

'You're a man! You were born a man!'

'No, I was born a baby.'

And then he stormed away. Whatever I was, it was for him, whoever he was, a personal affront. I got a lot of that.

Because I was still young when I became well known, the Wally Stott Band in every Goon Show, arranger for Shirley Bassey, Noel Coward, Marlene Dietrich, and the rest, it wasn't until I was forty-six that I dared face the terrifying journey across the gender divide.

June 1970. Casablanca. Gender Reassignment Therapy.

And the irony was that I only had the courage finally to start the journey towards becoming the person I knew myself to be, because I fell in love. With Christine Parker. She is the love of my life.

But there was something I had to do first. Of course, with Christine by my side. For the last time, I put on a man's suit, and together we travelled north, to tell Mum and my step-dad what I was about to do.

Silence. Step-dad just looked away. Then Mum said, 'Aye. I read something about that. In the Daily Mail.'

After the operation I couldn't see anyone. I hid from the world. Interviews on the telly, more Goon Shows – no. Just so they could see Wally Stott in a skirt! No way.

It was Christine who reminded me I still had a band – now the Angela Morley Orchestra. All my old mates. They'd been so patient, so loyal. I owed them.

That first rehearsal, and it was a nightmare. They could hardly look at me. They all said they'd stick with me, but now the reality of their Wally standing there in a *skirt* and *twi-set*, wearing *make-up* – they just couldn't handle it. Before, always you'd have had to fight to get a word in edgeways, be heard above the arguing, the dirty jokes, the anecdotes. And they played like a dream, we were seriously good.

Now – silence. Politeness, degenerating into a frozen embarrassment. And the playing was awful. I was at a loss. I couldn't see any way through.

The trombonist was always late. Always. And though none of us had seen each other for nearly three years, today was no exception. 'Hello hello hello!' – he always did a bad Harry Secombe impression – 'I know – late again but here I am your favourite trombonist, hello hello ...' It was as if the atmosphere rose up and smacked him in the face. ...
'Hello ... Angela.'

Slowly he went to his seat, opened his case and assembled his trombone. It was the loudest silence. Then, slowly, he looked up at me. And said: 'Hey, Wally, I suppose a fuck's out of the question?'

Everything went very still. I know I was in shock. Then the trumpeter – very slowly – stood up. And started to *applaud*. And, one after the other, they all stood up, and started to applaud. And I burst into tears. The trombonist started it:

'For *she's* a jolly good fellow, for *she's* a jolly good- ...' and they all joined in.

The dam had burst. That was the true beginning of my new life.

One night in the pub after a gig – the guys were playing as good as ever and we were getting all the bookings we could handle – one of the band – he'd had a few – said, 'Christine, how can you be man and wife ... or whatever ... I mean ... you know ...'

'What I know,' she said, 'is that there's more to marriage than sex. We have the music. And we have our love. And that will never change.'

Out of the blue I got an Oscar nomination. No! I wasn't ready! One look at Chrissie's face, and I knew we were going. I didn't win the Oscar, but I had a victory that was much more important. In America it was different. Here I was really accepted. Here no one had ever heard of Wally Stott.

Dynasty, Dallas, Cagney and Lacey, Watership Down, Star Wars, E.T., Schindler's List.
Andre Previn, Steven Spielberg, John Williams, Itzak Pehrlman. This was now my world.

Fifteen wonderful years in L.A. And then one morning we looked at each other, and we knew. It was time to move on. Scottsdale, Arizona. Blissful semi-retirement in the great outdoors.

This morning at breakfast, Chrissie said, 'It's fifty years to the day since you worked with Shirley Bassey. ... And by the way, they've offered you the next Harry Potter film.'

No.

As a man, I always tried to be what other people wanted me to be. As an arranger of other people's music, it had been the same.

Now, finally, I am entirely the person I've always known myself to be. It's time to write my own music. And in the time left to me, that is what I shall do.

Angela Morley (previously Wally Stott)

Tim Hardy