

In 2012, as vice chairman of the Delius Society, Michael Green took on responsibility for the composer's 150th anniversary celebrations, achieving nine Proms performances, together with many new recordings and performances in the UK and abroad.

Michael's interest in Holst goes back over 50 years. Over time, he has given many illustrated presentations on Holst and his music, the most recent being a presentation to the Delius Society and another a couple of years ago to a Norfolk U3A Group.

Michael is a member of both the Holst Society and the Birthplace Museum. He is also a member of the Bliss, Gurney, Finzi, Warlock and Delius societies.

Michael has a very high regard for the music of British composers particularly those who lived during the period 1870 to 1934. Of the three great composers who died in 1934 (Elgar, Delius and Holst), Michael has no doubt that Holst was the most original and exploratory.

GUSTAV HOLST AND THE DANCE

Introduction

Throughout his life's work elements of 'the dance' occur on such a regular basis in all forms of his output that for Holst it seems often to have become a natural way of expressing himself. Holst made many excursions into the world of 'the dance', but there is no attempt here to analyse; rather, the objective is to identify the most significant examples, drawing on a range of sources.

Gustav Holst came from a musical background, there being an unbroken line of musicians in the Holst family as pianists, teachers and composers extending from his Swedish great-grandfather down to Holst's daughter who was a composer, assisted Britten with the Aldeburgh Festival and also wrote a biography of her father as well as an important critical analysis of his music. She also edited much of his music for performance and publication and conducted many of the first recordings herself.

Holst's grandfather, Gustavus Valentine von Holst settled in Cheltenham around 1832 with an English wife and taught music to the young ladies of the town. In his spare time he composed little pieces for the harp or piano and there is a rare recording of one of his most popular compositions *A Bright Morning on the Alps* for violin, flute and harp trio. When this surprisingly appeared in the 78rpm catalogue in the 1930s it naturally astonished admirers of *The Planets* who could not reconcile these two very different works under the same name and there is certainly no evidence to suggest that it provided the mature Holst with any real inspiration.

A brief biography

Holst was born in a small house in Cheltenham on 21st September 1874. He studied violin and, more successfully, the piano and had a passion for Grieg's music. He acquired a copy of Berlioz's 'Orchestration' and at the age of around thirteen he worked in secret on the setting of a poem for chorus and orchestra but was appalled when he tried it out on the piano. He failed to win a scholarship to the Royal College of Music and at the age of eighteen became organist and choirmaster at the church in Wyck Rissington in the Cotswolds, his first professional engagement.

Holst's first success as a composer was with the music for an operetta, somewhat in the style of Sullivan, called *Lansdowne Castle* which was produced in 1893 at the Corn Exchange in Cheltenham and showed such promise that his father borrowed enough money to send Gustav to the Royal College of Music where he eventually did win a scholarship. His piano playing was much curtailed from an early age by neuritis in his right hand so he supplemented his finances by playing trombone on the pier at Brighton. Some years later he was first trombone and repetiteur for the Carl Rosa Opera Company.

At the Royal College he met Vaughan Williams who became a lifelong friend, composed his first opera, and Opus 1, *The Revoke* (which was never performed), became enthusiastic about socialism, fell in love and subsequently married Isobel Harrison, a cellist, in 1901. For the next thirty-three years he held a number of teaching appointments, notably at St. Paul's School in Hammersmith, Morley College and the Royal College of Music. Never a strong man, the struggle to find time for composing between his various teaching and other commitments lead to periods of ill health, a nervous breakdown and ultimately, no doubt, contributed to his early death, in his sixtieth year, in 1934.

Holst was a man of insatiable curiosity and the broad phases of his composing career reflect this. After an early period where he succumbed, as did so many other composers, to the influence of Wagner, he became swept up in the folk song revival in around 1905 and, although never a collector, folk melodies would be a source of inspiration for the rest of his life. Concurrently he became interested in Sanskrit literature and made his own translations of texts which he periodically set to music over a twelve year period up until around 1912. During the period surrounding the war years Holst created some of his finest work; *The Planets*, *The St. Paul's Suite*, *The Hymn of Jesus*, *Ode to Death* and many smaller scale compositions, often with amateurs in mind. Later, there would be a short neo-classical period and eventually, like Frank Bridge, his music became spare and less approachable - not surprising when you read how he hated the fame which *The Planets* brought him.

