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The Horn Call

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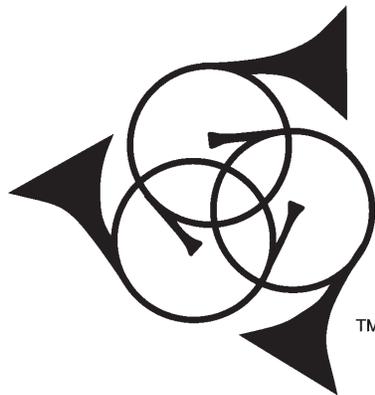
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The International Horn Society recommends that HORN be recognized as the correct English label for our instrument.

[From the Minutes of the First IHS General Meeting, June 15, 1971, Tallahassee, Florida, USA]

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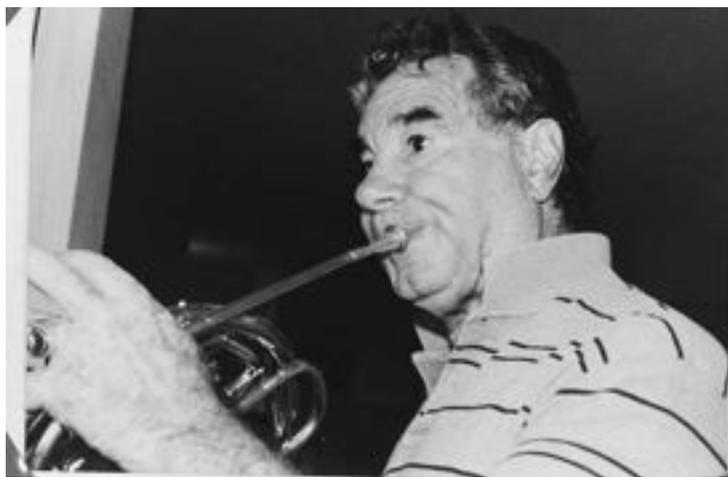
Vincent DeRosa Reminisces

As Told to Paul Neuffer

In a career that spanned over seven decades, Vincent DeRosa's mastery of the horn set the standard for horn players and composers in Los Angeles and beyond. Prior to his rise to stardom, three other horn players in Los Angeles laid the foundation of horn excellence that Vince would inherit and eventually supersede: Alfred Brain, Vincent DeRubertis, and Jack Cave. Now in his 90th year, Vince reflects on the trio that influenced him and on his own career.

- Paul Neuffer

Al Brain came from England to Los Angeles in the early 1920s to be first horn of the Philharmonic – he was trying to get away from a wife! She followed him to New York then to Los Angeles...he paid for her the rest of his life! She was a piece of work! He held all the first horn jobs in England and was very highly esteemed and celebrated there, much like his nephew, Dennis. His brother Aubrey usually sat third or somewhere in the section. We had musicians come here from England and they all said that when Al left, it was like day and night.



When Al got here, he really improved the quality of horn playing because the level of horn playing in Los Angeles was pretty low. My uncle, Vincent DeRubertis, said that Brain was absolutely infallible, so positive. He had gone through the conservatory in England, and you could tell in his playing that he had very solid training. He had a very English sound: very straight, clear, *perfect* attack. He could play any nuance from double piano to ten fortés. All the basics that a horn player should have, he had them, except low. He didn't play low at all. They didn't even go into it then. You were either a high horn player or a low horn player. He was a real character though. You'd never know he was a horn player. He had a big property in the Cheviot Hills area, which is between Fox and MGM. So he could get to either one easily. Anyway, I'd go to his house for a lesson and you'd think he was a farmer because he was always working in his garden, pushing a plough.

