

HOLST

THE
SOCIETY

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NEWS

FEBRUARY 2020

Issue No: 14

Welcome to the late winter newsletter.

BARNES MUSIC FESTIVAL

On Thursday 19th March, a new chamber arrangement by the conductor Joe Fort of Holst's *The Cloud Messenger* will be performed at St Mary's Church in Barnes by the choir of King's College London and the Barnes Festival Orchestra conducted by Joe Fort. The baritone will be Seb Johnson. The programme will also include Vaughan Williams' *Five Mystical Songs* and Richard Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll*. The concert starts at 7.30pm.

The work was completed by Holst at his home in Barnes in 1910. However, the work is rarely performed, largely due to the considerable forces required. The orchestral scoring needs about 80 players. As mentioned in newsletter number 13, Joe Fort has re-scored the work for a 15-player chamber ensemble. However, the original harmonic and melodic skeleton of the work is entirely intact. No notes have been added or removed.

The new arrangement has been recorded. The recording on the Delphinium label is due for release at the end of April 2020.

ENGLISH MUSIC FESTIVAL

This year's English Music Festival will take place between Friday 22nd May and Monday 25th May. There will be no less than nine works by Holst included in the Festival programme.

At 5pm on the Saturday at Dorchester Village Hall, Joe Fort will give a lecture on 'The story of Holst's *The Cloud Messenger* from the 1900s to today'.

That evening at 7pm, the Britten Sinfonia and the choir of King's College London under their conductor Joe Fort will give a concert including Holst's five part-songs (to confirm in next newsletter exactly which five part-songs), together with a performance of the new arrangement of *The Cloud Messenger*.

At 7pm on the Sunday, two works by Holst will be featured, including *The Marching Song* and *This have I done for my true love*. The orchestra is the Holst Orchestra with the Godwine Choir under their conductor Hilary Davan Wetton. Roddy Williams will be the baritone soloist.

The Monday evening concert commencing at 7pm will include Holst's *St Paul's Suite*. The concert will be given by the Orchestra of the Swan.

The Holst Society is making a substantial grant to the EMF in view of the number of works by Holst in this year's Festival.

ORGAN RECITAL

Holst Society member John Wright will be giving an organ recital on Wednesday 12th February at 1.10pm at Christ Church with St Ewen, Broad Street, Bristol BS1 2EJ. This will be a short recital, but will include one of the early voluntaries by Holst.

BANBURY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

The BSO will be giving a concert at Deddington Church (on the A4260 south of Banbury) at 7.30pm on 28th March 2020. The programme will include Holst's ballet music to *The Perfect Fool*. Also in the programme will be Hindemith's *Symphonic Metamorphosis of Themes by Weber* and Berlioz's *Harold in Italy*.

The concert will be sponsored by the Holst Society.

ANTHEM – NOT UNTO US O LORD

In the 1890s, Holst composed this anthem for SATB and organ. It is surprisingly lengthy at some 13½ pages of music.

Alex Davan Wetton, who conducts the Godwine Choir, obtained the score from the British Library in manuscript and engraved it for performance and recording. He passed a copy to me. In the event, the Godwine Choir has neither performed nor recorded the work.

I in turn passed on a copy to Will Vann who is the director of music at the Wren Chapel at the Royal Hospital Chelsea. His choir will be giving the first ever public performance of the anthem at choral matins at 11am this coming Sunday, 9th February.

It is very rare that members of the Holst Society will have an opportunity to attend a world première performance. This is one.

BRISTOL CLASSICAL PLAYERS

There is a concert this coming Saturday, 8th February, at the Pittville Pump Room in Cheltenham, starting at 7.30pm. The programme will include Holst's *Somerset Rhapsody*, Elgar's Violin Concerto and Vaughan Williams' *London Symphony*. The conductor is Tom Gauterin.

Strangely, the BCP has not applied to the Holst Society for a grant.

