

# HOLST

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# NEWS

AUGUST 2019

Issue No: 11

*Welcome to the late summer newsletter.*

## ENGLISH COMPOSER SOCIETIES

There are now about eleven societies promoting the music of specific English composers. By far the biggest is the Elgar Society which was established in 1951. In second place is the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society, which, this year, celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> birthday. The other nine societies which I have been able to identify are those in relation to the following composers:-

Sir Arthur Sullivan, Frederick Delius, Peter Warlock, Gerald Finzi, Havergal Brian, Sir Malcolm Arnold, Sir Arthur Bliss, Sir Charles Stanford and, of course, Gustav Holst.

I think it fair to say that all English composer societies are striving to maintain their membership. The days of a steady increase in membership, year by year, are long gone.

The latest statistics are as follows:-

Elgar Society – 1015  
VW Society – 897  
Sullivan Society – 375  
Delius Society – 287  
Warlock Society – 239  
Finzi Society – 231  
Brian Society – 230  
Arnold Society – 110  
Bliss Society – 92  
Holst Society – 88  
Stanford Society – 68

Please appreciate that the Holst Society was only established two years ago. Target membership is about 250.

One of the problems recruiting new members to any English composer society is that whereas most of those keen on classical music are very supportive, there is a general reluctance to join societies, whether English composers or of any other speciality.

Perhaps the most surprising feature of the above statistics is that there are no societies in existence to promote the music of, for example, Benjamin Britten, William Walton, Hubert Parry, Percy Grainger or John Ireland. However, there is the John Ireland Trust.

I do think that it is important that English composer societies should, wherever possible, work together in order to promote the music of their respective composers. For example, the Holst Society will be working together with the Stanford Society in order to promote the music of Holst and Stanford in 2024, which

will, that year, mark the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Holst and the centenary of the death of Stanford.

We have also made representations to the Vaughan Williams Society in relation to 2022, when the VW Society will be celebrating VW 150. The Holst Society will also promote VW 150 and similarly, in 2024, the VW Society should promote Holst 150.

We are also working with the Albion recording label (which principally records the music of Vaughan Williams). Our first joint recording will appear in October (see below). Both societies are very keen to produce further CDs of music by VW and Holst.

## EDINBURGH FESTIVAL FRINGE

Member and professional guitarist Steve Garrett was appearing at this year's Edinburgh Festival Fringe when he presented his show 'Guitar Discovery'. Included was a shortened version of Steve's arrangement of Holst's *Egdon Heath*.

## WOLVERHAMPTON YOUTH AND WIND ORCHESTRAS

The Society is delighted to hear that the Wolverhampton Youth and Wind Orchestras gave a series of concerts in Spain during July. As part of their programme, they played Holst's *Moorside Suite*.

## HOLST'S PIANO

On 8<sup>th</sup> November 1913, porters working for John Broadwood and Sons Limited trundled a large, brand-new, Broadwood grand piano into the newly-built music wing at St Paul's Girls' School in Hammersmith in London. The piano was one of the number 5 drawing room models, which had been ordered by the School for placing in a specially soundproofed teaching studio recently created for their head of music, Gustav Holst.

The serial number of the piano is 51868. The casework is of rosewood. It has a special steel 'barless' frame, a constructional feature unique to Broadwoods. The cost to the School was 225 Guineas (the equivalent of £26,520, today).

Holst used the Broadwood grand as a 'tool' to help create his greatest masterpiece, namely the *Planets Suite*.

Holst would regularly invite two of his friends on the School's music staff, Nora Day and Vally Lasker, to play to him excerpts from the *Planets* on the Broadwood grand in order to hear how the composition was progressing.

The piano was also used on a regular basis in connection with concerts. The records of Broadwoods show that their porters

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were hired to trundle the piano on at least 17 occasions between 1913 and 1938 from Holst's room to the great hall and back.

