



Journal of the

國際圓号協會

l'Association internationale du cor
Internationale Horngesellschaft
La società internazionale del Corno

國際ホルン協會
국제호른협회

Sociedad internacional des Trompa
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The Horn Call

The Horn Call

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James Boldin, Editor

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

On the Cover:

Robert Watt, February, 1987.

Photograph courtesy of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Archives.

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The International Horn Society

Officers

President

Andrew Pelletier
College of Musical Arts
1058 Moore Musical Arts Center
Bowling Green State University
Bowling Green, Ohio 43403 USA
president@hornsociety.org

Vice President

Kristina Mascher-Turner
35, rue Emmanuel Hiel
1030 Brussels
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Secretary-Treasurer

Annie Bosler
2024 Broadview Drive
Glendale, CA 91208 USA
Phone: 213-200-0144
bosler@gmail.com

Executive Director

Julia Burtscher
PO Box 5486
Toledo, OH 43613 USA
exec-director@hornsociety.org

IHS Membership Coordinator

Elaine Braun
305 Raywood Ct.,
Nashville, TN 37211-6000 USA
Membership-Coor@hornsociety.org

Website Manager

Dan Phillips
manager@hornsociety.org

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*Countries/states not listed are "open."
To become a country representative, contact Kristina Mascher-Turner –
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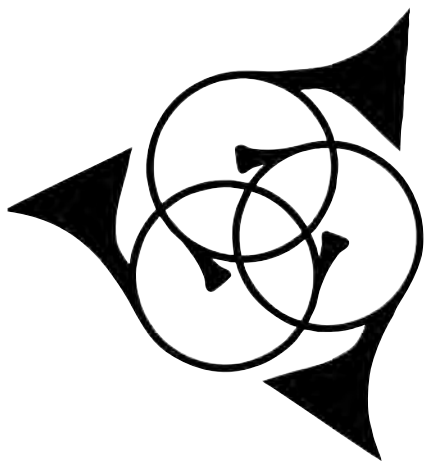


https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCFqyMb5Mbzn17grF2HEIb_g

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The Horn Call

Editor

James Boldin
School of Visual and Performing Arts
University of Louisiana Monroe
700 University Avenue
Monroe, LA 71209 USA
editor@hornsociety.org

Assistant Editor and Website Editor

Marilyn Bone Kloss
1 Concord Greene Unit 8
Concord MA 01742-3170 USA
978-369-0011
mbkloss@comcast.net

Proofreaders

Allison DeMeulle
Joseph Johnson

Website Manager (hornsociety.org)

Dan Phillips
manager@hornsociety.org

Contributing Editors

News Editor

Brenda Luchsinger
Department of Music
Alabama State University
bluchsinger@alasu.edu
news@hornsociety.org

Book and Music Reviews

Heidi Lucas
Department of Music
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Cogswell Hall, Room 103
422 South 11th Street
Indiana, PA 15705-1071 USA
heidi.lucas@iup.edu

Recording Reviews

Lydia Van Dreel
School of Music and Dance
1225 University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403-1225 USA
vandree@uoregon.edu

Online Media Reviews

Matthew Haislip
Department of Music
Mississippi State University
matthew.haislip@msstate.edu

Column Editors

The Creative Hornist & Technique Tips

James Naigus
jamesnaiguscomposer@gmail.com

Horn Tunes

Drew Phillips
aphillips527@gmail.com

Cor Values

Ellie Jenkins
elliejenkinshorn@gmail.com

Music, Health, and Science

Amy Thakurdas
ihs.health.harmony@gmail.com

Advertising Agent

Paul Austin
PO Box 6371
Grand Rapids MI 49516-6371 USA
HornCallAd@gmail.com

From the Editor

James Boldin

"To be a person is to have a story to tell."

–Karen Blixen (1885-1962)

**"There is no greater agony than
bearing an untold story inside you."**

–Maya Angelou (1928-2014)

Dear Friends:

I hope this message finds you in good health! To me, the quotes above by Danish author Karen Blixen and American poet, memoirist, and civil rights activist Maya Angelou represent much of what I love about the IHS. One of our great strengths is that we are for all horn players. All are welcome to submit an article for consideration, and we are interested in all topics related to the horn. These can include personal stories, history, equipment, pedagogy, and much more. I encourage anyone who has an idea for an article to contact me at editor@hornsociety.org so that we can chat about it. We all have stories to share about our mutual love of the horn.

Last summer, we were saddened to learn of the passing of Honorary Member Ib Lanzky-Otto (1940-2020). Please take the time to read the warm, heartfelt tributes to him by Peter Damm, Frøydis Ree Wekre, and others. We also lost Edwin C. "Ted" Thayer, longtime principal of the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington DC and a highly regarded teacher. Randall Faust has contributed an excellent biography and discography in celebration of Mr. Thayer's life and career.

Highlights in this issue include the first of a three-part series by Mary Ritch, "Robert Watt Remembers." Mr. Watt was the first African-American horn player to be hired by a major American symphony orchestra, and his story is both inspiring and compelling. Katy Ambrose's article "Unlocking the Past: William Lee and The Rodenbostel Horn at Mount Vernon," sheds new light on the life of William Lee, an enslaved Black American horn player.

We also introduce two new columns, "Horn Tunes" and "Teacher Talk." Although it has been available on hornsociety.org for some time, "Horn Tunes" will now also be available in *The Horn Call*. Curated by Drew Phillips, the goal of this column is to provide a library of pieces free for use by and for IHS members. The IHS is blessed to have many wonderful educators at all levels among its membership, and "Teacher Talk" will feature content authored by and for them. Articles will address issues faced by band and orchestra directors, private horn teachers, as well as university professors and all other educators. I am delighted that Karen Houghton was kind enough to write the first article for this exciting new addition. I also hope you'll listen to *The Horn Call Podcast*. New and archived episodes can be downloaded through Apple Podcasts and other podcasting apps.

