



Journal of the

國際圓号協会

l'Association internationale du cor

Internationale Horngesellschaft

La società internazionale del Corno

国際ホルン協会

국제호른협회

Sociedad internacional des Trompa

International Horn Society

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OCTOBER 2020

# *The* **Horn Call**

# *The Horn Call*

**Journal of the International Horn Society**

**Volume LI, No. 1, October 2020**

**James Boldin, Editor**

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The International Horn Society recommends that HORN be recognized as the correct English label for our instrument.  
[From the Minutes of the First IHS General Meeting, June 15, 1971, Tallahassee, Florida, USA]

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**On the Cover:**

Vincent DeRosa, photographer wishes to remain anonymous.

*Cover design by Shanette Washington*

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# The International Horn Society

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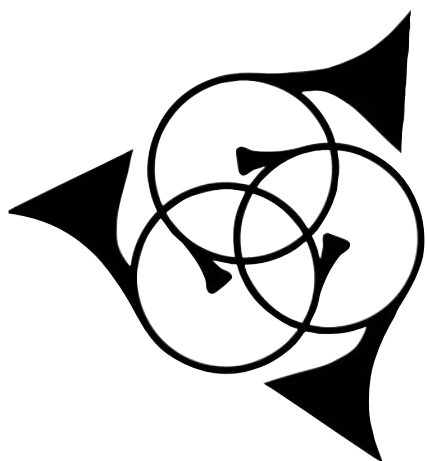


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THE HORN CALL

# From the Editor

By James Boldin

## Greetings from your new Editor!

Please know what an incredible honor it is to follow in the footsteps of Bill Scharnberg, who served as Editor of *The Horn Call* for the last seventeen years! As you may know, Bill not only did a tremendous job in this position, but simultaneously taught in the College of Music at the University of North Texas, and was an active solo, chamber, and orchestral performer. It boggles the mind how he was able to balance these varied and difficult tasks so well. I cannot thank him and the rest of his editorial staff enough for their service to the IHS, and for setting such a high standard for us all to follow.

Working on this issue of *The Horn Call* has given me ample opportunity to reflect on what the International Horn Society means to me personally and professionally. As a young horn student, I eagerly awaited each new issue of *The Horn Call*. In its pages, I discovered a world of horn playing that extended far beyond the borders of my small, rural town.

Decades later, the global landscape has changed: social media, mobile devices, and other technology have allowed for a level of interconnectivity that few could have imagined except in science fiction. As I write these words, the ongoing coronavirus pandemic has impacted all of our lives. And while various arts organizations grapple with what these changes will mean in the short and long term, I hope that the International Horn Society and *The Horn Call* can continue to help you feel a sense of community and camaraderie with horn players around the world. Be sure to peruse the News and Reports column for information on what your fellow horn players have been up to recently. Your collective creativity is truly inspiring!

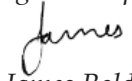
This issue is one of both sadness and celebration: we honor legendary Los Angeles studio musician Vincent DeRosa on his one hundredth birthday, and pay our respects to recently departed colleagues Michael Hatfield and Horace "Fitz" Fitzpatrick. Despite the cancellation of the 52nd IHS Symposium, our resilient community has forged ahead with the first ever "Virtual Workshop," a compendium of videos from IHS 52 clinicians, presenters, and exhibitors. There is a wealth of knowledge and experience to be found here, and I hope you will take the time to enjoy the presentations. Please join me in heartily thanking Lydia Van Dreel, Dan Phillips, and Jeff Snedeker for their efforts in organizing the Virtual Workshop.

As always, this issue of *The Horn Call* features great content from our article and column contributors, as well as reviews of new recordings, music, and books. Of particular interest is the new Media Reviews column, with Matthew Haislip joining us as editor. This column will consider the expanded world of streaming media, websites, mobile applications, and more!

I hope you'll also check out the brand-new *Horn Call Podcast*, a monthly podcast featuring interviews with *Horn Call* authors, archived audio from past IHS symposia, and other news and updates in the horn world. You can download the latest episodes from hornsociety.org, or by searching for it on your favorite podcast app.

In the past few months, I've learned so much about what it takes to edit a journal like *The Horn Call*, and I continue to learn new things every day. Please do not hesitate to contact me at editor@hornsociety.org with suggestions for articles, comments, questions, or to share a bit of horn-related news or humor. Maintaining our connections as musicians and horn players is more important now than ever.

Wishing you good health and great chops!

  
James Boldin

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The style manuals used by *The Horn Call* are *The Chicago Manual of Style*, fourteenth edition, and *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, sixth edition, by Kate Turabian. Refer to these texts or recent issues of *The Horn Call* for guidelines regarding usage, style, and formatting. The author's name, email address (or home/business address), and a brief biography should be included with all submissions. Authors are hereby advised that there may be editorial spelling/style/grammatical changes to articles in order to maintain the journal's format and professional integrity.

*The Horn Call* is currently created with Adobe InDesign, Photoshop, Illustrator and Acrobat. It is preferred that articles be submitted electronically attached to an email in Microsoft Word format. Footnotes (endnotes) should be numbered consecutively (no Roman numerals) and placed at the end of the text. Musical examples can be sent as pdfs, Sibelius files, embedded in a Word document, or as black and white images for scanning. Images/photographs may be sent electronically attached to an email or as hard copies to scan. For electronic submissions, 300 dpi is the minimum resolution necessary for clear reproductions in *The Horn Call*.

The octave designation system used in *The Horn Call* is the one preferred by *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music*, edited by Don Randel (1986):



# President's Message

By Andrew Pelletier

Hello, my dear horn friends and family!

Allow me to begin this message by saying how much I missed seeing all of you this past summer, and reconnecting with you at IHS52. That said, I hope you have had the chance to enjoy all of the presentations of our Virtual IHS52 Symposium. I thought it was an interesting and wide variety of presentations, especially for our first digital workshop. We are all indebted to **Lydia Van Dreel**, **Jeff Snedeker**, **Dan Phillips**, and the entire IHS52 team for their hard work, dedication, and service to the IHS. Without their efforts, we would have had no Symposium at all! I thank them from the bottom of my heart, and I know that you join me in that sentiment.

As the calendar turns a page at an IHS Symposium, and a new program year begins, we also have elections and changes in the Advisory Council. **Susan McCullough**, **Radegundis Tavares**, and **Lydia Van Dreel** have all been elected to a second term on the AC. I welcome **Benoît de Barsony** and **Leslie Norton**, newly elected AC members, starting their first terms. Their biographies are on the IHS website so you can get to know them. Along with these changes, this October edition of *The Horn Call* welcomes our new Publications Editor, **James Boldin**. We are all excited about James joining the team, and look forward to the new “look” and new ideas he brings to the IHS.

A few announcements for you about the coming year: as was discussed at our IHS Annual General Meeting, the Advisory Council has moved to create the first IHS endowment! I want to personally thank the AC for their quick action on this item, which will go towards ensuring a healthy and secure future for the IHS. In the coming year, our newly created **Educational Resource Committee** will be bringing new initiatives to the Advisory Council, looking at increasing the IHS's offerings for students and teachers — more to come! Also, please note the advertisement for our new **Student Advisory Committee**. This committee will be a sounding board for the Executive Committee of the IHS, and to give a voice and sense of ownership to our high school and college students. If you are of this age group, and have an interest in helping the IHS, please consider applying! And, last but not least, in this new program year I will be creating a **Diversity and Inclusion Committee**, to make recommendations to the Advisory Council about how to make the IHS even more welcoming and inclusive of all people who happen to play the horn! If you have an interest in joining this committee, please contact me directly.

As announced at our IHS Annual General Meeting, IHS53, summer of 2021, will also be held online. It was a difficult decision for the Advisory Council, but a nec-



essary one. Our original hosts, who had been planning and working for a few years on the Symposium, had to withdraw their bid when their institution halted all activities for the year, due to COVID-19. Your AC sprung into immediate action, trying to secure a venue and host who could put on a symposium, with less than a year to prepare and plan. Surprisingly, we found a few willing hosts, but only unwilling venues/institutions. The problem lies in planning and securing venues and spaces. Even though no one knows what will happen with COVID-19 in the coming year, and we *all* pray for its total eradication, *no* venue is willing to commit to a large event and secure contacts for spaces as long as the pandemic is in play and travel restrictions are in place.

However, IHS53 will be much closer to what we all anticipate from an in-person IHS Symposium. We are planning on having performances (both of soloists and ensembles—including some making their IHS debut), various masterclasses and warm-up sessions, and the return of all of our Competitions and Scholarship programs. IHS53 will be a major undertaking, and I am excited to see what the Advisory Council is able to “cook up”—they already have some extraordinary ideas. *More to come* on this as time progresses, but you will *not* want to miss it!

Last, but certainly not least, probably my favorite duty as IHS President is presenting the annual awards of the Service Medal of Honor, the Punto Award, and Honorary Membership. Being a natural-born historian, I'm honored to recognize these great individuals who have had such an impact on our Society and the horn world at large. **Jeff Snedeker** received the Service Medal of Honor for all of his years of service to the IHS: on the Advisory Council, as *Horn Call* Editor, as President (two terms), and as curator of the Virtual IHS52. **John Cox** received the Punto Award. Honorary Membership, which is the Society's highest honor, was awarded to **Kazmierz Machala**, **Tom Varner**, and **Vicente Zarzo**. Their biographies are included in this *Horn Call*, so you can appreciate their exceptional careers and activities.

Sorry this message has been so unusually long, but we have lots going on. Please be safe and healthy, and, to steal Jeff Snedeker's wonderful line from his welcome to IHS52: remember that a virtual community is *still* a community!

Wishing you all of the very best!

  
Andy

---

*P.S. It goes without saying, of course, that I hope you will join me in a hearty “Happy Birthday” to the legendary Hollywood recording artist, Vincent DeRosa, who turns 100 on October 5!! I hope you enjoy the look back over his incredible career in this Horn Call, and wish Mr. DeRosa excellent health and good spirits!*

---





# Vincent DeRosa: A Life In Music

## By Betty DeRosa and Paul Neuffer

October 5, 2020, marks Vincent DeRosa's 100th birthday. Arguably the most recorded horn player in history, Vince has influenced and inspired countless horn players, composers, musicians and audiences around the world. However prominent his musical accomplishments, Vince remains a bit of an enigmatic figure. The reason for that may be that studio work is itself a bit of an anonymous field. Listeners hear the wonderful musicians in a movie soundtrack or on the radio, but don't know their names. Another reason may be that Vince, for all his personal and professional success, remains a very humble person. Some have made suc-

cessful documentation of Vince's life: Todd Miller, in his marvelous book, *Carved in Stone: The Life and Musical Legacy of Vincent DeRosa*; Annie Bosler, in her tremendous documentary film, *1M1: Hollywood Horns of the Golden Years*; and Howard Hilliard's excellent article, "The History of Horn Playing in Los Angeles from 1920 to 1970." As a tribute to Vince, his daughter, Betty, has graciously agreed to help write a biography, drawing from her family's history, as well as previous interviews with Vince, Jim Decker, Richard Perissi, and Brian O'Connor.

Music runs deep in the roots of Vince DeRosa's family tree. His maternal grandfather, Fortunato DeRubertis, was a concertmaster at La Scala. Along with concertizing on violin, he also taught opera for the members of La Scala. Fortunato's wife, Maria, was a highly accomplished pianist and the two would often perform recitals together. Fortunato and Maria had eleven children, some of whom would become professional musicians themselves. Vincent would eventually become one of the top horn players in Los Angeles; Julius would become a professional flutist; though not pursuing a professional career, Clelia would become a fine soprano. Fortunato and Maria's union would spawn several generations of future professional musicians: Henry Sigismonti, grandson, horn; Louise DiTullio, granddaughter, flute; Jeffrey DeRosa, great-grandson, horn; William DeRosa, great-grandson, cello; Ronald Royer, great-grandson, cellist/composer.

