

London **Philharmonic** Orchestra

**HOLST**  
**THE PLANETS**

**VLADIMIR JUROWSKI** *conductor*  
**LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA**



## HOLST THE PLANETS

Up to 1914 most of Holst's music was written on a relatively modest scale, but practical experience as an orchestral trombonist had helped him acquire a thorough understanding of orchestration and he wanted to compose a large-scale work of symphonic proportions. With no certainty of ever hearing such an extravagant composition, he began *The Planets*, a suite of seven tone poems for very large orchestra. Normally the most practical of composers, he allowed himself on this occasion every instrument his conception demanded, calling for two piccolos, four flutes and alto flute, three oboes, cor anglais and bass oboe, three clarinets and bass clarinet, three bassoons and contra-bassoon, six horns, four trumpets, three trombones, tenor and bass tubas, two harps, celesta, organ, a large array of percussion and strings. In the last movement he added an off-stage six-part female choir.

The work was completed in 1916. In September 1918, when Holst was leaving on a wartime mission to Greece, the composer Balfour Gardiner engaged the Queen's Hall Orchestra for a semi-private Sunday morning session so that Holst could hear *The Planets*. Sir Adrian Boult conducted. Influential musicians were present and *The Planets* made such an impression that it was soon published and

publicly performed. The work has remained popular and is a staple of the orchestral repertoire both professional and amateur.

Holst's concern was not with astronomy but with the planets' supposed astrological associations, and he gave each movement an explanatory title.

***Mars, the Bringer of War*** evokes the horrors of modern warfare. It is noteworthy that Holst composed this before the outbreak of hostilities. The movement is dominated by a 5/4 rhythmic motive initiated by timpani, harps and strings played *col legno* (with the wood of the bow). Against this are heard a menacing, heaving theme and an undulating second subject, the music moving relentlessly with brutal power. The climax is a tremendous explosion for organ and full orchestra, and with ferocious chords on brass, timpani and strings this prophetic movement ends.

***Venus, the Bringer of Peace*** is a study in calm and beauty, founded on a rising horn phrase and descending woodwind answer. There are expressive solos for violin, oboe, clarinet and cello in the middle section, and the movement concludes with an elaboration of the opening material.

***Mercury, the Winged Messenger*** is a fleeting scherzo, deriving its character from delicate scoring and rapid switching between remote tonalities. The three main ideas are a figure that flits through woodwind and strings, a rhythmic phrase introduced by woodwind and a six-bar tune played by a violin and other soloists before it spreads to the whole orchestra.

***Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity*** suggested to the composer one of those fat people who enjoy life, and the boisterous outer sections are marked *Allegro giocoso*. All three themes in the first section are given to the horns. The great tune of the central section, *Andante maestoso*, later had patriotic words fitted to it, but it was not composed with such sentiments in mind. Its climax is cut short by the woodwind heralding the return of the previous themes, but it returns imposingly on the brass just before the end.

***Saturn, the Bringer of Old Age*** is perhaps the most imaginative movement in the suite. While swaying chords on flutes and harps mark the passage of time, a dark figure emerges from the basses and grows into a sombre march for trombones. Then the flutes take over, and the march reaches an anguished climax. When this subsides, the opening

bass figure reappears, but the anxiety has passed and the closing pages suggest calm acceptance of the inevitability of age.

***Uranus, the Magician*** sounds related to *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, though Holst did not know Dukas's work when he wrote this. Three commanding statements of a four-note figure open the proceedings, (and recur throughout like a magician's spell) and the bassoons begin a jogtrot that grows into a big, swinging tune. Then the magician's incantation becomes the accompaniment to a march tune introduced by tenor and bass tubas. A mighty climax produces a spellbound hush. There is one more brief outburst. Then, with an echo of his motive in faint harp harmonics, the magician vanishes.

***Neptune, the Mystic*** is *pianissimo* throughout and devoid of expression, its intangible form and shifting harmonies suggesting somewhere infinitely remote. Cast in a metre of three beats followed by two, it begins with a flute theme but dissolves into alternating chords against harp and celesta arpeggios. Distant disembodied voices steal upon the air and gradually the instruments fall silent until nothing is left but wordless singing fading into outer space.

