

FROM A TO B  
KENNETH ALFORD (1881–1945) and  
HUBERT BATH (1883–1945)

Posterity can be unfair to artists who do not definitely belong to the class of undisputed great masters and this applies to the other arts as well as music. Look in the Oxford Book of Verse and note how many first-rate poems are by writers who are virtually unknown and how many second-rate ones bear the name of some recognised genius.

Perhaps we are all too busy to re-examine for ourselves the large output by minor artists and so the snap judgements of the textbook and biographical dictionary get handed on without much discernment and in many ways reconsideration is overdue.

The words of the distinguished musician, Sir Thomas Armstrong, first heard on a BBC broadcast over thirty years ago, reflecting on the life and work of a neglected English composer.

They seem an ideal preface to the work and achievements of two musicians, Kenneth Alford and Hubert Bath, who worked in different areas of creative music. Each was distinguished in their chosen field during their lifetime, but in the fifty years since their deaths, both composers have been subjected to the vagaries of fortune's whim.

Pseudonyms are somewhat rare among composers, for Kenneth Alford was born Frederick Joseph Ricketts on 21 February 1881. The son of a coal merchant, Ricketts' younger brother, Randolph, born three years later, was also to enter the world of music, becoming Bandmaster of the Essex Regiment and the Royal Corps of Signals. In the best family tradition, he also used a pseudonym, composing under the name of Leo Stanley. His most famous composition being the march, *The Contemptibles*.

The tragic early death of both parents saw Frederick join the army as a bandboy. Already a chorister who learnt to play both the piano and organ, aged fourteen, Ricketts joined the Royal Irish Regiment as a cornet player. A year later, as a member of the Band of the 2nd Battalion Royal Irish Regiment, Ricketts was sent to India, where he was to serve for seven years, first at Jabalpur, then to the North West Frontier.

On his return from the Indian subcontinent in the summer of 1904, Ricketts was recommended for entry into the Royal Military School of Music at Kneller Hall. After two years training as a Bandmaster, he was retained on the staff of the college, serving as Assistant to the Director of Music and as Organist. While in

residence in September 1907, Frederick Joseph Ricketts married Annie Louisa Holmes. Within a few months of their marriage, however, the couple were bound for South Africa where Ricketts was to command the band of the 2nd Battalion Princess Louise's (Argyll and Sutherland) Regiment.

Soon after his arrival at the Bloemfontein Garrison, Ricketts was asked to compose a quick march to complement the official regimental march, *Highland Laddie*. He took as his inspiration two bars of the regimental bugle call which he incorporated into a march he entitled *The Thin Red Line*. For his title, Ricketts adapted the regimental motto gained during the Crimean Campaign and commemorated in a famous painting by Robert Gibb of the regiment at the Battle of Balaclava in 1854.

This early work shows many of the musical fingerprints that were to characterize Ricketts's compositional output – impressive octave openings, lively themes, effective thematic treatment in both high and low registers, strong and largely diatonic harmony occasionally coloured by chromatic audacities, the 'borrowing' of phrases and melodies from other music to give added symbolism to a particular composition – all important musical ingredients which, when combined with the composer's unerring understanding of the military band, helped him create masterpieces of their type. Solid and succinct in construction, undemanding on the ear and generally populist in conception, mention should be made of the restraint, the nobility and grandeur of expression which the composer could also invoke.

Though composed in 1908, it was seventeen years before *The Thin Red Line* was published. By then Frederick Joseph Ricketts had compositionally metamorphosed into Kenneth Joseph Alford. He took his first name from Kenneth, his eldest son, Joseph, being his own name and Alford, being his mother's maiden name. The first march to appear under the Alford imprint was *Holyrood*, published by Boosey and Hawkes in 1912. Opening in impressive style, this march is unusual in that Alford repeats his middle trio section rather than return to the opening *pomposo* mood. Somewhat surprisingly, Alford did not repeat this unusual and effective variant in any of his later works.

