

HOLST

THE
SOCIETY

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NEWS

JULY 2018

Welcome to the latest newsletter. September 2018 is a significant month for three reasons:-

- Our first AGM.
- The annual Holst birthday concert.
- The 100th anniversary of the first public performance of *The Planets Suite* – to be celebrated at a concert at the Barbican in the City of London.

All will happen on 29th September 2018. Marvellous if we could attend all three events. Hopefully you can make one or two.

ENGLISH MUSIC FESTIVAL

The annual English Music Festival took place over the late spring bank holiday weekend. On the Saturday night (26th May) the Holst Orchestra, together with the Godwine Choir, conducted by Hilary Davan Wetton, gave a programme of music by Dyson, Holst, Bliss, Finzi, Elgar and Vaughan Williams. The works by Holst included three part-songs from *Seven Part-Songs* setting poems by Robert Bridges and composed in 1925 to 1926. They were *Sorrow and Joy*, *Love All My Heart* and *Assemble, All Ye Maidens*.

We also heard three of the five part-songs dating from 1902, namely *Dream Tryst*, *Ye Little Birds* and *Come to Me*.

It was good to hear, live, the six part-songs, which were well received by the good-sized audience.

Holst also featured in a lecture given by your chairman on the Monday evening, entitled "Gustav Holst – The Impact of the First World War". This will shortly be posted to our website.

We have asked Em Marshall-Luck, the artistic director of the Festival whether she would like a third lecture on Holst, next year, covering the period 1919 to Holst's death in 1934.

ROYAL WEDDING

Members of the Society will have been pleased to hear the fourth movement of the *St Paul's Suite* played before the marriage service of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle.

SWORDS AND PLOUGHSHARES

Between 21st and 29th June, there was a mini-festival entitled "Summer Music in City Churches" performed in London by the City of London Choir, the Septura Brass Septet, the New London Chamber Ensemble and various soloists. Unfortunately,

the Society only received notice of the Festival after the last newsletter had been dispatched. This was a pity, because the programme included Holst's *Nunc Dimittis*, together with his *Wind Quintet in A Flat* and the two-piano arrangement of *The Planets Suite*.

The Society would be most grateful to its members if they could let me know, in advance, of amateur and professional concerts featuring music by Holst, so that we can pass on this information to other members.

THE PLANETS – TRANSCRIPTION FOR PIANO

The Society has received an email from David Rubinstein, a professional pianist, with regard to his transcription and recording of *The Planets* for solo piano. The recording also includes Holst's *Toccata*.

The recording dates from 2015. It is believed that this is the only recording of *The Planets* for solo piano. David Rubinstein has been described as a pianist "at the height of his powers, playing with precision, delicacy and warmth". The recording is on the Musicus label (769173106628) and can be obtained for about £10.

PAINSWICK MUSIC SOCIETY

The chairman of the trustees, Chris Collier, attended a concert in Painswick Parish Church in May, given by Dame Sarah Connolly. The programme included songs by Vaughan Williams, Ivor Gurney, Herbert Howells, Charles Stanford, Arthur Somervell and Frank Bridge. Dame Sarah also performed settings of four Laurie Lee poems by the contemporary composer Sally Beamish who was in attendance and who spoke about her composition, which was premiered at the concert. There was one song by Holst, namely *Journey's End* from the *Humbert Wolfe Cycle*.

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Although Dame Sarah's voice had been trailed in advance publicity as having a touch of the "luxury chocolate-liqueur" (which Chris not unreasonably describes as a touch of the absurd), he considered that Dame Sarah's voice has a wonderful timbre and her control and interpretation of each song was remarkable. With regard to the Holst song, Chris described it as a question and answer lyric which Dame Sarah captured well, together with the father-son exchange and its subtlety and gentle pathos. There was an arrangement of the same song by Frank Bridge. However, Chris felt that the Holst arrangement worked better.

Overall, Chris considered that the highlight of the afternoon was a song by Arthur Somervell, together with the Beamish settings.

The following night, at Wycliffe College in Stroud, there was a performance of Holst's *St Paul's Suite*, which does seem to be getting a fairly regular airing.

ISOLATION AND MORTALITY – HOLST AND VAUGHAN WILLIAMS IN OXFORD

This is a review of a concert given in Oxford in late March. The reviewer is Holst Society member Chris Carter.

