

HOLST

THE
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NEWS

NOVEMBER 2018

Welcome to the latest newsletter of the Holst Society. There is much to report, which I hope you will find of interest.

Annual General Meeting

The first AGM of the Society was held on Saturday 29th September 2018 in the Montpellier Room, St Andrew's URC in Cheltenham. There were eight members of the Society in attendance. I presented the management committee's report. David Young presented his treasurer's report. Chris Collier presented the trustees' report.

The management committee was re-appointed comprising myself as chairman, David Young as honorary treasurer and John Graham.

The trustees will continue in office as they do not need to be re-appointed until the second AGM.

An issue was raised concerning when membership would lapse in the event that the annual subscription had not been paid. It was agreed that members should receive notification that their membership was about to lapse and that the operative date should be 31st October.

If any member of the Society would like a copy of the chairman's, the treasurer's or the trustees' report, would they please let me know.

Charity Commission

The annual return and trustees' annual report were submitted to the Charity Commission on 29th October 2018.

Holst Birthday Concert

The annual Holst Birthday Concert took place at St Andrew's URC on the evening of 29th September, given by the Cheltenham Choral Society under its conductor Ian Higginson. The choir was accompanied by Alison Howell.

The programme included the following music by Holst:-

- *Turn Back O Man* from *Three Festival Choruses*
- *Let all mortal flesh keep silence*, also from *Three Festival Choruses*
- Six Songs namely *Invocation to the Dawn* H68/1, *Fain would I change that note* H68/2, *In a wood* H68/4, *I will not let thee go* H68/6, *A Vigil of Pentecost* H123 and *Awake my heart* H14/4
- *A Short Festival Te Deum*

Music by Mozart, Bach, Tallis, R O Morris, Vaughan Williams and Charles Wood was also performed.

We were most fortunate to have, as soloist, the international tenor James Gilchrist, who lives in Cheltenham, accompanied by John Wright, a member of the Holst Society and also a well-known musician in Cheltenham.

The Six Songs by Holst were a revelation. They were also almost certainly world première performances.

All six songs had been transcribed by John Wright from the original manuscript which the Society had extracted from the British Library. The Society is most grateful to John for all his hard work.

These songs will shortly be recorded on the Albion label in a joint project between the Vaughan Williams and Holst societies to record music for voice and piano by Vaughan Williams and Holst.

Concert this Saturday 10th November

Just to remind members that there is a concert at Tatsfield Village Hall TN16 2AG (Biggin Hill in Kent) this Saturday 10th November at 7.30pm when the North Downs Sinfonia will be playing Holst's *Suite de Ballet*. This is a concert sponsored by the Holst Society, in that we have loaned the orchestra the music for performance.

The rest of the programme includes music by Vaughan Williams, Butterworth, Coates and Elgar.

The Planets

Although the Society does not know the precise number, there must have been a substantial number of performances of *The Planets* this autumn, coinciding with the centenary of the first public performance in September 1918.

The centenary happened to be on 29th September, which coincided with the AGM and the Holst Birthday Concert in Cheltenham. For those who were able to attend the Barbican, that evening, there was a celebratory performance of *The Planets* introduced by Professor Brian Cox. A sketch of Professor Cox by Ronald Stein is featured below.

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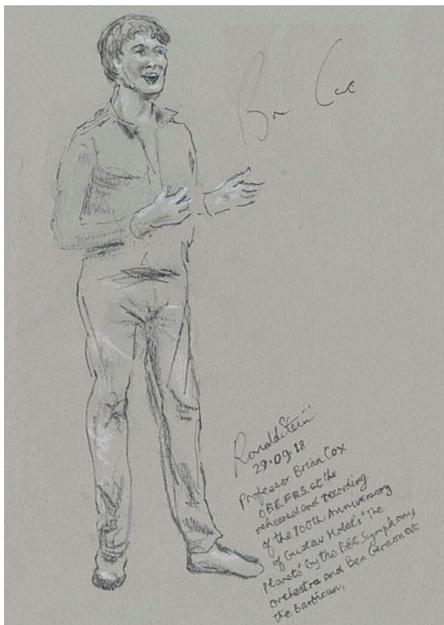
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Meanwhile, in Ely Cathedral, the Ely Sinfonia gave a performance of *The Planets*, together with Holst's *Cotswold Symphony*.

In addition, Imperial College London is giving *The Planets* a modern makeover.

Visit website at <http://www.imperial.ac.uk/news/188310/music-science-collide-holsts-the-planets/>.

