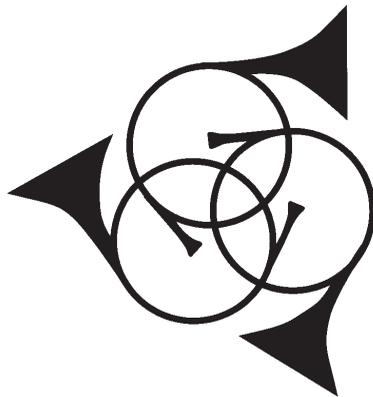


The Horn Call

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William Scharnberg, Editor

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On the cover: photograph by Li Zhi Yeoh – his horn on the University of Nebraska campus

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Alfred Edwin Brain Jnr (1885-1966)

Prince of Horn Players

The Forgotten British Horn Virtuoso

Part II

by Leighton Jones

Brain Family Photographs



Letitia and A.E. Brain Sr



The Brain family at their home in London



A. E. Brain Sr with Aubrey on his right and Alfred on his left



Alf on his 21st Birthday

Alfred Edwin Brain Jnr (1885-1966)

Of Alf's birth we have the following information from the Certified copy for an entry of Birth:
 Registration District St. George's Hanover Square.
 Birth: Sub-district of Belgravia, the County of Middlesex.
 24 October 1885. 174 Wellington Buildings.



*The Brain family home.
 1, Orimston Road.
 Shepherds Bush*



PROGRAMME.

PART FIRST.

1. CONCERTO GROSSO FOR STRINGS IN B MINOR.
Viv. & Sic. 17c. (After Corelli & Geminelli) *Maestri*

2. ARIA "SARABANDA" (Lute Concerto). *Maestri*
M. BROWNE DE BAZZEL.
(After Corelli & Geminelli)

3. ROMANCE AND FINALE FROM CONCERTO IN E FLAT FOR HORN AND ORCHESTRA. *Maestri*
(After Corelli & Geminelli)
Solo Horn—MR. A. E. BRAIN.

4. VOLCANIC SONG FROM "PILGRIMS AND BARKS". *General*
M. EDWARDS DE BAZZEL.

5. OVERTURE TO "THE MERRYBANDS". *Maestri*

PART SECOND.

6. SONG "THE TWO GARDENERS". *Soprano*
M. EDWARDS DE BAZZEL.

7. SYMPHONY No. 4 in F Minor. *Triumphantly*

CONDUCTOR—
Dr. FREDERIC COWEN.

ROMANCE AND FINALE FROM CONCERTO IN E FLAT FOR HORN AND ORCHESTRA (E. FLAT) (After Corelli & Geminelli) Solo Horn—MR. A. E. BRAIN.

The Horn Concerto, from which the romance and finale are taken, was written by the late John Geminelli in 1712, and in the year of its first publication was dedicated to the late John Geminelli. The work is a most beautiful and interesting one, and has been frequently performed in London, and in other parts of the world. The romance is a beautiful and highly original work. The performance of the solo horn part is a most important one in the work, and it is a pleasure to hear it performed by a soloist of the calibre of Mr. A. E. Brain.

From these archives, we may deduce that opportunities for appearing as a soloist in the Scottish Orchestra were very few and this was by no means unusual for orchestras in Britain or, indeed, anywhere

in the world. The horn, although much appreciated as an orchestral instrument, was not in great demand as a solo instrument. Despite his "residency" in Scotland, Alf was sometimes asked to come back to London to play, as he did on April 27th 1907, to perform the "Quoniam" from Bach's *B Minor Mass* at the Alexandra palace.

During his time in Scotland, at the age of 22, Alf married Gertrude Levi, the daughter of a Rabbi in Fulham, London on September 26th 1907.

Alf's legendary coolness under pressure was tested at an early age when playing with the

Scottish Orchestra. Irving Rosenthal recalls the incident in *Of Brass and Brain*:

On one lamentable occasion the programme consisted of the Ninth Symphony of Beethoven. To make room for the chorus, the members of the orchestra were somewhat squeezed together. The timpanist placed directly above and behind Brain suddenly became violently ill and in the middle of the performance uncontrollably spewed all – directly upon the back, shoulders, and head of Alfred. However with characteristic self-control nothing could deter him from playing his part in the best Brain tradition but, as he recalled, it was one of the most trying times of his career.⁵

Alf Brain Returns to London

Returning to London in 1908, Alf played first horn for the Queen's Hall Orchestra and with the Royal Philharmonic Society, which preceded the now Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. He described his experience their:

This orchestra has only guest conductors but they have the greatest of them as the names of Nischisch, Richter, Savonoff, Mengelberg, Weingartner, Steinbach, Sir Thomas Beecham, Sir Henry Wood, Sir Landon Ronald, Hamilton Harty and Albert Coates will amply bear me out.

On 28 November 1908, Alf, together with Frederick Salkeld (who he had taken as his second horn from the Scottish Orchestra to the Queen's Hall Orchestra) gave the first London performance of Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 1 in F Major.