Finally, I invite you to send in material for a forthcoming "lighter side" column. Submissions can include favorite recipes, humor, horn-related brain teasers/puzzles, anecdotes, interesting hobbies, funny/unusual photos, etc.

Though the past year has been filled with turmoil and numerous challenges, I am optimistic about the future, and hope that you are too!

James





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~Robert Ward



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Guidelines for Contributors

The Horn Call is published tri-annually, with mailings as close as possible to October 1, February 1, and May 1. Submission deadlines for articles and news items are the first day of the month, two months prior to the issue (August 1, December 1, and March 1). Inquiries and materials intended for *The Horn Call* should be directed to the editor or appropriate contributing editor (see the list of editors to the left of this column).

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), photograph, 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. In general, submissions should be approximately 1500 to 4000 words in length. Longer articles may be considered, but with the understanding that they may be edited for length and content, with the option to publish additional material from the original submission at hornsociety.org/publications/horn-call/extras.

The Horn Call is currently created with Adobe InDesign, Photoshop, Illustrator, Reader 9, and Acrobat. Prospective articles and accompanying materials (images, musical examples, etc.) should be submitted electronically to editor@hornsociety.org. For large files and/or a large number of files, a link to a file-sharing service such as Dropbox, Google Drive, etc., can be included. Footnotes (endnotes) should be numbered consecutively (no Roman numerals) and placed at the end of the text. Musical examples should be attached as pdf, jpg, or tiff files, or embedded in a Word document. For images, 300 dpi is the minimum resolution necessary for clear reproductions in *The Horn Call*. A *Horn Call* article template is available online.

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):



Robert Watt Remembers, Part 1

by Mary Ritch

Robert Lee Watt was the first African-American horn player to be hired by a major American symphony orchestra, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, joining the ranks of only a handful of African-American symphonic musicians. It was his first professional audition, at age 22 during his third year at New England Conservatory, and he held the position of assistant principal in the orchestra for 37 years.



Robert Watt in 2019 and 1970 from the short film
Bob Watt in Conversation with Todd Cochran

Watt (who goes by Bob) gained experience and preparation for his audition at the New England Conservatory (NEC) in Boston. He studied with Harry Shapiro, long-time second horn of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and, when he was only 20, was a soloist with the Boston Pops under Arthur Fiedler. He also assisted BSO principal James Stagliano under Erich Leinsdorf and played in the Boston Ballet Orchestra under Arthur Fiedler.

Bob's successful musical career is remarkable considering his background. He was born in Neptune, New Jersey on January 15, 1948 into a family struggling with poverty. He learned to play soprano bugle from his father, who coached a community drum and bugle corps, then switched to French horn bugle. His father and others tried to discourage him from playing horn, but he persisted and as a high school freshman picked up a horn, convinced the band director that he could play it, and within a few months won the first horn position in New Jersey's All-Shore Symphonic Band. Success continued through high school: New Jersey's All-State Regional Band and Orchestra, All-State Band and All-Eastern Band & Orchestra, and a merit scholarship from the Monmouth Arts Foundation with a performance of Strauss's Concerto No. 1 for the Foundation's Annual Concert. By the time he graduated from high school in 1967, he had been a regular member of the Monmouth Symphony Orchestra and New York City's Cosmopolitan Youth Orchestra, as well as student band director at his high school. He attended New England Conservatory on full scholarship and was a fellow at the Tanglewood Music Center the summer before his junior year at NEC. He finished his BA in Music at the California Institute of the Arts in Santa Clarita.

In his orchestral career, Bob played under the Los Angeles Philharmonic's music directors Zubin Mehta (1962-78), Carlo Maria Giulini (1978-84), André Previn (1985-89), and all but the last two years of Esa-Pekka Salonen's tenure (1992-2009). He also played under principal guest conductors Michael Tilson Thomas

(1981-85), Sir Simon Rattle (1981-94), and Leonard Slatkin (2005-07).¹ While a member of the Philharmonic, Bob performed the Mozart and Strauss horn concertos, and often shared principal horn duties with Sinclair Lott (1949-73), Henry Sigismonti² (1971-78), Bill Lane (1973-2010), John Cerminaro (1979-86), and Jerry Folsom (1987-2006). He also substituted in the section

wherever needed.

During his off time from the Philharmonic, Bob played for television and film composers Elmer Bernstein, Alf Clausen, Danny Elfman, Michael Giacchino, Maurice Jarre, Quincy Jones, Trevor Jones, Henry Mancini, Alan Menken, Lalo Schiffrin, John Williams, and others. His recording credits include *Last of the Mohicans* (1992), *Pocahontas* (1995), *Mission Impossible* (1996), *Rush Hour* (1998), *The Incredibles* (2004), *Miracle at St. Anna* (2008), as well as three seasons of *The Simpsons*, *American Dad*, *Family Guy*, and *King of the Hill* (2006-08). Bob has also recorded and performed live in many genres, including pop, R&B, jazz, funk and soul, with artists ranging from Paula Abdul to Stevie Wonder. In 1985, he helped organize an all-black brass quintet, the New Brass Ensemble, which performed twice at Finland's Lieksa Brass Festival, and in 1989, he was appointed to the Grant Panel (Chamber Music Division) of the National Endowment for the Arts in Washington DC.

