

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	vii
<i>Introduction</i>	1
1 A Face Not Built for Gloom (1935–51)	11
2 Boy Wonder Tenorist (1951–55)	36
3 '56 not '45 (1955–58)	61
4 The End of the Old Order (1958–59)	89
5 Now It's Who Have <i>They</i> Got? (1959–61)	109
6 Down in the Village (1961–62)	134
7 Tubby Hayes Loves You Madly (1963–64)	160
8 The Best of Both Worlds (1964–65)	182
9 Addictive Tendencies (1966–67)	204
10 The Other Scene (1967–68)	225
11 The Beginning of the End (1969–72)	244
12 It'll Be Me Next (1972–73)	266
<i>Afterword: The Lost Leader: The Legacy of Tubby Hayes</i>	288
<i>Notes</i>	305
<i>Selected Discography</i>	335
<i>Index</i>	358

In a way, Tubby never grew up. Underneath it all was the basic thing that he sounded like when he was fifteen. He never had to try too hard – it was there, a natural thing.

Ronnie Scott

To Tubby
Thanks for the music —
Ronnie Scott

1 A Face Not Built for Gloom (1935–51)

He was never as happy as when he had his mouth wide open and was shouting his head off.

Dorothy Hayes

Tubby was born Edward Brian Hayes on Wednesday January 30th, 1935. Virtually every previous biographical account of his life has begun by incorrectly stating the location of his birth as Raynes Park in south-west London, close to where his parents lived and in which he would spend a large part of his formative years.

Home births were by no means unusual in 1935, but Hayes's birth certificate gives the location as St Pancras Hospital in Camden. The birth was not registered until March of that year for reasons that can only be guessed at.

One might be the working itinerary of his father, also named Edward, but known to all as Teddy. A handsome, bespectacled man with a Ronald Colman moustache and a swathe of dark hair, Teddy Hayes was a professional musician, playing the violin and leading his own dance band. At the time of his son's birth this work was prolific as Britain had been swept by the dance band craze. Live music at ballrooms, theatres and dance halls was still the major force in popular entertainment and the social interaction of dancing formed its very infrastructure.

People the length and breadth of the British Isles were used to the sound of dance bands; such people might be the posh and well-to-do, able to afford a night at one of the plush night-clubs and hotels in London's West End, where darlings of the genre such as Bert Ambrose, Lew Stone and Jack Jackson held sway, or the average wage earner of the day, happy to foxtrot away in front of the semi-professional band at the local Palais.

Teddy Hayes's orchestra – or rather orchestras, as, by the mid-1930s he was proudly boasting he could provide anything from a salon quartet to a full gypsy orchestra – were typical of the era.

A publicity brochure advertising the services of “Hayes Orchestra” at this time asked whether the reader required music for a wide array of events: “Masonic? Ladies Festival? Annual Dinner and Dance? Reception? Wedding? Cabaret? Theatre?” adding that bands could be “supplied at the shortest notice.” Alongside the agent-style puff was a list of the Teddy Hayes orchestra's “municipal engagements”:¹

Palace Pier, Brighton – 4 Seasons

Pavilion, Herne Bay – 3 Seasons

Pavilion, Burnham-on-Sea – 3 Seasons

Borough of Wembley – 2 Seasons

Herne Bay, Burnham-on-Sea and Wembley might not sound like the most exciting places in which to spend a musical career but Teddy was happy enough, and he was earning a good living, far better than many in 1935. Britain was still feeling the effects of the depression brought on by the Wall Street Crash in 1929. Economic downturn was the story everywhere, and in January 1935 the country's unemployment stood at a staggering 2,397,000. It was small wonder therefore that live entertainment flourished, almost as an antidote to the morbid fiscal atmosphere.

There were also renewed political tensions in Europe, surrounding the rise of a new German leader, Adolf Hitler, whose National Socialist Nazi party had swept to power in 1933. During the same month as the birth of the Hayes's son, a plebiscite in the Saarland region, taken from the German people at the end of World War I, resulted in a 90% vote in favour of rejoining the national borders, and, in March, in strict defiance of the Versailles Treaty, Hitler announced German rearmament.

International affairs, however, probably mattered little to Tubby's mother Dorothy in early 1935. A pretty dark-haired lady, with a good figure and a stylish dress sense, she was the ideal partner for Teddy, and together they made a striking couple. One of two sisters, she had been born Dorothy Roche and, like her husband, had a strong musical talent, receiving singing lessons as a child with an idea towards a career in classical music. Somewhere along the way though she'd changed direction and, by the time she and Teddy met, Dorothy was a revue artist, as likely to be in a dance troupe as an acting role. It appears that Dorothy had retired from the stage by the time of the birth of her son, leaving her husband to keep her in a style, if not exactly luxurious, then certainly less inhibited by the financial privations felt by many at the time.

Home for the Hayes family was 34 Kenwyn Road in the west Wimbledon area of south-west London, close to Raynes Park. Bordered by Wimbledon and New Malden, and effectively bisected by the Waterloo to Southampton railway line, Raynes Park was quintessential 1930s suburbia. The population of the area had begun to increase in the late-Victorian and Edwardian eras and the development of new housing and roads continued throughout the inter-war years, with the nearby A3 Kingston bypass and the A298 Bushey Road dual carriageway being built in the 1920s. Bus services to central London had run since 1914 and the London Underground network extended to adjacent South Wimbledon in 1926, making the suburb ideal commuter-belt territory.

Sharing the same 617-square-foot floor plan as the rest of the houses in the street, but with a slightly wider front garden, with both a hedge and a fence outlining its border with the pavement, the Hayes's home was by no means



Edward Brian Hayes 1936. Courtesy Liz Grönlund.

palatial, but Teddy's good earnings meant that the house had a telephone, still considered a domestic luxury, a radio and a gramophone player.

Brian, as the Hayes's always referred to their son, even into adulthood, grew up spoiled rotten. He was to be the couple's only offspring and this situation, together with a certain amount of monetary comfort, meant that he was indulged throughout his formative years, something that would have a great bearing on his adult character. Dorothy would hand-make a great many of his clothes and his surviving pre-school photographs show a well-dressed, happy-looking boy, with wavy blonde locks and the broad smile he would carry into adulthood. Years later the broadcaster Peter Clayton would comment that "Tubby's face wasn't built for gloom."² In his years as a toddler he certainly had plenty to smile about and, as if in practice for his later lifestyle, he grew up with a life of periodic disruption due to Teddy's workload. Indeed, most of the pictures of Tubby as a small child feature him with his mother at the various seaside locations where Teddy was working. One can easily understand the bond formed between mother and son as they often found themselves alone together as Teddy played matinee performances, week in week out, for several months at a stretch. Amusing a child at the seaside would have been easy enough for Dorothy, but one can also imagine her loneliness, as she was left to bring up her son almost single-handedly at times. It was by no means an easy task. Boisterous and confident, the young Brian was already showing clear signs of a distinctly artistic temperament.



Tubby with his parents, Edward and Dorothy, circa 1936.
Courtesy Liz Grönlund.

Osmosis would be the most pragmatic explanation behind his gifts. Teddy was a successful musician and Dorothy had her own talents, not just as a vocalist but as a skilled seamstress. Both were clearly creative and the young Brian was growing into a world where talent was all around him. Doubtless

he sometimes watched his father's band in action during the long months spent away from home as a small child and he had also begun to show a fascination with drawing, a compulsion he shared with a later hero, Sonny Rollins. Surviving childhood sketches show a clear eye for detail and an indication that, had he chosen to pursue this career path, he could have made an excellent artist.

Tubby's behaviour was also alarmingly precocious: Dorothy would later describe him as "a little show-off." There was certainly a vanity to him, which would persist through his teenage years and into adulthood, and a definite will to have things his own way, another character trait that would not desert him in the years ahead. And, although he had a deep and affecting relationship with his mother, it was to be his father who became his first real hero. "Everything his father had he had to have too,"³ Dorothy once remarked, and soon that "everything" would include the violin, Teddy's instrument of choice and the first of Tubby's many musical conquests.

At the outbreak of World War II in September 1939, Teddy was part way into his season at Brighton and, in the first of what would be many twists of fate linking the two men, unbeknown to Tubby, he would spend the opening days of the war in the same town as his future musical partner Ronnie Scott, who was staying in a hotel owned by an aunt and uncle.⁴ Approaching five years of age, Tubby was old enough to appreciate the excitement of the conflict, but not yet old enough to comprehend the coming horror. Little is known about his life during the war years, or indeed about the extent of Teddy's participation in the conflict. He almost certainly would have been too old for call-up, although the presence of what appears to be an ARP helmet in a wartime snapshot of his son suggests he may have done his bit in local civil defence, hardly a position matching the glamour of his regular employment. Tubby may well have been evacuated for a brief time – the Hayes family had relatives in Maidenhead – but it is fairly certain that Teddy, Dorothy and Tubby remained in Raynes Park into 1940, when the Battle of Britain took the German offensive over the skies of the capital.

However, that same year an event occurred that had a far greater impact upon the young Tubby Hayes than either the new world of primary education he had just entered into or the unfolding spectacle of the war around him.

Teddy took his young son along to Archer Street in London's West End, the narrow, short road that runs, parallel with Shaftesbury Avenue, between Great Windmill Street and Rupert Street. Since the 1920s the street had acted as an open-air labour exchange for jobbing musicians, a tradition that would stretch forwards to the dawn of the '60s, and Monday afternoons would find throngs of players jamming the pavement eagerly looking for work. The jobs on offer, however, weren't jazz as Tubby Hayes's generation would know it, but commercial engagements, everything from Palais gigs to West End shows, Deb balls and hotel soirées. Sometimes the musicians came straight from other gigs, still in evening dress, and it was common practice for players to



"A face not built for gloom." Late 1930s. Courtesy Liz Grönlund.

carry their respective instrument cases in order to alert potential employers as to their skills. There were also other less chivalrous codes of conduct, designed to entrap the naïve, as clarinettist Vic Ash recalled: "Certain bandleaders [might] call out 'Trumpeter for Palais, Wednesday night, £5!' But as you got closer you would see [he] had two fingers spread on his lapel, indicating the job was in fact worth £2."⁵

But, by and large, there was a brotherly camaraderie amongst the job seekers, and Archer Street, or The Street as it was simply known to its regulars, was as much a social gathering as an exercise in career movement. There would be ribald humour, practical jokes and put-ons and, when the weather took a turn for the worse, as many bodies as possible would crowd into the Harmony Inn. Steaming cups of tea and endless games of table football passed the time if no work was forthcoming.

Archer Street was just one part of the booming band business and by the late 1930s music publishers, booking agencies and instrument shops dotted the map of the West End, each contributing in its own way to the ongoing appeal of dance music. Whilst the publishers and bookers oiled the wheels of the professional side of the business, the retailers were a magnet for the amateur, who might just fancy himself as another Nat Gonella or Harry Hayes. Shining rows of trumpets and saxophones were as ineluctable to the children of the 1930s as electric guitars were to be to the rock-and-roll generation years

later and it was into the gleaming window of one such retailer, Joe Pausey's Saxophone Shop in Shaftesbury Avenue, that the five-year-old Brian Hayes gazed and realized instantly – and with a certainty that would extinguish any notions of it being just a passing childhood fad – that he had found something indisputably for him. “I’ll never forget it,” he remembered twenty years later: “I saw three saxes in the window, an alto, a tenor and a baritone. I knew right away and said I wanted the one in the middle.” This sudden and compelling desire wasn’t shared by Teddy. “[He] said I was too young to learn tenor,” Hayes remembered, but like parents the world over Teddy diplomatically deferred his son’s dream rather than brush it completely aside: “[He said] I could have one when I was twelve. I kept him to that promise.”⁶

It’s easy to understand Tubby’s all-consuming fascination with the saxophone, and the tenor saxophone in particular. It is one of the most eye-catching of all the musical instruments, the result of a quite remarkable blend of practical mechanism and aesthetics. Uniting a wonderfully complex-looking series of levers and rods, gaping tone holes, spring work and circular keys operated by a series of pearl buttons, viewed close up there is a suggestion of something vaguely Jules Verne about its construction. It is clearly designed to do something quite complex, and the minutiae of the craftsmanship brings with it a sense that the instrument is not simply a practical tool but a work of art. By the time the young Tubby Hayes was peering through Joe Pausey’s window, the tenor saxophone also had its first handful of jazz virtuosi.

Emerging from the band of Fletcher Henderson in the late 1920s, Coleman Hawkins had all but invented the instrument as a viable jazz voice, possessing a technical command unrivalled by any other player of the day, a tone cello-rich and lustrous throughout the entire register and a harmonic mind that had few equals. He had worked his way through a variety of bands besides Henderson’s before striking out on his own, touring Europe as a soloist during the mid-thirties. However, his crowning glory came when he returned to the United States in 1939, just a few months before Tubby Hayes first set his heart on owning a saxophone, with a recording of the ballad ‘Body And Soul’, a performance which, in under three minutes, virtually defined his style and which, over seventy years later, can still overawe anyone encountering it for the first time.