The horn section he led in the Philharmonic included my uncle Vincent, George Hoffman, and Odolino Perissi, Richard Perissi's father. That was as good a section as it comes. Three

of them were first horn players: Al was first horn at Fox, my uncle was first at Paramount, and Hoffman was first at Warner Brothers. Eventually they all left the Philharmonic to be first horns at their studios full time. I didn't know Hoffman, but Al was a wonderful man; always positive, very nice demeanor, a gentleman. He set the standard of behavior not only for horn players but for all the musicians. We all learned to emulate his attitude and character. Al was unflappable no matter how tense the situation – he was steady as a rock, never showed any pressure. Which was the greatest thing that ever happened to me because I got to be the same way – just concentrate on what you're doing and that's it.

Now my uncle, Vincent DeRubertis, was a really good player, but he was emotional. Every once in a while something would get his goat and the funny thing was, it was usually something really simple. We were on a date and he somehow got bugged about the attack on the first note. It was nothing – it was just a D concert. But things weren't happening. So I said, "Uncle Vince, let me just do that for you. This is nothing, but you're bugged about it." So the next time the conductor gave the downbeat, I did it. He just got too emotional about it. But other than that he was a really good horn player. Excellent. I heard him play a live broadcast of the Haydn Symphony No. 31 on the radio. He was first and George Price [long time LA Philharmonic third horn] was second. They sounded absolutely incredible.



This is a photo of the first get together of the LA Horn Club in 1951 at Joe Eger's house. Vincent DeRubertis is in the middle with a lady on each arm and Jack Cave is to the right, next to a man in a light jacket. Wendell Hoss is in the to the left of DeRubertis, Jim Decker is behind him. Richard Perissi is behind DeRubertis and Joe Eger is at the bottom. Photo courtesy of Jim Decker.

Uncle Vince came out here from Kansas City, Missouri, where his uncle, Ned DeRubertis, a virtuoso double bassist, founded the Kansas City Conservatory. That conservatory was very well known. We had a lot of musicians come here from there. Even Al Brain told me it was well known and respected.



That uncle, Ned DeRubertis, was invited by Toscanini to be principal bass of the New York Philharmonic. But he turned it down as he was busy with the conservatory and the orchestra in Kansas City. My father played clarinet in that orchestra as well. The DeRubertis side of the family were all musicians. Another uncle, Dominic DeCaprio, was professor of woodwinds at Northwestern University for many years.

After playing first horn in the Kansas City Symphony, uncle Vince came to Los Angeles – about the same time as Al Brain. He took the second horn job in the Philharmonic and eventually became first horn at Paramount. He was a gentleman and was very well liked and respected. When Jim Stagliano came to Los Angeles, he had a problem in his playing: he had no attack. He would just kind of enter. And he had a big wah-wah. Stagliano respected my uncle and he went over to get some help. Vince told Jimmy that you didn't want to swell on a note after you get it. You want to come in nice and hold it even. So Stagliano listened to him and took his advice.

My uncle played on an Alexander double and Al Brain played a double horn in the symphony. But in the studio, Al used a 5-valve B² horn. In the movies, there were a lot of stopped solos and he could play those without transposing. I never liked the Alexander double – they had a lot of resistance. I preferred the Kruspe style horn. 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.



The first officers of the LA Horn Club (l-r): Alfred Brain, President; Wendell Hoss, secretary; Art Franz, Treasurer; Jim Decker, Vice President. Photo courtesy of Jim Decker.

I wanted my uncle to play assistant when we were going to record some symphonic stuff with Leinsdorf [Wagner highlights and the *Scheherazade* recordings]. So I asked the contractor if I could have an assistant and he agreed. So, my uncle came in to play assistant and you know what's funny? We lived in the same house and he had never heard me play. We were in the session and he looked over at me and I said, "What's the matter?" He said, "You don't need anyone playing assistant." It really hit me. That was one of the biggest compliments I ever had, especially coming from him.

