

Cornucopia

News and articles for anyone interested in the horn

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Olivier Messiaen
(1908-1992)

Cornucopia

is published five times a season. It is free, although contributions are welcome. To add your name to the mailing list (email or regular mail), send a contribution, or submit material, contact:

Cornucopia

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Heavenly Messages in "Appel interstellaire" by Angela DiBartolomeo



Olivier Messiaen's unaccompanied horn solo "Appel interstellaire" (Interstellar call) is the sixth movement of the twelve-movement orchestral work *Des canyons aux étoiles*. It was inspired by a visit to Bryce Canyon in Utah and premiered in 1974. The title "From the canyons to the stars" evokes imagery of the open spaces of the American Southwest, including vast sandy deserts and towering red rock formations, contrasted by the glittering purple Milky Way Galaxy above.

Olivier Knussen wrote, "In a note issued before the first performance, Messiaen stated that *Des canyons* was 'written to glorify God in the Beauties of His Creations: from the colours of the earth and the songs of the birds to the colours of the stars and the Resurrected Ones in Heaven.'"

Messiaen's love of Catholicism was a significant source of inspiration in his works. *Des canyons* and *Appel* are profoundly religious. In *Appel*, two tuneful segments are reminiscent of Gregorian chant, chantlike offering calm contrast to the surrounding exclamatory phrases. To Messiaen, including neo-Gregorian chant signified how "earthly music mirrors heavenly concord."

Messiaen viewed birds as the bridge between God and humanity, mediators between the physical and spiritual realm – actual angels on earth. A lifelong ornithologist, Messiaen spent days in the forest transcribing birdsongs that he used extensively in his compositions. To him, birdsong was a blessing from heaven. He included two of these birdsongs in "Appel interstellaire" – the Chinese thrush and Canyon wren.

The narrative of the *Appel* horn solo is a quest to find existential meaning through humanity's suffering and isolation. We can think of the solo horn as "the seeker," who has gone into the Bryce Canyon desert searching for answers. Under the Milky Way and in the company of nothing but nature, the seeker pleads for a response, but is repeatedly met with silence. Indeed, the horn's anguished cries mimic the human voice. Various parts of the solo conjure the emotional surge of rage, yelling into the heavens, while others illustrate a sense of contempt.

Angry and confused, the seeker perceives the bird calls as nothing more than interruptions, and continues to beg for a reply. If Messiaen believed birds were angels on earth, and their calls were blessings from heaven, what if the birds were actually answering the seeker's prayers? Perhaps the seeker had turned a deaf ear to the responses offered by Messiaen's heavenly messengers.

"Appel interstellaire" delivers a dramatic statement, calling on the poignant tone and wide range of timbral colors available on the horn, making it a fantastic addition to any recital. The extended techniques, wide range of articulations, dynamics, and extremes of tessitura are a challenge and require extensive preparation to master. That said, studying the composer and understanding the context and symbolism Messiaen sought to portray are also vital to an effective performance. ♦

Angela extracted this from her doctoral lecture recital paper at Boston University. She teaches at the University of New Hampshire and is an IHS Area Representative.

The Mitchell-Ruff Duo plays Strayhorn, again



"Billy Strayhorn's Suite for the Duo is having a second life," says Willie Ruff, "with a 50th Anniversary Reissue of the 1971 recording, a Walter van de Leur score based on Strayhorn's manuscript, a new transcription of the recording, and an article in the Spring 2021 issue of the British Horn Society journal, *The Horn Player*."

Willie Ruff (string bass and horn) and Dwiki Mitchell (piano) first met in 1947 in the band at Lockbourne Air Force Base in Ohio, caught up again in 1955 in Lionel Hampton's band, and started performing as a duo a few months later, playing over many years for Young Audiences, at schools and colleges, and as music ambassadors to Africa, Russia, and China. Dwiki died in 2013.

Willie describes the genesis of the Suite for Horn and Piano (as he refers to it) in his autobiography, *A Call to Assembly*. Billy Strayhorn knew the duo through Duke Ellington and had employed Willie in his Riverside Drive Five group. He listened to the duo in 1967 at the Hickory House jazz club in New York several times and finally invited Willie to his apartment to try out a piece he was writing for them.

Strayhorn led Willie through the first movement, then resketched and played through the new materials until he was "nearly satisfied." Ellington phoned from

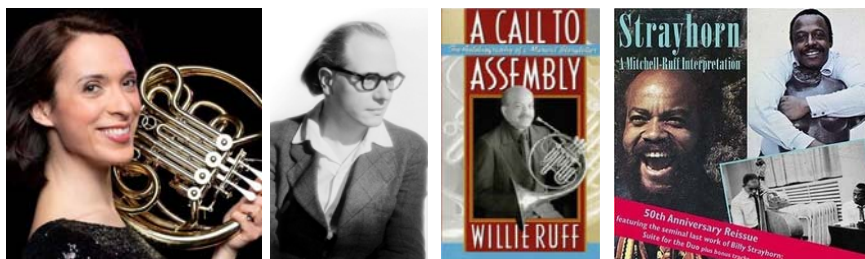
Omaha. Strayhorn and Willie played what they had so far, then Ellington and Strayhorn consulted, Strayhorn "scribbled," they played again, rinse and repeat. This went on for the rest of the week. When he had the suite in final manuscript form, Strayhorn said, "Now I want to hear it with a *real* pianist. Call Mitchell!" The suite became part of the duo's permanent repertoire.