But Hawkins had also returned to find a new rival, Lester Young, a Missouri-born performer who had done what was hitherto thought impossible in eschewing the heavy tone, thick vibrato and grandiose delivery favoured by his opposite number (adapted in varying degrees by nearly every other tenor player of the day, including Ben Webster, Don Byas and Chu Berry). Instead, Young offered a poetic and languid sound, lighter, airier and in many ways more flexible than that of Hawkins. His improvisations, whilst as harmonically sound as that of his predecessor, stressed melodic content first and foremost, almost if he were singing through his instrument. Young’s early recordings, with Count Basie, Billie Holiday and others, soon caught

the ear of a younger generation of American jazzmen, among them Dexter Gordon, Stan Getz and Zoot Sims, and would likewise transform the lives of English musicians of a similar age, such as Tommy Whittle and Don Rendell. From then on, throughout the Swing Era, tenor players of all abilities had two principal role models from which to choose, Hawkins or Young, with each camp thinking they knew best.

Tubby Hayes would have been unaware of these partisan allegiances in 1940, and like the thousands of people who have taken up the saxophone since its invention a century earlier, he found there was simply something about its look, its feel and its aura that captivated him. There was no way that he would forget his first encounter with the tool of his life's work and no way in which he would let his father forget the promise that, in the not too distant future, a tenor saxophone would be his for keeps.

In the meantime Teddy decided that his son's musical education was best served by learning the violin. Tubby began these studies under his father's tutelage in 1943, aged eight, and this start at such a young age, even on an instrument he would soon abandon, set in place several of the key musical foundation stones of his mature talent. Teddy was a stickler for accuracy and one can imagine that the young Tubby would have spent hours working on his instrument until his father was satisfied. Teddy also taught Tubby to read music at this time, another skill vital for the years ahead. In fact, it is impossible to overemphasize the importance of learning this, the most fundamental of musical requirements, so young. Children who learn to read music at an early age do so with a degree of receptivity not always found in more mature learners, or in those who have initially learned to play "by ear." The latter have to effectively "unlearn" their inherent skill, and the misbalance between what they can reproduce by sheer reflex and what they struggle to reproduce from a written score can inhibit further musical development. Aged eight, Tubby simply followed his father's example and learned what he was shown. The degree of natural talent involved – through osmosis – may or may not have been higher than that of an average learner, but without access to either some sort of formal musical certificates or recorded evidence it is impossible to judge.

Tubby moved to Rutlish School in nearby Merton in 1945.⁷ The school, whose motto is "Modeste, Strenue, Sancte" (Be Modest, Be Thorough and Pursue Righteousness), was named in honour of William Rutlish, one-time embroiderer to Charles II, who upon his death in 1687 had left the princely sum of £400 for the education of "poor children of the parish." This charity existed until the 1890s when the chairman of the board of trustees, local landowner John Innes (after whom the famous garden compost is named) used the excess funds to build a school.⁸

Up until 1945 Rutlish had been a private school, subsisting solely on fee-paying pupils, but the 1944 Education Act had meant that by the end of World War II it had begun to accept a number of pupils through scholarship



Tubby in his Rutlish blazer, outside 34 Kenwyn Road, circa 1947. Courtesy Liz Grönlund.

entry. The effect of this system was to prove seismic and the Rutlish that Tubby Hayes encountered upon his arrival was an establishment struggling to cling onto its laurels. Many aspects of the school were straight out of *Tom Brown's Schooldays*. “Each entry year of about 90 boys was divided up evenly into eight houses: Argonauts, Crusaders, Kelts (sic), Parthians, Romans, Spartans, Trojans and Vikings,” a school friend Alan Reeves recalls. “Tubby and I were Trojans.” Discipline was rigid. “We were forbidden to run in the playground, and had to wear school caps at all times if wearing the school tie and blazer. To be caught in uniform out of school without a cap was a detentionable offence.”⁹

Although young Brian Hayes appears not to have made too much of an academic splash during his initial year at the school, opinions differ as to his character. “He was quiet and kept his head down and got on with his work,” Dudley Herbert comments,¹⁰ whilst another school friend Don Bishop describes him as “full of fun, even then.”¹¹ Alan Reeves recalls that Hayes “was not the most studious of pupils academically” but that he was “friendly and amiable.” Everyone, however, remembers his nickname: “Even in those days, although he was named Edward Brian – I had heard him called Brian – he was always known as Tubby, which he was.”¹²

For the moment Tubby’s preoccupation was with sport, which would remain a lifelong passion. Indeed, among the photographs surviving from his childhood are several of him with a cricket bat or squaring up to the camera in a pair of boxing gloves. Boxing was a particular favourite and during his time at Rutlish he hero-worshipped Freddie Mills, the English fighter who had secured the World Light-Heavyweight Champion title in 1948. This fascination with the fight game was such that Tubby himself was often involved in informal boxing championships with fellow pupils such as Alan Reeves on nearby Cannonhill Common.¹³ Hayes’s talent for drawing also enabled him to produce an A3-sized “comic” book, telling the adventure of an imaginary American boxer, each scene lovingly sketched and scripted with a neat and fastidious eye for detail, a skill that would stand him in good stead in the musical career that lay ahead. Tubby’s own beautifully annotated boxing

scrapbooks were among the few early possessions he would retain until his death.¹⁴

Cricket was another enthusiasm. The 1948 Test Match, with the arrival of the sensational Don Bradman and his Australian squad, was also a magnet for his father, who considered it of such importance that he purchased the considerable luxury of a television set on which to watch the coverage.

Teddy was also keen to further encourage his son's musicality. Although Tubby had already been playing the violin for two years prior to his arrival at Rutlish, it was there that he first made a distinct musical impression on those outside his family. One morning before the school building was unlocked Alan Reeves discovered Tubby, in cap and blazer, "serenading us all solo on his violin."¹⁵ Dudley Herbert remembers that he already had a tangible sense of style: "He displayed panache when playing with the school orchestra. He was a performer, even then. The other boys in the orchestra, which was led by our French master, would all be sitting with rather sullen faces and Tubby would be leaning forward and smiling. He had no nerves about him."¹⁶

Nerveless and precocious, Tubby clearly had much going for him musically, but, like countless parents before and since, Teddy and Dorothy decided that their son's musical future would benefit from piano lessons, and like innumerable children, their son balked at the idea. Although he later expressed regret that he hadn't pursued these studies further (which also began to teach him the basis of musical theory) in order to aid his compositional skill, the deciding moment came when Teddy and Dorothy decided to groom Tubby for a public performance. "They tried to rush me I'm afraid. They said they'd like me to play a piece at a concert and I got the horrors and refused to go to lessons anymore!"¹⁷

In between sports, drawing and the piano, the young Tubby had also found a new interest in jazz, one which to his father's annoyance he seemed intent on indulging. Ironically, it had been Teddy who first introduced his son to a music that seemed a world away from the cosy dance band quaintness of his own orchestra. "I remember him switching on the radio when I was very young and listening to Benny Goodman's band or something on the short wave,"¹⁸ he recalled twenty years later, but although early exposure to swing stylists such as Goodman might have initially caught his young ear, as the forties progressed a musical revolution was taking place that would transform jazz – and Tubby Hayes – forever.

World War II had been a catalyst in breaking down many barriers – sociological, moral, technological and artistic – and, as the conflict drew to its conclusion, there was a certainty that nothing could be quite the same again. Old ideologies had been toppled, empires were crumbling and convention was being thrown out the window. Unsurprisingly, this spirit of revolution had also surfaced in jazz.

The Swing Era of the late 1930s, which had rocketed men such as Benny Goodman to fame, and which had, for the only time in history, placed a music

primarily based on instrumental jazz in the forefront of public taste, had now settled down into something tediously routine, especially to those young musicians employed in the big bands of leading black performers such as Count Basie, Earl Hines and Cab Calloway. It wasn't only the formulaic nature of the music that irked them. Swing may well have been a phenomenon created by men like Fletcher Henderson and Jimmy Lunceford but to the general public the princes of the music were virtually all white – Goodman, Artie Shaw, Tommy Dorsey and Glenn Miller. In a country where they faced social indignities on a daily basis, some black musicians thought the theft of music they had created the ultimate injustice.

There was also a deep dissatisfaction with the direction of the music itself and, as young players dreamt up new ways to escape the formula of swing, three figures emerged as central to the revolution: trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie, pianist Thelonious Monk and alto saxophonist Charlie Parker. All three had served time within the big swing bands (Gillespie with Cab Calloway, Monk with trumpeter Cootie Williams and Parker with Earl Hines and Jay McShann) and each was musically curious enough to want to experiment. The new music pioneered by these players, worked out in after-hours jam sessions, eventually acquired the nickname bebop, derived from its off-kilter rhythmic figures and stop-start melodies; by the close of World War II it had begun to be documented by small independent record labels in New York. The first handful of bebop 78s, including such seminal recordings as 'Ko-Ko' by Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie's 'Groovin' High', set the tone for the whole movement and were virtual definitions of the language of modern jazz: new and complex melodies sat atop old chord progressions in a way that challenged both the player and the listener to a mind game that no previous style had offered – it was jazz seen through the prism of post-war cynicism, the height of hip.

Inevitably, but interminably, bebop filtered through to Europe. A few of the younger London musicians, who had befriended US servicemen stationed in the UK, had already come to know the name Charlie Parker: saxophonists Ronnie Scott and John Dankworth, two of the country's most promising musical figures then earning their keep in commercial dance bands, both remembered a young altoist by the name of Art Pepper (then serving as a military policeman) telling them about Parker after a wartime set at the Feldman club in Oxford Street. For the moment, however, he was just a name and a reputation, although enlightenment wasn't far away. The epiphany for Ronnie Scott and several other young players occurred soon after, at one of the informal listening sessions held at the record-lined flat of drummer Carlo Krahmer, an avid collector who through a variety of routes managed to secure many records not yet available in the UK. On this afternoon he played a 78 rpm by guitarist Tiny Grimes, titled 'Red Cross', made in late 1944, and featuring Charlie Parker in one of his last on-record appearances as a sideman. Grimes's riff was a typically trite throwaway, the sort of thing swing musicians

were used to concocting on the spot, but Parker's improvisation was a clarion call from another place altogether. For Scott, hearing the altoist's playing was like opening a door onto another world; similar conversions were occurring all over London, often in the unlikeliest of places: clarinetist Vic Ash recalls saving up to buy the 78 of his first Parker–Gillespie recording – the blistering 'Shaw 'Nuff' – from a market stall in the East End's Petticoat Lane, and playing it until the grooves wore off. What was clear to all its converts was that bebop was music of its time, of *their* time.

Britain's record industry had been slow to grind back into action following World War II and it was some time before anything by Parker, Gillespie and the other revolutionaries became available domestically. Parlophone and HMV, the two major labels, eventually released several titles by Gillespie in 1947 but the time-lag between the UK and the US meant that many of these recordings were already several years old. Even so, in the austere circumstances of late forties London, which could give the feeling that a full-stop had been planted on progress, they still seemed like missives from the future. Ever enterprising, Carlo Krahmer saw a gap in this market and teamed with fellow enthusiast Peter Newbrook to form Esquire Records, a label operating along almost cottage industry lines which issued 78s by Parker, Sonny Stitt, Miles Davis and others, often dubbed from dreadful third-hand copies of the original American discs. Esquire also gave valuable early recording breaks to the small coterie of English musicians exploring the new music, amongst them Ronnie Scott, John Dankworth, pianist Tommy Pollard and drummers Laurie Morgan and Tony Crombie.

Like the founding fathers of the style in New York earlier in the decade, the English boppers were already earning good money in commercial dance bands. Some, like Ronnie Scott, who at nineteen had been recruited by the hottest new band on the London scene, that of trombonist Ted Heath, had already made an impression as fledgling swing players, but the frustrations of unsuitable outlets for their type of music soon surfaced. There was even open hostility from some established leaders who, having proffered a very polite type of dance music since before the war, didn't take kindly to their young upstart sidemen indulging willy-nilly in "reboppy" solos. The music press of the day also considered the new music to be bunk, a reaction typified by *Melody Maker's* reviewer Edgar Jackson, a man of forthright opinions who more or less wrote his own epitaph with repeated attacks in print on Charlie Parker. Adding further to this dilemma was an ongoing feud between the American Federation of Musicians and the British Musicians' Union which, in an attempt to protect the interests of English performers, had placed an embargo on visiting American players. Its effect was nothing but negative: during the 1930s, Fats Waller, Coleman Hawkins and Benny Carter had all visited the UK and recorded with local players, and a young Dizzy Gillespie had even toured with the band of Teddy Hill, whilst the war itself had brought down certain barriers with the arrival of Major Glenn Miller's Army Air Forces

Orchestra and the US Navy band headed by former Artie Shaw saxophonist Sam Donahue; but if anyone expected the transatlantic strictures to loosen after the conflict ended they were to be bitterly disappointed.

For Ronnie Scott, John Dankworth, Tony Crombie and the other young British modernists there seemed only one solution, that of somehow getting to America. As pipe dreams went it was as tough as they came, but youthful determination kicked in. The first to go, Scott and Crombie, pooled their money and flew – via Iceland – to spend a few intoxicating weeks in New York. Once there, the guessing game was over. They caught Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Tadd Dameron, Bud Powell and others at clubs such as the Three Deuces and the Royal Roost, before returning to London, broke but inspired.

