

# HOLST

THE  
SOCIETY

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# NEWS

APRIL 2018

## Welcome to the latest newsletter.

As the last newsletter appeared just before Christmas 2017, I do apologise for the lateness in this first newsletter for 2018. However, there has been much progress with regard to the Society during the last four months, as you will see set out below. Pressure of work through my day job, running two limited companies has meant that this newsletter appears somewhat later than I had hoped.

What I would now propose is that the Society sends out a newsletter every two months and therefore the next one should appear at the end of June/ early July.

### MEMBERSHIP

The Society continues to grow. We now have members from throughout the UK and also from Europe and the USA.

We are now entitled to claim Gift Aid from the Revenue. If any subscriber is a UK taxpayer and has yet to complete a Gift Aid form, would you please contact me, whereupon we will complete a form and send to you. This is very useful income for the Society, representing 25% of the annual subscription or any donation that you make, particularly with regard to a new CD recording.

### HOLST SINFONIETTA

Speaking of our European friends, the Society has learnt of the existence of the Holst Sinfonietta, which is based in Freiburg in Germany. The orchestra is conducted by Klaus Simon who is a very keen advocate of the music of Holst; hence the name of his orchestra. The Holst Sinfonietta/ Klaus Simon has performed *Savitri*, *The Wandering Scholar*, the *St Paul's Suite*, *Terzetto*, *The Planets* arranged for two pianos, the *12 Humbert Wolfe Songs*, the Vedic hymns and the *Lyric Movement*. What is particularly interesting is that the Holst Sinfonietta and Klaus Simon will be putting on a staged version of the opera *The Perfect Fool* in 2019/2020. We will keep members of the Society informed of developments.

### ENGLISH COMPOSER SOCIETIES

We have made contact with all the English composer societies. I have written about the Holst Society in their respective newsletters, or otherwise placed advertisements.

### THE BARNES MUSIC FESTIVAL

Held its annual festival in March, when the Barnes Concert Band played the arrangement of *Jupiter* from *The Planets* by James Curnow. The Society is in contact with the Festival

organisers with a view to more Holst being played at next year's Festival. Holst lived at 10 The Terrace in Barnes from 1908 to 1913.

### THE ORIEL SINGERS

Recently recorded *The Listening Angels*, an anthem for solo contralto and choir with organ accompaniment (dating from 1891), together with *New Year Chorus* for SATB and piano/organ, dating from 1892. John Wright FRCO, a member of the Society, was at the organ. The recording at All Saints' Church, Cheltenham (where Holst's father was organist) was made for the Holst Birthplace Museum's Holst interactive section.

### WHITTINGTON INTERNATIONAL CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL

Will take place between 15<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> May 2018 at Whittington Church in Shropshire. The concert on Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> May at 7.30pm will feature Holst's three pieces for oboe and string quartet (H8A) dating from 1910. Other music in the programme includes works by Britten, Vaughan Williams and Walton. The Society has made a performance grant to the Festival in respect of this concert.

### IN THE BLEAK MIDWINTER

Holst's carol (H73) was once voted the British public's favourite carol. The tune to the carol is *Cranham*, a village in the Cotswolds. There is a strong tradition that Holst composed *In the Bleak Midwinter* whilst staying at a cottage in the village, which now bears the name Midwinter Cottage. Shortly before Christmas, carols were performed at Midwinter Cottage, including *In the Bleak Midwinter*. Chris Collier, chairman of the trustees of the Society, arranged the event.

### HOLST'S BIRTHPLACE

Like me, you probably thought that Holst was born in Cheltenham. Not so, according to Jamaica Gleaner, who recently performed a two-hour programme featuring classical, jazz and contemporary music. The programme included a "joy-filled jig" by Gustav Holst, who was described as having been born in Kingston, Jamaica, but lived most of his life in England. Well, what do you know.

### A MOORSIDE SUITE

The Society has received from Professor Stephen Arthur Allen a copy of his paper "A Symphony Within: Rehearsing Holst's *A Moorside Suite*". The paper was commissioned by the Musical Times and was originally presented at the Greater New York

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Chapter meeting of the American Musicological Society at Columbia University on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2017. The paper is too long to be included within this newsletter. However, if any members would like a copy, would they please contact me.

