

Bob Smith's Ideal Band

Ideal Music / Better than an Orchestra

Featuring:

*James Andrews, J B Andrews, Alec Bissee, Tony Capaldi,
Neil Fyffe, George Harrison, J Hiddlestone, Charlie Knight*



- 1 **Bob Smith's Ideal Band**
Eightsome Reel Part 1
[Fairy Dance / The Breakdown / De'il Among the Tailors]
- 2 **James B. Andrews & Bob Smith**
Dulcimer Duet
Ashcroft's Reel / Londonderry Air / Breakdown
- 3 **Bob Smith and his Ideal Band**
Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders
- 4 **James Andrews** (The British Champion)
Hohner Harmonica Solo
Liverpool & High Level Hornpipes
[includes Down Home Rag]
- 5 **[Bob Smith's Ideal Band]**
Band with vocal chorus
The International
- 6 **Alec Bisset**
Melodian Solo with Dulcimer Accompt. by Bob Smith & J.B. Andrews
Medley of Popular Waltzes
[Let Me Call You Sweetheart / Smile Awhile / Down at the Old Bull and Bush /
By the Side of the Zuyder Zee / Let Me Call You Sweetheart]
- 7 **Bob Smith's Ideal Band**
The Canal Cruise Parts 1 & 2
[includes A Life on the Ocean Wave / The Drunken Sailor / Miss MacLeod / A Man's a Man for All That]
- 8 **Tony Capaldi**
Continental Accordion Solo with Bob Smith 's Ideal Trio
La Varsoviennne (La Va)
- 9 **Bob Smith and his Ideal Band**
with vocal chorus
Big Reason Blues
- 10 **Bob Smith's Ideal Band**
The Boston Two-step
- 11 **Bob Smith's Ideal Band**
March: Horseguards Blue
- 12 **Hiddlestone**
His Hohner and Bob Smith's Ideal Band
Happy Hours
- 13 **Bob Smith's Band**
Barn Dance - Woodland Voices
- 14 **Bob Smith's Ideal Band**
Eightsome Reel Part 2
[Kate Dalrymple / Wind That Shakes the Barley / Soldier's Joy / Miss MacLeod]
- 15 **Bob Smith and his Ideal Band**
Ideal One-Step
- 16 **James Andrews** (The British Champion)
Hohner Harmonica Solo
The Middy March
- 17 **Bob Smith's Band**
Empress tango
[Road to the Isles / John Peel / Phil the Fluter's Ball / John Brown's Body]
- 18 **[Bob Smith's Ideal Band]**
Band with vocal chorus
The Red Flag
- 19 **Bob Smith and his Ideal Band**
Wull's Wireless Wails Parts 1 & 2
[includes Flowers of Edinborough / When You and I Were Young, Maggie /
Highland Laddie / Orange and Blue / Kafoozalum]
- 20 **Alec Bisset**
Melodeon Solo with Dulcimer Accompt. by Bob Smith & J.B. Andrews
[The Irish Jaunting Car / Come Back to Erin / Eileen Alannah]
Medley of Irish Waltzes
- 21 **Bob Smith's Ideal Band**
[The Favourite Hornpipe / unidentified barn dance]
The Ideal Lancers
1st Fig: Rakes of Mallow / My Love Is Like a Red, Red Rose / The Girl I Left Behind Me
2nd Fig: Lass of Gowrie / Kate Dalrymple / Loch Lomond
3rd Fig: Blackthorn Stick / Irish Washerwoman
4th Fig: The Alma (Quick March) / Atholl Highlanders / Bonny Dundee
5th Fig: unidentified / Atholl Highlanders / Nora Creina /
Biddy the Bowl Wife / Rakes of Kildare / Barren Rocks of Aden
- 22 **[? J.B. Andrews & Bob Smith]**
[dulcimer and piano duets]
Dulcimer tunes from
An Old 'National Hall' Favourite Parts 1 & 2
- 23 **Bob Smith's Ideal Trio**
with vocal refrain
I Still Love You —
Waltz Hesitation
- 24 **Heddlestone and Macfarlane**
Hohner Harmonica and Harp Duet
The Call of the Pipes Part 1
- 25 **Bob Smith and his Ideal Band**
with vocal chorus
Why Worry

Track descriptions are as given on the labels of the original issues. The numbers in parentheses are first the original master, then the original Beltona issue. Recorded in Peckham, London, 1930-31, or Edinburgh, c1934.

