

# HOLST

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# NEWS

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*Welcome to the early winter newsletter.*

## AGM

The Society wishes to draw members' attention to two errors which appear in the minutes of the AGM which took place on Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> October 2019. Firstly, John Wright points out that Cheltenham's twin town in Germany is Göttingen. Secondly, Paul Sarcich who has kindly assisted with transcribing a number of works for voice and piano from original manuscript, is a tutor at Morley College and not the director of music.

I apologise for these errors.

## WILLIAM G WHITTAKER 1876-1944

Dr Whittaker, a professional musician and composer who resided in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, was a lifelong friend of Holst. They corresponded extensively. Furthermore, Dr Whittaker is mentioned throughout Michael Short's biography of Holst.

Not only did Dr Whittaker lecture on Holst, but he also gave frequent performances of Holst's works including a number of premières. He was the conductor of the Newcastle-upon-Tyne Bach Choir and also the Armstrong College Choir and there is reference to Whittaker conducting the Tynemouth, Whitley and District Choral Society.

Whittaker regularly invited Holst to Newcastle and ensured that Holst was able to conduct his own music, whilst there.

In 1921, following the Three Choirs Festival, Dr Whittaker, together with Holst and Vaughan Williams, set out from Hereford on a walking tour. Whittaker took his camera. There are a number of photographs of Holst and Vaughan Williams taken by Whittaker.



Holst and Vaughan Williams, September 1921

Whittaker championed the music of Holst and must have conducted works by Holst on frequent occasions throughout his life.

For example, in 1920, Whittaker decided to give the first public performance of Holst's Two Psalms which date from 1912 (H117). The performance was arranged for 18<sup>th</sup> July 1920 and Holst was invited to Newcastle to conduct. As the performance was to take place in the open air, the organ part was re-arranged for brass band. The voices and strings were given extra support from wind instruments. The performance was part of the annual Newcastle and District Festival at St James' Park Ground in Newcastle before a crowd of 20,000. The choir numbered 800. The orchestra numbered 100 and the St Hilda Brass Band mustered 30 players. It must have been quite an occasion.

I recently discovered an article written on Dr Whittaker by his daughter Mary. She wrote as follows:-

"In 1913 Gustav Holst, Ralph Vaughan Williams and my father set out together on a walking tour in the Northumbrian Hills, knapsacks on backs, staying at wayside inns. I was seven years old, but my father told me in later years what a debt of gratitude he owed to Holst, for, on every single one of those fourteen days, this loyal and eminent friend had emphatically urged and insisted that 'Will' should somehow find time for composition. My father had for many years wished to write his own music but had felt reticent and unsure of his capabilities in this field. Holst's absolute integrity and conviction gave him the confidence he needed, and the results proved the rightness of his friend's instinct, for two Carnegie Awards followed in 1921 and 1924, besides the publication of much of his other original work."

"When he leapt into the future, the results were equally visionary in scope. It was he who, with an uncanny musical insight, saw the potential of such spirits as Holst, Bax, Howells, and Vaughan Williams and others now eminent after a period of half a century, and had the courage and sense of adventure to propagate their work in the 'Barbaric North of England'."

## THE ELGAR SOCIETY

Some news from the largest English composer society.

Meinhard Saremba has resigned as the editor of the Elgar Society Journal after just three years. The normal tenure is five years. In his editorial, Herr Saremba says that the main reason



for his resignation is that the Brexit decision was not cancelled by the UK government. He goes on to say that after almost 30 years' work, he can see no future for any further commitment for British culture in continental Europe – which was also confirmed by his experiences with British consulates, the British Council and other institutions which showed indifference towards efforts to support the appreciation and understanding of our respective cultures. Herr Saremba is going to focus on some forthcoming book projects which will not include British music. He hopes that in the distant future, he will witness Britain's return to a united Europe.

Steven Halls, a former editor, writes that he has great sympathy for Herr Saremba's position and goes on to say that "his departure is yet another example of the self-inflicted damage we British have been doing to ourselves in the last few years of divisiveness". He goes on to say that he considers that it is ironic that the Journal's first editor from Germany, a country that Elgar visited and loved, that welcomed Elgar's music and some of whose citizens nourished and supported him for much of his life, should feel he must turn his back on Britain. Mr Halls feels that we are turning our backs on him.

The Journal also makes reference to Elgar's letters to Herbert Thompson, the music and art critic of the Yorkshire Post. Thompson lived from 1856 to 1945. These letters are preserved at the University of Leeds, together with correspondence between Thompson and Parry, Stanford, Holst and others. The archive can only be inspected by appointment. If any member of the Society happens to be in Leeds, I would be most grateful if they could visit the Library and consider the Holst correspondence, which might be of interest.

Sad to report that Elgar's medals, both the Order of Merit and the Grand Knight Commander of the Victorian Order were stolen from The Firs (the Elgar museum) on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2019. It would appear that the medals were stolen to order. Nothing else was taken. The medals have not been recovered. A reward of £2,000 has been offered.

The Elgar Society has also published its accounts to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018. These showed an income of £48,452 and expenditure of £55,813. Reserves amount to £104,606.

