

# HOLST

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# NEWS

JUNE 2019

*Welcome to the early summer newsletter.*

## THREE CHOIRS FESTIVAL

I make no apologies for referring, again, to the host of Holst's music due to be performed at this year's Three Choirs Festival which runs from 26<sup>th</sup> July to 3<sup>rd</sup> August. The host cathedral city is Gloucester. As I mentioned in the April 2019 newsletter, there is much music by Holst to be heard at this year's Three Choirs.

John Graham, Chris Collier (co-trustees) and I will be at the Festival between Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> July and Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> August. We will be wearing our badges. If you are able to attend, do please make yourselves known to us. We look forward to seeing you there.

## THE PROMS

On a less positive note, there is nothing by Holst at this year's Proms, other than the annual performance of *The Planets*. Regrettably, English music does not feature as much as it should. To summarise:-

Malcolm Arnold – *Peterloo Overture*

Benjamin Britten – *Piano Concerto, Sacred and Profane, Violin Concerto* and *The Fugue to the Young Person's Guide*

Edward Elgar – *'Cello Concerto, Enigma Variations, The Musicmakers, Sea Pictures* and *Sospiri*

Percy Grainger – *Handel in the Strand* and *Marching Song of Democracy*

George Frideric Handel – *Jephtha, Music for the Royal Fireworks* and *Trio Sonata in G Major*

John Ireland – *The Holy Boy* and *Piano Concerto*

Henry Purcell – *Selections*

Arthur Sullivan – *Victoria* and *Merric England Suite*

Ralph Vaughan Williams – *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, Serenade to Music* and *Valiant for Truth*

William Walton – *Belshazzar's Feast* and *Where does the Uttered Music Go?*

There is no Bax, Moeran, Stanford, Tippett, Delius or Parry (apart from Jerusalem).

What is particularly surprising is that there will be no performance of any British symphony at this year's Proms.

Nevertheless, music by contemporary composers is well featured.

The Malcolm Arnold Society has analysed the performances of works by British composers at the Proms.

The top ten makes interesting reading:-

Edward Elgar 899  
Ralph Vaughan Williams 351  
Benjamin Britten 301  
William Walton 272  
Frederick Delius 266  
Gustav Holst 191  
Hubert Parry 148  
John Ireland 129  
Charles Villiers Stanford 120  
Granville Bantock 117

What is of particular interest is the previous success of certain composers, who are now almost wholly forgotten. For example, Haydn Wood and Henry Walford Davies secured 92 and 76 performances, respectively. Hamilton Harty secured 50.

The Holst Society is grateful to the Malcolm Arnold Society for allowing us to quote these useful statistics.

## BANBURY CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

As I mentioned in the last newsletter, the Banbury Chamber Orchestra gave a concert on 19<sup>th</sup> May which featured Holst's *Fugal Concerto*. The concert was sponsored by the Society.

Raymond Head (vice president) attended the concert and has penned the following review:-

The concert sponsored by the Holst Society, consisted of Sibelius' *The Tempest*, Holst's *Fugal Concerto* (1923) and Haydn's *98<sup>th</sup> Symphony*, an enterprising concert. Haydn was, of course, one of Holst's favourite composers. However, I was there for the rarely performed short (8min) *Fugal Concerto* with soloists Rachel MaCubbin (flute) and Christine Griggs (oboe). The opening neo-classical *Moderato* movement was suitably solid and well judged. The second movement with its Bachian counterpoint was very well played by both soloists. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> movement (*Allegro*) the soloists came adrift slightly but gathered themselves for the furious ending with its "if all the world were paper" counterpoint. The work does seem closer to Bartok than to any other English contemporaries as does the *St Paul's Suite* of 1912. Paul Willets was the lively and

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clear conductor for all the items and the orchestra played very well throughout.

Earlier in the year, the same orchestra and conductor performed Holst's rarely performed master piece the *Fugal Overture* with great success apparently, but I could not be there.

The BSO continues to perform Holst which began long ago under my direction when we played *The Planets*, *The Mystic Trumpeter* and *Indra*. Long may it continue.

## THE CHAPEL CHOIR, KING'S COLLEGE, STRAND, LONDON/ THE CLOUD MESSENGER

This was a concert which was given at King's College on 8<sup>th</sup> June. Shortly before the concert, the director of the Chapel Choir, Joseph Fort, wrote to me and said that he had been interested in Holst's *The Cloud Messenger* for years and had decided to make a chamber arrangement of the orchestral part in order to facilitate a performance. Fortunately, the Arts Council agreed to make a grant towards the cost of the arrangement. In due course, Delphian Records will record the new arrangement. The Society will let members know once the recording has appeared. However, the new arrangement was given a first performance at King's College on 8<sup>th</sup> June, which vice president Alan Gibbs was able to attend. His review follows.