An all-English concert in Oxford in late March featured two uniquely beautiful, but rarely heard, gems by Holst and Vaughan Williams. The former's Two Psalms and the latter's "An Oxford Elegy" provide interestingly contrasted views of mortality and man's sense of isolation. The superb Berkeley Sinfonia and Jubilate Chamber Choir were conducted by Benjamin Nicholas of Merton College. The setting was Jericho, in the de-facto parish church of St Barnabas, immortalised as St Silas's in Thomas Hardy's "Jude the Obscure".

In the first, mainly choral, session, faultlessly delivered, we heard four finely crafted spiritual songs by Hubert Parry, commemorating both his centenary year and his importance as progenitor of the English Musical Renaissance. These were matched with the Magnificat and Eclogue for Piano and strings by Gerald Finzi – a composer whose wonderfully distinctive sound world seems almost out of proportion to his actual stature in the pantheon. In Part Two, a neat, sure-footed - rather than an electric - performance of Elgar's Introduction and Allegro provided the centre piece for the Holst and VW.

Holst's Psalms 86 and 148 for choir, soloists and strings/organ were written in 1912, at a time when their composer was refining his textures and paring his resources down to the very bare essential (in his later works, he almost foreshadowed minimalism). While Psalm 148 ("All Creatures of Our God and King") has an expressive warmth, it is Psalm 86 which stands

out - a minor masterpiece in some ways, and certainly among the most poignant and arresting music Holst ever wrote.

The melody derives from the Genevan Psalter of 1543, with the text ("To my humble supplication, Lord, give ear and acceptance") taken from a metrical version of 1620 and from the King James Bible. The piece is startlingly simple. A haunting, repetitive fragment creates an image of monastic plainchant from a bleak and ancient age. There is a hint too of what was to become Holst's trademark use of processions to represent both time and timelessness. Then suddenly what was harsh, hopeless and dissonant transforms into an exquisitely beautiful lamentation, as the theme softens into a new version, played with stoical rhythm over a walking base line, then to give way to the return of the Genevan hymn sung as a shattering plea and finally a reduction to silence.

In Psalm 86, sung beautifully here by soloists Livy Watson and Tom Ibbotson, Holst has created less of a psalm than a self-contained drama - acting out man's plea to God for relief from despair. It is timeless and austere, yet vibrantly compelling.

There's a very different type of isolation in mortality depicted in Vaughan Williams's "An Oxford Elegy" of 1949. Here, the composer, writing in his old age, draws on his earlier pastoral style, but with a much more mature and nuanced command. Composed for speaker, orchestra and (mainly wordless) chorus, the piece is a rendition of selected extracts from two poems by Matthew Arnold - "The Scholar Gypsy" and "Thyrsis." It tells the timeless tale of a scholar who abandons Oxford academic life for an elusive existence among gypsies, counterbalanced by a heart-breaking lament for the loss of Arnold's friend, the poet Arthur Hugh Clough, with whom he walked the same countryside.

Vaughan Williams had less austere sensibilities than Holst, generally eschewing minimalist forces (though *Flos Campi* might be an exception). In "An Oxford Elegy" he gives us what must be his most successful, and harmonically adventurous, dream of an England summer seen in youth – the sensuous warmth to then be eerily darkened and tightened by shifting polytonality, as the scholar is seen battling against the winter winds and snow, while festivities are held by his former friends in Christchurch Hall.

Brian Kay, as speaker, had just the right timbre – deep and mellow – becoming increasingly sensitive and well-paced as the piece progressed. . . As "An Oxford Elegy", in its best-known recording, is indelibly associated with the voice of John Westbrook, he successfully managed to stamp his own personality without emulation or over-emphasis.

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While Holst's Psalm 86 leaves us with an unanswered question as to mortality, "An Oxford Elegy", true to Vaughan Williams' sanguine temperament perhaps, brings us to a sense of acceptance and resolve. "Despair I will not, while I yet descry/That lonely tree against the western sky", the narrator declaims against a softly humming choir. Then a serenely comforting tune lulls us toward the close of the piece ("I wander'd till I died"), as the earlier pastoral section returns to remind us of life's verities.

