GUSTAV HOLST AS A CHORAL COMPOSER: HIS LIFE, FACTORS INFLUENCING HIS COMPOSITIONS, HIS PLACE IN ENGLISH MUSIC, AND A CONSIDERATION OF THE PRINCIPAL STYLISTIC ELEMENTS OF HIS CHORAL MUSIC

THESIS

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MASTER OF MUSIC

By

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Chapter

### I. INTRODUCTION

- Musical Heritage
- Preparation
- Teacher

### II. FACTORS INFLUENCING HIS COMPOSITIONS

- Consideration of Accusations of Eclecticism
- Impressionism
- Stravinsky and Neo-Classicism
- Early Inclinations toward Lyricists
- Wagner
- Vaughan Williams
- Folk-song
- Tudor
- The Hindu Epics

### III. HOLST'S POSITION IN THE 20TH CENTURY

- RENAISSANCE OF ENGLISH MUSIC

- State of English Music at Turn of Century
- Holst's Relation to the English Tradition

### IV. A CONSIDERATION OF SOURCES OF HIS TEXTS AND PRINCIPAL STYLISTIC FACTORS OF HOLST'S CHORAL MUSIC

- Sources of the Texts
- Emphasis on Declamation and Prose-Rhythm
- Principal Stylistic Factors

## CHRONOLOGICAL LISTING OF HOLST'S PUBLISHED CHORAL MUSIC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Use of 5 and 7 Beat Bars</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Stepwise Descent of Octave Figure in Bass</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Harmonic Changes Determined by Contrary Conjunct Motion</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Recitative Revolving Around a Central Pivot Tone</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Cadences Consisting of Four Notes Dropping by Step</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Contrast of Parlante and Cantabile Sections of &quot;To the Unknown God&quot;</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. (Same as Above)</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Antiphonal Section of &quot;The Hymn of Jesus&quot;</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Narrative Between Soloist and Chorus of &quot;Evening Watch&quot;</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Scale of &quot;To the Unknown God&quot;</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Use of Rag Bhairiyi in &quot;First Choral Symphony&quot;</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Use of Dorian in &quot;This Have I Done For My True Love&quot;</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Use of Phrygian in &quot;The Choral Fantasia&quot;</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Harmonic Structure of &quot;To the Unknown God&quot;</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Organum-like Texture of &quot;The Choral Fantasia&quot;</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
16. Chords Built on 4ths in "First Choral Symphony" ........................................ 57
17. Chords Built on 4ths in "Evening Watch" .................................................. 58
18. Bitonal Chords in "The Hymn of Jesus" ....................................................... 59
19. Polytonality in "First Choral Symphony" ..................................................... 60
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"An amiable personality, not himself an unusually passionate man, Holst has excited more violent passions than any other contemporary English composer. How difficult he is to assess as a creative artist is perhaps indicated by the extraordinary fluctuations in his reputation." ¹ For a number of years he was completely unknown and ignored, living a quiet and unhurried life as an obscure teacher. Then with a momentary flash, after outstanding works such as "The Planets," and the "Ode to Death," he was caught up in a wave of public approval that made him, for a time, the recipient of national and even international honors.² He was awarded the gold medal by the Royal Philharmonic Society, was made a Fellow of the Royal College of Music, and was offered honorary degrees by American universities.³ Then, as suddenly as he had been acclaimed, the flame subsided and his later works were received with "callous

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²Ibid.
fertility. Always a subject of great controversy during his time as an important English musical figure, contemporary criticisms ran from such superlatives as Edmund Rubbra's comment on the "First Choral Symphony," "... The whole work is a wonderful and exhilarating essay in choral writing. ... Its sheer virtuosity ... never flags and its wit and mercurial thinking combine to make it consistently exhilarating" to Herbert Raynor's description of the same work as a "courageous failure." In reference to this work, "others complained of the 'dreary wastes of dulness' and the chilly vacillations of its harmonies, where cerebration tamed inspiration."

Whatever the comments of his critics and contemporaries, "he has never recovered his earlier glory ... and his most representative works are now scarcely performed." Subsequent events and the passing of years have shown that his is a position of central importance in the Renaissance of English music, and that his music should be given a rehearing and his position a re-evaluation.

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4 Mellers, op. cit., p. 229.


8 Mellers, op. cit., p. 230.
Musical Heritage

Gustav Holst was born at Cheltenham, England, on September 21, 1874. "Despite the foreign origin of his name, Gustav Holst's ancestry is preponderantly English, and associated with those Western countries from whence have come many representative English composers of the 19th and 20th centuries." His was the unrivalled legacy of being born of a family of musicians; his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather were all professional musicians. He grew up with music always about him: it was the family language and he had this advantage, for which there is in later life no equivalent, of using it from the first like any other.

His full name was Gustavus Theodore von Holst. His great-grandfather, Matthias von Holst, was a Swedish musician who had lived in Riga, and for a time taught harp to the Imperial Family in St. Petersburg. "Matthias von Holst was a competent musician, but his political ideas were so unwelcome that by the beginning of the 19th century, he had

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10Imogen Holst, op. cit., p. 6.


12Imogen Holst, op. cit., p. 7.
to escape from Riga with his Russian wife and his small son Gustavus Valentine." He went to London and began a very profitable career teaching harp and piano. Gustavus Valentine also grew up to be a very competent musician, a composer as well as a pianist. He settled in Cheltenham with an English wife and, in his turn, was a much respected provincial teacher. He had two sons; the younger of these, Adolph von Holst, was a gifted pianist who followed in his father's place teaching in Cheltenham. He married one of his pupils and had two sons; the eldest was Gustavus Theodore. Adolph's capacity for work was almost unlimited and he set for himself an extremely high standard of perfection, a trait which undoubtedly was inherited by Gustavus Theodore. Of course, it was only inevitable that Gustav begin studying music, and while a youngster acquired quite an adequate piano technique, also learning the violin. His father was determined that he should be a really good pianist, but the long hours of practice were being disturbed already by neuritis in his hand. This neuritis was to eventually become indirectly a blessing in disguise for "it led to the intimate orchestral experience and practical sense of

13 Ibid.
14 Ibid., p. 8
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid. p. 9
17 Ibid.
interpretation which have contributed so much to his technical equipment."\(^{18}\)

**Preparation**

Possibly one of the most fortunate opportunities of his life came as a youth. "His first professional engagement was at Wyck Rissington, a small village in the Cotswolds, where he was organist and choirmaster . . . He was also appointed conductor of the Choral Society at Bourton-on-the-Water, and here he had his first experience of dealing with a choir and orchestra."\(^{19}\) "Here he laid the foundations of his knowledge of choral effect, and of his powers as a teacher . . . "\(^{20}\)

" . . . Adolph had begun to let things slide, and during the last few years . . . [Gustav] . . . had done all the odd jobs, from checking the orchestral parts and cueing in the missing woodwind to sending post cards to the players to remind them of extra rehearsals."\(^{21}\) In 1893 he composed the music for a local operetta called "Lansdowne Castle." "The music was said to be tuneful, if somewhat in the style of


\(^{19}\)Imogen Holst, *op. cit.* p. 10.


\(^{21}\)Imogen Holst, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
Sullivan, and although at one point the young composer had shocked the audience by introducing an Anglican chant into the dialogue, the work as a whole was considered to be a success and showed signs of great promise. Thus he had considerable practical experience in music before going to the Royal College of Music.

Although Adolph had not been much impressed with Gustav's early inclinations toward composition, after the performance of "Lansdowne Castle" he borrowed one hundred pounds from a relative to send him to the Royal College of Music. He arrived at the Royal College of Music at a time when the standards were exceptionally high, from the standpoint of teachers as well as pupils. His teachers were Sharpe for piano, Hoyte for organ, and Rockstro for theory. "Rockstro may have been an insecure theorist, but he fired the young man with the almost religious fervor of his teaching."

