

7-10 December
Sydney Opera House

HOLST'S THE PLANETS & BRITTEN



Presenting Partner



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«SYDNEY»
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SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

PATRON **Her Excellency The Honourable Margaret Beazley** AC KC

Founded in 1932 by the Australian Broadcasting Commission, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra has evolved into one of the world’s finest orchestras as Sydney has become one of the world’s great cities. Resident at the iconic Sydney Opera House, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra also performs in venues throughout Sydney and regional New South Wales, and international tours to Europe, Asia and the USA have earned the Orchestra worldwide recognition for artistic excellence.

The Orchestra’s first chief conductor was Sir Eugene Goossens, appointed in 1947; he was followed by Nicolai Malko, Dean Dixon, Moshe Atzmon, Willem van Otterloo, Louis Frémaux, Sir Charles Mackerras, Zdeněk Mácal, Stuart Challender, Edo de Waart and Gianluigi Gelmetti. Vladimir Ashkenazy was Principal Conductor from 2009 to 2013, followed by David Robertson as Chief Conductor from 2014 to 2019. Australia-born Simone Young commences her role as Chief Conductor in 2022, a year in which the Orchestra makes its return to a renewed Sydney Opera House Concert Hall.

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra’s concerts encompass masterpieces from the classical repertoire, music by some of the finest living composers, and collaborations with guest artists from all genres, reflecting the Orchestra’s versatility and diverse appeal. Its award-winning education program is central to its commitment to the future of live symphonic music, and the Orchestra promotes the work of Australian composers through performances, recordings and its commissioning program.

Simone Young

Chief Conductor

Donald Runnicles

Principal Guest

Conductor

Vladimir Ashkenazy

Conductor Laureate

Andrew Haveron

Concertmaster

Chair supported by

Vicki Olsson

FIRST VIOLINS

Harry Bennetts

Associate

Concertmaster

Sun Yi

Associate

Concertmaster

Lerida Delbridge

Assistant

Concertmaster

Jennifer Booth

Brielle Clapson

Sophie Cole

Claire Herrick

Georges Lentz

Emily Long

Alexandra Mitchell

Alexander Norton

Anna Skálová

Cristina Vaszilcsin*

Léone Ziegler

Amanda Chen†

Seroan Danis*

Andrew Haveron

Concertmaster

Fiona Ziegler

Assistant

Concertmaster

Nicola Lewis

SECOND VIOLINS

Marina Marsden

Principal

Emma Jezek

Assistant Principal

Victoria Bihun

Rebecca Gill

Shuti Huang

Wendy Kong

Benjamin Li

Nicole Masters

Maja Verunica

Riikka Sintonen*

Benjamin Tjoo*

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Kirsty Hilton

Principal

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Associate Principal

Alice Bartsch

Emma Hayes

Monique Irik

Tim Yu*

VIOLAS

Richard Waters*

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Tobias Breider

Principal

Anne-Louise

Comerford

Associate Principal

Justin Williams

Assistant Principal

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Graham Hennings

Stuart Johnson

Justine Marsden

Felicity Tsai

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Rosemary Curtin

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Timothy Nankervis

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Adrian Wallis

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Jaen Pallandi

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Ian Wildsmith*

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Rachel Silver

Abbey Edlin*

Eve McEwen*

Lee Wadenpuhl†

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Principal 3rd Horn

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Nick Byrne

Christopher Harris

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Scott Kinmont

Associate Principal

TUBA

Edwin Diefes*

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Principal

TIMPANI

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Phillip South†

HARP

Julie Raines*

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Melina van Leeuwen*

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David Drury*

Guest Principal Organ

Bold = Principal

Italics = Associate

Principal

* = Guest Musician

= Contract Musician

† = Sydney Symphony

Fellow

Grey = Permanent

Member of the Sydney

Symphony Orchestra

not appearing in

this concert

MASTERS SERIES

Wednesday 7 December,
8pm
Friday 9 December, 8pm
Saturday 10 December, 8pm
Concert Hall,
Sydney Opera House

