

Chandos

CHAN 8302

HOLST THE PLANETS

GUSTAV HOLST
(1874-1934)

THE PLANETS Op. 32 (1916)
Suite for Large Orchestra

MARS - The Bringer of War (1:14)	SATURN - The Bringer of Old Age (12:00)
VENUS - The Bringer of Peace (10:39)	URANUS - The Mystic (9:57)
MERCURY - The Winged Messenger (6:29)	NEPTUNE - The Mystic (8:08) <small>(with Women's Voices of the SAC Chorus)</small>
JUPITER - The Bringer of Jollity (7:24)	

SCOTTISH NATIONAL ORCHESTRA
Leader: Edwin Potts

conducted by
SIR ALEXANDER GIBSON

BANK OF SCOTLAND SERIES

The Bank of Scotland's record sponsorship is a proud testimony of its association with the Scottish National Orchestra since 1976. The Bank became the first commercial sponsor of an orchestra, and continues to support the SOO and other arts. It has continued to support the Orchestra with great success.

BANK OF SCOTLAND
Glasgow

Recording Producer: Brian Martin, Naxos
Project Director: David Pople, Naxos Records
Digital Recording Engineer: Ralph Cooper
Revised and Expanded Edition: Naxos Records, Naxos Records Ltd, Naxos Records Ltd, Naxos Records Ltd
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DIGITAL



HOLST THE PLANETS

SCOTTISH NATIONAL ORCHESTRA
conducted by
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THE COMPACT DISC DIGITAL AUDIO SYSTEM

offers the best possible sound reproduction — on a small, convenient sound-carrier unit. The Compact Disc's remarkable performance is the result of a unique combination of digital playback with laser optics. For the best results, you should apply the same care in storing and handling the Compact Disc as with conventional records.

No further cleaning will be necessary if the Compact Disc is always held by the edges and replaced in its case directly after playing. Should the Compact Disc become soiled by fingerprints, dust or dirt, it can be wiped (always in a straight line from centre to edge) with a clean and lint-free, soft, dry cloth. No solvent or abrasive cleaner should ever be used on the disc.

If you follow these suggestions, the Compact Disc will provide a lifetime of pure listening enjoyment.

CHANDOS DIGITAL RECORDING

This recording was mastered and edited on Chandos Complete PCM Digital System. This system is superior to conventional analog (tape recorder) recording in dynamic range, signal to noise and distortion.

Equipment used:

- Schoeps & Neumann microphones
- New classical mixing console—State of the Art specification designed and built by Chandos
- Sony PCM 1610 Digital processor
- DAE-1100 Digital electronic editor
- Digital information stored in BVU 200A recorders

Although analog tape recorders have been remarkably improved today, they are still limited by a number of drawbacks resulting in distortion and dynamic range limitations. These limits are inherent in the tape, heads, and other mechanical factors, and it is virtually impossible to eliminate them completely.

Digital recording, including PCM (Pulse Code Modulation) is a revolutionary technique to leave these limitations of present analog recorders behind. With digital systems, the sound signal is recorded and transmitted in the form of digital codes and this provides a whole host of features.

Outstanding among them are:

- Wide dynamic range ● Flat frequency response regardless of input level
- Extremely low distortion ● Superior transient characteristics
- No deterioration when repeatedly duplicated

SIR ALEXANDER GIBSON celebrated his twenty-first season as Music Director of the Scottish National Orchestra during 1980. When he was appointed in 1959 he became the first Scotsman to have held the post.

His career prior to 1959 had been outstandingly successful: following his studies at Glasgow University and the Royal College of Music in London where, in 1951, he was awarded the Queen's Prize, he studied at the Salzburg Mozarteum and then went to Siena to work at the Accademia Chigiano. At the 1952 Besancon Festival he was awarded the Enesco Prize for young conductors.

