



WHAT MUSIC IS

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2025 | 3:00 PM

CENTURY II CONCERT HALL

Thomas Heuser
Guest Conductor

Bill Barclay
Narrator



PROGRAM NOTES

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CLAUDE DEBUSSY

Born August 22, 1862, in St. Germain-en-Laye, France

Died March 25, 1918, in Paris, France

Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faune

Last performed by the Wichita Symphony on January 26 and 27, 2019 with Daniel Hege conducting.

Inspired by the evocative poem of his friend, symbolist poet Stephane Mallarmé, Debussy had begun sketching an orchestral work in 1892 that he was soon calling *Prélude, interludes et paraphrase pour "L'après-midi d'un faune."* A scheduled performance in March 1894 had to be canceled because the composer had not yet finished revising the piece. The much-anticipated work, reduced during the revision process simply to *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, was finally presented at a concert of the Société Nationale in Paris on December 22 and 23, 1894. It was so enthusiastically received that conductor Gustave Doret had to repeat it on the spot, and soon conductors everywhere were clamoring to perform it. Eighteen years later Debussy's sensual music served as the basis for the provocative ballet choreographed and danced by the celebrated Nijinsky.

In Mallarmé's famous poem, first published in 1876, a faun rouses on a drowsy summer afternoon from a dream or daydream and recalls his amorous activities with a pair of nymphs, wondering whether they were real or imagined. In the note that Debussy wrote or at least authorized for the premiere he stated that his music did not "by any means pretend to be a synthesis of the poem; but rather a series of successive scenes across which the dreams and desires of the faun pass in the afternoon heat." The poet, for whom Debussy had played the work on the piano, expressed great admiration, saying, "I didn't expect anything like this. It is music that brings out the feeling of my poem, providing it with a warmer background than color."

There almost had to be a flute solo at the beginning of Debussy's work. Flutes have a long history of association with pastoral scenes, scenes of seduction, and especially with fauns. In the famous Greek myth Pan chases the nymph Syrinx, who is transformed into rushes, which then become his panpipes. Mallarmé's poem seems to call out for a "long solo":

The vast and twin reed on which one plays under the azure:
Which, turning to itself [the reed flute] the trouble of the cheek,
Dreams in a long solo, that we were beguiling
The surrounding beauty [of nature] by false [fictitious] confusions
Between itself [the beauty] and our credulous song;

—trans. Robert Greer Cohn

Debussy's inspired, sensual flute roulades have become among the most famous solos in the repertoire and perfectly evoke the languorous, erotic atmosphere of the faun's afternoon. The other main theme, bolder and less dreamy, is played by the winds. The miracle of Debussy's revolutionary technique comes in the treatment of these ideas as fragments to be explored, intertwined, and altered in a manner far removed from traditional formal patterns.

The composer's harmonic palette consists of tonal ambiguities, often related to the interval of a tritone, which had already been outlined in the opening solo. His sonorous colors are drawn from an orchestra rich in winds, joined by four horns and harp but no trumpets or trombones. The only percussion consists of two antique cymbals, delicately chiming the notes E and B.

JESSIE MONTGOMERY

Born December 8, 1981, in New York City, New York

Starburst (2012)

Last performed by the Wichita Symphony on September 21 and 22, 2019 with Daniel Hege conducting.

"As the Wichita Symphony begins its 76th in the year when we recognize and celebrate the centennial of the 19th Amendment granting women the right to vote, it seems appropriate that the season begins with a work by a young American woman who is rapidly making a name for herself on concert stages."

- Don Reinhold, September 2019

Jessie Montgomery was born and raised in Manhattan's Lower Eastside in the 1980s at a time when the neighborhood was developing a reputation for its cultural activity and development. She studied violin at the Third Street Music Settlement and graduated from Julliard in 2003 with a degree in violin performance. She subsequently completed a graduate degree in Composition for Film and Multimedia at New York University in 2012.