On 13th October, vice president Alan Gibbs attended a performance of *The Planets* at Thaxted (where Holst was organist for a time). Alan writes:-

Thaxted's tribute to *The Planets* on October 13th began on high notes even before the music was heard. The printed programme contained a revealing Foreword by Sir John Eliot Gardiner, Balfour's great nephew; and Baroness (Jenny) McIntosh gave a spoken introduction, a no less affectionate testimony by a former resident in high office, discerning two important related themes: Music and Friendship. If this sounds like Elgar's *Enigma Variations*, no matter, although the focus was on Holst's masterpiece a century after its private première sponsored by Balfour Gardiner in the Queen's Hall. Holst's friends were, if not 'pictured within' like Elgar's, nonetheless represented in the concert by Vaughan Williams (in his *Lark Ascending*) and Balfour (in his *Overture to a Comedy*). The other personality involved from the past was Thaxted's wonderful church, full to capacity –people were turned away-

and surviving, unlike the Queen's Hall which succumbed to a Nazi bomb in 1941. Balfour's generosity extended to paying for repairs to the church roof, and RVW figured in living memory when he joined with Gustav at choir rehearsal, one conducting and the other playing the organ. He was very complimentary about what his friend was accomplishing in the Thaxted festivals, and when the English Hymnal, which he edited, was published, it was put to good use at the church.

The concert began with a rollicking performance of the Balfour overture from the Saffron Walden Symphony Orchestra under Richard Hull, built around two hummable melodies and imaginatively orchestrated –an ideal opener. The Vaughan Williams romance, like the Holst first heard in its orchestral version under Boult, may be similarly familiar but cannot be done to death, and had a superb soloist in Jake Walker. It is hard to believe he is primarily a violist as a professional, but he is known locally as the violinist for the Thaxted Morris dancers. On this occasion something more expressive and atmospheric in turns was called for, and he supplied it faultlessly. *The Planets* began with a bang, *Mars* the Bringer of War imposing himself mercilessly on the cathedral-like acoustic. I fancy Holst would have respected, for once, the relatively measured tempo which took into account the younger players in the orchestra, something he knew all about. If *Venus* suffered from some uncertain breathing and intonation, *Mercury* atoned with its *moto perpetuo* excitement and nicely-tuned triads. *Jupiter* was comfortably jubilant and *Saturn* (Holst's favourite) and *Uranus* well-controlled. *Neptune* is a special case: Boult was so nervous of the effect of its clashing chords, more advanced than anything audiences had heard from a British composer at the time, that he held it back from public performance, Albert Coates eventually risking it in November 1920. The players on this occasion gave a reasonably good account of it: the melodic strains could sometimes have imposed themselves more clearly against the mixed harmonies, but the required sense of Mystery was well maintained, and finally crowned by heavenly sounds from members of Saffron Walden Choral Society and the Granta Chorale.

Alan Gibbs

And finally on the subject of *The Planets*, the Society has received a communication from Thomas Wheeler, a student at Arizona State University, who is sitting his master's degree in guitar. Thomas has embarked upon an unusual project to play all movements of *The Planets Suite* on guitar. He has been working on this solo guitar arrangement for over a year and, to date, has completed and premièred *Mars*, *Venus* and *Saturn*. Thomas has asked the Society to sponsor him "along this

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journey". However, we have declined but have wished Thomas every success in his unique venture.

Yorkshire and Humberside Brass Band Association

No less than 18 bands assembled in Dewsbury on Sunday 4th November to participate in the annual contest held in the Town Hall. Music played included Holst's *Suite in E Flat*.

Holst in Germany

Holst's Psalm 148 will be performed at two concerts in May 2019. On Saturday 18th May 2019 at 7pm at the Johanneskirche in Sindelfingen and on Sunday 19th May, also at 7pm at the Marienkirche in Reutlingen.

If any member of the Holst Society happens to be in Germany that weekend, hopefully they could attend the concert and provide me with a review.

New recordings

Chandos is continuing its series of orchestral works by Holst, which was inaugurated, some years ago, by the late Richard Hickox. Sir Andrew Davis has taken over as conductor. Orchestral Works Volume 4 (CHSA 5192) appeared in October 2018. The BBC Philharmonic plays the following:-

- *A winter idyll*
- *The Cotswold Symphony*
- *Invocation*
- *A Moorside Suite*
- *Indra*
- *Scherzo*

The recording of the *Moorside Suite* is the 1932 arrangement for string orchestra.

Under the SOMM recording label (SOMM CD0187), the Chapel Choir of the Royal Hospital Chelsea have recently produced a CD "In Remembrance" including music by Ireland, Parry, Guest, Elgar, Harris, Stanford, Fauré and Holst. The two works by Holst are *I vow to thee my country* and *The Ode to Death*. What is particularly interesting about this recording is that this is a world première of the *Ode to Death* in a new transcription for choir and organ by Iain Farrington. This is a superb recording of the Ode. Indeed, overall, it is an excellent CD, which the Society would recommend to its members.

Hopefully, the transcription of the Ode will ensure that this excellent work by Holst receives far more performances than it has achieved in the past. The Society hopes that the Ode with

organ transcription, will feature at Remembrance services in cathedrals throughout the UK in the future.

