

Music from 1900-1945

“JUPITER, THE BRINGER OF  
JOLLITY”

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# “JUPITER, THE BRINGER OF JOLLITY”

A discussion of the way in which Gustav Holst (1874-1934) musically interprets the traditional associations with the planet Jupiter in “Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity” from *The Planets Suite* (1914-1916).

During his lifetime, Gustav Holst became quite learned in the area of astrology. Through his 1917 composition *The Planets*, Holst’s interest in the cosmos is evident as he musically interprets the personified traits ascribed to each planet. The orchestral suite also depicts some of the Planets’ mythological associations with the Roman gods of the same names. *The Planets* is a semi-programmatic work in that while not depicting specific scenes, events or stories, it conveys these traditional associations with the planets. Mark Morris<sup>1</sup> describes the suite as an embodiment of “the Classical or spiritual associations with the heavenly bodies”. Holst<sup>190</sup> described his own work as “a series of mood pictures”<sup>2</sup> while Vaughn Williams believed that “...the titles suggest the general character of the music...”<sup>3</sup>. For example Jupiter in “Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity” suggests qualities of jolliness, pride and grandeur. Holst achieves this musical representation through his manipulation of the musical concepts.

The idea of “jollity” denotes joviality and cheerfulness. Jupiter’s connection with these concepts stems from its astrological associations as “the optimist”. Throughout “Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity”, Holst conveys these traits through his treatment of metre and tone-colour. The use of staccato and syncopation suggests Jupiter’s light-heartedness and joviality. For example, at bar 23 (Figure 1) the whole orchestra plays a syncopated, staccato melodic figure in rhythmic unison, the syncopation and irregular rhythm of which creates a laugh-like phrase.

Figure 1



<sup>1</sup> Morris, M. “The Pimlico Dictionary of Twentieth Century Composers”, Pimlico, UK, 1999

<sup>2</sup> <http://wso.williams.edu/~ktaylor/gholst/compositions/orchestra/planets.html>

<sup>3</sup> Ralph Vaughn Williams, “National Music and other essays”, Oxford University Press, New York, 1987.

Similarly, at bar 62 (Figure 2) Holst's use of syncopation, staccato and quavers represents jollity as the horns and strings play one of the well-known melodies from the movement. The juxtaposition of the irregular rhythm of this cheerful melody against the bass tuba's plodding "walking bass" of crotchets creates mischievous undertones, further enhanced by the trombone's continuous quaver and quaver rest figure which syncopates against the <sup>300</sup> bass tuba.

Figure 2

The image displays a musical score for three instruments: Horns, Trombone (Tromb.), and Bass Tuba. The score is divided into two systems. The first system (bars 62-65) features the Horns playing a melody marked *f molto pesante* with a 2/2 time signature. The Trombone part consists of a continuous quaver and quaver rest figure. The Bass Tuba part plays a plodding "walking bass" of crotchets. The second system (bars 66-69) shows the Horns and Trombone parts continuing with the same markings, while the Bass Tuba part continues its walking bass. The overall tempo and mood are indicated by the *f molto pesante* marking.

The use of imitation as the upper woodwinds immediately take over the melody, like an echo, enhances the idea of mischievous joy (Figure 3).

Figure 3

This musical score for Figure 3 features five staves for woodwind instruments: Piccolo (Picc.), Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), E. Horn (E.H.), and Clarinet (Cl.). The Piccolo, Flute, and Oboe parts are marked with a forte dynamic (*f*) and the instruction *non legato*. The music consists of a series of eighth-note patterns that are imitated by the upper woodwinds, creating a playful, echo-like effect. The Piccolo part is the most active, with the other instruments following in a staggered fashion.

The bright tone-colour of the piccolo, flute and oboe, conveys a light-hearted jolliness. Similarly in a later section (Figure 4), a short melodic passage consisting of staccato quavers is heard. This playful segment expresses jollity as the ascending and descending melody is passed throughout the woodwind section.