Alf's career in London's top orchestras was soon re-established. He took part in some premiere performances of new compositions (not all of them he approved of) while he was in the Queen's Hall Orchestra. There were also some groundbreaking performances of not so recent works that were very demanding and difficult to play, such as Schumann's *Konzertstück* in F, Op.86 for four horns. A work bristling with difficulties, it requires a seamless blending of notes and precision timing. The effect is life affirming – a rejoicing sound from all four players. Alf Jnr, Alf Snr, Oscar Borsdorf, and G. W. Smith gave the first United Kingdom public performance of this difficult and lovely piece at a promenade concert on Friday 8th October 1909. Sir Henry Wood did not forget to mention this important performance in his autobiographical recollections, *My Life In Music* (1938, p. 311).

We produced a work for four solo horns for the first time in England. This was a very difficult *Konzertstück* by Schumann (Op.86). The soloists – all our own men – were A. E. Brain, Brain Senior, Oskar Borsdorf and G. W. Smith. This work was written in one of Schumann's most prolific years (1849) and is not heard nearly enough. It was a favourite with Schumann himself and is contemporary with *Manfred*. It certainly does require four fine and even horn-players: but these we had in 1909.⁶

In the same concert, Alfred Brain Jnr also played the horn part in the first performance of Walford Davies's *Songs of Nature* for treble voices, piano, flute, horn, and strings, in seven movements. (Sir Henry Wood, 1938, p. 311) Reginald Morley-Pegge, who recalled this concert, gave the following observation about the *Konzertstück*:

(In one instance in the first movement) The second horn part being higher than the first is normally played by the third horn so it would have fallen to the lot of Oscar Borsdorf, eldest son of Adolf Borsdorf who was then 1st in the LSO and who trained Alfred and Aubrey Brain and many other fine horn players... They made a fine quartet, more or less on a par with the LSO's own "God's Own Quartet" (A. E. Borsdorf, H. van der Meerschen, Thomas Busby, and A. E. Brain senior).⁷

This quartet was originally with Henry Wood in the Queen's Hall Orchestra, but broke away to found the LSO (in 1904); this was because Wood banned the use of deputies in the Queen's Hall Orchestra. The four original breakaway players who set up the London Symphony Orchestra were, Adolf Borsdorf, Thomas Busby, Henrick van der Meerschen – horns, and John Solomon – trumpet. A. E. Brain Snr, along with some others from the orchestra, moved as well to become founder members of the LSO.

It is interesting to note, that whilst Sir Henry named his quartet, Reginald Morley-Pegge gave the name of the performing players as Alf Jnr, Fred Salkeld (Alf's normal second horn)



A. E. Brain Jnr

O. Borsdorf, and G. W. Smith. Alf Snr was not there according to Pegge because he had left the Queen's Orchestra for the LSO. Sadly Fred Salkeld was killed in a motorcycling accident in 1931, whilst on holiday in Wales with his wife.

It is interesting to recall here what Alf's nephew (Leonard Brain, the distinguished oboist and Cor Anglaise player) said about his uncle on Alf's return to London:

In some concerts the whole horn section was 'Brains' Alf (1st) Arthur (2nd) Aubrey (3rd) Papa Brain (4th). When, as mentioned earlier, Arthur left to become a policeman, the other three Brains, when seen by the other members of the orchestras were described as 'the father the son and the Holy Ghost.' The Holy Ghost being Alf.⁸

"LSO No Deputies Row." It is worth here explaining a bit about the LSO and the deputie's row. Approximately 1900 musicians lived on what they could earn from theatres, restaurants, and music halls. Symphonic work took first place artistically but second place financially. If you were a member of the Queen's Hall Orchestra (QHO) you did not have a very secure living, as the concerts could conflict with other work going on. The deputy system was introduced – a player could send someone to deputize for him in a concert and sometimes to various rehearsals. On some occasions a conductor could have a horn section playing in the concert that was totally different from the section that appeared in the rehearsals. In 1903, Sir Henry Wood made an offer to his players of £100 per year provided that he had first call on his players and no deputies were to be used.

About two years after his return to London, Alf and his wife, accepted a lodger, Frank Probyn, who was in London to enroll at the Royal College of Music. What Probyn related to Stephen Pettitt, concerns the years 1910 to 1914.⁹

At Alf's invitation, he went to an address at Shepherd's Bush but found the house deserted. Alf had not remembered to send a message to Probyn that he was about to move to Third Avenue, Acton. Eventually Probyn found the new address in Acton with half-opened packing cases all over the place. Alf went out and, when he returned, he soon got into a heated row with his wife. Alf insisted that Probyn have a meal and a bed made ready. Probyn didn't recall the daughter, Olga Brain, who was born a year or so later – in 1911. As in his later years in Los Angeles, Alf demonstrated his willingness to help a young horn player just starting out.

