

GUSTAV HOLST
(1874-1934)

The Planets
Opus 32

Mars, the Bringer of War
Venus, the Bringer of Peace
Mercury, the Winged Messenger
Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity
Saturn, the Bringer of Old Age
Uranus, the Magician
Neptune, the Mystic

GEORGE WATSON'S COLLEGE GIRLS' CHOIR
Director Norman Mitchell

Holst was introduced to the study of astrology by Clifford Bax (brother of the composer) in 1913. It was a direct result of this new found fascination that the Planets came into being. The work took the best part of five years to complete as Holst was essentially a 'week-end and holiday' composer, his job as director of music at St Paul's Girls' School occupying the rest of his time. The score was first performed privately in September 1918, when it was conducted by the 29-year-old Adrian Boult, on whose score Holst subsequently wrote: 'To Adrian Boult, who first caused the Planets to shine in public and so earned the gratitude of Gustav Holst'. Boult certainly did the composer proud, performing the work throughout his long life and making no less than five commercial recordings of it. (Incidentally, Holst himself made two recordings, and it has been most instructive for me to be able to study them in preparing for this performance.) It was, however, perhaps rather surprisingly, the Russian emigre Albert Coates who gave the first public performance in 1920.

This is Holst's largest-scale work and employs a huge orchestra, including such exotica as alto flute, bass oboe and tenor tuba, in addition to the luxuriance of two sets of timpani, two harps and celeste. This is the more unusual in that one tends to think of him, if not as a miniaturist, then certainly as a composer of smaller-scale works. The scoring shows complete assurance, Holst demonstrating that he knows the orchestra from the inside. (Holst started his professional career as a trombonist in the orchestra which was later to become the SNO.) It is ironic that this work which the composer did not regard particularly highly - and he was irritated by its success, to the detriment of his more favourite works - is the only one to have been taken up internationally.

Mars has of course become fixed in many minds, not least those of the producers of television programmes about the First World War, as a direct result of that conflict. This is quite untrue, because it was completed several months before the war even began. Holst said that he wanted to portray the stupidity of war. Certainly nothing like it had ever been heard from a British composer in its brutal power. He makes considerable use of the tritone (the diabolus in musica) and employs a menacing ostinato figure in 5/4 time. Like the Stravinsky, written two years earlier!, seventy-odd years have not diminished its power to shock.

The music of Venus could hardly bring a greater contrast. Solo horn and flutes establish a mood of cool, translucent beauty. The tempo quickens slightly in the central section, which features violin solos, before the opening tranquil mood is reestablished.

Mercury is perhaps the most openly virtuosic movement of the suite, and is an interesting early example of Holst's subsequent interest in bitonality - some of the orchestra in Bb, the others in A. Holst also employs cross-rhythms by juxtaposing two against three (6/8 against 3/4 time). There is a brief trio section.

Jupiter has been described as the most worldly of the seven movements and the one in which folksong, a great early enthusiasm of Holst's, never seems far away. The trio section was later set to the words 'I vow to thee, my country'. If Holst wrote any more Elgarian passage than this, then I have yet to hear it. Saturn is a most sinister and disturbing movement. The flutes and alto flute and harp harmonics suggest the inexorable passing of time, like a deep-tolling bell. The dusty decayed atmosphere is heightened by solo double basses and that most reluctant of instruments, the bass oboe. (Our oboe-player tracked this one down in its natural habitat, in Dorking.) Very gradually the movement builds to a powerful climax full of desperation. Holst here employs for the first time the tubular bells, to devastating effect. The anguish gradually subsides and the music takes on a more peaceful, resigned quality, reminding us that old age can also bring its own peaceful serenity. Uranus. We are not very far from the world of the Sorcerer's Apprentice. (Holst was nothing if not eclectic.) Although there is humour in plenty in this movement, it is certainly of a rather grim nature. Neptune has been described by one critic as 'perhaps the most remarkable piece of pure orchestral impressionism ever written'. The whole orchestra apart from one tiny passage, is instructed to play 'sempre pp throughout, dead tone'. Talking of eclecticism, was Vaughan Williams subconsciously thinking of this movement when he wrote the Epilogue of his Sixth Symphony (again pp throughout) thirty years later? Holst achieves the almost impossible in this movement by employing the human voice but at the same time managing to dehumanise it. Like the Stravinsky, the countless imitators over the past seventy years have not made this music sound any the less strange to us.

