

..... Reginald attended an audition and played Debussy's 'Arabesque', and was signed up to provide accompaniment and musical effects - officially as 'pianist-cum-musical-director' at the Stocksbridge Palace for the princely sum of £3 per week.

One thing that was becoming less scarce was petrol, and the young man invested in a motor cycle to help him get about. This was also the means by which he could see his fiancée after work, and to whisk her away with him for a ride, followed by a long walk on the nearby moorlands and hills. He was certainly more than a hit musically at the Stocksbridge Palace. His good looks were quickly noticed by one of the family who owned the cinema. Their previous pianist had left, and a week of fruitless auditioning had followed. Things looked bleak. Suddenly, one evening, Mr. Haines, the owner, arrived home beside himself with glee.

He breathlessly explained to his family how, following Reginald's audition, he had signed up the teen-aged musician. He told them that the young man was very talented, and exactly what they had been looking for. When his daughter first saw him, she was instantly struck by his looks and general appearance. "He was very slim, with very dark hair and had a small moustache, I think, but the things I noticed most were his hands, which were very slender and delicate looking. But when I first heard him play! Honestly, I didn't know what all the fuss had been about. To me, more interested in the 'pop' of the day, he didn't seem to play anything, but just rippled up and down the keys in whatever mood the film suggested. Not so my father, though. He would leave mother in the cine box (projection room) to cope on her own, and would stand at the back of the cinema, entranced."

Reginald Dixon remained at the Palace for about eighteen months. Many times Mr. Haines would say the pianist was far too good to be wasting his talent by playing in a cinema, and predicted that he would go far in the entertainment world. In any event, this first post as a cinema pianist was of immense value to Reginald, in that he built up quite a large repertoire of contrasting style and mood. He also developed the split second timing desirable in a cinema pianist, which quality was to prove so useful in later life when timing broadcasts and recordings to the second. Often a new film would be run through for the first time at about 4.30pm., and the score which accompanied it would be studied by the pianist (and, at Stocksbridge, the violinist). Then, without any time for rehearsal straight into the evening performance, often at various speeds - due to projector problems - until, by the end of the week, when perfect synchronization might be achieved, in would come another batch of films, and the whole process was started again.

The use of mere music was not sufficient for the 'musical director' and he felt that certain action in some of the films called for more realistic sound effects. Ever the perfectionist, his research came up with a couple of useful effects. One consisted of raising the piano lid with one hand, while playing with the other, and then, in accompaniment to the visual firing of a gun on-screen, slamming down the lid to great effect; another involved the removal of the lower panel of the upright piano so that, at the sign of approaching herds of cattle, stampeding horses or a violent storm, he would run his foot up and down the exposed strings. The end product was a rather eerie, ringing glissando and, although most effective as far as the audience went, spelled ultimate doom for the piano. The latter deteriorated to such an extent that, quite convinced the cause was only old age, Reginald told Mr. Haines that a new piano would have to be obtained, or he could not continue to play there.

Unfortunately, Mr. Haines was not entirely his own boss. Family consultations brought no response. The business could not afford another piano. Reginald began to look elsewhere for a job, and decided to accept a post in Chesterfield. This was as pianist deputising on the organ when the resident was absent. This allowed him to practise on a theatre organ. The Haines family were all sorry to see him go, although Mr. Haines once again predicted a big future for the young man in music - albeit not sitting alone in a orchestra pit, playing to an audience lost in cowboy films and Chaplin comedies. Ironically, the day following Reginald's departure from Stocksbridge Palace, a new piano had to be brought in because applicants for his vacated post were most unwilling to tackle the old one !