In 1910, the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders returned to Scotland, being based at Maryhill Barracks. Moving to Fort George Barracks, near Inverness, in April 1912, Alford was to come across an unusual incident that was to give him the stimulus for his most famous creation, *Colonel Bogey*. It was while walking on a local golf course that the composer heard a golfer whistle two notes (Bb to G) to warn of his impending shot. Spontaneously, Alford responded with an



answering phrase that forms the principal subject of the march. Appearing just as it did at the outbreak of the 1914–1918 War, the melody quickly became the unofficial anthem of the British Army. Its early origin, as a whistled theme, was taken up by infantry men who often supplemented their whistling with snatches of unpublished and often unprintable lyrics written by barrack-room librettists.

Fame, even notoriety, has tended to obscure the musical strength of the composition as well as Alford's role in its creation. Its use, in 1957, by the composer Malcolm Arnold, as part of his Oscar-winning music for the film *Bridge on the River Kwai*, brought the music to a new audience as well as further obscuring its origins. Alford himself had expanded the march in 1939, as part of a free fantasia which he entitled, *Colonel Bogey on Parade*.

The Great War saw Alford, transferred with his bandboys to the 3rd Battalion of his regiment, becoming heavily involved in concert activity, a dual purpose being to raise morale as well as money for war charities. It was also to be one of the composer's busiest creative periods beginning with the march, *The Great Little Army*, which he dedicated to Field Marshal Sir John French, the Commander of the British Expeditionary Force. Dating from 1914, the work is full of dynamic contrasts being followed by two marches with a nautical flavour – *On the Quarter Deck* and *The Middy*. In 1917, Alford dedicated his new march, *The Voice of the Guns* to the 'Officers and Men of the Royal Artillery to reflect their role on the Western Front'. Some years later the main theme of the march was linked to the British Grenadiers to become the official march of the Royal Artillery.

Alford's final march of the First World War was the poignant *The Vanished Army* which the composer dedicated 'to the memory of the first one hundred thousand men who were killed during the war'. Here Alford demonstrates his skill in introducing melodic fragments of other music into his marches with *It's a Long Way to Tipperary* chillingly reminding listeners of the mayhem and carnage associated both with the title as well as the dedication.

At the close of the war, Alford rejoined the 2nd Battalion and undertook a somewhat nomadic existence. In 1920, the Battalion and Band were sent to Southern Ireland where, on several occasions, the composer was lucky to escape with his life. For six months, in 1925–1926, Alford was chosen, with his band, to attend the New Zealand and South Seas Exhibition, which was held at Dunedin, in New Zealand. The event inspired the march *Dunedin*, one of the composer's longer works and one which many feel is the composer at the height of his creative maturity. Returning to England via the Panama Canal inspired *Old Panama*, complete with hints of Spanish rhythms.

During the 1920s, Alford produced a number of Fantasias including *A Musical Switch* (1921) and *The Lightning Switch* (1924) which allowed him free reign, not only for his inventive scoring and contrapuntal expertise but showed the composer in lighter mood, humour being just below the surface. *The Lightning Switch* certainly lives up to its name as it opens in dramatic style with *Soldiers of the Queen* before invoking echoes of Wagner, folk-melodies, music hall songs, and the First World War; *Colonel Bogey* brings the work, inevitably, to an exultant conclusion.

Among the published compositions, marches predominate and established Alford's reputation, but in manuscript there are both original compositions as well as arrangements for military band of operatic works by Wagner, Verdi, Gounod and Tchaikovsky. In contrast are the miniatures, arrangements for saxophone quartets, even nonets and include some novelty items such as *The Two Imps*. Written for xylophone, this particular work has become well-known in the hands of both Patrick Moore and Evelyn Glennie.

In 1927, Alford was appointed Director of Music for the Royal Marines, beginning a seventeen-year association with the regiment. After serving for three years at Deal, Alford moved to Plymouth in 1930, being promoted to Captain in 1935 and Major in 1942. Within months of joining the Royal Marines, Alford composed *HMS Jollies* which introduced bugle call references to the three divisions of the Corps – Chatham, Portsmouth and Plymouth.

The 1930s saw a busy schedule of work which seemed to preclude the creation of any major new marches. One exception was *By Land and Sea*, composed in 1935. Re-written two years later and adapted for ceremonial use, the march includes references to the Corps' quick march, *A Life on the Ocean Wave*, its title *By Land and Sea* being a version of the motto – *Per Mare, Per Terram*.