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FORTHCOMING CONCERTS (WORLDWIDE)

Thursday 13 February, 7:30pm

University Auditorium, University of Florida, Gainesville, USA
A Fugal Overture
University of Florida Symphony Orchestra
Raymond Chobaz, conductor

Tuesday 18 February, 7:30pm

Bridgewater Hall, Lower Mosley Street, Manchester M2 3WS
Ave Maria; Nunc Dimittis
Tenebrae
Nigel Short, Director

Saturday 22 February, 7:30pm

New Theatre Royal, 20-24 Guildhall Walk, Portsmouth, Hants.
PO1 2DD
St. Paul's Suite
English Chamber Orchestra
Stephanie Gonley, Director

Sunday 23 February, 3:00pm

Ivor Gurney Hall, Pitt Street, Gloucester GL1 2BH
Gloucester Music Society
Lisa Lan (from 12 Welsh Songs)
Octavo



Thursday 27 February, 8:00pm

Palacio de Bellas Artes, Sala Manuel M. Ponce Av. Juárez,
Esquina Eje Central, Mexico City, C.P. 06050
St. Paul's Suite
Orquesta de Cámara de Bellas Artes
Jesús Medina, Conductor

Saturday 29 February, 7:30pm

St Mary's Church, Darlington Street, Bathwick, Bath BA2 4EB
Nunc dimittis
The Handful, chamber choir
Tomos Watkins, Conductor

Sunday 1 March, 12:00pm

Auditorio Silvestre Revueltas - Conservatorio Nacional de Música
Av. Presidente Masaryk 582, Col. Polanco, Mexico City Federal
District, 11560
St. Paul's Suite
Orquesta de Cámara de Bellas Artes
Jesús Medina, Conductor

Thursday 5 March, 7:00pm

Queen's Chapel of the Savoy, Savoy Hill Strand, London WC2R
0DA
Nunc dimittis
New London Singers
Ivor Setterfield, Conductor

Saturday 7 March, 7:30pm

Concert Hall, Town Hall, Blagrove Street, Reading, Berkshire
RG1 1QH
Nunc dimittis
Reading Phoenix Choir
Berkshire Young Voices
Berkshire Children's Choir
Christopher Hann, Conductor

Saturday 14 March, 7:45pm

St. George's Church, High Street, Beckenham, BR3 1AX
Nunc dimittis
Beckenham Chorale

Sunday 15 March - updated

Episcopal Church of the Holy Family, Jasper, GA USA
Savitri (chamber opera in one act)
John King Carter, Organist/Choirmaster

Saturday 21 March, 7:30pm

Southgate (The Bourne) Methodist Church, Southgate, London
N14 6RS
Brook Green Suite
Winchmore String Orchestra

Friday 27 March, 7:00pm

Deborah Miles-Johnson, conductor
Linden Innes-Hopkins and Paul Webster, accompanists
Ave Maria
Gloriana
Imperial Male Voice Choir

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Saturday 4 April, 3:00pm

St Mary's Church, Painswick, Gloucs. GL6 6UT

St. Paul's Suite

Orchestra of the Swan
Painswick Music Society

Tuesday 7 April, 8:30pm

Colmar, St. Matthew Church, 18 Place de la Cathédrale, 68000
Colmar, France

Colmar music and culture festival

St. Paul's Suite

Royal Chamber Orchestra of Wallonia
Gérard Caussé, Conductor

April 16, 17, 18, 7:30pm

Meyerson Symphony Center, Dallas, Texas, 75201, USA

Double Concerto for two violins

James Ehnes, Violin, Conductor
Alexander Kerr, Violin

Saturday 18 April, 7:30pm

St Martin-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square, London WC2N 4JJ

St. Paul's Suite

Trafalgar Sinfonia
Ivor Setterfield, Conductor

Saturday 18 April, 7:30pm

Huddersfield Town Hall, Corporation Street, Huddersfield, Yorkshire HD1 2TA

Egdon Heath

Slaithwaite Philharmonic Orchestra
Benjamin Ellin, Conductor

Wednesday 22 April, 8:00pm

Sage Gateshead: Sage Two, St Mary's Square, Gateshead Quays, NE8 2JR

Wind Quintet in A flat major, Op.14

Royal Northern Sinfonia

Wednesday 13 May, 7:30pm

Symphony Hall, Broad Street, Birmingham B1 2EA

The Perfect Fool Ballet Music

CBSO
Mirga Grazinyte-Tyla, Conductor

Thursday 14 May, 2:15pm

Symphony Hall, Broad Street, Birmingham B1 2EA

The Perfect Fool Ballet Music

CBSO
Mirga Grazinyte-Tyla, Conductor

The Holst Society is grateful to Karen Fletcher for providing the above information.