The piano is now in the ownership of Katie Smith who has agreed that it should be heard publicly, once again. As a result, Broadwoods are sponsoring a number of recitals to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first public performance of the *Planets*, including a concert which will take place on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2019 at St Paul's School. This will feature the piano duet version of the Suite. It will be remarkable to hear the music on the very same piano used by the composer when he composed the *Planets* 100 years ago.

Further details of the concert are as follows. This will take place at St Paul's Girls' School, Brook Green, London W6 7BS on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> September at 3pm. John and Fiona York will perform the piano duet version of the *Planets* with Heidi Pegler (soprano) and the Paulina Voices choir from the school.

Members may already have heard the piano at a concert given on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> June at the Lions Concert Hall at the University of York when Jakob Fichert and Mark Hutchinson performed the piano duet version of the *Planets* (dating from 1922) as part of the York Festival of Ideas.

The Society will advise members of further performances on Holst's piano which come to our attention.



Holst conducting – his statue in Cheltenham

## HOLST BIRTHPLACE MUSEUM ANNUAL BIRTHDAY CONCERT

Just to remind members once again, that the annual birthday concert will take place on Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> October 2019 at St Andrew's United Reform Church, Montpelier, Cheltenham at 7.30pm. Music by Holst will include the *Fugal Concerto*, *Songs Without Words (number 1)* and the *Lyric Movement*. There are also works by Mozart and Vaughan Williams.

Prior to the concert, the Holst Society will be holding its Annual General Meeting also at St Andrew's URC commencing at 4pm. The AGM should finish by 5pm.



Plaque by Imperial Park, Cheltenham

## DAILY TELEGRAPH TOP 100 CLASSICAL WORKS

Recently, the Telegraph published its top 100 classical works. The list was divided into different sections, such as 'Nostalgia for Childhood', 'Songs of the Sea', 'Tear-jerkers' and 'The Devil has the Best Tunes'. Unfortunately, English music did not feature well. Included were the following:-

- Britten *The Brambleberry Song* from *Gloriana*
- Benjamin Britten *Four Sea Interludes* from *Peter Grimes*
- Benjamin Britten *Malo* from *The Turn of the Screw*
- Delius *In a Summer Garden*
- Elgar *For the Fallen*
- Elgar *Where Corals Lie* from *Sea Pictures*

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- Handel *Pastoral Symphony* from *The Messiah*
- Handel *Where e'er You walk* from *Semele*
- Handel *Zadok the Priest*
- Parry *I was Glad*
- Purcell *Come Let Us Drink*
- Thomas Tallis *If Ye Love Me*

As members will see, Holst did not feature at all. Shame on the Telegraph!

## THE FOURTH YORKSHIRE ENGLISH MUSIC FESTIVAL

This will take place between 27<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> September 2019 at St Andrew's Church at Aysgarth in the Yorkshire Dales. On Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> September at 7pm, James Gear (tenor) accompanied by Andrew West or Ronald Woodley will perform a selection from Holst's *12 Humbert Wolfe Songs*. Also in the programme will be songs by Holbrooke, Lambert and Walton.

## TWO MOORS FESTIVAL

This will take place between 11<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> October 2019 at a number of venues in Devon and Somerset. On Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> October at 6pm at the Church of St Peter and St Mary Magdalene in Barnstaple, the North Devon Sinfonia will give a concert including music by von Suppé, Beethoven and Tchaikovsky. Also included in the programme will be an extremely rare performance of Holst's *Songs of the West* (H86). The piece was composed in 1906 and revised the following year. The first performance was given in India in October 1909 by the Governor's Band. The first performance of the original work for orchestra took place in December 1909 at the Excelsior Hall in Bethnall Green Road by the Oxford House Musical Association Orchestra, conducted by Holst.

The arrangement for wind band has been performed in the USA. However, the Society does not have details of the date or place of the last UK performance of either arrangement.

The Society will be sponsoring this concert.

## THE RUSSIAN STRING ORCHESTRA

This orchestra was founded in 1991. At that time, it was known as the Chamber Orchestra Kremlin. The Russian String Orchestra is in the UK this month giving a series of concerts. Included within their programme is the *St Paul's Suite for String Orchestra* by Holst. In the orchestra's publicity material, there is reference to hearing 'great works by Liszt, Grieg, Stravinsky and not forgetting dear old Gustav Holst'.