Fortunately a more practical route to the jazz mecca opened up shortly afterwards with the relaunch of transatlantic cruise liners including the *Queen Mary*. These ships had always needed bands – quaintly referred to as “Geraldo’s Navy,” after the veteran bandleader who organized the secondment of these ocean-going musicians – and if it meant a few days’ blowing sedate foxtrots and waltzes to placate the moneyed passengers, the incentive was a full day’s turnaround in New York. Young jazz musicians flocked for the jobs and soon they were regularly hearing their heroes up close, often finding them not much older than themselves. A whole world denied them back home suddenly opened up. John Dankworth – one of the few of these transatlantic pioneers to have enjoyed a formal musical education – took an even more practical route to learning Charlie Parker’s cipher, writing down whatever he could remember from a night spent listening at a club when he returned to the ship. For those left back home, the “Geraldo’s Navy” men brought back the valuable teaching tools of more recordings, together with other hip ephemera gleaned from the jazz capital – everything from boxes of saxophone reeds purchased at Manny’s, the music store frequented by Charlie Parker, to Ivy League ties, colourful shirts and socks.

Inspired by venues such as the Three Deuces, and desperate to create a playing environment of their own, the clique around Dankworth and Scott formed their own club late in 1948, Club XI, named after its still disputed list of eleven founder members. Unlike the venues they’d visited in New York, their effort had a distinctly austere British flavour. Held in Mac’s rehearsal rooms in London’s Windmill Street (a stone’s throw from the famed Windmill Theatre), its amenities were crude and the lighting basic but it quickly became a magnet for true aficionados, who sat avidly soaking up the sounds of Dankworth’s and Scott’s respective bands, or who worked out bizarre half-speed dance steps to accompany the racing music. The atmosphere was often as raw and energized as the playing, but incredibly, for a venue that existed more on luck, love and spirit than on fiscal resources, the club soon acquired a European reputation.

The embargo on American performers didn’t apply to continental Europe and so bebop bands such as Dizzy Gillespie’s and that of former Parker trumpeter Howard McGhee were already visiting France and Sweden. Some

of these visitors passed through London on their way to the continent and sought out Club XI; Gillespie's pianist John Lewis (later to form the successful Modern Jazz Quartet) dropped in one night on his way back from Paris, and among the other illustrious guests was Tadd Dameron, the lyrical bop composer who found himself briefly in the UK working as an arranger for Ted Heath. Even Benny Goodman called in, bringing with him an impressive – and then unknown – young pianist named Buddy Greco. These visits offered sure-fire endorsement of the local's efforts and, by 1949, bebop had a firm if somewhat limited foothold in London. Although its coterie of practitioners may have been confined and hermetic, they were already beginning to exert an influence on other young musicians, including Tubby Hayes.

Tubby's wartime wish finally came true on Christmas Day 1946, when Dorothy and Teddy at last presented him with his first tenor saxophone. It's unclear exactly what the instrument's provenance was, or its company of manufacture: later in life Hayes's only recollection about his first saxophone was that it was "a pretty beat-up one." Nevertheless, his progress appears to have been instantaneous and, according to one interview, he was proficient enough to be playing along with the Squadronaires dance band on the radio by Boxing Day. "I picked up the fingering right away," he remarked in 1960, adding modestly "I think my ear must have been pretty good."¹⁹

Frustratingly, Hayes gave very little away over the years about his early days as a learner. With the exception of one lesson "which taught me how to take the instrument out of its case, and cost me about twenty-five shillings,"²⁰ he maintained that he was largely self-taught. Indeed, his descriptions of his early efforts tended to be brief and rather uninformative, usually along the lines of "I practised pretty hard for a couple of years"²¹ but, given the fact that he had a successful professional career with one of the top bands in the country barely four years after first taking up the saxophone, he can be forgiven for not offering much in the way of an explanation. The proof, he probably thought with some justification, was clear for all to hear. There is little doubt that he was a natural, and a prodigal one at that, but for all his inherent talent (and one cannot fail to recognize that his earlier efforts on the violin and piano contributed much to this rapid mastery of his new skill) there must have been a time when he simply settled down and got on with the basic groundwork of learning the mechanics of the instrument.

As anyone who has ever learned to play the saxophone to a degree of successful musical consistency is aware, there is much more to the task than simply learning the order of the keywork. A reasonable amount of digital dexterity can be achieved in a relatively short space of time, the very reason why so many amateur saxophonists with ambitions to play jazz can produce superficially impressive runs of notes without too much effort, but the difference between these callow efforts and a higher level of performance comes from a concentration on producing an effective and controlled tone, which is arguably harder to do and requires greater patience. This also



In the back garden
at Kenwyn Road
with his first
tenor saxophone.
Courtesy Liz
Grönlund.

accounts for the number of would-be saxophonists who complain about, or even abandon, their playing because “it doesn’t sound like the records I listen to.”

Tubby would have without doubt worked on his control (through the near mesmeric process of playing sustained notes) along with the development of his technical velocity, achieved by the same old routine that has blighted many a child’s piano lessons: scales and arpeggios and simple, sometimes mind-numbing, exercises designed to strengthen the fingers and heighten the hand/eye co-ordination. Later on in his career, he criticized his early playing for having a thin tone, but this might well have had nothing to do with a lack of application on his part, but rather on his following the fashionably “light” sound of the leading tenor saxophonists of the day.

Aside from a precociously quick grasp of the technicalities involved in playing his instrument, Hayes also boasted two other highly prized assets. He could read music fluently, the result of his earlier violin tuition, and, even more promisingly, he had an extremely receptive ear. It is not known whether he had perfect pitch – the uncanny ability possessed by some people to hear a note and identify exactly what pitch it is – but he certainly had relative pitch, whereby he could hear a melody and play it back instantly on his instrument without a delay in working out the relevant fingering – hence the early “sit-in” with the radio in the living room at Kenwyn Road.

The radio would have been an important part of Tubby’s musical education, as indeed it was for virtually all of his generation. Exposure to his father’s band meant he was familiar with the disciplined and sometimes over-fussy music that still ruled the airwaves after World War II, but, as the earlier encounter

with Benny Goodman has illustrated, odd spots of jazz did make their way onto the BBC. Alongside American records, there were also appearances by British groups on the programme *Jazz Club* (begun in 1947 and later to be a regular source of employment for Tubby). Much of the music heard on these broadcasts in the late 1940s echoed the small-band swing from earlier in the decade, but the growing interest in “revivalism,” a movement that sought to reinstate the values of early jazz from New Orleans, and which was making stars of players such as the young former guards officer Humphrey Lyttelton, meant there was also liberal helpings of even more backward-looking forms.

Bebop had taken a while to surface on the BBC and ironically it first did so in an unlikely place, on a show quaintly titled *Accordion Club*. Bandleader Tito Burns had assembled a group of young bop-influenced players including John Dankworth and Ronnie Scott, and for no other reason than his playing accordion, the band wangled a broadcast. The new music had therefore initially arrived via the back door, but as time went on more modern styles began to infiltrate *Jazz Club* and there were the infrequent occasions when the BBC might dare to play a recording by Charlie Parker, or by the brash new big bands led by Woody Herman and Stan Kenton.

Exactly *when* Tubby Hayes first heard Charlie Parker is undocumented, but he later revealed that the first Parker recording he owned was a 78 of ‘Stupendous’, a composition recorded for the Dial label in California in 1947 during an especially purple patch in the American’s career.²² Although he doubtless found delight in the playing of Parker’s sidemen on the disc – including the tenor saxophonist Wardell Gray, among the first to transfer the language of bebop onto the larger horn – for Tubby Hayes, it was the leader who was the king. The altoist’s example had also set him a formidable challenge: “I always wanted to sound like Parker. There weren’t any tenor players playing like that then.”²³

Alongside Charlie Parker, other influences were beginning to affect Tubby’s musical development, key amongst them being the altoist’s hand-in-glove partner Dizzy Gillespie. Parker was a genius, quixotic, mercurial and gifted with a language that couldn’t really be codified but in Gillespie Hayes had found an example that was more practically useful; his music was easier to comprehend and emulate: “He was sort of more accessible, he caught your attention more,” he later remarked.²⁴ It was small wonder that throughout his life Hayes’s work often contained the diminished scale runs that Dizzy had pioneered in the late 1940s, but what he lacked at this point – or rather hadn’t yet sought out – was a definitive tenor saxophone playing role model.

When he did eventually find a tenorist who truly caught his ear, ironically, his first major influence was not an American, but a fellow Londoner, Ronnie Scott. Charismatic, assured and with a musical strength that made him stand out among his peers, Scott quickly became a new hero for the young Hayes, and, although he didn’t yet know it, they already had much in common. Scott was an only child, doted on by his mother, and his father, a working musician,

had left the family home when Scott was a toddler. Hayes's home life was to follow a similar pattern. Both men had a steely compulsion to have their own way that sometimes meant they rode rough-shod over others. They also shared a definite flair for putting their music and themselves across with absolute professionalism. However, the opportunity to meet and play with his idol was still some way off, and for the time being Hayes sought out rather more parochial playing partners. Principal among these was Mike Oliver, with whom he co-formed his first band, the Oliver–Hayes Bopset, a quartet that played at local youth clubs.

In the days before rock and roll made a vocation out of teenage delinquency, youth clubs were the closest thing young people got to making their own entertainment on their own terms and in this quaint and unthreatening environment – where demonstrating a skill like playing a musical instrument would instantly win friends – it was unsurprising that Tubby Hayes was already beginning to make a reputation for himself.

He had also become a beacon of musical modernity for his fellow Rutlish pupils, all of whom were startled at how quickly he had been able to assimilate the message of bebop. Dudley Herbert recalls that Hayes's quick musical ear even delighted the school's music teacher Roy Howard.

Alongside providing a useful guide to what was hip, Hayes also revelled in recounting tales of late-night jam sessions and the wild antics of his bebop-obsessed associates.²⁵ Later to become a professional jazz drummer who would go on to work with Dick Morrissey, Joe Harriott and Michael Garrick, a younger pupil, Colin Barnes, saw the saxophonist as an idol, retaining a vivid memory of the blazered Tubby playing during an assembly in front of the whole school: "Mr Blenkinsop, the headmaster, introduced him and it was all very sober and serious: 'And now Hayes will play the saxophone'. He played 'East Of The Sun' and we loved it."²⁶

The school's attitude to Hayes's musical ambitions nevertheless remained inconsistent. Although there was pride in his precocious ability, and even special dispensation for him to keep his fashionable "Boston" hairstyle²⁷ – which he described to the head as "like a union card – without it I can't get work" – Hayes continued to shirk his academic studies. Indeed, fast approaching his final year of schooling, and showing no real sign of aligning himself to any subsequent career path, it had become clear that the distraction of music was now absolute. At home, when he wasn't playing, he'd be tuning into Armed Forces Network, the American radio station that had become a lifeline for many jazz-starved British fans. On occasion he'd also turn the dial to pick up French radio and when Charlie Parker played at the 1949 Paris Jazz Fair, the altoist's short-wave transmissions provided excuse enough for him to abandon his homework. There were also late-night bouts of saxophone practice, the Hayes's neighbours' reaction to which can only be imagined. The mornings after could be problematic for Tubby. He'd regularly doze off during maths lessons, incurring the wrath of a fearsome slipper-wielding

master named Hathway. Alan Reeves also recalls him being hauled up as a bad example to his peers: “I recall our physics master, a Mr Butler, singling out Tubby in front of the class – as he had clearly not done his homework – to say ‘you’ll never do anything in your life!’ How wrong could he be?”²⁸

The decision terminating Hayes’s schooling appears to have been taken sometime during 1950, when, according to legend, he overslept following a late-night gig and failed to turn up for an examination.²⁹ While, for Tubby, this early dismissal was a blessing, for his father the ramifications were harder-hitting: “My Dad paid out an unreturnable deposit to pay for my education till I was sixteen so he was pretty sick that I left at fifteen. He thought I was a nut not to stay at school.”³⁰ Despite his reservations, Teddy recognized his son’s determined talent and gave him a familiar qualified proviso: “[He] told me that I could try my hand at music for a year but after that I’d have to start earning a living.”³¹ There may well have been other factors at play in his father’s mind at this time. Now ensconced in the BBC Revue Orchestra, Teddy had finally come off the road, but his wanderlust remained as strong as ever. Finally Dorothy tired of seeing his charm work its spell on other women and the marriage disintegrated. Soon after Tubby’s departure from Rutlish, Teddy moved out, leaving Dorothy alone to deal with her now professional, and increasingly wayward, son.

Fame and success didn’t occur overnight for Tubby Hayes. His prodigal talent may have already promised much more than mere novelty value, but upon leaving school the spade work of commercial gigs continued apace. As had been the pattern during his final year at Rutlish, this work, still often with Mike Oliver, comprised local weddings, tea-dances and suburban youth clubs but there were also odd sorties further afield. The night of his first gig in the West End was to prove equal parts triumph and disaster: borrowing his father’s evening dress, Tubby had returned home the next morning minus his shirt and nursing a thundering hangover. For the time being Dorothy mitigated that her son had “not been used to drink and things like that,”³² but within a short space of time he had begun sinking pints with the ease of a lifelong drinker. Having now entered a tough, adult profession wherein seasoned players would expect a newcomer to prove his mettle in all sorts of ways, Tubby Hayes was growing up as fast as a hothouse flower.