BREAKFAST ON RADIO 3 – DECEMBER 2019

Holst did not do well in December. The only music played was *In the Bleak Midwinter*, which received three airings.

In January 2020, Psalm 148, *Venus* from *The Planets* and a *Country Song* were played.

NEW MEMBER

The Holst Society is delighted to welcome to membership Mr Haruo Tohmatsu who is a professor of diplomatic and war history at the National Defence Academy in Yokosuka, Japan. As a member of the Elgar Society, Professor Tohmatsu regularly contributes to Japanese music journals and programmes of professional symphony orchestras on modern British orchestral and choral music. In 2004, he wrote a programme note for the Japanese première of Elgar's oratorio *The Apostles* given by the Tokyo Symphony Orchestra and Choir. He has also written an introduction and analysis in respect of five works by Elgar and Holst's *Planets Suite*.

NEW RECORDINGS

Come, let us make love deathless

This is a recording on the EM record label of songs by Holst and Joseph Holbrooke.

The songs were recorded at the Bradshaw Hall, Royal Birmingham Conservatoire in August 2018. The CD appeared last autumn.

The Holst songs include the 12 Humbert Wolff Songs dating from 1929, together with *The heart worships* (1908) and *Epilogue: I lay these lilies* (1929). The latter was completed by Colin Matthews, one of our vice presidents, in 2018 and is a world première recording.

Joseph Holbrooke lived from 1878 to 1958 and was a contemporary of Holst. There are 11 songs by Holbrooke, all world première recordings.

The tenor is James Geer and the pianist Ronald Woodley.

A review of the CD appeared in the January 2020 newsletter of the British Music Society. Alan Cooper's review is set out below.

This CD is very much a production of two very distinct halves. Both are engagingly well crafted by James Geer, a strong, fluent and clear tenor supported by detailed and eloquent piano playing by Ronald Woodley.

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Going beyond just listening pleasure however, considering the two composers, the CD is a masterclass in how to produce the finest musical settings of poetry (Holst) and how not to (some, but not all, of the Holbrooke).

What makes the 14 Holst songs so special? First, there is his choice of poems, the first 12 of 14 are by Humbert Wolfe (1885 – 1940). His poetry is intrinsically musical in its rhythm and imagery, and the often bell-like sounds of the words. The composer must seize upon that and mirror it in the rhythm and phrasing of the music, possibly expanding upon it, which is what Holst does to perfection.

Words and music flow together perfectly. Then, musical colours should be derived from the meaning of the words and the pictures conjured by them. Once again Holst ticks all the boxes. To pick just one of the songs as an example, in 'The Floral Bandit', a colourful depiction of the joys of a spring landscape, we find the lines:

Who is this lady? What is she?
The Sylvia all our swains adore?

At this point in the piano part, Holst includes the merest hint of Schubert, but does not overdo it. Later in the song clavichord and Purcell are mentioned and the piano writing responds but ever so delicately. Holst's music also responds to the colourful landscape writing bringing it vibrantly to life.

Holbrooke's music is very much late romantic English, but in the first six settings, with much less promising poetry, the music does not really fit the words anything like as well as the Holst.

Just a moment though, the last five songs, starting with 'Golden Daffodils', poetic and musical rhythm go far more convincingly together. It is interesting that the accompanying programme note suggests that in this poem, the text is possibly by Holbrooke himself, writing under the pseudonym Florence Hoare.

I am certain to listen to the Holst songs many times more – the Holbrooke? I am not so sure.

Alan Cooper

The recording (EMR CD060) can be obtained directly from EM Records whose contact details are as follows:-

EM Records
PO Box 123
Clunton
Craven Arms
SY7 7BP

<http://www.em-records.com/>

ALPHA AND OMEGA

The recording of Holst's Christmas music was pressed shortly before Christmas 2019. Due to various problems last autumn, the EM record label was unable to distribute the CD in time for the Christmas sales. What is now intended is that the CD will be launched late summer of this year, so that the same can be reviewed by the various music publications and marketed in time for Christmas sales. However, a copy of the CD (EMR CD062) can be obtained from EM Records (see contact details above).