Let us hope that Russian audiences will be hearing other works by Holst, in the future.

## WYCK RISSINGTON PARISH CHURCH

The following is a review of a concert which took place on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2019 to celebrate the 750<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the consecration of the chancel at Wyck Rissington Parish Church. The concert was given by the Cantores Chamber Choir under its conductor, John Holloway. Society member John Wright was the organist.

### Holst and Wyck Rissington, A concert to celebrate the 750<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the consecration of the chancel

22<sup>nd</sup> June 2019

Choir: Cantores Chamber, under conductor John Holloway. Organist John Wright

Holst was appointed organist at Wyck Rissington Parish Church in 1892, his first-ever professional assignment. Payment £4 a year. In 1941 his daughter brought pupils and friends together at the church, to mark the passage of almost fifty years. 'It was no concert [wrote a reviewer]; no audience was invited. In fact, the little church was almost completely filled with singers and players, who played and sang because they wanted to, as Holst used to urge at Thaxted...'

On 22<sup>nd</sup> June this year, 2019, musicians gathered again at the church, filled the chancel, not the whole church, to celebrate the 750th anniversary of the consecration of the chancel, and also to celebrate the close connection between the church and the young Holst. David Verey in his book on Gloucestershire churches complains that the organ is too prominent, but given the Holst connection this mutes any criticism. It is a fine instrument.

The programme began with Stanford's Three Motets, its uplifting (the first motet takes as its text, *Justorum animae*, the souls of the righteous) mood contrasting with the two movements, both gentle and quietly sustained, from Imogen Holst's Mass in A Minor, which followed. Then a lighter touch: John Wright has edited early organ pieces by Holst and it was he who played them, and brought out their cheerful, playful, almost fairground quality. A marked contrast with the strong emotions of Parry's *Songs of Farewell*. Parry of course was director of the Royal College of Music when Holst studied there, and Stanford the inspirational professor of composition. The first half ended with the choir and audience/congregation singing *Come down O love*

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divine, to Vaughan William's celebrated tune, Down Ampney.

The second half began with Vaughan William's Mass in G minor, dating from 1921, and dedicated to his close friend, Gustav Holst. Music of such liturgical power and resonance normally belongs in larger churches but neither choir nor indeed chancel were daunted. Both rose to the challenge! The rest of the programme was dedicated to Holst's music. Another organ solo lightened the mood. His Nunc Dimittis from 1915, long lost and only rediscovered in 1974, was followed by his setting of the hymn, Turn back O man. Four folksong arrangements followed (three from his Opus 36), with contrasting moods – the wistfulness of 'I sowed the seeds of love', the redemptive quality of 'I love my love', and the exuberance of 'Swansea Town'. The concert ended with the audience standing and singing, as so many congregations before them, Cecil Spring Rice's hymn, 'I vow to thee my country', a setting of a Holst tune which has now become the property of the wide world – and a fitting piece with which to end.

*Chris Collier  
Chairman of the Trustees  
Holst Society*

## HOLST'S INDRA

Indra (H66) is a symphonic poem for orchestra composed by Holst in 1903. It is rarely played in public. However, there was a performance in Germany in early July 2019. The following is a review.

### The Gelsenkirchen Music Theatre's season ends exotically

To conclude the season, the Neue Philharmonie Westfalen (NPW) (Westphalian New Philharmonic) breaks down musical frontiers

Exciting, surprising and brilliant. That's how the NPW's 2018/19 season ended on Monday in the music theatre with the ninth symphony concert of the year. Once again, musical director Rasmus Baumann proved that a programme reaching beyond the classics like Bach, Beethoven and Brahms, can work, if musical boundaries are broken down meaningfully. The audience rewarded this encounter with 'Exotic Legends' with cheers and several minutes of applause.

