

PARRY, OWEN HENRY (HARRY PARRY; 1912 - 1956), jazz musician

Name: Owen Henry Parry
Date of birth: 1912
Date of death: 1956
Spouse: Jessie Parry (née Bradbury)
Spouse: Gwen Parry (née Davies)
Parent: Emily Jane Parry (née Rowlands)
Parent: Henry Parry
Gender: Male
Occupation: jazz musician
Area of activity: Music; Performing Arts
Author: Gwilym Arthur Jones

Born 22 January 1912 at Caepella, Bangor, Caernarfonshire, the eldest son of Henry Parry, railway worker, and Emily Jane (née Rowlands). He was educated at Glanadda school and the Central School. He joined the department of physics, University College of North Wales, as an apprentice instrument maker. He showed an early interest in playing musical instruments and when twelve years old joined one of the district's brass bands. He was a member of St. Mary's Church choir, but was intent on playing instruments. He soon became adept at playing the tenor horn, flügel horn, cornet, violin as well as drums. He mastered the saxophone and was said to be Wales ' champion player. He was an expert clarinettist - his favourite instrument - and was taught initially by Francis Jones (1904 - 1986) of Port Dinorwic. He yearned to develop a more swinging musical style and experimented in that direction. His style was heard by some of the B.B.C.'s leading figures as he had by then joined some of England's main bands. Charles Chilton suggested that he should form his own instrumental group and that he should use the vibraphone instead of the trumpet. On 28 September 1940 the sounds of the 'Radio Rhythm' Club sextet which he formed were heard for the first time. Miff Ferrie heard of him and it was from that association that the group ' Jackdauz ' was formed. He held concerts in the Locarno, London, and shared platforms with musicians like Michael Flome, Louis Levy and Charles Shadwell. He joined the blind pianist, George Shearing, and the drummer, Ben Edwards, to form a trio which became very popular. It was his sextet which was the first to make a record in the ' Super Rhythm ' series for the Parlophone company; his association with this company lasted for ten years. Many of his plans were shattered by World War II, but he resumed them later and formed a permanent orchestra in the Potomac, London. His compositions ' Parry Opus ', ' Thrust and Parry ', ' Potomac Jump ', ' Blue for Eight ', ' Says You ' and the most popular, perhaps, ' Champagne ' became household names amongst his followers. He appeared in five short films and was described by some critics as ' Britain's jazz king '. According to one of his contemporaries, he was the first from Wales and England to record a voice in instrumental style with the co-operation of his own band. The crowds flocked to listen to him in centres such as the Hippodrome, Birmingham; the Empire, Woolwich; and the Empire, Glasgow. His popularity waned during his tour of the Middle East and Egypt. After his return he presented the popular programme ' *Housewives Choice* '; he was also involved in the children's programme ' *Crackerjack* '. According to some columnists at the time, he died when he was on the brink of regaining his popularity, as he was the first to present 'swing' music to the layman. He was described by an *Evening Standard* columnist at the time as ' the third best clarinettist in the world '. His heroes were Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw, Benny Carter, Count Basie and Glenn Miller. Towards the end of his life he attempted to adopt a style similar to Miller. He counted Henry Hall, Roy Fox and Geraldo amongst his friends. His first wife was Gwen Davies. After a divorce he married Jessie Bradbury, a professional singer, but that marriage failed. They were childless. He thought highly of his home town, but seldom had the opportunity to return there.

Harry Parry died 11 October 1956 in his room in Adam's Row, Mayfair, London. His ashes were buried in Golders Green crematorium, London.

Author

Gwilym Arthur Jones, (1925 - 1998)

Sources

Information gleaned from a family scrapbook in the possession of his sister, Eunice Taylor, Uxbridge, and her husband, Stan Taylor. This is now lodged at the Library of the University of Wales, Bangor

Some information also from his brother, Hugh P. Parry, Colwyn Bay

Harry Parry And His Band, [Hot Dogs](#), British Pathé YouTube channel

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Harry Parry](#)

Additional Links

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Published date: 2001

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