The outbreak of the Second World War stimulated Alford to a final flourish of creativity. *Army of the Nile* of 1941 was dedicated to General Wavell, being followed a year later by *Eagle Squadron*, a paean of praise to the Royal Air Force. Here Alford, in typical style, combines fragments of *Star-Spangled Banner*, *Rule Britannia* and Walford Davies's newly created Royal Air Force March Past. In this, Alford's final work we find him speaking with a new voice, encompassing the mood of the war as successfully as he had summed up the spirit of the Great War some twenty-five years earlier.

Kenneth Alford retired on 30 May 1944 following almost fifty years service to military music. He died on 15 May 1945, a few days after the allied victory in Europe, his career personifying the world of devotion and duty, the world of the



military musician. He has left us a rich and diverse legacy of music, overcoming the limitations of the format to create classic works in their form. To call him 'The English Sousa' is to pay him the finest compliment.

The careers of Kenneth Alford and Hubert Bath share many similarities – early training as church choristers, compositional success throughout their careers, one particular composition for each composer brought fame outside their normal boundaries, one film apiece heightened their success and since their deaths both men are generally forgotten. While Kenneth Alford particularly worked within the confines of the military, Hubert Bath's career encompassed many and varied facets of the musical world.

Hubert Bath was born in Barnstaple on 6 November 1883, the son of a schoolmaster. As a boy he sang in his local church choir where his father was choirmaster. Studying the piano and organ, aged seventeen, he won a place at the Royal Academy of Music. Here he was taught the piano by Oscar Beringer and composition by Frederick Corder. Among his fellow students were Arnold Bax, York Bowen, Myra Hess and Harriet Cohen.

While a student he composed a set of Variations in the style of Elgar's *Enigma Variations*, won the Goring-Thomas Scholarship for a one-act setting of Longfellow's *Spanish Student* and saw a *Transvaal War March* published. He first came to the attention of a wider audience with a set of Orchestral Variations which were performed at the Queen's Hall in 1904 and five years later, *Two Sea Pictures* for orchestra were premiered at the Promenade Season of 1909.

The voice was to play a large part in Bath's early creative output. He displayed a special talent for the setting of words, whether by song or recitation and in the heyday of the Ballad Concerts, wrote many songs for these affairs. His most successful choral work was *The Wedding of Shon MacLean*, a setting of a poem by the Scottish poet, Robert Buchanan, first performed at the 1910 Leeds Festival. Other choral works include *The Jackdaw of Rheims*, *The Legend of Nerbudda* and *Men of the Line*, written for and performed by the musical forces of the Great Eastern Railway.

Opera was a continual fascination for the composer as he became involved in a number of operatic projects which included Thomas Hardy's *The Three Strangers*, George Du Maurier's *Trilby* and Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Sire De Malétroit's Door*. In 1912, Bath went with the Thomas Quinlan Opera Company on a tour of South Africa and Australia, staying with them for their London season before helping Sir Thomas Beecham with productions such as Strauss's *Elektra* and Ethel Smyth's *The Wreckers*.

For a time Bath assisted Sir Landon Ronald at the Guildhall School of Music and became Musical Adviser to the London County Council. This involved him travelling round the London parks to advise and plan outdoor classical concerts. He also began to make records for His Masters Voice (HMV), generally as conductor of an accompanying orchestra for ballad and operatic singers.

When war broke out in 1914, an eye defect prevented him from serving at the front-line and during his time working in an Officer's Mess at Woolwich, he collaborated with the librettist, Basil Hood, and composer G. H. Clutsam on an English light opera, *Young England*. This was produced at Daly's Theatre in 1916 with a cast that included Harry Dearth, Clara Butterworth, C. Haydn Coffin and Walter Passmore. Another one-act opera, based on the Irish play, *Spreading the News*, was entitled *Bubbles* and was produced by the Carl Rosa Opera Company at London's Scala Theatre in 1924 in a double bill with Pagliacci, both works under the composer's direction and with Eva Turner in the leading role.