The end-of-season concert combined three works which distinguish themselves through a fascination for foreign cultures: Gustav Holst's (1874-1934) tone poem 'Indra', a homage to an Indian god, Pradeep Ratnayake's (1964) 'Kuweni' about a princess from Sri Lanka and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's (1844-1908) 'Scheherazade' full of fairytales from the Arabian Nights. On the stage, a musician in a red, far-eastern robe sits down cross-legged and plays the sitar, the Indian long-necked lute. Next to Pradeep Ratnayake, the master musician from Sri Lanka, sits Ramon Jaffé, a representative of the European classical period, with his 'cello. Orient and Occident meet in virtuoso harmony.

Middle and highpoint of the evening – the four-movement work 'Kuweni' composed by soloist Ratnayake for sitar, 'cello and orchestra. How the soloists enter into a virtuoso dialogue with one another, react attentively, engage with the fascinating monologue and then, with the orchestra, weave together elements of Indian and classical music – magnificent.

Baumann on the rostrum ensures the elegant lyrical root, rhythmic theme-setting, increases in tempo and fiery accents. The encore was excellent, with the musicians celebrating in beautiful sound their reunion after eight years and the audience experiencing the solo instruments once again in dialogue. Holst's tone poem 'Indra' documents how the Briton Gustav Holst imagined the Far East in 1903 from a colonial viewpoint, using methods from the classical late romantic period to celebrate the Indian deity. The NPW lit a gloriously colourful, rhythmic, sparkling firework.

After the interval, the stage belonged to Rimsky-Korsakov's fairytale princess from the Arabian Nights. The orchestra crowned the evening with his 'Scheherazade', the different sections of the orchestra contributing exceptional virtuoso solos. A dazzling end to a season rich with performances.

*Elisabeth Höving, WAZ Gelsenkirchen, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2019 (translated from the German by Alison Gardner)*

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## OPERA FACTORY FREIBURG – HOLST FESTIVAL JULY 2019

Under its conductor, Klaus Simon (a member of the Society), South Germany was treated to a festival of music by Holst to mark Opera Factory Freiburg's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Although the Society does not normally make grants for performances outside the UK, we are making an exception on this occasion. The Society is delighted that Herr Simon and his orchestra, the Holst-Sinfonietta, has introduced a number of works by Holst to German concertgoers. The following is a review.

### India and the Inner Worlds

#### **Opera Factory Freiburg celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary with Gustav Holst's opera 'Savitri'**

In 1993, a group of Freiburg students began their involvement in small-format musical theatre with Gustav Holst's mystery 'Savitri', which sits somewhere between cult and chamber opera. The brains and driving force behind the group is still its conductor, Klaus Simon. Despite many battles with the adversities of an independent existence in the music market, the Opera Factory became a cultural force in the region. And now celebrating its jubilee in Freiburg's Pauluskirche (St Paul's Church), there were two evenings devoted to Holst.

There have been many paths to modernity. The Englishman, Holst, born in 1874, a contemporary of Arnold Schoenberg who is known for his 12-tone technique, found his own. The 'Four Songs for Voice and Violin' dating from 1917 during the First World War, appeared soon after Holst's major work, the orchestral suite, 'The Planets'. Karoline Thornhill as Siri and Kirsten Harms (violin) commenced the intimate spiritual songs in the entrance to the church and moved through the central aisle. Then in front of the altar plinth – adoration of Jesus accompanied by gentle counterpoint, double stopping and radical reduction of the accompaniment to a single sustained note on the violin. There the music is led back to its origins.

The striking linguistic picture created by poet and Heine translator, Humbert Wolfe – in 1929, Holst had set 12 texts to music for voice and piano – demands colourful sounds. Mr Simon has arranged three of these late works for his Holst-Sinfonietta. The gems are gilded with celeste and cor anglais. Now Colin Balzer moulds them with distinct tenor lyrics.