In some instances the growth came with an ignominious price, and his first regular engagement, at a pub in Woolwich, was no exception: “[We] used to travel all the way from Raynes Park for 10s a night plus what we got going round with a collecting box. We split it between the five of us. The leader was a coalman and we used to drive to our dates sitting on the empty coal sacks in his truck.”³³ As the youngest member of the band, Hayes wasn’t always guaranteed a place in the cab and often rode on the back of the lorry. It was hardly an auspicious start to his professional career and one can imagine some hard-fought battles to look cool after a trip across London on an open coal truck. There were perks, however, as the gig fee included “everything

you could drink,”³⁴ something that, even at this early stage, he found a highly appealing prospect. But it was to be his youth that spelled the end of the gig: when the landlord discovered the saxophonist was only fifteen the band was instantly dismissed.

There were musical opportunities to be had closer to his home turf too and, in spring 1950, Hayes alighted on a new venue that had recently opened up in nearby Morden, the T and H Modern Rhythm Club.

The T stood for Les Tomkins, a young jazz fan and avid record collector who together with a bunch of like-minded friends was a regular attendee at dances held at nearby Wimbledon Palais. To supplement these trips, Tomkins thought that this nucleus needed a place to meet and play what he recalls as its collection of “swing, bebop and hot vocal discs.” Early in 1950, he began to lay the groundwork for the first of these club meetings and found suitable premises in Morden Assembly Rooms, handily adjacent to a pub called The Beverley, as the T and H, like most such gatherings of the time, was to be decidedly “dry.”

The club was soon presenting live jazz alongside its record recitals, creating a rare oasis of modernism for a mixed ability group of local players. Exactly how Tubby Hayes first heard of the T and H isn’t clear – although Les Tomkins recalled making extensive house-to-house leaflet drops advertising the club – but there is little doubt that he wanted a piece of the action.

Some time in May 1950, together with other assorted friends including Mike Oliver, he made his way to the club, intent on buttonholing Tomkins for a sit-in. Minus his tenor, Hayes – who Tomkins remembers as “a curly haired, rather corpulent lad”³⁵ – borrowed a baritone saxophone, got up in front of drummer Lennie Hastings and “proceeded to astound everybody.” “All the musicians there were saying ‘Who’s *this*?’”³⁶ Answering the question at the end of the night Tubby gave Tomkins his card, which read “The Oliver–Hayes Boptet.” His instant reaction was to enquire about the saxophonist’s future availability.

Besides Tomkins, other jazz promoters were beginning to sit up and take notice. Bix Curtis – a former trumpet player who would shortly write himself into the history books by defying the authorities and bringing Coleman Hawkins to the UK for a concert – organized a guest spot for Hayes with the Toni Anton band at Acton Town Hall on July 9th. “[His] capacity for showmanship was as large as his jacket,” wrote Mike Nevard in *Melody Maker* the following week, thus marking Hayes’s first notice in the national press.³⁷

The success of the T and H meetings at Morden soon prompted Les Tomkins to look for somewhat larger premises and during the summer of 1950 he moved the club to the Rosehill Community Centre in Sutton. Via agent Les Perrin (later to work for the Rolling Stones), he had also begun to organize a programme of visiting bands, as well as revamping the club’s use of local performers, now engaging a pool of nine musicians, including Tubby, pianists Jack Honeyborne and Harry South and saxophonist Les Simons,

all of whom alternated leadership of the club's resident group. Although he cannot recall the exact circumstances surrounding the break-up, Tomkins remembers that by the time of opening the new venue at Rosehill, "[Tubby's] former colleagues had been jettisoned and the real star was being featured."³⁸

The relocated T and H's "Grand Opening Night" on Monday September 4th presented "Britain's Musician of The Year, leading his own Band of Radio and Recording Fame, The Great Johnny Dankworth Seven," with, at the foot of the bill, The Tubby Hayes Group. The booking of Dankworth was an especially shrewd piece of business. Since Club XI had disintegrated earlier that year, the altoist had been running his own seven-piece group, which, in keeping with its leader's character, presented a lighter and less intense brand of modern jazz which was proving enormously popular. Unsurprisingly, Dankworth's set at the T and H drew a large crowd and as the leader and his men made way for the intermission slot by the resident band, they experienced the familiar feeling of dread they'd felt dozens of times before when faced with the prospect of hearing a group of local amateurs. Listening to Tubby Hayes, however, provided a shock of an altogether different kind, as the leader remembered: "We sort of pooh-poohed [Tubby] when he did his first intermission thing, and then at the end we were rather frightened about going on because he couldn't be followed."³⁹ "This little kid got on stage and exploded! There's no other way to put it," Dankworth's trombonist Eddie Harvey recalled years later. "We couldn't believe it."⁴⁰

Hayes's victory was sweet, but as if making musicians in the country's leading modern jazz group sit up and take note were not enough, two weeks later on September 18th he finally got the opportunity to play alongside his hero Ronnie Scott. Tomkins had booked the tenorist's Club Copacabana Sextet, another sure-fire draw, and as the evening progressed suggested Hayes might like to join Scott for a few numbers. Surprisingly, he found the younger saxophonist was far from enthusiastic. "I was scared stiff,"⁴¹ Hayes confessed years later, but he wasn't the only one unnerved by this historic meeting. Ronnie Scott would tell the story of this initial encounter many times over the next forty-five years, but never better than in the sleeve notes to one of Hayes's albums in the early 1960s: "During the course of the evening, a chubby young man who appeared to be about twelve years old (he was, in fact, fifteen) came on to the stand with a tenor saxophone only a couple of sizes smaller than himself and asked if he could 'sit-in'. With rather patronising amusement, I agreed. He then proceeded to scare the daylight out of me. The conception, the spirit and fire, the confidence in one so young and inexperienced was absolutely astonishing."⁴²

Word about the talents of the Raynes Park wunderkind was clearly spreading. Having rapidly become a local hero, he now took to looking elsewhere for opportunities to demonstrate his gifts. By the close of 1950, he was also venturing regularly to the White Hart in Acton, home of the faintly Goon Show-esque sounding Acton Bop Club, and to the Number 1 Jazz Club

in Great Newport Street, where Les Tomkins remembers him taking part in sessions involving scat-singer Alan Dean and fellow tenorist Kenny Graham, whose Afro-Cubists, one of the most distinctive of British modern outfits, had also visited Rosehill.



"He scared me to death." The flyer for the T and H Modern Rhythm Club gig during which Ronnie Scott first encountered the teenaged Tubby Hayes. Author's collection.

Like Scott and Dankworth, Graham had been instantly won over by the teenaged Hayes but, unlike the stoic Scott, his affection for the youngster showed itself in an almost avuncular form. Indeed, it appears that it may well have been Graham who first furnished the young Hayes with the nickname The Little Giant around this time. At five foot, five inches tall, Hayes appreciated the sentiment but detested the name.

It may well be worth pausing at this point for a revised look at Hayes's oft-remarked-upon weight. Intriguingly, photos taken at various points during his time at Rutlish give the lie to legends of a "fat little boy" and show a full-faced yet handsome young man, with no suggestion of any obesity. The only sign of anything that might have given rise to his nickname is merely some teenage puppy-fat. His earliest publicity photos, taken some time in 1951, show a trimmer physique still: the only thing in excess is hair, as he had yet to lose the Boston.

Les Tomkins saw a further opportunity for Hayes early in 1951 when he read in *Melody Maker* that trumpeter Kenny Baker was forming a sextet.

Although he was no bebopper, Baker's fiery yet sweet playing had been a key part in the success of the first Ted Heath band, and now, frustrated at a lack of opportunity to play small-group jazz, he was looking to strike out on his own. When he discovered that the trumpeter was due to make a guest soloist appearance at Acton, Tomkins wasted no time in orchestrating a meeting between the star soloist and his young friend. Like Dankworth, Scott and Graham, Baker was immediately impressed and, as had been Tomkins's intention all along, by the end of the evening he had offered Hayes a job.⁴³

Joining what amounted to the most exciting new jazz group in the country was vindication for Hayes, and when *Melody Maker* broke the news of Baker's new signing on February 10th, complete with a photograph of the band



Young man with a horn. Tubby sports the legendary "Boston" for his first publicity photograph, 1951. Author's collection.

caught during a break in rehearsals, among those who saw it and smiled with vicarious pride was his former school friend Alan Reeves. "It amazed us all, with a mother of one of my school friends saying 'What? Little Tubby?!"⁴⁴ Hayes – the recalcitrant pupil who barely a few months before had been told he'd never amount to anything – had finally made it.

The biggest impression Hayes was making, however, was upon his fellow band mates. The personnel of Baker's sextet shifted subtly over the first few months of its existence, but the opening line-up featured two musicians with whom he would form fast friendships: veteran tenor saxophonist Jimmy Skidmore and, closer to his own age, clarinetist Vic Ash, also embarking on his first professional "name" job.

To his younger colleagues, Skidmore – arguably the first great jazz saxophonist the UK had produced – was a veritable fount of knowledge, a player who knew the business, and all its ups and downs, inside out. To be privy to such wisdom was bound to prove insightful, so much so that Hayes later declared the best thing about his stay with the Baker sextet had been getting the chance to work alongside Skidmore. The admiration was mutual: Skidmore's similarly talented tenor-playing son Alan remembers his father returning home from an early Baker gig raving about "this youngster – he's absolutely phenomenal."⁴⁵

After a month of rehearsals, the Baker band made its debut at the No. 1 Jazz Club in Great Newport Street on Sunday March 4th and headed out on the road for the first time a week later for a concert at Manchester Hippodrome. Work for the group had yet to pick up and, as Baker organized a more widespread tour for later in the spring, Hayes continued to freelance with a bewildering array of players: he appeared with a big band led by the legendary British bop guru Denis Rose at the Downbeat Club in Archer Street on March 3rd and on March 9th drummer Billy Kaye's Contemporary Music Society presented him as a member of The Martin Feldman All Stars, a group led by the future comedian and actor. The contrast between the diligent Hayes and the leader – a self-confessed musical chancer – couldn't have been stronger. Years later Feldman delightfully confessed, "I have a write-up that describes me as the worst trumpet player in the world, which sums it up, I think."⁴⁶

Even though Hayes had clearly moved on from the circle around the T and H Modern Rhythm Club he was still in regular contact with Les Tomkins, and on April 5th, 1951, he recorded a privately cut 12" 78 rpm acetate accompanying Tomkins's vocals at R. G. Jones Studio in Morden. Although the leader sings with spirit on both sides, the real value of the disc unsurprisingly lies in Tubby Hayes's full chorus solo on 'Good Bait' (he does not solo on the reverse). It would be nearly three years until he would set foot in a professional recording studio to make a commercially available recording featuring his solo skills, and consequently Tomkins's acetate is not only historically significant but musically revelatory – the first evidence of



The Kenny Baker Sextet, 1951. Baker (trumpet) leads David Milne (piano), Allan McDonald (bass), Pete Bray (drums), Vic Ash (alto saxophone), Jimmy Skidmore (tenor saxophone) and Tubby Hayes, aged sixteen. Courtesy Vic Ash.

Tubby Hayes, the youthful giant slayer, already capable of playing men with far more experience to a standstill.

So how does he sound to twenty-first-century ears? The answer is simple: impressive, extremely competent and confident, and, as would be the case throughout his career, like a consolidator rather than someone with a startlingly new voice. The tenor tone is light, edgy and cool, in line with the prevailing Stan Getz influence of the day, and the absence of any of the clichéd vocabulary of bebop is also telling. Indeed, throughout the solo, Hayes sounds very much like Getz did in the late 1940s, and, even if this can ultimately be dismissed as mere mimicry, it is still no mean achievement for one so young.

After Charlie Parker, Stan Getz had become the strongest force in shaping Hayes's musical language. "Back in 1951 *everyone* was trying to imitate Stan Getz," he remarked later,⁴⁷ but we also know that by this point he had heard some of the first recordings issued in the UK by Sonny Stitt and Sonny Rollins (including the classic August 1949 session made for Blue Note under Bud Powell's leadership) both of whom had transplanted the cadences of Charlie Parker to the tenor. There is nothing of this in the recording with Tomkins. In fact, listening to Hayes on 'Good Bait', one is instantly struck by how cool and reserved he sounds – a world away from the full-on drive of his mature music. Indeed, the disc only adds to the impression that his pre-1955 discography actually contains very little to support his early wunderkind reputation. However, this is a judgement informed by hindsight and one must not forget

that, in the UK of the early 1950s, such an accomplished facsimile of the latest American style must have seemed hugely impressive, especially when delivered by a sixteen-year-old.

The folklore that has grown up around Hayes since his death has also loaded our expectations. His initial meeting with Ronnie Scott, a few months before the recording with Tomkins, has invariably been written up as some sort of tenor battle, the imagined soundtrack of which appears in the mind's ear as something akin to the two men's later *Jazz Couriers* collaboration. The truth is that, in the *very* early 1950s, Hayes was still a long way from being the machine-gunning technician he was to become later and that – not for the last time in his career – his talent was for following fashion rather than dictating it.

