



## Ed Lockwood meets the new Principal Horn of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

**Congratulations on your appointment! When did you start and what was your first programme?**

Thank you. I started in mid-August and the first thing I did was three days of sessions recording old Lionel Richie tracks. It was great fun. But the first proper programme was with Vasily Petrenko, our Principal Conductor and it was Beethoven's *Symphony No. 7*.

**How did your horn playing journey begin?**

Both of my parents are amateur musicians and members of the Blackpool Symphony Orchestra. When they couldn't find a babysitter, we would go along and watch the rehearsals. The orchestra uses professional soloists and I remember watching Peter Dixon playing Elgar's *Cello Concerto* when I was about seven and being transfixed by the music. The thing that made me want to play the horn, though, was watching a rehearsal of a Mozart horn concerto with Barbara MacLaren as the soloist. I remember thinking, OMG what is that instrument? The sound and everything about it made me fall instantly in love and I thought, that is absolutely fantastic, I want to do that. My parents contacted her and she became my first teacher. She was so welcoming and enthusiastic and was the perfect first teacher.

A year or two later, I went to Chatham's School of Music and had Lizzie Davis who was also really enthusiastic and a great teacher, and it was wonderful to have had two such inspirational teachers in my early days as a horn player.

**Did you have any horn playing heroes or recordings that you listened to on repeat?**

Well, having heard Barbara play the Mozart, my parents got

me a CD of Mike Thompson playing the Mozart concertos and I was also given a CD of Dennis Brain playing lots of different things which I nearly wore out. But during my childhood, and even more so now, I love listening to anything whether it has a horn in it or not. My dad loves music so I listened to whatever was left in the CD player, from Rostropovich playing solo Bach to Ian Bostridge's *The English Songbook* recording.

**Did you go through the National Youth Orchestra before College?**

Yes, I went there when I was 12 and my nickname was half-pint because I was so much shorter than everyone else at the time. They were all really nice to me which was lovely because they were all so much older and I was basically still a child! Eventually I became Principal Horn and I did that for two or three years.

**So moving on, you eventually went to music college?**

Yes, I did four years at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and then another year at the Royal College of Music.

**I gather you were in a very successful year and a lot of you are now in jobs? Did you feed off each other's energy or was there a little rivalry in the mix?**

Yes, it was a big year with seven players in it. We had Alex Wide (Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra), Meilyr Wyn Hughes (BBC National Orchestra of Wales), Ed Griffiths (Welsh National Opera) and Lauren Reeve-Rawlings (Scottish Opera), so yes, quite a few of us went on to get good jobs.

I'd say that there were a number of reasons for this success. It was clear that, with seven players in the year, if we wanted to be one of the five players in the orchestra from across the whole college, we would have to earn that place and so we all worked very hard. Another reason was that Hugh Seenan was the unofficial head of the horn department, and he instilled in us a culture of pride that we were the Guildhall Horn Department and that there was a tradition to uphold. We really embraced this and would swap recordings, play to each other and give each other feedback. It was like a horn club in a way.

The department was very well organised and was like a well oiled machine. It had produced a lot of very good players who were only a bit older and we could see the route forward. The teachers were also very well balanced as a group.

My teacher was Jeff Bryant but I went on to have lessons with Hughie, Jonathon Lipton, Richard Bissill and David Pyatt.

Jeff was an enormous influence on me and changed a lot of things about the way I approached music. He could be very strict and blunt but was always very honest and he helped change the way I thought about my playing. When I arrived at college, I was very confident in my abilities having gone through Chet's and NYO, and people had always told me how fantastic I was. But I realised, with his help, that that type of confidence wouldn't last and that real confidence comes from within. I learned that it was based on preparation, a love for what we do, and planning, and so I managed to develop true

## ALEX EDMUNDSON

confidence which didn't rely on constant topping-up from other people.

### **It clearly paid off. Did you get your job (3<sup>rd</sup> horn) in the LSO whilst still at the Guildhall?**

Not quite. I had some lessons with Simon Rayner and John Ryan at the Royal College but I also had a monthly lesson with Tim Jones. Tim was great because he was very different from anyone that I'd studied with before. He told me that "you can clearly play and you're going to be fine, but over the next year, I'll teach you my system". This meant both technically and his mental approach, and it gave me even more playing options. During this time I began going in to the LSO a bit to bump up and at the end of the year he gave some final ideas and also said that I should apply for the 3<sup>rd</sup> horn job in the LSO. By this time, it had been vacant for five years since John Ryan had left. The job had been advertised twice but I hadn't felt ready so didn't apply.

I did some work on 3<sup>rd</sup> horn, had an audition and was then officially on trial. I did a couple of months on 3<sup>rd</sup> and then we went away on a tour to Australia with Gergiev. At the end of that three-week trip they offered me the job! I started in January 2015 and was there for six years. It was absolutely fantastic. I thought as a kid I was being given a great education as a player, but when I joined the LSO I felt that this process was beginning all over again. There were a huge number of challenges to overcome - coping with a busy, demanding schedule - and it was all a bit of a shock to the system. You learn a huge amount from the great players around you and I really felt that I wanted to live up to the incredible horn-playing heritage of the LSO. I really wanted to play at my best at all times but it took a while to learn the right way of achieving this. You would never expect Usain Bolt to run his best 100m time every day but it took time and experience to learn the best way of achieving this in my job.



Alex with former LSO colleagues, Angela Barnes and Tim Jones

Now, as a principal horn, I feel like I'm having to learn this again and I'm sure it will take time to get it right. Looking after your health, your mental health, your chops, making sure you enjoy it and that you have a life outside of the orchestra all go towards making you better in the orchestra.

I learned a huge amount from listening to Tim and the many people who came in on trial for David Pyatt's old job. Eventually, as I felt more comfortable, I began to sit up myself and play principal too. The first time was scary but over time, I became more comfortable in my own skin and eventually it no longer felt like such a big deal.

### **Was your trial for the RPO a long one?**

It was over a two-year period which is pretty standard these days. I had to play a lot of the major repertoire during that time so by the end of the trial they knew my playing pretty well. After we had played Tchaikovsky's *Symphony No. 5*, I politely asked the orchestra "how the process was going". Trials can go on forever if allowed to and I needed to look after my LSO work as well so I pushed a little for an answer one way or the other. Fortunately this worked out and they came back and offered me the job.

### **Great! So have the RPO got anything coming up soon that our members might like to go and see?**

I'm trying to think... My head is not really on our schedule at the moment because we are expecting our second child to arrive in the next two to three weeks.

### **Wow! Congratulations!**

I was thinking more about what do I need to think about repertoire-wise. Ravel *Piano Concerto in G*. I've not done that before. One of the things I'm really looking forward to is making my concerto debut with the orchestra in Mozart's *Horn Concerto No. 2* in mid-June and I'll also be doing the Britten *Serenade* in London next year.

**Congratulations on a wonderful achievement, Alex. We'll all enjoy watching your career in the future. EL**



Alex on tour with his daughter in Luxembourg