Early Music

Much of Holst's early music falls into the 'chamber' category and is for various combinations of instruments. It has suffered from being uncharacteristic of his later mature compositions and from being almost entirely ignored or rejected by Imogen.

Holst. However, dance movements appear from time to time and there is an attractive minuet for oboe and String Quartet in an arrangement of his Opus 2 *Fantasiestücke*. The *Wind Quintet Op.14* of 1903, had an interesting life, having apparently vanished in 1914 and was considered lost until a draft score was discovered in 1952 in a pile of second-hand music. The full score then turned up in 1978 enabling the first performance to be given in 1982. Imogen and Colin Matthews then prepared a version for publication the following year. The music doesn't sound very much like Holst but it is pleasing and deserves to be better known. The short third movement is a *Minuet* (in canon) with *Trio* and is typical of the sort of music he was composing before he was bowled over by folk music.

Ballet Music

Although not particularly evident in some of Holst's more important works such as *The Planets*, *The Choral Fantasia*, *Ode to Death* and *Hammersmith*, elements of dance appear during all periods of his composing life and he did write a number of smaller-scale ballet scores which we should perhaps explore first. Curiously the first of these, a *Suite de Ballet Op. 10*, dating from 1899 was not written for stage performance and there is no story to follow. This is music of its time, well organized, tuneful and well orchestrated but providing few clues as to the identity of its composer at this early date. The four movements are *Danse rustique*, *Valse*, *Scene de Nuit* and *Carnival* and whilst the music is perhaps not crying out for dancers it might respond well to an interesting scenario. The finale, as someone commented, if arranged for wind band might not sound out of place at the end of a pier!

Some of his early music certainly suggests that Holst might have chosen a comfortable career as a composer of light music, but it was not to be. His next music for dancing (ballet may not strictly be the right term) was an unusual commission, in 1915, from the Japanese dancer Michio Ito who was appearing at the London Coliseum. The dancer whistled Japanese themes to Holst during the intervals in his performances and the resulting *Japanese Suite* was used to accompany a dance sequence at the same theatre in the following year. There are six movements, of which the third, *Dance of the Marionette* actually used Holst's own melody and in the fifth, *Under the Cherry Tree*, we step, for a moment into the world of *Venus* from *The Planets* which he was working on at the time. In these brief movements Holst had already progressed a long way since the *Suite de Ballet*.

A few years later Holst composed the incidental music to a play called *The Sneezing Charm*, by his friend Clifford Bax. This was performed at the Royal Court Theatre, Sloane Square in 1918 and has not been heard of since. However, this is not the full story because Holst was soon working on his comic opera *The Perfect Fool*, and adapted the music for the ballet which begins the opera. Like *The Sneezing Charm* the opera has sunk into oblivion. Holst's own libretto was a disaster and the first audiences at Covent Garden found the work far from comical and somewhat tiresome. But the ballet music has survived and has proved to be one of the composer's most original and popular works. It is danced by Spirits of Earth, Water and Fire and is brilliantly orchestrated throughout.

A short ballet called *The Magic Hour* for Morley College, and performed by the students, has also vanished without trace but another short ballet, *The Lure*, although withdrawn by the composer from his list of compositions, has achieved belated approval with a recording now available. This is mature Holst in 1921 and the orchestration, of course, is brilliant and inventive albeit with a tendency to rely on technique and be repetitive. It has the unpromising scenario of moths fluttering around a candle who scorches them when they come too close. Folia, the most beautiful of the moths appears and fails to pay homage to the candle who, filled with desire for her beauty and angry at her indifference uses all his powers to draw her towards him. *The Lure* is a short but powerful ballet which appears to have never been performed except in a concert version. Of course we must remember that the visits to London of Diaghilev and his Ballets Russes over a twenty year period up to 1929 were hugely influential and many English composers, including Bax and Elgar were inspired to write ballet music.