In 1909, Fortunato traveled to the United States with Oscar Hammerstein I. Upon seeing the opportunities available in the United States, he decided to move the family from Italy. Fortunato settled in Kansas City, Missouri, where his brother, Nazzareno, was himself already settled. Nazzareno was a highly accomplished bassist and director of music at the Olin Music School in Kansas City. He was also the conductor of the Kansas City Symphonette. Arturo Toscanini had offered Nazzareno the principal bass position of the New York Philharmonic, but he declined, preferring to remain in Kansas City.

After settling in Kansas City, Fortunato began bringing the rest of the family from Italy, starting with the eldest son, Vincent. Vincent would soon be hired by Alfred Newman and Leo Forbstein to work at the New-



Sally, Marie, Clelia DeRosa.  
Photo courtesy Betty DeRosa.

man Theater in Kansas City. In 1916, Fortunato unexpectedly died due to a prescription medicine error. Vincent, being the eldest, assumed the responsibilities of the head of the household and brought the remaining members of the family over from Italy. In 1919, Newman and Forbstein moved to Los Angeles. In 1920, Vincent himself moved to Los Angeles where he became principal horn of the California Concert Orchestra. After reconnecting with Newman and Forbstein, they recruited Vincent to join the newly formed Philharmonic Orchestra, where he would sit second to Alfred Brain.

The orchestra and music school in Kansas City were beginning to achieve quite a fine reputation. Musicians from all around the world would join its numbers including another Neapolitan, clarinetist John DeRosa. Nazzareno eventually introduced John to his niece, Clelia, and after a courtship, the pair married in 1918. Two years later, they had their first child, Vincenzo Fortunato Nazzareno Pietrangelo DeRosa. Four more children would follow.

About a year later, John, Clelia, and Vince moved to Chicago, where John would work with the Chicago Civic Opera. Vince's parents began teaching him solfeggio, ear training, intervals, and scales. His ability to read music was established before he learned how to play horn. Having a very fine ear, his family thought that he could be a good horn player, so John bought him a horn and also arranged lessons for him with Peter DiLecce, a member of the Civic Opera Orchestra.

Due to financial difficulties, the Civic Opera closed, and the DeRosas moved to Los Angeles where they would share a house with Vincent DeRubertis and Grandmother Maria, who would also help teach Vince solfeggio and other music fundamentals. The DeRosas remained in that house until John obtained a job with the



Santa Monica Municipal Band, after which they moved to a home in the Santa Monica area. John's work with the Santa Monica Municipal Band would be supplemented with other performing groups as well as studio recording. In the mid 1930s, John received a contract to work as a permanent member of the Twentieth Century Fox Studio Orchestra. Unfortunately, John was born with a heart condition, which would plague him his entire life. Two weeks after receiving the contract from Twentieth Century Fox, he passed. Vince was fifteen and, being the eldest, became the head of the household, eerily similar to his uncle Vincent DeRubertis's family situation.

While still a high school student, Vince would obtain special permission to work whenever the opportunity arose. He had a newspaper delivery route, but most of his earnings would come from various music jobs with symphony orchestras, opera orchestras, and chamber groups. He joined the California Junior Symphony, along with two other future Los Angeles horn stars, Richard Perissi and Jim Decker. Rich and Vince would grow up together, after Vince had moved to Los Angeles. They were both frequent guests at each other's homes, practicing or simply spending time together. Along with horn playing, the two would get into a bit of mischief. Rich would likely have been the more mischievous. Having an adventurous spirit, Rich would take Vince along on some of his exploits:

On Friday or Saturday nights, we would drive out to the San Fernando Valley, which was nothing at the time. Just pastures, fields, orchards. Several of us would meet for what we called "Hare and Hound" races. A car with about twenty to thirty sacks of flour would lead off. He would get about a minute head start, then the rest of us would take off. When we would get to the flour sack, we wouldn't know whether to turn left or right, we just had to guess. The next sack would be about one hundred yards away and we would keep racing until we got to the lead car. On one of these "Hare and Hound" races, Vince was with me, sitting in the passenger seat. We were going down White Oak Avenue when there were these dips and hills, then a raised railroad track. We were going so fast that when we went over the railroad tracks, the car became airborne. I glanced over at Vince to see if he was OK, and he was laying on the floor, scared to death!

Jim and Rich recollect going over to Vince's house to practice etudes and play duets. They would play their horns outside in the yard, after which Clelia would make

them some lunch. However, before Vince was allowed back into the house, his mother insisted that he do his long tone exercises, to Clelia's satisfaction.

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### **Jim would recall, in amazement, how intensely Vince concentrated on every note.**

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Each entrance was perfectly articulated, the sound-ing tone was steadily held, and the crescendo and diminuendo evenly balanced with a continuous beautiful tone, complete with as many overtones as Vince could produce. Jim credited Vince's eventual mastery of tonal control and mental concentration to this extreme focused training.

Vince had always been a conscientious student. Now, with the understanding of needing to earn an income, his practicing became even more diligent. Upon arriving in Los Angeles, Vince had taken lessons with his uncle Vincent as well as with Rich Perissi's father, Odolindo Perissi, who served for many years as the Los Angeles Philharmonic's fourth horn. Now he would begin studying with the best horn player in Los Angeles, Alfred Brain, Dennis Brain's uncle. Alfred Brain served as principal horn of the Los Angeles Philharmonic as well as principal horn of the Twentieth Century Fox Studio Orchestra. Prior to his move to the United States, Al held the principal horn position of every major orchestra in London. Brain's arrival in Los Angeles established what would become the standard of excellence for horn as well as all other musicians.



*Vince, ca. 1950*

Vince's first lesson with Brain was impressive enough for Brain to immediately begin referring Vince for professional work. Vince would do extra work with the Philharmonic as well as an occasional orchestral soundtrack session. Much of his work though came from live radio programs. In the 1930s and 1940s, there were many live local and national serial radio programs, several of which called for a small ensemble to accompany the drama of the story. Vince considered this among the greatest training he would receive. The musicians would have one thirty-minute rehearsal prior to meeting with the actors. The musicians would rehearse with the actors once, again for thirty minutes, then perform the show live, on the air. This routine of having to quickly learn one's parts and perform on a tight time schedule developed the concentration and accuracy demanded of such work. As Vince would confess, he didn't want to make a mistake on live radio with millions of people listening.

The radio, concert, and recording work would help Vince support his family until World War II arose. He en-





listed in the Army Air Corps, based in Santa Ana, where he would work in an orchestra that was recruited by Los Angeles music contractor Dave Klein. Many of Los Angeles's finest musicians were members of that ensemble, including: Mannie Klein, Bob Bain, Jim McGee, Harry Schmidt, Felix Slatkin, Abe Most, Lew Rademan, Harry Bluestone, Jimmy Getzoff, Dick Noel, and Earl Hagen, to name just a few. Many of the members became good friends. Vince would be Jim McGee's best man at his wedding, while Mannie, Bob, Harry, and Jim remained friends with Vince for the rest of their lives.

In 1944, while still in the service, Harold Diner, a friend of Vince's, arranged a blind date for him with Sally Jordan, an actress at the Pasadena Playhouse and in a radio soap opera. Harold had been trying to get the two together for quite some time, but Vince and Sally's schedules never managed it. A bit of serendipity may have played a part in the pair meeting. Sally was also an ice skater with the Ice Follies, which was scheduled to go on tour. Unfortunately, however, Sally fell and cracked her chin, forcing her to miss the tour. Finally being available to set up their date, the two met and after a very short six-week courtship, married, to the astonishment of their families. They had two children, John in 1946 and Betty in 1948.

After WWII ended, Vince immediately began working in the Los Angeles studios.

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### **His reputation as an excellent musician along with his flawless horn playing made his talents in high demand.**

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Alfred Brain, Jack Cave, and Vincent DeRubertis were the reigning top horn players in Los Angeles. In a few years' time, Vince would eventually surpass everyone as the most requested horn player. Most studios employed contracted orchestras of their own. Vince however opted not to sign a contract with any one particular studio as he preferred the freedom and flexibility to choose his work requests. According to Vince, he and Jack Cave were the only two horn players that were not tied down to any studio contracts, but preferred freelancing. In the early 1930s, Jack Cave became the principal horn of MGM studios, at twenty-two. He grew up in Santa Barbara where his stepfather taught him to play horn. His uncle, Bruno Jaenicke, selected for him a five valve B-flat Alexander, which he would use for his entire career. Two of Jack's

better-known soundtracks are *The Wizard of Oz* and *Gone with the Wind*. Incidentally, he was on the audition committee for Judy Garland's audition for MGM. Though Jack was nine years older than Vince, the two would become the best of friends, often working together as well as taking vacations together with their wives.

Requests for Vince's services were nonstop. Every composer wanted him on their sessions. This would at times put Vince in a delicate situation. Since the studios had a principal horn under contract, Vince did not want someone to lose their income due to a composer's desire for him to perform their score.

Vince would negotiate with the studio on behalf of the other horn player: he would only agree to work for the studio if they would guarantee to pay the other horn player their salary. The studio would always agree to Vince's demand. Vince worked for every major studio for every major film composer. When the film sessions finished for the day, usually around five o'clock, Vince would drive to another studio to work on a commercial

recording session. Along with popular soloists of the time, such as Bing Crosby, popular arrangers and writers such as Nelson Riddle and Percy Faith were requesting Vince to perform on their recordings. The days could be quite long, beginning at eight or nine in the morning and continuing until as late as two o'clock the next morning. Then, after grabbing a few hours of sleep, Vince would start the arduous process again the next morning at eight or nine. Despite the taxing schedule, his quality never suffered. No matter how difficult the parts or the number of takes required, Vince always maintained his high standards.

In 1950, Arturo Toscanini led his NBC Orchestra on a concert tour to the West Coast. After attending a concert, Vince was greatly impressed by the sound that the horn section, the noted Berv brothers, achieved on their Conn 8D horns. Vince decided that he too wanted to achieve the deep, dark sound that the Anton Horner students, James Chambers, Mason Jones, and the Berv brothers were obtaining. Around the same time, a horn player in Los Angeles who was going to leave town and the music business, contacted Vince to see if he wanted to buy his Conn 8D (one of the original production runs). Vince agreed and contacted the Conn factory to inform them that he would be assuming the payments of the instrument. Vince would practice on the 8D at home, becoming familiar with its characteristics, until finally



*A shot from the LA horn club recording session of David Raksin's Morning Revisited. L to R: Hyman Markowitz, Ralph Pyle, Richard Perissi, Vince DeRosa, Wayne Barrington, Fred Fox. Photo courtesy of Jim Decker.*



deciding to take it to work. The response was immediately positive. Conductors, composers, other musicians, and even the engineers loved the rich, deep tone Vince was achieving with the instrument.

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**From that moment on, the 8D would be his main instrument and would influence others to also use the Conn 8D.**

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Vince stated, “the Conn 8D was more free blowing, had easy response, good intonation, evenness and depth of sound. Of all the double horns the 8D comes closest to the sound of a Waldhorn and the Vienna F horn sound.”