The CD includes all Holst's Christmas music, no less than 17 carols. Apart from two, all of these carols have previously been recorded. However, these recordings are scattered through a host of CDs. This is the first time that all Holst's Christmas music has been brought together on one CD. The world premières include *I saw three ships* and *A dream of Christmas*.

In addition, the recording includes five works for organ by Holst, all world premières. The four early voluntaries dating from 1890 to 1891 are recorded including the March in C Major, the Allegretto *Pastorale*, the Postlude in C and the Funeral March in G Minor.

These are very early works by Holst, composed by him when he was 16/17 years of age. However, they are of great interest and worth discovering.

The CD concludes with a four-hand arrangement for organ by Richard Brasier of Holst's last work, namely his Scherzo dating from 1933. This short six-minute piece was to form part of Holst's second orchestral symphony. Unfortunately, he was taken ill and subsequently died before he was able to start the other three movements. The arrangement is astonishingly difficult to play, but is given a first-class performance by Richard Brasier and Tom Bell. The recording took place at Hereford Cathedral in August of last year.

Virtually all of the costs of producing this CD have been met by the Holst Society. The total amount is well in excess of £8,000.

The Holst Society is delighted with the recording and, in particular, the fact that we have now brought together on one CD all Holst's Christmas and organ music.

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Vice president Alan Gibbs has reviewed the recording, which is set out below:-

Can it really be a quarter of a century since Hyperion issued their Holst Singers CD of his choral music with notes by Michael Short? All the more welcome, then, is EM Records' new Godwine Choir one, recorded at the same Hampstead venue and Hereford Cathedral. This one focuses on the Christmas music, with organ music added embracing both his teenage voluntaries and a duet arrangement of his last completed work, the orchestral Scherzo, hence 'Alpha and Omega'. The organ music appears in first-time recordings, as do two of the choral works. 'A Dream of Christmas' draws, like many of the other carols, on the rich vein of Mary Segar's Medieval Anthology, its gently lilting melody harmonized, now in the Dorian mode, now in major/Mixolydian. 'I saw three ships' is a straightforward unison setting of the traditional carol obviously intended, like 'Masters in his Hall' at the 1920 Whitsun Festival in Dulwich (to be commemorated this year), 'to be sung by everyone'. The other unison carol in this group of three is 'Personent hodie', familiar to present churchgoers in Dearmer's 'God is love: his the care'. At Thaxted they still sing Jane Joseph's rendering, 'On this day earth shall ring'. She is remembered there with affection, having been Holst's pupil, amanuensis, composer, friend and colleague who worked tirelessly in support of his festivals. So it is good to hear the 'Wassail Song' which she collected in Wales on the CD in his arrangement and given a lively performance.

Vaughan Williams composed a still-popular *Fantasia on Christmas Carols* in 1912, ending with echoes of a traditional wassail song wishing us all 'a happy New Year'. But this CD gives us the opportunity to enjoy Holst's own fantasia of two years earlier. He admitted defeat in this characteristic friendly rivalry (RVW had considerably avoided using the same tunes, apart from a brief phrase of 'The First Nowell' on the tuba), but his uninhibited and ingenious combinations of different melodies are clearly enjoyed by the performers. The lovely poems have inevitably attracted other composers but his settings have in most cases stood up robustly in face of the competition. 'Terly terlow' by Warlock, for instance, is exciting but does not eclipse Holst's setting with its oboe interludes (played expressively by Charlotte Evans) and virtuosic repeated cello motif (I turned the pages for the cellist in the Hyperion recording, so saw

the difficulties at close hand!) –Alison Moncrieff-Kelly copes equally well here at a slightly slower, but still successful, tempo. 'A Welcome Song' has the same unique instrumental pairing, and both carols deserve to be more often performed. 'In the bleak midwinter' is sung here without the printed rests between phrases, but this is to the benefit of the words. It remains a favourite