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## VLADIMIR JUROWSKI *conductor*

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Vladimir Jurowski was born in Moscow, but in 1990 moved with his family to Germany, where he completed his musical studies at the High Schools of Music in Dresden

and in Berlin. In 1995 he made a highly successful début at the Wexford Festival conducting Rimsky-Korsakov's *May Night*, which launched his international career. Since then he has worked with the world's leading orchestras and opera houses such as the Berlin Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw, Dresden Staatskapelle and Philadelphia orchestras as well as the Royal Opera House Covent Garden, Opéra Bastille de Paris, La Scala Milan and Metropolitan Opera New York.

In January 2001 Vladimir Jurowski took up the position of Music Director of Glyndebourne Festival Opera. In 2005 he was appointed Principal Guest Conductor of the Russian National Orchestra and granted the title of "Special Artist" of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. In September 2007 he became the London Philharmonic Orchestra's twelfth Principal Conductor.

## LONDON PHILHARMONIC CHOIR

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The London Philharmonic Choir was founded in 1947 as the chorus for the London Philharmonic Orchestra. It is widely acclaimed as one of the nation's finest

choirs and consistently meets with critical acclaim. Continuing to perform regularly with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the London Philharmonic Choir also works with many other orchestras throughout the United Kingdom and makes annual appearances at the BBC Proms. It has performed under some of the world's most eminent conductors – among them Pierre Boulez, Sir Mark Elder, Sir John Eliot Gardiner, Bernard Haitink, Kurt Masur, Sir Roger Norrington, Sir Simon Rattle, Sir Georg Solti and Klaus Tennstedt. The London Philharmonic Choir has participated in more than seventy recordings, including a Gramophone-Award-winning performance of Mahler's Eighth Symphony under Klaus Tennstedt. The Choir often travels overseas and in recent years it has appeared at the Canary Islands and Lucerne music festivals, and given concerts in Europe, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Australia.

# LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

The London Philharmonic Orchestra is known as one of the world's great orchestras with a reputation secured by its performances in the concert hall and opera house, its many award-winning recordings, its trail-blazing international tours and its pioneering education work. Distinguished conductors who have held positions with the Orchestra since its foundation in 1932 by Sir Thomas Beecham include Sir Adrian Boult, Sir John Pritchard, Bernard Haitink, Sir Georg Solti, Klaus Tennstedt, Franz Welser-Möst and Kurt Masur. Vladimir Jurowski was appointed the Orchestra's Principal Guest Conductor in March 2003 and became Principal Conductor in September 2007, succeeding Kurt Masur. The London Philharmonic Orchestra has been resident symphony orchestra at Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall since 1992 and there it presents its main series

of concerts between September and May each year. In summer, the Orchestra moves to Sussex where it has been Resident at Glyndebourne Festival Opera for over 40 years. The Orchestra also performs at venues around the UK and has made numerous tours to America, Europe and Japan, and visited India, Hong Kong, China, South Korea, Australia, South Africa and Abu Dhabi.

The London Philharmonic Orchestra made its first recordings on 10 October 1932, just three days after its first public performance. It has recorded and broadcast regularly ever since, and in 2005 established its own record label. These recordings are taken mainly from live concerts given by conductors including LPO Principal Conductors from Beecham and Boult, through Haitink, Solti and Tennstedt, to Masur and Jurowski. [www.lpo.org.uk](http://www.lpo.org.uk)



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**GUSTAV HOLST (1874–1934)**

**The Planets Suite**

**43:06**

- |    |      |                                 |
|----|------|---------------------------------|
| 01 | 6:31 | Mars, the Bringer of War        |
| 02 | 6:52 | Venus, the Bringer of Peace     |
| 03 | 3:46 | Mercury, the Winged Messenger   |
| 04 | 7:06 | Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity |
| 05 | 7:24 | Saturn, the Bringer of Old Age  |
| 06 | 5:38 | Uranus, the Magician            |
| 07 | 5:49 | Neptune, the Mystic             |

**VLADIMIR JUROWSKI** *conductor*

**LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA** *and* **CHOIR**

**Pieter Schoeman** *leader*

**Neville Creed** *chorus master*

*Recorded live at Southbank Centre's* **ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL**, London