During this time the neuritis which had begun to trouble him as a youth was becoming increasingly painful, so much so that he found prolonged practice at the piano impossible.

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22Ibid.
23Ibid.
24Ibid., p. 12.
26Capell, op. cit., p. 1074.
27Imogen Holst, op. cit.
It was at this point that he was forced to the conclusion that a career as a pianist was impossible, and took up the trombone, which he studied under Case.28

During the school term of 1904 the borrowed one hundred pounds was completely gone, and he was faced with the probability that he would have to leave school during Christmas recess.29 However, a few weeks later, he won the open scholarship for composition just barely inside the age limit.30 He studied composition with Stanford, who proved to be a very wonderful stimulation as well as a critical task-master.

He appreciated the way that Stanford insisted on sincerity, and he readily accepted the creed that a composer, however gifted, must learn his technique so thoroughly that he can forget it. He envied Stanford's genius for quoting exactly the right musical example to illustrate any point he was criticizing, and he delighted in his refusal to rely on cast-iron rules. Although he often disagreed with Stanford's opinions, he was always grateful to him, especially for having taught him to become his own critic.31

It was during these student days that Gustav Holst first became completely absorbed in Wagner, an influence that was to hold him for a number of years. By far the deepest and most profound influence which he came to know during his student days was meeting and forming a friendship with

28Thompson, op. cit., p. 846.
29Imogen Holst, op. cit., p. 13.
30Ibid., p. 15.
31Ibid., p. 11.
Ralph Vaughan Williams, a relationship which will be discussed at greater length later in this paper.

In 1898 the family financial position was becoming somewhat desperate; during the summer of this year he was offered a position by the Carl Rosa Opera Company as first trombone and répétiteur. It seemed too good a chance to let pass, and he left, regretfully, the Royal College of Music.\textsuperscript{32}

In addition to the Carl Rosa Company, he also toured for several seasons as second trombone in the Scottish Orchestra.\textsuperscript{33}

This period in which he made his way as a professional orchestra player, though a transitory period, cannot be underestimated as a developing factor.

He got to know the feeling of an orchestra from the inside, and it was a far better training for a composer than the life of a virtuoso pianist would have been \ldots

Now that he was in the middle of it all, he began to get intimate knowledge of the practical possibilities of an orchestra. While listening to rehearsals he found out the strong points and the shortcomings of the different instruments, and before long the balance and texture of his scoring became instinctive.\textsuperscript{34}

Teacher

In 1905, Holst was asked to deputize for the singing teacher at the James Allen Girls School at Dulwich,\textsuperscript{35} thus

\textsuperscript{32}Ibid., p. 19.

\textsuperscript{33}Thompson, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 846.

\textsuperscript{34}Imogen Holst, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 20.

\textsuperscript{35}Thompson, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 846.
embarking on a long and fruitful career as a teacher. Even those who have been the most vehement critics of Holst as a composer have very readily testified to his enduring contribution as a teacher. For as Vaughan Williams said, "Gustav Holst is not only a great composer--but a great teacher." 36 One of Holst's pupils, Harvey Grace, offers the following comment about this aspect of his career:

A writer dealing with this subject is at the outset struck by the inadequacy of the term "teacher" in its present-day connotation. To describe this side of Holst one needs a synonym with some of the flavor of the dim past when a teacher was felt to be a leader, apostle, prophet. 37

To be sure, Holst had a compelling power as a teacher which is well described by Percy Scholes in the Oxford Companion to Music:

During the latter part of the 1914-18 War ... he readily agreed to go to Salonica and then to Constantinople to organize musical activities amongst the soldiers, he was successful in arousing enthusiasm, and sent home for large consignments of harmony text-books, song-books, and copies of Byrd's Three Part Mass--a special edition of which was printed for his use, several performances duly taking place. This is mentioned as typical of his power, from his village days, of communicating

36 Vaughan Williams, op. cit., p. 237.

37 Harvey Grace, "Gustav Holst--Teacher," Musical Times, LXXV (August, 1934), 689.
a love for the finest music to any body of men, women or children with whom he might happen to meet.  

He retained the Dulwich post until 1919, although in 1905 he was appointed music director at St. Pauls Girls School in Hammersmith, and in 1907, musical director at Morley College for Working Men and Women. The post at St. Pauls requires special consideration. "This was his biggest teaching post, and the only one that he kept until his death." That he greatly raised the standard of music is not a matter of great importance; such a thing was entirely expected. The most important event connected with St. Pauls was that he was given a long-dreamed-of luxury—a large sound-proof room where he could compose in unbroken silence and solitude.

That room was to have a profound influence on his life. He got into the habit of saving up his half-finished phrases till the end of the school week, and saving up his half-formed ideas till the end of the school year. And then he would find it so easy to write that he used to speak of the "spell" that his room held for him.

Virtually everything that he wrote of importance was written in this room.

39Thompson, *op. cit.*
40Imogen Holst, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
41Ibid.
42Ibid.
At Morley College Holst found "materials and conditions admirably suited to bring out his peculiar qualities as a leader." 43 Here his students consisted of men and women of all walks; there were young and old, educated and illiterate, "and practising a medley of trades and professions." 44 "Morley College was afterwards to bring an incalculable amount of joy into his life, but at first it was a frightful business trying to get things going." 45 Apparently before Holst assumed the position as director, music was treated in a very perfunctory manner, for immediately after he took the post students began dropping out of the classes due to the exacting demands of the new conductor. 46 The authorities grew quite alarmed, and actually entertained serious thoughts of asking him to resign. 47 He stayed on, however, and some four years later Morley College gave the first performance since the 17th century of Purcell's "Fairy Queen." This was an undertaking of colossal magnitude; the full score of the opera had been lost since shortly after Purcell's death, and had only been recovered very recently. He got permission for his Morley bakers, mechanics, etc., to copy the complete

43 Grace, op. cit., p. 689.
44 Ibid., p. 690.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
vocal and orchestral parts. It took over a year for those inexperienced copyists to write out the 1500 pages of manuscript. Unfortunately, it wasn't always just simply copying; oftentimes transpositions were found to be necessary; yet they persevered and the performance was a marked success. What a far cry from the Morley College of four years previous when a popular ditty, poorly performed, was the scope of the musical enterprise. To have made such an outstanding success in so perilous a task as adult education undoubtedly required a personality of great "sympathy and enthusiasm, humour and understanding of human nature, as well as thorough practical experience and knowledge." 

In 1919 he joined the teaching staff of the Royal College of Music as teacher of composition. "At the Royal College of Music he proved an inspiring figure in his insistence at once on contrapuntal discipline and on true creative freedom, based on absolute economy of means." As a teacher . . . he was always far more interested in what he could coax out of a pupil than in what he could instil into one.

48 Ibid., p. 39.
49 Ibid., p. 39.
50 Thompson, op. cit., p. 846.
51 Imogen Holst, op. cit., p. 78.
52 Mellers, op. cit., p. 230.
53 Evans, "Gustav Holst," Musical Times, LXXV (July, 1934), 593.
"He enjoyed teaching at Morley and St. Pauls more than . . . at the Royal College of Music. For he was always doubtful whether composition could be taught at all."\(^{54}\)

He believed that "education in its deepest sense was the unfolding of the pupil's mind."\(^{55}\)

Arnold Foster, who was Holst's successor at Morley College,\(^{56}\) has said that "when a full-length study of Holst comes to be written, the Festivals given by the Whitsuntide Singers will have to be taken into account."\(^{57}\) Surely in any consideration of Holst's choral music the Whitsuntide Singers must be given a place of special importance, for a considerable number of his choral works were written expressly for the Singers, "and it is fair to assume that but for the stimulus and the occasions, they would either not have been written, or would have been written differently."\(^{58}\)

The Whitsuntide Singers were an institution which grew out of Holst's work at Morley College and a stay at Thaxted, in Essex.\(^{59}\) "Holst was struck by the fitness of the church (at Thaxted) and surroundings for certain types of choral music."\(^{60}\) "Thaxted itself was beautiful. There was a

\(^{54}\)Ibid., p. 98.