After the Wagner sessions, Leinsdorf wanted me to go to New York to be first horn in the Met Opera. He told the orchestra manager, Dave Klein, "I've got to have the first horn player in New York. The guy never misses a note and has a beautiful sound... I have to get him." Klein said, "Erich, NO way." Erich said, "What do you mean?" Klein told him, "The guy makes four or five times the money that you could give him." It was the same with the Chicago Symphony. They wanted me to go there around the same time, but I didn't want to go back there. I had lived there as a kid – I'd go to school in three feet of snow. It was fun as a kid – I loved it. But I wouldn't love it now!

I was around 11 or 12 when I first heard the name Jack Cave. My uncle came home from a session and said that the new kid at MGM was terrific. Jack Cave was 22 years old when he became first horn at MGM. His father was a trumpet player and he was related to Bruno Jaenicke. He was raised in Santa Barbara, got married, then came to Los Angeles to be first at MGM in the 30s. Like Al Brain, Jack played a 5-valve B² horn and always sounded beautiful on it.

When Jack was first at MGM and I was first at Fox, we did the majority of the recording work. Almost every night, after doing movie recordings, we were recording with different artists. I didn't have a contract when they first came in, and I didn't want a contract. Jack was the same way. We liked to be freelancing. If a composer you liked was doing a picture at a different studio, you could go over there and do it. The first guy that gave me a contract was Alfred Newman. He said I was his first horn and had to be on contract. I told him I didn't want to be on contract, but he was persistent. He wasn't going to let me walk away without signing a contract.

But not all the horn players liked working for Alfred Newman. He was tough and could be mean. At one session Newman was leading, there were eight horns and Al Brain was first. I was in the back row with Richard Perissi. Brain was a real funny guy. He told a joke to the section and we all broke up laughing. Newman got mad and fired all of us in the back row. Jack said that Newman kind of spooked him. Jack asked me once how I liked working for Newman. I told him I liked working for him because anything he says is musically correct and he's not just saying it.

You know how some conductors are. A lot of them are baloney artists. They just blow off and don't know what they're talking about. When I first started, a lot of them were like that. Because I was a kid, they would try to intimidate me. So, the first thing at the beginning of the session, 9 o'clock, they would say, I want to hear the horn at bar so and so. Some of them didn't even have anything to do with the music, they were just conducting for the composer. That was a BS time. But I liked working with the really good ones because anything they said was the right thing to say. Whatever Newman said was the right thing to say and that was OK with me. The ones that were full of it though, I would just nod my head and that's it.

But I got over conductors *real* fast. No one was going to get under my skin and fluster me. My whole attitude as far as guys yelling and so forth, well the hell with them. They didn't even bother me. One time at a session at MGM, Jack told me that the guy conducting was really picking on the horns. Jack was first and Odolino Perissi was sitting fourth. Odo was a very volatile Italian and he couldn't speak English well at all.



So the conductor was picking on the horns and Jack was calmly letting it go. Well Odo wasn't going to take it. He stood up and yelled, "You-a shut up-a. I-a hear you. I'm-a no blind." The whole orchestra, a hundred or so people, all broke up laughing. Jack said he just about fell over laughing so hard. Fifty years in the country and he still couldn't speak the language!

So, Jack and I did about 90 percent of the freelance work between the two of us. Jim Decker, Richard Perissi, and Bill Hinshaw would often fill out the section. But Jack and I did all the important stuff. We didn't do any symphony work because they had to have rehearsals. If there was a concert with two or three rehearsals, we couldn't do it because of our schedules. So the guys like Jim and Richard and Bill would do them because their schedules were a bit less busy than ours. I would have liked to have done some of the concerts or symphonic stuff – but not at the loss of a thousand dollars! In those days they'd give you maybe \$200 to do a concert. I have no bad feelings about missing that!

Jack was 11 years older than I, but we were best friends. Richard Perissi and I were like brothers. We grew up together after I moved here from Chicago. But if I wanted to go on a vacation or do something like that together, Richard didn't want to. Jack and I did everything together. He was always a fun guy. And our wives got along great. For buddies, he was a real buddy. I sure miss him...

Paul Neuffer is a free-lance hornist in central California. He studied with DeRosa at USC.

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