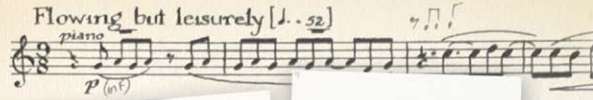



Horn in F *Flowing but leisurely* (♩. 32) *piano* *p* (mf)  

Andante *Allegro* *Arnold Cooke*


Concours du Conservatoire de Musique de Paris

SOLO POUR COR

avec accompagnement de PIANO

PAR

RAOUL PUGNO

PIÈCE DE CONCERT

Paul VIDAL

Pour COR Altériorité en FA

Letzte u. schwierigste Teil

Andante

FROM DENNIS BRAIN'S LIBRARY

A programme of English,
French and German music

STEPHEN STIRLING: HORN
TONY HALSTEAD: PIANO

with Kathron Sturrock: piano, Christian Halstead: violin



(mf) più cantabile

Ossia

- | | | |
|----|--|------|
| | Alexander Ecklebe: Sonata for Horn and Piano (1956) unpublished | |
| 1 | I. Allegro vivace | 4:49 |
| 2 | II. Moderato, poco rubato | 4:39 |
| 3 | III. Allegro | 3:42 |
| 4 | Alan Bush: Autumn Poem Op.45 pub. Schott & Co. Ltd. | 4:20 |
| 5 | Alan Bush: Trent's Broad Reaches Op.36 pub. Schott & Co. Ltd. | 4:59 |
| 6 | Arnold Cooke: Rondo in B flat (1952) pub. Schott & Co. Ltd. | 3:08 |
| | Arnold Cooke: Arioso and Scherzo for Horn, Violin and Piano D63 (1957)
unpublished | |
| 7 | Arioso (Andante) | 4:51 |
| 8 | Scherzo (Allegro vivace) | 3:59 |
| | Peter Racine Fricker: Sonata for Horn and Piano Op. 24 pub. Schott & Co. Ltd. | |
| 9 | I. Con moto | 6:24 |
| 10 | II. Scherzo: Presto | 3:10 |
| 11 | III. Invocation: Molto moderato | 5:58 |
| 12 | Henri Büsser: Cantecor for Horn and Piano Op. 77
pub. Buffet Crampon & Co. | 5:47 |
| 13 | Paul Vidal: Pièce de Concert (1924)
pub. Buffet Crampon & Co. | 5:45 |
| 14 | Charles Tournemire: Fantaisie for Horn and Piano (1931)
pub. Buffet Crampon & Co. | 4:33 |
| 15 | Raoul Pugno: Solo pour Cor (1900) pub. Alphonse Leduc | 6:17 |
| 16 | Jean-Baptiste Senaillé: Allegro Spiritoso (arr. J. Salmon) pub. Ricordi | 2:29 |
| 17 | Camille Saint-Saëns: Le Cygne (The Swan) pub. Durand | 2:39 |

Total Playing Time 78:21



Photo courtesy of Tina Brain

STEPHEN STIRLING

As a youngster I grew up with Dennis Brain's Mozart recordings in the background. My horn teacher, I for James idolized him and my father loved telling the story of the day he had sung with the London Philharmonic Choir and had heard two minor miracles: Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau opened his mouth for the first time in the UK and Dennis Brain played a note that disappeared to nothing. Both moments drew gasps from the choir. When I learned that Brain's personal music library was in the possession of Mark Andrews I realised that it might contain all sorts of manuscripts sent to him by hopeful composers, so, joined by another hero of mine, horn (and piano) playing legend Anthony Halstead, we visited the collection to see what might be there. After a day of sight reading through all sorts of material we settled on a few manuscripts as being worth further investigation. Those by Ecklebe and Cooke stood out. The pandemic got in the way of the necessary deeper exploration that we will delve into soon but several printed, yet virtually unknown works also grabbed our attention for the simple reason that they were very well thumbed! And for good reason – works of effortless Gallic charm emerged. It became a natural decision to record this repertoire and we were thrilled when master horn player turned record producer, Michael Purton took us on. Together with the deeply felt austerity of Fricker, the pastoral nature of Bush, Ecklebe's gentle humour and Cooke's reworking of his well known *Arioso and Scherzo*, we hope to replenish the stock of music for horn players, student and professional alike.