Bath began his association with the theatre in 1908, when he composed incidental music for Beerbohm Tree's production of *Hannele* by Gerhard Hauptmann. From this score the composer fashioned his most ambitious work, the symphonic poem *The Visions of Hannele*, which was performed in 1913, and revised seven years later. Alongside his serious music, much light music flowed from his pen. Inspired by his trip to South Africa with the Quinlan Opera Group came an *African Suite*, first performed at the Queen's Hall at a July Promenade Concert in 1915, and later recorded by HMV. In addition he wrote a *Devonia Suite*, *Princess Mary Waltz* (for the Princess Royal's wedding in 1922) and two marches, *Admirals All* and *Out of the Blue*. The latter was written for the Royal Air Force Hendon Pageant in 1931 and later used by the BBC as a signature tune for a sports programme.

In the 1920s Hubert Bath was one of the many established composers invited to compose especially for the brass band movement. His symphony for brass band entitled *Freedom* was written as the challenging test piece for the 1922 National Championship which was won by the Horwich RMI Band conducted by John Greenwood. Other composers writing for the National Championships at this time included Cyril Jenkins, Henry Geehl, John Ireland, Gustav Holst and Sir Edward Elgar. Indeed Bath's tone-poem for brass entitled *Honour and Glory* was the test-piece for the 1931 National Championships, the year after Elgar's *Severn Suite* had been premiered.

In addition to many transcriptions of light music, Hubert Bath was much in demand at festivals throughout the country, adjudicating and conducting. For a



time he conducted the somewhat unusual, if not unique brass band, known as St. Hilda's Colliery Band. The band, which originally hailed from South Shields, enjoyed considerable success winning the National Championships many times. At one point many questioned the eligibility of the band to compete in amateur events, for in addition, the band undertook winter seasons playing for Bertram Mills Circus, Hubert Bath being the conductor.

With his considerable and wide experience of the theatre, it seemed inevitable that Bath should be drawn into the world of the newly-emerging British cinema industry. Indeed, he was one of the pioneers helping to set standards from the very outset. It was Bath who wrote the music for *Kitty*, the 1928 romantic melodrama, which was notable as Britain's first sound film. This was followed by *Blackmail*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Next he scored *Under the Greenwood Tree* for British International Pictures before returning to Hitchcock once more.

The film was *Waltzes from Vienna*, a cinema adaptation of Tom Arnold's musical spectacle about Johann Strauss, father and son, which had run for a year on the London stage. Bath arranged and scored the music for what sadly became a bargain basement musical, almost without music. Hitchcock became very disenchanted with both the film and his leading lady, Jessie Matthews, later saying that he hated this sort of thing – 'Melodrama is the only thing I do'.

In 1933, Bath joined the permanent staff of Louis Levy's music department at the studios of Gaumont-British in Lime Grove, Shepherd's Bush. His role was to compose, arrange and score music for whatever was required, often without recognition. The company's policy at that time was to credit all the music to the permanent Music Director, Louis Levy. Also, each staff composer was obliged to 'sell' (for a statutory one shilling) all his performing rights to a company-run publishing house.

In 1934 came the orchestration of the musical, *Chu Chin Chow* before Bath linked up again with Hitchcock for the third and final time, with the director's rather free adaptation of John Buchan's *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, starring Robert Donat. Other films of the period included *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*, *His Lordship*, *Bulldog Jack*, *Dr Syn*, *The Great Barrier*, *The Adventures of Tartu*, *A Place of One's Own* and *Rhodes of Africa*, from which the composer arranged his own march *Empire Builders*.

Between 1937 and 1943, Bath left Gaumont-British to work freelance and scored MGM's first major British film, *A Yank at Oxford*, as well as the Associated British version of Eden and Adelaide Phillpotts' play, *Yellow Sands*. He completed a number of scores for the RAF Film Unit, before, in 1943,

returning to Lime Grove Studios to work on a film entitled *Love Story*, which was to feature what has become his most popular composition, *Cornish Rhapsody*.

The work, a concerto for piano and orchestra, has its origins in matching the demands of the cinema with the musical content and style of the Romantic concertos of Grieg, Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov. During the 1930s, the Polish pianist Paderewski had been brought to England to provide the music for a successful film called *Moonlight Sonata*. At about the same time a film entitled *The Great Lie* popularized the Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto. Enterprising producers looking to exploit this genre began to explore many musical possibilities for their films and, looking for something a little different, turned to their in-house composers including Jack Beaver, Richard Addinsell and Hubert Bath.

