

Danny Alguire Remembered

by Chris Tyle

Danny Alguire, cornetist and vocalist, died July 8. He was 79 years old.

Alguire is best remembered for his long association with the Firehouse Five Plus Two, from 1949-1971. His tenure with that band is available on many Good Time Jazz recordings. In addition to his work with the Firehouse 5+2, he was a member of Bob Wills' Texas Playboys in 1941-42, during which time he recorded "Home in San Antone" a hit record during World War Two, which is now available on a Rhino compilation of Wills' material.

Born in Chickasha, Oklahoma, August 30, 1912, Alguire grew up in a musical family, his father playing drums professionally as did his brother. He began playing mellophone at age five and joined the Ft. Worth (Texas) Rotary Club Boys' Band. His family moved to Kansas City, Missouri, where young Alguire heard Bennie Moten's band and the Coon-Sanders Nighthawks. He was 16 when he got his first trumpet, and played in the high school band, playing stock arrangements, including Red Nichols' arrangement of "Ida, Sweet as Apple Cider." During this time he listened to records by Nichols, Bix Beiderbecke and Louis Armstrong, and live radio broadcasts from Chicago by Earl Hines' band. By 1935 he was working professionally in bands in Oklahoma City, and the next year he moved to Los Angeles to work in bands there.

On a visit to his parents in Oklahoma City in 1941, Alguire went to see the Bob Wills band, as a good friend and fellow trumpeter, Benny Strickler, had recently joined them. Although the Wills band was erroneously thought by many musicians to be a "hillbilly band," Bob Wills' favorite music was jazz and his band was becoming well known as a fine jazz group in addition to playing

"Western Swing."

Wills was riding high on a crest of popularity; his band frequently packed ballrooms, and this was the case the night Alguire went to hear them—it took him 15 minutes to reach the bandstand! Alguire was very impressed with the band. That night, Wills hired him, trumpeter Alex Brashear, and clarinetist Woody Woods.

The effect of trumpeter Benny Strickler on both Alguire and Alex Brashear was immense. Strickler influenced both men's playing for the remainder of their professional careers (Brashear died in the 1970s after a brief comeback playing with Merle Haggard). In a written tribute to Strickler, Alguire recalled Strickler emphasizing a cooperative band spirit, which he termed a "meeting of the minds for a meeting of music." Strickler stated "If you don't think together, you can't play together." Alguire commented that Strickler "brought to the bandstand each night an enthusiasm that actually permeated throughout the band. It was a feeling that we were all going to play good — and we did."

The Wills band broke up in 1942 due to the war, and Alguire joined the Navy as a radioman, stationed in the South Pacific. During his stint, he and his shipmates heard Wills' recording of "Home in San Antone" played on a radio show. Although his shipmates didn't believe it was Alguire singing, the fact was confirmed by the radio announcer! No doubt Alguire was very proud to know that Wills' record was a hit.

Following the war, Alguire spent time in San Francisco, playing "dime grinds" (dance hall jobs where a dance with a female employee cost ten cents) with Harry Mordecai (banjo) and Burt Bales (piano). He also visited Hambone Kelly's to hear Lu Watters' band—sometimes sitting



Danny Alguire, wearing his Firehouse Five outfit, June 1966.

in, but more often just listening. Alguire also played a session with Turk Murphy (trombone), Bob Helm (clarinet), Burt Bales, Bill Dart (drums) of which private recordings exist.

Returning to Los Angeles Alguire played for awhile with T. Texas Tyler's Western Swing Band, but eventually left full-time music to work as a fingerprint expert with the Los Angeles Police Department and later as a distributor of classical and jazz recordings.

Alguire joined the Firehouse Five Plus Two in 1949, played and recorded extensively with them. Through the band's association with Walt Disney Studios he secured a job as an assistant director of Disney films (mostly cartoon work). He stayed with Disney until the mid-1970s, when he retired and moved with his wife to Beaverton, Oregon.

While in the Portland area, he continued to play music occasionally, with Monte Ballou's Castle Jazz Band, the Jim Beatty Jazz Band and pick-up groups. He made frequent appearances at meetings of the Oregon City Traditional Jazz Society, even after he quit playing (for medical reasons) in the early 1980s.

During the time Danny Alguire lived in the Portland area I had the pleasure of getting to know him, and the first time I played cornet in public was in a band with him in 1975. Alguire was a consummate musician — he knew exactly what he wanted to do and played everything from the heart. Personally, he was a down-to-earth man, and he had an infectious sense of humor. Although he loved and lived jazz, he knew how to entertain, and his version of the 1930s

radio theme "Little Orphan Annie" was an oft-requested favorite.

Although the Firehouse 5+2 has been criticized by some writers for the occasional use of various sound effects (a tongue-in-cheek approach that was actually used sparingly), the band was totally dedicated to playing good jazz, and Alguire's input regarding tempo and pacing, based on his experience with Bob Wills, was invaluable. Alguire's recorded work with the band illustrates his style — a simple, direct, no-nonsense approach to playing jazz — which worked perfectly. Standout performances can be heard on his solo on "San Antonio Rose," and his ensemble work on his own composition "Firechief Rag" (based on the Bob Wills composition, "Beaumont Rag").

Firehouse 5+2 pianist K.O. Eckland commented in the NOJC News, "Danny Alguire played a straight-ahead lead and the front office did little circles around him, all this set to a firm boom-chick beat. In reviewing Danny's sound, I realized that he probably never played anything past a quarter note. He didn't have to. He was relaxed. The whole damn band was relaxed. And what the relaxation brought about was time for fun." In a letter to Hal Smith two years ago, Alguire stated his intention of "just riding it out to the coda" — an appropriate sentiment from a former Texas Playboy.

*Strickler died in 1946. In the 1950s Good Time Jazz issued four sides from airshots of the band he led at the Dawn Club in San Francisco in 1942.

(Thanks to Hal Smith for reference assistance)

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