Since 1999, Ms. Montgomery has been affiliated with the Sphinx Organization, which supports the accomplishments of young African-American and Latino string players. A two-time laureate in the annual Sphinx Competition, she has served as a teacher, juror, orchestra member and concertmaster, panelist, and ambassador. Since 2012 she has been a member of the highly acclaimed Catalyst Quartet. During the 2018-2019 season, she was a collaborator with Yo-Yo Ma's Silkroad Ensemble and toured with the group.

Ms. Montgomery summarizes her philosophy writing, "Music is my connection to the world. It guides me to understand my place in relation to others and challenges me to make clear the things I do not understand. I imagine that music is a meeting place at which all people can converse about their unique differences and common stories.

While Montgomery was composer-in-residence with the Sphinx Virtuosi, The Sphinx Organization commissioned *Starburst*. The work was composed in 2012 and premiered by the Sphinx Virtuosi in September 2012, at the New World Center in Miami, Florida. In addition to the Wichita Symphony, *Starburst* will be heard at the Atlanta, Dallas, and Spokane symphony orchestras, among others, this season [2019-2020].

From the Composer's website, her program notes for the work tell us:

This brief one-movement work for string orchestra is a play on imagery of rapidly changing musical colors. Exploding gestures are juxtaposed with gentle fleeting melodies in an attempt to create a multidimensional soundscape. A common definition of a starburst: "the rapid formation of large numbers of new stars in a galaxy at a rate high enough to alter the structure of the galaxy significantly" lends itself almost literally to the nature of the performing ensemble who premieres the work, The Sphinx Virtuosi, and I wrote the piece with their dynamic in mind.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Born December 16, 1770, in Bonn, Germany

Died March 26, 1827, in Vienna, Austria

Symphony No. 5 in C minor, Op. 67

1. Allegro con brio
2. Andante con moto
3. Allegro
4. Allegro

Today's performance only features an excerpt from the third and fourth movements. However, the last complete performance of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony was on October 28 and 29, 2017, conducted by Daniel Hege. The October 2017 performance was dedicated to and in honor of Dr. Jay C. Decker.

The immense popularity of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony has dulled our senses to the boldness and originality of the work, which initially caused a certain resistance. The great Goethe could not appreciate it, remarking that "it is merely astonishing and grandiose." Equally astonishing were the "oboe cadenza" in the first movement, the addition of piccolo, contrabassoon, and three trombones to the finale, and the return of the scherzo in the finale, all of which were innovative at the time.

Many features have contributed to the eventual superstar status of "the Fifth." The opening motive (the famous ta-ta-ta-TAH"), which Beethoven reportedly explained to his friend and biographer Anton Schindler as "Thus Fate knocks at the door!" has provided dramatic associations to generations of listeners. In World War II, the motive's rhythm was associated with the Morse code for "V", as in Victory, and was used as a symbol of resistance to facism.

Though Beethoven left no programmatic explanations linking his Symphony to political events of the early nineteenth century, the work is a product of his heroic style and his patriotic and anti-Napoleonic sentiments that had reached their height at this time.

Like many of Beethoven's works, the Fifth had a long gestation period: sketches from early 1804 appear amid those for the Fourth Piano Concerto and the first act of *Leonore* (later titled *Fidelio*); more sketches appeared later in 1804, and by 1806 advanced sketches for all the movements took shape near those for the Violin Concerto and Cello Sonata in A Major. Beethoven then interrupted work on the Fifth to compose what became the Fourth Symphony. Beethoven returned to the Fifth in 1807 and finally completed it in the spring of 1808.

The Fifth Symphony was first performed on an incredible more-than-four-hour concert at the Theater-an-der-Wein on December 22, 1808. The all-Beethoven program consisted mainly of newly composed works: the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies conducted by the composer, the Fourth Piano Concerto in which Beethoven performed the solo part, the aria "Ah! Perfido," three numbers from his Mass in C Major, his own improvisations, and – for an effective concert ending and because the chorus was already on hand – the quickly composed Choral Fantasy. By all accounts the preparations for this concert had been extremely problematic, Beethoven himself contributing a large share of the difficulties. The audience half froze in the unheated hall, and the under-rehearsed concert could not help but produce mixed results, but what a wealth of inventive ideas he had unleashed!