Holst's two final ballets, dating from 1926-7 are both choral and more substantial although each lasts for less than half an hour. They look back to the Elizabethan masque in which there was both singing and dancing and they remind us of Holst's love of the music of Weelkes and Morley and his championing of Purcell. The influence of folk music is also very apparent here.

The first of these choral ballets, *The Golden Goose*, was written for a Whitsun festival, to be performed out of doors and was dedicated to Morley College, whose students combined with his pupils from St Paul's Girls School to give the first performance on the lawns at the James Allen School in Dulwich. It is characteristic of the great quantity of music which Holst composed for amateurs to perform and shows how well Holst could adopt elements of folk song to suit his purposes. The story was adapted by Jane Joseph, a talented composer and pupil of Holst, from one of *Grimm's Fairy Tales* about a Princess who could not laugh, although Holst uses only the final part of the story. Apart from a standard orchestra and a chorus there are a great number of parts for dancers and mimers. The work is not often performed and when heard is usually in a purely orchestral version. It contains some attractive and rarely heard music.

The opening *Prelude*, with trumpet flourish, sets the scene as a banner is brought on stage announcing that the king will offer his daughter, along with half his kingdom to anyone who can make her laugh. The chorus enters and goes on to praise the 'lovely and gracious' Princess.

The Princess dances alone and then a showman enters and introduces his mummers. In the next extract they perform *The Old Woman and her Pig*. This is difficult music for children to sing and is, as Imogen points out, 'a rare instance of impractical writing'.

To continue, the mummers having failed to make the Princess laugh, the showman now produces a human organ with pipes made up of gnomes but this irritates the courtiers who turn on the showman (really a wizard) who casts a spell, putting them

to sleep. A goose is now brought on with magic glue applied to its tail feathers and a folksy violin solo introduces three young girls who dance around the goose and in turn get stuck to its tail. The music here is quite elaborately developed and leads to the arrival of hero Jack who also becomes stuck so that, in a line, they engage in the Goose dance, accompanied by thrilling orchestral effects. The court awakes and the scene in front of her makes the Princess laugh for the first time. The chorus re-enters with the moral of the story and the opening fanfares return - leading to great rejoicing, the crowning of Jack, his betrothal to the Princess and a final chorus.

Holst's second choral ballet, *The Morning of the Year*, was composed during 1926, very shortly after *The Golden Goose*, for the English Folk Dance Society and dedicated to them. Its first performance took place in the Albert Hall in March of the following year without actors or costumes and then in June at the Royal College of Music and then the New Scala Theatre, London where there were fully staged performances. The ballet has claim to be the first work to be commissioned by the BBC.

For a piece lasting barely twenty minutes *The Morning of the Year* makes extravagant demands on the forces required for performance: a large orchestra including cor anglais, double bassoon and organ pedals along with professional musicians and dancers to cope with the demanding modern musical score and complex time signatures.

The 'Morning of the Year' is the Spring equinox, as traditionally celebrated by Morris and other traditional dancers but there is no attempt to achieve the drama of *The Rite of Spring* with sacrificial dance; rather a celebration of the continuity of love as renewed every Spring. The scene is set in a forest clearing and after the preliminaries the high point comes with a series of dances.

There is an unmistakable folksy mood about much of the music in these choral ballets and we'll be looking at other folk music influences on Holst later on. Even without the prospect of a performance it is fascinating to listen to this music in the context of the more austere pieces he was composing around that time.

Choral and vocal works

Around 1899 Holst developed an interest in Sanskrit literature which was to influence his work until about 1912. Finding English versions of the literature unsatisfactory Holst enrolled at the School of Oriental Languages at the London Institution and subsequently, with one finger in the dictionary set about making his own translations. The full length opera, *Sita* was his main preoccupation for seven years up to 1906 and helped Holst to make the transition from the influence of Wagner to a more personal expression. Other main products of this period were the symphonic poem *Indra*, the exquisite chamber opera *Savitri* and numerous groups of settings for various choral forces of *Hymns from the Rig Veda*. His last Sanskrit translation, dating from 1912, was *The Cloud Messenger*. An ambitious setting for contralto solo, chorus and orchestra of a poem by the much revered Kalidasa, who flourished in the first century BC. The story is about a poet, separated from his wife,

who begs a passing cloud, moving in the direction of the Himalayas, to carry a love message to her. On its journey the cloud passes over the Ganges, presided over by Shiva, the great Lord and God of the Dance.