During the contract era, musicians could find themselves without work for days or weeks, due to recording scheduling or parts scoring. To fill the time, some musicians would gather together to play chamber music. Jim Decker remembers:

The L.A. Horn Club was started through an idea from Wendell Hoss. We’d go up to his house to play quartets. Art Frantz said that we should have a regular thing set up so that a lot of the other guys could join in. So, we started the Horn Club then in 1951 or 1952. We did a lot of concerts: Pomona College, Bakersfield, Long Beach. At Immaculate Heart College, we were doing a concert there for the nuns and that’s where Bob Myers, who was an A and R guy for Capitol records, heard us and came backstage and said to us, ‘We’ve had a lot of records sold for the French horn and we wondered, if a record of one horn can sell that well, if a record of a group of horns would sell well too? Would you like to do a record for us?’ We all said, ‘YES!’ The group recorded their first album in 1960 followed by another edition in 1970. The ensemble would be the inspiration for many other American horn ensembles. They also helped expand the horn ensemble repertoire by commissioning works from David Raksin, Russel Garcia, and Ronald LoPresti. Other compositions and arrangements were produced by members George Hyde, Huntington Burdick, and Leon Donfray. Vince performed on both albums as the opening solo to Raksin’s *Morning Revisited* and along with Jim Decker, as the Descant soloists on Alec Wilder’s *Nonet*.

In the mid 1950s, the entire Los Angeles music recording industry was launched into a bitter battle. The president of the American Federation of Musicians, James Petrillo, decided, without conferring with the

musicians in the Los Angeles musicians’ union, to demand a tax on the studios to subsidize a union performance trust fund. As Jim Decker recalled:

Petrillo wanted to tax the studios that were making television shows. He wanted five percent of the gross cost of that picture to go into the trust fund. Not of the music budget, but of the whole budget. So, everything started going overseas. So we had to go on strike. We thought that was gross negligence. He didn’t ask us about it. So, Cecil Read started the Musicians Guild. Lloyd Ulyate and Vince were on the board. Ted Nash was on the board and we started that Guild. And one hundred of us bolted from the union. And then they wanted to kick us all out. Fortunately, in the international trade, they could keep us from doing local things like concerts and things like that. But they couldn’t keep us from doing things that were sold over state lines — radio stuff and records and things like that. But the television stuff went overseas.

The rift between those who supported Petrillo and those who didn’t was wide. Friendships were broken, and in some cases would never be mended. Many musicians feared that they would never work in the music industry ever again. Jack Cave was considering transferring to a business job. Sinclair Lott was then principal horn of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. He decided to join the Musicians Guild and, according to Jim Decker, was subsequently ordered to be removed from his position by the union. Jim was himself taking a technical writing course to learn how to write technical manuals.

Vince was under tremendous pressure from the union to remain in its good graces, or face expulsion. Being on the board of directors of the Los Angeles Lo-



Conch Shells. R to L: Vince, Bill Hinshaw, Jack Cave, Harry Schmidt





cal 47 musicians' union, Vince was one of the most influential persons in the Los Angeles music arena, his voice being greatly respected. When Vince remained true to his principles and voted against the wishes of Petrillo and the AFM, the pressure was intensified. Betty DeRosa remembers, "It was a very dark, scary time. It was like something out of a movie. Cars would slowly drive up and down the street, past our house, to let us know they were watching us. Mom kept a hammer by the door in case anyone came by. Eventually my brother and I were sent to live with our grandparents in Redondo Beach. We stayed there for a long time."



L to R: Harry Schmidt, Jack Cave, Vince

As others were planning on leaving the music industry, so too was Vince searching for what direction to take. After discussing the situation with Al Brain, Vince began setting the groundwork to move to England. The family began packing and plans were in motion to sell the house. Fortunately for Vince, and others, that drastic step would not be necessary, for the strike would be settled in 1959. This would bring an end to the studio contract era and commence the freelance era. However, the union would ban everyone who had joined the Guild from performing live concerts. Vince had been very active as a concert performer. Now, he would focus only on studio recording until a few years later, when the AFM and the Guild would agree to merge its members back together.

As before, the work for Vince was almost nonstop. He would sit first horn on nearly every movie soundtrack that was produced in Los Angeles for the next thirty to forty years. Work was not limited to movie soundtracks. Television had replaced radio as the main form of home entertainment. There were weekly episodic television shows as well as live television programs. The "popular" music genre was flooded with work from the "traditional" singers and composers, to the new "pop/rock" field. Studios were recording twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Los Angeles was the music recording capitol of the world and Vince DeRosa was its first call horn player.

Though most of the work that Vince would do would be in the "commercial" recording genre, Vince did make some "classical" recordings. In 1962, guitarist Laurindo

Almeida recorded his second volume of his *Duets with the Spanish Guitar* series, *The Intimate Bach*, for Capitol records. In this edition, Vince would collaborate on Almeida's arrangement of one of Bach's Partitas for harpsichord. For the recording, the engineers wanted to try to achieve a good balance with the soft timbre of the guitar and the louder horn. Almeida and Vince were set ten feet apart and Vince was put in a three walled "box," heavily lined with thick carpet/curtain material to try to deaden the horn sound as much as possible. The separation distance made it difficult for Vince to hear Almeida. For his part to balance with Almeida, Vince tried to play as lightly as possible. Yet, with so many challenges, the results are remarkable. Prominent music critic Alfred Frankenstein supplied the liner notes for the album. He wrote:

This is the most astonishing example of virtuosity on the horn I have ever heard on records. As a former orchestral player, I had always known the horn's capabilities, but nothing even remotely approaching the technical demands of this transcription appear in the orchestral literature; possibly some modern concertos for the horn may come close, but even there the instrument is covered or highly supported by the orchestra. To play as lightly and speedily as a harpsichord, right out in the open with a minimum of support, is to give an incredible performance, one that is as much a tribute to Mr. Almeida's modesty in playing the secondary role as it is to Mr. DeRosa's ability in his handling of the horn part.

For their efforts, the album received a Grammy nomination.

Other "classical" recording work would come with Bruno Walter (Columbia Symphony, Mahler 1st Symphony, fifth horn) and Jascha Heifetz. In 1957, Erich Leinsdorf led a collection of many of Los Angeles's finest musicians (Concert Arts Orchestra) in an album of Wagner works. Vince led the horn section which included Jack Cave, Jim Decker, and Richard Perissi. A couple of years later, the same section partnered with Leinsdorf in Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade*. Leinsdorf was so impressed with Vince's playing that, after the Wagner sessions, he offered Vince the principal horn position of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra.



Vince with Patterson Double Horn



Los Angeles studios weren't the only ones that wanted to woo Vince into their folds. Leopold Stokowski, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the Chicago Symphony all tried to lure Vince with offers for their principal horn positions. Vince would pass them all up to remain in the Los Angeles freelance field.

As busy as Vince was with performing and recording, he did make time for a few private students. His first student, George Price, would serve as third horn of the Los Angeles Philharmonic for forty-five years; Henry Sigismonti, Vince's younger cousin, would become co-principal of the Los Angeles Philharmonic before venturing into an extremely successful freelance career; Brian O'Connor and Jim Thatcher would also become top Los Angeles freelancers; Jim Atkinson had a very active freelance career as did Gus Klein, before moving into the music contracting field. In 1974, Vince joined the faculty of the University of Southern California. With his commitment to USC, he would begin passing along the legacy from Alfred Brain to a larger student base.

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### **Vince was demanding in his lessons, but fair.**

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He wouldn't demean his students, but would push them to try to achieve the level of excellence that professional horn playing demanded. As Brian O'Connor recalled:

Lessons with Vince could be very intense and sometimes he had just one objective or aspect of playing or production that he would focus on. In those lessons, he would be relentless about getting that objective drilled or trained into you. In one of those lessons, I played the big unison call from *Heldenleben* and was a little tired at the end, and Vince could hear it. He said, "We really have to work on your endurance. So this is what you're going to do: you start this excerpt again and play it through, then take one bar rest and start it all over again. You keep playing it this way until I tell you to stop." I did it six or seven times and I was absolutely shot! I don't think I even came close to the high B-flat the last couple of times! But doing it that way gave me the beginnings of the training for the production, concentration and endurance I would need. Because in the studios, you never know how many times you might have to do something. Vince would sometimes have to play very difficult things several times and he would almost never miss!

Not all lessons were so nerve-racking. Vince has a great sense of humor and at times, would display it in lessons. Los Angeles Opera horn player, Daniel Kelley tells: "One of his favorite components of being my professor was to describe what my tone sounded like to him. The most consistent depiction being when he quacked like a duck, including flapping his arms and bouncing, to demonstrate his opinion of the sound I was able to make. Unfortunately, he was right!"

Vince continued teaching at USC until 2005. He continued recording, in a limited fashion, until 2008. At age eighty-eight, after over seventy years of professional horn playing, he decided to retire. Since retiring, he and Sally would continue to travel and enjoy their family of grand-children and great grandchildren. Sally passed in 2014 and Vince is now well cared for at home by his loving daughter Betty.



Jack Cave, Vince, Richard Perissi:  
Columbia Studios, 1953

*Commemorating a century of life is a great honor and pleasure, especially when that centenarian happens to be a member of the family of horn players. This celebration is, for us, even greater, for we have the chance to reflect upon the rich life of Vincent DeRosa. Not only was Vince one of the most influential musicians of the twentieth century, but also an outstanding human being. Vince DeRosa's extraordinary musical skills were highly crafted and fundamentally solid. His artistry as a horn player and musician has few peers. Additionally, Vince's personal character was as rare and solid as his musical skills. A very humble, modest man who gave freely of his time and knowledge to as many as he could accommodate. He touched the lives of many, near and far. It is probable that a career like Vince's will not happen again, for his star shone during the golden age of music recording. Of the great horn players of years past, Hampel, Leutgeb, Punto, we have only written lore of their musical prowess to study and pass along to future generations. Thankfully, we have decades of recorded works of Vincent DeRosa to listen to for ourselves and to marvel at the amazing artistry of one of the greatest horn players of all time.*

*A true, complete listing of all of Vince's work would be impossible. Vince did so much work in so many fields that in some cases, such as "B" movies, jingles (television and radio ads), and some commercial recordings, personnel records are not available. What follows is a very abridged listing of titles of works and names of artists with whom Vince worked.*





## Composers/Arrangers

Burt Bacharach, Elmer Bernstein, Bruce Broughton, Alf Clausen, Bill Conti, Alexander Courage, Percy Faith, Jerry Goldsmith, Bernard Herrmann, James Horner, Maurice Jarre, Quincy Jones, Michael Kamen, Roger Kellaway, Henry Mancini, Billy May, Dennis McCarthy, Alfred Newman, Randy Newman, Alexander North, Andre Previn, David Raksin, Nelson Riddle, David Rose, Miklos Rozsa, Alan Silvestri, Lalo Schifrin, Nathan Scott, Richard Sherman, Max Steiner, Dimitri Tiomkin, Franz Waxman, Jimmy Webb, John Williams, Victor Young

## Singers

Tony Bennett, Glenn Campbell, Nat King Cole, Bing Crosby, Ella Fitzgerald, Judy Garland, Johnny Mathis, Frank Sinatra, Barbara Streisand, Sarah Vaughn, Andy Williams

## Jazz/Rock Groups

Chicago, Earth Wind and Fire, Stan Kenton, Chuck Mangione, Doc Severinsen, Frank Zappa

## Significant Recordings

Laurindo Almeida ..... *The Intimate Bach/Duets for the Spanish Guitar, Volume 2*  
Erich Leinsdorf ..... *The Sound of Wagner / Concert Arts Orchestra*  
*Scheherazade / Concert Arts Orchestra*  
Billy May ..... *Billy May's Big Fat Brass*  
The Hi-Lo's ..... *And All that Jazz*  
George Shearing ..... *Burnished Brass/Satin Brass*  
Henry Mancini ..... *Mancini '67*  
(Featured solo, "The House of the Rising Sun")  
*A Merry Mancini Christmas*  
(Featured solo, "Silent Night")  
*Uniquely Mancini*  
(Featured solo, "Lonesome")  
Henry Mancini / Doc Severinsen ..... *Brass on Ivory*  
(Featured duet, "Brian's Song")

## Movie Soundtracks

*Ben Hur*  
*Cleopatra*  
*Days of Wine and Roses*  
*Diary of Anne Frank*  
*E.T. The Extraterrestrial*  
*Fantasia (1982 version)*  
*How the West was Won*  
*Invasion of the Body Snatchers*  
(1978): Source music, Mozart,  
Concerto for Horn in D, K. 412  
*The Last Boy Scout*  
*The Magnificent Seven*  
*Mary Poppins*  
*Oklahoma*  
*Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*



Image provided by courtesy of Conn-Selmer, Inc.