## NORTH DEVON SINFONIA

On 20<sup>th</sup> October, the North Devon Sinfonia gave a performance of Holst's *Songs of the West* (H86).

In August 2016, the orchestra won the Best Amateur Orchestra Award hosted by the BBC. The Holst Society sponsored this concert by providing the full score and the orchestral parts.

The *Songs of the West* date from 1906/07. This followed a suggestion from Cecil Sharp that, like Vaughan Williams, Holst might try his own hand at the art of setting folk songs in an orchestral context. The *Songs of the West* were first performed on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1906 at the Pump Room in Bath. They were subsequently revised by Holst. However, they then slipped into obscurity and were never published.

More recently, the Songs have been transcribed. A full score together with parts has been created. The Society understands that the Port Sunlight Orchestra gave a performance a year or so ago. The performance by the North Devon Sinfonia is probably only the second performance since 1906.

The Songs have yet to be recorded.

## HOLST IN THE COTSWOLDS IN 1892 (Raymond Head – a vice president of the Holst Society)

Extracted from a talk given to the members of the Incorporated Society of Musicians, Oxfordshire Branch at Burford, Oxfordshire, in 2004.

Going to London from Cheltenham, which Holst sometimes did by walking to the RCM, London, in the early 1890s was a distance of over 100 miles. The journey took him through Charlton Kings to Whittington, via Bourton on the Water to Sherbourne, Burford, Minster Lovell, Witney, then smoky Oxford, High Wycombe, Beaconsfield then eventually into London.

This well trodden path was superseded in the 1920s by the new A40. Yet the old narrow road to London still exists. Even now the lane, where Holst could be found practising his trombone to the amusement of passing sheep, exists! How long this journey took him we don't know, perhaps 3 days.

The beautiful town of Burford has fine rows of 17th Century houses much admired by William Morris and Holst. Like many of the towns in the area it derived its wealth from the wool trade. On several occasions Holst would stay at the Lamb Inn (still there) during one of his walking tours. He was a great walker all his life, not for him the gentle stroll from the car to the tea room; instead he would walk miles! On one occasion in 1930 when he was 55, he walked from Oxford to Gloucester to hear the first performance of his *Choral Fantasia* in Gloucester Cathedral. Another time in 1932 he walked from Malvern to Banbury. Of course in those days there were fewer cars on the roads so he could walk in relative safety on the main roads, but he probably took secondary roads or foot paths as well.

In the 1920s when his great friend and musician William Gillies Whittaker was on a cycling tour of the Cotswolds, Holst strongly

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urged him to go through Burford as he knew its beauty would greatly appeal to him. In those days it was a small, flourishing market town. Today it is a tourist haunt but you can still see the fabulous buildings. Another of Holst's great friends, the composer and patron of music Henry Balfour Gardiner, (Sir John Eliot Gardiner's uncle), came for a cycle ride from Oxford and stayed in a house in Little Barrington, very close, and contemplated buying the vicarage. So friends were attracted to the area too. Burford was also home to the stone carving family of the Strong's, famous for carving the decorative mouldings of St Paul's Cathedral, London and many houses in the Oxfordshire area. The road that Holst, on his way to London, took him along the beautiful, sleepy River Windrush which was bounded by reeds, ash and willow trees. It was really an idyllic walk with just the odd horse and cart overtaking him.

Before we leave Burford going towards Cheltenham, I should point out that at the church, a fine Norman building, three army officers were shot in 1649. They were called The Levellers. During the civil war of the 1640s a great debate arose amongst the ranks of Cromwellians about what should happen after the end of the war. People in the ranks began to talk about the need for "Equality, liberty, democracy" and the necessity of Parliament to support the people. This did not go down well even with Cromwell who feared an insurrection as feelings were very strong. Eventually, the leaders were rounded up and three of them were shot against the wall of the church. The bullet marks can still be seen today. The beliefs of the Levellers greatly influenced both the French Revolution and the American War of Independence. And today the tragic killing of those army people is still commemorated. There is no doubt that Gustav Holst with his early background in socialism would have become aware of this tragic event in Burford.

In those days, the Cotswolds were very bleak. Cobbett in *Rural Rides* of 1823 referred to the landscape as "bleak", and people tended to avoid them. There were very few trees. But large unenclosed estates were formed here because land was cheap and in the late 19th century there was also an agricultural depression.

But unbeknownst to Holst bubbling beneath the surface, was a thriving folk music tradition which in the 1890s had just started to be uncovered by Cecil Sharp. Nearby Bledington, Idbury, Longborough and Bampton in the south all had flourishing folk traditions as did Stow on the Wold, (where Percy Grainger was to glean so many tunes) and Burford. The topographical names *Dancer's Hill* and *Fiddler's Hill* at nearby Charlbury testify to this. I doubt that Holst would have been aware of this as he was more interested in Grieg, Mendelssohn and Gilbert and Sullivan and later Wagner in 1892. But it is curious that ten years later

folk music was to dominate his life together with friendships with Cecil Sharp and Lucy Broadwood. Numerous folk song arrangements were made by Holst, not just from the Cotswolds but Somerset too in about 1906. I doubt that he would have contemplated this before. It was their simplicity and strange, modal harmonies that attracted him. This was the very opposite to Wagner's influence. Such preoccupation with simplicity was to rescue him from the power of Wagnerian domination and resulted in the chamber opera masterpiece *Savitri*.