Bob's love of chamber music and desire to make classical music more accessible inspired him to form the Renaissance Evenings chamber music series at the City Club on Bunker Hill, featuring LA Philharmonic musicians and Los Angeles freelancers. He has lectured extensively on music and African history, and has taught a course about The Music of Black Americans at Los Angeles City College. He is a descendant of The Gullah/Geechee Nation from the coastal areas and sea islands of the southeastern states of Florida, Georgia, and the Carolinas.³ He produced a documentary called *Missing Miles* (about his friend, jazz trumpeter Miles Davis), which was chosen by the Pan African Film Festival and the Garden State Film Festival.

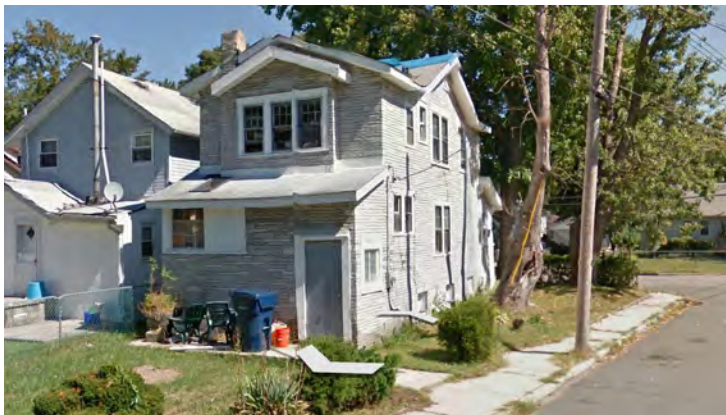
Bob has written extensively about jazz and classical musicians for various publications, including the Brass Bulletin, and his article for *Accent/LA* directed towards the African American community, "Come Hear Me Play," was reprinted by the Los Angeles Philharmonic in a concert program and many times thereafter. His autobiography, *The Black Horn*, and a horn-playing instruction



manual, *French Horn Tips and Tricks*, were published in 2014. He is currently working on a new book, *Tales from the Symphony: An African-American Perspective*, containing interviews with professional African-American symphonic musicians. Fluent in both German and Italian, his interests outside of horn playing include dressage, martial arts, Sabre fencing, and flying.

Bob talked with composer Todd Cochran in 2019 to discuss his musical roots and the making of his 2018 debut solo album *I Play French Horn*. The following three-part article is based on that YouTube interview, other interviews about and excerpts from his published book, excerpts from his instruction manual, and 2020 telephone interviews with the author. Unless otherwise indicated, all photos are from Bob's collection. Sources for the article can be found online at <https://hornsociety.org/publications/horn-call/extras>.

In Part 1, Bob reminisces about his early years, falling in love with the sound of the French horn, his first musical experiences in drum corps, learning the "real" French horn, his first successes in music competitions, his high school years, and leaving Asbury Park for the New England Conservatory.



Google Earth Street View (rear) of Robert's boyhood home at 433 Drummond Avenue, Neptune, NJ

My Early Years

I was the fourth of seven children growing up in the frigid Northeastern United States, in Neptune and Asbury Park, New Jersey. We grew up in a giant cold-water flat of a house. But we didn't think about that – we made fun kid stuff of it – like snowball fights inside the house (because there were cracks in the windows, and snow would drift in). We didn't think, "Oh my God, this is terrible – we have no heat!" – we just made fun of it. Sometimes we had to use kerosene lamps and candles for light, and firewood for heat. Food was scarce at times; I remember once when all we had to eat was powdered milk from the U.S. Army and sandwiches made from Karo syrup, mayonnaise, and mustard on white bread. In 1958, when I was ten years old, we were behind on rent, so we had to move to a small, dingy, rat and roach infested apartment above a liquor store on Springwood Avenue in Asbury Park. The triple window in the large front room was a wonder. We sat for hours just watching people and the things that happened on the street below.

Once I saw the police continue to beat a handcuffed guy who still had chunks of glass in his body.

There was no hot water, no stove, and no central heating. My siblings and I shared one large bedroom with three sets of bunk beds. Eventually, we got a kitchen stove, and it was my job to get coal for it to heat water for bathing. I washed myself every day, birdbath style, in cold water when I didn't have time to heat water on our kitchen stove. It was really cold in our flat at times and to wash up in cold soap and water in the dead of winter was bordering on insane. I was always very embarrassed having to go to my grandmother's place in the "Projects" (Asbury Park Village, where we later moved) once a week to take a bath. We didn't have a telephone and I was just too embarrassed to tell people that we didn't have one, so I told them it wasn't working. When I later went to the New England Conservatory, I had to get used to the fact that I was in a totally different environment. I remember thinking there would always be heat and hot water, enough food, and most places would be free of rats and roaches.



Robert's neighborhood, Springwood Avenue, Asbury Park, 1968 from *Bygone.com*

My parents were both musical.

My mother played piano by ear, and my dad played trumpet at Cuba's Spanish Tavern & Night Club.⁴ He would come home at night and play his trumpet and scat sing, and I would peek down from the stairwell. During that time period, starting when I was seven years old, he tried many times to teach me trumpet. He said if I learned the trumpet, I would be joining a long line of trumpet players named "Bobby." There was my cousin Bobby Booker, a.k.a. Robert Lee Booker (my namesake), a well-known jazz trumpet player in New York, and his Uncle Bobby, who also played jazz trumpet in New York. But, in spite of that great tradition, I never learned the trumpet.