\(^{55}\)Ibid., p. 98.


\(^{57}\)Grace, op. cit., p. 694.

\(^{58}\)Ibid., p. 694.


\(^{60}\)Grace, op. cit., p. 694.
quiet dignity about the 15th century houses, and the cobbled streets, and the windmill near the church, and the church itself was the crowning glory of the place. It was like a cathedral. And inside, instead of dark and cluttered up, it was spacious and incredibly light." Holst, visiting the church, conceived a Festival, for which he would bring together his friends, disciples and pupils and sing Palestrina, Vittoria, Purcell and Bach. The dream became a reality during the Whitsun weekend of 1916 and became an annual affair, being cancelled only two or three times, due to unavoidable conflicts, such as the year Holst was in Salonica with the army. Holst himself had this to say concerning the first Whitsuntide festival in a letter to his friend, W. G. Whittaker:

It has been a revelation to me. And what it has revealed to me and what I shall never be able to persuade you is that quantity is more important than quality. We don't get enough. We practise stuff for a concert at which we do a thing once and get excited over it and then go off and do something else.

Whereas on this occasion things were different. Take Bach's Missa Brevis, for instance. The Morleyites had practised it since January. On June 10th they rehearsed it and other things for three hours in Thaxted church. On Whitsunday we did it during the service in the morning, and again in the

61 Imogen Holst, op. cit., p. 46.
62 Ibid.
63 Grace, op. cit., p. 694.
evening, and again on Monday morning. And then some enthusiasts went through it again on Tuesday morning.

In the intervals between the services people drifted into church and sang motets or played violin or cello. And others caught bad colds through going long walks in the pouring rain singing madrigals and folk songs and rounds the whole time.

The effect on us all was indescribable. We weren't merely excited: we were quite normal, only rather more alive than usual.

I realise now why the Bible insists on heaven being a place ... where people sing and go on singing.⁶⁴

It is incorrect, however, to form the conclusion that these week-end music-makings were something free and easy and "hearty;" there were long and exacting rehearsals, even of familiar things. No amateur enjoyed music more keenly than Holst, but he kept his professional standard: "You must give your utmost or nothing."⁶⁵ After the first Festival at Thaxted, the location of the Festival would change from year to year, sometimes in cathedrals and sometimes in the city churches of London.⁶⁶

Undoubtedly one of the greatest contributing factors to Holst's effectiveness as a choral composer was his thorough knowledge of choral technique. Harvey Grace, in speaking of Holst's extraordinary gifts as a choral conductor, describes a performance by the Whitsuntide Singers

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⁶⁴Imogen Holst, op. cit., pp. 47-49.
⁶⁵Grace, op. cit., p. 694.
⁶⁶Imogen Holst, op. cit., p. 49.
of Vaughan Williams' "Mass in G Minor" (which was dedicated to the Whitsuntide Singers): "A very large public knew him as a highly efficient director of his own orchestral works; but his interpretive and evocative genius had full play only under the more intimate and congenial conditions of these Festival performances. Musicians are apt to scoff, not without cause, at novelists' descriptions of musical heroes who, conducting or performing, hypnotize their hearers. Yet we know that no great interpretive artist is without some such power . . . on this occasion I was conscious that Holst's ascendancy over his singers had in it a magnetic quality that gave me a new experience. The impression has remained vividly . . . and I set it down . . . because I feel that an attempt to do justice to Holst's singular powers as a leader would be incomplete without it." 67

In his direction of the Whitsuntide Singers, Holst showed the practical working out of his creed as to the social value of music, and displayed it to an extent unequalled in any of his other activities. 68 He had a strong belief in music-making as a form of social activity. 69

67Grace, op. cit., p. 694.
68Ibid., p. 693.
69Ibid., p. 689.
an artisan in the fullest sense of the word, treating it always as a vital thing in every-day life, and not a secret preserve for the comparatively leisurely few."  

70 Rubbra, op. cit., p. 31.
CHAPTER II

FACTORs INFLUENCING HIS COMPOSITIONs

Consideration of Accusations of Eclecticism

In a lecture delivered in June, 1921, at the Royal Institute of Great Britain, Henry Colles made the following comment: "Holst will pick up fragments from a dozen different sources and hurl them together in haste to say what they will."¹ This accusation will immediately lead one into that central question of Holst's music which is discussed most intensely by both his critics and his pupils--the problem of his inclination towards eclecticism; of reflecting too many diverse styles in his music.² "The word 'problem' appears to have been not seldom on Holst's lips. It marked his sense of responsibility in the face of day-to-day requirements of amateurs, students, and artists who looked to him for inspiration; in a wider sense it denoted his life-long search for a style that should satisfy him as a vehicle of personal expression . . . ."³ "Holst's

³"New Books," (author not given), Monthly Music Record, LXXXI (June, 1951), 131.
tragedy—if one can use such a strong term—was that his long path to maturity was immediately lengthened by yielding to the attractions that a naturally adventurous mind found in all the cross-currents of 20th century music, but it is a mistake to think that his own apparent changes of direction were a sign of musical instability, or of an effort to find his own centre in some movement or 'ism' outside himself. Rather, they are... signs of a search for an ideal musical vehicle for his singularly consistent musical thought, for the essential Holst... is recognizable whatever musical garb he adopts."^4

"Holst is a figure of peculiar fascination."^5 He is fascinating for the "personal cast of his mind which gives his music a savour one may either like or dislike, but cannot ignore."^6 Holst's original personality emerged gradually, traveling its own direct path.^7 "So various were his powers and interests, so continually changing was his direction that it is almost impossible to plot the resultant curve of his career."^8

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^6 Ibid.


The essence of his eclectic searchings seems to be that "in Holst we have a composer of considerable musical intelligence and definite musical personality cutting his path through a variety of phases and attitudes, influenced . . . more deeply by varieties of extra-musical thought that seemed to point a direction for his gifts than by musical precedent."\(^9\) Holst expended a very great deal of time and effort in locating and pinning down these "extra-musical thoughts" and would then adapt to them a musical language which he felt would most adequately express them. "Holst's mind . . . was one that continually quested beyond the immediate circle of native tradition, and the development of his music owes much to a deep assimilation of [the most recent continental trends and] non-European scales and modes of musical thought."\(^10\) Indeed, a good bit of Holst's music was accused of being a "compendium of recent musical history."\(^11\)

Impressionism

Of the purely musical influences on Holst's choral compositions, the Impressionistic School made very little


impact save in the attitude toward chords: "... not in the surface sense of using ... [impressionistic] harmonies, but that the chords become valuable in themselves, as coagulations that have a meaning apart from contest." There is, however, one choral work which shows a distinct link with the Impressionists; this is the "Hymn to Dionysius," for female voices and orchestra. This work was written while Vaughan Williams was still under the influence of his lessons with Ravel. As Vaughan Williams and Holst constantly showed their compositions to each other while they were in the formative stages, it is apparent that Holst was also influenced to a limited extent by these lessons. The work consists of much unison chanting, tranquil pentatonic passages, and is built on the Dorian mode. For all practical purposes the "half-lights of Impressionism" held little attraction for Holst; he had no use for the sensual in music.