One could experience the composer at the beginning of his career with the expressively performed 'Scherzo for String Sextet' dating from 1897. The catchy melody is reminiscent of the Viennese. Before it falls into indulgence, Holst reacts with turbulence – counterpoint and conflict with tradition. The programme stated that this was the 'official world première'. Earlier performances and the recording by a Cologne ensemble obviously took place without the approval of the curator...

### **Death is here in good voice**

Holst found himself in his work with Hindi literature, studying Sanskrit, in reflection about God and the world, man and nature. Mr Simon, the conductor for the evening, has arranged five of the 'Vedic Hymns' for chamber orchestra. We heard atmospheric tone painting, with harp glissandi in 'Ushas', at sunrise. Ekkehard Abele prayed for mercy with bass baritone emphasis in 'Varuna' and characterised with precise articulation the humorous 'Song of the Frogs'. The female section of the Freiburg Chamber Choir mastered quite remarkably, in the Sunday concert discussed here, the intonational challenge of the choral hymns. Mr Simon has adapted three of the existing Rig Veda settings for choir and orchestra, for chamber ensemble. Chamber choir leader, Lukas Grimm, took on percussion duties during the 'Agni' fire dance. Savitri (composed in 1908), Holst's key work from his Indian phase, followed after a lengthy set change.

In the middle of the space, bare branches rise up from white blocks. The instrumentalists of the Holst-Sinfonietta are positioned sideways. The audience is in front of and behind the performance, with conductor Mr Simon on the altar plinth. Siri (Karoline Thornhill) gave the clever Savitri's lament a warm, intense, dark richness, with tenor Colin Balzer opposite her in the role of husband. Inner worlds become intimate theatre. Ekkehard Abele, who also played this role 26 years ago, at the inception of the Opera Factory (then known as the Young Opera Company), traversed the space with a strong voice, as Death, relentless yet outsmarted by Savitri. The wordless part sung by the female voices of the chamber choir rang out from the gallery like a message from distant, archaic worlds. And the pillars of the Pauluskirche lit up, golden.

*Christine Adam, Badische Zeitung, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2019  
(translated from the German)*

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## FIRST PERFORMANCE IN OVER 120 YEARS

On 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2019, the Charlton Kings Choral Society will give a concert, which will include Holst's *Fugal Overture*, the *Two Songs Without Words*, the *St Paul's Suite* and a choral work entitled *Clear and Cool*. The latter has neither been published, nor recorded. In fact, the last performance of this early work (dating from 1897) appears to have taken place on 26<sup>th</sup> March of that year at the Athenæum in Goldhawk Road, Shepherds Bush. The Hammersmith Socialist Choir, with piano accompaniment, was conducted by the composer. Since then, the music has languished at the British Library. The Society secured a copy of the original manuscript, which has now been transcribed by John Wright, a member of the Society. John will be conducting the concert, which will take place in Cheltenham (venue to follow in the next newsletter).

So here is a rare opportunity to hear a work by Holst which has not been performed for 122 years.

The Society hopes that, in due course, the work will be recorded.

## TWO SONGS WITHOUT WORDS

The Society has secured the full score, together with the orchestral parts. These are available for hire. On 12<sup>th</sup> October, the Haslemere Musical Society will be giving a performance of the *Two Songs Without Words*. We have lent the full score and the orchestral parts to the Society, without charge. After the concert, the music will be returned to the Society and will then be loaned to the Charlton Kings Choral Society for their concert on 23<sup>rd</sup> November.

The Society intends to build up a library of orchestral full scores and parts, so that these can be lent out to amateur orchestras. Initially, upon enquiry, we would lend the full score to the conductor. If he/she is interested in the music, we would then hire the orchestral parts from the publishers, at the Society's expense. The full score and the parts are then lent to the orchestra. All that we would require is that the Society is acknowledged in the programme, in respect of the loan of the music, together with details of the Society itself.

This way, I hope that more of Holst's neglected orchestral music can come to the attention not only of orchestras, but also the general public.