Between 1951 and 1957 he held posts as répétiteur and later Staff Conductor at Sadler's Wells and was Assistant Conductor of the BBC Scottish Orchestra from 1951-54; in 1957 he became Music Director of the Sadler's Wells Opera Company and two years later returned to Scotland and the Scottish National Orchestra. Within his first five years he greatly enhanced the prestige of the orchestra at home and abroad and was the founder and instigator of Scottish Opera in 1962. He and the SNO have now toured Europe and North America several times and made many recordings, and this remarkable success story achieved recognition in 1978 with the grant of patronage by Her Majesty the Queen, closely following the award of a Knighthood to Alexander Gibson in the Jubilee Honours List of 1977.

Many other awards and honours have been conferred upon Sir Alexander, including Honorary Doctorates from the Universities of Aberdeen, Glasgow and Stirling; Honorary Fellowships of the Royal Academy, Royal College, Scottish Royal Academy of Music and the Royal Society of Arts. He was created CBE in 1967; he won the ISM Musician of the Year Award in 1976, and he was awarded the Sibelius medal in 1978.

Apart from his work with Scottish Opera and the SNO, he has travelled widely in Europe and in the USA, where his visits to Houston have become annual events, as well as in Australia and South America.

OVER MANY YEARS there has been a long held attitude that British music is best realized only when interpreted by native artists. Inevitably this misguided native view has contributed much to the unwillingness of foreign-born musicians to perform the works of the British composers. Surely the realization of the musical value of a work is its continued universal acceptance. Fortunately this last attitude has long been held in regard to Holst's best known work, the seven movement suite *The Planets*. First performed in London on September 29, 1918 at a private concert in the Queen's Hall and given as a present to the composer by his fellow musician Henry Balfour Gardiner, the work was soon heard in the United States, Austria, Italy, Germany, Hungary, France, and even the Soviet Union. The first performance in Scotland was of only three movements - *Mars*, *Venus* and *Jupiter* - at a Paterson concert in Edinburgh on January 16, 1922 - and the first complete one at a BBC concert in St. Andrew's Hall, Glasgow on December 2, 1926, conducted by the composer.


The first recording (an acoustic version) of the seven movements was made by the London Symphony Orchestra under the composer between September 1922 and October 1923. He later re-recorded the work via the then newly introduced electrical system between June and October 1926. Since that time the music has been recorded by Boult (on five occasions), Sargent (twice), Solti, Hurst, Susskind, Loughran, Marriner and, most recently, Sir Alexander Gibson. Foreign conductors who have committed their interpretations to record include Stokowski, Bernstein, Karajan, Mehta, Steinberg, Ormandy, Haitink, Previn and Bernard Herrmann. After Elgar's *Enigma Variations* the Holst work is one of the most recorded large-scale orchestral compositions by a British composer.

Holst's interest in astrology came about in the spring of 1913 when he met Clifford Bax. The composer later wrote:

'As a rule I only study things that suggest music to me... Recently the character of each planet suggested lots to me.' His daughter Imogen in the introduction to the third volume of Holst's *Collected Works* states: 'he learnt that Mars was 'headstrong, forceful and assertive'; Venus was 'of an even disposition' with 'a love of all things beautiful'; Mercury, the 'winged messenger of the gods', was 'quick in thought' and 'ingenious'; Jupiter was 'buoyant and hopeful'; Saturn was 'patient' and 'enduring'; Uranus was 'eccentric, abrupt' and 'unexpected'; and Neptune was 'subtle' and 'mysterious'.

The composer's original title contained on the manuscript read 'Seven Pieces for Orchestra' but this was changed in February 1919 to 'Suite for Large Orchestra'. In fact, the latter ascription was more correct, for the size of the forces was the largest that Holst had yet employed: 4 flutes (alternating 2 piccolos and a bass flute), 3 oboes (alternating a bass oboe), cor anglais, 3 clarinets, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, double bassoon, 6 horns, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, tenor tuba, bass tuba, timpani (2 players), bass drum, side drum, tambourine, cymbals, gong, bells, glockenspiel, xylophone, celesta, 2 harps, organ and strings, plus a hidden women's chorus in six parts in Neptune.