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INTERVAL OF TWENTY MINUTES

IGOR STRAVINSKY
(1882-1971)

Le Sacre du Printemps

First Part

Adoration of the Earth

Introduction

The Augurs of Spring, Dances of the Young Girls

Ritual of Abduction

Spring Rounds

Ritual of the Rival Tribes

Procession of the Sage

The Sage

Dance of the Earth

Second Part The Sacrifice

Introduction

Mystic Circles of the Young Girls

Glorification of the Chosen One

Evocation of the Ancestors

Ritual Action of the Ancestors

Sacrificial Dance (The Chosen One)

One day in 1910, when he was finishing *The Firebird* in St Petersburg, Stravinsky had 'quite unexpectedly, because I was busy with other matters, I had a vision of a great pagan festival with wise old men sitting in circle watching the death dance of a young girl who is to be sacrificed to the God of Spring'. This was the genesis of *Le Sacre*. He immediately began discussions with the stage designer, Nicholas Roerich, and they drafted the scenario in a few days. The music was finished by the end of 1912, although for a time Stravinsky was

unable to notate the music of the final *Danse Sacrale*. Like *Firebird* and *Petrushka* it was intended for Diaghilev's ballet company, although it was choreographed by Nijinsky. The circumstances of the notorious premiere in Paris in May 1913 are well known. The opening high bassoon solo inspired giggling in the audience, not helped when Saint-Saens demanded very audibly of his neighbour in sarcastic tone, 'What instrument is that?' and swept out of the theatre. The Countess Pourtales brandished her fan like a sabre, exclaiming, 'It is the first time in sixty years that anyone has dared make a fool of me!' Nijinsky attempted to jump on the stage and initiate a counter-riot, and had to be held back by the composer. Meanwhile Diaghilev was switching the lights on and off in an attempt to restore calm. Stravinsky's own account is of interest: 'At the performance mild protests against the music could be heard from the beginning. Then, when the curtain opened, a group of knock-kneed and long-braided Lolitas jumping up and down, the storm broke. Cries of "ta gueule" came from behind me. I left the hall in a rage. I have never again been that angry. The music was so familiar to me; I loved it, and I could not understand why people who had not yet heard it wanted to protest in advance.' Happily, at the first concert performance a year later, the work met with a very different reception. The composer himself provided a synopsis of the action: 'The title of the first part is the Adoration of the Earth. It contains the ancient games, 'The Desire of Spring". When the curtain rises we see the ritual round dances - a competition between two villages. All this is interrupted by the "Procession of the Wise Elder", who kisses the earth. A frenetic dance of the people, intoxicated with the exhilaration of spring, ends the first part. Second part. Secret nocturnal games of young girls on the sacred hill. One of them is chosen to do the sacrificial dance. She enters a stone labyrinth, while the others exult in a wild warlike dance. Then the "wise elders" appear, and the chosen one is left alone with them. She dances her last "sacred dance", the Great Sacrifice, to which the second part of the work owes its title. The wise elders are witnesses to this final dance, which ends with the death of the chosen one.'

Le Sacre du Printemps is perhaps Stravinsky's masterpiece and has certainly had an incalculable effect upon the music of the twentieth century. More than that, it is the music of the twentieth century. Stravinsky himself said, 'I had only my ear to help me; I heard and I wrote what I heard; I am the vessel through which *Le Sacre* passed.'