HOLST'S *THE PLANETS* & BRITTEN

BRITISH BOLDNESS

JAMES JUDD conductor
ANDREW HAVERON violin
LADIES OF SYDNEY PHILHARMONIA CHOIRS
ELIZABETH SCOTT chorus master

PAUL STANHOPE (born 1969)

*Ocean Planet**

- i. *Ice Shelf* –
- ii. *Wave Energy* –
- iii. *Calm Seas* –
- iv. *Strange Creatures* –
- v. *Incursion* –
- vi. *Collapse/Reflection* –
- vii. *Rising*

BENJAMIN BRITTEN (1913–1976)

Violin Concerto, Op.15

- i. *Moderato con moto*
- ii. *Vivace*
- iii. *Passacaglia*

GUSTAV HOLST (1874–1934)

The Planets, Op.32

- i. *Mars, the Bringer of War*
- ii. *Venus, the Bringer of Peace*
- iii. *Mercury, the Winged Messenger*
- iv. *Jupiter the Bringer of Jollity*
- v. *Saturn the Bringer of Old Age*
- vi. *Uranus, the Magician*
- vii. *Neptune, the Mystic*

Paul Stanhope's Ocean Planet was made possible through the Sydney Symphony Orchestra's 50 Fanfares Project and was commissioned by the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, supported by Vicki Olsson.

Pre-concert talk by
Jim Coyle in the Northern
Foyer at 7:15pm.

ESTIMATED DURATIONS

12 minutes, 32 minutes,
interval 20 minutes,
51 minutes

The concert will conclude
at approximately 10pm.

COVER IMAGE

Andrew Haveron
Photo credit Nick Bowers

LIVESTREAM

Wednesday's
performance will be
livestreamed through
the Sydney Symphony
Orchestra's website and
will be available to watch
on demand from Thursday
8 December.

PRESENTING PARTNER



Abercrombie & Kent

PRINCIPAL PARTNER



WELCOME

Welcome to Holst's *The Planets* & Britten

Abercrombie & Kent would like to welcome you to *Holst's The Planets & Britten*, performed by Andrew Haveron and conducted by James Judd.

Holst's *The Planets* is a musical tour de force through each of the seven planets of the Solar System, as inspired by their astrological sign. From *Mars, the Bringer of War* to *Neptune, the Mystic*, each orchestral movement contains a kaleidoscope of textures and rhythms that bring the essence of our extraordinary universe to life.

Just like Holst was inspired by the seven planets, here at Abercrombie & Kent, we are inspired by all seven of Earth's continents. Each one marches to its own breathtaking beat. From the wild majesty of Africa to mystical Asia, eclectic Europe, rustic outback Australia, gregarious North America, vibrant Latin America and, of course, the final frontier, Antarctica.

Our Journey Designers are masters at finding the right tempo and perfect pitch to bring our beautiful planet to life, for globe-spanning journeys that are simply unforgettable. Whether uncovering the vertiginous fjords and gigantic glaciers of Patagonia, or bathing along the sun-dappled beaches of the Amalfi coast, let us guide you into a world of discovery, Holst-style, with all the atmosphere of his orchestral suite — we promise the show will be unforgettable.

I hope you enjoy tonight's performance and leave enthused to go on an inspirational discovery of your own.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Debra Fox". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter 'D' being large and stylized.

Debra Fox
Managing Director
Abercrombie & Kent

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

JAMES JUDD conductor

British conductor James Judd is internationally celebrated for his consummate musicianship, versatility and deep commitment to the orchestras and musicians with whom he works. Music Director Emeritus of South Korea's Daejeon Philharmonic and the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, he is admired for his dynamic music making, communicative style and his gift for establishing inspiring collaborative relationships.