TSDL319

This record ushers back on to the musical stage one of the most intriguing bands of the past - the musicians, singers and occasional comedians who orbited round Bob Smith's Ideal Band. At its heart was the Ideal Trio, playing everything from country dance music to the **Big Reason Blues**. Round them clustered the star instrumentalists - James Andrews and Jimmy Hiddlestone on mouth-organ, Tony Capaldi at the accordion and Alec Bisset at the melodeon, and a shadowy dulcimer-player still unidentified. From the talents of this company came the sketches - playlets for the gramophone, with music and patter and songs - like **The Canal Cruise** and **Wull's Wireless Wails**. Altogether, a fantasia of music and fun from the Glasgow of the '30s.

The Bob Smith Story

The story of Bob Smith and his Ideal Band is quite difficult to write. Bob does not seem to have left much evidence that has survived the years since his heyday in the early '30s. Not much evidence, that is, besides about 150 recordings by the band (in one form or another) and its associates. Much of the scanty information we have been able to piece together has come from the accordionist Tony Capaldi and mouth-organ virtuoso Jimmy Andrews. Both worked with Bob Smith and travelled down to London with him to record.

Bob Smith ran a photographic shop in Dalmarnock Road, in south-east Glasgow. He also had a dance band, which played for functions in and around the city. The dances would include the Eightsome Reel, Lancers, Quadrilles, Boston and Military Two-Steps, La Va, Barn Dances and so on. The core of the band was a trio: probably Bob on drums, Jim McCann on fiddle, and an unidentified piano-player. Near Bob's shop was the Sportsman Cafe, run by Tony Capaldi. Tony was making a name for himself on the halls in the late '20s. Born in Italy, he was brought to Glasgow as a baby, but took holidays back home, and there learned to play the continental accordion. He played all sorts of tunes, including a good deal

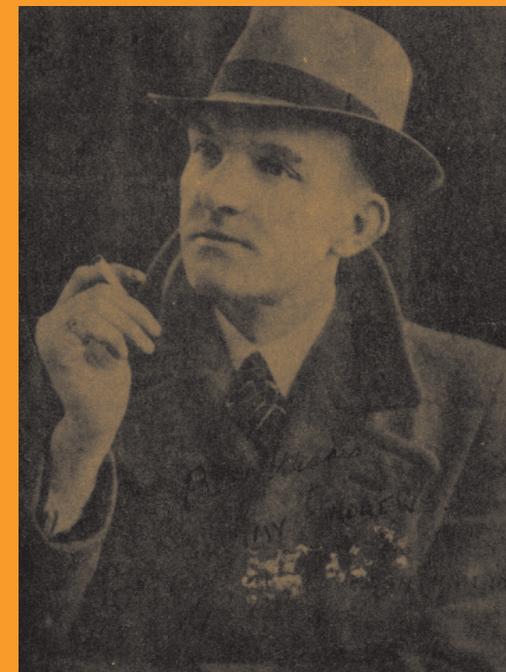


James Andrews

of traditional music; the **High Level Hornpipe**, for instance, he remembers as a great favourite. One day, passing Bob Smith's shop, Tony stopped to admire a collection of photographs in the window. He fell into conversation with the proprietor and found they had a mutual interest in music. Bob Smith at that time also dealt in records, and he suggested to the manager of the Murdoch Trading Company, then owners of the Beltona label, that some records should be made of the Smith band. This being agreed upon, Tony Capaldi was invited in to the scheme to give it more variety (or, more probably, more sales potential, for Capaldi had developed a considerable local following). It seems likely that Bob was quite involved in local entertainment; he was certainly associated with the sketchwriter Willie Park. Contemporary newspapers do not mention the band but it was rare for any music of this type to receive coverage.