The Fifth Symphony has become one of the most popular works in all symphonic music. Its influence cannot be

Symphony No. 5 in C minor, Op. 67

continued

underestimated. No matter how many times we have heard the work, it continues to surprise and delight. The first movement is remarkable for its concentrated rhythmic development, based on the opening rhythm, short-short-short-long. This rhythm appears in more than half of the movement's measures, with captivating, ingenious transformations. Beethoven unified the entire Symphony with further developments of this same rhythm. We hear it in the second theme of the slow movement and in the fortissimo horn call that answers the haunted opening of the scherzo.

The slow movement provides a certain relaxation from the heroic style, but even here the dotted rhythms can sound martial and the ending of the first phrase receives a heroic stress. Even more striking is the valiant blaze of C Major into which Beethoven has modulated during the course of the second theme. The double variation – two alternating sections, each varied, plus coda – is remarkable for its move from literal variation to a free, more improvisatory style of variation.

The scherzo contains the aforementioned rhythmic motive in its first section, followed by an energetic trio in fugato (imitative) style and a shadowy, abbreviated return the scherzo section. After the suspense of the transition, the finale bursts forth triumphantly.

The addition of piccolo, contrabassoon, and trombones – for the first time in symphonic history – contributes to the triumphal character of the finale. The use of sonata form here shows Beethoven's continued concern for giving his last movement equal weight with his first. The unexpected return of the scherzo in this movement gives Beethoven another chance to show transcendence over adversity, symbolized by the recapitulation grandly banishing the stealthy strains. Further it gave him good reason – that of balance – to include a prolonged affirmation of the major home key in the coda. Symphonic thought had entered a new era.

EDWARD ELGAR

Born June 2, 1857, in Broadheath, England

Died February 23, 1934, in Worcester, England

Variations on an Original Theme (Engima), Op. 36

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| I. "C.A.E." Listesso tempo | VIII. "W.N." Allegretto |
| II. "H.D.S.-P." Allegro | IX. "Nimrod" Moderato |
| III. "R.B.T." Allegretto | X. "Dorabella - Intermezzo" Allegretto |
| IV. "W.M.B." Allegro di molto | XI. "G.R.S." Allegro di molto |
| V. "R.P.A." Moderato | XII. "B.G.N." Andante |
| VI. "Yosbel" Andantino | XIII. "***-Romanza" Moderato |
| VII. "Troyte" Presto | XIV. "E.D.U." - Finale |

Today's performance only features the ninth movement, Nimrod, which was last performed by the Wichita Symphony on February 23, 2025 in Memoriam of American Airlines Flight 5342 Victims. However, the last complete performance of Engima Variations was on March 26, 2023 with Rei Hotoda conducting.

- No one knows what the "engima" is - Elgar never revealed his secret!
- Each movement is a musical portrait of one of Elgar's good friends.
- Some variations bluster and argue, others soothe and ajole.
- The lovely "Nimrod" variation is played in England on its own, as a memorial tribute when someone of note has died.
- Which variations are like *your* friends?

Elgar is widely regarded to be the most important English composer of the turn of the century. During the nineteenth-century, England was disparagingly referred to by Germany and Austria as "*das Land ohne Musik*" – the land without music. Elgar was both catalyst and symbol of a major renaissance in English composition, and his Enigma Variations catapulted him to fame both in his own country and on the continent.

Born into a musical family, Elgar learned to play violin, organ, and bassoon as a child. His father owned a music shop, tuned pianos, and played in the local orchestra. By the 1870s, young Edward knew he wanted to be a composer, but practical considerations steered him toward his father's various businesses. He became active in the musical life of Worcestershire County, playing primarily violin but also organ. Not until the Enigma Variations did he gain recognition from his contemporaries as a composer.

