

# HOLST

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# NEWS

SEPTEMBER 2018

*Welcome to the latest newsletter. We do hope you can attend the AGM and the Holst Birthday Concert, both in Cheltenham on Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> September.*

## AGM

Welcome to the latest newsletter. This month, we celebrate the 144th anniversary of the birth of Holst. The annual Holst Birthday Concert will take place in St Andrew's URC, Montpellier Street, Cheltenham at 7.30pm on Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> September. If you plan to be in Cheltenham that evening, why not make it a day's visit by including the Society's first AGM which will be held at St Andrew's URC that afternoon, at 4pm. At the conclusion of the AGM, Angela Applegate will present a PowerPoint illustrated celebration of Holst, entitled "Music, Friendship and the Cotswold Hills: The Life of Gustav Holst".

We hope to finish events by 5.30pm, which should give a little time for a bite to eat, prior to the evening's concert.

Please also note that we will be providing refreshments at the AGM including hot drinks, biscuits and cake. There will also be a sale of second-hand CDs.

With regard to the AGM, we attach agenda, proxy voting form, notice and the accounts.

If you are unable to attend events in Cheltenham on 29<sup>th</sup> September and find yourself in London that day, you may wish to note two concerts. Firstly, Robert Hunter and James Longford will be playing the original arrangement of *The Planets* for one piano and four hands. This will take place at Arts Depot. The address is 5 Nether Street, Tallyho Corner, London N12 0GA. The concert will commence at 7.30pm.

Alternatively, you could attend the centenary concert of the first public performance of *The Planets* which will take place at the Barbican Concert Hall that evening. Timing is 7.30pm. Members will need to check with the Barbican, beforehand, as there is the possibility that the concert may be sold out.

## CONCERTS/EVENTS

### September to December 2018

Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> September at 7pm. St Thomas' Church, Salisbury. Holst *St Paul's Suite*.

Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> September 2018 at 7pm at the Barbican Hall, London. Holst *Egdon Heath*.

Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> September at 7.30pm at St Katharine Cree, London. Holst *Nunc Dimittis* and Holst *Home they brought her warrior dead*.

Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> September at 2.30pm, Malvern Theatres, Malvern. Holst *A Moorside Suite*.

Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> September at 3pm, St Mary Magdalene Church, Hucknall, Nottingham. Holst *Choral Hymns from the Rig Veda*.

Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> September at 7.30pm, Wigmore Hall, London. Holst *The Heart Worship*.

Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> September at 7.30pm, Ely Cathedral. Holst *The Planets* and *The Cotswold Symphony*.

Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> September at 3pm, Great Witley Church, Worcestershire. Holst *The Moorside Suite*.

Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> October at 7.30pm, St John's Smith Square, London. Holst *St Paul's Suite*.

Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> October at 7.30pm, Thirlestain Long Gallery, Cheltenham College, Bath Road, Cheltenham. Holst *Trio in G Minor*.

Friday 5<sup>th</sup> October at 7.30pm, St Paul's Church, Knightsbridge, London. Holst *Nunc Dimittis*.

Friday 19<sup>th</sup> October at 7.30pm, Courtenay Centre, Newton Abbot. Holst *St Paul's Suite*.

Friday 19<sup>th</sup> October at 7.30pm, St Luke's Church Hall, St Luke's Place, Cheltenham. *Holst as an opera composer – A talk by Nigel Simeone*.

Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> October at 8pm, SJE Arts, St John the Evangelist Church, Oxford. Holst partsongs (details unknown).

Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> November at 7.30pm, North Downs Sinfonia, Tatsfield Village Hall TN16 2AG. Holst *Suite de Ballet*.

Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> November at 8pm, Church of St Michael and All Angels, Galleywood, Chelmsford, Essex. Holst *This have I done for my true love*.

Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> November at 7.30pm, Elgar Concert Hall, The Bramall, University of Birmingham. Holst *St Paul's Suite*.

Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> November at 3pm, Elgar Concert Hall, The Bramall, University of Birmingham. Holst *Swansea Town*.

Monday 26<sup>th</sup> November at 7.30pm, St John's Smith Square, London. Holst *The Perfect Fool* (ballet music).