The first recordings were made in the spring or early summer of 1930, at Edison Bell's studio in Peckham. (Edison Bell appears to have recorded most, if not all, of Beltona's Scots artists in the early '30s, as custom jobs for the Murdoch company. These recordings have master numbers in Edison Bell's regular series, but with an M prefix.) Bob Smith's Ideal Trio and Tony Capaldi were down for the session, as was the trio's

regular vocalist at this time, Charlie Knight. Knight was a tram conductor and a member of the famous Glasgow Tramway Entertainers, and became known as the Glasgow Tramway Tenor. He eventually left the trams and followed a career on the halls. The night before the recordings commenced, the band went for a meal at a Lyons Corner House. The pianist was cutting a bread roll when the knife slipped and went into his right hand. Not wanting to lose his job, or the recording fee, he bandaged the hand and turned up at the session next morning as if nothing had happened. The recording supervisor for Edison Bell at this time was Harry Hudson - also the label's house band-leader, and responsible for many popular records under such credits as Harry Hudson's Melody Men. When the musicians arrived at the studio he glanced at them and remarked, all too audibly, 'I didn't know they were running cheap excursions from Scotland.' But despite this doubly inauspicious start the musicians went on to make two dozen or so recordings. Capaldi was generally the featured artist, recording either solo or with the band accompanying him, but the band cut some sides on their own behalf, including the two-part sketch The Canal Cruise, which was to be one of their greatest successes. As well as this sketch, the two-part **Eightsome Reel** and **La Varsovienn**e from this session and **I Still Love**



James Andrews

You are also included on this collection. In a review of *The Canal Cruise* one of the trade papers of the day (the *Ulster & Scottish Radio Dealer* for October 1930) noted: 'This is a representation of a cruise on the Forth & Clyde canal on the well known steamer 'The Fairy Queen'. The songs by the ticket collector and others, and the accordion solos and dance music all put before the listener a sound picture of the gaiety of one of these popular cruises. It is rather a clever record.'

In some ways it is quite surprising that a local dance band should be making records despite having no very extensive reputation. In fact these records are a rare documentation of what the grass-roots musicians of the time were doing, and their vigour and exciting lack of polish mark them out from the 'name' dancebands of the period. As was suggested above, the Smith band may have appealed to Beltona chiefly because of their association with Capaldi. The accordionist had already approached a major label, Decca, asking for a contract, but, not knowing the record business very well, he had asked for £1000 per record - a proposal which terminated any interest Decca might have had in him. His next ploy was to call at record shops and ask if they had any Tony Capaldi records. They didn't, of course, but assuming

a market they began to ask their suppliers for them, and the resulting climate of interest may have worked favourably on Beltona. At any rate, the results seem to have been satisfactory: Capaldi's *Mama Mia* (Beltona 1516), composed of favourite boyhood tunes which his mother had liked, is reported to have sold 50,000 copies, and **The Canal Cruise** too was a popular record. Tony's ad libbed reply to the line 'All hands on deck' became, he says, a catch-phrase all over Scotland. Capaldi and the band made another recording trip to London in November or December of that year, and upwards of two dozen sides were made, including the sketch **Wull's Wireless Wails**. Shortly afterwards there were some solo recordings by Capaldi and by the Glasgow mouth-organ player James Andrews, the latter accompanied on piano by Harry Hudson. Jimmy Andrews had only a limited association with Bob Smith.

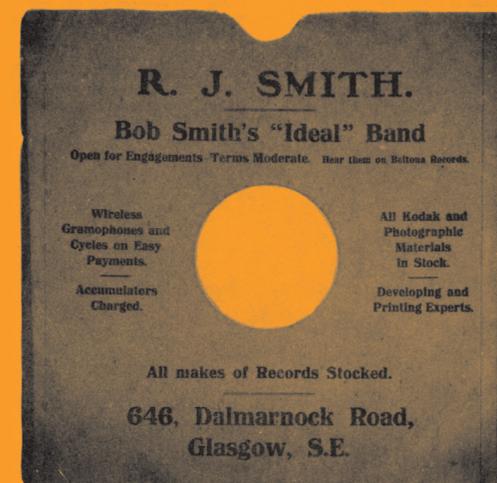
Apart from being at a more or less contemporaneous recording session he played occasionally with the band on the halls. He himself played the halls regularly, all over the country, against some opposition from his family (though his father had managed Glasgow's Gaiety Theatre). He won the annual Scottish Mouth Organ Championship, held in Glasgow's City Hall, in 1928, came second in



Tony Capaldi

1929, and won again in 1930, in a field of 59 players whose standard was so high, said the Music Trades Review, that the judges had a 'hard task reaching their decision. In addition to the three-guinea prize and the silver cup, Andrews was offered a job with the popular mouth-organ bandleader Eddie Mayo. He also played with Borrah Minevitch and his Harmonica Rascals, but had to quit them (and miss a chance of travelling on the Continent) when he got married. One of his outstanding numbers was the **High Level Hornpipe**, in which he effected the key-change by using a two-sided, two-key instrument and swapping from side to side with great skill. He has always played the diatonic mouth-organ rather than the chromatic harmonica. He worked for a time with the dulcimer-player William McNally, who recorded several sides for Beltona, and also with Jimmy Hiddlestone, an ex-railwayman and mouth-organ player, likewise from Glasgow, under the name of The Andrews Brothers. Hiddlestone too was associated with the Bob Smith circle: he recorded some duets with the autoharp-player MacFarlane at the November 1930 session, such as **The Call of the Pipes Part 1**, and later some solos with the band's accompaniment, like **Happy Hours**. Both Hiddlestone and MacFarlane also show up in the sketches.