*Rocky III*

*Rocky V*

*The Sound of Music*

*Star Trek: The Motion Picture*

*Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*

*Star Trek III: The Search for Spock*

*Testament*

*West Side Story*



Vince, ca. 1970s

## Television Themes/Music

*Bonanza*

*Dallas*

*Falcon Crest*

*Hawaii Five-O*

*Little House on the Prairie*

*Peter Gunn*

*The Rockford Files*

*The Virginian*



The Electric Prunes Session: L to R: Jim Decker, David Duke, Bill Hinshaw, Vince DeRosa. Photo by Tom Greer.

## Growing Up DeRosa

By Betty DeRosa

**B**etty DeRosa's childhood memories offer us a behind the scenes peek into her father's personal and professional life, as seen through the eyes of an adoring daughter.

So, I fully admit, I'm a "Daddy's girl." Dad never missed one of my performances! My passion was singing, though I never sang professionally. But Dad never wanted me to be in the music business. He saw, first hand, the starlets and how they were used. Understandably, he did not want me in that situation. He knew, however, that it was what I wanted. So he was able to hire Sally Sweetland as my teacher. She was a wonderful singer. She dubbed for Joan Leslie, Martha Vickers, and others. Barbara Streisand was studying with Sally at the same time I was, so Dad was doing his best for me, despite his not wanting me to pursue my passion professionally. I sang throughout school and was lucky enough to be able to sing at Disneyland with Bill Ulyate's orchestra at the "Carnation Plaza," as well as with Abe Most's combo.

### I liked going to the studios, as did my Mom.

When *The King and I* was being filmed at the Fox back lot, we were not allowed on the lot during filming, but Dad told Mom to come quickly, before they disassembled the sets. It was fascinating to me. After that, we met Dad at the commissary for lunch. I was excited and proud. Dad was able to get us onto the Fox lot for a taping of the nuns in the abbey for *The Sound of Music*. Yes, Marni Nixon was there. I would have loved to BE her! Unfortunately, Julie Andrews was not there. She may



have arrived after we left. It was wonderful and magical. Lionel Newman was the conductor at that time. He was very flamboyant, very different from his brother, Alfred. It was so exciting for me to be at the Fox recording sessions. I would stand by the conductor, Alfred or Lionel, and could see so many of my family and friends in the orchestra: uncle Joe DiTullio on cello; cousin Louise DiTullio on flute; Uncle Joe's brother, Adolph, and his brother-in-law, Kurt Rehr; cousin Henry Sigismonti; my honorary uncle, Richard Perissi, and honorary godfather, Jack Cave, in the horn section with Dad. It was a thrill that I didn't fully appreciate at the time.

Dad was a protege of Alfred Brain and we spent a lot of time at Al and Straussie's house. I loved going to their "ranch" because they lived next door to Roy Rogers and Dale Evans's ranch. Al and Straussie would have huge gatherings with many of my family and family friends: Uncle Vincent DeRubertis and his wife Aunt Evelyn; Jack and Betty Cave, my honorary god parents; Richard Perissi, who I called my uncle, even though he wasn't. Dad and he were like brothers. During the parties, I would sit on the fence—Jack taught me how to sit on a fence and not fall off—and I would watch Roy and Dale's kids ride their horses. Every so often, someone would come out and check on me. Our group would sometimes meet up for dinner at a restaurant near the studio where they were recording: Nickodell's, Musso Franks. The waiters and



Vince, ca. 1980

bartenders knew everyone by their first names as well as their drinks of choice.

Dad did all of the awards shows, including the Academy Awards, which he did for over fifty years. I would give him my autograph book to take with him, to capture as many stars' signatures as he could. If he missed someone, I would ask, "Why?" What a brat! Thanks to him, my autograph book is amazing. Getting the autographs I have in that book would be impossible these days.

I always wanted to go to the gigs, especially those with Frank Sinatra. The first time I saw him, I must have been about seven years old. I sat quietly and didn't move a muscle as my mother explained to me that if I ruined the recording, I would never be allowed to go back again. After that session, Dad brought Mr. Sinatra over to me and introduced me. He asked if he could do anything for me and I asked for his autograph. Mom and Dad were a little embarrassed. He did not give me one. However, the next day, mother and I saw a big black car pull up in front of our house. A man ran up to the door and handed my Mom an autographed picture of Mr. Sinatra.

How wonderful of him to have remembered. I was mesmerized and couldn't wait to tell Dad. He was a very charming man. I visited his recording sessions about a half a dozen times. When I was about fifteen, mother and I again went to a session. When we arrived, however, we were told that we could not enter because it was a closed set. Dad came out into the hallway to look for us. Mr. Sinatra found out that we had been shut out and he laid into the person that wouldn't let us in. He then escorted my mother and me to the front of the studio and ordered chairs for us. There were mouths open, wondering who we were! It was incredible.

Through the years, Mr. Sinatra was always kind to remember me. I know he respected my father's playing. Dad worked on so many of his records, television shows, and specials. Not that he didn't play with many others: Dean Martin, Sammy Davis, Jr., Andy Williams, and Judy Garland. One of the last things Ms. Garland did in her short life was to host her own TV show. I was fortunate enough to be in the audience for the taping of two of her shows. It took forever for her to come out, she never came out for rehearsals. When she finally did, she was fabulous. What a performer! So sad, though. Both Dad and Jack Cave said that it was very sad. Jack had been on the committee for her original audition for *The Wizard of Oz* at MGM. He was with her for her entire career at MGM and witnessed how horribly MGM treated her. Exactly why dad didn't want me to go into the business. Still, I do feel lucky that I was able to see her perform live.

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**I love my father and all that  
he has accomplished.**

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He has worked so hard, he deserves to be acknowledged for his immense natural talent and kindness to others. I am clearly his biggest fan. The world is fortunate to be able to enjoy his contribution on thousands of movies and records with so many wonderful artists from the 1930s to the 2000s.

## Recalling Vince DeRosa

### Compiled By Paul Neuffer

**V**ince often had a deep and lasting effect on those who knew him. Here are some recollections from those whose lives were touched by Vince.

*Editor's Note: The following written testimonies represent a who's who of the Los Angeles studio recording industry, spanning Vince DeRosa's long and incredible career. The outpouring of memories was so tremendous that not all of them could be printed here. More are available online at <https://www.hornsociety.org/publications/horn-call/extras>.*





## Composers

Vince DeRosa's contribution to American music can't be overstated. He was the premier first horn player on virtually every recording to come out of Hollywood for over forty years. He represented the pinnacle of instrumental performance and I can honestly say that what I know about writing for the French horn, I learned from him.

DeRosa was an inspiration for at least two generations of composers in Hollywood and beyond. He is respected worldwide and universally regarded as one of the greatest instrumentalists of his generation. It has been a privilege to have worked with him all these many years.

*John Williams*

*Film composer and conductor*

I first met Vince while working with Glen Campbell during the early 1970s. Being basically self-taught, I had never worked with French horns, but worked mainly with rhythm sections, strings, trumpets, trombones, and woodwinds. As soon as I heard Vince play, I realized that my musical template had just expanded exponentially! Truly the most inspirational sounds I had ever heard! And ever since, I have always used horns in nearly everything I write. During my eighteen-year run with *Star Trek*, I never used less than six horns - GLORIOUS sounds! So, basically, Vince changed my life! A great man and I miss working with him.

*Dennis McCarthy*

*Film and television composer*

## Colleagues

I first met Vince in 1965 when I, on returning from a two-year adventure playing in a Tokyo orchestra, decided to try to make a career in Los Angeles. I arrived at a lucky time as I was soon being called for a variety of jobs, from studio work, local orchestras, even Ringling Brothers Circus, to recordings with Heifetz. The greatest thrill for me were the occasions when the horn section would be headed by Vince; then I heard the most beautiful, fluid, impeccable horn playing imaginable. No matter the idiom or style, he would grasp it immediately and, take after take, we would be thrilled and astounded. One of the most memorable sessions was the scoring for *Rocky V*, which was beautifully written for the horns, but a fifth higher than customary. Over and over, take after take, Vince floated above the ensemble in the most amazing and beautiful lyrical playing I've ever heard. Search for it on one of the movie channels; in spite of the fisticuffs and conversations going on simultaneously, it's a thrill.

Another section I played in with Vince was the scoring for John Huston's *The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean*. After a three-hour morning session, the rest of the orchestra was dismissed except the horns. Then, water glasses

were distributed and each of us spun our fingers on the rims and produced those eerie, weird wailing sounds that are apparent at the "Main Title," or very beginning, of the film.

Vince and I were once called to do a Bach Cantata at that church on the hill in Santa Monica. He had me come to his house to go over the parts; he was very concerned about the performance. Needless to say, it was as perfect as could be and in the finest "Bachian" style. He loved to talk about Alfred Brain (Dennis's uncle), who he had studied with and adored. He played second to him in the L.A. Phil for a while and described his glorious playing to us in loving detail. Thus, tying these, what are considered diverse styles, together by their common artistic and musical aims.

After eight years "out there," I auditioned for the Boston Symphony. For the audition, Vince offered me his old silver Schmidt horn that he had grown up with. When Vince heard I'd won the job, he seemed really pleased and even proud, like one of our boys found success. He then paid me the great compliment of selling me his precious Schmidt, which I treasure. It's the only horn I still have. Thank you, Vince, for all the joy you've given us.

*Richard Mackey*

*Boston Symphony Orchestra, Retired  
Former member, Los Angeles Horn Club*

The first picture that I worked on with Vince was back in 1963: *Marco Polo*, Goldwyn studios, Les Baxter wrote the score. It was quite an adventure because the whole score was like a horn concerto. We did the whole movie in three hours. It was quite an experience working with Vince for the first time, because he was flawless. And of course, when he played flawlessly, it made us play flawlessly too. I had done about five sessions with Vince, and he never missed! The sound just flowed out of him. Then, one day, we were doing this two-horn call at MGM, *The Addams Family*, the composer was Vic Mizzi. We had a unison line that started on a D, went up to an A then to a high E. We did it a few times. On the fourth time, going up to the high E, Vince lays the biggest egg that you would ever hear. My body went limp. It was like an awakening! It was one of the greatest feelings that I ever had in my life. I thought, 'the guy is HUMAN!' Because Vince DeRosa was NOT HUMAN! Nobody could play like Vince DeRosa. There are guys that can get around the horn like butterflies; there are hundreds of those guys. But there was only one guy that could do what Vince DeRosa could do: the consistency, fourteen hours a day, never got tired, always had that big sound no matter how high he went. He was just amazing. So, when he made that clam, I told myself, "OK, I can handle this; no fear now!"

I never learned how to play the horn correctly until I started working with Vince. Every time I worked with



him was like taking a lesson. I never asked him how he did something, I just watched and observed. He was the master teacher, whether he knew it or not. So, I had thousands of “lessons” with Vince and I never paid him a dime! But Vince never did anything for the money. He worked for the money, but I’m talking about the extra-curricular stuff like teaching or if he sold a horn to somebody, he would sell it for the price he had paid for it, not charge them more. He was a very giving guy.