Elgar composed the Variations in 1898 and 1899. The inner page of the score bears the inscription "Dedicated to my friends pictured within." Over the first page, the word "Enigma" appears. Each of the fourteen variations is titled either with a monogram or a nickname that identifies one of the composer's friends. Thus "C.A.E." of the first variation is the composer's wife, Caroline Alice Elgar; Variation II's "H.D.S.-P." is Hew David Steuart-Powell, pianist in Elgar's trio (along with "B.G.N.," Basil Nevinson, the cellist and subject of Variation XII), and so forth. Many of their circle in Worcestershire achieved thereby a measure of immortality in Elgar's piece.

The portrait gallery of the fourteen variations is a treasure trove of brilliant character sketches, despite Elgar's insistence that his work was absolute music to be considered independently of those who had inspired it. William Meath Baker, the "W.M.B." of Variation IV, is said to have been a decisive, athletic man who went about life with great physical flourishes punctuating his activities; his variation is appropriately resolute. Isabel

Variations on an Original Theme (Engima), Op. 36

continued

Fitton, the "Isobel" of Variation VI, was a viola student of Elgar's; her lyrical, gentle variation features a viola solo and allegedly satirizes technical problems in her string playing that she never overcame.

Contemporaries described Arthur Troyte Griffith ("Troyte," Variation VII) as an argumentative type. Elgar paints him with vigorous timpani, then brasses in animated dialogue with rapid violin triplets; this is a true virtuoso variation, enough to convince us that Troyte was a formidable opponent in debate!

"Dorabella" (Variation X) was Elgar's pet name for Dora Penny, the youngest member of his circle included in the *Enigma Variations*. Her nickname was a conscious allusion to Mozart's *Così fan tutte*; her variation has the airy delicacy of the ballet music from Ponchielli's *La Gioconda* or Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*. "Dorabella"'s sprightly, chirping fillips of woodwinds and strings invite choreography; it comes as no surprise that Frederick Ashton created a ballet from Elgar's piece in 1968.

Technically, what makes the *Enigma Variations* so marvelous is a combination of splendid orchestration, careful gauging of key changes, and brilliant transitions from one variation to the next. Spiritually what binds it is the overriding affection Elgar had for his friends. Variation XIV, "E.D.U." (Alice's pet name for her husband was "Edu") binds the set together in exuberant conclusion, as if to say "Lucky me, that my life is enriched by these wonderful people." Whether heard as an independent piece of music or in the context of Elgar's musical portrait gallery, the *Enigma Variations* is one of the masterpieces of the repertoire, and Elgar's finest composition.

Elgar's *Variations* are scored for a large orchestra of 2 flutes (second doubling piccolo), 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones (third doubling tuba), timpani, percussion, organ ad lib. and strings.

THE UNSOLVED ENIGMA

When the *Enigma Variations* first appeared, listeners mistakenly believed that the identities masked by the variation titles were the enigma of the subtitle. The composer promptly debunked this theory in his own program note for the piece, writing:

The enigma I will not explain—its "dark saying" must be left unguessed, and I warn you that the apparent connection between the variations and the theme is often of the slightest texture; further, through and over the whole set another and larger theme "goes," but is not played.

This cryptic clue has led to countless theories about the hidden, unstated theme, with guesses ranging from "God Save the King" and "Auld Lang Syne" to "Ta ra ra boom-de-ay" and "Home sweet Home."

In 1991, the English pianist Joseph Cooper came forth with a new theory, that the enigma was derived from Mozart's slow movement to the *Prague Symphony*. Just this past December, another Englishman, Dr. Clive McClelland of Leeds University, proposed that Elgar's theme derived from the hymn "Now the Day is Over," by Sabine Baring-Gould, the composer of "Onward Christian Soldiers."

Variations on an Original Theme (Engima), Op. 36

continued

No satisfactory solution has been universally accepted, and the secret of the enigma remains one of music's great unsolved mysteries. Perhaps Elgar was not referring to a melody at all, but rather a place implied by the "spelling" of the notes in his theme, much as Robert Schumann did with the town of Asch in *Carnaval*.