Further evidence of his youthful development was delivered a few weeks after his recording with Tomkins, on April 21st, 1951, when he made his first BBC appearance, playing two numbers alongside blind pianist Eddie Thompson in the “Jazz for Moderns” slot of *Jazz Club*. “Considering how [he] plays at the age of sixteen,” *Melody Maker*'s Maurice Burman wrote presciently of Hayes, “he ought to top the poll by twenty – if Ronnie [Scott] will let him.”⁴⁸

2 Boy Wonder Tenorist (1951–55)

Every session is a clambake, a party, and being young and full of the zest of life he makes the most of it.

Patric Doonan, *Weekly Sporting Review*, 1955

The Kenny Baker Sextet begun to strike out to the provinces that same month, with the band's first ballroom gig, at South Parade Pier, Southsea, attended by a crowd of two thousand, giving a hopeful indication of future success. The group's first tour proper began on May 5th, 1951, following an unusual engagement at the Granada Theatre in Sutton, during which it performed for an exclusively school-aged audience, some of whom were barely a few years Tubby Hayes's junior. That same evening the band appeared in Ipswich, before heading off for gigs in Leicester, Chorlton-cum-Hardy, Leith, Leeds, Sheffield, Whitley Bay, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Cowdenbeath, a wide range of locations typical of a touring band's itinerary at the time.

Vic Ash remembered life on the road with Baker with a mix of horror and affection: "He had bought an old, barely roadworthy coach with no heater, as was usual in those days, in which to get around. It was not the most comfortable way to travel and was a hard introduction to youngsters like Tubby and me."¹ Travelling to and from gigs in the pre-motorway Britain of the early 1950s was an arduous task and every touring band faced the same hurdles. Then working the traditional jazz circuit, trumpeter Dickie Hawdon remembered well how time-consuming it could all be: "For a gig in Liverpool you left Alsop Place (behind Baker Street where all the bands used to meet) at around 8.30 am. You didn't get back until 7.30 the next morning."² Bassist Pete Blannin, another regular on the road, recalls how "everything took an age then, with no motorways. It used to take four or five hours to get to Manchester. The next morning you'd stumble off the coach absolutely knackered and there's all these people going to work, clean, fresh, smart with collars and ties, and we'd all be shattered."³

On the longer trips – and if they could afford it – bands stayed overnight, but, in the days before elaborate contractual “riders” stipulating high standards of accommodation, the musicians often had to find their own digs. A regular port of call was Mrs Mac’s boarding house in Manchester. “It was home to all the touring bands,” recalled Vic Ash. “It had one single bedroom for the bandleader and one large dormitory with eight beds in it, which the rest of us used for the privilege of five shillings night. You can imagine the grunts and groans and odours during the night!”⁴ If places like Mrs Mac’s were not available, a band would be forced to split up and scour the streets for a single room.⁵

Alongside the ways of the itinerant musician, the first Kenny Baker tour introduced Tubby Hayes to many things he’d grow used to in the coming years. He accompanied an American star – the vocalist Nellie Lutcher – for the first time, and developed a begrudging affection for the lethal food served by the nation’s transport cafes (which, in the words of Benny Green, “dotted the country’s highways like a run of acne”⁶). There were other vices too, such as the over-enthusiastic female fans that would make themselves readily available. “These girls would follow the bands around and offer their services, not for money,” Vic Ash maintained, “but because they were such fans of jazz musicians.”⁷ Casual sex was available nationwide, with some of these “groupies” garnering quite a reputation for their accommodating manner. The most notorious of all was “Jean,” a colourful lady from one of the big industrial towns in the north of England. “She was something else,” one musician remembered. “She would only do oral, that’s all, everything else was off the menu, but she would give a great blow-job.” One day, one of Hayes’s colleagues came down to breakfast at a boarding house to find the young man seated in closed-eyed reverie at the kitchen table. “Aaaah! First one of the day,” Hayes beamed, as Jean surfaced, smiling. Jean was certainly exceptional: without stylistic prejudice, she would provide her services to musicians in both the modern and traditional fields of jazz. Benny Green even went so far as to joke that when Ronnie Scott enlarged his group to a big band the fan who had gained the most out of the decision had been Jean.⁸

Occasionally, faced with such an inconsistent lifestyle even a young man with the cast-iron constitution of Tubby Hayes could find it all too much. When the Baker band played the Winter Gardens in Ventnor that July, he passed out, according to the *Melody Maker*, suffering from the effects of heat. The headline “Tubby Keeps Going Despite Collapse”⁹ and the accompanying description of his being advised to rest but refusing to let the band down is an eerie precursor to the kind of news Hayes would make during the 1960s. For the time being, however, he managed to keep his vices under control. “He’d drink a bit and maybe have a joint,” Vic Ash remembered, “but in those days, Tubby wasn’t doing anything heavy, maybe just the odd smoke.”¹⁰

Ever since the “Jazz Age” the music had an associated narcotic culture, as the multitude of songs with the words ‘Reefer’ and ‘Viper’ in their title

betrayed, and cannabis joints were by no means unknown to the young beboppers. Tubby had started smoking cigarettes at school and to indulge in something more illicit probably seemed little more than part of his rite of passage into the upper echelons of the music business. However, something far darker and more deadly came with the new music: heroin addiction.

News of Charlie Parker's habit had arrived in the UK through the distorted rumour-mill of jazz folklore. Parker was known to be a hedonist, and for some European fans ignorant of the ravages of his addiction, musical modernity and narcotic indulgence seemed to be logical bedfellows. Inevitably, several of the younger English modernists began to ape their American counterparts in ways other than simple musical flattery, progressing from cannabis to heroin. One, the drummer Phil Seamen, summed up this disturbing attitude when he stated "Bebop is heroin music."¹¹

To his credit, Tubby Hayes's emulation of his American heroes at this time only went so far. "People always talk about Tubby's raving side, but by far the most impressive thing about him was his music," Vic Ash commented;¹² and in summer 1951 the impression Hayes was making upon listeners received its first international acknowledgement when Barry Ulanov, the editor of the American music magazine *Metronome* (second only to *DownBeat* as chronicler of the latest jazz news) wrote a glowing endorsement in *Melody Maker*: "One of the very few English jazzmen who create a fresh pattern and an original fabric of ideas in a bop setting is a youngster I heard with the Kenny Baker band, a 16 year old tenor saxophonist by the name of Tubby Hayes."¹³

Exactly how Tubby Hayes sounded whilst with Kenny Baker's sextet is, yet again, something of a guessing game. The only commercially issued recording by the band during Hayes's stay doesn't feature him in any capacity other than that of an ensemble player. Parlophone had cut a test session with the band at EMI's soon-to-be-legendary Abbey Road Studios in June 1951 and a month later, on July 24th, the group recorded two titles, issued on the dark blue label "Rhythm-Style" series: 'I Can't Get Started', a feature for Baker, and 'I Only Have Eyes For You', including solos from Vic Ash and Jimmy Skidmore.

In the absence of any other recorded evidence from the time, surviving concert programmes provide the best indication as to the Baker band's musical bias outside the studio. They make fascinating reading: bop standards such as 'Marmaduke', 'The Squirrel', 'Ow' and 'Wee Dot' rub shoulders with themes such as 'Ray Anthony's Boogie' and 'Music, Music, Music' and there is a heavy emphasis on the vocals of either Linda Ellington or Joan Brook. Given such unfocused prospects it was hardly surprising that, although he'd barely been professional for a few months, by the autumn of 1951 Hayes was already getting itchy feet. Even a revamped band, bringing in other musicians closer in age, including saxophonist Harry Klein and pianist Stan Tracey, couldn't stop his musical wanderlust.

The final gig with Baker was on November 3rd and instantly Hayes moved on to another six-piece line-up led by another trumpeter, Terry Brown, a player with an interesting pedigree who would eventually abandon performing to become a successful producer for the Philips and Pye labels, working in both the folk and jazz idioms. During the 1960s, Brown would go on to produce several of Tubby Hayes albums, but in 1951 he was one of a small handful of local modern jazz trumpeters. He was also hopelessly idealistic, believing that artistic integrity and show-business commerce needn't automatically cancel each other out. Initially he had made the outwardly sensible decision to pattern his new outfit on a well-known role model, the sextet of accordionist Tito Burns, which had scored as much of a commercial bullseye as was possible from modern jazz in the UK with its adaptation of the style of the famed Charlie Ventura Bop For The People group. The glaring fact that Ventura's original had eventually floundered didn't seem to enter the equation.

The limited circle of jazz venues across the capital meant that the band was soon working favourite haunts such as Studio 51 and the White Hart in Acton, as well as venues which at this distance in time sound like something from a far less sardonic age, such as the Maidstone Rhythm Club and the Boathouse Bop Club in Kew. It was by no means a glamorous existence, as Brown recalled: "We had no transport, and my extra-musical job was transporting the music stands and arrangements packaged together with string, and meeting up with jobsworth bus conductors."¹⁴ Finally, after such an undignified start, a welcome three weeks of work outside of London presented itself at The West End Café in Edinburgh over Christmas 1951. "Sean Connery was one of the bouncers," Brown remembered,¹⁵ but being let off the leash so far away from home proved to be the band's undoing. On New Year's Eve they were invited to a party held by an individual Brown recalled as a prominent "local bigwig," during which the leader's young sidemen got very drunk. "Tubby had discovered a local brew called Thompson's British Wine at five shillings a bottle. Thanks to Tubby over-imbibing somewhat we were all thrown out. Into the cold, cold snow."¹⁶ The band split shortly afterwards.

If the ignominious death of Brown's sextet had been merely disappointing, Hayes's next job was nothing short of hilarious. Earlier the previous year, much to his sidemen's disgust, Kenny Baker had taken a holiday, leaving his band high and dry and without work. For Hayes, a lucky break came when bandleader Roy Fox offered a two-week engagement bridging the gap. He took the job, played the fortnight and, as a result, the bandleader made a note that should he ever need a tenorist, the young man would prove ideal.

Although American by birth, Fox had been a doyen in British society circles since the 1930s, but by the early 1950s he realized that a move with the times – albeit a considered one – had become necessary in order to survive. In February 1952, the prospect of working regularly with a band chockfull of bebop-obsessed contemporaries – Hank Shaw, Vic Feldman and bassist

Lennie Bush among them – coupled with regular money, seemed ideal to Tubby Hayes. The reality was less endearing. Despite the new blood, Fox's band remained unrequitedly square and proffered nothing more challenging than an innocuous dance repertoire. The leader was also notoriously bad at paying his men on time, leaving a string of unpaid debts. Within a couple of weeks, Hayes was already feeling the pinch. Les Tomkins remembers meeting the saxophonist in an especially despondent mood on one of Fox's gigs, and believes it to be the first time he had ever witnessed the effect of stimulants other than alcohol on his friend. It was brief though, though, and within two weeks Hayes had left the band, appending a cynical commentary about the experience in his own scrapbook. Written in ink beneath a picture of the Fox and his musicians are the words "I joined this band in February 1952 and left in February 1952. Reason? NO MONEY."

Joining Tito Burns's group for a Scottish tour, Hayes's next career move looked more promising. Burns had upped his usual numbers to that of a fourteen-piece big band, containing friends Harry Klein and Benny Green in the saxophone section; however, the uncanny knack for joining bands just as they changed musical policy persisted when Hayes was recruited to Burns's regular sextet that May. "I had only two solos. The Champ and Intermission Riff,"¹⁷ he later recalled with disgust.

The real issue was that Burns was first and foremost a shrewd businessman and throughout his sextet's existence he'd always somehow contrived to balance business with bebop. Indeed, he was among the first commercial bandleaders in Britain to adopt the style, employing young mavericks such as John Dankworth, Ronnie Scott and Tony Crombie when few other name bands would have touched them. However, by the summer of 1952, whatever saleable steam there had been in the music was fast running out, and Tubby Hayes found himself aboard a less than happy ship that was taking an age to sink. A photograph of Burns's group in Hayes's scrapbook, taken in Ramsgate during the summer of 1952, shows a glum-looking saxophonist apparently puffing his cheeks out in exasperation, and is titled "Tito's Happy Smiling Band." Like all of Hayes's employers, all Burns was attempting to do was keep alive a financially solvent working band. His only mistake was to employ a clutch of young bebop musicians, none of whom really sympathized with their leader's plight.

Away from his sideman duties, Hayes's reputation as a jazzman was still on the upsurge. Billed under straplines like "Boy wonder tenorist," there was certainly no shortage of opportunities to show off his skills. His diary for 1952 lists countless appearances at the Feldman Club in Oxford Street and at now-forgotten suburban venues such as the Beehive Club, London; the Lion's Den, Sutton; the Club 23, West Norwood; the Robin's Nest, Hornchurch; and the Royal Roost, Leytonstone. The list of musicians participating in these ad-hoc engagements makes fascinating reading: Hayes played alongside most of the prominent local modernists of the day including Joe Harriott, Danny

Moss, Les Condon, Victor Feldman, Hank Shaw, Leon Calvert, Vic Ash, Harry South, Bob Burns, Dickie Devere, Don Lusher, Eddie Thompson and Jimmy Skidmore. There were also occasional reunions with his old idol Ronnie Scott, like that at the Gearbox Club in Dartford in December 1952. But perhaps the most remarkable of all these ad-hoc gigs were the All-Nighter sessions held on Christmas and New Year's Eve at the Zan-Zeba Club, during which Hayes locked horns with Benny Green. The Zan-Zeba was located at 39 Gerrard Street, later to become the first home of Ronnie Scott's club.