**CLEAR AND COOL (1897) – WORLD PREMIERE PERFORMANCE AT THE PITTVILLE PUMP ROOM IN CHELTENHAM ON SATURDAY 23RD NOVEMBER 2019**

Daniel Jaffé writes:-

The Pittville Pump Room was nigh packed on Saturday 23 November for the concert held by the Charlton Kings Choral Society and the Regency Sinfonia under their conductor John Wright. The first half of the concert was devoted to Gustav Holst and involved a well-contrasted programme of works including the premiere of the early choral work *Clear and Cool* in orchestral guise.

John Wright has already done great service to Gustav Holst and admirers of that composer's music by dedicating himself to the revival and even the first performance and recording of several of Holst's earliest works. At the Holst birthday concert held last year in Cheltenham, Wright himself was the pianist at the first modern performance of several fine but as yet unpublished songs by the composer with the tenor James Gilchrist: though not in the style widely recognised as Holst's own, the rich, impassioned Romantic style of those songs was sincere and already showed a striking melodic talent. Now Wright was to conduct the first performance with orchestra of Holst's *Clear and Cool*, a setting of Charles Kingsley's poem composed by Holst while a student at London's Royal College of Music. Its sole previous performance, given on 26 March 1897 at the Athenaeum, Goldhawk Road, had been with piano accompaniment only (played by Holst's close friend Thomas Dunhill, remembered today by some violinists for the simple pieces he wrote for developing string players).

First, though, we heard a zestful account of Holst's rhythmically buoyant *Fugal Overture*, a mature work composed for full symphony orchestra in 1922. For this performance, Wright had artfully trimmed the orchestration down to the resources of the fine amateur chamber orchestra he now conducted. I can truthfully say that such was the success of this arrangement – Wright retained characteristic details such as the sleighbells – and the spirit with which the orchestra played, that I did not miss any of the original scoring; hats off to brass, and the splendid

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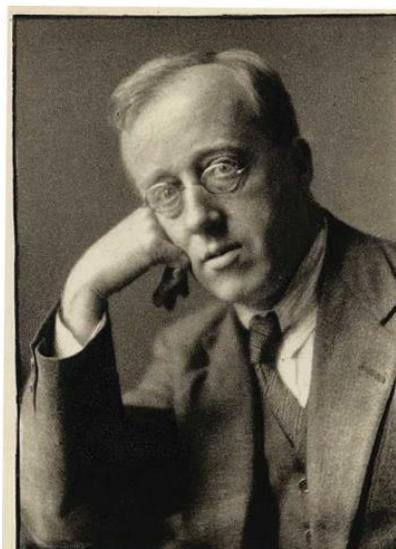
sole double bassist who at one point carried off a fugal line played solo pizzicato with great aplomb!

Then followed the 'new' work. For the opportunity of hearing this, thanks is due not only to John Wright but also to the Chairman of the Holst Society, Chris Cope, who disinterred the manuscript score from the British Library, passing it on to Wright who then transcribed from the score parts suitable for his chamber orchestra. Not having myself seen the original score, I can only report how the music struck me. The opening – starting with a high string note which heralded the gentle undulating music of the river – I found captivating, especially when solo oboe added its gleaming touch of melody with a bright Lydian touch (B natural) against the predominant F major of the orchestra. The choral setting of the opening verse, with the overlapping vocal entries, only reinforced this impression. If I say Holst more than matched the quality of the poem in this opening stretch, I'm afraid the implication is that though the music 'took flight' at this point, it appeared all too faithful to the rather pedestrian and worthy Victorian sentiment of the second verse ('Darker and darker the further I go./Baser and baser the richer I grow;/Who dare sport with the sin-defiled?/Shrink from me, turn from me, mother and child!'), though the lilt of the depicted river remained as a constant thread. But as a demonstration of how more than technically competent Holst was even in his early twenties, with even a touch of transcendent beauty when unfettered by Kingsley's verse, I was grateful for this opportunity to hear this hitherto virtually forgotten work.

But how consistently fresh, by contrast, were the Two Songs Without Words! Composed in 1906, around the time of A Somerset Rhapsody, one can hear Holst, as in that work, relishing his skill in combining two contrasting themes in counterpoint. Yet such was the simple poetry with which the opening clarinet solo was played that I forgot, for once, the opening song's indebtedness to Wagner's Siegfried Idyll, relishing instead its melodic freshness. Indeed the melodies in this, and the following 'Marching Song', are Holst's own invention rather than 'borrowed' folk themes, though clearly inspired by his work with such traditional music.