Alf gave Probyn opportunities to gain horn playing experience while he was a student at the R.C.M. Probyn benefited from being used as Alf's deputy in the Shaftesbury Theatre Orchestra, conducted by Arthur Wood – Alf was their regular first horn. On the first occasion that Alf sent Probyn to the Shaftesbury, the other players banned him from performing. On the second occasion, however, Arthur Wood had sorted out the problem and Probyn was allowed to play thereafter as Alf's permanent deputy. Perhaps it was a mutually beneficial arrangement, for while Probyn was filling engagements with Alf's orchestras, Alf was enjoying some leisure – playing poker, for example, through the night at the Musicians Association.

One day, Alf was booked for two jobs – one at Waterloo in the morning and another at Winchester Cathedral in the

afternoon/evening. Instead of going himself, he sent Probyn and took the day off. Word of this got to his father, A. E. Brain Snr, who sought out his son and gave him a severe reprimand: "What the bloody hell did you mean by sending the youngster to Winchester?" Following this incident, A. E. Snr advised Probyn not to stay with Alf any longer.

Probyn appears not to have been entirely grateful to Alf for all the opportunities that came to him through Alf's kindness. Probyn described Alf's manner as "very coarse." He was a great womaniser, he said. Probyn also found Alf's wife "very coarse and fat" and, moreover, of "doubtful reputation." She had been "a Tiller girl." [*chorus line dancer*] So what? Perhaps Probyn's provincial background had not prepared him for the culture shock of living in London. Probyn seems to complain about everyone; he was very dismissive of Aubrey, stating he was not respected!

Alf's marriage to the "Tiller girl" was not a happy one, as Probyn witnessed on the day he became their lodger. Around 1914 Alf left his wife and moved to Gutteridge's pub at Elstree, which was run by a friendly couple. His wife followed him wherever he went but he made every effort to lose her. On one occasion, she caught up with him and Frank Probyn at the Spa Orchestra, Bridlington.

Another horn-player (an amateur/professional) Handel Knott, recalled Alfred Jnr from the very early days in London:

I started to play the horn about 1905 when I was seventeen and I think it was after that time when Alfred came from being principal horn in the Scottish Orchestra to take up a similar position in Henry Wood's Queen's Hall Orchestra for the promenade concerts. I know I went to Queen's Hall to hear him play the Strauss Horn Concerto No. 1 and it was a revelation. Horn concertos played in public in those days were hardly known. His magnificent playing thrilled everyone and the Brain supremacy in horn playing was established. He also played 1st horn in Schumann's *Konzertstück* for four horns and orchestra, a truly remarkable achievement on the horns then in use. When playing quietly he produced the wonderful true French horn tone with a floating kind of sound that seemed to come from nowhere. In playing at various concerts with Alfred, I always got this same impression of his tone. His technique also was very fine, a much more difficult task on the piston narrow-bore horn of those days.¹⁰

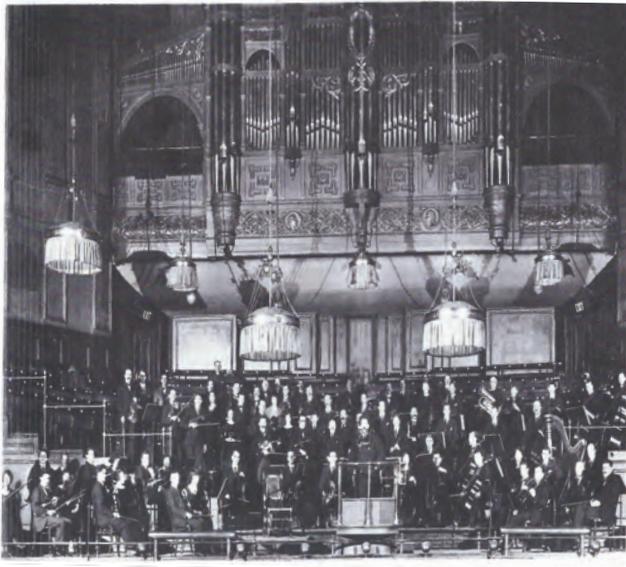
Clearly, Alf's performance of Strauss in concertos or orchestral work was legendary. This is confirmed by his early recordings with Albert Coates and others, in the acoustic era of the gramophone. In spite of the limitations of the recording technology, his vivacity of style and beauty of tone can be heard. In the Queen's Hall Orchestra, Alfred gained a reputation as one of the more outspoken members of the orchestra. If he didn't like a piece of music, he wasn't shy about telling the conductor exactly what he thought! One example is told by Sir Henry Wood, in his autobiography, *My Life And Music* (Victor Gollancz, 1938, p. 380):