The recording also includes the Fauré Requiem as transcribed for chorus and organ by Iain Farrington. This too is a first.

Project 1

I am very pleased to report that we are nearing the completion of our first project, namely to transcribe from original manuscript, Holst's songs for voice and piano. One song has yet to be transcribed. The manuscript is awaited. Another song at the British Library is incomplete. The *Nine Folk Songs* (H84) are said to be in a private collection. However, it may be that these are also in the collection of the Holst Foundation. In any event, we recently received a copy of one of these songs. We will advise further. Fifty-three have been published and 34 have now been transcribed from the original manuscript. With regard to those 34, the Society hopes to publish those songs, next year. Hopefully, some of the songs will be recorded. The Society is equally keen to ensure that the songs are performed. In that regard, we would like to produce the published volume of songs to professors of music at all the leading music colleges in the UK.

Project 2

Now that project 1 is virtually complete, I am moving on to project 2, which is to put together a collection of all 77 partsongs composed by Holst (a cappella). Fortunately, most of these have been published. However, there are a number which remain in original manuscript and the Society is in the process of obtaining the original manuscript music and arranging for the same to be transcribed. Again, we aim to arrange performances and recordings.

Holst Society recordings

It was originally planned that we would be producing our second CD, late this autumn, of Christmas music by Holst, together with most if not all of his sacred music. Combined, the music lasts about 80 minutes, which is approximately the length of one CD. It had been hoped that this recording would be made by the City of London Choir under its conductor Hilary Davan Wetton. Unfortunately, the Choir cannot now make a commitment with regard to the proposed recording. We have approached the Godwine Choir who produced our first CD, *Dream Tryst*. I will shortly be meeting with the conductor of the Godwine Choir and I will keep you informed.

With regard to the recording with the Vaughan Williams Society on the Albion label, this will be a boxset of two CDs. One CD will be devoted solely to works by Vaughan Williams for voice

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and piano. The second CD will be shared between VW and Holst. The Holst works for inclusion are the following:

- *Four songs for voice and violin* H132
- *Cradle Song* H69
- *Four Songs* H14
- *Six Songs* H68
- *Darest Thou Now O Soul* H72
- *The Willow Tree* H83/6
- *Abroad as I was walking* H83/1

This will include no less than nine world première recordings.

We have an impressive line-up of soloists including Roderick Williams, Kitty Whately, Mary Bevan and Will Vann at the piano, with Thomas Gould on violin.

Recording sessions will take place at the end of November at Potten Hall in Suffolk.

We will advise members as soon as the CD has been released.

And finally... project 3

The Society is very keen to encourage good amateur orchestras to perform orchestral works by Holst, other than *The Planets*. One of the problems is that a number of works are too short to be performed on their own. It does not make commercial sense for an orchestra to hire music, rehearse and then give a performance of a work lasting say six minutes.

What the Society is proposing to do is to suggest a grouping of works, which could be performed together in a concert performance.

Group 1 would include *Two Songs Without Words* (H88) and the *Somerset Rhapsody* (H87), which date from 1906/07. Together, they last 17 minutes.

Group 2 would include *The Lure* (H149) and *The Fugal Overture* (H151), which date from 1921/22. Together, they last 14 minutes.

Group 3 includes *Capriccio* (H185) and *Scherzo* (from the unfinished symphony – H192) which date from 1932 to 1934 and last, together, some 12 minutes.

Group 4 comprises the *First Suite* (H105) and the *Second Suite (Hampshire)* (H106) as transcribed for orchestra by Gordon Jacob. These pieces date from 1909 to 1911 and, together, last 21 minutes.

Other works to be offered to amateur orchestras will include:-

- *Hammersmith* (H178 – 1930 – 14 minutes)
- *Beni Mora* (H107 – 1909 – 15 minutes)
- *Suite de Ballet* (H43 – 1899 [revised 1912] – 20 minutes)
- *The Perfect Fool* (H150 – 1920 – 11 minutes)
- *Egdon Heath* (H172 – 1927 – 15 minutes)
- *Moorside Suite* (arranged Gordon Jacob – H173 – 1928 – 15 minutes)

We are presently acquiring the full scores in respect of these 14 works. A copy will then be sent to the conductor of good amateur orchestras which have expressed interest in Holst's music. If the conductor decides to include the work in a forthcoming concert, the Society will hire the music (at its own expense) which will then be provided to the orchestra for rehearsal and performance. That way we bring music by Holst to the attention of the public, the orchestra learns a new work by Holst, the publishers benefit from the hire fee and we get publicity. Everyone benefits!

This is a long-term project. Again, we will keep members informed of developments.

Chris Cope
Chairman
8th November 2018



Holst in Salonika with other officers