Lastly, a huge vote of thanks to my dear friend and wonderful pianist, Kathron Sturrock, for agreeing to help complete the project when a pandemic delayed procedure for Tony threatened to scupper the schedule!

Stephen Stirling, November 2021

TONY HALSTEAD

Memories of the 'From Dennis Brain's Library' recording project are still whirling around in my head, 4 days after we finished the sessions.

On a purely musical level, I'm astonished that, after feeling rather negative, initially, about some of the uneasy, disturbing sounds in the Fricker *Sonata*, I now find myself actually loving the piece, after working on it in a very detailed way. The start of the 1st movement has much in common with, e.g. the opening of Nielsen's *5th Symphony* or even Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*: there is a fragile emerging thread of lyricism that struggles to be perceived against a dissonant, obscuring background. Throughout the entire work, gritty, muscular blocks of tension are frequently resolved by exquisitely reposeful passages, as the musical narrative unfolds. I urge the listener to stay engaged with it, during, and after its first two rather difficult minutes!

During the recording sessions I found myself observing and admiring the role of the record producer, often the 'unsung hero' of a successful CD. By his skilful use of encouragement, exactitude and empathy, Mike Purton showed himself to be a superb 'musical psychologist'; he knew exactly how hard to push us!

Tony Halstead, September 2021

The whole team would like to thank Mark Andrews for making this wonderful collection available for this and hopefully further projects.



Photo courtesy of Mike Purton

Tony Halstead, Christian Halstead
and Stephen Stirling

It comes as no surprise to find that Dennis Brain, as the greatest horn soloist of his era, built up a fine library of horn music of over 500 scores. This unique collection was kept together after his death but was put up for sale in 1998 and, as many of the items bore his signature, there was a real chance of the collection being broken up and individual items destroyed. Fortunately, Mark Andrews, a lawyer and keen amateur horn player, stepped in to buy the library complete and he still holds it today.



The collection naturally includes the works which formed the core of Brain's many recitals across the UK and Europe – for example, Beethoven's *Horn Sonata*, Schumann's *Adagio and Allegro* and Dukas's *Villanelle* – but his wide tastes mean that there are also many other less well-known pieces, and it is these which are explored on this recording. Some were written for him, some are arrangements which he played as encores, and there are also works by French composers which clearly attracted him both for their quality and for the opportunity to display his fabulous technique. The collection also includes the only surviving copy – in manuscript – of an otherwise unknown three-movement sonata by the German composer Alexander Ecklebe.

Ecklebe was born in Kosel in northern Germany, in 1904, the son of a soldier who later became a customs officer in Breslau (today Wrocław) in Poland. He trained at the Breslau Conservatory and then moved to Berlin in 1929 to study composition with Franz Schreker before becoming a conductor with the

Berliner Rundfunk, the city's radio station, from 1930 until 1945. After a period first as a prisoner of war and then a bar pianist, he then returned in 1948 to the station's post-war West Berlin successor, RIAS, as a chamber music consultant and then as head of classical music. It seems likely that the composition of his *Horn Sonata* in 1950 was somehow connected with Brain's visit to Berlin to record a radio broadcast on 20 April: Ecklebe left RIAS that year to become a full-time composer and Brain certainly owned the score of this ebullient and engaging work by 1951.

Benjamin Britten's *Canticle III Still falls the rain* and Alun Bush's elegiac *Autumn Poem*, were both written for a concert which John Amis organised in memory of the brilliant Australian pianist, Noel Mewton-Wood, who committed suicide on 5 December 1953. Britten's partner, Peter Pears, had performed with Brain and Mewton-Wood in a performance of Schubert's *Auf dem Strom* on 28th January that year and, when the memorial concert took place on 28th January 1955, Pears and Brain were joined by Bush in the premières of both new works. Bush's gently-flowing *Trent's Broad Reaches* also received its first official performance at the concert although it had been composed in 1951 and published by Schott in the following year.

