

# Gustav Holst Comprehension

Gustav Holst was born in Cheltenham on September 21st 1874. He came from a line of talented musicians. Holst was taught how to play the piano by his father, however a problem with his nerves ruled out a career as a pianist. He later took up the trombone instead. His first conducting job was with a local church choir which he found to be excellent experience.

Holst attended the Royal College of Music where he studied composition and met fellow student, Ralph Vaughn Williams, another great composer. The two became great friends for life.

Holst's wife was a soprano. He instantly fell in love with her but she was not particularly impressed by him at first. For a while, he supported himself and his wife by playing the trombone professionally alongside composing in his spare time.

Holst became a teacher and worked at St Paul's Girls' School, Hammersmith where they opened a new music wing in his honour in 1913. The music wing housed a sound-proof room where Holst could work without being disturbed.

Holst became very interested in astrology which was the inspiration for his best known piece, 'The Planets'. This launched him into real stardom, however he was never happy to be in the limelight as he was a shy man.

The first performance of 'The Planets' was given in September 1918. Each movement describes the planet's character, for example, Venus is the bringer of peace, Uranus is about a magician and Saturn is based on the bringer of old age.

Due to poor health, Holst finished teaching, enabling him to spend more time composing. In his lifetime he produced operas, orchestral pieces and choral music. His ashes are buried at Chichester Cathedral in Sussex.



# Gustav Holst Comprehension Questions

1. What is the name of Holst's most famous composition?

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2. How are the Venus and Saturn movements different?

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3. What happened in 1913, in Holst's honour?

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4. Who did Holst meet at the Royal College of Music?

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5. Apart from the piano, which other instrument did Holst play well?

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6. Based upon what you have read, how would you describe Holst's personality?

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