

The Legacy of the Alphorn

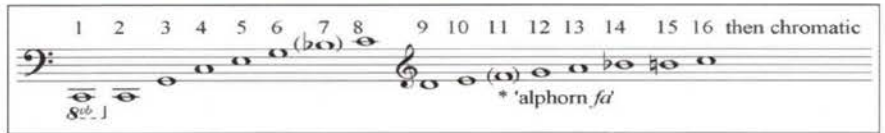
Part 2 Alphorn music in orchestral and chamber repertoire

by Frances Jones

This is the second article concerning the abundance of alphorn music incorporated into the classical repertoire. The first article introduced the characteristics of alphorn music and looked at references in dramatic works; this second article focuses on its use in orchestral music and chamber repertoire. Some information here refers back to points raised in the previous text.

Britain's leading authority on the alphorn, Frances Jones, is also a freelance horn player and oboist. She performs frequently on the alphorn and gives lecture-recitals and masterclasses on the instrument throughout the UK and in France and Switzerland. Frances is currently working on a Doctorate about the alphorn and its influence in classical repertoire.

She has concentrated for the purpose of these two articles on music that might be of particular interest to orchestral horn players and has not included the many references found in solo repertoire for the horn, the voice, the piano or for other instruments. However, if anyone in the course of their musical encounters spots any other potential alphorn motifs not mentioned here, she would be delighted to know of them for incorporation into her thesis and the book about it that is in preparation. Please let her know through the contact page on her website: www.AmazingAlphorn.com.



Ex. 1. The Harmonic Series. The 7th harmonic sounds slightly lower than written here; the 11th (the 'alphorn fa') is about a quarter-tone higher.

Musical references to the herdsman in the concert hall often occur with the word 'Pastoral' as a descriptive caption. Leopold Mozart (1719-1787) used a number of folk instruments in his compositions, including a hurdy-gurdy, a dulcimer and a set of bagpipes and, in 1755, during the winter in which his son, Wolfgang, was born, he wrote at least two Christmas works, or *Sinfonia Pastorelli*, with parts for alphorn. He captured the spirit of the alphorn in various ways: besides using traditional alphorn calls, echo effects and drone accompaniment, he incorporated another characteristic sound, the 'alphorn fa'. This is one of the notes that it is possible to play on a narrow tube, but which rarely features in classical music. Any tube produces a specific pattern of notes, called the harmonic series; the longer the tube, the lower the pattern begins. They occur at the following distances apart (for simplicity of notation, the harmonics for a 16ft tube, which has a fundamental note of C, are shown in Ex. 1 above).

These notes form the basis of our modern scales, although two of them are avoided in classical music: harmonic no.7 which is considered to be unpleasantly flat, and no.11 which falls between two notes in standard

use. When composing for trumpets and horns, these two harmonics are usually avoided. All the harmonics from about no.3 to no.14, however, are found in alphorn music, including the two 'odd' notes: when playing to cows, or on a high mountain alone, or with other alphorns, they have never been a problem! To classically-attuned ears, the presence of these unusual notes in alphorn music creates a haunting, other-worldly effect. Referring to the fundamental, or first harmonic, as doh, the note produced at the 11th harmonic falls above the normal note used in classical music for fa, and in alphorn repertoire this note is now referred to as the 'alphorn fa'. Rather than avoid it in his *Sinfonia Pastorelli*, in the 3rd movement of one of the works, Leopold Mozart wrote a passage for the alphorn which contains the 'alphorn fa', marked x in the quotation below, as a deliberate reference to the world of alphorn music. In the orchestral passage that follows, the strings repeatedly play with the strange note, adjusting it both upwards (marked y) and downwards (z) for maximum effect.