Judd's partnership with the Daejeon Philharmonic raised their profile with a successful European tour in 2017 and acclaimed performances at the Seoul Art Center's Festival. As Music Director of the New Zealand Symphony he brought the orchestra to a new level of visibility and international acclaim at the Sydney Olympic Arts Festival, the Auckland International Arts Festival and the Osaka Festival of International Orchestras. He led the NZSO in its first tour of the major concert halls of Europe, including their debut at the BBC Proms. He has held artistic positions with the Slovak Philharmonic, Israel Symphony, Orchestre National de Lille, and Adelaide Symphony. His 14 years as Music Director of the Florida Philharmonic culminated in international recognition for their recordings of Walton, Bernstein and Mahler.

In recent seasons he has conducted the NHK Symphony, Hungarian National Orchestra, the New Japan Philharmonic, Kyoto Symphony, the Tokyo Metropolitan Orchestra and Slovenian National Philharmonic. He conducted the Romanian Radio Orchestra in a livestreamed performance of Britten's *War Requiem* at the Enescu Festival, and has led the Berlin Philharmonic, Rotterdam Philharmonic, Orchestre National de France, Leipzig Gewandhaus, Royal Philharmonic, London Symphony, English Chamber Orchestra, BBC Symphony, and numerous American orchestras.

James Judd has been a regular guest with the English National Opera, Wexford, Glyndebourne and the Florida Grand Opera. He recorded the complete operas of Meyerbeer and Donizetti; his recording of Elgar's Symphony No.1 with the Hallé Orchestra remains a highly regarded reference standard. His extensive discography on the Naxos label with the New Zealand Symphony features works by Elgar, Vaughan Williams, Beethoven, Bernstein, Copland, Gershwin. His recording of Mahler's Symphony No.1 was awarded the Gold Medal by France's *Diapason* and the Toblacher Komponierhäuschen for the best Mahler recording of the year. His recordings are also featured on the Decca, EMI and Philips labels.



James Judd
Photo Latitude Creative

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

ANDREW HAVERON director and violin
Sydney Symphony Concertmaster, Vicki Olsson Chair

Andrew Haveron has established himself as one of the most sought-after violinists of his generation. A laureate of some of the most prestigious international violin competitions, Andrew studied in London at the Purcell School and the Royal College of Music. With his unrivalled versatility, he is a highly respected soloist, chamber musician and concertmaster.

As a soloist, Andrew has collaborated with conductors such as Sir Colin Davis, Sir Roger Norrington, Jiří Bělohlávek, Stanislaw Skrowachewski, David Robertson and John Wilson, performing a broad range of the well-known and less familiar concertos with many of the UK's finest orchestras. His performance of Walton's violin concerto with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra in 2015 was nominated for a Helpmann Award. Andrew's playing has also been featured on many film and video-game soundtracks, including Disney's *Fantasia* game, which includes his performance of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields.

In 1999 Andrew was appointed first violinist of the internationally acclaimed Brodsky Quartet. A busy schedule saw the quartet perform and broadcast in their unique style all over the world. Amassing a repertoire of almost 300 works, they collaborated with outstanding artists and commissioned many new works from today's composers. Also famed for their iconic 'cross-genre' projects, the quartet enjoyed barrier-breaking work with Elvis Costello, Björk, Paul McCartney and Sting. Andrew has also appeared with numerous other chamber groups such as the Nash and Hebrides ensembles, the Logos Chamber Group, Kathy Selby and Ensemble Q.

Andrew is also in great demand as a concertmaster and director and has worked with all the major symphony orchestras in the UK and many further afield. In 2007 he became concertmaster of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, broadcasting frequently on BBC Radio and enjoying many appearances at the BBC Proms including the famous "Last Night". Joining the Philharmonia Orchestra in 2012 Andrew also led the World Orchestra for Peace at the request of its conductor Valery Gergiev, and again in 2018 at the request of Donald Runnicles. He has also been the leader of The John Wilson Orchestra since its inception. In 2013, Andrew started in his current position of concertmaster of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. In 2019 Andrew appeared with the London Symphony Orchestra under Sir Simon Rattle, and in recitals around Australia with pianists Anna Goldsworthy, Piers Lane and Simon Tedeschi.