Stravinsky and Neo-Classicism

"Possibly the most significant contemporary influence in his life was the effect that Stravinsky had on his

\begin{enumerate}
\item \cite{Rubbra, Gustav Holst, p. 48}
\item \cite{Imogen Holst, The Music of Gustav Holst (London, 1951), p. 37.}
\item \cite{Ibid.}
\item \cite{Ibid.}
\item \cite{Kidson, op. cit., p. 187.}
\end{enumerate}
music . . . ." The striking number of distinctive ostinato passages in his choral music of the middle years is evidence that Holst was more than just conversant with early Stravinsky. "Technically, it is immediately recognizable in the insistence of repeated time-patterns and the bitonal clashes of C to F#. This relationship between C and F#, however, and between C and Db, can hardly be considered as a local or a personal influence; throughout Europe composers were seizing hold of these sounds in their conscious or unconscious attempts to get away from the clearly defined major and minor keys . . . ." Holst described Stravinsky's "Les Noces" as being "terrifyingly impressive." 

Early Inclinations toward Lyricists

Of the very early musical influences on Holst the names of Grieg and Sullivan are prominent. Grieg had been a devotion of his since his days as a young piano student in Cheltenham. This devotion, however, was not shared by his father. "He had a passion for Grieg, but had to wait

until his father was out of the house before venturing to play the Lyric Pieces."\textsuperscript{21} Even later when a student of composition with Stanford "he continued to turn out songs that were mock Sullivan and piano pieces that were imitation Grieg."\textsuperscript{22} This early devotion to Grieg which influenced his student work ... occasionally crops up in his later music, without in the least detracting from its individuality."\textsuperscript{23} A notable example of this is the "Battle Hymn," number two of the "First Group of Choral Hymns from the Rig Veda."\textsuperscript{24}

Wagner

Fritz Hart was Holst's first real friend at the Royal College of Music and it was he that introduced him to the music of Wagner.\textsuperscript{25} Holst immediately became completely engrossed in Wagner-worship, and everything that he wrote was stereotyped with the chromatic changes of harmony, motifs dealt with in sequence, and inevitable secondary 7ths.\textsuperscript{26} "Tristan had transformed his whole existence and for the next ten years he was held by the binding of its

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid.  \textsuperscript{22}Imogen Holst, The Music of Holst, p. 4.


\textsuperscript{25}I. Holst, Gustav Holst, p. 11.

\textsuperscript{26}I. Holst, The Music of Holst, p. 6.
spell."\textsuperscript{27} This was entirely a natural inclination; any young musician groping for an expressive power in the 1890's could only inevitably come under the spell of Wagner.\textsuperscript{28} Although Wagner's music exerted an extreme pressure on the early music of Holst, one may observe that the influence is actually more important from a negative aspect, as his development as a composer is traced principally through the path he took in revolting from 19th century Romanticism.

**Vaughan Williams**

As was mentioned in the first part of this paper, the deepest and most profound influence on Holst was his lifelong friendship with Ralph Vaughan Williams. Beginning with their first meeting in 1895 and extending until Holst's death in 1934, he and Vaughan Williams would always show each other the first drafts of their compositions.\textsuperscript{29} "As a result of this close companionship it is not always easy to decide if Vaughan Williams has influenced Holst or if Holst has influenced Vaughan Williams . . . . Each of them used to declare with the utmost sincerity that he had borrowed extensively from the other."\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{27}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{28}Vaughan Williams, *Beethoven's Symphony*, p. 81.


\textsuperscript{30}Ibid.
opinion meant more to him than anything that anyone else could say."31 Deep musical affinities between the two do not really exist however, save in the absorbing interest in folk-song.32 "The mutual influence was strongest in 1905, when the folk-song revival completely changed Holst's way of thinking."33

Folk-song

Of all the many and varied influences on the music of Holst, one of the most vital was the folk-song revival by Cecil Sharp and others. The work had been going on for a number of years, but Holst only became aware of it, through Vaughan Williams, in 1905.34 The folk-song revival exerted the greatest influence on Holst in that it opened to him the avenue through which he was to make his greatest musical contribution, that of showing the way to a closer relation between English music and the English language.35

Vaughan Williams makes the following comment about the folk-song:

The subject of English folk-song . . . has been much misunderstood . . . . To those who have understanding, the folk-song is a liberating and not a fettering influence. The

31I. Holst, Gustav Holst, p. 108.
32Rubbra, Gustav Holst, p. 48.
34I. Holst, Gustav Holst, p. 27.
contact with new types of melody bound by purely melodic considerations, with rhythms not tied by the convention of bars and signatures, the expressiveness of short and simple tunes—all this cannot fail to suggest to any one who is naturally sympathetic new vistas of musical thought which may, indeed, have nothing to do superficially with the curves and cadences of folk-song, but are suggested by its spirit if not by its letter.36

Holst in a letter to a friend said, "I find that unconsciously I have been drawn for years towards discovering the (or a) musical idiom of the English language."37 In folk-song he found what suggested to him a solution for this problem. "Their simplicity, sincerity and impersonal character immediately appealed to Holst, more particularly as he realised the significance of their inherent economy and the harmonic possibilities which their modal formations dictated."38 His melodic technique starts from the traits of folk-song, yet he adopts them in a highly personal manner.39 "Holst never did attempt to imitate the folk-song, and only on rare occasions did he incorporate folk materials in his work."40 It was the artistic impulses behind the English song that motivated him.41

38 Kidson, op. cit., p. 186.
41 Ibid.
Tudor

Another influencing factor on the music of Gustav Holst was the deep esteem he had for the Tudor and Elizabethan composers. "No one before him had so strongly felt our traditional and our 16th and 17th centuries' music as living influences . . . ." It was in 1914 that he became extremely excited over the rediscovery of the English madrigal composers. "Ever since Fellowes' edition of Morley's madrigals was published," he wrote, "I think I can say that I have never been quite the same man." This edition of the English madrigalists, plus the newly discovered works of Purcell came as a great revelation to him, and he quickly imbibed their spirit. "Yet as a composer his relation to the English 16th century is a somewhat curious one, for he is not . . . directly a lyric and polyphonic composer. His knowledge and love of English Tudor music rather conditioned his . . . approach to his art." Edmund Rubbra states that it is a question of

43Imogen Holst, Gustav Holst, p. 44.
44Ibid.
45Vaughan Williams, Music and Letters, I, p. 310.
"orientation rather than resemblance, for it would be difficult to point to any definite reminders of early English music: the influence is upon the plane of quality."\(^47\)

The Hindu Epics

The influence of the Hindu epics is considered a minor one on the music of Holst in that the period of his actual absorption in the subject is not as long as it was in other fields. However, it may well be that it is the most important of them all as there are readily discernible in Holst's music actual usages of Eastern scales and practices.

He made choral settings for various groups--womens' choirs and mens' choirs, combined with various instrumental ensembles--of a great number of hymns from the Rig Veda. For these he studied Sanskrit and made his own translations. Through this study he came to appreciate the significance of unaccompanied vocal line, and this distinctly influenced the evolution of his mature style of vocal-choral composition.\(^48\) Out of this grew his subsequent addiction for irregular and asymmetric rhythms.\(^49\)

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\(^47\) Rubbra, Gustav Holst, p. 49.


However, it was not the orientalism of the Vedic Hymns which attracted Holst, but the mysticism; "He needed some expression of the point of view less materialised and less systematized than anything to be found in occidental liturgies."  

