

NAXOS

HOLST

Cotswolds Symphony

Walt Whitman Overture • Indra  
Japanese Suite • A Winter Idyll

Ulster Orchestra • JoAnn Falletta



## Gustav Holst (1874–1934)

### Walt Whitman Overture • Cotswolds Symphony • A Winter Idyll • Japanese Suite • Indra

The English composer Gustav Holst was the son of a musician and descended from a family of mixed Scandinavian, German and Russian origin that had settled in England in the early nineteenth century. His childhood was spent in Cheltenham, where his father supervised his study of the piano. A later period at the Royal College of Music in London brought a lasting friendship with Ralph Vaughan Williams, an association that was to the advantage of both in their free criticism and discussion of one another's compositions.

It was in part a weakness in health, as well as financial necessity, that prompted Holst for a time to earn his living as a trombonist, touring with the Carl Rosa Opera Company and playing with the Scottish Orchestra. Eventually he decided to devote himself, as far as possible, to composition. Teaching positions, and particularly his long association with St Paul's Girls' School in Hammersmith, and his work as director of music for the enthusiastic amateurs at Morley College, allowed him some time, at least in the summer holidays, but the relatively even tenor of his life, which suited his diffident character, was considerably disturbed by the great popular success of *The Planets*, which had its first complete public performance in 1920. His later music never achieved such a lasting triumph with the public, although his Shakespearian opera *At the Boar's Head* aroused respectful interest at the time, while other works generally had a mixed critical reception, including his 1927 *Egdon Heath*, published as a tribute to Thomas Hardy. His *St Paul's Suite*, written for the well known girls' school in Hammersmith, retains a firm place in string orchestra repertoire, as does the later *Brook Green Suite*, and the 1917 *Hymn of Jesus* for choruses and orchestra has an honourable position in English choral music.

Holst's later years brought engagements that overtaxed his strength, not least a stimulating and busy period in 1932 in the United States, where his music was welcomed and where he conducted the Boston Symphony Orchestra in a series of three concerts of his own works and taught and composed during a short period at Harvard, lecturing on Haydn at the Library of Congress in Washington. He also took the opportunity to visit his younger brother Emil,

established in America as an actor under the name of Ernest Cossart. By June he was in England again, able to entertain his brother, with whom he visited scenes from their childhood. His time in America had brought a temporary break in hospital, and when he returned to England his health was uncertain, leading to periods in hospital. He succeeded, however, in completing the *Brook Green Suite* and the *Lytic Movement* for viola and orchestra. He died on 25th May 1934, after a major operation, and is buried in Chichester Cathedral, where his music had often been heard, near the grave of his favourite Tudor composer, Thomas Weelkes.

Holst wrote his *Walt Whitman Overture* in 1899, a year after completing his studies at the Royal College of Music. He had become interested in the work of William Morris and the socialism the latter advocated. Holst joined the Hammersmith Socialist Club and from 1897 conducted the Hammersmith Socialist Choir, through which he met his future wife, although he was never closely involved in political activities. These interests led him also to the work of the American poet Walt Whitman, whose work, with its blend of mysticism and realism, held a particular contemporary appeal to some British composers, including Holst's friend Vaughan Williams, Hamilton Harty and others. Holst's *Walt Whitman Overture* is positively Wagnerian in its ebullience, a significant early achievement, even if Holst had not yet found his own distinctive voice as a composer.

Holst worked on his *Cotswolds Symphony* in 1899 and 1900 and it was first performed in 1902, a year after Holst's marriage, by Dan Godfrey and the enterprising Bourne-mouth Municipal Orchestra that he had established in 1893. The first movement, with thematic hints of contemporary interests in English folk-music, is eclipsed, as is the rest of the symphony, by the moving elegy for the textile designer, artist, writer and utopian socialist William Morris that forms the second movement. The *Scherzo* seems to return to another world, and the symphony ends with a movement that is a witness to Holst's assurance in handling the orchestra, of which he had had experience as a trombonist.

There was a similar assurance in the orchestral writing in *A Winter Idyll*, dating from 1897, reflecting the influence,

perhaps, of his teacher, Stanford, and his own instinct and practical experience.

From 1914 onwards Holst was occupied in the composition of *The Planets*, but his attention was diverted in 1915 by a request from the Japanese dancer and choreographer Michio Ito. Ito, born in Tokyo in 1892, had moved to Paris in 1911 and in 1914 to London. In 1916 he went to America, where he established himself, before being compelled to return to Japan after Pearl Harbor. In London Ito had provided dance for W. B. Yeats's play *At the Hawk's Well*, based on the tradition of the Japanese Noh Play, which Ezra Pound had brought to his attention. In London he was to appear at the Coliseum, but required music that was more Japanese in flavour for his performance. This Holst provided for him in a series of pieces that have an oriental thematic element, evident from the opening *Prelude*. One of the movements at least, the *Dance of the Marionette*, seems soon to turn into Stravinsky, with a suggestion of *Petrushka*. The suite ends with a wilder *Dance of the Wolves* and was first performed under the composer's direction.