Andrew Haveron plays a 1757 Guadagnini violin, generously loaned to the Sydney Symphony Orchestra by Vicki Olsson.



Andrew Haveron
Photo by Pierre Toussaint

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

ELIZABETH SCOTT chorus master
Associate Music Director
Sydney Philharmonia Choirs

Elizabeth Scott is a highly skilful choral conductor who has led Sydney Philharmonia Choirs' young adult choir VOX to great success since 2008. A former SPC Assistant Chorus Master (2006–2008) and Acting Music Director (2013), she is also currently the Music Performance Projects Officer (Secondary Choral Music / Instrumental Music) for the Arts Unit within the NSW Department of Education. Since 2009 she has been the Choral Conductor for the Schools Spectacular, and was recently appointed Lecturer in Choral Conducting at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. Elizabeth conducts the Sydney Conservatorium of Music Choir and has performed and recorded with Cantillation, Pinchgut Opera and The Song Company. She has also recorded the music of Daniel Walker, Sally Maer (ABC Classics) and Sally Whitwell (ABC Classics).

After graduating from the Sydney Conservatorium of Music in 1995, she completed postgraduate studies in choral conducting, vocal performance and aural training in Hungary and Germany. Through Symphony Australia's Conductor Development Program she has worked with the Queensland, Adelaide and Melbourne symphony orchestras and Orchestra Victoria, among others. Elizabeth holds a Doctorate of Musical Arts in Choral Conducting.

Elizabeth is a regular chorus master for the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and has prepared choirs for international conductors including Simone Young, David Robertson and Gianluigi Gelmetti. She also regularly works with Gondwana Choirs and Cantillation.

In 2017, Elizabeth became the first Australian woman to conduct SPC's *Messiah* concerts at the Sydney Opera House. Recent performance highlights include 2022's *Mozart: Requiem & Revelations*, *Berliner Messe* and *St John Reimagined* (2021), *Considering Matthew Shepherd* (2020) and *Music at the Movies* (2019). She is Sydney Philharmonia Choirs' first Associate Music Director.

Elizabeth is a passionate champion of contemporary composers such as Arvo Pärt, Eric Whitacre, Ola Gjeilo and Ēriks Ešēvalds, as well as Australian composers such as Paul Stanhope, Joseph Twist, Brooke Shelley, Matthew Orlovich and Sally Whitwell.



Elizabeth Scott
Photo by Keith Saunders

SYDNEY PHILHARMONIA CHOIRS

SYDNEY PHILHARMONIA CHOIRS

ARTISTIC & MUSIC DIRECTOR BRETT WEYMARK OAM

Brett Weymark OAM Artistic and Music Director

Dr Elizabeth Scott Associate Music Director

Tim Cunniffe Assistant Chorus Master and
Principal Rehearsal Pianist

Sydney Philharmonia Choirs presents the art of choral singing at the highest standard, and develops the talents of those with a passion for singing in Sydney and beyond. Founded in 1920, it has become Australia's finest choral organisation and is a Resident Company of the Sydney Opera House. Led by Music Director Brett Weymark OAM since 2003, Sydney Philharmonia Choirs comprises of three auditioned and three community choirs that perform a range of repertoire from choral classics to musical theatre and commissions by Australian composers. It presents its own season of concerts with leading conductors, soloists and orchestras.

In 2002, Sydney Philharmonia Choirs was the first Australian choir to sing at the BBC Proms (Mahler's Eighth Symphony under Sir Simon Rattle), returning again in 2010 to celebrate the Choirs' 90th anniversary. The Choirs perform in the Sydney Symphony Orchestra's concert season every year as they have done for over 80 years.