Figure 4

This musical score for Figure 4 features seven staves for woodwind and string instruments: Piccolo (Picc.), Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), E. Horn (E.H.), Clarinet (Cl.), Bassoon (Bcl.), Bassoon (Bn.), and Double Bass (Dbn.). The woodwind parts (Piccolo, Flute, Oboe, E. Horn, Clarinet, and Bassoon) play a short, staccato melodic passage consisting of eighth-note quavers. The passage is ascending and then descending, and is passed throughout the woodwind section. The Bassoon and Double Bass parts provide harmonic support with chords and a simple bass line. The Piccolo part is the most active, with the other instruments following in a staggered fashion.

Holst maintains the movement's overall theme of jolliness through his use of ornamentation. Specifically, trills, turns, runs, tremolo and glissandi are mainly utilised by the strings and upper woodwinds. These instrumental techniques are evident throughout the movement and help to create unity. For example, the use of staccato semi-quavers in the flute, piccolo and clarinet against the upper strings' tremolo at bar 54 (Figure 5), creates a busy texture and also an "optimistic" excitement. Similarly, the woodwind adds excitement and a slight cheekiness to various melodic themes when proceeding them with rapid sextuplet and septuplet runs (Figure 6).

Figure 5

Figure 5 is a musical score for a woodwind and string ensemble. The score is arranged in a system with seven staves. From top to bottom, the staves are labeled: Picc., FL., Cl., Trp., Vns., Vns., and Db. The Picc., FL., and Cl. parts feature rapid, rhythmic patterns of staccato semi-quavers. The Trp. part has a melodic line with some staccato markings. The Vns. and Db. parts provide a harmonic accompaniment with tremolo-like textures. Performance instructions include 'Ritenuito' at the top right, 'cresc.' (crescendo) in several places, and 'stacc.' (staccato) for the woodwinds. There are also markings for 'div.' (divisi) for the violins and 'a 2' (second endings) for the trumpet.

Figure 6

Figure 6 is a musical score for a clarinet (Cl.) part. It shows a single staff with a rapid, rhythmic run consisting of a sextuplet followed by a septuplet. The notation includes slurs and accents over the notes to indicate the speed and articulation of these runs.

Being the largest planet in our solar system, Jupiter has traditionally been associated with qualities of grandeur and nobility. Part of this idea has arisen from its connection with the god "Jupiter" from Roman Mythology, also identified with "Zeus" from Greek mythology. "The Roman father of heaven...he was Rome's special patron and protector, and his cult was celebrated with great pomp"<sup>4</sup>. Through the application of the concepts, Holst not only conveys the "jollity" associated with Jupiter, but also the size, regal nature and protector aspects. The utilisation of a very large orchestra helps to convey the sheer physical vastness of the planet. The score consists of a conventional string, woodwind, brass and percussion section with the addition of Cor Anglais, Bass Clarinet, Double Bassoon, Tenor and Bass trombone, Tenor and Bass Tuba, Glockenspiel and harp. Such a broad range of instruments covers an enormous pitch range and creates a robust tone colour, conveying the immensity of Jupiter.

Throughout the movement, Holst frequently uses the brass section create a majestic tone colour, as traditionally, brass instruments, have been associated with royalty and grandness because of their use in fanfare. A fanfare-like figure can be seen at bar 146 (Figure 7) as the trumpets continuously alternate on an ascending quaver motif creating a majestic tone-colour.

Figure 7



The lower brass at the beginning of the movement similarly portray this stateliness and anticipation; Six horns "announce" the arrival of Jupiter, playing a syncopated and heavily accented figure in mid register. Their strong deliberate pulse and muffled yet sonorous timbre creates regality (Figure 8).

