



GUSTAV HOLST (1874–1934)

While Holst grew up in a family of musicians, the future did not look promising for this severely near-sighted, asthmatic child. Although he was a proficient trombonist and pianist, the neuritis in his right arm prevented any hope of a performance career. On the bright side, he met Vaughan Williams when they both were in their early twenties, becoming great friends for the rest of their lives.

Despite his physical challenges, Holst put energy into all that interested him. When on vacation with brothers Clifford and Arnold Bax, he became intrigued with Clifford's conversations about astrology and resolved to depict the astrological attributes of the planets in a suite for large orchestra. He worked at it for two years yet he realized that due to the expense involved, it would probably never be heard.

That may have been the case were it not for the generosity of friend and composer Balfour Gardiner who gave him the magnificent present of two hours with the Queen's Hall orchestra and the then young conductor Adrian Boult to rehearse and perform *The Planets* for an invited audience. Holst himself conducted the work with great success, establishing its status in the symphonic orchestral canon.

The Planets, Op. 32 (1914–16)

The bass trombone part for *The Planets* was written to be played on a narrow bore bass trombone in G, common in Britain until the 1960s, in a section that also would have included two narrow bore tenor trombones. A G bass trombone with a single valve to D would have made playing this work easier for performers of the time.

Today, it is almost always played on a modern bass trombone in B-flat (valves F & D) that makes the part more manageable. The metronome markings are taken from Holst's own 1923 and 1926 recordings of the work with the London Symphony Orchestra. Tempos will vary with individual conductors.

Movement 1 – Mars, the Bringer of War

The relentless rhythmic drive of the 5/4 meter represents the Roman god of war, Mars. The bass trombone plays the theme at Rehearsal no. 1 in octaves with the second trombone. Play this very legato with a deep sense of foreboding. There is no nuance or dynamic change to be found in the war-like, rhythmic passage at Rehearsal no. 2.

Holst's phrasing for the trombone section soli at measure 43 makes finding a place to breath difficult; avoid breaking a slur by taking a very quick breath at the end of measure 44.

17 **1** [**Allegro** (♩ = ca. 164)]

24

39 **2**

43

Detailed description of the musical score: The score is for bass trombone in 5/4 time. It begins at measure 17 with a tempo marking of Allegro (♩ = ca. 164). The first staff (measures 17-23) starts with a dynamic of *p* and includes a slur over measures 17-23, with dynamics changing to *mp* and *p*. A *cresc.* marking is present at the end of measure 23. The second staff (measures 24-38) starts with *mf*, has a slur over measures 24-38, and includes a dynamic change to *f* at measure 38. A *p cresc.* marking is at the end of measure 38. The third staff (measures 39-42) starts with *fff* and features a slur over measures 39-42 with triplet markings over measures 39, 40, and 41. The fourth staff (measures 43-44) continues the phrasing from measure 43, with a slur over measures 43-44.

The forceful nature of this sequence continues the relentless drive of this movement.

At Rehearsal no. 8, all three trombones play the theme in unison. Observe the staccato markings but do not let the articulations become harsh in this extremely loud dynamic. Keep your tone color consistent without getting edgy or resorting to blasting.

126

132

Movement 4 – Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity

This bass line occurs under an expansive melody that was used in the British patriotic song, “I vow to Thee, My Country.” It should be played in a noble character and each note should be given full value.

Here, the bass trombone is joined in octaves by the tenor tuba, bass tuba and other trombones.

[Andante maestoso (♩ = ca. 86)]

217

225

For this jumpy and syncopated passage beginning in measure 262, take care not to fall behind the beat.

Holst did not include the G-natural sixteenth-note in measure 266 because it was virtually impossible to play the interval G to A on a G bass trombone (first to sixth position) in this fast tempo. Today, players usually play this G, as notated below in the ossia measure, which makes entering on-time easier.

246

265

The bass trombone, tuba, low strings and winds reprise this movement's slow theme at Rehearsal no. 17. Play this in a loud dynamic and with a well-projected legato. This melodic passage requires good breath control in the low register. Experiment with breaths after the third beats of measures 389 and 390.

388 **17** **Lento maestoso** (♩ = ca. 76) accel.

ff legato *p* molto cresc.

395 **Presto** (♩ = ca. 84)

fff 6