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CHAPTER III

HOLST'S POSITION IN THE 20TH CENTURY RENAISSANCE
OF ENGLISH MUSIC

State of English Music at Turn of Century

"A sketch of the work of Gustav Holst entails some
indication of the historical course of English music and
of the state of the musical England of his time."¹ It is
necessary to emphasize that he was born in one of the most
fallow periods in English musical history.²

The English musician had as rich a heritage as did the
musician of any country in the lineage from Purcell, Dun-
stable, Morley, Byrd, Weelkes and others. Yet in the
generations succeeding them there was no continuity of
native tradition maintained.³ "This apparent recession was
caused, not so much by a withdrawal of native musicality,
as by the overlaying of the latter with an alien musical
culture."⁴ The period in which earlier cultivations lapsed
actually began in the 18th century with a complete acceptance

¹Richard Capell, "The Time and the Place," Music and
Letters, VII (January, 1926), 150.
³Capell, op. cit., p. 150.
⁴Rubbra, op. cit., p. 7.
of Handelian principles. In the century and a half after Purcell's death, the art of music was practiced fairly actively in London, and the London public counted considerably in the lives of a number of composers: Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Mendelssohn; yet in all that time the native "creative impulse . . . remained quite feeble."

During the 19th century, as English music was still without the alleviating gleams of genius, it continued its decline into a sleepy solemnity and an empty conventionalism. "The talents that did crop up were not of the right robust sort to be matched against a too forbidding world." While professional composers of the Sterndale Bennett type were producing diluted Mendelssohnian music, the national musical temper is perhaps best indicated by the success of Sullivan.

"Genius . . . is a collaboration between a man and his circumstances." A musical public cannot expect to

5 Ibid.
6 Capell, op. cit., p. 151.
7 Ibid.
9 Capell, op. cit., p. 152.
10 Rubbra, op. cit., p. 7.
11 Capell, op. cit., p. 102.
raise within its borders a music beyond what itself makes possible.12 "Putting the eccentrics aside, composers write to be heard, and what they write is in an important measure governed by what can be performed and what will be listened to."13 In this lies the genius of Sullivan. In this, also, lies the comparative frustration of Parry and Stanford. "Parry and Stanford left musical England in a much more dignified position than they had found it, and however infrequently their compositions may be brought to hearing it would be unpardonable to fail in respect toward their names, associated as they are with splendid didactic achievements."14 Apparently then, the importance of these teachers and composers--Parry, Stanford, and MacKenzie--lies more in having made musical England aware of a better music than with providing it with this music.

The music of Holst and his contemporaries was received with a great deal less antagonism than had been accorded their predecessors. This was due in part to the foundations laid by their earlier generation, in part to the obvious need for much work to be done, and perhaps in greatest part, to the case of Wagner.15 After the great triumph of Wagner, the liberal became permanently strengthened, and

12 Ibid. 13 Ibid. 14 Ibid. 15 Ibid., p. 312
new voices were allowed to have a word. Outside the English academic circle, two composers can be seen to have taken the opportunity thus afforded at the close of the century. They were Edward Elgar and Frederick Delius. However, neither of them contributed a foundation upon which could be built an English music. Delius' music was too introspective and personalized, while Elgar represents the only English contribution to the Romantic movement. He was the first Englishman to use the full orchestral palette with success and mastery and his contribution is rather the last fruit of an epoch than the beginning of a new. Wilfrid Mellers sums up the situation with the following observation:

... What were the choices open to the composer who worked in the early years of the century? He could hardly imitate Elgar—an honest mind would scarcely feel like that any more. He might risk following Delius and write a music of harmonic nostalgia withdrawing from the modern world altogether...

More easily, the composer could take the path of least resistance and, without even realizing that his position was in any way peculiar, become an academy piece. More romantically, but still safely, he could indulge in a compromise between a kind of elegiac chromatic poetry and the academic tradition...

... Or he could think honestly and intelligently about the position English music found itself in and then apply powerful creative gifts to solve the problem—at once musical and social—which his intelligence revealed. ... I think we can see that there were two composers who saw what had to be done and who had the integrity to do it... These two were Gustav Holst and Ralph Vaughan Williams.16

Holst's Relation to the English Tradition

Holst has been described as being "the midwife at the rebirth of English music."\(^{17}\) Surely his position in the 20th century renaissance of English music is a curious one. Holst's struggle is so intimately related to that of English music history that the English musician of today can hardly help but be aware of the mental and spiritual struggle he has saved them.\(^{18}\) "Holst's importance as a representative figure lies in his honest preoccupation with, rather than in, his solution of the problems which English musicians are obliged to tackle."\(^{19}\)

The great problem confronting Holst was to find a way of purging English music of the bad blood of Teutonic inflation and a heat of romantic fervor that had been corrupted. The path that he took in attempting this was one that led far from the accepted norm of musical expression of the day. The most commonly found contemporary criticism of Holst's music was that it was too bleak and austere. That his music was considered "cold" was a personal and historical necessity for Holst; personal in that coming after the wave of romantic, sensual music he believed


\(^{18}\) Ibid.

"sentimentality to be the ultimate crime in art," and historical in that he felt it was necessary, before a truly English music could be rediscovered, to return to the bare essentials of the musical heritage—organum, plain-chant, and folk-song. Consequently, a danger confronting him then would be to allow consecutive 4ths to simply replace consecutive 7ths.

Holst and Vaughan Williams have been consistently paired in English musical criticism as the founding pillars upon which the renaissance of English music has been built. Yet to only one, Vaughan Williams, has the recognition been given, and his music been given a proper place of pre-eminence, while Holst has languished in a comparative neglect. The reason for this lies in the fact that, although contemporaries and close colleagues, they were historical opposites. In founding an English music they had no tradition from which they might work. If a "tradition" were to be established it would have to necessarily be an aggressive, militant national idealism. Vaughan Williams was content to accept this limitation and work within it, while Holst roamed far afield in search of both musical and non-musical materials and stimuli. "Holst's ... eclecticism equalled the exclusiveness of Vaughan

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Williams concentrated Englishness. Consequently, Holst was historically unacceptable and could not be a rallying point for English music. "Now, when so much English music is Europeanised, Holst's cosmopolitan experiments wear a decisively prophetic look . . . and Vaughan Williams, by one of those ironic twists of cultural fate, has cleared the path for a readier appreciation of Holst's art, which in so many ways stands closer to the music of our own day . . . ."  

22Ibid.
A CONSIDERATION OF SOURCES OF HIS TEXTS AND PRINCIPAL STYLISTIC FACTORS OF HOLST'S CHORAL MUSIC

Sources of the Texts

In the consideration of any vocal or choral music, the texts used, and the sources of these texts are, obviously, of a very central importance. This is especially true in the music of Gustav Holst. Holst spent a very great deal of time seeking out suitable texts. It is indicative of his great concentration and thoroughness that on finding a text that appealed to him, he would become completely absorbed in it, and with painstaking care, completely master the ideal or philosophy behind it, and from this absorption expend endless effort in expressing it. This presents one of the reasons for the almost agonized intensity of virtually all of his choral music.

The sources from which Holst chose texts are widely diversified and covering a vast range of subject matter. This in itself is of significance; most vocal or choral composers generally remain rather closely allied with a particular religious philosophy, a philosophy of romantic love, or some other field which provides them a vehicle to
express an idea which they, more or less, advocate. There are, of course, notable exceptions to this. "... It is [as] though, in the words he used in the ... [many] diverse works, Holst felt he had found the catalyst in which he could combine his desire to create and his musical intelligence with a personality that seems to be oddly divorced from them until a suitable text appears."

The principal sources of Holst's texts are listed here with some of the works from these sources:

**Vedantic Literature: Kalidasa, the Rig Veda**
and the Ramayana

Holst made an effort to learn Sanskrit and made his own translations. After translating a Sanskrit excerpt, rather than set the literal translation to music, he would steep himself in the idea of it and then paraphrase it to set to music. Choral works from the Vedantic literature include four sets of choral hymns from the Rig Veda, "The Cloud Messenger," an ode for chorus and orchestra, and "Two Eastern Pictures" for women's chorus and harp.