Figure 8



<sup>4</sup> The Reader's Digest Great Encyclopaedic Dictionary, Reader's Digest, Sydney, 1965

Once again, Holst uses the brass to depict various aspects of Jupiter's character at bar 105 (Figure 9) of the movement. The horns, again, have the main melody, playing a plodding crotchet figure in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time. The majestic tone colour combined with the accents placed on every first beat of the bar, portrays the noble nature Jupiter's grandeur. To further enhance this regality, the entire string section plays crotchet chords sounding on every first beat of the bar building upon the horns' accents and creating a robust texture and resonant tone colour.

Figure 9

The image displays a musical score for Figure 9, consisting of two systems of staves. The top system is for Horns (Hrn.), featuring three staves. The bottom system is for Strings (Vns., Vas., Vc., Db.), featuring five staves. The Horns part is in 3/4 time and features a plodding crotchet melody with accents on every first beat. The string section is marked 'arco' and plays crotchet chords on every first beat, building upon the horns' accents. The score is written in a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a common time signature of 3/4.

The spirit of this section however, gradually changes from stately regality to a cheery mood as various sections take their turn in playing the melody and different layers are added. Thus, the texture is progressively altered. For example the upper woodwinds add fast, rippling ascending and descending arpeggiatic motifs over the top of the melody (played by the trumpets). While creating a fuller texture this, as well as the tambourine's sustained trills, also creates a brighter, more brilliant tone-colour keeping with the cheerful nature of Jupiter's jollity.

Because of Jupiter's position in Roman mythology as the patron of the country and "Father of Gods" or "Optimus Maximus"<sup>5</sup> (Greatest and Best), Jupiter has often been associated with feelings of patriotism. Exemplifying this aspect is the most famous section of "Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity", where Holst uses tone colour and melody to convey a regal, hymn-like figure (Figure 10).

Figure 10

The image displays a musical score for the section "Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity". It features two main sections: Horns and Strings. The Horns section consists of three staves, with the top two staves marked "non legato". The Strings section consists of four staves, with the bottom staff marked "pizz.". The score includes various musical notations such as clefs, time signatures, and dynamic markings. Handwritten annotations "Horns" and "Strings" are present on the left side of the score. The score is divided into measures, with some measures containing Roman numerals (I, II, III) and a "400" marking.

<sup>5</sup> Hurley, T. Medcalf, P. Murray, C. Rolph, J, ANTIQUITY 2, Oxford University Press, New York, 1998



The horns and strings play the main melody in octave unison, creating a purity of sound and a rich, resonant tone colour. Stateliness is also conveyed through the accompaniment's crotchets, played on the first and third beat of the bar. The flowing lyrical melody which represents Jupiter's generosity and pride is gradually built upon in octave layers while also ascending in register as, by the end of the section, the violins, viola and cello are playing at a very high register and the majority of the orchestra are playing the melody in unison, spanning three octaves at the climax of the section. This use of broad pitch range and the span of the melody across so many parts, accentuates the emotional effect of this famous melody.

The emotion associated with this melody was described by Holst as "the more ceremonial type of rejoicing associated with religious or national festivities".<sup>6</sup> Consequently, this anthemic middle section was later used as the melody for a patriotic hymn, "I vow to thee my country".<sup>7</sup> The use of this hymn at many contemporary British Royal occasions<sup>8</sup> (see appendix), demonstrates the semi-programmatic nature of the movement as it is used to represent pride, patriotism and celebration. This majestic type of celebration can be seen at the beginning of the movement as the violins create excitement and anticipation with their fast staccato semi-quaver ostinato (Figure 11).

Figure 11



The cello and viola enter also playing this motif in a high register, the viola in the treble clef and the cello in the tenor clef, adding a strained quality of sound and further increasing the sense of excitement as the bowed high pitched semi-quavers create a bright, light sounding tone colour.

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.barbwired.com/barbweb/programs/holst\\_planets.html](http://www.barbwired.com/barbweb/programs/holst_planets.html)

<sup>7</sup> Ralph Vaughn Williams, "National Music and other essays", Oxford University Press, New York, 1987

<sup>8</sup> Sung at Princess Diana and Prince Charles' wedding and also at Diana's funeral.