## THREE CHOIRS FESTIVAL

As mentioned in the previous newsletter, the Three Choirs Festival which this year took place at Gloucester at the end of July and the beginning of August included a number of works

by Holst. I think that the concert which featured Holst's music which impressed me the most was the late-night concert on Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> August in the quire of Gloucester Cathedral, when the Oriel Singers under their conductor Ben Sawyer gave a performance of Holst's *Choral Hymns from the Rig Veda, Group 3*. The harp soloist was Catherine White who was quite superb, as was the choir. Afterwards, a number of people expressed astonishment, at hearing the music for the first time, that the composer was Holst.



Holst and Vaughan Williams – resting during a walking holiday in the Malvern Hills following the Three Choirs Festival – September 1921

## RECORDINGS

Our joint recording with the Vaughan Williams Society on the Albion record has now been released. It is entitled *Time and Space* and includes songs for voice and piano by Holst and Vaughan Williams. The recording includes Holst's *Six Songs* (H68), the *Cradle Song* from *Six Songs* (H69), the *Four Songs* (H14), *Folk Songs from the Eastern Counties and Hampshire* including H83/1 and H83/6, the *Four Songs for Voice and Violin* (H132) and *Darest Thou Now O Soul* (H72). For a CD to feature no less than 18 songs by Holst is clearly a treat. What is even more special about the recording is that 11 of these songs are world premières. The soloists are Mary Bevan (soprano), Roderick Williams (baritone), Jack Liebeck (violin) with William Vann at the piano.

The recording will be available for purchase in early October. Members of the Society will be hearing directly from John Francis, who runs the Albion record label and who is a vice president of the Vaughan Williams Society.

I am also pleased to report that we are making good progress with regard to the Christmas CD. All the choral music has now

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been recorded. This took place at St Jude's Hampstead Garden Suburb in July. The music was sung by the Godwine Choir.

The CD will also feature all of Holst's organ music and will include the four voluntaries, dating from 1892, when Holst was just 18 years of age. These will be recorded by John Wright.

Holst's last work was a *Scherzo* for orchestra, which he had planned to be a movement of a four-movement symphony. Unfortunately, he never completed the symphony and the only music that survives is the *Scherzo*. He died shortly afterwards.

Richard Brasier, a very talented young organist, has transcribed the *Scherzo* for organ for four hands. He and his colleague Tom Bell will be recording the *Scherzo* at the same time as John Wright will be recording the four early voluntaries. Hereford Cathedral has been booked for Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> August, when the recordings will take place. The organ at Hereford is a particularly fine instrument. The *Scherzo* arrangement requires a four-manual organ. Hereford has an excellent example.

## SOUTH MOLTON TOWN BAND

I live in North Devon. Our local town is South Molton. We have a very talented local brass band which, this year, has qualified for the Brass Band Championship finals. The qualifying piece was a movement from Holst's *Moorside Suite*. The band will be incurring some fairly substantial expenses in connection with getting to Cheltenham for the final. The Society has made a modest grant.

I hope that the band will be persuaded to play more Holst, in due course, thereby bringing Holst's music for band to the attention of the North Devon public.

## LANSDOWN CASTLE (OR THE SORCERER OF TEWKESBURY)

Some details of rare performances of a work by Holst from 1893:

A tale of magic, spells and sorcery! A revival of Holst's early comic opera, performed by musicians from Pate's Grammar School.

Music direction Ellis Lane; Accompaniment Warwick Cole

19<sup>th</sup> September at 7pm, Recital Room, Pates Grammar School, Cheltenham GL51 0HG.

21<sup>st</sup> September at 3pm, St Andrew's Church, Montpelier, Cheltenham GL50 1SP.

Admission free with retiring collection.

## REVIEWS

If you attend any concerts featuring Holst's music, do please send me your review for publication in the next newsletter.

## NEXT NEWSLETTER

The next newsletter is due in early October. However, it will not appear until after the Holst Birthplace Museum concert, which will be the same day as the AGM. Formal notice of the AGM will follow separately. Do, though, please make a note in your diaries in connection not only with the AGM, but also the evening concert. St Andrew's United Reform Church, Montpelier, Cheltenham, Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> October.



Chris Cope  
Chairman

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