In 2020, Sydney Philharmonia Choirs celebrated 100 years which it marked with a commissioning project — 100 Minutes of New Australian Music — featuring composers Elena Kats-Chernin and Deborah Cheetham, among others. In 2023, Sydney Philharmonia Choirs has a full season at the Sydney Opera House Concert Hall and at The Neilson, Walsh Bay Arts Precinct with programs including Handel's *Samson*, *Golden Age of Broadway*, Verdi's Requiem, *Carmina Burana*, James MacMillan's Stabat Mater, David Lang's *Little Match Girl Passion* and the community choir 'big sing' ChorusOz where they will perform Mahler's Symphony No.8, *Symphony of a Thousand*.

SYDNEY PHILHARMONIA CHOIRS

SOPRANOS

Jodie Boehme
Josephine Brereton
Anita Burkart
Nicollette Burr
Courtney Cousins
Melanie David
Leila Harris
Caitlin Kearney
Emily Knapman
Yvette Leonard

Clare Macpherson
Amelia Myers
Jane Nieminska
Isabella Rahme
Maya Schwenke
Odilia Sugita
Eva Tarbox
Xia Lian Wilson
Emily Winton
Dorothy Wu

ALTOS

Leonie Aitken
Meaghan Backhouse
Ariel Bonnell
Alison Campbell
Gillian Downes-Morgan
Alison Feng
Sophie Funston
Kathryn Harwood
Lindy Jefferson
Caitlin McNamara

Anna Peter
Sophie Whitehead
Noriko Yamanaka
Priscilla Yuen



Photo by Keith Saunders

ABOUT THE MUSIC

PAUL STANHOPE (BORN 1969)

Ocean Planet

Planet Earth is an Ocean Planet: unique in our own solar system and possibly further afield. We now know more about the surface of Mars than many ocean depths, and, given the fact that this piece appears in a concert with Holst's *The Planets*, the subject material was compelling.

The piece is divided into seven sections:

i. *Ice Shelf*: Strange, underwater sounds begin the piece produced by various extended techniques on a floor tom, cymbals (with bows) and tam-tam, possibly evoking whale sounds. This texture builds into a rumbling 'collapse'. A main theme is introduced by a solo trumpet amidst textures intended to evoke a seascape of boiling waves.

ii. *Wave Energy*: The music suddenly shifts to syncopated rhythmic patterns in the strings, amidst splashes of wind and brass, intended to evoke the tremendous natural energy of the ocean and perhaps hinting at later industrial soundscapes.

iii. *Calm Seas*: The chuntering rhythms subside into gentler pulsations as new, calmer variations of the main 'Ocean' theme are taken up in the upper and lower strings, coloured by hints of bird song. This is interrupted briefly by sudden industrial patterns from metal percussion and brass.

iv. *Strange Creatures*: The rhythmic music from section two returns, moving into a more dance-like section with pizzicato strings, percussion and woodwind flourishes intended to evoke the strange diversity of submarine life. Are humans really the strange creatures?

v. *Incursion*: The return of industrial-sounding textures seems to confirm that notion. Fragments of the 'Ocean' theme are interrupted by pounding rhythms.



Paul Stanhope, photo by Jason Catlett

Paul Stanhope's Ocean Planet was made possible through the Sydney Symphony Orchestra's 50 Fanfares Project and was commissioned by the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, supported by Vicki Olsson.

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vi. *Collapse/Reflection*: The opening ‘collapse’ string glissando and brass interjections return, suggesting larger breakdown. The opening melody returns this time in a more mournful version played by a solo oboe and followed by a ‘lament’ variation in a flute solo. This elegiac music continues in a small group of solo strings, followed by fragments of theme in wind and brass solos before releasing to the underwater sounds of the very opening.

