

Cornucopia

News and articles for anyone interested in the horn

January 2009



Michael Thompson

Cornucopia

is published four or five times a season. It is free, although contributions are welcome.

For further information, to add your name to the mailing list (email or regular mail), to send a contribution, or to submit material, contact:

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**Horn New England and
Northeast Horn Workshop**
www.HornNewEngland.org

International Horn Society
NEHS encourages membership in IHS (\$40/year). For further information, contact:

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IHS Online
www.hornsociety.org.

Britten Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings



The Britten Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings, Opus 31 is one of the most beloved solo horn pieces. The evocative poetry and music and the characteristic horn writing speak to hornists and non-hornists alike.

Britten returned to England in 1942 after three years in the US. He made the acquaintance of Dennis Brain, who was playing in the RAF Central Band, for which Britten was writing incidental music. Brain asked Britten to write a work especially for him, and Britten composed the Serenade in the spring of 1943. The first performance took place the following October at Wigmore Hall with Brain and Peter Pears as soloists and Walter Goehr conducting. The work is dedicated to Edward Sackville-West, who helped Britten choose the texts.

The Prologue and Epilogue are for natural horn alone and are the same except that the Epilogue is played off-stage. The horn's natural harmonics, especially the out-of-tune 11th partial, evoke an earlier, more primitive time (although of course many listeners just think the horn is out-of-tune!). Some performers play these two movements on a modern horn without using the valves, others play a natural horn, and Danny Katzen has been known to employ an Alphon.

The poems, all by different authors, have a common subject - the night - with images ranging from sunset to midnight, the moon, and sleep.

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|-------------|----------------------------------|
| 2. Pastoral | Charles Cotton (1630-1687) |
| 3. Nocturne | Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809-1892) |
| 4. Elegy | William Blake (1757-1827) |
| 5. Dirge | Anonymous (15th century) |
| 6. Hymn | Ben Johnson (1572-1637) |
| 7. Sonnet | John Keats (1795-1821) |

The Pastoral describes the coming of night with descending arpeggios. The Nocturne has cadenza-like fanfares with chains of thirds about a bugle blowing and echoes dying. Major to minor tonality and hand-stopped glissandos contribute to the dark cast of the Elegy. The horn enters the Dirge dramatically with a fugue subject after a powerful climax in the strings. The mood lightens in the Hymn to the huntress Diana with pizzicato strings. The Sonnet is a beautiful Adagio without horn (to facilitate moving off-stage). ❖

Michael Thompson will perform this work with the Cantata Singers in Boston in January and discuss the challenges of playing it at Osmun Music. See page 2.

Fun & Easy Teaching and Learning

by Joan Watson



"Fun and easy" - if those two elements are missing from horn playing, teaching, and learning, something is wrong. I wouldn't be playing horn if it were as difficult as people *think* it is.

A help for beginning students is starting on a single B-flat horn, which has advantages over the single F horn: (1) smaller, lighter, easier to hold, carry, and blow; (2) easier to play high (harmonics further apart, more understandable fingerings); (3) faster progress and confidence; and (4) easier switch to double horn.

The first priority with beginning students is getting a great sound. Everything else comes after that. Buzzing should be relaxed, with a healthy, resonant vibration. Young children do this, and also breathe properly, naturally. Vibration of the air should happen as a *result* of the air going past the lips, not from a focus on "buzzing."

Students become familiar with notes on the horn by playing long tones; however, rather than single notes, I have students play a phrase - two quarter notes and a half note, for example. As they advance, the phrases become more complex and interesting. In these exercises, students focus on consistently knowing the amount of air needed to play a specific note. Even if they can't hear a note, they can feel it.

I recommend interval studies, following Chris Leuba's advice: "All you need to know to play the horn are how to start the first note, and how to move to the next note." Start with a second, going down from the tonic and back, and then up from the tonic and back. Continue with thirds, etc. Play the interval study in a different key each day, for beginners perhaps going only as far as fifths.

I believe in learning technique through music. My favorite beginning books are the Clevenger Method, which introduce range in the best way possible, keep music-making as the focus of playing, and include duets.

Ideal hornists seem to be students who love accomplishment and challenge and have patience to learn, but also have a child-like approach to just "making a joyful noise." I still love every minute and am swept away by the organ-like grandeur of multiple horns. Once students are hooked on the horn, they will be part of a community of like-minded musicians everywhere. ❖

Joan is principal horn of the Canadian Opera Company a member of True North Brass, and has two new CDs. She will be a featured artist at the 2009 Symposium in Macomb IL. The full article appears in the Fall 2008 issue of Canadian Winds. See www.joanwatson.com.