The concerto form these composers created has been labelled the 'tabloid concerto' and became extremely popular during the 1940s. The first work of its type was provided by Gaumont-British composer, Jack Beaver, for the 1940 film *The Case of the Frightened Lady*. However, this was to be quickly overshadowed by a film entitled, *Dangerous Moonlight*. Listening to a radio concert, while on duty during the war, script-writer Terence Young sketched out the idea of a Polish concert pianist who fights with the Polish Air Force until the collapse of that country, when he escapes to England to join the Royal Air Force. From this outline grew the film, and with it, the need for an original short descriptive work for piano and orchestra that would give the impression of a concert pianist playing a concerto in the style of a romantic composer of serious music. The result was the *Warsaw Concerto* by Richard Addinsell, which remains one of the most successful and popular exercises in the genre.

Hoping to exploit the popular possibilities of this style of film, led producers and script-writers to explore many and varied plots as well as music scores. In the end, producer Harold Huth, commissioned Leslie Arliss to direct a film entitled, *Love Story*, in which music would enhance and accentuate the feelings of the characters just as the *Warsaw Concerto* had done in *Dangerous Moonlight*. The plot concerns a pianist (Margaret Lockwood) who falls in love with Stewart Granger and is inspired to write a piano concerto expressing her emotions, full of the impressive grandeur of the Cornish coast, where the story is set. Putting these ideas into musical form was to be Hubert Bath, chosen to write a successor to the *Warsaw Concerto*, which he entitled *Cornish Rhapsody*. Fifty years ago the work took the musical world by storm, being the crowning moment in Hubert Bath's distinguished career.



Not everyone was as enthusiastic when the project was in its early stages. Stewart Granger, who once said, 'I've never done a film I'm proud of!', thought the script of *Love Story* to be utter rubbish as he later related in his autobiography, *Sparks Fly Upward*, (London: Granada Publishing, 1981):

I played a man going blind. The villagers dislike me as they think I should be in the army. Why don't I tell them I'm going blind? Margaret Lockwood is dying of some unnamed disease. We meet. I don't tell her I'm going blind. She doesn't tell me she's dying. The audience knows all this but we don't. We fall in love. Great stuff! She is a pianist/composer and writes the Cornish Rhapsody – best thing in the film, incidentally – and so it goes on. I was wrong of course. It was a smash hit and there wasn't a dry eye in the house.

Moderato (rubato)

*p* (as sea murmurs) *f* *p* *f* *p* *poco*

misterioso *mf* (as the screaming of gulls) *molto rall.* *p* *calmato* *a tempo*

espressivo molto cantabile *mf* *affettuoso*

*con anima*

Part of the score of Hubert Bath's *Cornish Rhapsody*, (London: Keith Prowse, 1944).

For her role in the film, Margaret Lockwood, a pianist in her youth, re-learned to play the piano so that she could synchronize her hands and fingers for the film camera. Hours of practising *Cornish Rhapsody* meant she could play the five and a half minute concerto without too many mistakes. Filming took place in Cornwall, the concert performance of *Cornish Rhapsody* taking place in the Royal Albert Hall. For three days filming took place in the splendour of the hall with Margaret Lockwood at the piano, supported by the National Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Sydney Beer. In reality, the sound-track was recorded by Harriet Cohen at the piano, the composer conducting. Supplementing the music were the noise of seagulls and the lashing of the waves on the Cornish coastline, which the score demanded.

Recorded on the composer's sixty-first birthday, 6 November 1944 at EMI studios, *Cornish Rhapsody* has remained popular being subjected to many and varied interpretations from Liberace to a jazz arrangement by Jack Fina with Freddy Martin's Band. Sadly, Hubert Bath died on 24 April 1945, his music being heard in a number of films that year. Apart from *Love Story*, Bath had completed the scoring for *A Place of One's Own* and *They Were Sisters* during 1944 and was working on sketches for the forthcoming Margaret Lockwood film, *The Wicked Lady* when he died.

The master of the unobtrusive film score, where music passes into the pattern of the entertainment, Hubert Bath did much to ensure that the high standard of British film music was maintained during the late 1930s and early 1940s. An amiable gentle man, he worked quietly and conscientiously, often with little outward recognition of his work and achievements.