Chris Carter

ELGAR SOCIETY

The annual accounts of the Elgar Society make interesting reading. Membership has steadily fallen since reaching a peak of 1253 in June 2016. Membership was down to 998 in December 2017. Their subscription income in 2017 was £27,461, with Gift Aid producing another £3954. Royalties amounted to £215, interest £376 and other income £1051, making a total of £33,057. However, as the Society did not receive any grants in 2017 (nor in 2016), 95% of the Society's income comes from subscriptions and Gift Aid.

The Elgar Society was fortunate in receiving a legacy of £57,079 in 2016. However, there were no legacies received in 2017.

In 2017, expenditure was £66,511, which produced a deficit of £33,454. That was met by a transfer from general funds.

The Elgar Society has a scheme called EIP (Elgar in Performance), whereby funds are put into performances and/or recordings. In 2017, the amount spent was £38,000.

Restricted/designated funds as at 31st December 2017 totalled £112,000.

It is a sorry state of affairs that in 2017, England's biggest composer society did not attract any grants, at all.

HOLST MEMORIAL

We feature below the memorial to Gustav Holst which can be found in Chichester Cathedral. The memorial immediately above that of Holst is that of Thomas Weelkes.



BARNES MUSIC FESTIVAL 2018

Alan Gibbs, one of the Society's vice presidents, attended the Barnes Festival in March. His review of the Festival will shortly be found on the Society's website.

HILL HOUSE, MONK STREET, ESSEX

For a time, Holst rented a cottage at Hill House, Monk Street, about two miles from Thaxted. Unfortunately, the property burnt down in the early 1950s. The site is now occupied by a business. Andrew Claxton, who has expressed interest in the Society, visited the area in August 2017, when he took a series of pictures of the site, which is now heavily overgrown, as can be seen from the picture below.



PLAYGROUND SONG

As previously mentioned, the *Playground Song* (apparently lost by St Paul's Girls' School) has been located and transcribed. The song has now been recorded by SPGS. Hopefully, the song will be included in a CD to be produced in due course by SPGS. This is the link to the recording:-

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/Ons85relxfv2oks/Cantamus%20Holt.wav?dl=0>

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The first Annual General Meeting of the Holst Society will take place on Saturday 29th September at St Andrew's United Reformed Church, Montpellier Street, Cheltenham GL50 1SP. We have booked the Montpellier Room from 3pm to 6pm. The AGM will commence at 4pm. Tea will be provided. We also hope to be organising a brief talk at about 5pm.

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That evening, the Holst birthday concert (organised by the Holst Birthplace Trust) will be held at St Andrew's Church commencing at 7.30pm. The concert will be given by the Cheltenham Choral Society and will include music by Vaughan Williams, Bach, Charles Wood and Holst.

Of particular interest to the Society will be a performance by the leading British tenor James Gilchrist (accompanied by Society member John Wright FRCO) of five early songs by Holst, previously unpublished. These songs have been extracted from the British Library in manuscript and transcribed by John Wright. The performance of these songs is almost certainly a first performance in over 100 years and may well be a world premiere, as well. The Society hopes that the songs will be recorded in due course.

Ticket prices are £17. The ticket includes a glass of wine/ soft drink.

The Cheltenham Choral Society was founded in 1938. The Society is celebrating its 80th anniversary, this year.

The Society looks forward to welcoming as many members as possible to the AGM and to the evening concert. Please make a note in your diary – Cheltenham 29th September 2018.

FRIENDS OF THE LONDON MOZART PLAYERS

Your chairman has been invited to present a lecture on Gustav Holst, on 12th March 2019. The talk will be largely based on his lecture *Gustav Holst and the First World War*, given at the English Music Festival in May. The venue will be the Fairfield Halls in Croydon.

SONGS FOR VOICE AND PIANO

The Society is making good progress with regard to building up a library of Holst's music for solo voice and piano. We have now obtained from the British Library (BL) a copy of virtually all the original manuscript music, some of which has been transcribed. Nevertheless, we still have a number of songs which have yet to be transcribed. If any member of the Society would like to take on this role, that would be greatly appreciated.

There are just three outstanding songs which the BL has been unable to produce (for various reasons) and which will require some research by your chairman who will be visiting the BL, in due course. Once a copy of those three songs has been obtained, the collection will be complete in respect of those songs which have yet to be published.

Our next project will be to build up a library of all Holst's part-songs, hitherto unpublished and most of which remain at the BL in manuscript.