Beethoven (1770-1827) was to bring the idea of 'programme' music to a new level in his *Pastoral Symphony*, No.6 written in 1808, a work which

Ex. 2. Leopold Mozart *Sinfonia Pastorella in G: 3rd movement, bars 96-104*. The unusual 'alphorn fa' (marked x) is imitated by the orchestra with two different notes at y and z. Edition: Frances Jones.



throws down the gauntlet to composers who followed after him. Music in the minds of Romantic composers took on a whole new world of meaning, that of describing feelings and emotions, with increasingly graphic representation of both the inner and outer world. Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony* projects his listeners directly into that world. Unlike many pieces with nicknames, this symphony was given the title *Pastoral* by the composer. Although he was at pains to explain that the symphony conveyed feelings aroused when in the countryside, rather than sound paintings of country scenes, this is surely one of the most descriptive pieces of music of its time. It was composed during a period of intense political and social turmoil in Europe whilst he was also struggling with the torment of increasing deafness. His feelings when walking in the countryside were intensified by the fact that not only was the region's peace now in question, but also that he could no longer hear many of nature's delights.

The title page reads *Pastoral-Sinfonie oder Erinnerung an das Landleben (Pastoral Symphony, or reminiscence of the countryside)*. To each movement he also gave a descriptive title: *Erwachen heiterer Empfindungen bei der Ankunft dem Lande (Awakening of cheerful feelings on arrival in the countryside)*; *Szene am Bach (Scene by the brook)*; *Lustiges Zusammensein in der Landleute (Happy gathering of the country folk)*; *Gewitter. Sturm (Thunderstorm)*; *Hirtengesang. Frohe und dankbare Gefühle nach dem Sturm (Herdsman's song. Joyful and thankful feelings after the storm)*.

Beethoven was not the first composer to write an orchestral work on the theme of nature: there were a number of such works written before his *Pastoral Symphony*. A possible influence was a symphonic work which had appeared in print over twenty years earlier. In 1784, the publisher Heinrich Bossler issued a set of piano



Ex. 3. Croatian folk melody used as the opening material for Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*.²

trios by Beethoven. Alongside the newspaper advertisement for these was listed another composition, also published by Bossler, a symphony by Justin Heinrich Knecht (1752-1817), an organist, theorist and composer working in Biberach, Württemberg in Germany; the work was entitled *A Musical Portrait of Nature*. Each movement of the symphony carried a descriptive title, remarkably similar to those used by Beethoven. Unusually, both compositions are in five movements.¹ One can only surmise that the superior quality of Beethoven's work ensured that his symphony, rather than any of its precursors, is the one that remains in the repertoire.



Ex. 4. *Pastoral Symphony*, opening phrase given an alphorn-like pause, and set to a drone accompaniment.³

Beethoven makes extensive use of both alphorn music from the folk repertoire and 'Rigi'-style motifs in his *Pastoral Symphony*. The opening theme of the first movement is an



Ex. 5. *Pastoral Symphony*, 3rd movement, *Happy gathering of the country folk*: opening of 32 bars of alphorn material played by the oboe.

extensive quotation of a Croatian folk melody commonly found in Hungary where he often went walking.

Beethoven is introducing us here not to the cliché of the *Kühreien* or a 'tourist' alphorn motif. It is a jolly alphorn melody drawn from the vast heritage of folk alphorn music, much of which has lyrics for singers too. Beethoven gives it alphorn-like use of pauses and a rustic drone accompaniment.

In the 3rd movement, *Happy gathering of the country folk*, Beethoven creates the scene with the oboe given playful alphorn-like phrases, with an irregular beat structure and echo effects on the

clarinet, another rustic musician playing a few bass notes to accompany the melody, and the bustle of people around represented by the violins.

After classical music's most famous depiction of a thunderstorm, Beethoven uses a rising flute scale to lead the listener to a place of repose: a lone clarinet, echoed by a horn, plays familiar 'Rigi'-style motifs. The new movement, which follows *attacca*, is called *Herdsman's Song*. Joyous, thankful feelings after the storm, and Beethoven uses music in alphorn-like tranquil mood creating a wonderful epilogue movement evocative of the herdsman playing to reassure everyone that all is well after a storm in the mountains.

Following these gentle announcement calls, Beethoven settles into his Herdsman's Song, another peaceful alphorn-like melody of similar style to the Croatian tune of the first movement. This time the theme is given to the violins.

