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SYDNEY THOMPSON

SYDNEY THOMPSON is a band leader who, as he puts it, is "terribly keen on dancing." Football, too, and particularly Chelsea football. Born in Wales but brought up in Kent, he would cycle, as a boy, 23 miles to watch Gillingham, so you could say his love of football preceded even his love of music.

Old-time dancing made the name of Sydney Thompson famous—as it did the other half of his partnership both in business and in private life, his wife Mary. "Take Your Partners" became one of the best-known band programmes on BBC radio; it has now passed a 25-year milestone, having started in January 1946.

His radio and TV performances combined are approaching 1,000 in total; he has performed in U.S.A. and Canada, several times at Royal Household balls at Buckingham Palace. Latin and modern ballroom dancing fill most of the Sydney Thompson Orchestra programme nowadays, with dance records on EP and LP sold all over the world.

And this week, as he and Mary prepare to take a two-week holiday in Tenerife, Sydney's music is presented in a new form—in cassettes and cartridges—to the ever-growing dancing world.

An uncle who lived at Wimbledon first introduced him to Stamford Bridge in the 1930s, and Sydney takes up the story of his association with Chelsea from there: "After



the war I came to watch Chelsea as often as possible between engagements.

"About eight years ago I decided I needed a regular outlet from work, some regular fresh air, and bought two season-tickets. Mary, too, became completely sold on Chelsea, and we've given up many engagements in order not to miss Saturday afternoons here. In fact, we now have three 'seasons'—it's nice to be able to bring along a friend or someone in the business.

"We come in all weathers and regardless of who Chelsea are playing. A lot of regulars didn't come to the game against the Luxembourg team in the Cup-Winners' Cup a few weeks ago, but we hate to miss any match. As real supporters we've got to be here for every game possible.

"Unfortunately, we had to miss Athens because we were in Blackpool at the time for the World Dancing Congress. But we made sure we saw the replay 'live' on TV. I have never been so thrilled by Chelsea as I was that night. That was the best I've ever seen them play.

"The fact that we did not make a very good start in the League this season doesn't worry me. No team can win everything, but we are obviously settling down to something again now and I am confident that, with the all-round strength Chelsea have built up, we are going to win another cup somewhere or other this season."