THE NIMROD VARIATION

Elgar took delight in expressing his friends' personalities in musical terms. To his friend August Johannes Jaeger, he wrote in October 1898:

Since I've been back I have sketched a set of Variations on an original theme; the Variations have amused me because I've labelled 'em with the nicknames of my particular friends—you are Nimrod. [*"Jaeger" means hunter in German; Elgar's reference is to Nimrod, the mighty hunter in the Book of Genesis. —L.S.*] That is to say I've written the Variations each one to represent the mood of the 'party.' I've liked to imagine the 'party' writing the variation him (or her) self and have written what I think they would have written—if they were asses enough to compose—its a quaint idea & the result is amusing to those behind the scenes & won't affect the hearer who 'nose nuffin.' What think you?

Jaeger was also Elgar's advocate at the London music publishing house of Novello and did much to promote Elgar's music and encourage his friend. Elgar returned the support by making Jaeger's the central variation of the set, the pivotal slow movement with the greatest emotional impact.

"Nimrod" is said to have been inspired by an evening walk during which Jaeger waxed poetic about Beethoven's slow movements. Surely it is no accident that Elgar placed this variation in E-flat major, Beethoven's heroic key. Many listeners have also perceived a strong similarity between the "Nimrod" variation's opening theme and that of the famous slow movement to Beethoven's "Pathétique" Sonata, Op.13.

KAIJA SAARIAHO

Born October 14, 1952, in Helsinki, Finland

Died June 2, 2023, in Paris, France

Asteroid 4179: Toutatis

This is the first performance by the Wichita Symphony.

"I first became interested in Toutatis when reading that it is the asteroid whose orbit passes closest to Earth. When reading more and then seeing pictures of it, I started to find its unusual shape and complex rotation interesting – different areas of it rotate at different speeds. One consequence of this is that Toutatis does not have a fixed north pole like the Earth; instead, its north pole wanders along a curved path on the surface roughly every 5.4 days. The stars viewed from Toutatis wouldn't repeatedly follow circular paths, but would crisscross the sky, never following the same path twice. So Toutatis doesn't have anything you could call a 'day'. Its rotation is the result of two different types of motion with periods of 5.4 and 7.3 Earth days that combine in such a way that Toutatis' orientation with respect to the solar system never repeats. All these peculiarities, and the fact that Toutatis already has had many collisions with other heavenly objects, inspired me to write this small work to complete the project that Simon Rattle and the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra created around *The Planets* of Holst."

SERGEI PROKOFIEV

Born April 27, 1891, in Sontsovka, Russia (now in the Donetsk Oblast region, Ukraine)

Died March 5, 1953, in Moscow, Soviet Union

Symphony No. 1, Op. 64, "Classical"

1. Allegro con brio
2. Larghetto
3. Gavotte: Non troppo allegro
4. Finale: Molto vivace

Today's concert only includes the first movement of Prokofiev's Classical Symphony. The last performance of the complete Classical Symphony by the Wichita Symphony was on February 21 and 22, 2015 with Daniel Hege conducting.

I spent the summer of 1917 [wrote Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953) in his autobiography] in the country near Petrograd all alone, reading Kant and working a great deal. I deliberately did not take my piano with me, for I wished to try composing without it. Until this time I had usually composed at the piano, but I noticed that the thematic material composed away from the piano was often better... A composition written this way would probably have more transparent orchestral colors. That is how the project for a symphony in the Haydn style came about. I had learned a great deal about Haydn's technique from Tcherepnin [during Prokofiev's conservatory years] and hence felt myself on sufficiently familiar ground to venture forth on this difficult journey without a piano.

It seemed to me that had Haydn lived in our day he would have retained his own style while accepting something of the new at the same time. That was the kind of symphony I wanted to write: a symphony in the classical style... I called it Classical Symphony: in the first place because it was simpler, and secondly, for the fun of it, to "tease the geese," and in the secret hope that I would prove to be right if the symphony really did turn out to be a classic.

I composed the symphony in my head during my walks in the country.