The West Side Community Center in Asbury Park always had a very fine drum and bugle corps, which my father started up (he was also the caretaker, janitor, athletic coach and music director there). I reluctantly



played soprano bugle in the corps, feeling like it was the least I could do for my father, who had taught me how to blow a brass instrument. He wanted me to follow in his footsteps and play trumpet, but the moment I discovered a recording of the French horn in the basement of the community center, I said, "what's that instrument?" He said, "Why, you like that horn?" I said, "It gives me chills, let me hear it again." It just really touched me. "Oh," he said, "that's a French horn, a peck horn. It's a middle instrument – it only plays the off-beats and never gets the melody – and besides, it's for thin-lipped white boys. Your lips are too thick for that narrow mouthpiece."

He believed I wasn't physically suited to play the French horn. I was crushed. He had these old ideas and, in his defense, he didn't know any black French horn players. These ideas were stuck in his head and he dumped them on his kid. Then I went to high school, and the white band director, Mr. Bryan, said the same thing – he had also taught my father in high school – but he ended up being the guy who helped me the most. After I had been playing horn for a while, he bought a new Conn 8D for me to play in high school (which I left there when I went to college). I took my instrument home every day and there were these privileged white kids who lived across the lake from the school and got to ride the bus, and they didn't bother to take their instruments home. When the band director found that out, he let them have it. Like me, most of the black kids had to walk a mile to school, or get there however they could from the West Side.

a very condescending posture and, in a way, he resented my strength and independence as much as he admired it. I think he wanted to support me, but he had a fear and a stigma towards what I wanted to do just because it was *different*. I found out just before I went to the Conservatory that he actually auditioned for Juilliard. He ran out of his audition there because he got frustrated; he wasn't classically trained, and didn't know what the technical terms meant. I could see he was deeply hurt by that incident. So, when I came along a generation later, saying I wanted to play French horn, he said, "You think they're going to take you? You'll see." Years later, when I had been a professional French horn player for over seventeen years, he had to take back his words. In the mid-1980s, I played for him from memory the fourth variation of Jean-Baptiste Arban's *Variations on 'Carnival of Venice'*. My father was very impressed, almost crying, and said, "Come hug your daddy – I know you're great; I'm really proud of you." It was closure for both of us.



Robert's father Edward Augustus Watt, Jr. (1921-2004) at age twenty playing trumpet in "The New Jersey Squires of Rhythm" at Cuba's Night Club in Asbury Park

So many kids had to do that and worse, and I believe it's so important for young people to hear these stories and know they can persevere in spite of hardships. It doesn't matter where you start off. It's where you end up (if you really want it). A lot of people say that black men of my father's generation had a hard time complimenting their kids, and he was always very critical of us. He had



Above: The Bobby Booker Band at the Roxy Club, Newburgh, New York, c. 1931-32. L to R: Roy Burnford, ts; Ed Hart, as; Don Frye, p; Gus Robinson, d; Bobby Booker, t/ldr.

Robert's paternal cousin once removed Robert "Bobby" Lee Booker (1907-1983) in New York circa 1931-1932 from *Storyville Magazine*, No. 101, p. 173.



Robert playing a duet with his father Edward in 1985 at a family reunion

My mother was a saint. She worried about me and wanted to make sure I never went hungry while I was at college in Boston. My mother wrapped newspapers around her regular shoes using black electrical tape to form a pair of "newspaper boots," then walked almost a



mile in a blizzard to the post office just to mail me a \$20 postal money order. I think my biggest artistic “hero’s journey” was playing in Carnegie Hall while my mother sat in the balcony. My mother, the person who had heard me try to play the French horn the first time and get through a melody. I had played some little tune, and I heard her from the kitchen saying, “Go on, boy.” One of the highlights of my life was seeing her watch me play in Carnegie Hall and knowing that she had witnessed the whole journey.

My self-image growing up was as a poor, nobody kid from a cold-water flat on Springwood Avenue, but I don’t feel that way anymore. There has always been a part of me that felt like, “How do you like me now? I’m playing at Carnegie Hall.” My mother was proof that class doesn’t come from money. She was so poised and carried herself in a way that commanded respect. That’s where I got my class. My mother used to feed the little kids next door – and *we* barely had enough – but she shared with those kids. A few summers ago, I saw a homeless woman without shoes trying to walk across burning-hot asphalt, and I could hear my mother saying, “Poor thing. Give her your shoes. You have plenty of others.” I gave her the old Crocs I was wearing. That’s what my mom would have wanted me to do.

Falling in Love with the Sound of the French Horn

I fell in love with the sound of the French horn at a very young age. I always thought that the French horn had a special sound and quality of tone like no other instrument. I heard the horn before I really knew what it looked like. One night, when I was in the seventh grade (1960) helping my father clean up at the community center, I was going through some old 78 recordings when I found the *William Tell Overture* (which, incidentally, was also the theme to the TV show *The Lone Ranger*, which every kid watched in the 1950s). While listening to that old recording, I asked my father what the instrument was that came in after the trumpet in the famous theme—what that instrument was that had such a deep, rich sound. That instrument sounded so wonderful – I felt it in my bones, like part of my heart and soul. There was nothing in my world so beautiful. Once I found out what that instrument was, I made a beeline for it and started learning to play, hoping I would be able to express myself musically on it someday.



Robert at age ten.

Growing up in New Jersey, there was absolutely *nothing* so beautiful as that music. I felt that if there was a musical world out there that I could be a part of, and play this beautiful instrument and make a living at it, I was going to do it. I knew there just had to be more out there than most people were telling me in my hometown. Community is really an influential aspect of who we are and how we see ourselves, but the community outside my doorstep was not feeding me what I needed; so, I had to go thousands of miles away (with my imagination). I knew that a world existed out there that I wanted to be a part of one day. I also think my emotional setup as a young man connected with the sound of the French horn. It had a deeply rich and, yes, *romantic* quality that, in my teenage life, was indescribable. People thought I was crazy to play an instrument so different than my father’s. It was a lonely vigil—loving something that no one else around me understood or could relate to.