### A PLAYGROUND SONG (H118A)

This piece for voices in unison and piano was composed sometime about 1912 for performance at St Paul's Girls' School, Hammersmith when Holst was on the teaching staff. As it does not appear to have been recorded, we contacted the School in order to obtain a copy of the song, but unfortunately, the library copy appears to have gone astray. Fortunately, Colin Matthews, one of our vice presidents, was able to locate a copy of the original manuscript in the archive of the Holst Foundation and that has now been transcribed by John Wright (grateful thanks) and sent to Leigh O'Hara, the director of music at St Paul's Girls' School. Leigh was delighted to receive a copy and assures the Society that there will be a performance at school assembly, in due course, with a recording to follow.



### SONGS OF THE WEST

This work (H86) was composed in 1906 and re-written in 1907. The original orchestral arrangement has never been recorded. However, in the early 1920s, Holst wrote to his friend, W G Whittaker, suggesting an arrangement for brass band. Nothing seems to have come of this. When I spoke to Professor Allen shortly after Christmas, he mentioned that he believed that the work had been arranged for brass band and that the score was at the Curnow Library in Kentucky. I contacted the Library, only to be told that, unfortunately, the parts had gone missing. However, they very kindly sent me a copy of the original score,

as transcribed. It then emerged that the work had in fact been recorded by the City of London Wind Ensemble way back in 1988. The CD on the LDRC label (1001) is still available.

### WORKS FOR VOICE AND PIANO

Holst composed at least 100 songs for voice and piano, as catalogued by his daughter, Imogen. As most of this music has simply not been recorded, I have spent time during recent months locating original manuscripts (largely at the British Library) and arranging for some to be transcribed. John Wright has very generously and without charge, transcribed nine of these songs which have been studied by Britain's leading tenor, James Gilchrist, who has expressed considerable enthusiasm. James and John will be performing some of these songs at the Holst birthday concert which will take place at St Andrew's United Reform Church, Montpelier, Cheltenham, on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2018.

The Society has also passed on to John Francis, the vice chairman of the Vaughan Williams Society, a copy of five of these songs, in connection with a proposed CD of songs by Vaughan Williams and Holst, due to appear in the next year or so.

The Society has obtained another 17 songs from the British Library, which now await transcription. As Holst was a student at the Royal College of Music in the 1890s, the Society approached the RCM enquiring whether students might be interested in assisting with transcribing these songs. However, the RCM has indicated that students would be entitled to charge at Musician Union rates, namely £35 per hour, which would probably work out at about £55 per song. The Society is not in a position to incur this level of costs. If there is any member of the Society who would be interested in transcribing these songs, could he/she please contact me. Even when those 17 songs have been transcribed, there will be yet more in the pipeline.

The Society's aim is not to record everything, which, hitherto, has not been recorded. We have identified a number of songs which the Society does not consider are worthy enough for recording, bearing in mind the considerable cost that would be entailed in producing a CD. Nevertheless, there is much superb music in manuscript format, which the Society is keen to record in due course.

### PART SONGS

Once the Society has completed transcribing Holst's music for voice and piano, we will then move on to part songs, of which, again, there is a considerable amount of material, in manuscript

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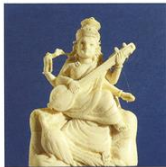
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format. Interest has been expressed by a number of groups of singers who are keen to be involved in future recordings.

## GUSTAV HOLST AND INDIA/ THE SANSKRIT WORKS

### GUSTAV HOLST AND INDIA THE SANSKRIT WORKS



Raymond Head

Society vice president Raymond Head has now produced the first major study of Holst's "Indian" works in a new and enlarged edition which appeared in February 2018. This is the first publication entirely devoted to Holst's interest in India. It briefly traces the history of the contact between Britain and India and puts it into the context of cultural understanding in the years 1899 to 1914.

Holst's interest in the Vedic hymns, the Mahabharata, Ramayana and the Upanishads eventually resulted in a corpus of work equalled by no other composer of the time or since. Unaccountably, the work has been little researched or appreciated.

The original work was critically acclaimed, when it appeared in 2012. It has now been fully revised. A hard copy of the publication can be obtained at a cost of £15 or as a PDF by email at £13. Those interested should contact the author [raymondhead@phonecoop.coop](mailto:raymondhead@phonecoop.coop).

## SCHERZO

As members will recall, at the date of his death, Holst was working on an orchestral symphony. The only movement that he had completed was the Scherzo. This piece (H192) lasts about five minutes.