MARS - THE BRINGER OF WAR

 'I had the whole of *Mars* fixed in my mind before August', wrote the composer. Holst was always at pains to refute the assertion that the movement was written after the declaration of the First World War on August 4, 1914. *Mars* is not a comment on war; it is a prophetic vision. The opening *relentless 3/4 Allegro* rhythm of the col legno strings, accompanied by timpani, is contrasted against the slow dotted minim and minim pulse of horns and bassoons; the dynamic marking is actually *piano* and the first crescendo does not occur until Bar 11. The lower brass then take over the contrasted role at Figure 1, but slowly the whole orchestra works up to a triple *forte* climax at II, where the strings, fourth trumpet, lower brass and timpani pound out the rhythmic figure in contrast to the dotted minim followed by minim of the woodwind and three trumpets. The prophecies and futility of the coming horror are all too

powerfully conveyed. Five bars later the horns have a chromatic wailing passage, soon taken up by the woodwind and strings, the opening rhythmic pattern being thrust on by the timpani. At Figure IV a new call to arms is introduced by a solo tenor tuba (given in a rhythm of 3 crochets and 2 triplet quavers), answered by the trumpets. After V there is an increasing introduction of semiquaver passages and the impression of approaching chaos and confusion is heightened by the change of time signature from 5/4 to 5/2 one bar before VI, where the *piano* marking is again employed. The mood suddenly changes by a return to the opening rhythmic figure (back in 5/4) at triple *forte*. The tenor tuba's solo is later reiterated at Figure VIII and three bars before IX the earlier theme for trombones and tenor tuba reappears on the woodwind. The tension and horror continue to grow, so that at five bars before IX (where the time signature changes once more to 5/2), the *ffff* marking gives the impression of the world disintegrating. A quick semiquaver scamper and the modified opening rhythm thunders to the movement's end. All this in about seven minutes, and the composer had never heard a machine gun and the tank had not yet been introduced.

VENUS - THE BRINGER OF PEACE



Is in fitting contrast to Mars, dispensing with brass and percussion, and thereby giving full scope to delicate and warmer tone colours via the woodwind, two harps, celesta, solo violin and strings. The

opening calm *Adagio* in 4/4 has a rising solo horn (marked *piano* but carefully qualified with a *diminuendo*) echoed by descending woodwind. The quicker, warmer middle *Andante* 2/4 section is introduced by a solo violin against wind and strings. A return to the opening 4/4 section material, but now richly amplified, is heard before the movement's *morendo al fine*.

MERCURY - THE WINGED MESSENGER



Is in essence a vivacious scherzo - quicksilver and fleet of foot - in which the heavier instruments are missing. The opening is notable for the way Holst cleverly and skillfully tosses the material between the wind

and muted strings, thereby creating the lightness and speed. The change of time signature to 2/4 at Figure III-cunningly gives the impression of an uneven number of beats. At IV the mutes are removed and six bars later the time signature 6/8 returns to unsettle the rhythm. The movement rushes headlong forward, and in a flash everything has disappeared. Of particular interest in this music is the composer's use of bi-tonality.

JUPITER - THE BRINGER OF JOLLYTY



Is marked *allegro giocoso*, the movement being a representation of 'one of those jolly fat people who enjoy life'. The opening passage for violins is full of activity and bustle, followed by the horns (marked *molto pesante*)

with the entry of the wind at Bar 14 to heighten the atmosphere, and two bars later the heavier brass forcefully adding to the rustic nature. At Figure III there is a noticeable change in atmosphere, here almost like a bucolic folk-tune. A change at V to 6/4 has the horns introducing another folk-like melody. Here Holst tends to present tunes time and again so that the sudden introduction of the *andante maestoso* passage 22 bars after VIII somewhat jolts one. This section was set at a later date to the words 'I vow to thee, my country'. The movement then speeds to an exultant close.