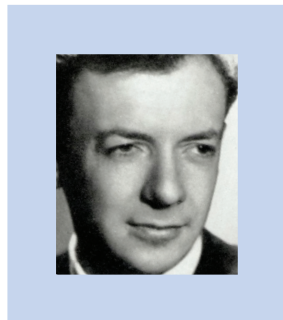
vii. *Rising*: Ascending glissando figures seem to announce a more hopeful strain. (‘Rising’ could also refer to the trend of sea levels, temperatures and CO2 levels.) A hymn-like version of the ‘Ocean’ theme is heard in the French horns together with a wrong-key ‘Lament’ theme. This builds into an orchestral tutti where both thematic elements are at odds with each other. The piece ends with a fanfare of rising melodic figures with crashing gongs and bells ringing out. There is something of a question mark expressed as to whether hopeful strains are warranted.

BENJAMIN BRITTEN (1913–1976)

Violin Concerto, Op.15

In September 1939 Britten wrote to a friend, ‘I have just finished the score of my Violin Concerto. It is times like these that work is so important — that humans can think of other things than blowing each other up!...I try not to listen to the Radio more than I can help.’

Britten was writing from the USA. He and the singer Peter Pears, his life-long partner, muse and interpreter, had left England for a long planned recital tour of Canada in May of that year. With the outbreak of hostilities in Europe in September, Britten and Pears decided, as committed pacifists, to remain in North America. British literati Christopher Isherwood and W.H. Auden, had already travelled to the USA, so the two musicians crossed the border and settled for a time in the orbit of New York City. But while the concerto was written in the immediate build-up to the outbreak of World War II, its emotional core is Britten’s



The young Benjamin Britten

ABOUT THE MUSIC

response to the Spanish Civil War. Britten had been particularly appalled by events in Spain, especially the atrocities in which soldiers as young as 14 were routinely facing firing squads.

In April 1936, Britten had flown to Barcelona with violinist Antonio Brosa for an International Society for Contemporary Music festival and here he heard the Violin Concerto of Alban Berg for the first time. He described it as 'just shattering — very simple, & touching.' With Brosa in mind he began work on his own concerto, completing the composition sketch in Canada in 1939.

The premiere was given at Carnegie Hall by the New York Philharmonic under Sir John Barbirolli with Brosa as soloist in 1940. In the UK its reception was mixed, notably because of Britten's decision to leave his country in her hour of need. In New York, however, the work found favour with its audience and even with *The New York Times*' critic Olin Downes, who observed drily, 'There is modern employment of percussion instruments.'

He referred, no doubt, to the opening motif for timpani and percussion which acts as a structural pivot for the first movement and imparts a vague sense of impending doom. Between appearances of this motto, however, Britten canvasses a variety of different moods. The central movement, which follows without a break, has that kind of fevered energy found in other work of Britten's from this time, notably *Our Hunting Fathers* and the 'Dies Irae' from the *Sinfonia da requiem*. It is also notable for very Brittenesque textures, such as a passage scored for two piccolos and tuba. The cadenza concludes this movement, leading into the finale which is in one of Britten's favourite forms: the passacaglia. He introduces the theme on the trombones that have been silent, *à la* Brahms, up until now. A passacaglia in a concerto presents any composer with a challenge — the repetition of a phrase which forms the basis of the form may work against the expectation of a concerto to become more

ABOUT THE MUSIC

expansive and virtuosic in its final movement. Britten, of course, carries it off with great flair over the considerable 15-minute span of the movement. This is not about merely scoring points, however. The music in the finale takes on the kind of Mahlerian/Bergian intensity which Britten's compassion called forth in him in the face of 'humans...blowing each other up'.

GUSTAV HOLST (1874–1934) ***The Planets, Op.32***

The Planets must be one of the most influential musical works of the twentieth century, thanks mainly to film. Russell Crowe and his cohorts in Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* seemed that bit more craggily determined thanks to a score that reminded us of *Mars*. At the opening of *Uranus*, a portentous four-note motif switches suddenly into a beguiling 6/8, as though Darth Vader ripped off his headgear to reveal a clown beneath. At the close of *Neptune*, Holst invents the fade-out. The iridescent opening of *Jupiter* foreshadows the work of John Adams, and for many years Anglicans have sung its big central tune as the patriotic hymn, *I vow to thee my country*.