News and Events

The previous issue elicited responses from readers about early IHS workshops. **Polly Dunn** (Gwynedd PA) wrote, "My first was the seventh in Canada with Wendell Hoss befriending me. Fond memories!" **Barbara Oldham** (Brooklyn) wrote, "My first workshop was at IU so must have been the fourth one. Looking at those photos from the early days makes me feel really old!" **Bill Sand** (Cromwell CT) wrote, "I was very pleased to see the early history of the IHS. It was exciting for me to read the list of artists at the First Horn Workshop because I was there and I had the good fortune to study with three of them." **Peter Dressler** (Norwalk CT) wrote that his late teacher (Joe Singer) is one of the artists pictured in the second workshop. Mary and Leland Bartholomew (Asheville NC) gave copies to colleagues in their CornoCopia group too young to have attended.

Stan Light (Springfield) writes that you can hear tracks from London Horn Sound 2 (Give it one) at www.giveitone.com. CDs are now available. The CD is reviewed in the February issue of *The Horn Call*.

Jake Barickman (Underhill VT) admires the horn part in the PBS program Frontline's theme music. Does anyone know who is playing it?

Nilo Caracristi (Italy) points out a typo in the September issue - it's Gomalan Brass Quintet, with a website at www.gomalanbrass.com.



The photo of Barry Tuckwell in the last issue was backwards. Here it is, now corrected.

Hilary Ledebuhr (Whitinsville) writes that the horns of the Hartford CT Symphony (**Barbara Hill**, **Emery Tapley**, Hilary, and **Andrew Spearman**) have formed a horn quartet. www.hartfordsymphony.org.

Polly Dunn (Gwynedd PA), **Walter Palmer** (Belmont), **Henry Landry** (Lowell), and **Pete Exline** (Yuma AZ for the winter) have sent contributions. Walter sent Forever stamps "to defray the cost of mailing." Henry was pleased that his horn sold as a result of the note in the last issue. He played with the Merrimack Valley Philharmonic for 40 years. Pete says email is working fine for him.

Lost: Niki Bozakis (Upton), Louise Wing (Lynn), Scott Hartman (San Jose), Ashley Borraro (San Antonio), Kathryn Williams (Milwaukee), Kelly Morrisette (Johnston RI), Bruce Hembd (Phoenix).

New members: **Peri Levin McKenna**, Jamaica Plain, after a long hiatus now studying horn with Nancy Hudgins and playing in a wind quintet; **Mary Bisson**, Baltimore; **Lawrence Price**, Hanscom AFB; and **Barbara Hill**, Brewster NY, principal horn in Harford CT. ❖



2009 Northeast Horn Workshop

March 13-15, Ithaca College, Ithaca NY

Gail Williams, Adam Unsworth, American Horn Quartet
Host: Alex Shuhan 607-277-6066 ashuhan@ithaca.edu
www.NortheastHornWorkshop.org



2009 IHS International Symposium

June 2-7, 2009 at Western Illinois University, Macomb, Illinois USA

Host: Randall Faust 309-298-1300 RE-Faust@wiu.edu
WIU School of Music, 126A Browne Music Hall, Macomb, IL 61455

Recitals, clinics, presentations, horn choirs, exhibits, etc.

Special competitions for ensembles and solo jazz

www.wiu.edu/horn



2010 IHS International Symposium

July 19-25, 2010 in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

Host: Peter Luff p.luff@griffith.edu.au
Join founding IHS president Barry Tuckwell down under

Michael Thompson in Britten Serenade

* Jan. 16, 8 p.m., Cantata Singers, NEC Jordan Hall
www.cantatasingers.org. See article on page 1

* Jan 17, Lecture/demonstration at Osmun Music, Arlington
Free. Phone 781-646-5657 for time and reservation

Anne Howarth Faculty Recital

Jan. 29, Tufts University Distler, annehowarth@world.oberlin.edu

International Horn Day

Feb. 27, St. Paul's Cathedral, Toronto, joan@truenorth.com

Jim Mosher in Strauss 1 on Cape Cod

Mar. 28, 7:30 p.m., Falmouth Academy, www.somonsinfonietta.org

NEC Brass Bash

April 5, 7 p.m., Jordan Hall, Free, Faculty and students

Gus Sebring in Brahms & Wyner Trios

April 25, 7:30 p.m., Concord Library, Concord MA, Free
Harumi Rhodes, violin and Yehudi Wyner, piano.
Reservations from Apr 11, 978-318-3301 www.concordlibrary.org