Strayhorn died months later, and the duo performed the suite for his memorial service at Lincoln Center at Ellington's request and to great acclaim. They recorded it two years later at Willie's apartment in Hollywood, inspired by the enthusiasm at the memorial service. Willie had acquired good recording equipment and rented a piano from Steinway; they offered him the one that Rubenstein favored. Willie summoned Dwiki.

Katy Ambrose, University of Virginia, learned that the original manuscript is in the Library of Congress and available only in person. Katy fired up social media to persuade Billy Strayhorn Songs to create a transcription of the recording; it will be available at Hal Leonard. ♦

Willie earned BM and MM degrees and was awarded an honorary Doctor of Music degree at Yale University. He was elected an IHS Honorary Member in 2001.

TEMP – RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



2021 International Horn Symposium

Theme: Our ONE Horn Community
Virtual Workshop, full range of video sessions
recitals, pedagogy, careers, mental health,
research topics, scholarships, competitions,
masterclasses, exhibits

ihs53.com



News and Events

Re: Identifying the people in the photo offered by Bob Osmun.
IHS President **Andrew Pelletier** identified everyone but the woman:
Back: Peter Lundgren, Eric Ruske. Middle: Hans Pizka, Richard
Watkins, Frank Lloyd, Michael Thompson. Front left: Barry Tuckwell.
Mike Thompson (soloist) identified the venue as the 1992 IHS Sym-
posium in Manchester, England. **Bob Ashworth** (Northern Opera in Man-
chester UK) identified the woman as car owner Suzy Stonefield, an
administrator at the Royal Northern College of Music (still!). The car
was a 1939 Morris Eight. **Eric Ruske** (Boston University) adds that "...
saying it was 'fun' would be quite the understatement!"

Re: Musical Diplomacy in Cuba by Lee Bracegirdle. **Beverly Bur-**
goyne (Campbell River BC Canada): "I especially enjoyed the article on
music in Cuba. I have visited Cuba many times, and always remember
speaking with brass players who used motor oil for their valves
(ugh!). From that point on, I took several bottles of valve oil to distrib-
ute on every trip. It is humbling to hear the calibre of music Cubans
produce with such inadequate instruments and supplies. Most Cubans
have no idea what a (French) horn is, but maybe Sarah Willis's album
Mozart y Mambo with musicians in Havana will change that!" Video at
youtube.com/watch?v=m1FSR3wKgrk ... Lee writes that a documen-
tary about Cuban musicians, *Symphony and Salsa*, is being filmed by an
Australian production company, delayed because of Covid but sched-
uled to be completed by the end of 2021. Trailer at youtube.com/watch?v=MICKCL9IDxk.

Jashua Thompson and Castleton University in Vermont held a
Horn Day in April with **Erin Paul**, **Mia Fritze**, and Calliope Brass.

Aaron Brask (Jacksonville FL): "During this time, reading *Cornu-*
copia has given my mind and soul a vacation – thanks. The Jacksonville
Symphony is in our 24th week of our season, a tightly run ship with bell
covers, masks, plexiglass, lots of distance – so far, so good, no issues."

Anne Howarth (Somerville) performed compositions by Emma
Wine (based on a poem by Emma Lazarus), Oliver Caplan (on a palin-
drome by Barry Duncan), and Carson Cooman (horn, violin, and piano)
at a Juventas New Music Ensemble livestreamed concert in March.

Priscilla Johnson (Latham NY): "Even though I no longer play horn
due to embouchure issues, I enjoy the news articles. I play orchestra
bells and other percussion instruments now!"

Bob Watt (Los Angeles) is featured at the Pan African Film and
Arts Festival in an interview with his record producer, Todd Cochran.
paff.org/films/bob-watt-in-conversation-with-todd-cochran/ Bob is also
featured in a series of articles in *The Horn Call*.

Kathleen Nagy (Holden MA) has published a book on music for
health, *Humming for Health: Sound Tools for Physical and Emotional*
Balance. nagykathleen1@gmail.com

Jay Kosta (Endwell NY), **Priscilla Johnson** (Latham NY), and
Aaron Brask (Jacksonville FL) have sent contributions. Thanks!

Lost: Lori & Bill Johnson (Dallas); Andrew Houde (Cantonsville
MD)

New members: **Norman Blakely**, Baltimore Brass Company,
Richard Steggall, BHS, editor of *The Horn Player*. ❖

Below: At 1992 Manchester Symposium. See above for identifications.