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## THREE CHOIRS FESTIVAL

The centenary of *The Planets* was marked by a performance at the Three Choirs Festival in Hereford Cathedral on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> July. The programme included a festival co-commission, namely Hannah Kendall's *Baptistry*, Finzi's *Severn Rhapsody* and Vaughan Williams' *Norfolk Rhapsody number 2*. The latter was premiered at the Cardiff Festival in September 1907. However, subsequently, the final two pages were lost and these were re-composed by the scholar Stephen Hogger in 2002. This was certainly a rare performance of the work.

The Philharmonia Orchestra gave a spirited performance of *The Planets* under their guest conductor Elim Chan, a native of Hong Kong. Ms Chan became assistant conductor at the LSO in 2015. She is also principal guest conductor of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. The general consensus of opinion amongst concertgoers was that Ms Chan is an accomplished conductor, of whom we will be hearing much in years to come.

It was a little disappointing that there was no other music by Holst played at Three Choirs.

## THE HOLST FOUNDATION

The Society is delighted to have received a second grant from the Holst Foundation, which has enabled us to acquire another orchestral score. We now have the full score and orchestral parts for Holst's *Two songs without words* (H88). We have received the music from the United States. This will be available for hire and hopefully we will see live performances of the two songs, by amateur orchestras, in due course. The Society does not propose to make any charge for the hire of the music, but we will insist that the Society should be given credit for lending the music and also a free advert in the concert programme.

The *Suite de Ballet* was acquired earlier this year, thanks to another grant from the Holst Foundation. It is presently with the North Downs Sinfonia, which they are rehearsing for a concert to be given in November (see above).

The Society intends to acquire more orchestral scores in due course. These will also be available for hire.

## ESPAÑA EN LOS GRANDES MÚSICOS

This is a new publication (Spain in the Great Musicians) which is available in paperback at a cost of £26.38. However, it is in Spanish. Any Spanish-speaking member of the Society who is interested in the publication, should contact Chris Cope.

## CONCERT REVIEW – THE PLANETS – TWO-PIANO VERSION

Thomas Bernard & Gavin Roberts (pianos)

St Marylebone Parish Church, London, 27 July 2018, 1pm

On a particularly hot day in late July, Gavin Roberts, director of music at St Marylebone Parish Church in London and director of the St Marylebone Festival, joined Thomas Bernard, a former fellow-student at London's Guildhall, to perform Gustav Holst's own two-piano arrangement of *The Planets*. A good-sized audience turned up, its healthy spread of ages reflecting the enduring popularity of the suite, even in this 'black and white' presentation without the attraction of Holst's super-size orchestra. Any concern that we might miss those colours were soon banished by Bernard and Roberts' performance with its remarkable ensemble and flair.

Shorn of the distraction of layers of colourful instrumentation, the grinding dissonances of 'Mars' were brought into sharp focus. One could appreciate more readily the variety of themes and motifs, and their increasing brutalisation through that movement: indeed, the central section has rarely sounded so chilling and menacing in its implacable progress.

After such an account, 'Venus' sounded even more its utter antithesis. Again we were treated to a fine performance, but here, rather more than even the ending of 'Mars', one became aware of the greatest shortcoming of rendering *The Planets* on even a pair of pianos, with their inability to sustain a held chord. Yet the build up of layer upon glittering layer of ostinatos in the final pages of that piece was entrancing.

'Mercury', like 'Mars', appeared to gain from the focused and monochrome sound of the two-piano arrangement, sounding indeed quicksilver in its smooth and sleek movement – tribute again to the superlative ensemble achieved by Bernard and Roberts, who truly sounded like a single prodigious musician performing.

Perhaps the most memorable contrast – appropriately – came with the fourth and fifth movements: 'Jupiter' and 'Saturn'. Perhaps in 'Jupiter' one missed a sense of different groups of instruments taking the spotlight in a great orchestral jamboree; yet the effect of jangling, bell-like tintinnabulation that finished that piece highlighted one of several links between this and 'Saturn', which starts – of course – with a funereal bell-like tolling. Bells (a particular obsession of Holst's from his time in Thaxted – witness such works as *The Hymn of Jesus*) are one link; the other is Elgar, an obvious influence on the noble theme in 'Jupiter', but also in 'Saturn's' processional theme (compare

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this, with its pacing bass, with the melody which opens Elgar's First Symphony). Again, though, one became aware of the piano's lack of sustaining power, not entirely mitigated by Holst's strategic repetition of certain notes in long-sustained melodies (though perhaps this is an appropriate effect, after all, in a movement about mortality).