Some years ago, after singing one of Holst's settings of Euripides most beautifully, a well-known contralto confessed to me that she found Gilbert Murray's translations too dated. Changes of fashion have not always worked in Holst's favour and a leap of faith is sometimes required for a present-day audience to appreciate his vocal music. *The Cloud Messenger* is one of the last of a series of writings from a rich Hindu heritage which inspired him to create his own texts. Here he was assisted by R W Frazer's adaptation of Kalidasa's 'great lyric love poem' (Head) in 5<sup>th</sup> century Sanskrit. In the flush of his recent marriage to Isobel, there was no doubt personal passion behind Holst's beginning his setting of this ode: we hear the banished servant of the god of wealth, pleading to a passing cloud to convey his love to the wife from whom he is separated. Archaic –even arcane- the words may be, but you have to admit that they are perfect for their simple message. Holst was very disappointed when the première which he directed at the Queen's Hall in 1913 'did not go well'. It was not helped by a choir which 'could not sing!' according to Vaughan Williams, and by the orchestra's 'overt opposition to new music' (Short).

Joseph Fort is Director of the Chapel Choir and Organist at King's College, London as well as Lecturer in Music. With a doctorate from Harvard, he will be well aware of Holst's affection for that university, which commissioned music from the composer. Yale, which awarded Holst a prestigious medal, holds the MS of this work, of which they have obligingly made an online copy available for Dr Fort, enabling him to prepare a version with reduced forces. This was used in the Alumni Concert at King's on June 8<sup>th</sup>. The listener has to accept that this cannot hope to reproduce the effect of the original orchestration with its Wagnerian array of four horns, three trumpets, three trombones and double bass trombone, double woodwind plus piccolo, cor anglais, bass clarinet and double bassoon, two harps, organ, full strings, etc. Dr Fort has cannily selected the notes that matter for a more modest assembly of single horn, trumpet and trombone, six woodwind instruments, one harp, celesta, percussion and a string quintet. The singers numbered a mere 22 instead of a large choral society, but made up for it in confidence. The climax at 'Him who holds the three Worlds in his grasp' rang out impressively. The strings were somewhat overshadowed by the other instruments, as were the rare vocal qualities of solo contralto Caitlin Goreing, but some of this could be put down to the resonant acoustic of the chapel: the recording will take place elsewhere and the engineers will no doubt make any desirable adjustments of balance.

The essence of Holst's typically imaginative scoring are preserved, the result of felicitous word-painting and mood-reflection: 'wild birds' singing the cloud's praises, its thunder and 'deep tone', causing the hills and 'lonely worker' (a sympathetic socialist touch?) to rejoice, raindrops, singing maidens... At the 'great God's' (Shiva's) 'solemn dance', there are memories of the Choral Dance in the Masque, but perhaps more a foretaste of 'Divine Grace' in the *Hymn of Jesus*. The Wagnerian use of Leitmotif distinguishes different elements in the story and their return at strategic points adds structural strength to counteract the possible longueurs in a 40-minute cantata. Particularly memorable in this respect are the 'Tarry not, O Cloud' theme and the opening bassoon 'yearning' melody. A magical effect is produced by the restatement of another as an 'Ah' vocalise in the male voices. And altogether the melody and harmony derive strength, a definite progress beyond Wagner, from the influence of Indian ragas.

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Dr Fort expresses the hope that his new version will be 'more readily available to choirs who wish to perform this work, in the hope that it can at last establish its place as an acknowledged masterpiece of 20<sup>th</sup> century English choral composition.' A fillip to this aspiration will be provided by the projected performance and launch of the recording at next year's Barnes Music Festival in March. At the King's concert, the Ode had congenial company in unaccompanied pieces by Finzi (Op 17 part-songs inspired by the beauties of nature) and again Holst (Op 12), already recorded by the Godwine Choir and reviewed in a previous Newsletter.



## LANSDOWN CASTLE

This is an operetta in two acts by Holst which, I suspect, most members of the Holst Society will not even have heard of. It was composed in 1892 when Holst was 18 years of age. The first full performance took place on 7<sup>th</sup> February 1893 at the Corn Exchange in Cheltenham. The piano accompaniment was played by the composer. Amateur performers from Cheltenham were conducted by D'Arcy de Ferrars.

Imogen Holst, in her Thematic Catalogue of her father's music, says little about the operetta which, incidentally, had the alternative name *The Sorcerer of Tewkesbury*. She did not give it an H number and it appears in the appendix.

In his biography of Holst, Michael Short describes the musical style as that of Arthur Sullivan, a composer admired by both Holst and his father. After the first performance, one critic expressed surprise at the composer's youth which "was suggestive either of unusual talent or of precocious mediocrity". However, the critic was won over by the music's ingenuity and pleasing melodies. Nevertheless, the stalwarts of Cheltenham concertgoers were not amused by one number which used a

distorted form of an Anglican chant as a magical incantation. They thought that this was going somewhat too far.