Nowadays we regard Bela Bartok as one of the leading forces in the development of modern music, but his works were unknown in England until 1914. On September 1, we played his *Suite for Orchestra* for the first time. This very original Hungarian composer's idiom was somewhat strange and brought forth a protest from one or two members of the orchestra... I recall with amusement that A. E. Brain – brother of Aubrey Brain, our present leader of the horns – stood up and “went for” me. “Surely you can find better novelties than this kind of stuff?” he said indignantly. I saw there was a call for a little tact. “You must remember,” I said, “that I must interpret all schools of music – much that I do not really care for – but I never want my feelings to reflect upon the orchestra. You never know, but I am of opinion this man will take a prominent position one day. It may take him years to establish it, but his originality and idiom mark his music as the type of novelty our public ought to hear.” This calmed Brain and, moreover, I have the satisfaction of seeing my prediction fulfilled.¹¹



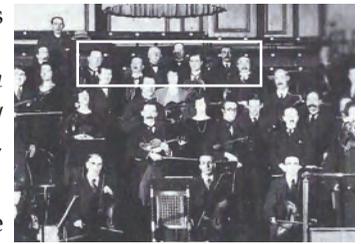
*The Brain Family – Winchester, 15th July 1920
The Queen's Hall Orchestra*



From the above photograph, I have tried to “zoom in” on the horn section below, sitting in the old English way, from right to left in the photograph – fourth to first. Go up from the gap next to the podium between two violinists, three rows to

the gent with a moustache. This is the fourth horn.

Fourth horn: Alfred Edwin Brain Snr; third horn: Aubrey Brain; second horn: Fred Salkeld, first horn: Alfred Edwin Brain Jnr.



It is worth noting here the history of “The Queen's Hall.”

It was to be founded in Langham Place London. Sir Henry Wood was appointed as assistant chorus master to the conductor Felix Mott for a series of Wagner concerts to be held at the newly built Queen's Hall. The manager of the hall was Robert Newman who proposed to run a ten-week season of promenade concerts and who, being impressed by Wood, asked him to conduct the orchestra.

There had been such concerts held in London since 1938 and Arthur Sullivan's concerts in the 1870s had been particularly successful, because he had offered his audiences something more than the usual light music. Newman aimed to copy Sullivan and stated “I am going to run nightly concerts and train the public by easy stages. Popular at first, gradually rising the standard until I have created a public for classical and modern music”¹²

In order to make the concerts more attractive to all Londoners, Newman charged prices that were cheaper than those found in normal concert halls. The promenade (where the public stood) was one shilling; the balcony two shillings; and the grand circle (reserved seats) were three and five shillings. In today's currency this would equate to £3.85 (\$6.30), £7.70 (\$12.59), £11.55 (\$18.89), and £19.25 (\$31.48). “The Proms” had started.

Newman needed financial backing for his first season, and the first sponsor was the very wealthy Ear, Nose, and Throat Consultant Specialist, Dr. George Cathcart. He would sponsor the concerts on two conditions: First, Sir Henry had to conduct all the concerts; second, the Queen's Hall Orchestra had to adopt the “diapason normal” pitch. This was because he had treated singers with throat problems as the result of singing at the then higher pitch used in London. At that time the pitch in London was A 452.4 Hz at 60F, and with the Queen's Hall Orchestra the pitch became A455.5 in a heated hall. Basically the pitch in London was a full semitone higher than that used on the Continent.

Due to his background in voice training, Wood agreed. The members of the brass and woodwind section of the orchestra were unwilling to buy new low-pitched instruments, so Cathcart imported a set from Belgium and lent them to the players. After a season the players recognized that the new low pitch would be permanently adopted, and they bought their instruments from him.

For the first concert Sir Henry opened with, what some critics called “blatant trivialities,” but within a few days he had introduced works such as Schubert's *Unfinished*, the *Great C Major*, etc.

In the *Radio Times* of September 30th, 1930, we have a section on “Henry Wood looks back” in which the great man gave the following information:



When I look round my orchestra at the end of this fourteenth season of Promenade Concerts, I feel like the father of a very big family, it is, I believe, a very happy family too. If it were not for our work together and especially everyday contact of the eight weeks Promenade season would be unbearable. Wasn't it George Formby who used to say, "relations are worst then friends?" Of all the silly ideas that exist concerning a conductor's job the silliest is that beloved of the writer of romantic fiction. To her (yes, usually her) the conductor plays magically on his instrument as though they formed an organist's keyboard. A pretty picture but obviously complete nonsense.¹³

We have our fun together, though it may be some of the things that amuse us do not seem so amusing to other people. That is something the fate of family jokes. Anyway we find it funny when we are rehearsing Ravel's *Bolero* in which you will remember each instrument in turn has an elaborate solo to play, to treat the whole thing as a competition festival. As each man completed his solo, the man who was to follow him treated his efforts with the utmost scorn, as much as to say, "What a rotten show, I'll show you in a minute." Then all joined in a shuffling of feet, which is the orchestra's traditional manner of registering its displeasure. Occasionally there are little rows in the orchestra. It was after a rehearsal of a piece by a now world famous composer, that that great horn player, Alfred Brain (brother of Aubrey Brain) wrote to tell me, without reservation, precisely what he and his colleagues thought of the music they had just been playing. And I shall not readily forget the look on the face of that magnificent flautist Albert Fransella when he told us exactly what would happen if we dared reengage a certain woman flautist who had just played a solo.¹⁴

Alf then became a member of the London Chamber Musicians, and took part in two concerts promoted by "Leighton House Chamber Concerts" at Leighton House, West Kensington. London. In the first concert on March 24th 1909, they performed the Octet by Hugo Kahn, and in the second concert on the 30th, they played the nonets of Spohr and Sir Charles Stanford.