with congregations, although choirs prefer Harold Darke's later setting. (It has a curiously similar opening phrase – compare 'Adam lay ybounden' set by Warlock and Ord.) As for 'Of one that is so fair and bright', a perfectly conceived setting of the macaronic poem, Holst was not to know that a youngster called Benjamin Britten would one day produce a memorable rival, perhaps inspired by his own music complete with Latin refrains by a semi-chorus. The *Four Old Christmas Carols* are a revelation: the Holst Singers recorded the haunting 'Jesu, thou the Virgin-born', but the complete set is refreshingly included here, each member having distinctive features: the bell-like peals in 'Now let us sing' reminded me of Somervell's equally neglected Grasmere Carol. 'Lullay my Liking', however, is a popular and beautiful conception which will surely never be forgotten.



The peak of Holst's inspiration was reached in 'This have I done for my true love' (first phrase 'Tomorrow shall be my dancing day'). As passionate as anything the composer produced, it led directly to the symbolism of the *Hymn of Jesus* and its importance in his output led to its inclusion at the unveiling of the Holst Statue in the Imperial Gardens in 2008. Sophie Hopkins sings the opening solo expertly: Holst inscribed Morleyite Lilian Twisleton's copy to 'the first singer of my Dancing Day' and Jane wrote to him 'It was largely the Dancing Day that made heaps of people feel that Monday [Whit Monday 1918] was the day. When are we going to sing it again? Soon please?' The Godwine Choir let their hair down in 'Bring us in Good Ale', a secular carol dedicated, like the preceding one, to Conrad Noel, the Thaxted vicar who shared Holst's socialism and sense of humour.

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Holst also must have thought it would go down well with the Prince of Wales (later Edward VIII) when he opened the new building at Morley College in 1924!

The four organ pieces, written when he was 16 or 17, are performed confidently by John Wright, who also provides an informative background note. They are unremarkable, but led on to significant inclusion of the organ in works like the first group of *Choral Hymns from the Rig Veda*, *The Cloud Messenger*, *Two Psalms*, *Hymn of Jesus* (the 32-foot pedal announcing the *Vexilla Regis*) and four of *The Planets*. The *Choral Fantasia* for Gloucester Cathedral has a substantial organ part, to the extent that Holst jocularly referred to the work as his 'organ concerto'. He had produced a duet with trombone at 20, but there are no solo pieces apart from the early batch of four. He did, however, provide an organ duet version of 'Neptune' so there is ample, and welcome, justification for Richard Brasier's clever duet arrangement of the late Scherzo, well shown off here by himself and Tom Bell. This is an undeniably effective version and deserves to be heard, like arrangements of *The Planets* (they do exist). The other organist involved in the CD, efficiently supporting choral items, is Douglas Tang, and the conductors are Alex Davan Wetton and Edward Hughes.

Alan Gibbs
(vice president)

FORTHCOMING CD

The recording of 15 part-songs by the Caritas Chamber Choir, who are based in Canterbury in Kent, is due to be released this spring. Hopefully, we can provide members with further information in the next newsletter. The recording took place at the beginning of January. Of the 15 part-songs recorded, no less than nine will be world premières. The line-up of music is as follows:-

- H128 – *This have I done*
- H129 – *Lullay my liking*
- H130 – *Of one that is so fair*
- H131 – *Bring us in good cheer*
- H137 – *Diverus and Lazarus*
- *H15 – *There is a voice*
- H48/1 – *Love is enough*
- *H48/2 – *To Sylvia*
- *H48/3 – *Autumn song*
- *H48/4 – *Come away death*
- *H48/5 – *A love song*
- *H59 – *It as a lover*
- *H58 – *Thou didst delight*
- *H57 – *I love thee*
- *H78 – *Now rest thee*

* World première recording.

The Holst Society has made a substantial grant towards the costs incurred in recording these part-songs.

NEXT NEWSLETTER

The next newsletter is due to appear at the beginning of April 2020. Copy should be sent to me before the end of March.

Chris Cope
Chairman

6th February 2020



Vaughan Williams and Holst walking the Malvern Hills after
Three Choirs Festival, September 1921