As a final treat before the interval, we had a splendidly sonorous performance of the St Paul's Suite, originally composed – and how effectively! – for the talented girl pupils of St Paul's School where Holst was head of music. I have to say that hearing this music played by excellent amateur musicians, rather than given a slick account by jaded professionals, really brings the character of the work fully alive. The 'Ostinato' second movement, which so often seems a rather pointless exercise, here appeared mesmerising as it went through all its

permutations of cross rhythms and changes of accompanying countermelodies. And the 'Intermezzo', which can sound a rather patchwork affair, was splendidly carried by the solo violinist, the effect, it occurs to me, being akin to the introverted hero in Berlioz's Harold in Italy whose ruminations are interrupted by the brigands. The whole was capped by a splendidly rousing account of the Finale, in which the Dargason is neatly combined with Greensleeves, with the excellent solo violinist rightfully given virtually the final word.



## BREAKFAST ON RADIO 3 – OCTOBER 2019

The following works were played:-

- 11<sup>th</sup> October – *Invocation to the Dawn*
- 14<sup>th</sup> October – *Brook Green Suite*
- 22<sup>nd</sup> October – *Venus from The Planets*
- 26<sup>th</sup> October – *A Fugal Concerto*
- 30<sup>th</sup> October – *Beni Mora* (as suggested by the Society)

## BREAKFAST ON RADIO 3 – NOVEMBER 2019

The following works were played:-

- 5<sup>th</sup> November – *Venus from The Planets*
- 21<sup>st</sup> November – *Jupiter from The Planets*

## SIMON HEFFER/ HINTERLAND

Professor Heffer writing in the Daily Telegraph on 26<sup>th</sup> October reviewed some recent recordings. He mentions in particular Albion's *Journey* which includes Vaughan Williams' rarities on the Albion record label. He also mentions a separate VW

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recording also on Albion Records entitled *The Song of Love* and, secondly, *Time and Space*, which was a joint recording by the VW and Holst societies of songs by VW and Holst. Of Holst, Professor Heffer says, "...almost an exact contemporary, Gustav Holst, a more precocious talent. It leaves one wondering what Holst, who died aged 59, might have achieved had he lived as long as Vaughan Williams". He lived until the age of 85. Professor Heffer is rightly enthusiastic about this new recording, which all members of the Holst Society should have in their collection. See below.

**TIME AND SPACE: SONGS BY HOLST AND VAUGHAN WILLIAMS (John Quinn, originally published by MusicWeb International)**

Holst and Vaughan Williams enjoyed a long, close and musically fruitful friendship. It's fitting, therefore, that this CD should be a collaboration between the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society and the Holst Society. Actually, it's not the first time that an Albion Records release has paired the music of these composers. An earlier disc, *Heirs and Rebels* was a programme of historic recordings; this latest album, however, consists of brand-new recordings. The CD includes many first recordings and since VW and Holst were each other's preferred critics of new pieces, it's fascinating to hear one or two examples of both of them setting the same text.

One such instance is the piece entitled *Cradle Song* by Holst and Blake's *Cradle Song* by VW. The text is from William Blake's *Songs of Innocence*. The two composers differ somewhat in their selection of stanzas but there's sufficient overlap to enable comparisons. In fact, the contrast is marked. Holst's music has an air of fresh innocence to it but might almost be described as jaunty. VW, on the other hand, provides a setting which is more in keeping with my expectations given the text; his music is gently reflective. But maybe my expectations were too one-dimensional. Holst's response to the words strike me, on reflection, as equally valid. Mary Bevan sings both items beautifully.

The other case of a comparable response comes right at the end of the programme with settings of a text by Walt Whitman which VW also used for his choral/orchestral work *Toward the Unknown Region* (1907). These were earlier settings for solo voice and piano and it seems from the booklet notes that this was an occasion when they indulged in "competitive composition". Apparently, when they came to judge the two Whitman settings, they decided VW was the winner, but I'm not so sure. VW's setting is the more direct, confident and melodically memorable of the two but Holst's effort is much more of an art song. His music is more ambitious, adventurous

and complex. Furthermore, it seems to me to be more varied in response to the words. VW later made his setting into a unison choral song; in no way could Holst's piece have been re-engineered in that fashion. These are two of the 14 recordings on the disc that Albion claim as world premiere recordings. In the case of the Vaughan Williams piece that may be true of its solo voice version but the unison choral version was included not long ago as the "filler" on Martyn Brabbins' recording of *A Sea Symphony*.

The programme includes examples of both composers as folk song arrangers. All five examples here are sung by Roderick Williams. The arrangements are skilful – and they're sung with flair by Williams. Two are particularly notable. *Bushes and Briars* has the distinction that it was the first folk song that VW collected, in 1903. His arrangement was made five years later. *The Captain's Apprentice* is a particularly choice example of a melancholy English folk song. I've heard the melody before in the context of VW's orchestral work, *Norfolk Rhapsody No 1* because it was used as the principal theme in that work. However, I've not previously heard the song itself and I must admit I was unaware that the story related therein is such a sorry tale of child abuse. I shall listen to the orchestral work with new ears from now on.