As a repository of orchestral special effects and memorable tunes, the piece has certainly earned its pop status, but its very popularity and the imitations it has spawned have disadvantaged it and its composer. We need to make an effort to hear the work with fresh ears - forgetting about gladiators and lightsabers and all that — and to remind ourselves that this was very radical music for its time. Moreover, we should note that it is atypical of its composer. An artist of great integrity, Holst refused to imitate the piece to ensure his own status, so that we sadly hear little of his other work, even though much of it is of the same quality as *The Planets*.

Holst, like his great friend Vaughan Williams, was of a generation, educated at London's Royal College of Music, that rejuvenated British music through the study of Tudor music and the collection of folk-song.



Gustav Holst, photo by
Herbert Lambert

ABOUT THE MUSIC

The young Holst was at first a Wagnerian, and his early works show this influence in their opulence and richly chromatic harmony. After some years as a professional trombonist - playing on occasion under that master orchestrator Richard Strauss - Holst decided in 1903 to devote himself to composition. In practice, though, this meant beginning his career as an outstanding teacher at St Paul's Girls School, Morley College, and later the RCM. In the first decade of the century he also became drawn to eastern mysticism, particularly that of Hinduism, which lead, indirectly, to his development of a much leaner harmonic style.

Planned in 1913 and composed between 1914 and 1917, the seven movements of *The Planets* are less about depicting large balls of gas and rock than about each planet's astrological significance. Given the outbreak of the First World War at the time, it is hard not to see *Mars* as grimly prophetic of the carnage of the first hi-tech war. Where a composer like Mahler uses military music for an ambiguously thrilling effect, Holst takes pains to make his music simply inhuman: the opening three note theme traces the tritone, an unstable interval often called the devil in music. The relentlessly repeated rhythm, or *ostinato* is no simple march, having five beats to a bar. The harmony is bitonal — that is, it superimposes chords of two different keys to give it its sense of unrelieved dissonance, especially at the shattering climax.

Venus, the Bringer of Peace of course offers a complete contrast: the orchestration is sweet and languorous and the harmony - while still frequently bitonal, uses chords which avoid direct clashes of adjacent notes, creating subtle voluptuousness. Framed by slow sections, the piece moves through a slightly faster section and a contrasting *animato*.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Mercury on the other hand, is rather like a symphonic scherzo: short, fast and orchestrated with the utmost delicacy. At the heart of the suite, Jupiter is an orchestral *tour de force*. The glittering fast music with which it opens is busy but crystal clear; its theme, like *Mars*, is based on a three-note motive, but here it is completely and solidly diatonic. *The Planets* was first planned during a holiday in Spain, so we shouldn't be surprised to hear certain Iberian sounds and rhythms in the dance music which follows. This is interrupted by a fanfare of repeated chords, which ushers in the quiet statement of the celebrated *maestoso* theme. The quintessentially British tune may seem out of place in a celebration of the Bringer of Jollity - it is hardly thigh-slappingly funny. Curiously, too, it doesn't reach a full close: what should be the second last chord sets off an echo the shimmering sounds of the opening. The tune does, however, stride through tumultuous last pages of the movement.

If *Jupiter's* big tune was a reminder that joy is fleeting, *Saturn* makes this very clear in its portentous, death-ward tread and ever more disturbing brass chords. Uranus, however, casts a spell (after ripping off the Darth Vader mask) in music as innocent as *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*. Tasking his cue from Debussy's *Sirènes*, Holst imbues *Neptune* with the mystery of wordless, offstage female voices. With its translucent scoring and the hypnotic use of repeated chord patterns, the work ends as perhaps no other had before, fading imperceptibly into night and silence.

Gordon Kerry © 2022

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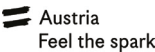
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