On 30th October 1911, Olga, Alf's daughter was born.

Due to his huge natural talent, within the short space of ten years Alf had become the foremost and most sought after horn player in London. When Borsdorf (Alf's teacher) had to retire in 1913 due to illness, Alf became the first horn of the Royal Philharmonic Society, and Thomas Busby became first horn of the LSO.

World War I and its Aftermath

The outbreak of the First World War in 1914, which made such a violent intrusion into everybody's lives, also interrupted Alf's career as one of London's foremost horn-players, and he saw active and dangerous service with the Scots Guards.

Aubrey joined the Welsh Guards, 24th February 1916; he remained with them until August 1920 playing the horn in

the band and saw no active service (Stephen Pettitt – *Dennis Brain*).¹⁵

At this time Alf considered a change of career – as a tenor – encouraged by Sir Thomas Beecham, as Alf here relates to a Los Angeles newspaper, explaining that this was dashed by the outbreak of hostilities:

No, I don't play any other instruments for the horn is my first and only love instrumentally and has been so for some twenty-two years, though come to think about it, if it hadn't have been for the Great War, this might not have been so, for just prior to the outbreak of hostilities, Sir Thomas Beecham had about persuaded me to devote all of my efforts to bringing out the latent possibilities of my voice. The War brushed that ambition aside for, of course, I went in with the outbreak of hostilities and stayed for the end of the show – including four months with the Army of Occupation. I don't think I will readily forget the tremendous crashes of sound or the deep diapason of the siege artillery with which I served four years, one year and eight months of which was in active service in France, until some shrapnel played havoc with my right hand and I thought for a while that my playing days were over. But I came around alright and they transferred me when the show was over to the Coastguard Band and, once more, I was following the peaceful vocation of blowing the horn in Cologne till my welcome discharge came along and permitted me to resume my activities in London once more.¹⁶

Alf's service record (service number 16810) confirms some of the above information and gives further details of dates of service and his military honours. His rank was that of a Private when he enlisted on 30 November 1915. He was on reserve until 23 August 1916, so presumably he was able to take part in what musical engagements were available in the meantime. He was transferred to the Scots Guards on 22nd May 1917 and was trained in communications. He was sent to the French Front in May 1917 where he spent over a year in the hazardous work of stringing up the vital telephone cable links between battle stations. He was hit by shrapnel in 1918 and, at one stage, it was thought he would lose the use of his right hand. Happily he made a complete recovery and on 19th November 1918 he was sent to the Army of Occupation in Cologne with the Coastguard Band, where he played the horn. He was discharged on 6 May 1919, as he was considered no longer fit for War service due to the injuries he had sustained.

Apparently, during his time in the trenches, Alf used to keep his lip in shape by playing on an old Bugle (related by Jack Cave). This is where he also learned to cook, a talent that would be of use to him later in life. Like many servicemen who served in that theatre of war, he was issued the British War Medal and Victory Medal.

On his return to London following the War, Beecham hired Alf to play first horn in the Orchestra of the Opera House, Covent Garden. Jack Cave recalls Alf telling him, during that period, there were not many good English horn players. Indeed, there used to be a sign outside the "Garden" stating, "Horn opening, English need not apply."¹⁷



Beecham was so pleased that Alf was back in London that he put him to work immediately giving Alf no time to “get his lip in shape.” Following the performance of *Aida*, Alf said his lips were like cardboard, and he could not blow a thing for a few days, but, blessed with a very strong embouchure, he quickly recovered.

An interesting story is told about Alf when he was in Covent Garden. They were doing *Siegfried* and Alf was playing the off stage Call. Just a short while before the Call, someone noticed that Alf was nowhere to be seen. Panic set in, and someone casually said, “he’s in the Nag’s Head” (a pub just outside the stage door of the opera house). Someone dashed over to the Nags Head, called Alf, and off he went to play the Call! This was noted and every night that *Siegfried* was on for that run, someone would go to the “Nag” shout out, “Alf when you’re ready,” and off he’d go to play, and then back to the bar for another libation. He was always that cool of temperament.¹⁸

Interestingly, many years later, around the mid 80’s Vincent DeRosa and Jack Cave and their wives took a holiday in London. When in town they wanted to visit the Paxman Horn factory, which was then situated in Long Acre, Covent Garden. There, they met some horn players and asked them for directions to the “Nags Head,” as they had recalled the pub from Alf’s story. They wanted to make a pilgrimage to have a “British beer” and toast their great friend in one of his haunts.¹⁹

Alexander Penn remembered Alf Brain Jnr as a “fine player” and particularly of works by Richard Strauss, whose works (Penn said) he interpreted with “great sense of humour.” Penn recalled a concert in Queen’s Hall (LSO), which included Wagner’s *Siegfried Idyll*. Aubrey Brain was playing first horn and Penn, second. Alf played a prank on them: creeping round behind the orchestra, he “hid behind the organ pipes, and tried to put them off. Aubrey was not amused.”