Three sessions, in (approximately) January, August and October, made 1931 a busy recording year for Bob Smith and company. On the first trip the team was augmented by Alec Bisset, a well-known Glasgow melodeon-player who, with his daughter Elizabeth (Benie) accompanying him at the the piano, was much in demand locally. On these, his only known records, he had, according to the labels, the dulcimer accompaniment of Bob Smith and JB Andrews. At the same session Smith and Andrews also recorded what were labelled as dulcimer duets but appear to be dulcimer solos with piano. Either man may have played the dulcimer, for JB Andrews is not Jimmy Andrews the mouth-organ player but another, wholly obscure, musician, while Bob Smith, though not recalled as a dulcimer-player, was acknowledged 'a versatile sort of a chap' and did, on other records, play the flexatone. Were Smith the man at the dulcimer on this session, JB Andrews may have been the pianist, and indeed the regular pianist on the band's records. It may be noted that the style of the drummer - which is very driving and exciting for a band of this type - remains constant throughout their records, so it would seem likely that Bob Smith himself occupied the drum chair.



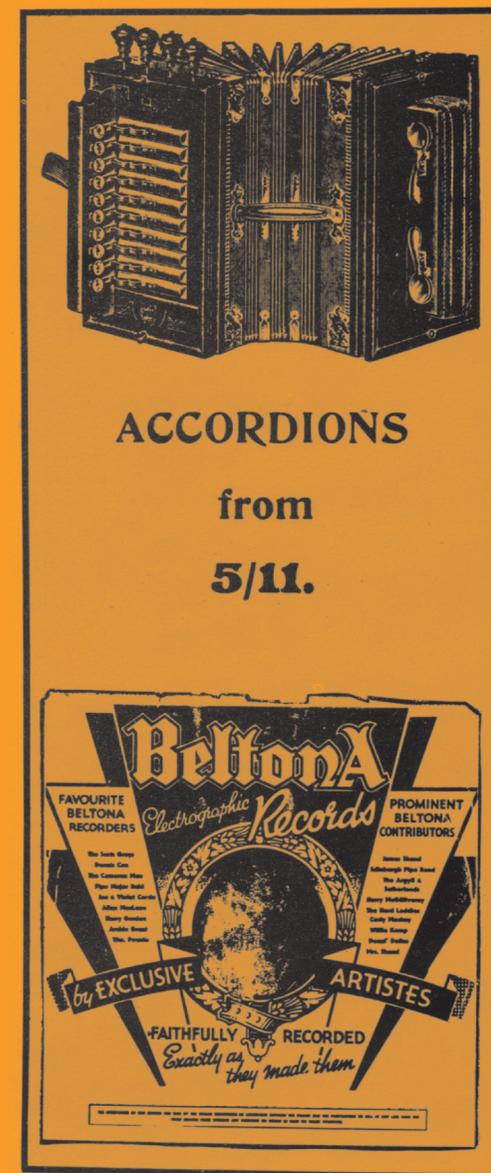
Alec Bisset has been referred to as a champion melodeon-player, and it may have been Beltona's policy (or Smith's) to use the band as 'house' accompanists for such musicians - as with Capaldi, who reappeared at the August and October 1931 sessions, and made one of his own about the end of December; or with Hiddlestone, whose solos with band accompaniment were made at the October session. The group also accompanied vocalists, such as Charlie Knight and Joe O'Rourke. Knight is sometimes the unnamed vocalist on Ideal Band records; at other times it is George Harrison or Neil Fyffe.

Two of the sides from the August 1931 session, by the Ideal Band including Capaldi and vocalist Fyffe, were issued anonymously: **The Red Flag** and **The International**. Did Beltona envisage a specific market for such couplings? It does not seem to have been, overtly at least, a politically conscious company, though to record large quantities of essentially traditional music in the '30s argues a social awareness not much in evidence among the major labels of the day. (However, Beltona may simply have discovered that there was a ready market for this kind of material, just as, it had recently been demonstrated, there was in the United States for Southern traditional music.)