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) enjoyed walking in the Alps and was familiar with its musical heritage. His father was a horn player and Brahms's deep love for the instrument is apparent in all his horn writing. Although he did not write overtly descriptive music in his orchestral works, folk-like elements pervade his musical language, and he is especially fond of reproducing the sound of the alphorn in a calm, peaceful setting. A particularly lovely example occurs in his dramatic Piano Concerto No 1, written in 1858. Towards the end of the slow movement the alphorn-like horn solo is marked *marcato, ma dolce*, and it is set over quiet piano arpeggiations while the rest of the orchestra is silent. Echoes are provided by the timpani.

Material notated directly from the Rigi also features in the work of Brahms. In 1868 he took a walking holiday with his father in the region of Lucerne. He had at that time rather strained relations with Clara Schumann, and in an attempt to win

Ex. 6. Pastoral Symphony: opening of 5th Movement: Herdsman's Song. Joyous, thankful feelings after the storm.

Ex. 7. Beethoven's alphorn-like Herdsman's Song. Final movement, Pastoral Symphony.

Ex.8. Alphorn-like horn solo in Brahms Piano Concerto No.1.4



Ex. 9. Postcard sent by Brahms to Clara Schumann, on which he wrote an alphorn melody that he heard on the Rigi.⁵

back her affections he sent her a postcard on her birthday, 12th September, noting down a melody that he heard played on an alphorn on the Rigi. This transcription bears only moderate similarity to the usual 'Rigi'-type motifs, returning us to live playing rather than the now more stylised phrases generally quoted. It also incorporates an 'alphorn fa', which was never reproduced in the standard, sterilised 'Rigi' motifs. Brahms wrote: *Also blus das Alphorn heut: Hoch auf'm Berg, tief im Tal, grüß ich dich viel tausendmal!* (Thus the alphorn blew today: from high in

the mountains and deep in the valley, I send you many thousand greetings!) Eight years later, he used the melody, though without the first note and its acciaccatura, in the 4th movement of his Symphony No.1. The theme appears directly after a turbulent, stormy movement, and thus reproduces the alphorn's calming, reassuring effect.

An East German five-mark nickel coin was issued in 1972 to commemorate 75 years from Brahms's death. It incorrectly quotes this alphorn melody: the third note

given on the coin is not possible to play on the alphorn.



Ex. 10. East German commemorative coin with an erroneous quotation of the alphorn melody.⁶

One of the leading horn players through the middle years of the 19th century was Franz Strauss. Although he wrote a large quantity of music himself, it was his son Richard who was to become one of the 19th century's foremost composers. Steeped in horn music from childhood, Richard Strauss (1864-1949) wrote most evocatively for the horn and was also deeply affected by the sound of horns in the countryside. He incorporated 'Rigi'-style motifs to depict pastoral scenes in a number of his compositions. They are used with telling effect in the pastoral episode of *Don Quixote* (1897):

Ex. 11. R Strauss *Don Quixote*, Variation II, where alphorn figures mix with the bleating of sheep in the Don's bizarre rural encounter.⁷



Ex. 12. R. Strauss *Ein Heldenleben*, Figure 99, opening of the section reminiscent of the alphorn playing at twilight. Wind parts.⁸

Strauss also wrote an extensive alphorn-style solo for the cor anglais, completed by the horn, towards the end of his epic autobiographical symphonic poem *Ein Heldenleben* (1899). He gave subheadings to the various sections of the work, although he later withdrew them. After agitated music describing his battles with his critics, he originally wrote the heading *Des Helden Weltflucht und Vollendung* (The hero's retreat from the world and his fulfillment) and depicts the protagonist's eventual relaxation in peaceful retirement. He uses the calming effect of 23 bars of alphorn melody over quiet C major held chords to introduce the reflective coda where he finally finds inner peace, beautifully capturing of the serenity of sunset and nightfall as it used to be signalled by the reassuring

tones of the alphorn in his native Bavaria.