I did thousands of two-horn record dates with Vince and it was so easy to play with him. It was just like fitting into a glove. Our pitch was flawless because VINCE was flawless. We did all kinds of styles that were demanded of us when doing commercial record dates, as opposed to picture calls. But during the 1960s, the styles were beginning to change. Arrangers like Jimmy Webb were being hired to write movie scores, so the style changed from classical to contemporary. Vince realized this and because I had a jazz background, I had played jazz piano, he would ask me how to get a certain feel to those scores.

Back then, there was so much work, there were record dates all day long. I was turning down four dates for every one that I took. There were so many groups recording at that time. Those groups of the sixties: The Mamas and the Papas, Beach Boys, Simon and Garfunkel, all of that stuff. Record dates would go on all day long, into the night and morning. We were working like crazy. Sessions would start at eight AM, then there would be the two o’clock session...and there were always sessions at night, double sessions starting at midnight. I remember one time back in 1963, Gunther Schuller was in town and they had some jingles starting at midnight for six horns, two trumpets, and a tuba—some KMPC commercials with brass fanfares in them. We finished at four-thirty and I took Gunther Schuller back to his hotel. There were numerous times that I started a session at midnight and would have to call a sub for my nine AM session. There was that much work. It was the great heyday of records. The composers and arrangers were phenomenal: Nelson Riddle, Henry Mancini, David Rose, Billy May, Gordon Jenkins, Roger Kellaway.

Vince would play through sickness and pain all of the time. There were times where any rational person wouldn’t go to work if they had a 104-degree fever and were coughing. I would be sitting watching Vince do that and think to myself that he could catch pneumonia any second! One time, we were doing the movie *Midway* with John Williams at Universal. There were three horns, Vince, Rich Perissi, and myself. Vince had just had a root canal in the morning, I mean an old-fashioned root canal. These days root canals are routine. Vince goes to work and there was a big solo that takes place at the end of the movie. Vince’s left cheek was swollen up like a baseball, he still played through the thing. Rich said to him, Vince you don’t have to do this, I’ll do it for you. Vince said,

no, I’ll do it. John Williams never knew. That was an eye opener. He would play through pain all the time. There was one time that he showed up at a date at Fox studios with Angela Morley and he called me up the night before and said he might be too sick to play but he was going to try. Could I stand by if he couldn’t do it? I said sure. In the first hour I found out that he couldn’t finish so he went home and I finished the date for him. But that was the only time that I had seen him go home from a date.

The reason why Vince had the attributes that he had, is because he was able to concentrate on his task at one hundred percent. When you can do that, at whatever you do in life, whether it’s playing the horn or anything else, it’s impossible for negative inferences to enter into your subconscious. If you concentrate at only a ninety-five percent level, there’s that chance of a negative thought to enter into your mind. One of the tricks that Vince used, to concentrate at a one hundred percent level, was to purposely change the way he played a solo, even if he had to do it twenty times. He would put a crescendo in a different place or change where he would take a breath. It was in this respect that he could fully concentrate on the task at hand. He was a master at that. Plus, he had the perfect foundation, the embouchure and the mechanics. But the concentration part, he could concentrate better than anyone I had worked with. Vince never had to brag about how great he was. But when you heard him play, you knew he was the best.

Vince was amazing. He worked through eight decades, from the 1930s to the 2000s. I think his last job was in 2008. We were doing *The Simpsons*, the last show of the season. It was just us on horn. After that session he decided that he wasn’t going to come back. The players of that era – Vince, Jack Cave, Jim Decker, Richard Perissi, Bill Hinshaw, George Hyde, Art Maebe, Henry Sigismonti later on – they created something very special that will probably never happen again. The amount and quality of work they produced was amazing. And that BEAUTIFUL SOUND, as in the opening of *Days of Wine and Roses*. A beautiful, deep, full, colorful sound. Of all the guys from that era, Vince is the only one left, now going on one hundred. The others are all gone.

David Duke

Los Angeles freelance horn player/studio musician 1959-2012  
Former member Los Angeles Horn Club

My first encounter with Vince DeRosa was about sixty-five years ago. I was on the road with Tex Beneke and my brother Ted was starting out in the L.A. studios. While visiting my brother, he had some tapes of studio recordings and played a few for me. He called my attention to one in particular. “Listen to this horn player.” Well, that sound grabbed me and I became an instant fan. “Who is that?” Ted replied, “The greatest horn player in town, Vince DeRosa.”





As years went by, I was fortunate to do sessions with Vince for various composers in many different studios. We worked at FOX together for many years. During those precious times, we became good friends, spending many hours together and comparing notes. Vince was a real smart guy. He would talk about different composers and how he went about accommodating them. He had tremendous musical instincts; he always seemed to know the right thing to do and at the right time. As well, when I was young and new to the L.A. studio scene, Vince would teach me the right things to say and NOT to say. I drank it all in. Thanks to Vince, I had pretty good success with many of the composers and arrangers.

Vince was a force and was someone to emulate, and I have always been pleased and proud to call him my friend.

Dick Nash

*Los Angeles freelance trombone*

Hands down, Vince DeRosa was the finest and most impressive horn player I ever heard and worked with; I worked thousands of sessions with him. When I moved to Los Angeles in 1974, Vince was already a legend. He had been working since the 1930s, almost always as first horn.

Vince had a beautiful, melodic sound in all registers, that soared above an orchestra. He was able to play into the lower register and sound even and controlled, the thing that often defines a "high" horn player from a "low" horn player. He was also the most accurate horn player I ever heard and could sight read even the most thorny and difficult parts. The horn is a difficult instrument to play without making an occasional "clam." Even major symphony horn players do it from time to time, and we accept it as listeners. But Vince DeRosa and his horn sections were solid and accurate. I was often amazed! Vince was also very versatile. He played many one-horn jobs for jazz band record dates. Horn players are notorious for NOT being able to "swing." For Vince though, it seemed very natural.

Vince was powerful in the "business." He had a lot to say about who played horn on most studio calls. All of the contractors relied heavily upon Vince for recommendations. If he liked you and your horn playing, he might put you in his first call section list, which often consisted of eight or more players. Those sections sounded just amazing, especially on soaring unison lines.

There were times when sessions would run late and the contractors would have to schedule an extra session. Before the contractor would put out a work call, they would first ask Vince if he was available, ahead of every other musician including first trumpet or Concertmaster. If he was not available, then the session would be scheduled for when Vince could make it. No single musician in the studios had such a long and successful career. Vince played on *The Simpsons*, until his retirement at eighty-eight.

Vince often worked three or more jobs in a day. He could play all day and still not sound tired, even after fourteen hours. One of the most important movie scores I ever did was in 1979 on *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*, the first *Star Trek* movie. Jerry Goldsmith was the composer. If I remember correctly, we had fourteen, four-hour sessions, all in the evening. Vince most likely played six to eight hours earlier in the day on many of those session days. The score asked for the first horn to play MANY super high, concert A-flats. Vince nailed them all! And all on his big Conn 8D.

I taught with Vince for many years on the faculty at the University of Southern California. His teaching is legendary as well. I think part of his success was due to his warm and friendly personality. He never seemed stressed. That relaxed all who were around him, myself included. He was NEVER a snob or haughty, just a nice man! Vince and I were on the opposite sides of the political spectrum. We would often have friendly disagreements about those things, but it was always an intelligent conversation (believe it or not, there was a time when that was possible). I loved any private time with him.

Many musicians I know think Vince DeRosa was the best BRASS player of all time, myself included. He set the standard for all brass playing. I wanted to play my tuba like he played the horn. I consider myself lucky to have had him as a mentor, example, and inspiration! The top studio musicians all seemed to be identified by their first name ONLY: Malcolm, Dick, Lloyd, George, Tommy, etc. We all knew who they were. He was known simply as "Vince," and we all knew who it was.

Jim Self

*Tuba soloist*

*Los Angeles freelance tuba performer/recording artist*

*Principal Tuba, Pacific Symphony, Pasadena Symphony,*

*Los Angeles Opera Orchestra, Hollywood Bowl Orchestra*

*Tuba Professor, USC/Thornton School of Music*

Working with Vincent DeRosa was during the happiest part of my career, before I played principal horn, exclusively. I would sit next to him and marvel at the ease, musicianship, sound, and total command he had over the instrument. Sometimes, I would almost lose my place in the music because I was listening to him so intently. One project, a television special, *A Woman Called Golda* (Michel LeGrande, composer), gave him a solo taking him into the upper stratosphere of the range and back down into the lower middle range. Vince toyed with it! After sessions, we would sit out in the car and he would talk to me like a father to a son. I love that man dearly. One Christmastime, we were on a lunch break at Evergreen Studio in North Hollywood. As we drove down Magnolia Boulevard, Vince saw a parking spot open in front of one of our favorite restaurants, on the other side of the street. He made an illegal U-turn in the middle of the block, right in front of a police officer!



The officer pulled us over and said, "Give me one reason why I shouldn't give you a ticket." Vince, in his low, humble voice, replied, "Well...it's almost Christmas?" The officer let him go. I believe the officer sensed he was in the presence of a unique and great human being.

*Jim Thatcher*

*International horn soloist and clinician*

*Los Angeles freelance horn performer/recording artist*

I grew up in Los Angeles. My dad was a motion picture projectionist and I would go to work with him and watch movies. I saw many of the classic movies several times and heard that fantastic horn playing of Vince's. Also, when I was growing up, I would listen to records like Billy May, Frank Sinatra, and others, that listed the names of the musicians on the recording, Vince among them. So, when I finally met Vince, I was already a big fan of his. In fact, I was in such awe of him that when I started working in the studios, even though I saw him in the sessions, I was afraid to talk to him for about five years!

I remember watching him in amazement, do twenty takes in a row, all different, all perfect. When I asked him how he was able to be so consistent, he said, "I try to make it interesting for myself. I think about doing it a different way every time. That way, I don't get locked into doing it just one way."

He was an amazing artist and probably knew as much as anyone ever has about blowing a horn. It's probable that no one will equal his run of a freelance career. To be in the recording studios for nearly eight decades, even though he wasn't as busy in his later years, he was still doing jingles, *The Simpsons*, and other things like that in his eighties, was remarkable.

Everyone wanted Vince on their sessions. Sinatra demanded that Vince be on his sessions. I heard a story that once, Sinatra sat on the steps outside the studio, waiting for Vince to get to the session. Vince was late getting there from another recording session and Sinatra wasn't going to start his session until Vince got there.

When I did finally work up the nerve to approach him, he was very friendly and kind to me. I remember going through some bad times in the 1970s and Vince could tell that something was up. He thought that I needed to get away, to get my mind and spirits back up and said to me, "You have to go to Maui." I said, "What's Maui?" He said, "Don't worry, I'll take care of everything." He did all of the booking and sent me over to his condo in Maui. After that, we became closer and eventually would travel to Europe with our wives. He even took me to my first and only baseball game. I'm not a baseball fan, but Vince took me to opening day at Dodger stadium one year.

I am amazed that I have been able to work with one of my musical heroes for so many years. He is a wonderful man and I am blessed to be able to call him one of my closest friends.

*Malcolm McNab*

*Trumpet soloist/recording artist*

*Los Angeles freelance trumpet*

I first heard of Vince DeRosa when I was a freshman at Cal State Long Beach. I became involved in the opera workshop program at UCLA, as we didn't have such a program at CSULB. Dave Duke was the principal horn with Dr. Popper's orchestra and it was a real pleasure to be his second horn. In the course of rehearsing, Dave often mentioned how DeRosa would manage the tone of a particular style of music. Or, he might explain how Vince would form his famous embouchure. At this stage, Vince DeRosa was more a legend to me than the actual person!

