career as a musician and entertainer. His family enjoyed listening to Tommy playing the piano (which he achieved by pressing the keys with his toes), and often sang together. His playing was appreciated locally, and he would perform at local pubs and in people's homes. Later, he became a popular entertainer on the London Palladium's travelling Variety show and was celebrated for his wide range of skills and artwork.

Tommy's remarkable dexterity was often remembered by those who knew him. He could thread a needle, sew a button, offer a cigarette from his jacket and a lighter. As his fame grew, he was invited to work for organisations such as the BBC and remained a regular feature in television, on the Variety circuit and behind the scenes.

In 1955 he played the Preston Hippodrome in 'Miracles of the Music Hall' and in 1956 travelled internationally with Tom Norman's Travelling Show, billed as 'Tommy the armless wonder'. He performed in Central Park, New York, where he loaded and shot a gun, shaved a man who was plucked from the audience, played the piano and displayed his artwork.

Tommy married Emily Violet Prowse in 1947 in Newport and in 1948 their daughter Diane was born. Following his retirement from the entertainment industry Tommy and his family moved to Cwmbran.

Tommy Jacobsen died on 3 October 1973 and was buried in Panteg Cemetery, Pontypool.

Author

Rebecca Eversley-Dawes

Sources

Family information

Ancestry

Lancashire Evening Post, 10 May 1955

Boston Guardian, 2 May 1956

[National Fairground and Circus Archive](#), Sheffield University

['Sister remembers Newport's Tommy "Twinkletoes"',](#) South Wales Argus, 15 February 2011

['A Short Bio of Tommy 'Twinkletoes' Jacobsen'](#), People's Collection Wales

Additional Links

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Published date: 2024-05-30

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