There are four sets of songs on this disc. Roderick Williams offers Holst's *Six Songs*. These date from 1902-1903 and they include three settings of lines by Thomas Hardy. Two of Holst's songs set texts that are more familiar from the work of other composers. 'Fain Would I Change That Note' was set rapturously as *Fair House of Joy* by Roger Quilter. I don't think Holst's setting is in quite the same league but his music is eager and it's very good to hear the words in the hands of a composer other than Quilter. 'The Sergeant's Song', one of the Hardy settings, is better known as 'Rollicum-rorum' in Finzi's cycle, *Earth, Air and Rain*. Holst provides a good, robust response to the poem. 'Invocation to the Dawn' is, apparently, the first setting that Holst ever made of Sanskrit verses in his own translation; the music is rapturous and confident. I also liked another Hardy setting, 'In a Wood', which is passionate and romantic. However, I couldn't help thinking that the last song in the set, 'I Will Not Let Thee Go', to words by Robert Bridges, tries rather too hard. Roderick Williams and William Vann are splendid advocates for all these songs.

Mary Bevan gives us an opportunity to hear VWs set of Housman songs, *Along the Field*. To my shame, I don't know these songs, though I understand there's been at least one previous recording. These songs are rarely heard and I suspect there are two reasons for that. One is that you require a very good violinist to commit to learning the demanding and

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important violin part. The other is that the music is spare; indeed, I'd go so far as to describe it as austere in places. In both respects, I'm reminded of the much later *Ten Blake Songs* for voice and oboe, written in 1957. In terms of the spare writing, more than once I was put in mind of the almost contemporaneous *Riders to the Sea*, which VW completed in 1927.

For *Along the Field*, VW selected poems by Housman that are less commonly set by composers: three came from 'A Shropshire Lad' (1896) and the remainder from the 1922 collection, 'Last Poems'. These songs are quite unusual, not least in that the vocal lines aren't as melodic as you might expect. The violin part is very important and acts as a fine foil to the voice part; Jack Liebeck plays superbly throughout. I was greatly taken, too, with Mary Bevan's performance. In the highly original song that gives the cycle its title she sings in a way that conveys marvellously the unspoken thoughts going through the poet's head and also words which are attributed to an aspen tree near where the poet finds himself. Her introspective account of 'The Half-Moon Westers Low' is ideally done, as is the last song, 'With Rue my Heart is Laden' where she captures the regret and melancholy in both words and music. Not all the songs are slow in tempo but even when VW writes a setting in a quicker tempo, reflection and introspection are never far away. This an intriguing set of songs and I'm delighted to have discovered them in such a fine performance.

I've already cited Rob Barnett's of an earlier recording of *Along the Field*. I only found that review after I'd completed my listening to this Albion disc and I noted with great interest the following perceptive comment about the VW cycle: "The Housman song cycle was written in 1927 then revised in 1954. It must surely have had its origins in the snowy perfection of Holst's *Four Medieval Poems* (words adapted by Helen Waddell)." I suspect Rob was referring to Holst's *Four Songs for Voice and Violin*. If so, the comparison can readily be made now for Mary Bevan sings them here, partnered once more by Jack Liebeck. The songs are indeed, as Rob describes them, "chaste and pure". According to the booklet notes, Holst's inspiration for this composition came when, in 1916, he chanced upon a young female student who was singing while simultaneously improvising on her violin. It seems that Holst's original intention was that this work would be performed by a singer who would play the violin at the same time! When you hear the songs, you'll realise how fanciful a notion that was. Thankfully, Holst quickly thought the better of it. The writing for the voice is more melodic than we find in *Along the Field*. Given the forces involved there's, perhaps inevitably, a certain sparseness of texture but I don't find the music austere in the

way that VW's settings were at times. Mary Bevan sings them most persuasively.

Holst's *Four Songs*, Op 4 come from much earlier in his career and are less exploratory in nature than the songs for voice and violin. The second of them, 'Margrete's Cradle-Song' sets some lines by Ibsen in English translation. The result is a soothing, gentle lullaby. 'Soft and Gently' takes words by Heine, again in English translation; here I like Holst's simplicity of utterance. 'Awake, my Heart', a Robert Bridges setting, is the only one of the set in a quick tempo. The music is confident but it seems to me that the setting in compound time, at a swift pace, of a fairly wordy poem makes the vocal line seem a bit too "busy". Overall, though, these are attractive songs and they're well done.

All the songs on this disc are worth getting to know. I think there's a case to be made that the album does an even greater service to Holst than to Vaughan Williams. After all, quite a number of VW's songs are well known – and over the years Albion Records have brought even more of them in from the cold. However, Holst's work in the genre represents a much less familiar side of his output. Indeed, I was astonished to learn that he wrote as many as 97 songs, but only 42 of them have been recorded – this disc has advanced that number with 10 recorded premieres. Not counting the two folksong arrangements, there are 16 Holst songs here and even now, 75 years after his death, five of these remain unpublished.

Both composers receive splendid advocacy here from Mary Bevan and Roderick Williams. The contributions of Jack Liebeck and William Vann are no less distinguished. Presentation is excellent, with the full texts provided and valuable notes. Deborah Spanton's engineering reports the voices and instruments very pleasingly in the sympathetic acoustic of Potton Hall.