'Uranus' was a splendid virtuosic romp, not least in the highly effective glissando which seemed to sweep all away more believably than is usually achieved in performances even of the full orchestral version. 'Neptune', usually thought the least successful transcription, sounded remarkably effective, the lack of variety in colour highlighting how increasingly strange and other-worldly the harmonies become as the movement progresses – and Bernard and Roberts even credibly managed the final fade out.

Some of us may have felt some apprehension about hearing this 'reduced' version of The Planets, but Gavin Roberts and Thomas Bernard achieved the minor miracle of not only mostly making us forget the orchestral version, but to give a performance that offered or provoked fresh insights and reflections on this well-loved work.

Daniel Jaffé

I cannot add to Mr Jaffé's admirable assessment, with which I totally concur, my own misgivings having been equally dispelled by this convincing performance of Holst's own version born out of necessity. To this (and there is of course also a well-known 4-hand piano duet version), the musicians of Morley College contributed their own unique take for 4 pianos and 8 pianists, created by Paul Sarcich and executed on 29 June by him and other members of the Morley staff, with students' digital animations. This Percy Graingeresque conception, less authentic than the St Marylebone one, was offered and enjoyed in a free and festive spirit along with other events, including a film and a ramble beginning at the Dulwich school where Holst taught.

Most impressive was a *Planets* performance by the London Schools Symphony Orchestra under Peter Ash, with Patrick Allies guiding the female members of Morley Chamber Choir in a nicely-judged *Neptune* fade-out. The addition of poems and musical foretastes did not disturb the slick sequence of movements, unlike the Prom, in which Sakari Oramo had to indulge the audience in their applause between movements. The BBCSO took it all in good part and soldiered on beneath the canopy of celestial blue lights. Oramo was not unduly flustered, but did he mean to substitute a more sedate third 'Holst' motive at the beginning of *Uranus* for the usual explosive one?

A forthcoming performance deserves mention – at Thaxted Church, sponsored by the Friends of the church, on 13 October. Balfour Gardiner, the composer whose generosity made the Queen's Hall première possible, also paid for repairs to the Thaxted church roof – Holst lived in the town and played the church organ. The programme will also feature Gardiner's own *Comedy Overture*.

Alan Gibbs (Vice President)

## CD REVIEW A DREAM TRYST – CHORAL MUSIC BY HOLST AND DYSON – EM RECORDS EMR CD049

(Godwine Choir / Alex Davan Wetton and Edward Hughes; organ Matthew Jorysz)

My initiation into the choral music of George Dyson was not The Canterbury Pilgrims but a typically sturdy, tuneful setting of the Evening Canticles, of which this CD reminded me. It was imaginative to find him paired with Gustav Holst, a contemporary with a similar RCM background, and the result reveals both their affinities and their individual characteristics. Formed in 2014, the Godwine Choir already has the qualities needful to perform their music: excellent ensemble in harmony and rhythm, tonal variety responding to its subtle dictates, and a willingness to explore unfamiliar works by well-known composers as well as new ones by contemporaries. Edward Hughes conducts the Dyson pieces and Alex Davan Wetton the Holst ones -appropriately, given his pedigree.

The poets range from the 16th to the 20th centuries, only one occurring twice (Herrick), and the St Jude's, Hampstead organ is used only in Dyson, for his Three Songs of Courage and Lauds (all from 1935), matching both his characteristic martial mood and more delicate passages. The other Dyson settings (like the Holst) are a cappella and demonstrate Dyson's gift for melodious, well-constructed music with felicitous accentuation and apt word-painting, from the trumpet call at the outset of Reveille to the 'ebb and flow' of the heart in Moon and the stirring build-up to unison at 'Heaven's Almighty King' in Lauds. Holst's early examples, Love is enough (H48) and the Five Part-songs (H61), have a similar approach, even to flirting with madrigalian technique. But Dyson's 'Foleros' subvert (to use Jaffé's word) the normal jolly refrain ironically in I loved a lass while Holst's 'fa-las' in Now is the month of maying and the catchy 'pleasant warblings' in Ye little birds are not far removed from his one-time idol's 'Sing a merry madrigal'. In Her eyes the glow-worm lend thee the Choir lights some explosive 'sparks' and we can enjoy the artful ghostly intake of breath in the second verse which Imogen added. Suitable for amateurs these part-songs surely are, although Holst's hopes for Love is

