



Gustav Holst (1874 – 1934) The Planets Suite

Gustav Holst was a British composer living and working in London 100 years ago. He was a very interesting man fascinated by space, astrology, alternative faiths, meditation and vegetarianism - in many ways he was completely ahead of his time. The Planets Suite, completed in 1918, describes 7 planets in music but looks at their influence on the psyche rather than their scientific properties. Each one has a subtitle that further explains the character of the music. Despite Holst's worries that it was too modern for the first audiences, The Planets Suite was an immediate hit and remains one of the most popular and iconic orchestral pieces of all time.

Holst's Planets are:

Mars, the bringer of war

in 5 time throughout (very unusual) with three massive climaxes. This movement greatly inspired the original music of Star Wars (played by this orchestra in 1977)

Venus, the bringer of peace

serene and beautiful with many orchestral solos and gentle accompaniment

Mercury, the winged messenger

flickering and flighty. Ideas dance around the orchestra pinned down only by some fiendishly difficult rhythms

Jupiter, the bringer of jollity

the emotional centre of the suite with a very famous tune that has been set as a hymn and a rugby anthem!

Saturn, the bringer of old age

Holst's favourite. Two spooky chords alternating back and forth like plodding footsteps. Mysterious and gloomy

Uranus, the magician

brass and timps herald the arrival of 'The Magician' before a skipping, jerky dance takes over, very much in the style of Dukas' 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice' from 20 years earlier

Neptune, the mystic

back in 5 time, this piece has shimmery, watery sounds and a magical ending.