No one in my world really knew what a French horn was, and yet I was deeply drawn to it.



Robert at age 14 from 1964 Asbury Park High School Yearbook.

One of my earliest memories of falling in love with the sound of the horn occurred in an elevator: I was probably just fourteen years old, with a group of people on the elevator, and heard the beautiful opening horn solo from Henry Mancini’s 1962 film score to *Days of Wine and Roses* (played by the legendary Vince DeRosa). I sucked in air, and said to everyone on the elevator, “Did you hear that?” They all looked at me and said, “Hear what?” And I said, “Did you hear that French horn?” And I’m very excited. When we got off the elevator, someone pulled me aside and said, “Son, if you’re hearing things, maybe you ought to talk to your mother. All we heard was music.” I felt so terribly upset, pacing back and forth, and went over to my mother: “Why don’t they hear it? Why couldn’t they hear this beautiful sound? What’s wrong with people?” She said, “You don’t understand. You have a musical ear. They don’t hear what you hear.”

Later in high school, after studying the horn for a while, the first recording I bought was Tchaikovsky’s Fifth Symphony. I knew about the famous solo because it was in the back of my French horn method book, but I had never heard it. I wanted to hear it played by a top symphony horn player, so I found a recording of the Boston Symphony with James Stagliano, but we didn’t have a stereo at home, so in order to hear it I had to use the stereo of one of my father’s girlfriends. The first



movement of the Symphony was absolutely beautiful, starting with the clarinets playing a very dark, melancholy tune with just the right emotion that I had felt many times myself. The ending of the first movement ended in such a way as to totally set up the mood for the second movement. When the French horn began to play, I held my breath and became a little dizzy after hearing how amazing it sounded. I wondered if I could ever play it that way. I was thrilled with the idea that I was going into a world where I could possibly have a chance to play that beautiful solo with an orchestra one day. I could use the power of music to express all those feelings that I had when walking to high school in freezing weather with no breakfast, or the times I wanted so desperately to be with my girlfriend and couldn't. After that experience, I went out and bought another recording, the *Choral Fantasy* by Beethoven. I loved the sound of his music; it really touched me. Somehow, I got ahold of a small record player which I could hide under my bed. It didn't have a cover, just a turntable that worked and a good stylus. When I was home alone, I listened to the *Choral Fantasy* with the volume turned up.

My First Musical Experiences in Drum Corps



The Neptune Shoreliners in 1964 from DCX - The Drum Corps Xperience.

In 1962, when I was in the eighth grade, my first real fascination with music was the Neptune Shoreliners, a new drum corps in town. When they asked me to join, I told them that I could play the soprano bugle. They said what they really needed were more French horn bugles.⁵ I had never heard of a "French horn bugle," but if it sounded anything like the French horn I had heard on that 78 recording, I was in. I could finally produce that French horn sound that had haunted me so much. My friend told me about how they played really fancy music, did very sophisticated marching maneuvers, and had really great red, white, and black uniforms and shiny bugles. My father was not happy about my finding another drum corps, and said that it was okay if I played in "that white drum corps" as long as I still played with his West Side Community Center Corps. At night, I practiced in the large, unheated front room for hours in the dark, wearing gloves and my overcoat. I took breaks

every so often and joined my family to get warm by the kerosene stove in the TV room. Music was the only thing that calmed me down in my turbulent living environment. I played my French horn bugle for hours in the dark in that freezing front room before I felt like myself again. At that time, I didn't know the difference between practice and playing. I just played whatever came into my head, mostly French horn passages that I had heard on movies and television.



A French Horn Bugle from Drum Corps Online Museum.

Learning the "Real" French Horn

In 1963, when I entered high school, my mission was to take up the *real* French horn. I went down to the band room to seek out the band director, Mr. Bryan, who had been teaching in the school district for years. He had even taught my father in high school. He played trombone and was a student of Arthur Willard Pryor⁶ ("Asbury Park's first musical superstar"), who was virtuoso valve trombonist for John Philip Sousa and a noted band-leader who made Asbury Park his summer home for nearly twenty-five years in the early 1900s. I told him that I wanted to take up the real French horn, because I could already play the French horn bugle by ear in drum corps and wanted to learn how to read music. He tried to tell me that there was no such thing as a French horn bugle! He said, "Well, son, I'm sorry, I don't have a French horn right now that you can start on, but I can start you on a trombone or tuba. I have plenty of those instruments on hand. Most of you colored fellows have thick lips, and you do better on the instruments with larger mouthpieces. The French horn has a very small, thin mouthpiece and you might have trouble blowing it." I told him that I already played the French horn bugle, it had a French horn mouthpiece, and my lips had no problem playing it. He paused before saying, "Look son, there is an old French horn in the instrument closet. I'm not sure it even works, but you can take it home. I'll give you a method book and you see what you can do with it." He opened the case and there it was, the *real* French horn. I was so excited; I had never seen a real French horn up close.



Underneath the horn, I noticed a method book, *Foundation to French Horn Playing: An Elementary Method* (1927) by Eric Hauser, also a player for John Philip Sousa. Mr. Bryan said the book would begin teaching me to read music as well as how to play the horn. I couldn't wait to get that instrument home. As I left the band room with that horn, I instantly felt more "on par" with my new love (a girl I met in the eighth grade who played in the band) and all of her advanced, accelerated, and valedictorian friends. I would become Bob Watt, French horn player, who would soon be in the College Prep curriculum, serious guy, most likely to succeed. After playing the single F horn over the weekend (and getting used to working with three sticky rotary valves instead of one piston valve, and the pitch of the instrument being a half-step lower than I was used to), I was extremely anxious to get to my first lesson with Mr. Bryan.