DREAM TRYST

The first recording partly sponsored by the Holst Society was launched at the English Music Festival at the end of May 2018. The recording features choral music by Holst and Dyson, recorded by the Godwine Choir. The music by Holst includes four of the Welsh Folk Songs composed between 1930 and 1931, namely *Lisa Lan*, *Green Grass*, *The Nightingale and Linnet* and *The Lively Pair*. Also featured are the Five Part-Songs dating from 1902/03, namely *Dream Tryst*, *Ye Little Birds*, *Arise the Glow-worm Lend Thee*, *Now is the Month of Maying* and *Come to Me*. Lastly, there is a world premiere recording of *Love is Enough* dating from 1897.

The works by George Dyson include no less than five premiere recordings.

The recordings were made at St Jude on the Hill, Hampstead, over the weekend of 21st and 22nd October 2017. The CD, which is highly recommended, can be obtained from EM Records at a cost of £10 plus postal charges of £2.50. The recording is numbered EMRCD049. Payment should be made to EMF Endeavours. Cheques should be sent to Em Marshall-Luck, Director, EM Records, PO Box 123, Clunton, Craven Arms, Shropshire SY7 7BP.

The Society is grateful to three of its members for their generous sponsorship of this recording. Together with a contribution from Society funds, total sponsorship amounted to £3,500.

CD OF CHRISTMAS MUSIC

The Society's next project is to record on one CD, all Holst's Christmas music, most of which has been recorded. However, these recordings are scattered amongst a number of CDs. The Society also intends that the recording will feature Holst's sacred music. It is hoped that all the sacred and Christmas music can be recorded on one CD. The recording will be made by the City of London Choir, together with the Holst Orchestra, conducted by Hilary Davan Wetton. The recording should be available by Christmas 2018.

This particular recording will be more expensive than *Dream Tryst*, largely because we will be using an orchestra. The recording will be under the EM label. If any member of the Society is able to assist with the sponsorship of this recording, could they please contact the chairman.

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SUBSCRIPTIONS

The Society's financial year runs from 1st June to 31st May. You should, by now, have received a subscription notice. We look forward to receiving your cheque, together with the subscription renewal form duly completed if you are a taxpayer, which will enable us to recover Gift Aid. As the Society has yet to receive any grant or legacy, our income is wholly derived from its membership.

FUTURE CONCERTS

BARBICAN HALL

Unfortunately, the centenary anniversary of the first performance of Holst's *Planets* to be given at the Barbican Concert Hall in the City of London by the BBC Symphony Orchestra, clashes with the Society's AGM followed by the birthday concert. All take place on 29th September.

3RD ST MARYLEBONE FESTIVAL

On 27th July at 1pm at St Marylebone Parish Church, there will be a performance of the two piano arrangement of *The Planets* given by Thomas Besnard and Gavin Roberts. The Society has made a grant of £150 towards this performance.

FROME SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

On Sunday 15th July at 7.30pm at the Cheese and Grain in Frome in Somerset, the orchestra will be giving a performance of Vaughan Williams' *Overture to the Wasps*, Walton's *Viola Concerto* and Holst's *Planets Suite*.

THAXTED PARISH CHURCH

On Saturday 13th October at 7.30pm, there will be a performance of *The Planets Suite*, together with Balfour Gardiner's *Overture to a Comedy* and Vaughan Williams' *The Lark Ascending*.

MORLEY COLLEGE

As members of the Society will know, Holst was, for many years, on the staff at Morley College, which this year is marking the centenary of the first performance of *The Planets Suite*.

The Morley College Festival runs from 27th June to 14th July and which included a spectacular reduction of *The Planets* for four pianos, with eight pianists and percussion. This was a specially-commissioned arrangement by composition tutor Paul Sarcich. The Festival will also include a screening of *In the Bleak Midwinter*, a Holst documentary by acclaimed filmmaker Tony Palmer.

For more information, please visit the College website at <https://www.morleycollege.ac.uk/>.

THE PROMS

Holst is doing well this year at the BBC Proms. The opening concert on Friday 13th July will feature *The Planets Suite*.

On Friday 27th July (the day before the opening of the Three Choirs Festival), the BBC National Orchestra of Wales will be performing Holst's *Ode to Death*, together with music by Parry and Vaughan Williams.

Jupiter from *The Planets Suite* will feature in Prom 59 on Monday 27th August.