'Then at even the minstrels assemble, to sing the praises of the Lord.
And see! The great God himself whose tread shakes the mountains,
He descends, and begins his solemn dance.....

If the music sounds at times as if it belongs to a Hollywood epic we must remember that this was 1912 and therefore predates the music of the movies.

The Cloud Messenger seems to have suffered from a disappointing first performance (under Holst's direction) and the composer appears then to have lost interest in the work which was not revived until some fifty years after his death, in the early eighties. At around forty minutes it might be over long and at times lacking the white heat of inspiration but surely Imogen's summary that 'the work as a whole is a dismal failure' is rather severe for there are some fine passages as can be heard in the two commendable recordings of the work currently available. The 'dance element' in *The Cloud Messenger* is a comparatively short event, but dramatic as Holst responds with full orchestra, chorus and organ to '....let thy thunder rolling o'er hill-tops, echoing through caves, beat out the measure for the dancing of him who holds the three worlds in his grasp'. This looks forward to the more central and ecstatic dance in *The Hymn of Jesus*, composed five years later.

During the years following the Sanskrit period Holst produced some of his finest and most popular work including the *St Paul's Suite* in 1913 and *The Planets* in 1917. Two choral compositions, very different from each other but both dominated by 'the dance' also appeared during this period. A delightful unaccompanied motet, *This have I done for my true love*, dating from 1916, is a setting of a mediaeval Cornish poem and has a wonderful dance-like flow and timeless quality -

To-morrow shall be my dancing day
I would my true love did so chance
To see the legend of my play
To call my true love to the dance
Sing O my love
This have I done for my true love.....

The following year, 1917, Holst completed a very different work, one of his undisputed masterpieces, *The Hymn of Jesus*, although it was three years before he had the opportunity to conduct the first performance. This took place at a Philharmonic concert at the Queen's Hall and was such an overwhelming success that several musicians in the audience went behind the scenes to demand that it should be repeated - a request which was denied only because it would have made the programme too long.

In *The Hymn of Jesus* 'the dance' is now central to the work and many in that first audience were either shocked or thrilled to hear music exhibiting such an unconventional approach to a religious subject. This is a great step forward from Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius* of twenty years earlier for Holst disregards the oratorio tradition entirely. He made his own choice and, typically, (with the help of his pupils), made his own translation of texts from the Greek of words from the Apocryphal Acts of St John. This is a work of striking originality with its plainsong chanting in the prelude, great choral outbursts, then the chanting of rhythmic speech in the *Hymn*, the subtle alternation of chorus and semi-chorus, astonishing harmonic progressions and the ecstasy of the pagan dance which forms the extended final section of the work.

'Divine grace is dancing; Fain would I pipe for you
Dance ye all!.....'

For Holst it was a great honour to receive a letter from the great musical analyst, Professor Donald Tovey saying that '*The Hymn of Jesus* completely bowls me over. Your presentation of it is the poem, the whole poem and nothing but the poem.....it couldn't have been done before....and it can't be done again....if anybody doesn't like it, he doesn't like life'.

Holst's next choral work didn't meet with such adulation. In 1924 he completed his *Choral Symphony* (often misleadingly referred to as his *First Choral Symphony* because Holst had always intended to compose a *Second Choral Symphony*). In the event, only a few sketches of this latter work were completed. This was not Holst's first essay into the world of the symphony - there had been a student effort and the early *Cotswold Symphony* of twenty four years earlier, but he now produced another large-scale work which, though flawed, shows great originality. By the end of 1923, ill from over work, Holst was advised by his doctor to take a complete break from teaching, lecturing and conducting for a year and to live quietly in the country. In the luxury of this freedom, the symphony took shape. Holst had chosen poems by Keats and the work opens with a spacious 'Invocation to Pan' which leads into the soprano 'Song and melancholy' lament and in turn into a Bacchanal which has been described as 'exciting in its pagan sound'. The contrast between the tender opening and the wild dancing and revelry is striking.