I eventually had the good fortune to perform with Vince. One performance that I can still relate with amazement happened at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. The Los Angeles Horn Club was one of the featured musical organizations asked to take part in the opening ceremonies of the Mark Taper Forum, in 1968 I believe. We were to play the "Echo Song" by di Lasso, eight of us in the choral "body" and another four, led by Vincent, as the "Echo" quartet upstairs. As the logistics were being banded about, the twelve of us were milling around in the lobby with our horns. A few paces away was the "Echo" quartet and I noticed Vince bring his Conn up and start playing a chromatic scale, beginning on the second line G, on up by eighth notes to the top of the staff, then continuing to the frosty height of G alto. He stopped for a second, then started again on that drastic soprano G, descending to where he began! A couple of the quartet glanced at each other, scuffing the carpet and rubbing their heads! Well, as a young guy in his twenties, I had never heard anyone do that! There was no change in tone color, either! I just thought, "Oh, Hell!"

While still a university student, I heard his amazing recording, *The Intimate Bach*, accompanied by Laurindo Almeida. As Jim Decker and I listened to this at his Naples home, Jim said, "That son-of-a-gun!" We all knew what a milestone it was in horn performance. I suppose millions of listeners fell in love with the Bach Partita! I sure did!

In the same room or studio, Vince had a most wonderful compact and dark tone. No sizzle, just a lovely, constant purple, hundred-dollar tone. He was incredibly easy to play with, from a second's point of view, with a scale and stability like a Steinway. It has been one of my greatest musical pleasures to have performed with this matchless artist. All of us in the horn community revere Vince as an exemplar of supreme musicianship and accomplishment!

*Tom Greer*

*Former Los Angeles freelance horn performer/ recording artist*

*Former member Los Angeles Horn Club*

*Former Principal Horn Long Beach Symphony*





## Students

I was fortunate to do my undergraduate degree studying under Vince DeRosa at the University of Southern California. He had been thinking of retiring and told me I was going to be his last student. He was true to his word and retired the year I finished my undergrad degree. The following year, during my graduate work, I skipped music history every Wednesday morning to go up to his house for lessons. He would make me a sandwich and continue to kick my butt on the horn. His parrot would laugh at me every time I made a mistake. I cherish those times more than anything. I use what he taught me every single day.

As many of my colleagues know, my youth was full of indiscretion. I started studying with Vince when I was eighteen, in the prime of my depravity. He was always amused at my misgivings and took a shine to me for it. One of the fashion trends at the time for studio musicians was slacks or khakis and Hawaiian shirts. After about a year of studying with him he started buying and wearing Hawaiian shirts with cigars, alcohol, and other contraband on them. He would always say, "What do you think of my shirt?" and give a good chuckle.

Studying with Vince was nothing short of a blessing. It was also very trying at times. He was relentless in his demand for perfection of production and sound. I sometimes would spend an hour playing one or two notes with him saying, "NO! NO! Get into the sound! What is this Peh, Peh, Peh sound? NO!" And then, very occasionally, a "Yes!" I could not hear the difference for the life of me, but I trusted him. It became my main goal to figure out how to just get him to say, "Yes!"

When I would show up to USC for my lesson, he would see me coming and start laughing. He was demanding, but fair. He never held me to a level that wasn't attainable. He would always tell me he didn't want me to sound good, he wanted me to sound great. He let me figure out a lot on my own, making sure he guided me down the right path, but not doing the work for me. He would often times tell me, "Get into the sound. Lift! I sound like damn broken record!"

As the unbelievable and amazing player that he was, he never bragged. Sometimes Vince would tell me a story about a solo he played and say, "It went OK." I was always amused because it would be one of the major solos in a movie that people would swoon over. His lack of hubris was an inspiration for how to handle oneself on a professional level. I can never thank Vince enough for what he has done for me as a player and person.

*Dylan Hart  
Los Angeles Studio Musician  
Hollywood Bowl Orchestra, Principal Horn  
Cal State Long Beach, Horn professor*

I come from a musical family: my father, Mannie Klein, was one of the top trumpet players in Los Angeles. He is still considered to this day, one of the greatest trumpet players of the twentieth century. He and Vince did a lot of work together. My uncle, Dave Klein, was also a trumpet player, but was more business minded and became a music contractor for Columbia Pictures, Capitol Records, and many others. He hired Vince for many of his projects. During World War II, Dave was responsible for recruiting musicians for a newly formed unit of the Army Air Corps, the Radio Production Unit (RPU), in Santa Ana, California. Dave and the officer in charge, Captain Eddie Dunstedter, assembled an orchestra, staff arrangers, and copyists, that would "back up" a Hollywood star or recording artist. They would give live, half-hour performances to persuade the country to buy war bonds. My dad was a part of that unit as was Vince DeRosa. Vince was eighteen years old and my dad was thirty-two. Despite their age difference, they became close friends. When the war ended and the RPU was dismantled, Dave had work lined up for Vince. I mean, Vince went to work in the studios the very day after his tour of duty ended.

My dad would take me to work with him and for some reason, I would usually sit in the corner near the brass section. As I grew older, I became fond of the sound of the horn, especially in movies. When I was in high school, I took up the horn and dad lined me up with lessons from Gale Robinson, for about a year. Vince came to our house one evening after work, to hang out with my dad. While he was there, he asked me to play a little for him, which I did. Vince then asked me if I had a teacher and I replied, yes, Gale Robinson. He then said that if I wanted to come to his house the next day, he could teach me.

At that first lesson at Vince's house, he told me to warm up, just play some tones. He said that I had a good sound and then laid this on me:

I can't teach you how to read music; you will have plenty of time to do that. You sound good. Along the way, you will meet horn players that can play better than you. Might play high notes better than you. Might read better than you. None of that matters. What *does* matter, is that when everyone else has stopped playing and you are the only one left playing. *That*, he said, matters most.

That was my first lesson. What he told me then was so true and insightful. Most of us don't feel comfortable when someone stands or sits behind us. However, Vince would tell me to meet him at work. He would say to me, "Don't talk" and would put a chair about ten feet behind him and tell me, "Sit here and don't talk. Listen." He must have told me "Don't talk" hundreds of times.



I started working with Vince after he told my mom that she could start putting me on some of her calls. My mom, Marion, took over Uncle Dave's accounts after he passed in 1959. She was a trail blazer for women in the music business. She had brains, beauty, and was a great contractor.

Almost all of my lessons with Vince were sans sheet music. It was always about the sound and how to produce it. He would often repeat whatever he had said at the previous lesson. To me, he will always be my teacher. But after my dad passed away, he became more of a father figure, with whom I could speak about anything going on in my life. From that, we became very close friends. We hornists owe Vince a debt of gratitude for all of his accomplishments as well as his approach to playing and teaching.

*Gus Klein*

*Los Angeles freelance horn player/music contractor*

I first met Vince DeRosa when I went to USC to go to grad school. I had never heard of him, but Jim Decker offered me a scholarship to go to USC. That's when I met Jim, Vince, and Henry Sigismonti, the three horn teachers at USC at the time. Vince and I got along very well. He taught a very natural, ear-based approach, hearing what you want, playing what you hear. I remember in my early lessons, Vince would say "we." "We play like this." I thought, wow, "we" do? I'm glad he included me in that "group." Those lessons were wonderful. After graduation, I spent a few years studying with him intermittently. He's such a wonderful man. He always had nice things to say to me and was always very helpful.

Once, when I was preparing for an audition with him, one of the excerpts was the high solo from the Ravel piano concerto. Vince said, "I like that excerpt. Oh, that's a great one. You know, I never play anything the same way twice. I like to keep it fresh, so I change the phrasing." Every time he did it, it was just amazing. And he was pushing 80, in his mid 70s for sure. It was so easy for him. And he wasn't showing off, he was just teaching me something about music. He was using the phrase that he had in his mind to play, to dictate what he was doing physically. He had a musical concept in place before he put all of the other stuff in place.

Vince told me how he developed that approach, how he would change things every time he played them. He was doing a session with Frank Sinatra and there was a piece that started with a horn solo which soared way up above the staff and tailed down ending on a note in the staff. That final note of the solo was the pitch that Sinatra had to enter on, so Vince had to make everything perfect. They went over the solo several times and Vince noticed out of the corner of his eye that after each take, one of the trombone players would lean over and write something on his part. Vince finally realized that the guy was writing down how many times he played the solo

without making a mistake. Vince then thought, "Wow, now the pressure is really on. Now what am I going to do?" Right then he decided to change things up on the solo and that he would do it differently every time. That way, his concentration was on the music and making his body react physically to what he wanted to do with the phrase, rather than thinking about not making a mistake or the difficulties of the horn.

In the '50s or '60s, Jascha Heifetz recorded a Mozart concerto for RCA. Vince was on that session, which was a very difficult session. The engineers kept stopping the recording and would reset the microphones to try to get a clearer sound. They kept putting the microphones closer and closer to the horns, until they were almost on top of them. It was a very tense session of about ten to fourteen hours. Vince didn't realize how mentally and physically exhausted he was until he got home and collapsed on his bed. The next day, Heifetz called Vince at home, to personally thank him for playing so wonderfully on the session.

*John Mason*

*Los Angeles freelance horn performer/recording artist*

When thinking back on Mr. DeRosa's influence on my life, it is hard to know where to begin, but we can go back to 2000, when Mr. DeRosa took me on as a student. In that year, he had decided to take on a few full-time students after a bit of a break. He was about to turn 80, and I was entering grad school at USC. When asked at the first meeting of our new 2000-2001 class, "Who would like to study with Mr. DeRosa?" my arm shot up as if being asked who would like to win the Publisher's Clearing House sweepstakes.

The next eighteen months of our student/mentor relationship felt a little like the "lather, rinse, repeat" directions on shampoo bottles. Mr. DeRosa taught me the same lesson for a year and a half. Let me be clear: this was not his choice. He most likely would have loved to move on from tone production and fundamentals to something more exciting. But, alas, it took me eighteen months to truly figure out what he was trying to say. "The embouchure is a holder, not a grabber." "You sound like 'BEEEH BEEEH BEEEH.' You need to sound like 'BAAAH BAAAH BAAAH.'" And one of my favorites, "sweetheart, that sounds like garbage."

I remember one Tuesday morning, getting through my lesson with a tight chest. He was trying to explain getting the air deeper into the horn and his instruction was flying over my head. I sat through the lesson trying as hard as I could to relax and play, listening for the overtones. I just couldn't hear the overtones that he was talking about, but I did not want to offend him by saying I didn't understand. When the hour was up, he said goodbye to me, touched my arm to give me some encouragement, and I left. I IMMEDIATELY broke down in tears outside. I wanted to get the tone he was talking about, but it was just out of my reach.





Mr. DeRosa had faith in me. He never gave up, describing over and over how to get the air moving and hold onto the sound. I struggled and struggled but one day, it all finally clicked. I came in and he asked to hear a Mueller etude. I picked one of my favorites, lots of slurs and jumps. When I was finished, he looked up and gave me a small grin saying, "There you go."

Now we jump ahead to how I feel about his mentorship today. I feel so lucky to be able to make my living as a horn player. I look back on the last twenty years of path building and struggles and really can't pinpoint one specific moment when I knew I could do it. But I do know that when the red light goes on and all of the adrenaline bubbles up, I hold fast to those things that Mr. DeRosa taught me. Hold the air. Be brave. Take a breath. Relax EVERYTHING except what you need to get that note going. Do what you have to do to pull the sound out of the horn. Hear the phrase and make something out of it! NEVER release the note early.

There have been moments in my career that I have been extremely aware that I am sitting in the same physical places where Vince sat. Getting the chance to add my sound to the liturgy of movie scoring and playing on the legendary sound stages is never taken for granted. I sit there trying my best to emulate the sound that he gave to the world, as well as adding my own perspective. I am so thankful for all of his guidance and faith. He never expected anything but the best from me and I hope to be making him proud to this day. Thank you, Mr. DeRosa. I will forever be grateful for you and your example.