Virtuoso organists Richard Brasier and Tom Bell have now arranged the Scherzo for organ duet. I have heard a recording, online, and it is certainly an exciting work, which the Society hopes will be recorded on CD, in due course. We are also planning a live performance in 2019.

## FUTURE FESTIVALS/ ENGLISH MUSIC FESTIVAL

The English Music Festival will take place at Dorchester-upon-Thames in Oxfordshire over the spring bank holiday weekend commencing on Friday 25<sup>th</sup> and concluding on Monday 28<sup>th</sup> May. The music of Holst will feature in the concert at 7pm in Dorchester Abbey on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> May and feature the Holst Orchestra and the Godwine Choir with performances of *Sorrow and Joy*, *Love on my Heart*, *Assemble all ye Maidens*, *Dream Tryst*, *Ye Little Bird*, *Come to me*.

In addition, I am giving a pre-concert talk at 5pm in Dorchester Village Hall on Monday 28<sup>th</sup> May entitled "Gustav Holst – The impact of the First World War". This follows the talk that I gave at EMF 2017 on Holst's music in the ten years leading up to the First World War.

## THREE CHOIRS FESTIVAL

Not much here to tempt Holst supporters to travel to Hereford. The only work is *The Planets* which features in the concert on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> July in Hereford Cathedral at 7.45pm. Other works in the programme include Finzi's *Severn Rhapsody* and Vaughan Williams' *Norfolk Rhapsody* No 2.

## THE PROMS

This being the centenary year of the First performance of *The Planets*, as you might expect, the work is featured in the programme for the first night on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> July. However, there is more Holst on Friday 27<sup>th</sup> July, which will see a rare performance of the *Ode to Death*. Parry and Vaughan Williams also feature in that programme.

Dame Sarah Connolly will give a concert at the Cadogan Hall on Monday 6<sup>th</sup> August, which will include Holst's *Journey's End*.

The BBC Singers will perform Holst's *Nunc Dimittis* at the Cadogan Hall on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> August.

And finally, on 27<sup>th</sup> August, the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra will be giving a "relaxed Prom", including music by Bernstein, Rachmaninov, Tchaikovsky and Holst. Unfortunately, the Proms website does not tell us what particular works are to be performed. I will provide more information in the next newsletter, once I have acquired the programme.

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In any event, one can certainly not complain about the fact that Holst features in no less than five Proms, this year.

## FUTURE CONCERTS/EVENTS

3<sup>rd</sup> May 2018 at 7.30pm. St Peter's Church, Eaton Square, London. *The Evening Watch/ Nunc Dimittis/ Choral Hymns from the Rig Veda*. The Holst Singers.

5<sup>th</sup> May 2018 at 7.15pm at Gloucester Cathedral. *The Hymn of Jesus*. Gloucester Choral Society and Oxford Bach Choir.

14<sup>th</sup> May 2018 at 1.30pm at The Spring, East Street, Havant, Hampshire. A music appreciation course on Walton's Viola Concerto and Holst's *Beni Mora*.

22<sup>nd</sup> May 2018 at 7.30pm. St John's Kirk, Perth, Scotland. *The Evening Watch*. Tenebrae.

6<sup>th</sup> June 2018 at 1.45pm. Music Room, Liverpool Philharmonic Hall, Hope Street, Liverpool. A talk on Holst's *Ode to Death*.

7<sup>th</sup> June 2018 at 7.30pm. Philharmonic Hall, Liverpool. *Ode to Death*. Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Choir/ Orchestra.

9<sup>th</sup> June 2018 at 7.30pm. St George's, Great George Street, Bristol. Holst's *Come to me in the silence of the night*. Exultate Singers.

13<sup>th</sup> June 2018 at 1pm. Bradby Hall, Haileybury College, Hertford Heath, Hertfordshire. *Vedic Hymns*.

26<sup>th</sup> June 2018 at 7pm. Priory Church of St Bartholomew-the-Great, London. *All Earthly Things Above: Holst's Planets*. John York and Fiona York (piano duet).

28<sup>th</sup> June 2018 at 7.30pm. Coventry Cathedral. *I Vow to Thee My Country*. American Festival Chorus.

4<sup>th</sup> July 2018 at 11am. Pitville Pump Room, Cheltenham. *Journey's End* from *12 Humbert Wolfe Songs*.