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enough may have been a tad optimistic: after its inclusion in the Leith Hill Festival of 1905, the committee glumly decided it had been 'rather beyond the present capacity of the choirs' -but not so our Godwine Choir, who clearly relished it. As for the group of four of the Twelve Welsh Folk Songs (H183), these unpretentious but masterly arrangements occupy a sound-world of their own, none more so than the heartrending Lisa Lan. The earlier Dream Tryst, after which the CD is named, is an affectionate piece dedicated to Adeline Vaughan Williams, but for me the two which stand out for originality are Holst's Come to me, with its unexpected discords, and Dyson's Nocturne of 1960, its mysterious opening Phrygian scale followed by unusual spare harmonic fifths.

This CD, which boasts six première recordings, does much credit to EM Records, who are fast making a mark in their field. Mr. Jaffé's notes on the music are most enlightening (a momentary confusion between Gardiners -George the folksong-collector and Balfour the composer-patron- is excusable) and whets the appetite for this gem of a CD which his sponsorship has made possible, in conjunction with the Holst Society, the Dyson Trust and Holst Foundation, Peter and Léonie Thorogood and Paul Spicer.

Alan Gibbs (Vice President)

## REVIEW – TOWARDS THE SUN RISING/ RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS REMEMBERED

Society member Stephen Connock (and Vaughan Williams Society co-founder and former chairman) has asked the Society to review a book of his recently published, which includes the reminiscences of some 85 people who knew Vaughan Williams. The book can be obtained from Albion Music Limited whose web address is [www.albionmusic.com](http://www.albionmusic.com). It is a book well worth obtaining.

It is not one of those publications that one would read from cover to cover. Dipping into the book from time to time is fascinating not only with regard to Vaughan Williams' long and busy life, but with regard to the development of British music during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

There are a number of references to Gustav Holst who was, of course, a close friend of Vaughan Williams. Each composer had a tremendous influence over the other. Vaughan Williams outlived Holst by 24 years, despite being some two years older.

### Margaret Asher (1914-2011)

Was a music teacher and oboe player. Studied at St Paul's School with Holst and at the RCM with Herbert Howells.

*Holst was awfully nice and full of ideas. I remember going to a lesson once and there was Beecham, Holst and Vaughan Williams all listening to eastern music. This is the sort of thing you learnt about at St Paul's. Holst was always physically cold. The silent practice room at St Paul's School was on the ground floor and he used to sit with a rug wrapped around him even with the central heating full on.*

### Michael Kennedy (1926-2014)

Summed up the relationship between Holst and Vaughan Williams as follows:-

*I was always aware of Gustav Holst's influence on his life. I do not think that he ever stopped missing Holst's friendship and advice. His was the only photograph in Ralph's bedroom at the end of his life. He once told Roy Douglas: "I can't tell you how much I miss Gustav".*

And went on to say:-

*It was a strange friendship between Vaughan Williams and Holst in that they were totally opposite characters. What was crucial to both of them was that they were absolutely frank and honest with each other. It was this way right at the start when they were at the RCM together. They would show each other their music and one would say "That's bloody awful" and mean it. They both trusted each other.*

### Correspondence

*In a letter from Holst to Vaughan Williams in 1903, Holst said:-*

*If you really must have lessons in London, I sometimes think that Stanford is the only man, now that he has learnt the elements of good manners towards you. But I don't want you to go to him.*

*But I believe that really the only good that will last, would be done by struggling away on your own.*

In fact, Vaughan Williams had studied under Stanford when at the Royal College of Music between 1890 and 1896. The following year, he had had lessons with Max Bruch in Berlin.