In the fifty years since their deaths, within a few weeks of one another, in 1945, both the work and names of Hubert Bath and Kenneth Alford have dimmed before our eyes. In many ways they both personify the world of the neglected composer, minor artists on a larger canvas. In tribute to all composers such as these, the words of Sir Thomas Armstrong provide a fitting tribute:

Survival isn't everything and there are many cases in all the arts of fine sincere craftsmen with a genuine creative spark who made a valuable contribution to the life of their generation and had their moments of deep personal vision and yet haven't made a lasting impression. Often or not their work is forgotten for a time until subsequent recognition reminds us how good the best of it was.

Kenneth Shenton



## HUBERT BATH – PRINCIPAL COMPOSITIONS

### ORCHESTRAL WORKS

*Two Sea Pictures*  
*African Suite*  
*Two Japanese Sketches*  
*Egyptian Suite*  
*Scenes from the Prophets*  
*Pierette by the Stream*  
*Devonia Suite*  
*Troubadour Suite*  
*Petite Suite Romantique*  
*Midshipman Easy Overture*  
*Summer Nights*  
*Empire Builders*  
*Princess Mary Waltz*  
*Admirals All*  
*Out of the Blue*  
*Norwegian Suite*  
*The Visions of Hannele*

### PIANO

*Song of Autumn*  
*Song of Summer*  
*Coquette*  
*Italian Suite*  
*Sonatina in F*

### SONGS

*Evoi*  
*A Sea Sketch*  
*The Vikings' War Song*  
*The Jolly Roger*  
*Sea Memories*

### FILM MUSIC

*Love Story*, including *Cornish Rhapsody* for piano and orchestra. Other film scores mentioned in the text: *Kitty*, *Blackmail*, *Under the Greenwood Tree*, *Waltzes from Vienna*, *Chu Chin Chow*, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*, *His Lordship*, *Bulldog Jack*, *Dr Syn*, *The Great Barrier*, *The Adventures of Tartu*, *A Place of One's Own*, *Rhodes of Africa*, *A Yank at Oxford* and *Yellow Sands*.

### OPERAS

*Young England*  
*Spanish Student*  
*Bubbles*  
*The Three Strangers*  
*Trilby*  
*The Sire De Malétoit's Door*

### CANTATAS

*Jackdaw of Rheims*  
*Men on the Line*  
*Psyche's Departure*  
*Look at the Clock*  
*Orpheus and the Siren*  
*The Legend of Nerbudda*  
*The Wedding of Shon MacLean*  
*The Wake of O'Connor*

### BRASS BAND

*Sunshine and Shade*  
*Freedom*  
*Honour and Glory*  
*Songs of Wales*  
*Songs of Old England*  
*Britannicus*

### ORGAN

*Melody*  
*Toccatina*  
*Barcarolle*  
*Heroic Prelude*

# KENNETH ALFORD – PRINCIPAL COMPOSITIONS

## MARCHES

*Holyrood*  
*The Vedette*  
*Colonel Bogey*  
*The Great Little Army*  
*On the Quarter Deck*  
*The Middy*  
*The Voice of the Guns*  
*The Vanished Army*  
*The Mad Major*  
*Cavalry of the Clouds*  
*The Thin Red Line*  
*Dunedin*  
*Old Panama*  
*HMS Jollies*  
*The Standard of St George*  
*By Land and Sea*  
*Army of the Nile*  
*Eagle Squadron*

## OTHER WORKS

*Valse Riviera*  
*Thoughts*  
*A Musical Switch*  
*The Two Imps*  
*The Lightning Switch*  
*Mac and Mac*  
*The Smithy*  
*The Two Dons*  
*Colonel Bogey on Parade*  
*The Hunt*  
*Lilliburlero*  
*A Life on the Ocean Wave*



Part of the score of Kenneth Alford's *Colonel Bogey*, (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1914).

Readers may be interested in John Trendell's biography of Kenneth Alford entitled *Colonel Bogey to the Fore*. This volume, published by Blue Band, can be obtained from The Band of HM Royal Marines, Commandos, CTCRM, Lympstone, Devon EX8 5AR.