SATURN - THE BRINGER OF OLD AGE



Reveals a marked contrast, for we enter upon a vast, cold, damp, desolate vista. Here Holst is in his most personal and eloquent frame of mind. The opening theme (*Adagio* 4/4), for 2 flutes, bass flute and 2 harps, portrays the

passing of youth, and the introduction at Figure I of pizzicato cello and double-basses, and two bars later of trombones, only emphasizes the atmosphere. The mood is heightened following the entry of 3 flutes and bass flute in minims three bars after II against plucked harps. The tension grows as the lower brass enter, contributing to a powerful climax with the bells struck 'with metal striker'. There follows a return to the quiet opening and at Figure V (marked *Andante*) a slightly more ethereal section appears, the harps being prominent until everything gradually fades away.

URANUS - THE MAGICIAN



In 6/8 and marked *Allegro*, begins with an invocation of four notes on trumpets and trombones, echoed twice by tubas and timpani. The bassoons start their heavy-footed rhythmic dance, only to be joined by

the rest of the orchestra. At Figure II the bassoon has a new theme which is taken up in turns by bass oboe, horn and clarinet, the whole working up to a climax. Then a second tune is started by the horns and strings at III with a third rhythmic pattern being introduced by the timpani 14 bars later. Then the whole builds up to a thundering *fff*, only to be cut off suddenly by an unexpected *glissando* from the organ. It is as if everything had vanished. A short commotion then occurs and in a flash all is over.

NEPTUNE - THE MYSTIC



Opens very quietly - the composer actually states in the score: 'the orchestra is to play *sempre pp* throughout.' Woodwinds and harps enter giving the impression of what

Miss Holst has called 'a prolonged gaze into infinity'. The whole movement is a remarkable example of Impressionism in musical terms. The introduction of wordless voices at Figure V only serves to heighten the ethereal nature, and the use of harps, celesta, low organ pedal notes and high lying string passages adds to the sense of the mystic nature. The composer's instructions to the singers are: 'chorus is to be placed in an adjoining room, the door of which is to be left open until the last bar of the piece, when it is to be slowly and silently closed'. For this recording, the choir was placed at the extreme opposite end of the hall from the orchestra, to give the desired effect.

Malcolm Walker

Recording Producer: Robert Matthew-Walker
 Artistic Director & Sound Engineer: Brian Cozzens
 Digital Recording Engineer: Ralph Cousins
 Recording Date & Location: July 24-3, 1979, Henry Wood Hall, Glasgow (SNO/Cent)

Reeve Design: Aiden

Instrumentation

- 4 Flutes - 3rd to combine 1st Piccolo
- 4th to combine 2nd Piccolo and Bass Flute
- 3 Oboes - 3rd to combine Bass Oboe
- English Horn
- 3 Clarinets
- Bass Clarinet
- 3 Bassoons
- Double Bassoon
- 6 Horns in F
- 4 Trumpets in C
- 2 Tenor Trombones
- 2 Bass Trombone
- 1 Tenor Tuba in B
- 1 Bass Tuba
- 6 Timpani
- Triangle/Side Drum
- Tamboourine/Cymbals
- Bass Drum/Gong
- Bells/Glockenspiel
- Celesta/Xylophone
- 2 Harps
- Organ
- Strings

2 Players

3 Players

2 Players

In the 7th piece only (Neptune),
 a Hidden Choir of Female Voices in 6 parts

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(1874-1934)

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SATURN — The Bringer of Old Age (10:00)
URANUS — The Magician (5:57)
NEPTUNE — The Mystic (8:09)
(with Women's Voices of the SNO Chorus)

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The number of possible recordings each year is limited by the costs involved and the Bank is very pleased to assist the SNO in this field, thereby enabling a wider range of records to be made available to the many thousands of listeners who enjoy the Orchestra's work.

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