

Maisie Ringham Wiggins

In this age of equal opportunities and political correctness female instrumentalists are not unusual, however back in the days of seventy-eight records things were very different. Credit therefore to S. P. & S Ltd, who in 1946 saw fit to produce three recordings featuring a young lady, who had gained quite a reputation within the S.A. as a trombone soloist, Maisie Ringham. Maisie was born in 1924 to Salvation Army officer parents at Woolwich, London. On the morning of her birth the band from Abercam, Wales, were visiting the Woolwich corps and on hearing the news they gathered outside the house to play the hymn tune Aberystwyth. She grew up surrounded by music, her mother played the piano and father the bass (G) trombone. Two uncles were members of the Canadian Staff Band and both, along with their wives, survived the Empress of Ireland disaster on the way to the 1914 congress. Maisie's cousins, Douglas and Arthur Rolls, were respected trombonists playing in the Men's Social Work HQ, International Staff and Rosehill Bands. Little wonder then that, aged six or seven, Maisie taught herself to play the 'C' scale on a euphonium which "just happened to be lying about the house". On hearing this, her father commenced her musical tuition and shortly afterwards, in a meeting at Rugby, she played her first solo performance on an instrument that was almost the same size as her.

Four years later, a trombone appeared in the house and again Maisie simply picked it up and had a blow. Rather liking it, she stuck to it, and once again father provided the basic tuition until she was old enough to play in the "boys band" as they were called in those days, although she was never commissioned as a young peoples band member. In 1935 she took part in a Divisional Young Peoples Festival at Ipswich with the Guard Troop from Colchester. The troop did a "club swinging demonstration" at the conclusion of which, Masie was left on her own in the centre. Somebody brought on her trombone and she played Unfathomed Love. This was her first real trombone solo and it was quite a surprise to the audience as it was most unusual for a girl to be playing a brass instrument, especially one so young. She was ten years old. From then on Life Saving Guard Maisie Ringham received invitations to travel and play regularly at special meetings and events but being too young to go alone her mother or grandfather, Lt.-Col. Greenaway, would chaperone her. She was regularly billed as "The Wonder Girl Trombonist" and The Musician reported that "A-Maisie-ing" Ringham's trombone solos were greeted with immediate and thunderous applause.

In June 1938, Maisie's parents were appointed to High Wycombe, where her father, who until this time had been her only brass instrument teacher, was far sighted enough to arrange for her to try for a "Saturday Morning Scholarship" at Trinity College of Music. She was successful and became a pupil of George Maxted, principal trombone of the London Philharmonic Orchestra. Unfortunately the outbreak of war put an end to this and Maisie was once again left to her own devices. The family moved to Folkstone, from

where Maisie was evacuated to Cardiff to live with relatives and continue her education. Here, aged fifteen, she wore full Salvation Army uniform for the first time. When her parents were posted to Stockport, Maisie was awarded a Candlin Wind Instrument Scholarship and Exhibition at the Royal Manchester College of Music, where she studied for three years becoming the first trombonist (and Salvationist) to gain an A.R.M.C.M. Performers Diploma.

On completion of her studies, Maisie was appointed as principal trombone in the BBC Midland Light Orchestra, where she remained for just over a year until she received a telegram from Sir John Barbirolli inviting her to join the Halle Orchestra. Not only was this a tremendous thrill but it was also the realisation of a childhood ambition as having been taken by her father to hear the Halle Orchestra, she had remarked "Dad, I'll play in that orchestra one day". After a decade spent performing and touring the world with the Halle and having been married for five of those years, Maisie left in order to raise a family. Her husband, Ray Wiggins, was coincidentally a trombonist and also a child of officer parents. On leaving the Halle, she continued to be in demand both as an orchestral player, teacher and soloist undertaking tours of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Scandinavia. Several trombone solos were composed especially for her, including Ray Steadman Allen's *The Eternal Quest* and *Concertino for Band and Trombone*, which was written after Maisie asked Erik Leidzen if he would consider writing an extended "Army" work, when they met, in New York, during her 1953 North American tour. For several years, Maisie was the only female S. A. Bandmaster in the British Territory, Cannock being one of the corps where she held this position. She also served as Songster Leader at Wealdstone and more recently was Bandmaster of the London Ladies Brass.