This welcome disc celebrates the friendship between Vaughan Williams and Holst by shining a light on less familiar items from their respective outputs, all of which are well worth hearing, especially in these excellent performances.

**VAUGHAN WILLIAMS - THE SONG OF LOVE AND HOLST/  
VAUGHAN WILLIAMS - TIME AND SPACE (Andrew  
Achenbach, December issue of Gramophone)**

Early in his career Ralph Vaughan Williams was much taken with Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 1881 collection of 100 sonnets, *The House of Life*, setting four of them for voice and orchestra, in *Willow-Wood* (1900), and another six for voice and piano in a song-cycle most likely begun in 1903. By far the best-known number from Vaughan Williams's *The House of Life* remains the justly loved 'Silent Noon' but there's some

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glorious inspiration to be found elsewhere, not least in 'Love-Sight', 'Death in Love' (which is almost scena-like in its dramatic reach) and 'Love's Last Gift'. Until now *The House of Life* has been the sole preserve of male vocalists on disc, so a warm welcome to this Albion newcomer. Indeed, the mezzo-soprano Kitty Whately's memorably affecting and delectably articulate contribution is of superlative quality and also serves to remind us that the cycle's first performance – on December 2, 1904, at London's Bechstein (now Wigmore) Hall – was given by a contralto, Edith Clegg, with Hamilton Harty at the piano. Whately also excels in the 1897 setting of *The Willow Song* and enchanting *Three Songs from Shakespeare* (1925, not to be confused with the *Three Shakespeare Songs* for mixed chorus from 1951), whose concluding 'Orpheus with his lute' comprises an altogether more pithy affair than RVW's earlier 1903 setting.

Elsewhere, the baritone Roderick Williams is on peak form in settings of seven French and German texts composed between 1902 and 1904, and is especially responsive to the rarefied atmosphere of *Two Poems by Seumas O'Sullivan* from 1925. Williams also affords splendidly lusty treatment to *The Spanish Ladies* (1912) and has a ball with the rollicking 'Buonaparty' (1908) from Hardy's *The Dynasts* (originally destined for *Hugh the Drover*, it didn't make the final cut). Two duets from 1903 round off proceedings in charming fashion. Needless to report, William Vann's sensitive accompaniments are a constant source of pleasure. Outstandingly perceptive music-making, then, immaculately captured by producer Andrew Walton and balance engineer Deborah Spanton. John Francis's detailed and authoritative annotation is a model of its kind.

Williams and Vann likewise shine on a companion release devoted to songs by Vaughan Williams and his dear friend, Gustav Holst. To hear their artistry at its very best listen to track 22 for a lovely sequence of five folk-song arrangements from the eastern counties and Hampshire by the two composers (the subtle harmonic scope of Holst's setting of 'The Willow Tree' has much in common with George Butterworth's haunting treatment of it towards the close of *The Banks of Green Willow*). Singer and pianist prove just as responsive to Holst's Six Songs, Op 15, from 1902/03 (boasting three Hardy settings which won the poet's approval). The even earlier (1896/98) group of Four Songs, Op 4, is entrusted to soprano Mary Bevan, who lends especially bewitching advocacy to the two lullabies that open the set, 'Slumber-Song' (from Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies*) and 'Margrete's Cradle-Song' (from Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*) – the latter displaying a distinctly Griegian flavour that carries over into 'Soft and gently' (after Heine).

Utterly different again is the courageously individual and tenderly intimate aesthetic embraced by both Holst's Four Songs for voice and violin (1916/17) and its no less questing sibling, RVW's *Along the Field*, eight settings of AE Housman in all probability written around 1925 (unmistakable echoes here of *Flos campi* and *Riders to the Sea*). In both these off-the-beaten-track gems, Bevan generates a profoundly moving rapport with the admirable Jack Liebeck. Albion's stimulating programme juxtaposes the two composers' handling of texts by Whitman ('Darest thou now O soul' from 'Whispers of Heavenly Death', published in *Leaves of Grass*) and Blake ('Cradle Song' from *Songs of Innocence and Experience*); RVW's touching treatment of the latter was fashioned in 1928 for *The Oxford Book of Carols*.

This is a peach of a disc, benefiting once more from top-notch production values – and it's good to learn that the Holst Society (co-sponsor of this issue with the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society) intends to publish a volume to include no fewer than 43 songs by the composer that have languished in manuscript in the British Library.

*Time and Space* can be purchased from Albion Records – [www.rvwsociety.com/albionrecords](http://www.rvwsociety.com/albionrecords).

## NEW RECORDINGS AND OLD

### Holst's *The Cloud Messenger*

This is a new recording of *The Cloud Messenger* in chamber version given by the choir of Kings College London with the Strand Ensemble conducted by Joseph Fort. With regard to his arrangement of *The Cloud Messenger*, Joseph writes, "Two convictions lie behind this chamber arrangement of *The Cloud Messenger*. The first is simply that the piece deserves to be better known. It holds an important position in Holst's work historically as the immediate predecessor to *The Planets*. It tells a beautiful story and is richly composed – powerfully moving and finely crafted. But with its vast orchestral scoring (needing about 80 players), the original is beyond the budget of most choirs and consequently it is rarely performed."