The Austrian Alps provided limitless inspiration for Gustav Mahler (1860-1911), a composer who used both hunting-horn and alphorn-style music in many of his works. He could not compose for long without his wonderful horn-writing coming to the fore, either deeply profound or unrestrainedly joyous. From his 1st Symphony's exuberant whoops on the horns and the offstage echo effects in the 2nd, the haunting alphorn-like elegy for *obligato* horn with the rest of the horns used as an echo in the 5th Symphony, to the extensive alphorn-style music in both of the *Night Music* movements of his 7th Symphony, the role of the horn in depicting the natural world and our relationship with it was

Ex. 13. Mahler *Symphony No.4*. Opening of 1st movement.¹⁰

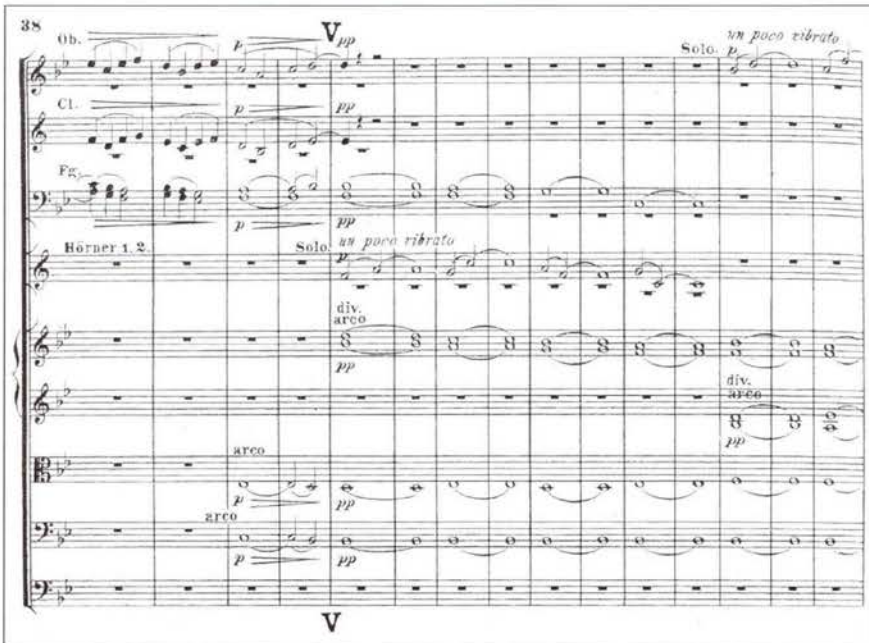


fundamental to the fabric of his symphonic writing. Mahler had spent the summer of 1893 in Steinbach on the Attersee near Salzburg, where he decided on a routine that he was to follow for the rest of his life: to compose there in the summer, and return to conducting and city duties for the rest of the year. He had a small hut built there where he could compose undisturbed: from the windows he could see only the lake and the mountains beyond. He described his 4th Symphony to the soprano Anna von Mildenburg: 'My symphony will be something the like of which the world has never yet heard! . . . In it the whole of nature finds a voice.' When the conductor Bruno Walter visited Mahler at his hut in 1895 and stopped to admire the panoramic mountain views, Mahler said, 'No need to look. I have composed all this already.' Mahler played through the score of his 4th Symphony at the piano. 'His whole being seemed to breathe a mysterious affinity with the forces of nature,' Walter wrote.⁹ By bar 3 in the opening movement, Mahler has already introduced jingling cowbells and alphorn calls:

Two composers wrote symphonies specifically describing the Alps: Joachim Raff (1822-82) and Richard Strauss. Raff was born and brought

Ex. 14. Mahler *Symphony No.7*, 2nd movement, *Nachtmusik*: alphorn music, with echoes.¹¹





Ex. 15. Raff *Symphony No. 7 In the Alps*, extract from 1st Movement *Wandering in the High Mountains: the first appearance of alphorn phrases.*¹²

