



The Last Performance of Dennis Brain

WHEN listeners hear the Dennis Brain Wind Ensemble in a programme from all YCs next Sunday, October 6, they will be hearing the last performance of one of the 20th century's finest instrumentalists. For shortly after this performance, speeding home to London and his family from Edinburgh, Dennis Brain met his

death when the car he was driving left the road. He was only 36 years old, and at the peak of his powers.

Dennis Brain was a third generation horn player. His grandfather, Alfred Brain, was a colleague of Borsdorf in the early days of the London Symphony. Alfred's three sons all took

to their father's instrument, one—Aubrey Brain, father of Dennis—becoming one of the finest French horn players of his generation. Aubrey in turn taught his son all he knew, with the result that, to quote *The Times* obituary, "The son was a better player than the father, on the father's own testimony, which is saying a lot."

During his career Dennis Brain played principal horn for both the Royal Philharmonic and Philharmonia Orchestras, and also played with a number of leading chamber combinations, including the Lener, Griller and Busch Quartets. He also on several occasions ventured into "swing," appearing with both Geraldo and Ted Heath's orchestras. Many works were composed for him; Benjamin Britten's *Serenade for Tenor, Horn and String Orchestra*, Hindemith's *Horn Concerto*, and compositions by (among others) Elizabeth Lutyens and Gordon Jacob. The last work written to display his talents was Malcolm Arnold's *Concerto*, performed in July this year at the Cheltenham Festival.

"The traditional uncertainties of the instrument never seemed to have occasioned a fluffed note from him and no technical difficulties ever appeared to cause him the slightest apprehension. . .," said *The Times*. " . . . English music will be poorer by the loss of so brilliant an executant."

At the Edinburgh Festival Dennis Brain appeared in two capacities—as the principal horn of the Philharmonia Orchestra, and as the leader of the wind ensemble which bears his name. The basic constitution of this ensemble is a sextet of woodwind, horn and piano. The programme to be heard next Sunday (7.30 p.m., all YCs) includes three Quintets, Beethoven's without flute and with piano, Fricker's and Malipiero's with flute and without piano. The other work in this programme is "Villanelle" for horn and piano, by Dukas.

Other programmes from the Festival will be heard on Tuesday, October 1, and Saturday, October 5. The Tuesday programme, from all YCs except 4YC, will be the Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam, conducted by Eduard van Beinum (with the violinist Szymon Goldberg as soloist), playing works by Cornelius, Kox, Mendelssohn and Debussy. On Saturday (7.30, YCs) there will be *A Concert for Young People*, with the BBC Scottish Orchestra, conductor Ian Whyte, and the soloist Nina Milikina. Also on Sunday, after the recital by the Dennis Brain Wind Ensemble, listeners will hear *Musica Scotica*, a programme of early Scottish chamber music for voices and instruments.

ASTROLOGER HOLST

AT a concert in the Wellington Town Hall on Wednesday, October 2, the National Orchestra—with women of the Hutt Valley Orpheus Choir—will present for the first time in New Zealand Holst's suite *The Planets*. On Thursday, October 17, the work will be presented again in a concert at Christchurch, with the substitution of local singers from the Christchurch Liederkranzchen.

It was a meeting with Clifford Bax which originally set Holst off on the study of astrology and eventually led to the composition of this work. In 1914 he wrote that the "character" of each planet was "beginning to suggest lots to me," and during the next year the seven tone poems that comprise the suite were completed. *The Planets* was first performed at a semi-private rehearsal by Adrian Boult in 1918, and in public (minus the second and last movements) by the Royal Philharmonic Society in 1919.

All the planets that were known at that time are included in the suite—the exception being Pluto, which was not discovered, though its existence was

predicted beforehand, until February, 1930. Earth, too, is absent (being only passive in astrological calculations). Holst's order of the planets is also not the astronomers' one—not, at least, in the first three, where he reverses the order of Mercury, Venus and Mars—perhaps because he was composing at a time when Mars was in the ascendant.

The first movement, "Mars, the Bringer of War," has been called the most ferocious piece of music in existence. Then come, in order, "Venus, the Bringer of Peace," "Mercury, the Winged Messenger," "Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity," "Saturn, the Bringer of Old Age" (the movement that Holst thought the best in the suite), "Uranus, the Magician," and finally, "Neptune, the Mystic."

When *The Listener* saw James Robertson at rehearsals in St Paul's Hall recently, he said that to cope with the score of *The Planets* they would have to add various instruments to the Orchestra.

"Something like 10 extra instruments, including a grand organ, are re-



GUSTAV HOLST

quired. There will be a great deal of noise."

Two harps are used in *The Planets*, said Mr Robertson, but the orchestra was actually going to carry an extra harpist for a space of two months to cope, not only with that work, but with other music (including a certain amount of French music), that could not be done adequately with one.

Mr Robertson turned over the pages of his score of *The Planets* which, *The Listener* noticed, was presented to him by the Governors of Sadler's Wells when he left there in 1954.

"It is one of the really great orchestral works," he said, "and has something for everybody. War, peace; then there is Mercury—who isn't interested in the postman? Jupiter gives jollity—that's the pub—and lastly there is old age, magic and mysticism. What more could anyone want?"

The Planets will be heard from all YCs at 9.0 p.m. on Wednesday, October 2, in the second half of the Wellington concert. In the first half, broadcast by 2YC only (8.0 p.m.), the Orchestra will play Haydn's Symphony No. 99 in E Flat, and *Death and Transfiguration*, by Richard Strauss.