That morning, I ran into him as I entered the building. "You walked all the way from the West Side in the rain with that horn, son? Imagine what kind of band I could have if I could get only half of the kids to take their horns home! Just play something, son. Let me hear you blow that horn." After a few minutes, he asked in amazement, "Where did you learn to play like that?" I replied, "Like I said, I played French horn bugle in a drum and bugle corps. We played competitions and parades all the time. I developed quite a lip, breath control, fast tonguing, and all that, but I can't read music." He said "Let's get you another instrument; those valve springs are shot. There's a girl who leaves her horn at school over the weekends, and you can take her horn home then. It's a double horn (Conn 6D) and it works very well." He said he would get the old single F-horn fixed.

The Eric Hauser book became the entire French horn world for me. It had famous horn parts from celebrated orchestral and opera works—the *William Tell Overture*, Wagner, and so on. I practiced so much that my mother would have to come into that cold room and tell me to take a break and go sit by the stove to get warm. She said I'd catch a nasty cold. I always reminded her that I was wearing my overcoat and was quite comfortable. In two months, I had finished the Eric Hauser book and started a new two-volume set of books called *Rubank Intermediate Method for French Horn*. Mr. Bryan told me that I was now at the intermediate level and progressing very well. He taught me weekly and guided me somewhat, but I had my own momentum. I played the French horn every day for hours, just producing long tones, getting used to the instrument, and enjoying the lovely tone. I just couldn't get enough of that rustic, mellow sound. When I tried to play bugle calls on the real French horn, I noticed it had a better response, a more liquid and softer feel to it. I started to get more and more curious about the composers listed in the back of the Hauser book. Who were Wagner, Mozart, Bach, and Grieg? One cold Saturday morning, I went to have my shoes repaired.



Robert's band director and first horn teacher Frank A. Bryan from 1965 Asbury Park High School Yearbook

There was an old guy named Leonard who lived and worked in the shoe repair shop (who employed me to run errands for him). Leonard talked to me a lot about what I wanted in life. He always lectured me to keep studying and to stay in school. One Saturday when I showed up to run my errands, Leonard had a gift for me. It was a photo collage of all of the European classical composers from Bach to Ravel. There was a photo of each composer with his birth and death dates. He said I should start learning music history and read up on the European masters. I put this wonderful gift on the wall of my little cubbyhole room and studied it daily, trying

to pronounce the names of each composer.

Later in the ninth grade, my girlfriend told me "Mr. Bryan told the whole band about you today." She said he made a big speech about how none of the kids practiced. If they'd just take their instruments home and do a little practice, the band would sound much better. Then he said, "I've got a colored boy who's learning French horn who carries his horn and school books all the way over to the West Side every day and on weekends. Some of you live just across the lake, and come to school in a nice comfortable school bus and can't even take your instruments home one stinking day of the week!" They asked what my name was and Mr. Bryan said, "Never you mind what his name is, you'll know soon enough because he's going to really do something on that French horn!" I was coming along on the horn so well that Mr. Bryan let me sit in as third horn with the concert band for one piece. I was really nervous at first and then things got better and easier the more I played.

Mr. Bryan started talking about an honor group called "All-Shore Band." He said he thought some of us should audition for it – just for the experience, not that we'd make it. He said if I came to Summer School Band and studied with him, I'd have a better chance if I wanted to audition for All-Shore Band. Mr. Bryan also conducted a professional concert band [The Asbury Park Concert Band] during the summer at the Arthur Pryor Band Pavilion at the beach in Asbury Park.⁷

Mr. Bryan thought perhaps I might sit in with his professional band to get reading experience. One evening I walked down to the beach to hear the band. There were two Juilliard French horn students who played extremely well. David Crites, the first horn, asked me how long I had been playing and if I had a teacher. I told him just Mr. Bryan. He said if I wanted, he would help me. "Come around tomorrow to my hotel and we'll have a lesson. Don't worry about the money, just show up with your horn." I ended up studying with him until I went to college. Later on, he gave me one of his mouthpieces, similar to a Giardinelli C4, which I played on my entire career. Vincent Dell'Osa in Philadelphia made a copy of it. I had Yamaha make a copy of it too when I was in Japan, and play the copy now. I have the original mouthpiece in a memento box.



First Successes in Music Competitions

After Summer School Band, Mr. Bryan informed me that I should try out for All-Shore Band which he was conducting in the coming school year. I asked him about All-Shore Band, and he told me that it was a concert band made up of all eighteen high schools in the New Jersey Shore Area. If I made All-Shore Band, it would be a big deal around school because very few students ever made an All-Shore team (in music as well as sports). So, in January 1964, I auditioned and was very surprised that I made first chair, first stand. In those bands, in order to give more students who qualified a chance to participate, they had two players on each part for every instrument.



Robert during 1966 New Jersey All-State Band. Jeff Neville, later personnel director of the LA Philharmonic, in the front row, second from right. They did not know each other at the time.

At the audition, I played part of the Mozart Horn Concerto No. 3 and really poured my heart out in the slow movement. I had very strong emotions in those days, and it came through in my music. Mr. Bryan was very impressed with my making All-Shore Band. He said, "I always thought Watt got a sound like a man on the French horn." All-Shore Band was very intense. It was a large group of 105 players. The rehearsals were more serious, and the level of playing was much higher than our high school band. I remember the other players in the section looking down at me every time I had something to play (the same way they did in my high school band), but I didn't care. It wasn't their fault they'd never seen a black person play the French horn. It was actually a friendly experience, once we all got a chance to talk to each other. It was just an innocent situation of curiosity, and of course, I had similar feelings about them. Most importantly, it was music that had brought us all together at such a tender age. My innocence as a young artist, just going after what was in my heart, was probably my first realization that there needed to be bridges between cultures, because I was trying to scale a cultural wall. That childhood wonder that knows no

boundaries between cultures – just the desire to express – enabled me to find my vehicle, and I was off and running.