Joseph goes on to say that he hopes that the new arrangement will create an economically viable option for choirs to sing.

His second conviction is that the work's original score is quite amenable to a chamber arrangement for single instruments. He has re-scored the piece for a 15-player chamber ensemble. However, the original harmonic and melodic skeleton of the work is entirely intact. He has not added or removed any notes.

The recording includes Holst's Five Part-songs, which were recorded last year on the EM label by the Godwine Choir.

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This particular recording on the Delphinium label is due for release on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2020. The Society has already received an advance copy. The recording is well worth obtaining.

### Come, Let Us Make Love Deathless

This is a new recording on the EM label of songs by Holst and Joseph Holbrooke. The Holst songs include all the 12 Humbert Wolff Songs from 1929, together with *The Heart Worships* (1908) and *The Epilogue: I lay these lilies* (H174A), dating from 1929. This piece was completed by Colin Matthews in 2018 and is a world premier recording.

In addition, there are 11 songs by Holbrooke, all world premier recordings.

The recording can be obtained from EM Records (EMRCD060).

### Chandos

Presently offering a discount on a number of previously issued CDs. There are quite a few CDs featuring Holst's music. For further information visit the Chandos website [www.chandos.net](http://www.chandos.net).

### FUTURE CONCERTS

#### **Thursday 12 December 2019 at 7:30pm**

St Mary at Hill, Eastcheap, London EC3R 8EE

#### **In the Bleak Midwinter**

Orlando Chamber Choir  
Lucy Goddard, Director

#### **Friday 13 December 2019 at 11:30pm**

St Wilfrid's Parish Hall, Standish, Wigan

#### **In the Bleak Midwinter**

Standish Chorale  
Peter Kwater, Conductor

#### **Friday 13 December 2019 at 7:30pm**

UhrTheaterzelt Altenburg, Germany

#### **A Dream of Christmas**

#### **Christmas Day**

Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir Altenburg Gera  
Soloists of the Thuringian Opera Studio  
Conductor, Thomas Wicklein

#### **Saturday December 14 2019 at 7:30pm**

Parish Church of St Peter and St Paul, Ash Church Road, Ash, Sevenoaks, Kent

#### **Music and Readings for Advent and Christmas**

#### **In the bleak mid-winter**

Kent Chamber Choir  
Alan Vincent, Conductor

#### **Saturday 14 December 2019 at 7:30pm**

St Mary Brookfield Church, Dartmouth Park Hill, London NW5 1SL

#### **Christmas Day**

North Camden Chorus and Orchestra  
Ian Gibson, Chorus Director

#### **Saturday 14 December 2019 at 8:00pm**

Cathédrale de Chartres, 16 Cloître Notre Dame, Chartres, Centre, 28000, France

#### **Ave Maria**

#### **Choral Hymns from the Rig Veda**

Maîtrise de Radio France  
Sofi Jeannin, Chorus Director

#### **Saturday 14 December 2019 at ?**

Stralsund, Germany

#### **Christmas Day**

Philharmonisches Orchester Vorpommern

#### **Sunday 15 December 2019 at 4:00pm**

St Marys Butts Church, 14 Castle Street, Reading, Berkshire RG1 7RD

#### **Christmas Concert**

#### **In the Bleak Midwinter**

Reading Symphony Orchestra  
Stefan Hofkes, Conductor

#### **Sunday 15 December 2019 at 4:00pm**

Maison de la radio:Auditorium, 116 Avenue du Président Kennedy, Paris, Île-de-France, 75016, France

#### **Ave Maria**

#### **Choral Hymns from the Rig Veda**

Maîtrise de Radio France  
Sofi Jeannin, Chorus Director

#### **15 December 2019 at 3:00pm**

St David's Hall, 9-11 The Hayes, Cardiff CF10 1AH

#### **The Sixteen at Christmas**

#### **This have I done for my true love**

The Sixteen  
Harry Christophers, Conductor

#### **Sunday 15 December at 2:30pm (Sold Out)**

Concert Hall, Gera, Germany

#### **A Dream of Christmas**

#### **Christmas Day**

Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir Altenburg Gera  
Soloists of the Thuringian Opera Studio  
Thomas Wicklein, Conductor

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**Monday 16 December 2019 at 7:30pm**