5<sup>th</sup> July 2018 at 3pm. Church of the Holy Innocents, Highnam, Gloucester. *Nunc Dimittis*. The Carice Singers.

6<sup>th</sup> July 2018 at 7pm. Cheltenham Town Hall. *Beni Mora*. (Only first movement. Why not perform it all?) BBC National Orchestra of Wales.

7<sup>th</sup> July 2018 at 12pm. Thaxted Parish Church, Thaxted, Norfolk. *Jupiter* arranged for organ. Organist Robin Walker.

## HOLST BIRTHPLACE MUSEUM

The Museum re-opened in February following the winter break and an exhibition featuring "Holst's other homes" is now on display. It gives an insight into the other houses that Holst occupied, in Cheltenham as well as London and Thaxted.

This will be followed by a major exhibition "Gustav Holst's WW1: With the Salonica Forces" which will run from 10<sup>th</sup> July to 15<sup>th</sup> December. The exhibition has been funded partly by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

## YOUTHFUL PLANETS

Gustav Holst 'proved by experience that school-children need exciting contemporary music to sing and play' wrote his daughter Imogen. But even he could scarcely have imagined that the day would come when an orchestra composed largely of school children would perform *The Planets*, regarded at the time of its launch as so difficult to understand that it had to be introduced to the public in abridged form after its first private performance 100 years ago in 1918. The London Schools Symphony Orchestra first played it many years ago, and had featured *Jupiter* as an encore in their 60th Birthday Gala Concert in 2011 under Sir Richard Armstrong. He, now a sprightly 75 -just- returned to conduct them in all seven movements on 9 January, again at the Barbican Hall where they have regularly performed under the generous sponsorship of the City of London. Imogen would have found little to fault. *Mars* fired off at the fast tempo her father had in mind, already set in Bernstein's *Candide* Overture which began the concert, and in between we heard Louise Alder, an LSSO alumna and since then Cardiff prizewinner, sing with entrancing variety and accuracy another American work, Barber's *Knoxville*, albeit in an engagingly English accent. Sir Richard's judicious choice of tempi continued throughout, avoiding self-indulgence in the central theme of *Jupiter* and not getting bogged down in *Saturn*. Dynamics encompassed exciting climaxes and the barely perceptible in the opening of *Saturn*. The peremptory four-note HOLST motif in the brass burst in at the beginning of *Uranus* in an appropriate segue. Instrumental playing was individually excellent and carefully graded in chordal groups in each section. Finally the LSSO Chorus capped the whole performance with their vocalizing as *Neptune* disappeared into the distance, the more effective for their total invisibility. Donald Sturrock's programme notes appropriately drew attention to the composer's work with amateurs, although he omitted to mention James Allen's Girls' School, which still takes a pride in its connection with his early days. If you missed this performance, you can hear members of the LSSO combine with Morley College-related players in a *Planets* Centenary

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performance organized by Morley at the Royal Festival Hall on 14 July.

Alan Gibbs  
Vice President/ Holst Society

## RECORDINGS

### The Godwine Choir

The Society is delighted to announce the forthcoming issue of a CD recorded by the Godwine Choir under its conductors Edward Hughes and Alex Davan Wetton of part songs by Dyson and Holst.

Four of the 12 Welsh Folk Songs (H183) appear, namely *Lisa Lan*, *Green Grass*, *The Nightingale and Linnet* and *The Lively Pair*.

There is a première recording of *Love is Enough* from the Five Part Songs (H48).

Finally, the recording includes the Five Part Songs (H61) which include *Dream Tryst*, *Ye Little Birds*, *Arise the Glow Worm Lend Thee*, *Now is the Month of Maying* and *Come to me*.

The recording will be launched at the English Music Festival at the end of May 2018.

The Society is greatly indebted to three of its members who have between them donated a total of £3000 towards the cost of this recording. The Society has added a further £500 from its own funds. Incidentally, it is interesting to note that to produce a CD of part songs (involving no accompaniment at all) now costs at least £6000.

## OTHER RECORDINGS

Steady progress is being made with regard to other recordings. I will keep members informed as to progress.

## AND LASTLY, THE MYSTERY CHORD

A mystery chord from *Saturn* (fifth movement of *The Planets*) will feature in Chord of the Week on BBC 2 in July (date to follow) under "Proms Extra". The broadcaster is the international concert pianist David Owen Norris who tells me that "Holst withheld the mode until the third note of the bass melody". All will be revealed in July.