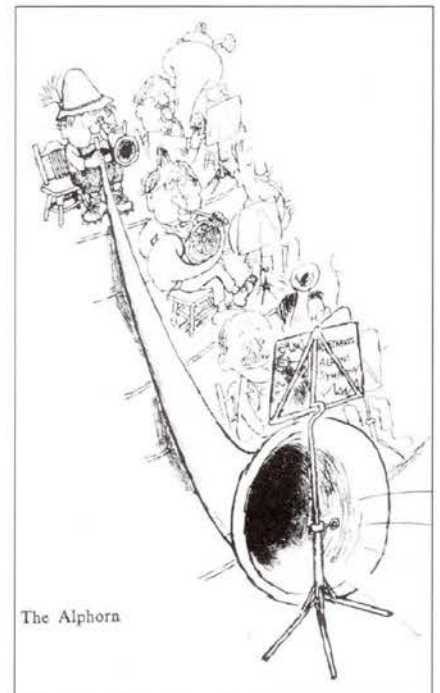
up beside Lake Zürich, and wrote his *Symphony No. 7 In the Alps* (1875) at the age of 53. The 1st movement, entitled *Wanderung im Hochgebirge* (Wandering in the High Mountains), opens by depicting the grandeur of the landscape, but soon grows gentler in a second subject where the sound of alphorns echoes across the valleys, inward-turning *arpeggio* motifs introduced by the horn and echoed on the oboe, which gradually become the main thematic material for the development section and indeed dominate the rest of the movement.

The 2nd and 3rd movements bear the titles *In der Herberge* (At the Inn) and *Am See* (On the Lake), and the final movement, *Beim Schwingfest – Abschied* (At the Wrestling Contest – Farewell), recapitulates themes heard previously, including the alphorn music.

In 1908, Richard Strauss had a house built in Garmisch with panoramic views over the Alps, and here he wrote his evocative *Alpine Symphony* in 1911. It describes a day in the mountains starting with the stillness of night, followed by sunrise and an ascent up the mountain. The listener is taken through a forest echoing with hunting horns, and

eventually reaches the high alp, which is portrayed with cowbells and typical alphorn phrases introduced by the cor anglais, bassoons and bass clarinet, appearing a further 36 times on a variety of wind instruments. After time spent at the summit, and a dramatic thunderstorm, a quick descent forms a recapitulation and finally there is sunset and stillness at end of the day. Strauss used twenty horns in his orchestra, but despite Gerard Hoffnung's cartoon showing

Ex. 16. Hoffnung's cartoon of an alphorn playing for Strauss's *Alpine Symphony*.¹³



an alphorn with lederhosen-clad player, the instrument was not included in the score.

The long horn was used for herding in mountain regions outside the Alps and its music found its way into the works of composers in other countries too. The French foothills of the Alps were possibly the source of an alphorn motif used by two French

Above: Ex. 17. R. Strauss *Ein Alpensinfonie*, Op. 64. *Arrival Auf der Alm*, where alphorn calls are first introduced on the cor anglais, clarinet and bassoons. Wind and cowbells parts.¹⁴



composers. Hector Berlioz (1803-1869) grew up near Grenoble, and describes in his memoirs his deep love for the Chartreuse mountains around his home. In his *Symphonie Fantastique* (1830), at the opening of the *Scène aux Champs*, the cor anglais plays *Ranz des Vaches* phrases with echoes provided by an offstage oboe; at the end of the movement the phrases are heard again but receive no response, re-interpreting the absence of the natural echo as a statement of personal abandonment. Berlioz may have heard the alphorn phrases he used in this symphony in his local mountains in his youth: motifs like these do not appear in the Swiss / Bavarian / Austrian repertoire. In his own description of this movement in the preface to the symphony, Berlioz explains that he is using the sounds of the *Ranz des Vaches* played at evening time:

'Un soir d'été à la campagne, il entend deux pâtres qui dialoguent un Ranz des Vaches; ce duo pastoral, le lieu de la scène, le léger bruissement des arbres doucement agités par le vent, quelques motifs d'espoir qu'il a conçus depuis peu, tout concourt à rendre à son coeur un calme inaccoutumé à donner à ses idées une couleur plus riante; mais elle apparait de nouveau, son coeur se serre, des douloureux pressentiments l'agitent, si elle le trompait . . . L'un des pâtres reprend sa naïve mélodie, l'autre ne répond plus. Le soleil se

Scène aux champs
Szene auf dem Lande – Scenes in the Country

Adagio M.M. ♩ = 84

Ex. 18. Berlioz *Symphonie Fantastique*, opening of the 3rd movement.¹⁵

Ex. 19. Opening of Debussy *Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un Faune*. Bar 3 is the alphorn phrase also used by Berlioz in his *Symphonie Fantastique*.

couche . . . bruit éloigné du tonnerre . . . solitude . . . silence . . . ('One summer evening in the countryside, he hears two herdsmen playing a *Ranz des Vaches* to each other; the pastoral duet, the gentle rustling of the wind in the trees, calm and joyful surroundings . . . then she appears once more. His heart is filled with foreboding. What if she is false to him! One of the shepherds resumes his simple melody, but the other answers him no more. Sunset . . . distant rolling of thunder . . . loneliness . . . silence.')

Midi d'un Faune (1894), played on the flute. This work, based on a poem by Stéphane Mallarmé, explores a young deer's sensuous feelings on awakening on a warm afternoon. The poem talks of the faun playing on his pipes. Debussy sets the scene by opening this delicate masterpiece of orchestration with musings on an unaccompanied flute which start with two typical musical references to the pastoral landscape: a flowing panpipe-like phrase followed by the alphorn motif seen above.

It may not be a co-incidence that the same alphorn phrase is used by fellow Frenchman Claude Debussy (1862-1918) in his *Prélude à l'Après-*

The music of Antonin Dvorak (1841-1904) is rooted in the folk music of Bohemia which surrounded him in his youth, as his father was a

Ex. 20. Opening melody of Dvorak *Symphony No.8*. played on the flute.¹⁶

200 Allegretto pastorale 45

Hb 1. Solo (p) dolciss.

Hr (E) 1. Solo (p) dolciss.

Hrf p

1 V pp

2 V pp

Br pp

Vc pp

Ex. 21. Liszt *Les Préludes*, bar 200ff, the alphorn-like melody giving a rural flavour to this scene.¹⁷

professional zither player. Themes with the character of music for the alphorn, set over a peaceful landscape background, occur many times in his compositions.

Hungarian composer Franz Liszt (1811-1886) wrote much descriptive music. *Les Préludes* was originally composed in 1848 as the Prelude to a cantata, *Les Quatre Elements*, with words by the poet Joseph Autran from Marseille. Liszt later linked it with poems of Lamartine instead. It is a series of mood-paintings, and a section describing the storms of life (*allegro tempestoso*) is returned to calmness by the following passage which reflects the innocence of rural life, entitled *Allegretto Pastorale*. It includes a carefree alphorn-like melody for the horn over a *pianissimo* drone, which is repeated and extended by the oboe and then the clarinet. It is interesting to notice how often the note *fa* is omitted in such music.

Alphorn music in solo repertoire

Bernhard Crusell (1775-1838) was a clarinet virtuoso born in Finland who studied in Berlin, though spent most of his working life in Sweden. His *Clarinet Concerto Op.5* has a slow movement entitled *Andante Pastorale* which makes considerable use of typical alphorn motifs, asks for passages to be played as echoes, and has the quiet accompaniment of strings only.

In 1833 Berlioz wrote a collection of five pastoral songs, Op.13, entitled *Fleurs des Landes*. The fourth song, *Le Jeune Pâtre Breton* (The Young Breton Herdsman), is a trio for voice, French horn and piano, and both the vocal part and the horn part are based on motifs that a herdsman would play to his animals.