Penn confirmed what is stated from other sources that Alf and his first wife didn’t get on. Penn recalled, “She was house-proud, he wasn’t; he used to delight in finding patches of dust in which he could write his name.” Although Alf had confided in Penn about the letter he received from Walter Damrosch, offering the principal post in the New York Symphony, Penn heard nothing further from him after he emigrated and did not hear about his death in 1966.

Alf’s reputation as one of Britain’s foremost principal horn players was assured through his concert performances as a soloist as well as an orchestral player, but early recordings also played an important part in spreading his reputation further afield than the shores of the British Isles. It is worth mentioning here what Vincent DeRosa recalled from a story told by Sir John Barbirolli: when Alf was very young and playing first horn in one of the orchestras in London (Papa had moved to 4th, Aubrey on 3rd), the conductor began getting a bit aggressive with him. Up jumped Papa Brain to his defence and said, “Sir, you can be replaced, but my son can’t!!!” Sir John was sitting in the last desk of the cellos at the time!

Alf then went on to form the London Wind Quintette with the virtuoso oboe player Leon Goossens. HMV and Edison Bell produced many recordings, mostly orchestral, which feature Alf in the orchestra or as a soloist in chamber music. Regrettably, he did not record any works for horn and piano or violin, horn, and piano. It is interesting to note that during his time in

London Alf never played the Brahms Horn Trio. When asked about this years later, he simply answered, “I couldn’t play quietly enough then.” Of course, this contradicts reports of his beautiful soft playing that appeared from no where.

Many years later, two years before he retired, he recorded a precious handful of works that include the lively, jocular, and beautifully played *Choros No. 4* for three horns and trombone by Villa Lobos. Some in the horn profession regard this as the best recording that Alf made but he also made the first gramophone recording of Haydn’s Second Concerto in 1950.

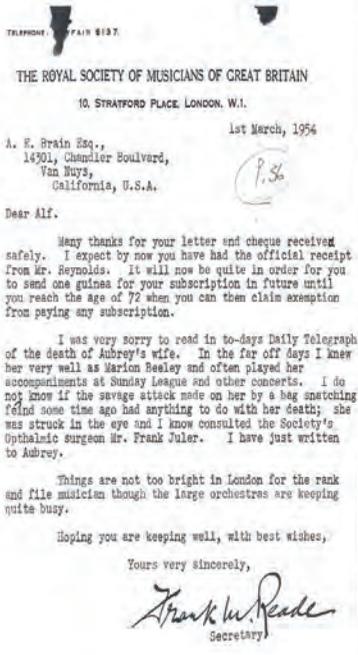
Apart from these precious works in the chamber and solo repertoire, it is still possible to hear his exceptional flexibility of sound and beauty of tone on a host of early pre-electrical recordings made for Edison Bell and HMV. He also participated in some of the first recordings that were made of wind music arrangements or excerpts by Bizet, Scarlatti, Pierne, Haydn, Barthe, and others. His discography is included in the first section of Appendix A at the end of this series of articles. Here are three of them as listed in *Dennis Brain – A Biography* by Steven Pettit.²⁰

Edison Bell Records – The London Wind Quintet: R. Murchie (flute), Leon Goossens (oboe), Haydn Draper (clarinet), W. James (bassoon), Alfred Brain (horn)

- EB 515. Andante & Allegro (Scarlatti), and *Pastorale* (Pierne), recorded 1922.
- EB 519. “Kermesse Scene” *Faust* (Gounod) recorded 1922. Quintette from Act 2 *Carmen* (Bizet). Recorded 1922 (on same disc)
- EB 3476. *Passacaille* by A. Barthe recorded 1920. Finale to *Suite Op. 57* (Lefebvre).

After Alf emigrated to the States, Frederick Salkeld took his position in the London Wind Quintette recordings made for Edison Bell. Salkeld’s name appears as the horn soloist in Edison Bell’s catalogue for these recordings, but curiously Alfred Brain, who played in the above recordings, is not mentioned. This must be an error or oversight by Edison Bell. Tony Catterick, in his conversations with Leon Goossens in the 1980s, learned that the Edison Bell recordings with the London Wind Quintette were with “Alfred Brain.” Perhaps one of them – the Thuille Sextette – has Salkeld playing. The long horn solo in the slow movement is very beautifully played but it isn’t Alf’s distinctive tone. No precise recording dates are known for any of these early Edison Bell recordings.