In addition, on Monday 6th August at 1pm, Dame Sarah Connolly will perform Holst's song, *Journey's End* and on Monday 20th August at 1pm, the BBC Singers will perform Holst's *Nunc Dimittis*. Both these concerts will take place at the Cadogan Hall.

ST STEPHEN'S CHURCH, ROCHESTER ROW, WESTMINSTER

The Civil Service Choir will be performing part-songs by various composers including Holst. We have no further details, other than 1pm on 12th July.

ST JAMES'S CHURCH, PICCADILLY

On 27th July at 1.10pm, Holst's *I Love My Life* from *Six Choral Folk Songs* will be performed.

MORETON HALL SCHOOL, WESTON RHYN, SHROPSHIRE

The Port Sunlight Orchestra will be performing Holst's *The Perfect Fool* ballet suite in concerts over the weekend of 10th to 12th August inclusive.

ST OSWALD'S CHURCH, LYTHE, NORTH YORKSHIRE

Holst's *Wind Quintet Opus 14* will be performed at 7pm on Friday 24th August.

BARBICAN HALL, LONDON

The LSO will perform Holst's *Egdon Heath* at 7pm on 16th September.

AUTUMN IN MALVERN FESTIVAL

Holst's *A Moorside Suite* will feature in a concert at the Malvern Theatres on Sunday 23rd September at 2.30pm.

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WIGMORE HALL, LONDON

Holst's *The Heart Worships* will feature in a concert on Sunday 23rd September at 7.30pm.

Clearly, this year, there will be numerous performances of *The Planets*. One can only hope that concert planners will also include other works by Holst in their programmes. An interesting comment by Ivan Hewitt, Daily Telegraph concert reviewer who recently wrote, "At one moment there's the terrifying military juggernaut of *Mars*, then there's the big, very English tune of *Jupiter*, which just cries out for some patriotically spiritual words (which it duly received in 1921, when Holst turned it into the hymn, *I Vow to Thee My Country*). There there's the strange, bleached grandeur of *Saturn*, which anticipates the elemental quality of Birtwistle's processions."

Does any member know how Birtwistle's processions have a connection with *Saturn*?

However, if you do attend a concert featuring music by Holst, could you please let us know and also provide a write-up.

HOLST BIRTHPLACE MUSEUM

The Museum is hosting a major exhibition between July and December 2018. Details accompany this newsletter.



HOLST'S BIOGRAPHY

The Society has, in stock, a number of copies of Michael Short's excellent biography of Holst – *Gustav Holst – The man and his music*. If interested, please forward a cheque payable to the Holst Society for £18, which will include the cost of postage.

NEWS FROM ST PAUL'S GIRLS' SCHOOL (SPGS)

Last term, the orchestra gave, for the first time, a performance of *The Planets Suite*, together with some of the Choral Hymns from the Rig Veda (not sure which group). Paulina Voices (SPGS senior group) are off to the USA where they will be performing the same programme in a big outdoor concert with the Boston Landmarks Orchestra.

THE VAUGHAN WILLIAMS SOCIETY

The Society is pleased to announce that the trustees have agreed that the Vaughan Williams Society should be offered honorary membership of the Holst Society. The Vaughan Williams Society is honoured to accept.

THREE CHOIRS FESTIVAL

The Planets will be performed on 29th July. Nothing else, we regret to report.

HOLST'S DEATH

On 21st May 2018, we invited Breakfast on 3 to feature Holst's music on 25th May 2018, the 84th anniversary of his death in 1934. We suggested a performance of his Scherzo (lasting five minutes) which was essentially the last work he composed and which would have formed part of a three or four movement symphony. The anniversary of his death was not acknowledged and no Holst was played. We hope for better luck in September, coinciding with the anniversary of his birth.

SUITE DE BALLET (1899) – H43

The Society has been approached by the North Downs Sinfonia (NDS) who were anxious to locate the full score of the Suite with a view to a live performance in November 2018. The Society has acquired the full score and orchestral parts, thanks to a generous donation from the Holst Foundation. We have loaned both score and parts to the NDS, without charge, ie effectively a grant. The concert will be given at 7.30pm at Tatsfield Village Hall TN16 2AG on 10th November 2018. The parts will be returned, in due course, for loan to other amateur orchestras. For the future, the Society intends to acquire other scores for similar loan.

NEXT NEWSLETTER

This will appear in early September and will be accompanied by a copy of the annual accounts, together with notice of the AGM.