1952 also saw the publication by Schott of Arnold Cooke's splendidly rumbustious *Rondo*, which they had commissioned for inclusion in the same series as *Trent's Broad Reaches*, and which quickly became part of Brain's regular repertoire. It may well have been that one of these performances encouraged 'Mrs Hackforth' to suggest that Cooke should write the *Arioso and Scherzo* (hn/vn/2vas/vc) for Brain, and he gave its first performance on 12th

May 1955 in Cambridge at one of the 'Thursday concerts' organised by Lily Hackforth, wife of the University's Professor of Ancient Philosophy. He then gave its first London performance at the Wigmore Hall on 26th May 1956 before recording it twice for the BBC and seems to have liked it so much that in 1957, he asked Cooke to make a new version for horn, violin, and piano. He may well have foreseen that, in this instrumentation, the *Arioso and Scherzo* would make an attractive companion piece for his many performances of Brahms' famous *Horn Trio*, Op.40, and it might therefore have become much better known if he had lived.

Peter Racine Fricker was working as a professor of composition at the Royal College of Music when he composed his *Wind Quintet* in 1947 and, having been at St Paul's Boys' School with Brain, he sent the score to him for comments. It is not clear whether these were forthcoming but in January 1949, Fricker discovered from the *Radio Times* that Brain was giving its first broadcast performance on the BBC. The *Sonata for Horn and Piano*, which he wrote particularly for Brain, followed between January and March 1955 when he was Director of Music at Morley College, and the pianist Harry Isaacs accompanied Brain in its first performance shortly afterwards at London's Conway Hall on 20th March. A broadcast followed on 1 August 1956 with Wilfrid Parry at the piano.

The four French pieces which are recorded here were all written for the *Concours*, the annual competition held at the Paris Conservatoire to identify the best player of each of the instruments which were taught there. These were often composed during the 19th Century by the instrumental professors

themselves, but in 1896, the Conservatoire's Director, Théodore Dubois, ruled that future test pieces should be commissioned from established composers. At around the same time, the traditionalists in the Conservatoire's hierarchy, who had insisted that all test pieces for horn should be played on the hand horn, began to lose their influence and for the next few years, the set pieces required a mixture of hand horn and valve horn technique. These included the *Solo* by Raoul Pugno which was used for the 1900 competition and although the score attracted little attention, François Brémond, the horn professor, clearly felt that it fulfilled its purpose as he programmed it again in 1922, the last time he entered students for the *Concours* before his retirement.

Brémond's successor, his student Fernand Reine, set Paul Vidal's *Pièce de concert en Fa* for the competition in 1924 and although there is no evidence that Brain ever played it in public, the well-thumbed nature of his copy suggests that he may well have played it frequently in private. Vidal was known best as a conductor, but he had studied composition with Massenet and taught Ibert, and while *Le Menestrel's* reviewer found the *Pièce de concert* 'not exactly easy', *La Presse* described it as being 'excellently written'.

The 1926 horn competition did not go well. The test piece, *Cantecor*, was composed by Henri Büsser who had studied with Franck and Massenet and had been teaching at the Conservatoire for five years, but none of the students' performances was deemed worthy of the first prize. *Le Menestrel* pulled no punches, commenting that *Cantecor* 'is certainly difficult' but that the contestants 'made it seem even more so' as they indulged in 'unforeseen fantasies of rhythm' and failed to find either the 'poetry' of the hand-stopped

passages or the lyrical nature of the work, 'which sometimes recalls Schumann and, sometimes, popular song'.

Another of Franck's pupils, Charles Tournemire, composed his *Fantaisie* for the 1931 competition. Its mystical, impressionistic mood recalls the character of *L'Orgue mystique*, the extensive series of pieces for organ with which he was preoccupied between 1927 and 1932, and it is difficult to know whether the audience was merely surprised by its sudden reference to the 'Siegfried Horn Call' by Wagner or puzzled by the problems which it caused the competitors. 'It caused a great deal of inconvenience to the lips of most of the players,' according to the arts magazine, *Comoedia*, and 'created some entertaining discords'. Even the competition winner, Edmond Danel, only 'nearly' managed 'the hard Siegfriedian climb without noticeable slips'. The *Fantaisie* also includes a short passage which may be a nod to another horn solo. In the tenth bar, Tournemire writes a nine-note figure which is uncannily similar to the opening of Frederick Delius's Fantasy Overture, *Over the Hills and Far Away*. Whether he knew the English composer's score is, however, a question which cannot be answered.