Prokofiev used the same modest orchestration of a Haydn symphony – pairs of winds and brass (no trombones or tuba), timpani and strings, and he employed the traditional four-movement form. The result, however, could never be mistaken for Haydn. Prokofiev's first-movement sonata form is too "textbook" to be Haydn, while his key schemes take the listener "astray" into shifts without preparation, and his melodic and rhythmic contours exaggerate what might be considered Classical. In the charmingly jagged second theme, for example, the leaps are too wide, the harmonies go beyond where a second key area should go, yet it is to be played "con eleganza" – almost in a mockery of Classical grace. In a witty deviation from traditional sonata form, the recapitulation begins in the "wrong" key of C major, and then suddenly jerks back to the home key of D.

In the Larghetto the tender yet wistful melody in the very high register of the violins and the gently pulsing accompaniment imply Rococo grace, but their piquant harmonies and wide spacing reveal their 20th-century origin. The contrasting middle section displays many of the transparent colors imagined by Prokofiev away from the piano.

The Gavotte was composed in 1916, before anything else in the Symphony. A gavotte is not a typical

Symphony No. 1, Op. 64, "Classical"

continued

symphonic movement, and Prokofiev's use of a Baroque dance here shows another of his twists on Classical form. The brief movement contains a wealth of harmonic surprises, and its trio employs open fifths evoking the drone of a musette. The brilliant Finale exerts the highest demands upon the players. Prokofiev again employed sonata form, this time calling for the repeat of the exposition. The movement bubbles irresistibly forward almost in perpetual motion.

The witty, lighthearted work stands in amazing contrast to historic events that surround it. Its effervescence gives no hint that it was composed during the First World War, nor that one month after its completion the October Revolution began. Prokofiev conducted the premiere in Petrograd on April 8, 1918. One month later he departed for what turned out to be a lengthy sojourn in America; he brought few possessions, but carried with him the score of the *Classical Symphony*, which caught the fancy of the American public more than any of his other works.

The score for the *Classical Symphony* calls for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings.

GUSTAV HOLST

Born September 21, 1874, in Cheltenham, England

Died May 25, 1934, in London, England

The Planets

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Mars, the Bringer of War (6') | 5. Saturn, the Bringer of Old Age (11') |
| 2. Venus, the Bringer of Peace (10') | 6. Uranus, the Magician (6') |
| 3. Mercury, the Winged Messenger (4') | 7. Neptune, the Mystic (7') |
| 4. Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity (7') | |

Today's concert only includes the fourth movement, "Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity." The last performance of the complete The Planets by the Wichita Symphony was on April 14 and 15, 2018. It was conducted by Daniel Hege and presented in collaboration with Dr. José Francisco Salgado and KV265.

"As a rule I only study things that suggest music to me. That's why I worried at Sanskrit. Then recently the character of each planet suggested lots to me, and I have been studying astrology fairly closely," wrote Gustav Holst in 1914. Clifford Bax, brother of composer Arnold Bax, had been impressed by Holst's settings of the *Rig Veda*, and it was he who introduced Holst to astrology in 1913, furthering the mystical leanings Holst showed throughout his life. Telling horoscopes, Holst admitted, was his "pet vice," and he stressed the astrological character of each planet, rather than its associations with myth. Equally important that year was Holst's exposure to the new sounds, particularly rhythms and ostinatos, in the music of Stravinsky, whose *Petrushka* and *Rite of Spring* were presented in London in June and July, respectively.

Though thoughts of *The Planets* had occupied Holst for some time, actual composing began in May 1914, on *Mars, the Bringer of War*. Holst's daughter Imogene steadfastly maintained that he had already completed the sketch before the First World War broke out on August 4, thus it should be viewed more as a prophetic vision than a comment on the War. Further work on *The Planets* had to be fit in among Holst's teaching commitments at St. Paul's Girls' School, hence its lengthy gestation period of two years. *Venus* and *Jupiter* were composed that fall, and in 1915 he worked on *Saturn*, *Uranus*, and *Neptune*. *Mercury* was the last of *The Planets* to be written, and the task of orchestrating the suite took place during 1916. Because of wartime conditions, there seemed little hope of an orchestral performance of his enormous work, and he had to be content with various two-piano airings.