.....beneath my palm trees, by the river side,
I sat a-weeping; what enamoured bride,
Cheated by shadowy wooer from the clouds
 but hides and shrouds
Beneath dark palm trees by a river side?
And as I sat, over the light blue hills
There came a noise of revellers; the hills
Into the wide stream came of purple hue -
 'Twas Bacchus and his crew!.....

Holst's songs are not very well known. Many of them are early works which only now are beginning to be discovered and recorded, but the wonderful Humbert Wolfe songs were composed in 1929, five years before his death. Although not a song cycle as such, there are twelve settings from Humbert Wolfe's *Curserly Rhymes* dealing with love, fantasy and reflection. In *Persephone*, the theme is Spring and we are swept along by the wonderful rippling piano accompaniment into the world of dance again -

Come back Persephone! As moonflake thin.
Flutes for the dancers you danced with begin.
Leave the deep hellebore the dark, the untr tranquil
For spring's pale primrose and her first jonquil.
Again they are singing (O will you not heed them?)
With none now to answer, and none to lead them.
They will grow older, till comes a day
When the last of your maidens is tired of play:
When the song as it rises faints and droops over,
And your playmates go seeking a gentler lover.
Listen, the dancers! The flutes, oh listen!
Hasten, Persephone! Persephone! Hasten!

The influence of folk music

Holst's escape from what he termed 'the good old Wagnerian bawling' of some of his early works had come about through his discovery, in around 1905, of folk song. Here he found the economy and simplicity he had been looking for and folk music would provide a recurring inspiration and influence over the rest of his life, represented in numerous sets of accompaniments, unaccompanied choral works, chamber and orchestral works, a small number of piano pieces and an opera. Although his own music would sometimes sound like authentic 'folk' he never became a mere peddler of folk tunes and progressively established his own individual and refined form of expression.

The elements of 'song' and 'dance' are of course often close relations in folk music but here we are exploring the more obvious dance elements. The earlier *Cotswold Symphony* of 1900 might have seemed a good starting point but it pre-dates Holst's discovery of folk music and contains neither discernable folk influence nor dance rhythms. It is more concerned with representing the composer's love of the Cotswold hills.

An early example of the new influence, though rarely heard, are the *Seven Scottish Airs* for strings and piano of 1907 which consists of a sequence of traditional Scottish folk songs composed apparently 'for studying purposes and 'because I had financial problems'. Attractive music nonetheless. The *Somerset Rhapsody* also dates from 1907 and was one of a number of orchestral folk-song based compositions from this period. It was composed at the suggestion of that great folk song collector, Cecil Sharp and was Holst's first real critical success. It shows him trying his hand again

at a more popular 'light music' style which he was not destined, ultimately to follow. Founded on folk songs, it reaches its climax with a confidently presented but rather heavy-footed country dance.

Other folk song influenced pieces of this period include an orchestral arrangement of *Six Morris Dance Tunes* harmonized by Cecil Sharp, *Two Songs without Words*, and *Songs of the West*. However 1912-13 saw one of Holst's most popular and successful compositions, the *St Paul's Suite* for string orchestra. It was named after the St Paul's Girls School where Holst taught for so many years and was composed for, and dedicated to, their school orchestra. The bold opening *jig* shows the influence of the Morris dance tunes he had been exploring around that time and in the final movement which, surprisingly, was composed three years before the rest of the suite, Holst drew on the final movement of his *Second Suite for Military Band*, composed a year or so earlier, where he brilliantly combines the old English dance 'The Dargason' with 'Greensleeves'.

Twenty years later and right at the end of his life, in 1933, Holst again composed a suite for his students at St Paul's Girls School - this time for their junior string orchestra - and for the last time he used elements of folk song. Although his health was failing, he was well enough to visit the school and hear the first performance in March of the following year, two months before his death. The *Brook Green Suite* has three short movements, the last of which has the title 'Dance'. This is a Jig, which incorporates a cheerful tune which Holst once heard when attending a puppet show during a stay in Sicily.