Or was the record more an expression of Bob Smith's own political beliefs? We may never know, but they are certainly moving performances.

During 1930-31, then, the Smith band produced records under various names: Bob Smith's Ideal Trio, Bob Smith's Ideal Band, Bob Smith & Party, and even, for one sketch, The Ex-Service Men. The core seems to have been the violin-piano-drums trio, augmented by - apart from musicians already mentioned, like Capaldi, the Andrewses, Hiddlestone and so forth - the occasional saxophonist or banjo-player, and sometimes by novelty instruments like Xylophone or flexatone. For their last recordings, however, which seem to date from the latter part of 1934 or thereabouts, and were probably made in Edinburgh. Bob Smith's Band (as it was labelled on nearly all its subsequent releases) adopted a different lineup, with concertina as a lead instrument, and a trumpet making occasional appearances.

The dance music and sketches of the Ideal Band, and the instrumental selections by musicians whom we can loosely term its associate members, provide an almost unique glimpse of traditionally rooted music in an urban community between the wars. Some of the performances are not too distant from the country



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fiddle bands of the day; others approach closer to the manner of the restaurant and ballroom bands; while the instrumental showpieces on the mouth-organ or accordion were certainly familiar fare at the music halls. Altogether, these recordings present a group of musicians who earned their popularity neither as a show band nor as an aggregation of personality acts - they might be better remembered if they had - but as purveyors, on gramophone records, of highly distinctive music, too lively to wear the straitjacket that was to crib and confine much Scots traditional music in later years.

THE CANAL CRUISE

Two Records
 Parts 1/2
 No. 1541
 Parts 3/4
 No. 1722



1540 Eightsome Reel. Parts 1 and 2
 1541 The Canal Cruise. Parts 1 and 2
 1542 I still love you Hesitation Waltz
 Dreaming (Waltz Valeta)
 1596 Bringing in the New Year
 (Complete on one Record)
 1597 Be a Chum
 Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders
 1607 Why Worry (Foxtrot)
 Big Reason Blues
 1615 A Record Trip Round the World
 Parts 1 and 2
 1633 An old "National" Hall Favourite
 Parts 1 and 2
 1659 Wull's Wireless Wails
 Horse Guard's Blue
 1689 Blaze of Glory
 1691 Ideal Lancers. Figures 1 and 2
 Ideal Lancers. Figures 3 and 4
 1692 Ideal Lancers. Figure 5
 Boston Two-Step
 1704 When the Wife's Awa'. Parts 1 and 2
 Cuckoo Waltz
 1705 I met that Girl (Waltz)
 1722 The Canal Cruise. Parts 3 and 4
 1742 A Scotch New Year. Parts 1 and 2
 1743 An Old Time Waltz Medley (Feldman)
 An Old Time Waltz Medley (L. Wright)
 1744 The Ideal One-Step
 Summer Sunbeams
 1760 Playgrounds, part 1
 Playgrounds, part 2
 1784 Oor Laddie. Parts 1 and 2

Bob Smith's Band
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SMITH'S IDEAL BAND with TONY CAPALDI

1512—Patience Quadrilles, Figs. 1, 2 and 3
 1513—Patience Quadrilles, Figs. 4 and 5
 1514—Patience Quadrilles, Fig. 6.
 La Va
 1699—The Auld Hoose. Parts 1 and 2



Production, remastering
 and sleeve design by **Tony Engle**
 Notes by **Tony Russell & Tony Engle**
 Original recordings from the collections
 of **Reg Hall** and **Tony Engle** (except track 4,
 by courtesy of **Bill Leader**).

IDEAL MUSIC
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TOPIC

TOPIC

Classic Thirties Recordings

Bob Smith's Ideal Band

Featuring
 JAMES ANDREWS, JB ANDREWS, ALEC BISSET,
 TONY CAPALDI, NEIL FLYFE, GEORGE HARRISON,
 JIBBIE HIRST, CHARLIE KNIGHT



TOPIC TAPPING DANCE MUSIC
 MOUTH-ORGAN WIZARDRY
 MELODIES ON THE MELOPHON
 DELICIOUS DELIGHTS
 MIRTHFUL SKETCHES

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