All-Shore Band took place out of town (in Long Branch) and Mr. Bryan drove us to the rehearsal venue at Shore Regional High School. After the first rehearsal, we stayed with white families for several days until the concert on March 24, which solved the transportation logistics. My hosts lived in such opulence and comfort that it was hard for me to believe I was still in New Jersey. I had a kind of premonition that this was the beginning of a completely new life for me; a really different life that music, my horn, and my education would earn for me. Perhaps I would have a nice home like that one someday, with heat in every room, and hot water, especially in the morning. Later in life my career in music would enable me to live in some of the poshest areas of Los Angeles: Bel Air, Pacific Palisades, and Baldwin Hills.



Robert in 1965, Asbury Park Press, 14 Nov. 1965, p. 18

During the spring of 1964, my horn teacher (Crites) invited me to play a concert with the Cosmopolitan Youth Orchestra of New York City, led by the assistant conductor of the New York Philharmonic. Crites needed me to assist him in Rachmaninoff's Symphony No. 2. I had to transpose mentally – on the spot – down a half-step to horn in E. Everything went by so fast and everyone seemed to know the music, except me. It was a beautiful work and I thought, "Here I am right where I want to be, sitting in an orchestra, not watching one on TV, but sitting and playing my horn in a *real* French horn section." However, I was having a hard time keeping up, and I suddenly had the frightening feeling that I had chosen the wrong profession. All the other musicians were just playing away and I was lost most of the time. I felt sick to my stomach. As we were leaving the rehearsal, Crites asked me what was wrong. Reaching the subway station, I told Crites that I was going to throw my horn in front of the train when it came. I told him I was going to quit playing the horn and maybe throw myself in front of the train, too. He grabbed me and shook me and said, "You're not going to quit!" He said these feelings were all part of the process and that I would just have to get



through it (and a lot of other insane stuff) before it was all over. A few months later, Crites was back in Asbury Park playing in the Summer Band on the boardwalk, and I was asked to sit in with them. It was a real thrill trying to keep up with those players, but I loved it. Once I started playing with those pros, I felt a lot better about my playing and my wounds had healed from feeling like I wanted to quit and jump in front of that train in New York.



Robert in October 1965 (age 17) in his bedroom at the Projects with his nephew Milton. Image from the short film Bob Watt in Conversation with Todd Cochran.

Planning for the Future

During my senior year, my *very life* was contingent on my getting into college and leaving Asbury Park, New Jersey. There was something about the city of Boston that captivated me.

Perhaps I felt that I could study better there than in New York. Perhaps it was

because I had watched the Boston Symphony Orchestra's television broadcasts on CBS Sunday nights for years. I asked my horn teacher if I went to the New England Conservatory of Music, was it possible I could study with one of the horn players of the Boston Symphony? He said my teacher would either be James Stagliano (BSO principal) or Harry Shapiro (BSO second horn), who both taught at the conservatory, and that I would be in good hands with either one of them. I knew then that I had to audition for the New England Conservatory. In the final analysis, the New England Conservatory of Music was my first and final choice.

My Senior Year of High School

My final musical achievement during my senior year of high school was being accepted to the NAFME All-Eastern Honors Concert Band, a symphonic band made up of students from eleven northeastern states: Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, plus the District of Columbia, and the Department of Defense School in Europe. The biennial Eastern Division Honors Ensemble Festival concert, sponsored by the National Association for Music Education (NAfME), was to be held in Boston that year (1967). I was chosen as one of the principal horns. I was extremely excited about going to Boston and having a chance to visit the New England Conservatory while still waiting to be accepted there. The first sights I wanted to see were the New England Conservatory and Symphony Hall. I couldn't believe

how old the conservatory building looked and how close it was to Symphony Hall where the Boston Symphony played. I thought if I got accepted into the Conservatory, I would be living in a musical paradise having the Conservatory and Symphony Hall so close together. I thought about all the live concerts of the Boston Symphony I could attend. After All-Eastern Band and the trip to Boston, it was very difficult to return home. After a few months, I was notified that I was accepted into the New England Conservatory on a full four-year scholarship.



These three Asbury Park High School students played in the All-Eastern Band and Orchestra recently at the Music Educators National Conference in Boston. They are David Herring, Robert Watt, and Judith Schwartz.

Robert in February, 1967, Asbury Park Press, 17 Feb. 1967, p. 27

Graduation and Leaving Asbury Park for The New England Conservatory



Robert's Senior High School Yearbook Photo 1967 (age 19)

High school graduation night was overwhelming. I was going to lead the class of 1967 down the aisle; me, the "nobody," who got left back in seventh grade and slept in his socks until black crust formed on his ankles, who carried twenty-five-pound bags of coal to make a cooking fire (when most people had gas ranges), a poor black kid from the West Side who started out in Basic Studies and ended up in College Prep. I became very emotional when the band started playing the graduation march, *Pomp and Circumstance*.

As September neared, I was getting more and more excited about leaving Asbury Park even though I didn't know how I was going to travel to Boston. To my great surprise, my father offered to *fly* me. I was a little nervous because I had never flown on an airplane. The next thing I knew, I was sitting on a DC-9 jet with *lots* of apprehension about my first time flying. I eventually overcame my fear and would later fly to hundreds of cities all over the world on tour during my 37 years with the Los Angeles Philharmonic⁸, and would even obtain my own private pilot's license! I have an ASEL license (airplane, single-engine, land) with instrument rating. One of my favorite memories was meeting legendary hornist (and pilot) Phil Farkas in Indiana and talking about the horn and flying.