**Walt Whitman**

During student days as a member of William Morris's Socialist Club, the poetry of Whitman made a deep impression

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on him and quite some time before he attempted to set to music any of this poetry he composed an orchestral overture which he entitled "Walt Whitman" (1899). In 1914 he set for male voices, brass, and drums the "Dirge for Two Veterans," a work of immense strength and dignity. In 1919 he set for chorus and orchestra the "Ode to Death." The "Ode to Death" was to become one of the most popular of all Holst's works, and in many respects was one of his first mature works. It was one of three works selected to be performed at a memorial service after his death in 1934.2

**Christian Liturgy**

Although Holst never formally embraced any religious creed, he very conscientiously studied the Bible and Anglican doctrine, even as he had studied the Hindu Bhagavad Gîtâ. He made settings of Psalms for chorus, string orchestra and organ, a "Festival Te Deum," and a number of shorter anthems for chorus and organ.

**Robert Bridges**

It was inevitable that Holst would use to a great extent the poetry of Bridges. Bridges was made Poet Laureate in 1913 and was interested, actually and practically, in music. He had edited a hymnal, and had a consuming interest in the metrical problems involved in setting words to music.

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Holst, using Bridges' poems, composed "Seven Part Songs" for female voices and strings. The words of Holst's "Choral Fantasia" for soprano solo, chorus and orchestra (a work considered by many to be his finest) are taken from Bridges' "Ode to Music" written for the Bicentenary Commemoration of Henry Purcell.

**Medieval Latin Poetry**

Holst made settings of two sets of "Medieval Lyrics" translated by Helen Waddell. One set of seven choruses for male voices, strings and organ, and a set of "Six Canons for Equal Voices," unaccompanied. He used also medieval Latin lyrics translations by Clifford Bax.

**Apocryphal Acts of St. John**

Once again Holst chose a text because of its inherent mysticism. The Apocryphal Acts of St. John was a book produced by a 2nd century sect of Gnostics who claimed to receive a mystical, divine, power through the practice of their ritual, particularly through a ritual of dancing. Holst, again, studied Greek and acquired enough facility to make his own translation of the Greek original. He then chose chapters 94 through 96 to use for the "Hymn of Jesus" for double chorus, semi-chorus and orchestra.
Greek Tragedies

From the Alcestis of Euripides Holst set "Seven Choruses" for voices in unison, three flutes, and harp. The translations were made by Gilbert Murray. "Hecuba's Lament," from the Bacchae of Euripides, was set for alto solo, chorus of women's voices, and orchestra. The "Hymn to Dionysius" was written for women's voices and orchestra.

John Keats

The poems of Keats were selected for the highly controversial "First Choral Symphony" of Holst. This was rather an unusual choice for Holst as Keats' verse is characterized by a luxurious sensuality far removed by the sombre austerity of most of his other texts. The prelude, an invocation to Pan, is from "Endymion." The first movement uses also words from the same poem. The second movement is a setting of the entire "Ode on a Grecian Urn." For the third movement he uses most of the poem "Fancy" and adds "Folly's Songs." In the fourth movement he uses the first stanza of the "Spirit Here that Reignest," four lines from the "Hymn to Apollo," and almost all of the "Ode to Apollo."

Emphasis on Declamation and Prose-Rhythm

Occupying a place of prime importance in the minds of English musicians at the beginning of the 20th century was
the effort to reassert the accent of speech. It is in this preoccupation that Holst attains his greatest importance. The problem of setting verse to music is one which has plagued both poet and musician throughout the course of musical history save in those primitive forms where a long evolutionary process has made possible a complete wedding of the two. Holst's solution of the problem lies half-way between the speaking voice as declamation and song. "The essence of declamation is that in deference to the exigencies of speech it eschews the long lyrical phrase and becomes relatively fragmentary." The most outstanding observation to be made concerning Holst's approach to declamation is that he sublimates speech more to a sustained prose rhythm than to the pitch of song. Throughout his musical development his music became more and more plastic and prose-like. The criticism has often been made that Holst was too deferential toward his poets, that he would go to great length devising subtle rhythms to express them, at the expense of expressing himself musically. Holst himself said that when he sat down to compose, it was with the attitude of a mathematician attacking an involved problem. To this can be attributed a great deal of the

4I. Holst, Gustav Holst, p. 67.
austerity of his music. This approach to declamation gives his melodic lines a wavering instability that is far removed from the accustomed lyricism, another of the reasons for his music not being readily accepted. This influence of the prose-rhythm is perhaps the most important stylistic factor of Holst's music in that not only were the rhythm and melody governed by it but the harmonies and the form as well. More and more he came to think of his harmonies in a prose sense too—to make them extensions of the prose melodic lines.5

Ground-basses and pedal-points are the most extensively used musical devices in the choral music of Holst, used almost to the point of being mannerisms. However, their use is necessary to provide anchorage for the wavering prose lines, and to compensate for the lack of formal structure which an unmeasured verse implies.

The search for suitable texts, and the approach to setting them is the element of greatest single importance in the choral music of Holst. "Holst's progress [as a choral composer] . . . becomes logical and easy to follow: his technical development is remarkable clear when we remember that each work attempts to solve a specific problem

of expression and adopts the means apparently most suitable for it."

Although lying outside the scope of this thesis, further proof of this conclusion is found in the orchestral music of Holst. It is evidenced by the vast difference in Holst's means of expressing his fascination with astrology in "The Planets," his absorption in folk-song in the charming, lyrical "St. Paul's Suite" for strings, and in the grim, stark, desolation of "Egdon Heath," which grew out of a sentence in Thomas Hardy's novel, "The Return of the Native."

Principal Stylistic Factors

The settings of the Rig Veda Hymns are the first mature works of Holst and contain many of the harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic characteristics that he was to use throughout all his work. These characteristics include:

1. The use of 5 and 7 beat bars.

Ex. 1 From "Hymn to the Waters"

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2. Stepwise descent of octave figure in the bass.

Ex. 2 From "To Varuna"

3. Harmonic changes determined by contrary conjunct motion.

Ex. 3 From "To Varuna"

4. Recitative revolving around a central pivot tone.

Ex. 4 From "Funeral Chant"

5. Cadences consisting of four notes dropping by step, often in whole-tones.

Ex. 5 From "Funeral Hymn"
The second hymn of the First Group, "To the Unknown God," SATB, is selected for a more detailed study of the characteristics that Holst was to make use of and intensify during the next 25 years.

"To the Unknown God" is 79 bars in length. It is marked "Adagio pp" and remains on a subdued level throughout, save for a climactic middle section. The work takes the form of a litany between a parlante section and a cantabile section. In the parlante sections the choir is at unison octaves, and in the cantabile it moves from 3rds, augmented 4th, and 5ths.

Ex. 6 From "To the Unknown God"

Ex. 7 From "To the Unknown God"
Ex. 8 From "The Hymn of Jesus"
In this work the entire choir sings both the question and the response, the difference being achieved by the contrast of the chanting of the parlante to the singing of the cantabile. A similar form is used nine years later in "The Hymn to Jesus" (1917), for double-chorus, and semi-chorus, in which the second chorus in unison octaves presents the question, and the first chorus presents antiphonally, the answer in counterpoint. Again seven years later the "Evening Watch" motet (1925) is described as a "Dialogue between the Body and Soul." In this work the narrative is between soloist and the chorus.

Ex. 9 From "The Evening Watch"

For the most part Holst eschewed the accepted formal patterns for a highly individual structure governed by the logic of text expression.
Scale

The scale used in "To the Unknown God" is the Hindu Rag Guari.