Holst's father had wanted his son to become a fine pianist but, as already noted, by the age of twenty he was suffering from sever neuritis in his right hand which was to trouble him all his life. Even holding a pen for writing music became an ordeal and practicing his student pieces became a misery. In some despair he finally gave up the piano and took up the trombone although in his twenties he played the organ in several Cotswold churches where it was feasible to combine this with his studies at the Royal College of Music.

Perhaps his neuritis was the reason why the keyboard was never prominent in Holst's compositions. There is an early and attractive, though uncharacteristic *Piano Quintet*, also the *Seven Scottish Airs for Piano and Strings* and a curious *Duo Concertante for Trombone and Organ*, as well as some fine accompaniments to his songs, notably the wonderful Humbert Wolfe settings. There is a piano duet arrangement of *The Planets* but sadly no sonata or concerto - only a handful of smaller pieces for solo piano.

The *Toccata* of 1924 is a notable exception; this is based on the Northumbrian pipe tune 'Newburn Lads' and is one of a number of ballads, songs and pipe tunes edited by his friend W G Whittaker, several of which were taken up by Holst. The history of the bagpipes goes back to the Old Testament and an early form of the instrument probably came to Britain with the Romans. There are many references to the popularity of the bagpipes in the counties of England and of pipers attached to the

courts of the monarchs. Although they steadily died out in England, and were taken up by the Scots (and the Irish), they are still popular today in Northumberland, where pipe tunes have a light and lilting character in keeping with the nature of the instrument and the folk music of the region. In Holst's delightful *Toccata* the spirit of the dance is ever present.

Holst composed little music for solo instruments and orchestra. There are two short early works; *A Song of the Night* for violin and orchestra and the *Invocation* for cello and orchestra and a late, somewhat austere, *Double Concerto* for two violins and orchestra, dating from 1929, none of which exhibit overt examples of folk dance. However the delightful *Fugal Concerto* which belongs to a brief neoclassical period around 1922 is worthy of mention. Composed for solo flute, oboe and string orchestra in three short movements lasting only around eight minutes the concerto was Holst's first composition after an accident in Reading where he fell off the rostrum while conducting. Although he appeared to recover quickly, the after effects were to trouble him for many years. Nevertheless he was soon sailing to America on board the *Aquitania* and passed some of his time scoring the new work, which was first performed at the house of President Burton of Michigan, USA, in May 1923. It was dedicated to the soloists. The final movement is ingenious; part way through Holst introduces the traditional dance tune 'If all the world were paper' whereupon he turns the movement into a double fugue.

Orchestral Works

If we consider the purely orchestral music of Holst we have already found the elements of 'dance' in *A Somerset Rhapsody*, *The Japamese Suite*, *The Fugal Concerto* and of course the *Suite de Ballet*. But there are many compositions where there is little or no evidence of 'dance'. This is true of the early *Cotswold Symphony*, *Walt Whitman Overture*, the symphonic poems *Indra* and *A Winter Idyll*, as well as *The Planets* and *A Fugal Overture*. It is also true of the works for solo instrument and orchestra. It is almost true of Holst's orchestral masterpiece and *most* personal work, *Egdon Heath*.

Egdon Heath is a late work dating from 1927 and was inspired by a sentence in Thomas Hardy's novel 'The Return of the Native' where the heath, Hardy's location for the desolate countryside east of Dorchester, is described as*a place perfectly accordant with man's nature - neither ghastly, hateful nor ugly; neither commonplace, unmeaning nor tame; but like man, slighted and enduring; and withal singularly colossal and mysterious in its swarthy monotony.* Holst visited the area with Hardy whilst composing the work but Hardy, sadly, did not live to hear it. Many will find this, along with other works of the period, to be austere, but it represents Holst's idea of beauty and there is a wonderful passage where, out of a mood of desolation the 'ghost' of a slow morris dance is heard.

Holst's *Oriental Suite*, *Beni Mora* is an altogether more cheerful work. It dates from 1909-10 and the composer was able to indulge himself in experiments in both form and orchestration, as it were, in preparation for *The Planets* four years later.