Cadogan Hall, 5 Sloane Terrace, London SW1X 9DQ

**The Sixteen at Christmas**

**This have I done for my true love**

The Sixteen

Harry Christophers, Conductor

**Monday 16 December 2019 at 7:30pm**

St. George's Church, Whyke, Chichester, Sussex PO19 7AD

**'Bout Bethlehem – A Christmas Celebration**

**Holst In the bleak midwinter (Arr. Gunga)**

St. Richard Singers

Noviomagus Ensemble

Sachin Gunga, Conductor

**Monday 16 December 2019 at 7:30pm**

Church of the Immaculate Conception, 114 Mount Street, London W1K 3AH

**Hymn to the Dawn, and Hymn to Vena, from Choral Hymns from the Rig Veda**

Margaret Lingas, Soprano

Rose, Isobel, Soprano

Emmett, Imogen, Soprano

Alice Habisreutinger, Contralto

Caroline Lesemann-Elliott, Contralto

Imogen Emmett, Harp

**Tuesday 17 December 2019 at 7:30pm**

Cadogan Hall, 5 Sloane Terrace, London SW1X 9DQ

**The Sixteen at Christmas**

**This have I done for my true love**

The Sixteen

Harry Christophers, Conductor

**Tuesday 17 December 2019 at 8:00pm**

St Cuthbert's Church, 50 Philbeach Gardens London SW5 9EB

**Hymn to the Dawn, and Hymn to Vena from Choral Hymns from the Rig Veda**

Margaret Lingas, Soprano

Lesemann-Elliott, Caroline, Contralto

Rose, Isobel, Soprano

Habisreutinger, Alice, Contralto

Emmett, Imogen, Harp

Charlotte Pawley, Soprano

**Wednesday 18 December 2019 at 7:30pm**

St Mark's Church, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire CV32 6DL

**In the bleak midwinter, arranged by Ola Gjeilo**

The Carice Singers

George Parris, Conductor

**Thursday 19 December 2019 at 7.45pm**

St John the Evangelist, Iffley Road, Oxford OX4 1EH

**The Sixteen at Christmas**

**This have I done for my true love**

The Sixteen

Harry Christophers, Conductor

**Friday 20 December 2019 at 7.30pm**

Saffron Hall, Audley End Road, Saffron Walden, Essex CB11 4UH

**The Sixteen at Christmas**

**Holst: This have I done for my true love, Op.34 no.1**

The Sixteen

Harry Christophers, Conductor

**Friday 20 December 2019 at 7:30pm**

Church of Our Lady and St Alphege, Oldfield Lane, Bath, Somerset BA2 3NR

**Lullay My Liking**

**This have I done for my true love**

Cappella Nova, Bath

Tony Shield, Conductor

**Saturday 21 December 2019**

Snape Maltings Concert Hall, Snape Maltings, Suffolk IP17 1SP

**The Mystic Trumpeter**

BBC Concert Orchestra

Susan Gritton, Soprano

Barry Wordsworth, Conductor

**Sunday 22 December 2019 at 7:30pm**

Concert Hall, Town Hall, Blagrove Street, Reading RG1 1QH

**The Sixteen at Christmas**

**This have I done for my true love, Op.34 no.1**

The Sixteen

Harry Christophers, Conductor

**Saturday 4 January 2020 at 7:30pm**

Christ Church, Waterloo Road, Freemantle, Southampton, Hampshire SO15 3BS

**The Perfect Fool**

Charity Symphony Orchestra

Kevin Withell, Conductor

**Friday 10 January 2020 at 6:45pm**

Shirakawa Hall, Nagoya, Aichi, Japan

**A Somerset Rhapsody**

Central Aichi Symphony Orchestra

Kosuke Tsunoda, Conductor

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**Saturday 18 January 2020 at 7:15pm**

Medina Theatre, Fairlee Road, Newport, Isle of Wight PO30 2EW

**The Perfect Fool**

Isle of Wight Symphony Orchestra  
Jonathan Butcher, Conductor

**Wednesday 22 January 2020 at 7:30pm**

City Recital Hall, 2-12 Angel Place, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

**Holst: Ave Maria; Nunc Dimittis**

Tenebrae  
Nigel Short, Director

**Monday 27 January 2020 at 7:30pm**

Royal Northern College of Music: Concert Hall, 124 Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9RD

**St Paul's Suite**

European Union Chamber Orchestra  
Eva Stegeman, Conductor

**Wednesday 29 January 2020 at 7:30pm**

Concert Hall, Town Hall, Blagrove Street, Reading RG1 1QH

**St Paul's Suite**

European Union Chamber Orchestra  
Eva Stegeman, Conductor

**Thursday 30 January 2020 at 7:30pm**

St David's Hall, Cardiff CF10 2DP

**St Paul's Suite**

European Union Chamber Orchestra  
Eva Stegeman, Conductor

**Monday 3 February 2020 at 8:00pm**

Grand Auditorium, Place de l'Europe 1, 1499 Luxembourg

**Egdon Heath**

Solistes Européens  
Christoph König, Conductor

**Tuesday 18 February 2020 at 7:30pm**

Bridgewater Hall, Lower Mosley Street, Manchester M2 3WS

**Holst: Ave Maria; Nunc Dimittis**

Tenebrae  
Nigel Short, Director

**NEXT NEWSLETTER**

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

**CHRISTMAS**

May I on behalf of the trustees of the Holst Society wish our president, vice presidents and members a happy Christmas and a prosperous, successful, healthy and holstian new year.

Chris Cope  
Chairman

12<sup>th</sup> December 2019



Canterbury, 1928

Of the 34 people depicted, interesting that 18 are looking away from the camera, including Holst.