*Laura Brenes*

*Los Angeles freelance studio musician*

While in college at Cal State Fullerton, I heard a lot about Vince from my teacher, Todd Miller, who wrote a superb book about Vince called *Carved in Stone*. I also heard from many fellow young aspiring hornists who spoke of Vince in tones of awe and reverence. I was impressed enough by these testimonials that I summoned up my courage and scheduled a lesson. In those days, this required phoning Vince at home, hoping to catch him during a narrow window early in the morning, before he left for work. Often it took several tries on consecutive days to reach him. I recall being terrified both during the phone calls and at the lessons, but he was unfailingly gracious and generous. I was a bit mystified by his verbal explanation of how to play the horn: "lift the weight, purchase the air." But these seemingly esoteric concepts would be revealed as solid reality when he'd grab my horn and demonstrate an excerpt with the amazingly rich, focused tone and liquid legato for which he is renowned.

By the time I left L.A. temporarily in 1981 to attend graduate school at Juilliard in New York, I was fully converted to the Vince DeRosa religion. I proselytized to the other horn students there, who were dubious until I played them my "mix tape" of recordings featur-

ing his artistry. His stratospheric cavorting in the L.A. Horn club's rendition of the Alec Wilder Nonet for Brass, reliably inspired gapes of astonishment. Practice room being scarce at Juilliard, we were often forced to practice in the stairwells, and I recall being amused to overhear a fellow student faithfully executing a particular flexibility exercise that Vince had taught me and which I in turn had shared with some of my intrigued schoolmates.

My first job with Vince also happened to be my first legitimate recording session in L.A. It was a TV date for Lalo Schifrin, who had the endearing policy of getting some of the young players from the student-level Debut Orchestra (which he conducted) onto his jobs. The horn section was Vince, the legendary Henry Sigismonti, and me. Vince and Henry treated me with kindness and courtesy, but a percussionist, one of the giants of the business, came over and said, "Who's this, Vince? One of your relatives?" Vince resisted the opportunity to complain about the unsolicited intrusion of an unknown greenhorn kid into his section and stuck up for me, responding that no, I wasn't a relative, just a very fine horn player. Along with Vince's phenomenal skills as a horn player, it is his qualities of integrity, generosity, and professionalism that I've always tried to emulate in my own career.

*Mark Adams*

*Los Angeles freelance horn performer/recording artist*

I first heard the name Vince DeRosa at the IHS workshop in East Lansing, Michigan in 1978. One of the guys I was hanging out with said that the best players in the world weren't at the workshops. The two best players were studio players in L.A. named Vince DeRosa and Jim Decker. I attended the IHS workshop the next year in L.A. and was sad to see that Vince wasn't on any programs and that even though Jim was involved, he didn't play. I had known Steve Becknell from youth orchestra and summer camps. In my first year at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Steve was finishing up his degree. He went to USC for grad school and told me of this great teacher and player, Vince. He said I had to come to L.A. Over spring break of my second year, I auditioned for USC, with Jim Decker. I ended up going to USC and studying with Jim and then Vince. Vince totally changed the way I played. It was a big leap for a Midwest kid with the Chicago Symphony in my ear, to change to the L.A. sound and way of playing. I never heard Vince perform live, but I did work with him about a dozen times. My first session with Vince was on *The Babe*, with music by Elmer Bernstein. The section was: Vince, Richard Perissi, David Duke, and me. I was taken by the amount of respect he was shown. He would sit at his chair on break and a line of people, young and old, came up to say hello. The one time that I really got to blow with Vince, was on a session for some news bumpers, composed by Bill Conti. There were three horns: Vince, Steve Becknell and me. Vince and I had the high parts. I was feeling



good and was putting out what I thought was a lot of sound. I rarely went into the booth, but for this, I wanted to hear what they were getting. They were getting mostly VINCE! His sound just dominated the tape. Not in volume, but in pure sound. It was a humbling moment, but one I would cherish. Vince and his wife, Sally, were always gracious and nice to my family and me.

My parents, Vince, Sally, and I went to dinner on several occasions. He is still very gracious. I went to visit him recently with Steve Juliani, another former student. He wanted to know where we were playing, etc. He is going on one hundred, but you can still see that gentle, funny, caring man.

*Phil Yao*

*Los Angeles freelance hornist*

I first learned about Vince DeRosa after my freshman year at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. I went to an International Horn Society conference in Indiana and a lot of the top horn players were there: Alan Civil, Hermann Baumann, Bill Lane. It was at a lecture that Lane was giving about Los Angeles studio playing that I heard Vince's name. Being from Wisconsin, I didn't really know much about L.A. horn playing, but I was always interested in film music, so that was the first seed that was planted. Then in 1981, I went to the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara where I studied with Jim Decker. Jim talked to me about coming out to USC for grad school to study with Vince. So, I went to USC for grad school and by that time I learned more about who Vince was and was in awe of this guy who could play anything. I always tried to get him to play in my lessons. He would tell me how to do something but I would say, "What do you mean? Show me." And I could usually coerce him into playing for me. He would pull out his mouthpiece and play on your [the student's] horn, so I knew right away that the horn wasn't the problem, because it sounded great when he played on it! For me, I really learned a lot by watching and listening.

After I graduated, in a few years I started getting some studio calls and sometimes Vince would be on the call. I remember doing *Rocky V* and got to hear him play the solos on that. That was amazing. By this time, Vince wasn't doing as much work as in the past, so he wasn't always on the call. But then he would show up and it was WOW, just getting to hear him play.

Sometimes it was nerve-wracking because there were only two horns, just Vince and me. Of course, I didn't want to mess up in front of my teacher! But it was really neat to see his demeanor, the way he approached the horn and hear his performance. There was this determination that he had an absolutely "no fear" attitude. That attitude, coupled with his excellent production, are what kept him going for so long. It was really amazing to see. And he loved playing the horn. It

wasn't an ego issue, an "I'm the best" attitude. He didn't have that. There are other great players, but for some of them it's an ego thing. That's only going to take a person so far. Vince had the whole package: a guy that loved playing the horn, figured out how to do it well, and had the mental strength to keep him going through thick and thin.

As time has passed, it has been fun becoming closer to him as a friend. I would go visit him at his house and he would tell me stories about the 40s and 50s. Also, as he got older, he became more open about his opinion of some of the people that he worked with, certain people that didn't treat him well and so forth. But the stories themselves are just wonderful. Working for Billy May, Alfred Newman, and what characters Al Brain and Richard Perissi were. It's really been fun getting to know this wonderful man.

*Steve Becknell*

*Principal Horn, Los Angeles Opera Orchestra  
Horn Professor, USC/Thornton School of Music  
Hollywood Studio Musician*

#### **Acknowledgements:**

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*Vince and Betty DeRosa*





# A Horn of Many Colors: The Horn in Film Scores

By Dafydd Bevil

I remember taking family trips to the cinema as a child and leaving the theater humming the melodies from the score while most of my peers were imagining that they were the hero or main character. I was especially drawn to the beautiful horn writing featured in many film scores, and these evocative pieces were formative in my decision to play the horn.

Since its introduction to the symphony orchestra, the horn has played a prominent role in the works of orchestral composers. From Bach, to Mozart, to Beethoven, to the operas of Wagner, most composers in the western canon have utilized the horn's versatile capabilities to evoke an emotional response from their audiences. Today, the heavy use of the horn is alive and well in the music of film.

Since the earliest days of cinema, specifically the sound film, music was used to drive home the emotion of the story. In many cases, it was the glue that held the audience to the far-fetched fantasy worlds where many of the first sound films took place. From the early sound films to the modern blockbusters, the horn has persisted as one of the most heavily used voices of the film orchestra. I believe that there are two main reasons for this heavy usage: the rise of the émigré composers in the early days of sound film and the presence of some of the world's best hornists in Los Angeles, California.

## The Music of Early Films

Before we can discuss the role of the horn in film music, we must first look back to how music and film came together as an art form. The earliest film music arose out of necessity. Although the films of the early 20th century are referred to today as silent films, the act of watching one of these productions was anything but silent. The projection equipment of the time was incredibly noisy and often caused theater patrons to leave the film before its conclusion.<sup>1</sup> This practice was not good for the theaters' profits, and as a result, theater managers had to find a solution, which was to hire musicians to mask the noise of the projectors.

Early film musicians were often local keyboard players known to have a skill for improvising. They would improvise music to fit with whatever was happening on the screen, often drawing from popular songs or classical standards. This improvisation was challenging, but soon

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**From a young age, I have been intrigued by and drawn to film music.**

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Dafydd Bevil

numerous musicians, referred to as music fitters, were in high demand in the large metropolitan areas of the United States. Several of these musicians began to write down their accompaniments for the most popular films of the time. They would then publish and sell them to other accompanists, thus creating the first quasi-standardized film scores.<sup>2</sup>

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**As films became more popular and more profitable, filmmakers and theaters began to reconsider the usefulness of music.**

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This increased demand for music led to some of the wealthier movie houses

hiring orchestras to accompany their films, a practice which quickly rose in popularity with their customers.<sup>3</sup> With music now an integral part of the movie-going experience, filmmakers wanted to use music to bring out the emotional content of their films. Film accompanists were now being asked to write orchestrations of favorite songs of the day or to incorporate excerpts from classical music that would fit with the story on the screen.<sup>4</sup> These orchestrations were the beginning of the transition from film accompaniment to dedicated orchestral film scores.

One of the first blockbuster films to specifically request the use of full orchestral accompaniment was the 1915 film *Birth of a Nation*. While this film is most often referenced today for its overtly racist messaging and plot, the film was a landmark for the genre of film music. The score for *Birth of a Nation* was not wholly original musical material. However, the use of a live, sixty-piece orchestra had a profound effect on the filmmakers and the film's audience. Thomas Dixon, the author of the novel *The Clansman*, upon which the film is based, stated: "The throb through the darkness of that orchestra raised the emotional power to undreamed heights."<sup>5</sup>

The score for *Birth of a Nation* drove home the film's racist narrative by including orchestrations of songs like *Swanee River*, *Turkey in the Straw*, *Dixie*, and *Zip Coon*. However, excerpts from Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony and Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries* were also used for dramatic effect.<sup>6</sup> From this period on, high budget films used full orchestras to increase the emotional effect their films carried, gradually using more and more originally composed film scores.



## Émigré Composers

In the mid-1920s there was a large influx of immigrants from Europe. With the rise of fascism on the horizon, many prominent artists decided it was in their best interests to leave their home countries for the United States. Many of the composers who came to the US settled in Los Angeles and began working in the newly blossoming film industry. There was plenty of work to go around, and with the advent of the sound film in 1927, the workload was only increasing.

During the early years of the sound film, most films were classified as movie musicals, and their music mostly comprised song and dance numbers. However, five years after the advent of sound, a group of composers changed the game concerning film scoring.

The first significant breakthrough happened with Max Steiner's complete original score to the hit 1933 film *King Kong*.