Ex. 10 From "To the Unknown God"

This scale is used in the accompaniment thirty times as an ostinato passage. The measures in which the ostinato is not used are those of the unison parlante chanting. Holst made use of various Hindu Ragas, Guari, Sind Kanada, Gandhara, and the Bhairivi. Not only did he use these modal melodic idioms in setting Sanskrit translations, but in other works of various texts as well, and it was a practice which he continued throughout his career. In one of the latest important choral works, the "First Choral Symphony," is found a soprano recitative using the Rag Bhairivi.

Ex. 11 From "First Choral Symphony"
In addition to using the Hindu scales and the conventional major and minor modes, Holst used extensively the Dorian and the Phrygian modes. This example of his use of the Dorian is from his setting for SATB chorus of a folk-song, "This Have I Done for My True Love."

Ex. 12 From "This Have I Done for My True Love"

The example showing his use of the Phrygian is from "The Choral Fantasia."

Ex. 13 From "The Choral Fantasia"

Rhythm and Meter

As has been mentioned in previous sections, Holst's approach to rhythm is probably the element of greatest importance in his choral compositions. There is always an ingenious effort made to make the music fit the words like a glove. To accomplish such an objective it was necessary to use a very flexible rhythmic structure.
Although the rapid interchange of meters gives his music a fluid, shifting feeling, it nevertheless achieves a strong rhythmic vitality.

The time signature of "To the Unknown God" is $\frac{4}{4}$, with six measures of $\frac{3}{4}$ in a middle section. The scope of the note durations range from a dotted whole note to a sixteenth. Analysis discloses that there are 54 measures of regular accent as compared to 25 of irregular.

Naturally, in such a flexible rhythmic idiom as was affected by Holst, seldom would particular rhythmic patterns achieve a place of prominence. Many patterns are deserving of note, however. Among these, one example from "The Hymn of Jesus" is of special interest: $\frac{5}{4}$ J J J J J. This figure, which is given to the percussion and underlies the dance section is repeated thirteen times. There is one variation to it: $\frac{5}{4}$ J J J J J J J. This is repeated twelve times.

Syncopation is a predominating feature of the rhythm of the choral music of Holst. There are seventeen instances in which he used syncopation in "To the Unknown God," with tied notes across the bar line being the most prominent pattern.

Of special interest in the consideration of Holst's use of syncopation is the semi-chorus in "The Hymn of Jesus." This is a treble chorus which, according to Holst's
instructions in the score, should be placed above the double chorus and well apart. Its function is to punctuate the text at intervals with an Amen in open 4ths. It enters 25 times, 23 times to sing an Amen and twice to set the stage for a different section of the work. Of the 23 Amens, 18 of them are syncopated, using this figure: \( \frac{3}{2} - \{ J_\text{men} \} | J_\text{men} | J_\text{men} \). This is varied in three different ways according to the meter being used. Holst uses six meters in the work, \( \frac{3}{2}, \frac{3}{4}, \frac{4}{2}, \frac{4}{4}, \frac{5}{2}, \text{and} \frac{5}{4} \).

As indicated previously there are two meters used in "To the Unknown God." However, a better work in which to consider Holst's use of mixed meters is the "Choral Fantasia." This work is 207 bars in length and uses meters \( \frac{3}{4}, \frac{4}{4}, \frac{5}{4}, \frac{7}{4}, \text{and} \frac{8}{4} \). There are 54 bars of \( \frac{8}{4}, 53 \text{ bars of} \frac{4}{4}, 45 \text{ bars of} \frac{7}{4}, 39 \text{ bars of} \frac{3}{4}, \text{and} 4 \text{ bars of} \frac{5}{4} \). The remaining bars are marked "ad lib." It is interesting to note that in this choral work exhibiting the most meter changes, the \( \frac{5}{4} \), which Holst ordinarily used more than others, is used in only 4 bars.

**Superimposition**

Superimposition, both rhythmic and metric, is also used extensively by Holst. In "To the Unknown God" there are four instances in which rhythmic superimposition is used, and two of metric superimposition.
Superimposition has two uses in choral music, one to facilitate the reconciliation of word accents with musical accents, and two, to give an extra bit of emphasis to particular words of the text. Notable examples of this include:

"To the Unknown God":

\[
\text{Sole ruler of the universe}
\]

\[
\text{Dwelling alone in his grandeur}
\]

"This Have I Done for My True Love":

\[
\text{Judas me sold, his covetousness for to advance}
\]

"Ode to Death":

\[
\text{Over the tree tops I float thee a song, over the rising and sinking waves}
\]
These examples illustrate also Holst's approach to fitting the syllabic accent with the metric.

There has been much controversy over the question of whether, strictly speaking, there is actually such a thing as \( \frac{7}{4} \) or \( \frac{5}{4} \) meter, with many musicians holding that they can only be compounds. Holst appears to adhere to this idea as in various places he has indicated in the score whether a \( \frac{5}{4} \) meter is to be considered as 3 plus 2 or 2 plus 3 (finale of "First Choral Symphony"), and a \( \frac{7}{4} \) to be considered as 4 plus 3 or 3 plus 4 ("Ode to Death").

**Melody**

As was true in the case of rhythm, melody in the choral music of Holst is governed by the problem of declamation. Holst never reverts to a lyricism. With his exceptional knowledge of choral technique, Holst was adept at writing melodic lines that lie in a good singing range for each voice part. He was aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the different sections of a choir in particular parts of their ranges and would plan accordingly to create certain effects. An example of this is pointed out by Imogen Holst:

His experience with elementary choirs helped him to achieve a feeling of depth
and deadness at "Then down to hell I took my way" [p. 12 of "This Have I Done for My True Love"]; by giving this line to the sopranos instead of the altos he was certain of getting an expressionless tone, for it lies below the level of the soprano's true compass, whereas it would have been difficult to persuade the altos to keep the warmth out of their voices.7

Holst was never guilty of the sort of choral writing that will put the basses on B and the sopranos on g2 FF and expect to achieve a balance.

The melodic range of "To the Unknown God" extends from e1 to g2, and modulates three times. There are no key signatures; the scale used, and the modulations being indicated by accidentals. This is a practice which Holst generally adhered to in all his choral music, even in the much longer works, as, for example, the "First Choral Symphony"; in the entire four movements there are only 139 bars preceded by a signature. The melody "To the Unknown God" is completely diatonic. The choral works of Holst, though not always entirely diatonic, remain so by far the greater percentage of the time. He gained his freedom from traditional major and minor key feeling by the use of the Church modes and Hindu Ragas

rather than by extensive chromaticism. His melodic idiom, in its faithful devotion to text expression, pure and simple, limits itself chiefly to conjunct motion or narrow-leaps.

Harmony

As "To the Unknown God" consists chiefly of unison chanting over an ostinato figure it offers little for observation of Holst's harmonic technique. However, the instances in which chord structures do appear give indication of the path that Holst would take in working out a harmonic technique. The harmonic structures used in this work consist of triads and open 4ths and 5ths over the ostinato; these were the seeds from which his harmony germinated.

Ex. 14 From "To the Unknown God"

Part of the reason for the bleakness and austerity of Holst's music can be attributed to his extensive use of 4ths and 5ths, which give his music an organum-like texture.
Ex. 15 From "A Choral Fantasia"

The harmonic structure of most of his later choral music is built almost entirely on chords of 4ths.