Both of the remaining pieces in this recording are transcriptions which Brain played on BBC broadcasts and which he probably made himself from existing arrangements simply because, as his widow Yvonne said, 'he enjoyed doing things like that when he had a spare moment.' The first, the *Allegro Spiritoso* comes from the *Violin Sonatas, op. 4* which were written by the French composer, Jean-Baptiste Senaillé in 1721. It was first taken up in a version for cello and piano by the French cellist Joseph Salmon and, after it was

popularised in England by the bassoonist Archie Camden, Brain broadcast his own version for horn on Sunday 11th August 1946 at 10.15am. Reginald Morley-Pegge was among those listening and, although he found the style of the music 'utterly foreign to the nature of the horn', he also wrote that day to his friend, WFH Blandford saying, 'Did you hear Dennis Brain's recital this morning? His technique in quick time is simply astonishing: I should doubt if it has ever been equalled'. Morley-Pegge was of course entitled to his opinion about the music but *La Basque*, a transcription of a fast movement by Senaillé's slightly older contemporary, Marin Marais, was the last solo work which Brain played, and that performance has gone down as one of the greatest in horn history.

Although Saint-Saëns's *Le Cygne (The Swan)* from *The Carnival of the Animals* was originally written for cello and two pianos, the second piano contributes so little that cellists have long omitted it and played the work as a solo for cello with piano accompaniment. It would therefore have been only a short step for Brain to write out the cello part in the right key for horn, and it is said that he often played it as an encore after recitals. A BBC memo suggests that he recorded it on 18 December 1953 with Wilfrid Parry at the piano for television's 'Teleclub', a 'fortnightly magazine for the under-twenty-ones' but there is no reference to it in that day's *Radio Times* and the recording does not survive. It is possible, however, that the memo was wrong: Steve Race, the music director of 'Teleclub', also presented 'Steve Race's Music Room' and says in his biography that, 'for some editions I would be able to afford the fee for a guest, and I remember inviting the great horn player Dennis Brain to play 'The Swan' for my younger viewers'.

John Humphries



Stephen Stirling
and Tony Halstead



Photo courtesy of Fiona Hanson

STEPHEN STIRLING: HORN

Stephen Stirling is a horn soloist and chamber musician of worldwide renown. His discography includes over 90 chamber works and concertos, many of them world premiere recordings, of both contemporary and neglected works by British composers alongside the great masterpieces for horn. His second recording of the Brahms *Horn Trio*, with the *Florestan Trio* (Hyperion), was nominated for a Gramophone award and his set of Mozart Horn Concertos (BMG/Classic FM) with

the City of London Sinfonia has been broadcast hundreds of times by Classic FM. The Concertino for Horn by Weber (Chandos), conducted by Michael Collins is also much broadcast. He has played at chamber music festivals all over the world to glowing reviews, 'phenomenal' (Berlin) and 'incomparable' (Graz). The CD 'Horn', with the Fibonacci Sequence on Deux Elles features both favourite and obscure masterpieces from the horn repertoire.

He is the principal horn of the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, the City of London Sinfonia and the Orchestra of St Johns, and appears regularly as guest principal with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, the London Symphony Orchestra, the BBC Symphony Orchestra and the London Philharmonic Orchestra. He has played as soloist with the ASMF and CLS, the Orchestra of St Johns, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, The Chamber Orchestra of Europe and many others.