Max Steiner

RKO sent into theaters a movie about an ape. It derived its power partly from the excellent special effects involving the ape, known as King Kong, partly from Fay Wray's fetching quality as the object of the ape's adoration—and partly from the empathic, wall-to-wall musical score by Richard Strauss's godson, an Austrian émigré named Max Steiner.<sup>7</sup>

Steiner and the other émigré composers were well schooled in the Romantic style of composition and orchestration. Their training came from the likes of Strauss, Mahler, Schumann, and most notably, Wagner.<sup>8</sup> With that in mind, it is essential to look at how composers viewed the horn during the late 19th and early 20th century. During this time, Hector Berlioz's *Treatise on Instrumentation and Orchestration* was still the preeminent text on the subject. However, Richard Strauss was asked to update Berlioz's work in 1904 to reflect updated instrument designs as well as the advances in orchestration developed by Wagner, Mahler, and himself.<sup>9</sup>

One of the most in-depth changes made to the text was a section regarding the valve horn. Introduced in the early 1800s, the valve horn did not gain a high degree of popularity among performers and composers until the mid to late 1800s.<sup>10</sup> However, with works by Wagner, Mahler, and Strauss specifically requiring the new instrument, players eventually made the switch. With this switch, the horn changed roles from a typical bass

line or fanfare brass instrument to a versatile tool that could be used in many different situations to depict an extensive range of scenes.

In the revised *Treatise on Instrumentation and Orchestration*, Strauss states, "Of all the instruments, the horn is probably the one that blends best with all instrumental groups."<sup>11</sup> He continues, "The introduction and improvement of the valve horn has undoubtedly inaugurated the greatest advance in the technique of the modern orchestra since Berlioz"<sup>12</sup> and that "it [the horn] always serves its task fully and entirely, it is unique in its versatility, and its effect is always conspicuous."<sup>13</sup>

By the end of the 19th-century and early 20th-century, composers used the horn in a vast range of settings, most notably in the operas of Richard Wagner, the symphonies of Gustav Mahler, and the tone poems of Richard Strauss; these horn parts beautifully conveyed emotional content from the stage or the program to the audience. The émigré composers' knowledge and skill of using the versatile nature of the horn are demonstrated in their film scores.

During the 1930s and 1940s, also known as the golden age of Hollywood, the film score indeed came into its own. This rise in popularity can be attributed to the increasing number of fantasy films after the decline of the movie musical. Filmmakers during this time needed music for their films to be well received by the audience. As Emilio Audissino states:

Music is more easily placed in films about the past, distant places, fancy romances, and exotic adventures, where the narrative is more in need of music to suspend the disbelief of the audience and to ensure the formal cohesion of the film, all of which confirms what Jack Warner used to say: "Films are fantasy—and fantasy needs music."<sup>14</sup>

This new genre of film led to the style of music written by the émigré composers becoming the new standard of film scoring.

The émigré composers drew heavily upon the operatic work of Richard Wagner. This influence is evident in the heavy use of leitmotives, instrumental choral writing, and the use of the horn as an adaptable instrument. They considered the horn to be equally at home playing as a solo voice or playing with any other group of instruments in a supporting role.<sup>15</sup> A great example of the horn's versatility can be heard in Erich Wolfgang Korngold's score to the 1935 film *Captain Blood*. In the track *Island of Magra*, the horn can be heard as a solo voice, a member of the brass family, playing a counter melody with the strings, playing effect sounds using stopped horn technique, and





returning as a solo voice, taking on all of these roles, in succession, in about 90 seconds.<sup>16</sup> While this shows the level of versatility the composers of Hollywood entrusted to the horn, it is also essential to discuss the musicians responsible for recording these demanding scores, and the scores that would follow.

## The Los Angeles Recording Studios

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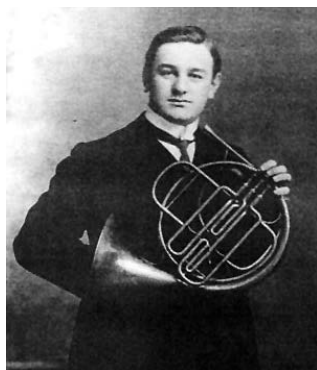
**The horn playing tradition in Los Angeles is one of the great traditions of American classical music.**

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However, until the internet age, little was known of these incredible musicians. Studio musicians were some of the most heard orchestral musicians in the world, but their audiences rarely, if ever, knew their names. Since the late 1920s, there has been a continuous line of world-class horn players available to the composers of Hollywood, and since that time, they have held an extremely high standard of reliability and excellence.

### Alfred Brain

The birth of this tradition can be traced back to Alfred Brain. Alfred (Alf) Brain was the uncle of the virtuoso hornist Dennis Brain. A native of Britain, Brain began his career playing in the orchestras of London. He was known for his calm under pressure, his beautiful sound quality, and his reliability. At one point or another, Brain held the principal horn position with every major orchestra in London,<sup>17</sup> a feat only he has claimed.



*Alfred Brain*

In 1922 Brain was asked to take over the principal horn position with the New York Symphony.<sup>18</sup> He accepted and moved with his daughter to America. However, New York did not suit Brain, and he played only one season in New York. At the end of that season, he was offered the position of principal horn with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, which he took.<sup>19</sup> Upon Brain's arrival in Los Angeles, he was quickly in high demand in the recording studios, signing a contract with MGM in 1927.<sup>20</sup> His ability to reliably produce beautiful results, no matter how difficult the writing, quickly made him the first call player for many of Hollywood's most accomplished composers.

Brain's playing exerted a heavy influence on the other horn players in Los Angeles. Between performing as principal horn with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and principal horn in recording sessions, he attracted players from the area to come to perform, work, and study with him. His influence on the horn playing community of Los

Angeles was massive. Jack Cave, another very successful studio hornist, described Brain's influence by stating:

Horn players wanted to play and sound like Alf. As far as the quality of tone and everything, Brain influenced everyone here in LA. He was like the only horn player in town. When there was a recording session and Alf was available, they didn't think about anybody else.<sup>21</sup>

According to many, Brain was also a generous and personable man. He welcomed new hornists to the area and would go out of his way to make sure that as many horn players as possible were getting performing work, regularly requesting that composers write their film scores for eight or more horns.<sup>22</sup> While he did not teach many formal lessons to these young hornists, he did give what he called consultation lessons, and in some cases literally let them sit at his feet during recording sessions.<sup>23</sup> One of these young mentees was the great Vincent DeRosa, who would go on to dominate the recording scene in Los Angeles for the second half of the 20th century.

Brain was the final piece of the puzzle that brought the horn to the forefront of film scoring. In the late 1920s and 1930s, Hollywood was transitioning from movie musicals to fantasy and adventure epics. The scores for these films were now being written by the highly-trained émigré composers, who now had a group of hornists at their disposal that could produce anything written for them on demand. This combination of talents was a recipe that allowed the horn to be used to its fullest potential and encouraged composers from then on to write extensively for the instrument.

### Vincent DeRosa

One of the players who carried on Brain's style and standard of playing was Vincent DeRosa, the first hornist to devote his entire career to performing in the recording studios.<sup>24</sup> He briefly held the third horn position with the LA Philharmonic. However, he was making more income from his work in the recording studios, so he devoted most of his time to recording work.<sup>25</sup> He began his career learning on the job and performing with Alfred Brain in Los Angeles, and after Brain retired from playing, DeRosa continued his spectacularly high level of performance and reliability.

DeRosa had an extremely long career, playing his first recording session in 1937 and his last in 2006.<sup>26</sup> During this time, he worked with every significant film composer, continually pushing the limits of what could be written for the horn. John Williams, one of the most





prolific film composers of all time, stated of DeRosa: "He represented the pinnacle of instrumental performance, and I can honestly say that what I know about writing for the French Horn, I learned from him."<sup>27</sup>

Like Brain, DeRosa became known for his ability to perform under pressure. Minimal post-production editing was done on film scores before the late 1980s.<sup>28</sup> Everything had to be performed flawlessly with little to no rehearsal time, and often in one take. Composers knew that DeRosa could deliver the sound they wanted no matter how difficult the writing, so they kept writing increasingly intricate horn parts for him to play. An excellent example of DeRosa's skill is displayed in the track "Micky" from the 1982 film *Rocky III*.<sup>29</sup> This track is a six-minute, extremely high range horn solo with string accompaniment.

Unlike Brain, DeRosa was an accomplished teacher. He was the professor of horn at the University of Southern California from 1974–2005, and many of his students—such as James Thatcher, Richard Todd, Steven Becknell, and Dylan Hart—have gone on to long and successful careers in the film studios, carrying on the traditions set by Brain and DeRosa to this day.

## The Modern Age

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**Today, the horn remains one of the most frequently featured and versatile instruments of Hollywood film scores.**

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The studio hornists of today are carrying on the traditions set by Alfred Brain and Vincent DeRosa. However, an argument can be made that the players today are asked to perform an even more challenging role in the production of film scores.

One example of the new challenges facing studio hornists is the advances made in electronic music, specifically the use of instrument samples by composers. Instrument samples are sounds recorded from actual instruments. Then, these sounds are reproduced electronically, and can be arranged into any order. Samples are a useful tool for composers because they allow them to listen back to their works and get real-time feedback, while also allowing for supplementation of certain live instrument groups during the recording process. This results in lower production costs; however, samples work better for certain instrument groups than others.<sup>30</sup> For instance, string samples work quite well and come close enough to recreating live string sound that they can often be used in place of live players.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, sample horn sounds could not be substituted for the real instrument, but are often used as supplementa-

tion to live players.<sup>32</sup> This technique leads to many modern film composers writing for these sampled sounds rather than human players.

With composers writing in this manner, horn players are now required to play exceedingly difficult parts that were initially written for a machine. To deal with these new challenges, the studio hornists of Los Angeles have incorporated the use of descant horns and Wagner tuben.<sup>33</sup> By using these instruments, the players can play particularly difficult passages with greater ease. For instance, many current film composers write loud melodies to be performed in the middle and low register of the horn.<sup>34</sup> This range is difficult for the standard double horn to project with significant volume, but players can deliver the desired results by playing these passages on the Wagner tuba. Another common occurrence is to have the horn playing in the extreme high register for an extended period. The descant horn with its shorter F-alto tubing allows the performer to play these passages with greater ease and security.<sup>35</sup>

## Conclusion

All told, two main factors led to the horn's rise to prominence in the world of film music. The first was the arrival of the émigré composers who brought with them the late Romantic, Wagnerian style of composition that heavily featured the horn. The second factor was the continued presence of truly world class horn players in Los Angeles. These simultaneously occurring events gave birth to the horn playing tradition in Hollywood. Due to the innovative compositions of the émigré composers as well as the playing abilities of horn players like Alfred Brain, Vince DeRosa, and their successors, the horn's use in film music has continued to raise the level of horn performance in Los Angeles and the United States while also inspiring a new generation of composers and hornists.

*This article is an excerpt from the author's DMA dissertation, "From Screen to Concert Hall: Solo and Chamber Works for Horn, A Full-Length Recording of the Concert Works of Film Composers and History of the Horn in Film Scores," published by the University of Wisconsin-Madison in conjunction with an album of original works for horn written by prominent film composers.*

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<sup>1</sup>Gary Marmorstein, *Hollywood Rhapsody: Movie Music and Its Makers 1900–1975* (New York: Schirmer, 1997), 8.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>3</sup>Patrick Miller, "Music and the Silent Film," *Perspectives of New Music* 21, no. 1/2 (Autumn, 1982–Summer, 1983): 582–584, accessed March 3, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/832894>.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 583.

<sup>5</sup>Marmorstein, 12.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 12–13.

<sup>7</sup>Marmorstein, 67.

<sup>8</sup>Charles Francis Leinberger, *An Austrian in Hollywood: Leitmotifs, Thematic Transformation, and Key Relationships in Max Steiner's 1942 Film Score, Now, Voyager* (Ph.D. diss., University of Arizona, 1996), 289–294. Accessed March 11, 2017, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/pqdtglobal/docview/304314135/FB7324FAFBC64FC0PQ/1?accountid=465>.

<sup>9</sup>Hector Berlioz and Richard Strauss, *Treatise on Instrumentation*, trans. Theodore Front (Melville, NY: Belwin Mills, 1948), 2.

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