In 1876, at the age of twelve, Richard Strauss wrote a work for his horn-player father entitled *Alphorn*, Op.16, also a trio for soprano, French horn and piano. This setting of a text by the poet and psychologist Justinus Kerner, reflecting on the alphorn's

55 Echo ppp

60 Echo ppp

ritardando

Above: Ex. 22. Crusell *Clarinet Concerto Op.5*, end of 2nd movement, *Andante Pastorale* (piano reduction).¹⁸

Below: Ex. 23. Berlioz *Le Jeune Pâtre Breton*, Op 13 No 4, for soprano, horn and piano.¹⁹

Tempo I

Couplet 2. (p)

A son tour An - na, ma com - pa - gne, Con-duit der -

Tempo I

riè - re la mon - ta - gne, Près des sur - eaux, Ses noirs che - vreaux.

27

32

„seinem lieben Papa gewidmet“

Alphorn

(Justinus Kerner)

Richard Strauss

Ex. 24. Appenzell motif opening to Strauss's setting of Kerner's text *Alphorn*, Op.16.²⁰

haunting qualities, contains many alphorn-like melodies, and opens with the characteristic strains of the *Appenzell Kùhren*, set over a still, quiet backdrop.

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) wrote his *Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings* in 1943. It is a setting of six poems about the night. Recalling the tradition of listening for the alphorn

as night falls, the opening *Prologue* is a powerful evocation of the alphorn in its natural setting, scored for a lone solo French horn. It is free-flowing music not constrained by pulse, has breath-length phrases each ending with a pause, and is restricted to the open harmonic series, and he adds a specific reference to genuine alphorn music with the rare instruction to use the 'alphorn *fa*'.

Ex. 25. Britten *Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings*, Op.31. *Prologue for unaccompanied horn*.²¹

To Edward Sackville-West

SERENADE

BENJAMIN BRITTEN
Op. 31

Horn in F

PROLOGUE

directing that the music is 'to be played on natural harmonics'.

This haunting Prologue is repeated offstage at the end of the group of songs as an Epilogue, with calm and peaceful effect, and it is with this wonderful music that I leave you in this exploration of how the world of the alphorn has been brought to the ears of the classical music lover.

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Notes:

1. Steinberg *The Symphony: A Listener's Guide*, OUP, US, 1995, p 35
2. Original music appears in an 1881 collection of folk songs quoted in Bela Bartok's Essay (1921) *The Relationship of Folk Song to the Development of the Art Music of our Time*, in Bela Bartok's *Essays* edited Suchoff, Faber, 1992, pp. 327-8
3. Beethoven *Symphony No 6*, score of 1830, BL f200d, and following facsimile extracts
4. J Brahms Two Piano Concertos Eulenberg Score No.713, p.66
5. www.corndellealpi.it/storia.html
6. www.worldcoingallery.com
7. R. Strauss *Don Quixote*, Eulenberg Score No. 3045, pp.53 - 5
8. R. Strauss *Ein Heldenleben*, Eulenberg Score No. 498, p.199
9. <http://www.cso.org/main.taf?p=5,5,5,7>
10. Mahler *Symphony No 4* Eulenberg score No. 545 p.1
11. Mahler *Symphony No 7* Eulenberg Score No 492 pp.125 & 126
12. J Raff *Symphony No 7* Robert Seitz, Leipzig, 1876, p.38
13. The Hoffnung Symphony orchestra, Dobson, London, 1978
14. R. Strauss *An Alpine Symphony*, Eulenberg Score No 8046, p.55
15. H. Berlioz, *Sinfonie Fantastique*, score of 1845, BL h456g
16. Dvorak *Symphony No 8* (now 4), score of 1892, BL h1573c, p.3
17. Liszt *Les Préludes*, Eulenberg score No 449, p.55
18. Crusell *Clarinet Concerto Op 5*, piano reduction P. Weston, UE 19084, Vienna, 1991
19. Berlioz *Le Jeune Patre Breton*, Op. 13, ed W Kuyper, IMC No 3227, New York, 1989.
20. R. Strauss *Alphorn*, Op 16, Edition Schott No 8389, p.1
21. Britten *Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings*, Op 31, Boosey and Hawkes, London, p.1