To bring together both the jolly and majestic aspects of the movement, Holst ends the movement on a jubilant yet triumphant note. With the horns, trumpets and tubas playing very loud (*fff*) ascending fourths, the tambourine playing a sustained trill, and the upper woodwinds and strings playing a quaver ostinato, the brilliant tone colour conveys exultance. In the second last bar, the trumpet, tuba and trombone's sustained chord is accompanied by a loud <sup>1390</sup> crash from the cymbal which enhances the bright tone colour and hence exuberant jollity of Jupiter (Figure 12).

The musical score is arranged in two systems. The first system includes Piccolo (Picc.), Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), English Horn (E.H.), Clarinet (Cl.), Bass Clarinet (Bcl.), Bassoon (Bn.), and Double Bassoon (Dbn.). The second system includes Horns (Hrn.), Trumpet (Trp.), Tenor Trumpet (Ten. Trb.), Bass Trumpet (Bass Trb.), Tenor Tuba (Ten. Tub.), Bass Tuba (Bass Tub.), Timpani (Timp.), Tambourine (Tamb.), Cymbal (Cymb.), Bass Drum (B.D.), Gong (Gl.), Violins (Vns.), Violas (Vas.), Cellos (Vc.), and Double Basses (Db.). The score features a quaver ostinato in the woodwinds and strings, and a sustained chord in the brass. A cymbal crash is marked in the second last bar. Dynamics include *fff* and accents. Performance markings include *a 2*, *a 3*, and <sup>1390</sup>.

Jupiter's traditional associations span across a spectrum from the proud regality of the Roman God, to the jovial excitement and jolliness of the astrological associations of Jupiter "the optimist". Jupiter's "jollity" is primarily conveyed through Holst's utilisation of syncopation, staccato and the bright tone-colour produced by the various instruments. The more resonant tone-colour of the horns and strings, along with the incorporation of a lyrical, hymn-like, melody in the middle of the movement, assists in portraying Jupiter as a <sup>400</sup>patriotic, Kingly figure.

# APPENDIX

## Words to “I Vow to Thee my Country”

*And there's another country  
I've heard of long ago,  
Most Dear to them that Love her,  
Most Great to them that Know.  
We may not count her armies,  
We may not see her King.  
Her Fortress is a faithful heart;  
Her Pride is Suffering.  
And Soul by Soul and silently,  
Her shining Bounds increase  
And her ways are ways of Gentleness  
And all her paths are Peace!  
We may not count her Armies,  
We may not see her King.  
Her fortress is a faithful heart;  
Her Pride is Suffering.  
And Soul by Soul and silently,  
Her shining Bounds increase  
And her ways are ways of Gentleness  
And all her Paths are Peace!<sup>9</sup>*

### WORD DEFINITIONS

**Astrology** – the study of the stars and planets to reveal their supposed influence on persons or events.<sup>10</sup>

**Mythology** – a body of myths relating to a particular country or person.<sup>11</sup>

**Regal** – king-like, stately, splendid, majestic.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> words to hymn found at <http://www.aquarianage.org/lore/holst.html>

<sup>10</sup> World Book Dictionary, Thorndike Barnhart, USA, 1981

<sup>11</sup> ibid

<sup>12</sup> ibid

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## Discography

**Holst- The Planets- Suite de Ballet, Op.10**, played by CSR Orchestra, Naxos, 1988

## **MUSIC 2 – Elective Musicology**

### **Band 5/6**

Annotation – sample 1

**Title: Jupiter: The Bringer of Jollity**

**Topic: Music 1900 - 1945**

This essay presents comprehensive musical observations in a well structured format. The candidate successfully attempts to bring an original perspective into the discussion of the music.

Musical concepts are supported through high level and appropriate terminology though the essay might have been strengthened by the addition of extensive score annotations and audio excerpts. A detailed reading list is included in the bibliography.