Unfit for service, Holst got his chance to contribute to the war effort in 1918 when he was sent to the Middle East as music organizer for the YMCA's army educational work. He was overwhelmed when Henry Balfour Gardiner gave him a parting gift of a private professional performance of *The Planets*. This miraculous event took place with the Queen's Hall Orchestra conducted by the young conductor and Holst enthusiast Adrian Boult on September 29. The audience of Holst's friends, colleagues, and pupils was awestruck by the power of this novel music. As a result of the performance, several Philharmonic Society officials wanted to engage Boult in the coming season and arrange for a public performance of *The Planets*. That performance did take place on February 27, 1919, but was probably just as well the composer could not be present for the work was performed without *Venus* and *Neptune*.

The popularity of *The Planets* and public recognition of Holst as a composer turned his life upside-down, much to his displeasure. He once said, "Every artist ought to pray that he may not be a 'success.' If he's a failure he stands a good chance of concentrating upon the best work of which he's capable." It was to his relief then that

The Planets

continued

in about 1925 he found himself no longer a popular composer. He had moved beyond *The Planets* but the public did not want to follow.

Mars, the Bringer of War, said novelist Henry Williamson, was the music of a man who knew what war was about. Its elemental power arises from the opening relentless rhythmic ostinato in 5/4 meter. There is almost no lightness or reprieve in Holst's vision. The final statement of the original ostinato is shattering.

No greater contrast could be imagined than the following ***Venus, the Bringer of Peace***, begun Adagio with its calm horn solo answered by winds, and its central Andante containing a warm violin solo. The glockenspiel, harps, and celesta add an unearthly orchestral color. The opening bars are identical to those of his song "A Vigil of Pentecost," written about the same time.

Mercury, the Winged Messenger is represented by a fleet scherzo, given impetus by the rapid exchanges between the winds and muted strings. Holst keeps the orchestration clear and light throughout. This movement is also noteworthy as the composer's first experiment with bitonality (music simultaneously in two keys).

Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity, bears out Holst's love of folk song and dance. The charwomen at the first private performance at Queen's Hall were said to have put down their scrub brushes and danced during this movement. Stravinsky's *Petrushka* and "Infernal Dance" from *The Firebird* may have inspired the opening bustle and syncopated rhythms, respectively. The famous melody played by strings and horns *andante maestoso* was later used for the patriotic song "I vow to thee, my country," to Holst's annoyance.

Saturn was Holst's favorite movement, and he was disappointed that some of the early critics hadn't liked it. He borrowed from himself again in this movement, in this case from his *Dirge and Hymeneal* for female voices on words by Thomas Lovell Beddoes. One of Holst's techniques for showing the passage of time is the alternation of two unresolved chords in a kind of ostinato (repeating pattern). A pupil of his also reported that Holst may have associated the tolling chords with old age, from watching two very old men ring the bells at the Durham Cathedral.

The peace of Saturn is shattered by the four-note brass "incantation" that summons ***Uranus, the Magician***. Several commentators have likened this movement to Dukas's *Sorcerer's Apprentice* due to its depiction of wizardly pranks and spells. It is clear that Uranus is no all-powerful magician, but something of a fumbler as the humorous touches show. One occasionally glimpses, however, a certain magic beyond anything the Magician can produce. All disappears as in a puff of smoke as the movement suddenly ends *ppp* (triple piano).

In ***Neptune, the Mystic***, Holst achieved a truly miraculous kind of stasis, something paralleled later in the music of Olivier Messiaen. Since Neptune in Holst's day was the furthest known planet in the solar system, Holst strove to evoke the mystery and remoteness of the vast reaches of outer space in his music. This he achieved by several means: the instruction to the orchestra to play *pianissimo* throughout, and with "dead tone" (excepting a clarinet solo and a passage for violins); the use of harps and celesta to provide ethereal colors; undulating patterns and oscillation between two chords; the use of a wordless chorus; and the final silence, which is arrived at by the repetition of the last bar by the chorus "until the sound is lost in the distance."