It was perhaps through his father's second wife, a theosophist, that Holst first became familiar with ideas associated with Indian philosophy. In London, at any rate, he had gone so far as to take lessons in Sanskrit and although never particularly proficient as a linguist was able to make English versions of texts from the *Rig Veda*, which he set as choral hymns. The *Ramayana* was the source of his first opera, *Sita*, written between 1900 and 1906, and the *Mahabharata* was to provide the basis of his chamber opera *Savitri*, while *The Planets*, in its conception, drew on Holst's related interest in astrology. The symphonic poem *Indra*, written in 1903, is based on the Indian legend of the god of the heavens, of rain and storm, and his conflict with the demon Vritra, brought to life by the Brahman Tvashtri to avenge the death of his son. The demon is eventually defeated by Indra, through the help of Vishnu, and the drought caused by the earlier victory of Vritra is brought to an end as rain falls again in Indra's triumph and the land rejoices.

Keith Anderson

## JoAnn Falletta

JoAnn Falletta serves as Music Director of the Buffalo Philharmonic and Virginia Symphony in the United States and Principal Conductor of the Ulster Orchestra in Northern Ireland. She has guest conducted over a hundred orchestras in North America, and many of the most prominent orchestras in Europe, Asia, South America and Africa and is the Principal Guest Conductor of the Brevard Music Center of North Carolina. Recipient of the Seaver/National Endowment for the Arts Conductors Award, winner of the Stokowski Competition, and the Toscanini, Ditson and Bruno Walter conducting awards, Falletta has also received eleven ASCAP awards and serves on the U.S. National Council on the Arts. A champion of American music, she has presented nearly five hundred works by American composers including over one hundred world premières. Her Naxos recordings include the double Grammy Award winning disc of works by John Corigliano and GRAMMY® nominated discs of works of Tyberg, Dohnányi, Fuchs, Schubert, and Respighi. For more information, [www.joannfalletta.com](http://www.joannfalletta.com)

## Ulster Orchestra

The Ulster Orchestra is one of Northern Ireland's cultural cornerstones and since its foundation in 1966 has become one of the major symphony orchestras in the United Kingdom and Ireland. JoAnn Falletta was appointed Principal Conductor in May 2011, the orchestra's twelfth but first female and first American to be appointed to the post. The Hungarian-born violinist, Tamás Kocsis, leads the Orchestra. Northern Ireland's only professional symphony orchestra performs in front of over 100,000 people across Northern Ireland each year averaging eighty to ninety performances, including its more than forty main season concerts, lunch-time concerts, BBC invitation concerts and concerts at many regional and national venues such as the National Concert Hall in Dublin and Royal Albert Hall in London. The Ulster Orchestra gratefully acknowledges the significant support it receives from its principal funder the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, the BBC, Belfast City Council and many of Northern Ireland's leading businesses. [www.ulsterorchestra.com](http://www.ulsterorchestra.com)



**JoAnn Falletta**  
Photo: Mark Dellas

**JoAnn Falletta conducting the Ulster Orchestra  
at Ulster Hall, Belfast**  
Photo: Harrison Photography / Marie Therese Hurson



Gustav Holst's youthful enthusiasm for Wagner is reflected in his ebullient *Walt Whitman* overture written in 1899. Shortly afterwards he composed the *Cotswolds Symphony* which embraces hints of contemporary British folk music but is dominated by the slow movement, a profound elegy for the utopian socialist William Morris. Though completed at college, *A Winter Idyll* shows real orchestral assurance. *Indra* is an accomplished tone poem revealing Holst's interest in the legends of India, whilst the glittering and evocative *Japanese Suite* was written in response to a request from a Japanese dancer appearing in London.



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HOLST**  
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<b>1</b> Walt Whitman – Overture, Op. 7, H42	7:21	<b>Japanese Suite, Op. 33, H126</b>	<b>10:17</b>
<b>Symphony in F major, Op. 8, H47, 'The Cotswolds'</b>	<b>23:11</b>	<b>7</b> Prelude: Song of the Fisherman	2:30
<b>2</b> Allegro con brio	3:34	<b>8</b> Ceremonial Dance	1:33
<b>3</b> Elegy (In memoriam William Morris): Molto Adagio	8:35	<b>9</b> Dance of the Marionette	1:39
<b>4</b> Scherzo	4:54	<b>10</b> Interlude: Song of the Fisherman	0:47
<b>5</b> Finale: Allegro moderato	5:59	<b>11</b> Dance under the cherry tree	2:00
<b>6</b> A Winter Idyll, H31	9:01	<b>12</b> Finale: Dance of the Wolves	1:46
		<b>13</b> Indra – Symphonic Poem,	



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