Beni Mora was a souvenir of a holiday which Holst took in Algeria in 1908. His neuritis had been so bad around this time that he was only free from pain when he put his arm a few inches from an oil stove or gas fire and perpetual overwork had reduced him to a state of nerves. He was ordered by his doctor to take a holiday in a warm climate so when a kind friend gave him some money, he decided to go to Algeria and bicycle in the desert. Despite numerous punctures he was able to write home to Isobel describing his wonderful experiences. Imogen tells us in her biography -

'Life was full of unexpected happening. His return ticket was stolen by a native. He helped to rescue an English woman who had been deserted by her French husband. He listened to an Arab musician playing the same short phrase on his flute for hour after hour. He rode through terrific storms and once, when the snow was above his knees, he carried his bicycle a considerable distance up a mountain that was five thousand feet high'

The Suite *Beni Mora* was first performed in 1912 and consists of three movements, the first two of which are titled 'dance' and in the final movement we hear the Arab's flute tune battling against an increasingly complex orchestral background. At the first performance there were some hisses from the audience which was not quite ready for some of the unusual and progressive effects and strange time signatures which the composer employs. But Holst could never be content with the mere picture painting effects of some of his contemporaries. Holst was now trying his hand at new ideas which would come to fruition three or four years later in *The Planets* and this is very evident in the last few bars of the second dance where the music is clearly feeling its way towards *Uranus*.

Opera

The ballet music in *The Perfect Fool* has already been mentioned. In a category of its own and without doubt the most unusual of Holst's folk music influenced compositions is the opera *At the Boar's Head* which he composed in 1924. Like *The Perfect Fool* the first-night audience were left in a state of bewilderment and the work must sadly be condemned as a brilliant failure. Holst took the words from the tavern scenes in Shakespeare's *Henry IV* and described the work as a 'musical interlude in one Act'. Fitting the words to traditional Morris and country-dance tunes Holst found that the opera 'wrote itself' and revelled in solving its intricate problems. But it was a perilous undertaking for both Shakespeare's words and the unaccompanied tunes were complete in themselves and bringing them together would have daunted any composer less obstinate than Holst. It is all faithfully and cleverly done with neat joins between the dance tunes but it doesn't quite work. After all, these Falstaff scenes were intended as interludes rather than to be run into each other so it all becomes too concentrated and hard work to follow - and the brilliant counterpoint is relentless.

One of the most successful passages is set in an upper room of the Boar's Head Tavern in Eastcheap where Falstaff has accused Prince Hal and Poins of cowardice for not supporting him in a highway robbery he and his men had attempted that morning. As usual he is embroidering upon his exploits until the Prince reveals that it was he and Poins who had in fact set upon Falstaff and robbed him of money he had stolen from some unarmed travellers earlier. The Hostess (Mistress Quickly) announces the arrival of a nobleman but Falstaff is all for sending him packing!

Wind Band Music

Like his great friend Vaughan Williams, Holst composed generously for military or brass band and concert wind band whose players had otherwise had to rely largely on marches and often rather dull arrangements of selections from the more popular operas and operettas. Holst's compositions included two *Suites*, a set of *Morris Dance Tunes*, *A Moorside Suite* and *Hammersmith, a Prelude and Scherzo*. *Hammersmith* and *A Moorside Suite* were late works, but the other compositions date from 1909-11 when Holst was still very much under the influence of folk song.

Suite No.1 is in three movements: Chaconne, Intermezzo and March and provided wind-band players with an original work of real stature. *Suite No.2* is founded on Hampshire folk-songs and concludes with that brilliant combination of the Dargason with Greensleeves which he later used as the finale to the *St Paul's Suite*. It opens with a March which incorporates a Morris Dance and the folk tunes 'Suite Town' and 'Cloudy Banks'. This fine toe tapping music which is also available in an orchestral version known as *The Hampshire Suite*. There is no real suggestion of 'the dance' in *Hammersmith*, which also exists in a version for orchestra.

Summary

So we have explored Holst's lifelong interest in 'the dance' through his ballet scores, his response to certain texts, the inspiration he derived from Eastern sources and the abiding influence of folk music. He was never a slave to the dance and much of his music, though rhythmically adventurous, is not overtly influenced by any traditional dance forms but he found ways of integrating the spirit of the dance into much of his music and his compositions are surely the richer for it.

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