The Robin's Nest, Hornchurch, October 1952. Courtesy Peter Tongue.

Tubby Hayes now had reason besides a full diary to feel satisfied. The previous autumn he had met Margaret Helen Yates, a pretty blonde who worked as a photo finisher at Wykeham Studios in Streatham. The couple's courtship was – typically for Tubby – brief and straight to the point. Already a jazz fan, Maggie had encountered the boyish saxophonist for the first time on a trip to Wimbledon Palais and despite his being five years her junior the



The soon-to-be Mrs Hayes: Margaret Yates, circa 1952. Author's collection.

attraction was instant and mutual: she found the young prodigy charming, funny, outrageous even, and, although by no means innocent, she was hardly prepared for his final gambit of the night. Returning to her cousin's flat, she discovered that her young beau was intent on much more than just a kiss goodnight. "I thought 'Oh, he's just a boy'. I thought I could handle him but he was very mature in *every way*."¹⁸

From then on the couple were, in Maggie's words, "inseparable," although the social strictures of the time presented a very real impasse for the young lovers. She remembers that an early visit to the Hayes family home wasn't to meet Dorothy – quite the opposite – but to assuage their mutual passion. Even trips away from their home turf could prove tricky. Terry Brown's disastrous Scottish tour of Christmas 1951 found "Mr and Mrs Hayes" ensconced in a boarding house, with "Mrs Hayes" the proud owner of a Woolworth's wedding ring hastily bought before the trip. But these youthful trysts also had their darker side. Between 1951 and their marriage in 1953, Maggie fell pregnant three times, with each pregnancy terminated in covert, back-street abortions.¹⁹

To the casual observer, Hayes's next career move might have looked even more musically disastrous than that he had made when joining Tito Burns. He was now recruited by veteran dance band leader "Bert" Ambrose, a legend whose West End residencies before World War II had made him the ultimate figure in musical high society. Like Roy Fox, Ambrose had realized that he had to make compromises for a post-war audience, but it had been done

through gritted teeth. “The dance-music public has changed completely,” he told *Melody Maker* in the spring of 1953. “It seems to be composed almost entirely of youngsters in their teens. There’s been a revolution in the dance-music business. And they know what they they’re paying for. Their musical knowledge is amazing. They ask for ‘The Champ’ or ‘The Hawk Talks’ and expect to get these numbers as they hear them on records.”²⁰

New Musical Express ran the story of Ambrose’s resurgence as if it were the dramatic recovery of a dying patient. “Among the finest he has ever fronted,” the paper declared of the new band, predicting that its formation would “bring him back into the public eye with a real bang.”²¹ Alongside Hayes, among the other young performers Ambrose had personally selected were saxophonist Jimmy Walker, Jamaican trumpeter Pete Pitterson and pianist Ken Moule, and although the veteran bandleader knew what he was looking for – in short, youth – he wasn’t really familiar with the work of the newer names under his charge. Hayes later remembered the novel way in which he’d been recruited: “Bert phoned me up and said ‘Are you Tubby Hayes?’ I said yes. He said ‘Can you play “The Champ?”’ I said yes. And he said, ‘You’re in!’”²²

Another new Ambrose signing was drummer Phil Seamen, the soon-to-be-legendary hell-raiser and a figure who was to play a dark and inconsistent part in Tubby Hayes’s life in the decades ahead. The two men’s relationship would always remain somewhat problematic. Maggie Hayes describes it as “destructive”²³ while bassist Jeff Clyne called it “a sort of a love–hate thing.”²⁴ But in 1953, at the time they joined Ambrose, the two men were at their closest. Similarly wild and rebellious, both revelled in whatever merriment they could make. Inevitably, Ambrose found the behaviour of the young men under his direction almost as intolerable as the new music they played. Bassist Pete Blannin sometimes worked with the band and found the leader’s attitude towards musical progress far less charitable during gigs than had been related in the press: “We would be playing the more commercial stuff and then he’d say ‘Right. Now we’re going to have the bebop band [within a band] play something for you’ and then he’d walk off with his fingers in his ears. He was really a dance band guy.”²⁵

Together with the seismic changes to his musical policy, the veteran star also now faced the indignity of boarding the same coach as his sidemen, just one of many reminders that his day had passed: when he arrived at an engagement in Whitley Bay in Yorkshire to find his name advertised on a chalkboard he took exception to the lack of publicity and refused to perform. But there were occasional triumphs too, and when the band headed a Coronation Ball at Southampton Guildhall on May 29th, 1953 it must have seemed like a return to former glories.

On October 27th, 1953, close to the end of his stay with Ambrose, Tubby and Margaret were married. Hayes’s proposal, Maggie recalls, had been as much practical as romantic. When she had moved into a downstairs flat in Brixton Hill earlier that year, her boyfriend had followed her, a situation



Mr and Mrs
Hayes: Tubby
marries Margaret
Yates, Tuesday
October 27th,
1953. Author's
collection.

prompting an apoplectic reaction from her landlady. “I remember her saying that this was a respectable place and it wouldn’t do. These days this sort of thing is just accepted but then an unmarried couple living together was a real taboo. When I told Tubby this, he just said ‘Right then, we’ll get married!’”²⁶

Before the wedding could take place, Hayes had another dilemma to attend to: aged eighteen, he had received his call-up for National Service, an opportunity that many of his generation were to later describe as defining, but which to a successful, headstrong, professional musician with a good career already established for himself held little appeal. Dodging the call to arms was possible if you knew who to ask and there were several names in the business that had done just that, including Ronnie Scott, who had been summarily dismissed from his RAF medical after he turned up speeding on Bensedrine. Others preferred to use the services of a corrupt Harley Street doctor who’d take a substantial fee for declaring his “patient” medically unsound. Along these lines, a young saxophone student of Hayes, Bruce Miles, remembers his teacher’s cryptic description of how he’d avoided National Service by “[paying] someone £100 to ‘fix it’ for him. I didn’t bother to ask who or how!”²⁷

According to Maggie Hayes, the wedding day was distinctly lacking in fuss. “We picked a Tuesday because we knew a lot of guys wouldn’t be working and we went down to Lambeth Registry Office with just Tubby’s mum and my mum. I made my own dress and I certainly don’t remember Tubby buying a new suit.”²⁸ The witnesses – trumpeter Les Condon and saxophonist Lennie Dawes – found the whole ceremony hilarious, the result of smoking several joints beforehand, while the reception – more or less an open house at Brixton Hill – had ended when MacBean, Kenny Baker’s powerfully built roadie, jammed shut the bedroom door in an effort to get the last guests to go home and leave the newlyweds in peace.

There was no honeymoon for the couple and married life soon settled into some sort of routine. Tubby would get out of bed every morning and practise

whilst still in his dressing gown (“Not scales and all that, but tunes”²⁹) but any activity on the domestic front was alien to him. Maggie says,

I did everything. He wasn't lazy but he just devoted himself to music. He wouldn't even knock in a nail as he was frightened of hurting his hands. We had a coal fire but if I didn't make it up Tubby would turn on the little electric heater as he didn't know how to make a fire. If I did light it and went out, he wouldn't put any coal on so when I got back it would be really low. He needed a woman to take care of him and that was my job. Music was all that mattered to him.³⁰

The couple's flat soon became a familiar port of call to many London jazzmen and, although far from salubrious, it was the scene of many convivial evenings. “It was a really rough and ready place, very grotty,” Eddie Harvey remembered. “In fact, one night at a party someone fell through the floorboards – it was that bad.”³¹ Occasionally there were early signs of the decay of Tubby and Maggie's relationship. Hayes could be possessive and was quick to anger when challenged. One night, he arrived home drunk with a group of friends and proceeded to pull Maggie into the kitchen by her hair, demanding she cook a meal, before he was pacified by drummer Lennie Breslaw.³² Maggie, however, was no soft touch. Eddie Harvey remembered another evening during which the couple began a terrific argument.

Tubby was swearing, you know. “You fucking bitch” and all that, and Maggie was giving as good as she got. Anyway, Tubby got really angry and proceeded to chase her out of the flat and down the hill. She was screaming and as she ran there were these two guys, bakers, who were obviously loading their van or something as it's about three in the morning, and all they see is this woman screaming and being chased by this guy. So they start to chase Tubby! I can see him now, running as fast as he could back into the flat!³³

During the same week as the wedding, Hayes had accepted an invitation to join the orchestra of Vic Lewis, then about to embark on a “Tribute to Stan Kenton” tour alongside the band of Ronnie Scott. After the disappointments of his stay with Ambrose, it seemed that the offer might at last afford him the chance to enter an enclave of genuine modernism. Lewis certainly had a controversial reputation for barrier-breaking music. Born in 1919, he was older than most of the other London modernists but, unlike Bert Ambrose or Roy Fox, his conversion to newer musical forms had been both sincere and successful. Having heard the Stan Kenton Orchestra on a wartime V-Disc, he had been determined to pattern something of his own in Kenton's image.

By and large he had succeeded, but the pressures of a circuit dominated by Palais edicts and strict tempos meant that commercial concessions were rarely far away. A surviving broadcast from January 1954, a few weeks after Tubby Hayes joined, gives a good indication as to the band's sometimes mixed aims: Hayes plays a Zoot Sims-like solo on the opener, Gerry Mulligan's 'Bark For Barksdale', and has a brief spot on Lewis's adaptation of 'Down By The Riverside', before the programme slides further down the ladder to novelties like 'O Mien Papa' and 'South Of The Border'. A far better testament to the band's ability came the following week, when Decca Records began a series of recording sessions for a new LP, centred on the music of Gerry Mulligan, whose piano-less quartet had recently turned the jazz world on its head. Released under the title *Mulligan's Music*, the recordings marked Tubby Hayes's first solo exposure on a commercially available disc.

Three years on from the acetate with Les Tomkins, he had clearly developed. He solos on seven of the eight titles (an eighth tenor solo on 'Walkin' Shoes' appears to be by his section mate, Les Wigfield) and plays with a sense of time and tone fittingly reminiscent of Stan Kenton's tenors of the day, such as Zoot Sims and Richie Kamuca. The sound is light, the swing breezy and the improvised lines by no means wholly locked into the bebop vernacular. Rather surprisingly, the one improvisation that is redolent of the steam-roller delivery for which Hayes would soon be renowned is that on 'Bark For Barksdale', wherein, at Lewis's request, he plays the baritone saxophone. The leader was undoubtedly thinking of Mulligan, but his young sideman sounds more akin to Cecil Payne or Serge Chaloff. Indeed, battling against a band whose enthusiasm borders on crudity, Hayes's playing is without doubt the best thing about the *Mulligan's Music* album. However, the music press of the day certainly saw nothing portentous in the recordings, with *Melody Maker* delivering a penny plain review which simply states "should go well with all who like honest-to-goodness swing."³⁴

Piecing together the story of Hayes's musical development pre-1955 requires the ability to make lengthy leaps between very few recorded stepping stones. The rediscovery of early acetates with Les Tomkins, Eddie Thompson and others has rounded out the picture considerably but the next step on from his official studio debut was a short one indeed. Three days after the final session for *Mulligan's Music*, on Saturday January 23rd, 1954 the Vic Lewis Orchestra's "Tribute to Stan Kenton" tour reached Sheffield City Hall, where it was recorded in circumstances that remain unclear. It appears that Lewis himself may have arranged for the concert to be taped using stereo equipment – then a new form of sound reproduction – in order for it to be sent to Stan Kenton. In the late seventies, Lewis unearthed mono acetates of the entire concert which, in truncated form and running slightly fast, were released on an LP by the HEP label.

Alongside reruns of much of the recent *Mulligan's Music* material, Hayes is featured in a quartet spot with the band's rhythm section, playing a two-tempo



Publicity still, 1953. Author's collection.

reading of 'Too Marvellous For Words' which proves to be his most revealing recording thus far. The first ballad chorus is pure Roost-era Stan Getz – clean-toned, lyrical, reserved yet romantic – but, once at medium tempo, the shape and momentum of his improvisation takes on a more characteristic Hayesian slant, with suggestions of his future work for the Tempo label, albeit tempered slightly by the cooler, leaner tone. Even if the treatment seems a little contrived and the playing somewhat routine and formulaic, the results remain impressive, especially coming from one so young. Indeed, 'Too Marvellous For Words' is just the kind of precocious performance that was then making jaws drop in London's jazz club. A few days shy of his nineteenth birthday, Tubby Hayes was already a jazzman with much to say.