It was not until late 1907 that Vaughan Williams travelled to Paris where he had lessons from Ravel until the early part of 1908. It is widely accepted that his time with Ravel transformed his music as reflected in his next two compositions, namely *On Wenlock Edge* and later *The Wasps* (both 1909).

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## Gordon Jacob (1895-1984) composer

*One always felt, all the same, that Stanford was secretly an admirer of the work of VW and also that of Holst, though The Hymn of Jesus aroused his finest powers of vituperation.*

## Clare MacKail (1896-1975)

She became a pupil of Holst at St Paul's School. Said:-

*To see him (VW) and Gustav together at any time was a delight, but to see them together at Morley College was pure joy. They understood each other and inspired each other. One can still see them so clearly, as complete a contrast in appearance as could possibly be imagined and yet so profoundly united in heart.*

*On VW's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, Gustav planned a serenade for him. (This episode is reminiscent of Wagner's serenade for his wife Cosima, Siegfried Idyll, written for Cosima's birthday and played on the stairs of their house on Christmas day 1870. It is unlikely that this light-hearted parallel was missed by the two friends).*

*In the dusk, a small band of Morley School students gathered stealthily in the front garden of 13 Cheyne Walk (where VW lived). Under the street lamp, and conducted by Gustav, they sang a short homage, including of course some of Ralph's own songs. Almost at once, the first floor windows opened and Ralph appeared, waving to the happy company below (VW went out and collected the singers and swept them in for an improvised party).*

## Herbert Sumsion (1899-1995) organist and composer

*VW and Holst were also keen walkers and it seems to me that walking and musical composition belonged to each other by nature. Holst always carried a small music notebook on his walks and jotted down anything that he thought might subsequently be of use to him. VW may have done likewise. Imogen tells us how "On more than one occasion, he (Holst) had followed the remains of a Roman road while on his way to conduct a Three Choirs Festival rehearsal. When the track led through hedges and ditches, Holst would go through hedges and ditches after it. Hours later he would arrive at the cathedral town, battered and dishevelled and wet to the skin and would conduct his rehearsal in borrowed clothes".*

*On one occasion, it was my privilege to lend him a pair of my trousers. VW would also combine long walks with festival rehearsals, but didn't arrive looking quite so "down and out" as Holst. I well remember how on one such visit, Holst arrived at our house looking so bedraggled that he was refused admission by our zealous maid and told to wait outside until we had been summoned to verify his assurance that we were expecting him.*

## Imogen Holst (1907-1984) composer and Holst's daughter

Imogen Holst, writing about her father's serious breakdown in health in 1932, said, "When he had sunk to the very depths, he had one clear, intense and calm feeling, that of overwhelming gratitude. And the three chief reasons for gratitude were music, the Cotswolds and Ralph Vaughan Williams".

## Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

Let's give the last word to VW who, on 30<sup>th</sup> April 1935, wrote:-

*Holst was a great teacher as well as a composer. He wrote his music in the intervals of a busy life and largely on the outcome of it. The stern necessities of life forced him to be practical and prevented his vision fading into mere dreams.*

Chris Cope

## **CHICHESTER CATHEDRAL**

In the last newsletter, we published a photograph of the stone in Chichester Cathedral which marks the burial place of Holst's ashes. Vice president Michael Short writes:-

*The original stone simply bore his initials and dates, but a few years ago, the cathedral authorities decided that something more elaborate should be provided. They commissioned a sculptor and chose a text from one of Holst's works, which didn't seem very good to me. I therefore chose a phrase from the Hymn of Jesus which seemed more appropriate, namely "The Heavenly Spheres make Music for Us". Luckily, the sculptor had not yet started on the text, so he was able to engrave these new words which now appear on the stone. It was only more recently that I discovered that exactly the same phrase had been put on Imogen's gravestone in Aldeburgh churchyard.*

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## NEXT NEWSLETTER

Due to appear in early November. If any member of the Society has attended a concert featuring music by Holst, we would be delighted to publish a review in a forthcoming newsletter. If Society members hear of concerts other than those featured above, where Holst's music is due to be played, again, we would be pleased to hear from you.