Ex. 16. From "First Choral Symphony"
In his later works Holst inclined to an extent toward polytonality; this was anticipated during the middle period of his composition by the appearance of such chords as the following from "The Hymn of Jesus." Polytonality is the predominating feature of the Scherzo (3rd movement) of the "First Choral Symphony," which is a combination of the tonalities of C major and C♯ minor, the C♯ minor being noted D♭ E♭ A♭. (See Ex. 19)

Modulation

There are three modulations in "To the Unknown God." The first 22 bars are built on the *Rag Gucari* on E, the ostinato figure outlining the scale. In bar 23 the chorus, a cappella, holds D♯ and G♯ in octaves; the ostinato then begins enharmonically from the held G♯ and outlines the same scale on A♭. The tonal feeling of A♭ continues until bar 37 where the chorus, again a cappella, reaches, by a chromatic half-step in the bass, C and G at octaves, the C becoming the tonic and the ostinato again
Ex. 18 From "The Hymn of Jesus"
outlining this scale. The tonal feeling of C continues until bar 51 where by a chromatic half-step, this time an extension of the ostinato by one note, B and E are reached, and the ostinato begins outlining the scale on E.

This modulation by manipulation of the descending ostinato figures is one for which many examples can be found all through the choral music of Holst. Other notable examples being prominent in "The Hymn of Jesus" and the "First Choral Symphony."

Counterpoint

It was only natural that one who had been influenced so greatly by the Tudor and Elizabethan composers make extensive use of contrapuntal devices in their own music, and throughout Holst’s career his love for counterpoint was expressed in composition. One of the very first of his choral works--an Ave Maria--written in 1899 for eight-part women's choir is contrapuntal, and then the last of his
choral works are two canons for equal voices written in 1932.

From bars 28 through 35 of "To the Unknown God" the soprano and tenor in octaves imitate the alto and bass in octaves at the interval of an augmented 2nd after two and a half beats.

Holst's polytonal inclinations are summed up in the settings of six canons for equal voices, composed in 1932.
### CHRONOLOGICAL LISTING OF HOLST'S PUBLISHED CHORAL MUSIC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Opus</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1899-1900</td>
<td>9A</td>
<td>Part-Songs:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Love is Enough</td>
<td>Novello</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sylvia</td>
<td>Novello</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Love Song</td>
<td>Bosworth</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9B</td>
<td>Ave Maria, for unaccompanied female voices in eight parts</td>
<td>Bosworth</td>
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<td>1902-3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Part-Songs:</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dream Tryst</td>
<td>Novello</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ye Little Birds</td>
<td>Novello</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Now is the Month</td>
<td>Novello</td>
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<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Thou Did'st Delight Mine Eyes Part-Song</td>
<td>Novello</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td>King Estmere, ballad for chorus and orchestra</td>
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<tr>
<td>20A</td>
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<td>Songs from The Princess, for unaccompanied female voices:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Sweet and Low</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>The Splendour Falls</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Tears, Idle Tears</td>
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<td>O Swallow, Swallow</td>
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<td>Home They Brought her Warrior Dead</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal</td>
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<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>20B</td>
<td>Four Old English Carols, for chorus with piano accompaniment (also arranged for female voices):</td>
<td>Bayley and Ferguson</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A Babe is Born</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Now Let us Sing</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jesu, Thou the Virgin-Born</td>
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<td>The Saviour of the World</td>
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1908  26  First Group of Choral Hymns from the Rig Veda, for chorus and orchestra: Battle Hymn To the Unknown God' Funeral Hymn

1909  26  Second Group of Choral Hymns from the Rig Veda, for female voices and orchestra: To Varuna (God of the Waters) To Agni (God of Fire) Funeral Chant

1909-10  26  Third Group of Choral Hymns from the Rig Veda, for female voices and harp: Hymn to the Dawn Hymn to the Waters Hymn to Vena (The sun rising through the mist) Hymn of the Travellers

1910  29  Christmas Day, for chorus and orchestra

--  The Swallow Leaves Her Nest, Part-Song for unaccompanied female voices

1911  19  Autumn Song, Part-Song

--  In Youth is Pleasure, Part-Song

31  Hecuba's Lament, for contralto solo, chorus of female voices and orchestra

1912  26  Fourth Group of Choral Hymns from the Rig Veda, for male voices, string orchestra and brass: Hymn to Agni (The sacrificial fire). Hymn to Soma (The juice of a sacrificial herb)
Hymn to Manas (The spirit of a dying man)
Hymn to Indra (God of heaven, storm and battle)

1910-12  30  The Cloud Messenger, An ode for chorus and orchestra  Stainer and Bell

1912  --  Two Psalms, for chorus, string orchestra, and organ (the second is also arranged for female voices):
To my Humble Supplication
Lord, Who Hast Made us for Thine Own

1913  31  Hymn to Dionysus, for female voices and orchestra  Stainer and Bell

1914  --  The Home-Coming, for unaccompanied male voices  Stainer and Bell

1914  --  A Dirge for Two Veterans, for male voices, brass, and drums  Curwen

1916  34  This Have I Done for My True Love, for unaccompanied chorus  Augener

Carols, for unaccompanied chorus:
Lullay My Liking
Bring Us in Good Ale
Of One That is so Fair

Two Carols, for chorus, with accompaniment for oboe and cello:
Terly Terlow
A Welsome Song  Stainer and Bell

Three Carols, arranged for chorus in unison, and orchestra:
Christmas Song: On This Day
I Saw Three Ships
Masters in This Hall  Curwen
1916 36 Six Choral Folk-Songs, unaccompanied: Curwen
I Sowed the Seeds of Love
There Was a Tree
Matthew, Mark
The Song of the Blacksmith
I love my Love
Swansea Town
(All these songs except the second are also arranged for male voices.)

Three Festival Choruses, with orchestra: Stainer and Bell
Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence
Turn Back, O Man
A Festival Chime

1917 -- A Dream of Christmas, for female voices and strings or piano Curwen

1917 37 The Hymn of Jesus, for two choruses, semi-chorus of female voices and orchestra Curwen

1919 38 Ode to Death, for chorus and orchestra Novello

1920 -- Festival Te Deum, for chorus and orchestra Stainer and Bell

1920 -- Seven Choruses from Alcestis, for female voices in unison, with accompaniment for harp and three flutes Augener

1923-4 41 First Choral Symphony, for soprano solo, chorus and orchestra Novello

1925 43 Seven Part-Songs, words by Robert Bridges, for female voices and strings: Novello
Say Who is This?
O Love, I complain
Angel Spirits of Sleep
When First we Met (a round)
Sorrow and Joy
Love on my Heart from Heaven Fell  
Assemble All ye Maidens (An elegy)

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>The Golden Goose, A choral ballet</td>
<td>Oxford University Press</td>
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<tr>
<td>1926-7</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>The Morning of the Year, A No. II choral ballet</td>
<td>Oxford University Press</td>
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<td>1927</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Man Born to Toil, anthem for chorus with organ accompaniment</td>
<td>Curwen</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Eternal Father, short anthem for soprano solo, chorus, and organ (with bells ad lib)</td>
<td>Curwen</td>
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<td>1927</td>
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<td>The Coming of Christ, music to a mystery play, for chorus, piano, organ (or string orchestra) and trumpet</td>
<td>Curwen</td>
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<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Choral Fantasia, for soprano solo, chorus, organ, strings, brass and percussion</td>
<td>Curwen</td>
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<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td></td>
<td>Wassail Song, arranged for unaccompanied chorus</td>
<td>Curwen</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
1931-2 -- Six Choruses for male voices, with accompaniment for strings, organ or piano. Words translated by Helen Waddell: Intercession Good Friday Drinking Song Love Song How Mighty are the Sabbeths (Also in a unison setting) Before Sleep

1932 -- Six Canons for equal voices, unaccompanied. Words translated by Helen Waddell: For three voices: If You Love Songs Lovely Venus The Fields of Sorrow David's Lament for Jonathan For three choirs (nine voices): O Strong of Heart For two choirs (six voices): Truth of all Truth

1932 -- Two Canons, for equal voices and piano: Evening on the Moselle If 'Twere the Time of Lilies
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