Early in 1954, *Melody Maker* published the results of its annual readers' poll and for the first time Hayes had entered the running. In later years jazz polls were seen as somewhat academic, but in the 1950s the results in papers like *Melody Maker* and *New Musical Express* were much anticipated – acting as a valid guide to who was hot and who was not. Hayes had come in at sixth place in the tenor saxophone category, taking him several steps closer to realizing Maurice Burman's earlier prediction:

1. Ronnie Scott 6151
2. Tommy Whittle 4826
3. Don Rendell 3211
4. Art Ellefson 1206
5. Kenny Graham 943
6. Tubby Hayes 851

The result was also a reminder that, despite all the necessary to-ing and fro-ing in commercial big bands, Hayes remained first and foremost a committed jazzman. Making a living, however, was still a concern. Vic Lewis's wage was barely enough and in March 1954 he left the band to join the Jack Parnell Orchestra, an appointment that would prove to be his last regular sideman job.

By the mid-1950s, Parnell was already something of a household name. A stint with Ted Heath's band in the late 1940s had effectively launched him as the UK's first real big band drum star, along the lines of American idols such as Gene Krupa and Buddy Rich. However, like those of Hayes's previous employers, his own bandleading efforts had been somewhat sabotaged by wilful and unsympathetic sidemen. The band into which Hayes now entered was no exception. With personalities as forthright as Phil Seamen, Ken Wray and Hank Shaw in his charge, Parnell faced an especially tough time keeping everyone happy, walking an awkward line between purism and novelty. The band recorded regularly for the Parlophone label; in among the pop songs, Hayes appears in a solo capacity on two titles: 'Sure Thing', taped on June 10th, 1954 and 'Trip To Mars', recorded late in September of the same year. The excellence of the band's performance makes one wish for more: Neil Hefti's 'Sure Thing' is pure Basie, with the tenorist in a lazy, Wardell Gray bag, whilst 'Trip To Mars' is a suitably ballistic Marty Paich arrangement complete with rocket sound effects. The short solo spots for Hayes, trumpeter Jo Hunter and trombonist Ken Wray are balanced by band passages which sound very close to the contemporary work of Stan Kenton and Woody Herman.

Despite these blasts of modernism, daily life in a commercial British big band continued to have more than its share of downtime and drudgery. Relieving this was simple – you drank more. Phil Seamen was Hayes's room-mate on Parnell's out-of-town trips and together the two men now embarked on a hedonistic lifestyle more commonly associated with later generations of rock stars. Pete Blannin depped on a Scottish tour made by the band during the summer of 1954 and was shocked to discover the disparity between his colleague's on- and off-stage behaviour:

We were doing [a gig at] Greens Playhouse in Glasgow and I was sharing with Phil and Tubby. Phil was incredible. He had a whole

stack of band parts and they were pristine! He just played them at a rehearsal and that was it, he never needed to look at them again. Anyway, one morning, we're all in bed and there's this knock at the door and this guy comes in and says "C'mon Tubby – wake up! I've got a beer for you." That was how they'd start the day. It was crazy, but on the stand they were both perfectionists, total professionals.³⁵

Alongside drink, Hayes also maintained his interest in another distraction – cannabis. Whereas Seamen was already locked in the throes of serious heroin addiction – still a rarity among British jazz artists at this time – the softer option of smoking a joint was open to everyone and Hayes had taken to pot with the same enthusiasm that he had for anything that took his fancy, musical or otherwise. He'd even done his bit for turning others on to it, including, allegedly, pianist Stan Tracey.³⁶

However, the law was less naïve than it had been a few years earlier during the fiasco of a drug-bust at Club XI, and those who regularly used cannabis knew they now faced much more than a smacked wrist if caught. On September 11th, 1954, whilst the Parnell band was playing a two-week engagement at Blackpool's Winter Gardens, Tubby and Margaret were arrested for possession of what the press noted as "dangerous drugs."³⁷ Hayes, it was said, had been found in possession of 3.53 grams of Indian hemp, whilst his wife was caught with 1.63 grams. The couple knew the ramifications were serious, and the press announced that the saxophonist and his wife were both to appear at Blackpool Magistrates Court in November to face sentencing.

There was precious little Hayes could do ahead of the court hearing other than to keep working and hope for the best. He certainly couldn't make any further plans, and at any rate the combined experience of dancing to the tunes of leaders such as Bert Ambrose, Vic Lewis and Jack Parnell over the past eighteen months had convinced him that there was little satisfaction to be had in joining yet another touring band. His solos were undoubtedly the musical high spot of the Parnell show, enjoyed by fans and fellow musicians alike, and he had made repeated requests for a wage packet reflecting his contribution, but the bandleader simply refused to budge. Years later Parnell saw the funny side of their exchanges: "[Tubby] stopped the show night after night when we were playing. I told him to bugger off, and I think to myself now: Tubby Hayes! He only wanted a pound, and he didn't get it!"³⁸

The Hayes's duly appeared before the court in Blackpool on November 12th charged with possession of a dangerous narcotic. Both had been advised to plead guilty. The arresting officer Chief Constable H. Barnes began by telling the court that a search of the house in which the couple had been staying whilst in Blackpool had revealed a tin of hemp found in Tubby's jacket and a small quantity of the drug wrapped in newspaper in his wife's coat. "It is obvious from other matters found there," Barnes concluded, "that these two people had been making their own cigarettes and smoking them."³⁹



Tubby and Maggie,
Studio 51, London,
December 2nd, 1954.
Author's collection.

When it came to passing sentence, the judge took into account that neither Tubby nor Margaret had had any previous encounters with the police and discharged them from court with an order to pay £2. 6s. 6d. each in costs. Chairman of the bench G. W. Leavesley delivered a stern reminder that, although they had escaped imprisonment, the couple were not above the law: "If you are caught in the next twelve months taking drugs again, you will be brought back to this court and punished."⁴⁰

The last weeks of 1954 were a merry-go-round of back-to-back club engagements for Hayes, taking in the Mapleton, Studio 51, the Café Anglais as well as other less celebrated suburban venues. Most of these appearances were nothing more than staged jam sessions, but alongside the good cheer to be had working with old friends, some of the musicians taking part, including Hayes, were beginning to realize that disorganized, ad-hoc situations weren't necessarily helping their musical progress. In trumpeter Jimmy Deuchar – one of the most theoretically minded of all London jazzmen – Hayes now found not only a sympathetic ear but also a simpatico musical partner; and across the closing months of the year the two men's efforts to present something far more cohesive began to get noticed. Delivering an overview of the London jazz scene during the previous twelve months in *Record Mirror*, promoter, compere and journalist Tony Hall – a figure familiar to all those who attended the Flamingo and Florida clubs – singled out the partnership for especial praise.

These two together have done so much to improve the "theme" situation in British jazz. Not for them 'Lester Leaps' (except under extreme pressure from audiences at places like Chingford!) and played-to-death standards. For them, in the latter category, it's

things like 'Between The Devil And The Deep Blue Sea', 'This Time The Dream's On Me', 'I Can Dream Can't I?' In the theme department they turn to the newest unissued American discs. They come up with exciting Horace Silver compositions on various changes.⁴¹

Although no one in the UK was as yet calling it by the name by which it would subsequently become known, the music that Hayes and Deuchar were playing was already firmly rooted in the hard bop vein. As the name suggested, the style was a logical outgrowth – and in some aspects *reduction* – of the methods of bebop. The tempos could still be as maniacally demanding as those of the late 1940s, but the melodies were often simpler, and the accompaniment, although still engaging and stimulating, had taken on a new earthy directness. The first records that could truly be said to feature the new style were those made by Miles Davis for the Prestige label in late 1951, featuring saxophonists Sonny Rollins and Jackie McLean. Coming on the back of the measured, pastel voicing of Davis's nonet recordings – the famous *Birth of the Cool* – this new music seemed base, crude even, but its sizzling intensity communicated in a way that was far more invigorating. Indeed, one of the basic tenets of hard bop was to be an almost "take it or leave it" approach. The style also kicked sand at the notion that the jazz idiom had to develop along more decorous, formal lines, as was then beginning to occur in California, home of what critics were already calling West Coast Jazz.

By 1954, the British Esquire label was beginning to release some of the earliest efforts in the hard bop style recorded for Prestige in New York, including records by Davis and Sonny Rollins, while Vogue had licensed similar sessions from the Blue Note imprint, among them a further Davis sextet date with trombonist J. J. Johnson and saxophonist Jimmy Heath and Johnson's own 10" LP featuring the brilliant young trumpeter Clifford Brown. Tubby Hayes and his young colleagues digested as much of this music as they could, and within a relatively short space of time its influence began to permeate their respective styles: bassist Pete Blannin took on something of Percy Heath's drive, drummer Bill Eyden hero-worshipped Art Blakey and a pianist from South London new to Hayes's circle, Terry Shannon, displayed an uncanny understanding of the methods of Horace Silver and Sonny Clark.

The local guiding light for all these men remained Jimmy Deuchar, a player cut from the same cloth as Clifford Brown, and one of the few British modernists to have emerged with his musical aims seemingly fully formed. On a scene where some players' efforts at contemporary improvisation could still sound ragged and unformed, Deuchar's solo work had a formidable logic, something that had begun to exert a tremendous influence upon Tubby Hayes. As the two men further cemented their collaboration over the festive season of 1954 – and with gigs at places as unpromising as Streatham Baths Hall

there was probably little else to do *but* strengthen relations – the saxophonist realized how much more he had yet to learn:

Jimmy was the one who really made me start taking music seriously. I'd been on the road with big bands from 1952–54 and didn't worry much about anything, except having a ball. Then that Christmas came the group at the old Flamingo with Jimmy, Terry Shannon, Pete Blannin and Bill Eyden. Jimmy was so good that I had to try.⁴²

The impact on those who heard this band in person was to prove unforgettable, with Tony Hall loudly predicting a great future for the unit in his regular magazine column. Sixty years later, he still stands by his earlier declaration that Deuchar and Hayes made a trumpet and tenor team every bit the equal of those in the bands of Horace Silver.⁴³ However, the pipe dream of a regular union between the two men burst on February 12th, 1955, when *Melody Maker* announced that Hayes was to form a new nine-piece touring band. At the age of just twenty, and after having spent barely four years as a professional musician, the saxophonist now faced the quite sudden prospect of becoming the youngest bandleader in the country. As such, the ensuing eighteen months would provide some of the best – and the worst – moments of his career.



Tubby Hayes and his Orchestra pose for an early publicity photo, spring 1955. Front row (left to right) Harry South, Pete Blannin, Tubby Hayes, Jackie Sharpe and Dickie Hawdon. Back row (left to right) Les Condon, Lennie Breslaw and Mike Senn. Author's collection.

It was small wonder that Tubby Hayes held ambitions to lead his own band. He was gifted, charismatic and precociously able and although barely out of his teens he felt he'd already taken more than his fill of working for other leaders. Much of the preceding four years had been spent bowing low to overly commercial musical policies or in being woefully under-appreciated by those that employed him. Even those leaders who had recognized Hayes's potential, such as Jack Parnell, had been hard put to find much space for him among programmes bursting with novelty numbers, popular songs and mambos. Nevertheless, there were those who *had* been listening and taking note.

Late during Hayes's stay with the Parnell band, his former employer Tito Burns had attended a concert at which the saxophonist had delivered a typically show-stopping solo feature. The audience's reaction to this dazzling display piqued Burns's interest. He already knew Hayes well: the two men's conflicting aims had brought their brief musical association to an abrupt end three years earlier, but by early 1955 even Burns himself had tired of the perpetual reinvention required to maintain a regular working group and had decided to use his already extensive musical connections in order to establish his own booking agency. The connections soon paid off and within a few weeks of starting his business Burns had signed a contract with Whetstone Entertainment Ltd, operators of a string of Northern ballrooms, and had also won a coveted deal as sole agent for the US Forces base at Burtonwood in Lancashire. Whoever Burns booked was assured of a healthy supply of work, and, keen to build a stable of young artists, he put the idea of leading a band to Hayes.

To Burns's surprise, the saxophonist was initially reluctant. Although no bad blood remained between the two men, the offer had struck Hayes as insufficient. The agent had volunteered his old band uniforms, music stands and a ready-made library, but Hayes was insistent that if a new band were to go out under his leadership it was by no means to be a second-hand echo of an already failed venture. This determination paid off and Burns eventually agreed to stump up the money for the new equipment and arrangements. The music press was soon ablaze with the news that Hayes was to become "Britain's youngest bandleader." *Melody Maker's* breaking story on February 12th made much of the young man's intention to provide a new sound "with the unusual instrumentation of three tenors doubling baritones, two trumpets doubling mellophone, three rhythm and a girl vocalist"⁴⁴ but, if anything, the press were a little ahead of themselves, as Hayes had as yet only confirmed the availability of three potential recruits. Nevertheless, one can readily understand their enthusiasm. Burns too had wasted no time in ensuring the new band's pre-launch publicity was as captivating as possible, announcing that Hayes had already signed a two-year contract with Vogue-Decca Records.