So to date, Alf had become the most sought after horn player in London, even Aubrey always played “down the line” to Alf. In 1921 on the 6th of November he joined the Royal Society of Musicians, and it was at this point that he made the very big decision to leave London as the result of an invitation to play for the New York Symphony Orchestra under Damrosch, who had worked with him in London. It was also his hope to escape from his wife. Whilst on an orchestral tour in Wales. Alf showed a colleague a letter from Damrosch inviting him to go to as principal horn to the New York Symphony Orchestra. When the colleague asked Alf if his wife know about this move Alf’s quick reply was “No, and for God’s sake don’t tell her.”²¹



Alf always kept in touch with friends and the R.S.M. He joined the Royal Society of Musicians on November 6th 1921.

Letter from the RSM Secretary in 1954 mentioning the death of Aubrey's wife Marion.

There is a great story of Alf playing the high horn duet in *Judas Maccabeus* by Handel. Nick Hill recalls the story, which was later confirmed to me by my friend, Terrence Johns, the former principal

horn of the London Symphony Orchestra, following a conversation he had some years ago with the well-known old London horn player, Jimmy Buck Snr.

In "See the Conquering Hero," there is a very high and exposed section for the two horns. The conductor, at the rehearsal on the day of the concert, said he wanted only the trumpets section to play the opening horn fanfare of the piece. Alf was incensed with the idea of not being allowed the chance of performing this well-known high exposed horn duet and objected, but to no avail. At the concert just before this particular chorus, Alf tapped the two trumpeters on the shoulder and told them that *he* was going to play. He then stood on his chair and played the fanfare with his bell right up in the air, and very loud indeed, without missing a note. When the section was finished he smiled at everybody and sat down. He had made his point.²²

Jimmy Buck stated that Alf was a very kind, fair, and modest person a real character who would help anyone but, he also could be very tough and hard when it was called upon to be so.

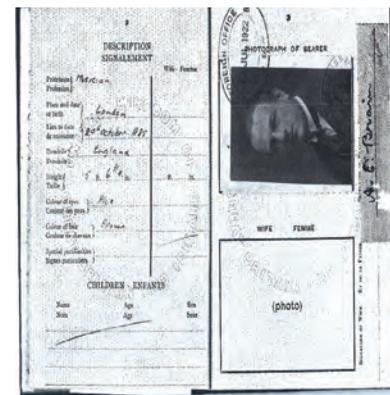
In Los Angeles in 1923, Alf remembered his days at Queen's Hall fondly and also the London Symphony Orchestra and Covent Garden Opera Orchestra:

For fifteen years I have been principal horn with the Queen's Hall Orchestra, of London, at the same time filling engagements in like capacity with the London Symphony Orchestra. This Queen's Hall Orchestra is a most interesting institution. You see, none of the chaps are paid for their performances for it is a co-operative organization of one hundred members, each holding ten shares of stock. They give their own concerts and have only guest conductors, the concerts being used for advertising purposes principally, for most of us are instructors as well as performers. I am still principal horn with them and still hold my stock (which, by the way, has greatly increased in value). They granted me a furlough to come to this country

but I have taken out my first papers and am still well-satisfied in Los Angeles that I am rather afraid they are going to have a long wait for my return. Then, too, I played some time with the Covent Garden Opera Orchestra and had the opportunity of playing under some great opera conductors – Mancinelli, Campanini, Panizza, Emile Cooper, and Bruno Walter conducting *The Ring*²³

Moving to New York, then Los Angeles

In late September 1922 Alf and his daughter Olga set sail for a new life performing as co-principal horn with the New York Symphony Orchestra.



The New York Symphony Orchestra eventually merged with the New York Philharmonic in 1928 to become the New York Philharmonic Orchestra.

In the 1922-23 season Walter Damrosch was conductor and the horn section was: A. E. Brain (alternate 1st horn), Santiago Richart (alternate 1st horn), Arthur Schneiderman, Max Srbecky, Eric Hauser (who replaced by Srbecky by February 5, 1923, and Fred Dultgen.

According to Stephen Pettit, Alf (who soon became Al in America) was co-principal of the New York Symphony from 23 October 1922 to 20 March 1923. Al

was not yet happily settled and there was "an uncomfortable rivalry between the New York Symphony and Philharmonic Orchestras which did not make Damrosch an easy man to work for." While the money as good the climate was too similar to that of London so, in the spring of 1923,

Al jumped at the opportunity to become principal horn of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. He bought a car and set out for the west with Olga. For the 1920s this was a daunting adventure that Al decribed as, "a liberal education as to the vastness of this country and, taken in all, a most delightful trip."²⁴

They arrived in Los Angeles in mid-September and Al soon wrote home to tell his family they had arrived safely. The return letter from his father was quoted in Part I of this article. Al was shocked that his mother had died, although the news was not entirely unexpected.