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WEDNESDAY 6 - FRIDAY 8 DECEMBER

Church Hill Theatre 7.30pm

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| HANDEL | Arias from <u>Agrippina</u> |
| PURCELL | <u>Dido and Aeneas</u> |

Sinfonia Opera
members of Scottish Sinfonia
Caritas Singers director Jean Kingsley

ISOBEL EWEN producer
TRACEY HAWKES choreographer
FIONA MORISON harpsichord
ALISON RUSHWORTH conductor

Cast includes Joanne Armstrong, Andrew Doig, Philip Henderson,
Frances Klayman, Ivor Klayman, Frances McCafferty, Inga Mantle,
Katrine Townhill

SATURDAY 3 FEBRUARY 1990 7.30pm

St Bernard's Church, Saxe-Coburg St

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| SCHOENBERG | Chamber Symphony Op.9 |
| MOZART | Serenade Notturna |
| MOZART | Divertimento K136 |
| STRAUSS | Suite Opus 4 |

members of Scottish Sinfonia

JOHN WILLMETT
NEIL MANTLE conductors

SCOTTISH SINFONIA

leader Michael Rigg
associate leader Alison Rushworth
conductor Neil Mantle

Violins I

Michael Rigg
Annaliese Dagg
Daya Rasaratnam
Anne Giles
Sonia Baxter
Una Doherty
June Nelson
Moray Rummy
Gillian Pickup
Huw Davies
Marilyn McLellan
Graham Ritchie
Carolyn Dyson
Julia Fowler

Violins II

Elizabeth Clement
Judith Dean
Fiona Morison
Robert Saunders
Irene Horne
Alastair Henderson
Norman Gillies
Kay Barton
Andrew Cairns
Jackie Adams
Sheelagh Lawrie
Lucy Creanor
Helen Busbridge
Lucy Watson

Violas

Julian Marshall
Anne Parker
Bridget Blackmore
Sophie Hay
Shirley Nielson
Elizabeth Mathison
Diane Lawrie
Sandra Hollingdale
Stephanie Williams
Mari Kobayashi

Cellos

Sam Coe
George Reid
Deborah McCoy
Suzanne Patterson
Aline Swanson
Moira McCaig
John Busbridge
Miles Morrison
Katherine Oliver
Dorothy McMillan
Elizabeth Kerr
Josephine Cameron

Double Basses

Walter Carlton
James Robb
Peter Craik
Jennifer Sharp
Eric Jeffrey
James Sloggie
Laura Dollin

Flutes

Barbara Richerby
Diana Cooke
Sheila Garner

Alto Flute

Fiona Black

Piccolo

Fergus Davidson

Oboes

Margot Cruft
Shona Caldwell
Elizabeth Scott

Cor Anglais

Iain Thompson

Bass Oboe

Morven Bell

Clarinets

John Peacock
Mark Casson
Jane Bryant

E♭ Clarinet

James Follan

Bass Clarinet

Hilary Saunders

Bassoons

Barbara Mooney
Rainer Thönnies
Julian Munro

Contra Bassoons

Patricia Akhtar
Jennifer Taylor

Horns

Alison Davidson
Steve Birch
Marion Kirton
Louise Maclean
Joanna Moody
John Chapman
James Brock

Wagner Tubas

Ian Smith
Charles Floyd

Trumpets

Brian Connor
Andrew Kinnear
Alasdair Grant
Jeremy Brown
Darren Benyon
**Euphonium and
Bass Trumpet**
Bill Giles

Trombones

Barry Kempton
Neil Short
John Fishwick

Tubas

Paul Drury
Andrew Wood

Timpani

Fiona Ewen
Ken Mailer

Percussion

Rebecca Paterson
John Willmetts
Adam Powell
Scott Mackenzie

Celeste

Fiona Morison

Harp

Janet Pecher
Janet Annand

Organ

Norman Mitchell

Secretary

Margot Cruft

Orchestral

Manager

Robert Saunders

General Admin-

istrator

Inga Mantle

Librarians

Annaliese Dagg
Una Doherty
Anne Giles
Helen Kemp
Elizabeth Mathison
Deborah McCoy
Shirley Nielson
Suzanne Patterson
Gillian Pickup

Publicity Officer

John Peacock

George Watson's College Girls' Choir

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|-----------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Samantha Binnie | Eona Blackwood | Jenny Blyth | Carolyn Campbell |
| Rachel Colles | Harriet Davidson | Anne-Louise Duncan | |
| Louise Hill | Jennifer Harkess | Katie McGlew | Kirsty McKnight |
| Sarah Nelson | Serena Ng | Monica Piris | Rachel Rankin |