As press and fans alike worked themselves into a minor frenzy over the potential of the new unit, there were those who cast a more considered eye,

including another young bandleader who might well have been able to offer some cautionary advice – none other than Ronnie Scott. Indeed, there was a certain amount of timely irony to the formation of the new Tubby Hayes band. With its flexible three saxes, two brass line-up and jazz-heavy intentions, the group was almost a carbon copy of the line-up that Scott had led since his defection from Jack Parnell in 1952, but which, by early 1955, was dying a slow, unfortunate death. For Tubby Hayes, Scott remained something of a hero and, throughout the scrapbook that he kept from 1951 to 1956, there are various clippings documenting the older man's musical movements. This interest was by no means obsessive, nor was it yet competitive (at least on Hayes's part), but rather Hayes sensed a musical kindred spirit in the older man. In fact, despite its failure, Scott's nine-piece was actually a rather good role model on which Hayes could base his own band. The instrumentation was large enough to pack the punch of a big band, but not so big as to become unwieldy and, crucially, there remained plenty of space for individual solo statements.

Whilst Tito Burns inked in the diary for that spring, Hayes got around to the hands-on business of choosing his sidemen, using the opportunity not to cherry-pick from well-known names but to give breaks to those contemporaries he thought deserved a wider hearing.

The saxophone section centred upon altoist Mike Senn, a journeyman from the bands of Basil Kirchin, Kathy Stobart and Henry Hall who had recently quit the music scene and returned to the family confectionery business. Alongside Senn, Hayes recruited a new face, tenorist Jackie Sharpe. A jobbing London taxi driver at the time he received Hayes's offer, Sharpe was perhaps taking greater risks than any other member of the new band, selling his cab – and potentially his livelihood – in order to buy a baritone saxophone and make the move to music full-time. Settling the remainder of the personnel was to prove more difficult. Bassist Pete Blannin still had to work his notice on a society gig in Mayfair whilst Harry South, an old friend from the days of the T and H Club, had to extricate himself from commitments to the Tony Crombie band. Securing a trumpet section was even more time-consuming: after accepting a lucrative contract with the BBC Show Band, Jimmy Deuchar was unavailable and so Hayes turned initially to another Crombie alumnus, Les Condon. In principle, it was an inspired choice. Vociferously dedicated to the new music and well regarded in London jazz circles for his sharp dress sense and general air of hipster cool (his colleagues had nicknamed him *The Dude*), Condon hadn't yet displayed much in the way of matching musical coherence. Indeed, the Tony Crombie band from which he'd transferred – in which he'd played alongside fellow trumpeter Dizzy Reece – had boasted some of the most ragged ensemble work yet heard on the British jazz scene. The same triumph of spirit and camaraderie over musical appropriateness also informed Hayes's choice of drummer, Lennie Breslaw, another East-Enders who had made a name for himself on the suburban jazz club circuit.

The personnel finalized, there then followed several hectic weeks up until the band's first public performance, scheduled to take place at the South Parade Pier, Southsea on Friday April 1st, 1955. Throughout the build-up Tito Burns continued to court the press. Publications as varied as *Weekly Sporting Review* and *Record Mirror* devoted columns to coverage of the band's first rehearsal at Studio 51, with Tony Hall positively effusive in his verdict: "It was the most exciting and musically interesting – as well as swinging – sound I've heard since the Scott band started three years ago. Rough edges galore, of course. But that's only to be expected at this stage. I hope it's a great success."⁴⁵ However, by far the most perceptive documentation of the birth pangs of the Tubby Hayes orchestra was that contributed to the *New Musical Express* by Benny Green.

Green had been catapulted to musical fame as part of the Ronnie Scott band, but he had deep-seated reservations as to whether he was genuinely capable enough to sit among such fast company. Although undoubtedly a competent saxophonist, his real gift and, it would transpire, true vocation was as a writer. Indeed, such was his all-consuming fascination with literature that the rumours soon abounded that while the remainder of the Scott band were going to bed with whoever they could, Green was going to bed with a good book. Supporting this, television personality Michael Parkinson remembers an incongruous situation when, as a young jazz fan in Barnsley, he had the dubious pleasure of providing the Scott band with refreshments on the interval of a gig. Parkinson entered the dressing room to find most of the band members making merry in whatever way they saw fit, as Green sat soberly in the corner reading Dostoevsky.

Such were Green's talents as a wordsmith that in 1953 the *New Musical Express* hired him to contribute a regular column – a sort of insider view of the jazz scene. However, it quickly transpired that this was to be none of the trite prose found elsewhere in the music press. Green wrote with genuine wit and a sophisticated command of the language, a skill that sat somewhat at odds with his cab-driver speaking voice, and he had an uncanny knack for blowing apart the artifice that accompanied much of the dance band business.

NME liked to bill Green with various jocular straplines – "The Runyon of Rhythm" and so on – and reviewing the early rehearsals by the Tubby Hayes band in the paper's March 25th issue, he was dubbed "The Saxophone Player With A Twinkle In His Typewriter." Enormously impressed by Hayes, Green quickly took to task those who saw the leader's tender years as an impasse to the success of his new venture:

Here and there, I have heard scepticism about this project. People wonder if one so young as Tubby can front a band. I remind them that age is a question less of years than experience and that Tubby has been with the best touring bands for a long while now.

He also offered up the first documented acknowledgement of what, if it didn't sound too pretentious, might be termed the Tubby Hayes Phenomenon.

In some weird way that defies explanation, Edward Brian "Tubby" Hayes has, over the past two or three years become something of a legendary character to the teenagers of the provinces. He has somehow captured the imagination of the younger fans possibly because he is no older than they are and they can identify themselves with him and enjoy a sort of vicarious self-pride when he does something special, perhaps because the boisterous happy spirit is there for everyone to see. The boy is bursting at the seams with it. Whatever it is, it is a factor which cannot be ignored by those who are trying to assess his chances. The touring band leaders who have had Tubby in their bands and have lost him know what I mean.⁴⁶

Green concluded his piece by mentioning some of those within the business who wished Hayes well, including Phil Seamen, Kenny Graham and himself, adding that should Mike Senn unexpectedly quit "well, Tubby has my number – I wouldn't mind."⁴⁷

On March 10th, 1955, three weeks ahead of its public debut, the Tubby Hayes orchestra visited Decca Studios in West Hampstead to cut its first recording for the Tempo label. Just ahead of the session, *Melody Maker* had announced the recruitment of Dickie Hawdon to the band's trumpet section, to some observers a highly unlikely appointment. Hawdon had cut his teeth in traditional jazz circles with bands as dyed-in-the-wool as the Christie Brothers Stompers, but in recent years had surprised everyone with a titanic musical leap to the cool school sextet of Don Rendell. There were still problems in securing the personnel and so for the purposes of the recording Jimmy Deuchar temporarily joined Hawdon in the trumpet section. In the remarkably short time allotted them, the band cut four titles, Duke Jordan's 'Jordu', 'Orient Line' by Harry South, Horace Silver's 'May Ray' and Victor Feldman's 'Monsoon'.

Although Hayes had chosen an ambitious set of compositions – almost amounting to a modernist's manifesto – the band's performance revealed equal parts strength and weakness, as the music press were quick to highlight. Unsurprisingly, *Melody Maker's* Edgar Jackson hacked the recordings to pieces. Reviewing the initial 78 rpm release of 'May Ray' and 'Orient Line' in the paper's May 14th edition, he described the notion of recording the new unit as "a mistake."⁴⁸ "A band needs time to develop a character and if one may judge from this record, Mr Hayes is no exception to this rule." *New Musical Express* was only slightly more charitable: "Rough but ready, willing and able. The band's tremendous wailing enthusiasm atones for the lack of polish. But that I'm sure will come before very long."⁴⁹



"A lovely shouting little band." The octet on-stage at the Chiswick Empire, Sunday April 24th, 1955. Author's collection.

Sixty years on there remains a substantial body of truth in these contemporary assessments. The first recordings by the new Hayes band are indeed both bursting with youthful alacrity and lacking in mature refinement. However, it should be remembered that they are, above all, *debut* recordings and should be judged accordingly. Neither profound, nor especially well executed, they contain little in ensemble terms that presciently points towards the sort of high standard that the leader would demand in the coming decades, but where they do score is in Hayes's startling confidence. For one so young, he already sounds remarkably assured, and a well-assimilated understanding of the mechanics of modern jazz is evident throughout, especially on 'Jordu,' a composition with a devilish series of descending modulations in its construction. What is perhaps even more remarkable, especially at this distance, is how unlike any other jazz saxophonist – American or British – he already sounds. Finding just the right setting for this gift was to prove difficult in the years immediately ahead.

Hayes arrived in Southsea on April 1st to find a stack of telegrams from friends and colleagues wishing him well for opening night, among them messages from Annie Ross, Tony Hall, Tito Burns and Harold Davison. The evening now had an added pressure: the band of drummer Basil Kirchin was also appearing in the town that same night and, although the two men were friends, Hayes knew the competition for an audience would be very real. The music press was also waiting with bated breath, poised to deliver its verdict on The Little Giant's big idea. In general, their reception was positive: Mike

Butcher's report in *NME* glowed with praise, especially for Hayes's quick-thinking attitude regarding the evening's programming. Finding themselves before a largely dance-hungry crowd, the band hastily reorganized from the heavily jazz-slanted set-list they intended to play to something far more commercial.

Tubby proved he has an alert head on his young shoulders. He put in a lot of commercial material including some well-conceived medleys of current pops and familiar standards, relegated most of the jazz to a less conspicuous position, between more obviously popular offerings – and still managed to feature more good music in three hours than most of his competitors in thirty!⁵⁰

Butcher also praised the band's cohesion: "The ensemble gets a great fat sound and shows unmistakable evidence of painstaking rehearsal. Sure enough the band has its faults, including the occasional inaccuracies common to every new crew. But the success it deserves is unlimited."⁵¹

All of the press reviews singled out Tubby's own solo contributions, with *Music Mirror's* Tony Hall making note of two tenor features, 'Imagination' and "the Sonny Rollins line on 'Way You Look Tonight'": "He is quite the most uncommercial tenorman in Britain. Certainly the most coloured [sic] sounding. Very Sonny Rollins-ish, in fact."⁵² Mike Nevard of *Melody Maker* agreed: "[He is] a magnificent tenorist by any standards, with eloquent ideas, an admirable sound and swing and the authority which many musicians twice his age would envy."⁵³

Having scored a somewhat qualified victory, it was clear from the outset that Hayes and his band were going to have a struggle on their hands as they tried to escape the expectations of the dance circuit. Indeed, their touring itinerary that spring wasn't exactly chock-full of outstanding jazz dates:

April 2nd – US Air Force base, Brize Norton

April 3rd – US Air Force base, Greenham Common

April 4th – Royal Festival Hall concert opposite John Dankworth and Don Rendell

April 8th – Chingford

April 9th – Chelmsford

April 10th – Chatham

April 14th – Amesbury

April 16th – Empire Rooms, Taunton

April 17th – Hackney Empire (compere Bob Monkhouse)

April 18th – Royal Festival Hall Recital Rooms

April 23rd – Peterborough

April 24th – Chiswick Empire (with David Nixon)

April 29th – Recording session for Decca

May 1st – debut appearance at The Flamingo Club

May 2nd – Manor House

May 5th – Acton

May 8th – Ramsgate

Bassist Pete Blannin remembers well the pressures they were under: “We tried to get a few commercial things in there to kind of keep the punters happy. You just did it – you had to play things they could dance to. You’d have this bloody big ballroom full of people who wanted to dance so you can’t go playing ‘Oop Bop Sh’Bam’ and all that. It was a case of survival.”⁵⁴ As his sidemen soon found out, the leader took it all in his stride. Off the stand, he rarely focused on their shaky fiscal future, preferring instead to indulge his passion for sport. Jack Sharpe in particular found him a fascinating character. “Though music was Tubby’s life he had a lot of outside interests. He was a keen fight fan, and we



An impromptu cricket match on an unidentified Devon beach, summer 1955. Mike Senn fields while Bill Eyden keeps wicket. Courtesy Maureen Eyden.

used to go to all the small halls. He had all the books and a terrific knowledge of boxing. In the daytime, when he was away with the band, his spare time would be taken up watching cricket or football.⁵⁵

Life on the road also fuelled the gradual realization that, although the man next to you was musically hand-in-glove, you needn't necessarily approve of everything he did. Even the leader wasn't above criticism. Pete Blannin found Hayes unashamedly self-centred: "He was a bit spoilt, I think. His upbringing, I guess. He liked to get his own way about everything. He could be very petulant at times."⁵⁶ Dickie Hawdon recalled his boss as "a bit of a hooligan," prone to living it up rather than taking care of business. Hawdon also remembered that the inconsistencies of being a co-operative band were enough to test even the most battle-hardened of campaigners. When they found themselves playing a percentage gig to a handful of people in Wisbech, the trumpeter's protestations to his leader ended in a fist-fight.⁵⁷ Under such duress, the only thing to really do was concentrate upon the music and, as the Tubby Hayes band toured across the UK during the spring of 1955, it grew in cohesiveness, artistic empathy and musicianship. Years after it had disbanded, its member still glowed with pride about its collective achievements: "It was a lovely shouting little band," Dickie Hawdon remembered,⁵⁸ whilst Jack Sharpe maintained "Tubby's band on the road was an education I would not have missed for anything: One of the happiest periods of my life."⁵⁹