The time is the reign of King Henry VII. The action takes place in the hall of Lansdown Castle and in the sorcerer's den at Tewkesbury.

The press was largely enthusiastic. However, one reviewer said, "Since all comic operas of recent date have more or less followed the lines of the Gilbert and Sullivan collaboration, this can hardly claim to be an exception." Another writer said that the music "does great credit to the young composer, as well as gives promise of future achievements." The Gloucester Chronicle said that the music "gives proof of the possession of very great and available talent." The Echo commented, "Young Holst gives evidence not only of genius, but of careful laborious study."

After the performance, Holst's father decided that the boy was perhaps destined for a successful career as a composer and urged him to apply for a scholarship at the Royal College of Music. Holst submitted the score of Lansdown Castle, but the College was not impressed and the scholarship was refused.

(I am grateful to Michael Short for most of the above information).

The Society has no idea when Lansdown Castle was last given a performance. It may have been as long ago as the first performance on 7<sup>th</sup> February 1893. However, there is now to be another performance. This will take place on Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> September at 7pm in the Recital Room at Pate's Grammar School in Cheltenham and then at 3pm on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> September (Holst's birthday) at St Andrew's Church, Montpellier in Cheltenham.

Warwick Cole, who is a harpsichordist and 'cellist, obtained the score from the British Library some time ago and has been working on it. The operetta will be performed by pupils at the School directed by their head of music (Ellie Lane). The tenor James Gilchrist will help with the staging and directing the performance. It is significant that the work is being performed by pupils from Holst's own school.

I do hope that members of the Society who live in the Cheltenham area will be able to attend one or other of these performances.

## BARNES FESTIVAL 2019

Alan Gibbs (vice president) attended the Barnes Festival writes:-

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When the annual Barnes Music Festival was inaugurated in 2013, Holst was an obvious choice (having been a resident there for some years) for specially-featured composer. Since then he has figured somewhere in the programme most years, and after the Barnes Concert Band had performed David Curnow's arrangement of *Jupiter* last year, I suggested to their conductor Alan Goodall that one of the Suites for Military Band might be considered for this year. The First Suite was duly given a rousing performance under Alan's successor Daryle Lowden, already known to the band. This was the work which broke the mould of all-too familiar arrangements (no disrespect to David Curnow) which filled regular band programmes. A trombonist himself, Holst demonstrated in this work that wind players deserved specially-composed music of quality. Imogen suggested that this pioneering three-movement piece might have been written for the Festival at People's Palace, Mile End in 1909. In Barnes, we heard the opening stately Chaconne, a formal choice already proclaiming Holst's serious intentions, followed by the folksy Intermezzo and culminating in the unbridled joyful March finale. He would follow it up with actual folksongs in the Second Suite, which I hope Andrew Summers will consider for 2020. 'Military' indicates the use of woodwind instruments as well as brass. Holst eventually paid the medium the ultimate compliment of writing one of his finest works for it at the behest of the BBC, the Prelude and Scherzo entitled *Hammersmith* in 1930; the MS is now in the State University College of New York at Buffalo. In 1928 he had also composed a much-cherished work for 'pure' brass band without woodwind, *A Moorside Suite*, for the National Brass Band Festival.

## HOLST BIRTHDAY CONCERT

This will be performed by the Cheltenham Chamber Orchestra conducted by Timothy Carey and featuring viola soloist Ana Teresa Alves. The concert will take place at 7.30pm on Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> October. The venue is St Andrew's Church, Montpellier, Cheltenham. The programme will include Mozart's *Overture to Don Giovanni* and his Symphony No 39, together with Vaughan Williams' *Romance* from his *Serenade in A Minor*. Works by Holst will include *The Fugal Concerto*, *Song No 1 (Country Song from Two Songs without Words)* and the *Lyric Movement*.

The Society's AGM will take place that afternoon at St Andrew's Church. Timing will be at 4pm or thereabouts (confirmation to follow).

## ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

The RPO will be giving a concert of music by English composers at G Live, London Road, Guildford, Surrey, at 7.30pm on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> November. Included within the programme will be Holst's *Marching Song from Two Songs without Words*.

## STEVE GARRETT

In the last newsletter, I mentioned Steve Garrett's arrangement of *Egdon Heath* for electric guitar. Having rather enjoyed the experience of arranging *Egdon Heath* for guitar, Steve has asked for a further suggestion. I put it to him that he might like to give some thought to a guitar arrangement of *Venus* from *The Planets*. He thought this a good idea. It should be interesting to see what materialises.