Throughout his career Stephen has been associated with innovative ensembles. The New London Chamber Ensemble was one of the first groups, now much imitated, to pioneer choreographed performances in wind chamber music. In collaboration with Endymion, Capricorn, the NLCE, the Fibonacci Sequence, Arpège, the Composers Ensemble and the Hebrides Ensemble, he has been involved with commissioning, premiering and recording countless new works, chamber and solo, working with some of the finest composers of our time, James Macmillan, Martin Butler, Harrison Birtwistle, Thomas Adès, Sally Beamish, Brett Dean, Jörg Widmann, and Gary Carpenter to name a few. He was an early member of the Chamber Orchestra of Europe which revolutionised performance practice of the classical repertoire on modern instruments through their work with Nikolaus Harnoncourt, and recently Stephen has relished working for Aurora Orchestra in memorised live orchestral performances of Beethoven, Mozart, and Brahms symphonies.

Stephen is Professor of Horn at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance and is a faculty member of the Yellow Barn International Summer Music School and Festival in Vermont, USA. His own studies were at the Royal Northern College of Music with Ifor James and later, privately, with Julian Baker.



TONY HALSTEAD: PIANO

Although known primarily as a horn player and more recently a conductor, Tony Halstead has been active as a keyboard player for many years. His first major recording project other than as a horn player, the complete cycle of Johann Christian Bach's 15 fortepiano concertos and 12 harpsichord concertos, with The Hanover Band, was for the German record company *cpo*.

Soloists and conductors with whom he has collaborated as a continuo player include Christophe Coin, Christopher Hogwood, Gidon Kremer, Julian Lloyd Webber, Simon Standage, Crispian Steele-Perkins, Benedict Preece, Pinchas Zukerman and many others.

As a 'modern' pianist Tony has played recitals with instrumentalists Hermann Baumann, William Bennett, Christian Halstead, Frank Lloyd, Thomas Martin, Stephen Stirling, Michael Thompson, Radovan Vlatković, Richard Watkins, and the late Alan Civil, Ifor James and Barry Tuckwell.

© Tony Halstead, September 2021

KATHRON STURROCK: PIANO

Kathron Sturrock, a student of Alfred Brendel in Vienna and of Mstislav Rostropovitch in Moscow, was twice the winner for the best pianist at the Sofia International Opera Competition. After these awards she was invited to work for several years with Elisabeth Schwarzkopf in her Master Classes throughout Europe. She is a founder member and Artistic Director of the chamber ensemble The Fibonacci Sequence, appearing often on BBC Radio 3. As a soloist she has played with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and the BBC Concert Orchestra, making her Proms debut in 1994 in Alan Rawsthorne's *Concerto for 2 pianos* with Piers Lane. She has recorded CDs for Hyperion, Chandos, Gamut, Pickwick, Sain, ASV, Black Box, Quartz and Deux-Elles. In September 2003 she joined the Keyboard Faculty at the Royal College of Music, London





CHRISTIAN HALSTEAD: VIOLIN

Christian Halstead started learning the violin with his mother at the age of five. He continued his studies with professor Dona Lee Croft at the Royal College of Music, where he won several prizes.

Since graduating in 1999, Christian has enjoyed a busy and varied career as a freelance violinist, working with ensembles such as London Mozart

Players, St. Paul's Sinfonia, City Chamber Orchestra, 18th Century Concert Orchestra, Ex Cathedra, and Orpheus Sinfonia.

Christian was a founder member of the Southbank Sinfonia in 2002-3; he is also leader of the orchestra for Surrey Opera, and was appointed leader of Kent Sinfonia in December 2011. He also leads the Royal Orchestral Society, the Whitehall Orchestra, and guest-leads the Isle of Wight Symphony Orchestra and the Westminster Philharmonic Orchestra.

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We should like to thank all our fantastic supporters, without whose generous assistance this wonderful project would not have come about.

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MPR112 From Dennis Brain's Library

Music for Horn and Piano with Violin

Stephen Stirling: Horn (All Tracks),

Christian Halstead: Violin (Tracks 7-8),

Tony Halstead: Piano (Tracks 1-5, 7-11, 13-15),

Kathron Sturrock: Piano (Tracks 6, 12, 16,17).

Recording Venue: The Colyer-Fergusson Hall,
University of Kent, Canterbury, England

Recording Dates: 13th-16th September 2021

Producer and Editor: Mike Purton

Recording Engineer: Ben Connellan



Photo courtesy of Mike Purton

Stephen Stirling