SYMPHONY SOCIETY OF NEW YORK

1. I agree to play Horn for the Symphony Society of New York for the season of 1922-1923 beginning on or about October 23rd, 1922. The season shall consist of a minimum of thirty (30) consecutive weeks. The Symphony Society of New York has the privilege of further prolonging this season of thirty (30) weeks at its pleasure by notifying me of such extension on or before March 20th, 1923.
2. During the term of this contract, I agree to play to the best of my ability whenever called upon by the Symphony Society of New York in rehearsals, solo and public performances.
3. In case of war, strikes or force majeure the Symphony Society of New York has the right to cancel this contract.
4. For my services, as above specified, the Symphony Society of New York agrees to pay me the sum of one hundred dollars (\$100.00) a week.
5. The Symphony Society of New York shall have the privilege of renewing this agreement under the same terms and conditions for the season of 1923-1924 by notifying me on or before April 1st, 1923.
6. All further details not specified in this agreement are to be arranged in accordance with the rules and by-laws of the New York Local, 802, A. F. of M.

Alfred Brain

Approved and accepted by the
SYMPHONY SOCIETY OF NEW YORK

Per *George Sogley*
Manager.



When he arrived in Los Angeles, Alfred already appears to have been a celebrity to judge from the long and detailed feature interview that was published in a Los Angeles newspaper shortly after his arrival. This article contains information that would otherwise be lost to us, since it gives Alfred's own story of his life and career up to that point.

The financial "backer" for the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra at that time was Williams Andrew Clark, a multimil-

The contract written by Alfred Brain for his employment with the New York Symphony Orchestra in 1922. Point number 5 concerning the possible renewal of the agreement never materialized.

lionaire who had made his money in the Gold Rush. He was a violinist himself and sometimes "sat in" during rehearsals – after all he paid the money! Clark wanted to establish a first-rate orchestra in L.A. Besides securing the services of Alf he also managed to hire de Busscher (oboe), and Fred Martz (bassoon). They were paid \$250 a week. George Hoffman, principal horn of the Berlin Opera was originally booked to play first but, when the conductor Rothwell heard Alf play, he had no hesitation to put Alf on first and Hoffman on third – all done without consulting Hoffman!²⁵

Los Angeles was, in 1923, a thriving metropolis with many theatre orchestras that provided regular work for the local musicians, and Alfred wasted no time in establishing himself there. Apart from the theatres, there was also the silent film industry up until about 1929, and thereafter the early sound tracks for films that required orchestral accompaniment. Al Brain played in the first "talkies" with Al Jolson, and later for MGM and Twentieth-Century Fox Studios. He can be heard on such films as *Hurricane*, *Ben Hur*, *Captain of Castile*, *King Kong*, and countless others. Early radio broadcasts also helped to spread Alf's reputation as both orchestral player and soloist.

To be continued...

In his youth, after only a brief period of study, Welshman Leighton Jones became solo horn of the National Youth Orchestra of Wales. At nineteen, he began to play and broadcast with the BBC Orchestra of Wales. He studied with Keith Whitmore (principal of the LPO) and Alan Civil. Due to family commitments, he returned to West Wales and is a freelance hornist with chamber and orchestral groups, including The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, City of Birmingham Orchestra, The National Symphony Orchestra, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, and The Orchestra of Welsh National Opera.

Notes

- ¹Royal Academy of Music students records
- ²Stephen Pettit. *Dennis Brain A Biography*. (London: Robert Hale. 1976, 1989)
- ³Ibid.
- ⁴Ibid.
- ⁵Irvine Rosenthal. "Of Brass and Brain," *Woodwind Magazine* 6 (October 1953) pp. 9-10+
- ⁶Sir Henry Wood *My Life on Music*. (London: Victor Gollancz. 1938)
- ⁷Recalled by Reginald Morley-Pegge (author of *The French Horn* – Benn 1960) who attended the concert.
- ⁸Rosenthal. op. cit.
- ⁹Pettit. op. cit.
- ¹⁰This statement was reputedly made by Handel Knott, a composer/amateur horn player and contemporary of A. E. Brain, who now does not recall making the statement.
- ¹¹Sir Henry Wood. op. cit.
- ¹²The History and Foundation of the BBC Proms. Online
- ¹³Sir Henry Wood from "Sir Henry looks back," *Radio Times* Sept 1938
- ¹⁴Ibid.
- ¹⁵Pettit. op. cit.
- ¹⁶An interviews with A. Brain, *Chicago Musical Leader*, Oct 20, 1923
- ¹⁷Personal communication from Vincent DeRosa (Los Angeles studio hornist) and from letter of Jack Cave (Los Angeles studio hornist) to Tony Catterick (London)
- ¹⁸Letter from Jack Cave to Tony Catterick
- ¹⁹Personal interview with Vincent DeRosa
- ²⁰Pettit. op. cit.
- ²¹From a personal interview with Alexander Penn. Alf related this information to his friend Penn.
- ²²From Terry Johns, former LSO Principal Horn, who heard this from Jimmy Buck Snr, a horn playing contemporary of Alf, who was present at the concert. Confirmed in a letter by Nick Hill.
- ²³*Chicago Musical Leader*. op. cit.
- ²⁴Ibid.
- ²⁵Related to the author by Vincent DeRosa