## FRIENDS OF THE LONDON MOZART PLAYERS

In March, at Whitgift School in Croydon, I gave a 60-minute lecture on Holst to the Friends of the London Mozart Players. My talk included numerous musical examples. I was not particularly sure how an audience of some 60 devotees of Mozart's music would respond to a lecture on the life and times of Gustav Holst, together with his music. However, I am pleased to report that everyone seemed very enthusiastic and impressed with the music that they heard.

## RECORDINGS

### Project 1

This will be a recording of Holst's Christmas music, together with his organ music, to be recorded on the EM label.

The Godwine Choir will be recording all the Christmas music at St Jude's, Hampstead Garden Suburb, over the weekend of 13<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> July. The recording will feature instrumental and/or organ accompaniment.

Towards the end of August, at Gloucester Cathedral, Richard Brasier and Tom Bell will be recording their transcription of Holst's Scherzo. In addition, John Wright, a member of the Society and a professional organist from Cheltenham, will be recording the four voluntaries by Holst dating from the early 1890s.

The recording will be released in October.

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Costs continue to escalate. However, the Society is applying to a charitable trust for a grant. I will provide an update in the next newsletter.

The Society is though indebted to the Dean and Chapter of Gloucester Cathedral for agreeing to make the Cathedral available for purposes of this recording.

## Project 2

This was our first recording which appeared in May 2018. The CD is available on the EM label and is well worth adding to your collection.

## Project 3

This joint project with the VW Society continues to make progress. The recording is due to be released in October 2019.

The Society's financial contribution was agreed in the sum of £2,000. I am very pleased to announce that a member of the Society has underwritten this cost, entirely. The Society is most grateful.

## Project 4

This is to be a recording of Holst's music for female voices. There is no progress to report since the last newsletter.

## Project 5

This CD will be devoted to Holst's sacred music. There is nothing further to report since the last newsletter.

## Project 6

This is a project with St Paul's Girls' School. Since the last newsletter, the Society, together with the music staff at St Paul's Girls' School have agreed to include two additional works to those mentioned in the last newsletter. The CD will now feature the following:-

- H101- Masque – *The Vision of Dame Christian*
- H118A – *Playground Song*
- H118 – *St Paul's Suite*
- H190 – *Brook Green Suite*
- H146 – *Seven Choruses from the Alcestis of Euripides*

All of these works were composed for St Paul's Girls' School.

The first, second and fifth works will be world première recordings.

It is proposed that all or some of these works will be included in a gala event at the Barnes Festival in March 2021. The works will be recorded immediately thereafter.

The recording will be under the EM label.

## THE HOLST EDITION

The Society plans to publish all 43 songs for voice and piano not previously published. With regard to the cost of the project, this has been estimated at £1,500. Contributions would be gratefully received.



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Congregational, Ralph Vaughan Williams  
*Come down O love divine*

*Mass in G minor*, Ralph Vaughan Williams

Organ solo – *Postlude in C*, Gustav Holst

*Nunc Dimittis*, Gustav Holst

*Turn back O man*, Gustav Holst

Folk Song Arrangements, Gustav Holst  
*My sweetheart's like Venus*  
*I love my love*  
*I sowed the seeds of love*  
*Swansea Town*

Congregational, Gustav Holst  
*I vow to thee my country*

Choir – Cantores. Conductor – John Holloway. Organist – John Wright.

Wyck Rissington is 1.5 miles north east of Bourton-on-the-Water in the Cotswolds.

Holst was organist at the church between 1892 and 1893. The concert is part of the 750<sup>th</sup> celebrations of the building of the chancel.

## DR LINDSAY LAFFORD (1912-2014)

A distinguished organist, conductor and composer who spent much of his life in Hong Kong and the USA. I was playing Lafford's arrangement of Amazing Grace at the conclusion of the service in our church on Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> June. In the introductory notes, it is stated that Dr Lafford conducted the premières of works by Darke, Jacob, Dyson, Elgar (*Coronation Ode*) and Holst. Do any members know what the Holst work would have been and where it was performed?

## NEXT NEWSLETTER

Due to appear in early August, following the Three Choirs Festival. If members have attended any concerts featuring Holst's music, do please let me know and/or let me have a review for inclusion in the newsletter.

Chris Cope  
Chairman

[chairman@holstsociety.org](mailto:chairman@holstsociety.org)

## CONCERT THIS SATURDAY, 22<sup>ND</sup> JUNE 2019

Wyck Rissington Parish Church at 7.30pm

*Three Motets*, Charles Villiers Stanford  
*Justorum animae*  
*Coelos ascendit hodie*  
*Beati quorum via'*

*Mass in A minor*, Imogen Holst

Organ solo - *March in C major*, Gustav Holst

*Songs of farewell*, C. Hubert H. Parry  
*My soul there is a country*  
*At the round Earth's imagined corners*

Organ solo - *Allegretto pastorale*, Gustav Holst