The new section of Asbury Park Village "The New Village," where Robert lived in the late 1960s, was built in 1952. It was his last residence before going to college in 1967 (he lived on the 3rd floor). Image from the short film Bob Watt in Conversation with Todd Cochran.

In Part 2, Robert Watt talks about music school, his early career, soloing with the Boston Pops, his first professional jobs, Tanglewood, preparing for auditions, auditioning for the LA Philharmonic, the Conn 8D school of horn playing, auditioning for the Chicago Symphony, playing in the LA Philharmonic, playing assistant principal horn, soloing in Europe, playing chamber music, and his studio playing. In Part 3, he discusses being a black hornist, his friendship with Jerome Ashby, racism, other black horn players, black conductors, The New Brass Ensemble, teaching, writing, his friendship with Miles Davis and the birth of the idea for his solo album I Play French Horn.

¹Mr. Watt also played in Los Angeles and on tour with the Los Angeles Philharmonic's guest conductors Leonard Bernstein, Eugene Ormandy, Henry Lewis, James DePreist, Herbert Blomstedt, Marin Alsop, Christoph Von Dohnányi, Daniel Barenboim (1977), Pinchas Zukerman (1978), Erich Leinsdorf (1981), Myung-Whun Chung (1981-82), Andrew Davis (1983), David Alan Miller (1991), Kurt Sanderling (1991), and Pierre Boulez (1992 & '96).

²Maternal first cousin and student of legendary Hollywood studio hornist Vince DeRosa.

³"Designated by the United States Congress in 2006, the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor extends from Wilmington, North Carolina in the north to Jacksonville, Florida in the south." From The Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission (*see sources page, hornsociety.org/publications/horn-call/extras*)

⁴"Cuba's Spanish Tavern & Night Club (1934-71) 1147 Springwood Avenue, Asbury Park. Owner Henry Lopez (Puerto Rican native, born in 1895). Cuba's opened in 1934. Together with his wife, Minnie, they also owned a candy/newspaper store (also called Cuba's, or the Midway Stationery) located about four doors down from the night club. Performers include Billie Holiday, Ike and Tina Turner, Little Richard, and the Four Tops. They often performed in the back room, which was named the 'Aztec Room.' Memory from Cliff Johnson: 'I can remember being still in my teens and we were playing in Cuba's. In Cuba's, they had a bar in the front, and a nightclub in the back. They had Broadway-type shows back there, they had two or three showgirls, they would have a comedian, they would have tap dancers, and all sorts of entertainment – the kinds of things you would see if you went up to New York. I was fortunate enough, when I was still a teenager, to play there in the back of Cuba's. Many of our parents – because we were all teenagers, the guys in the band – our parents came to see us perform there. And not only our parents, but back in those days, people who wanted to hear jazz music, people who wanted to have a good time and go to a nightclub, they came from the east side of Asbury Park, with their furs, pulling up with their limousines, big time. Going to the back of Cuba's. And there were no racial incidents whatsoever.

Mary Ritch earned a BM in performance at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and an MM and DMA in performance at the University of Southern California. At USC, she was librarian and music copyist of the Wendell Hoss Memorial Library of the LA Horn Club from 1999-2003 and worked with such noted film composers as Elmer Bernstein, Bruce Broughton, and Michael Giacchino to prepare newly-commissioned works for publication by the Los Angeles Horn Club. This is her second article in a series about noted West Coast horn players' memoirs for The Horn Call. She wishes to thank Mr. Watt for his assistance with this article.



Everyone just melded together." From Asbury Park African-American Music Project (*see sources page*)

⁵A French horn bugle is a single-piston-valved instrument used in drum and bugle corps, pitched in the key of G-D (an octave lower than played), and used with a horn mouthpiece. These bugles (invented in 1941) became popular because they could sound more notes than other bugles utilizing the lower portion of the overtone series. Around 1957, new bugles were made available with the option of a factory-installed secondary 'slip-slide' or rotor valve. Many corps opted to utilize bugles with only a primary piston during the early 1960s. Despite the fact that many corps utilized 'slip-slides' as a secondary 'valve' for their bugles, most corps that utilized an additional valve were choosing rotor assemblies for their instruments by the mid-1960s. These rotors were cleverly designed into the tuning slide and were played by the left thumb or forefinger. From Scooter Pirtle's "Evolution of the Bugle" (*see sources page*)

⁶"As assistant conductor of Sousa's band, Pryor was largely responsible for introducing the syncopated rhythms of ragtime music to the Sousa band's repertoire. Some of the titles of his compositions reflected the disturbing racial beliefs of the era, including cringe-inducing titles like 'Smoky Mokes.'" From Jean Mikle's "Arthur Pryor, Asbury Park's First Musical Superstar" (*see sources page*)

⁷The Asbury Park Concert Band, which entertained summer boardwalk crowds, was comprised of 17 core professional musicians and frequently brought in college students to help cover all the parts. The band's repertoire included Sousa marches, show tunes, big band selections, movie and TV themes, classical and jazz and music that appealed to children. The band was originally formed by Arthur Pryor in 1942 (who died shortly thereafter), then directed by his son Arthur Pryor, Jr., who was followed in 1945 by Frank Bryan as director until 1989, when John Luckenbill became the conductor. –From "Asbury Park Concert Band Celebrates Diamond Jubilee Season" by Ed Salvat (*see sources page*).

⁸With the Philharmonic, Mr. Watt toured over 300 cities in over 30 countries.

