

AN ANALYSIS OF THE FIRST SUITE IN E-FLAT
BY GUSTAV HOLST

by

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INTRODUCTION

Gustav Holst was 35 years old when he composed, in 1909, the First Suite in E-Flat for Military Band. The work was not commissioned and did not approach the status it enjoys today for several years.

Holst wrote nothing about the Suite in E-Flat and left only the following short note to the conductor at the bottom of a two-lined condensed score:

As each movement is founded on the same phrase, it is requested that the Suite shall be played right through without a break. It is suggested that in the absence of a string bass, the ad lib part for that instrument in the Intermezzo shall not be played on any brass instrument, but omitted, excepting where the notes are cued in other parts. Also in the absence of Timpani, the ad lib part for the latter is to be omitted entirely.

The Suite was not published until 1921 by Boosey and Co.

The Suite was idiomatically conceived for the English military band, which is synonymous with the concert or symphonic bands in America. The Suite represents a pioneer effort on the part of the composer to establish himself and his country, England, in a style which at this time was of significance.

CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND TO GUSTAV HOLST AND THE
SUITE IN E-FLAT FOR MILITARY BAND

Gustav Theodore Holst (1874-1934) was one of the most prominent English composers of his generation.¹ His name, Gustav, reflects the foreign ancestry of Baltic Russia, although his family had lived in England since 1807. Holst had the good fortune of being born into a family in which his great-grandfather, grandfather and father were all professional musicians.² His mother, Clara Lediard, was a noted English pianist and piano teacher.³ The music tradition was significant in the Holst family.

Holst came into the music profession as a village organist and a conductor of a choral society at Bourton-on-the-Water.⁴ He desired to become a composer, and had given great study to the Berlioz Treatise on Instrumentation at the young age of thirteen.⁵

¹ Edwin Evans, "Gustav Holst," Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians, II, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan Co., 1937), p. 657.

² Imogene Holst, The Music of Gustav Holst, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 2.

³ Imogene Holst, Gustav Holst, 2nd. ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 5.

⁴ Percy M. Young, A History of British Music (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1967), p. 553.

⁵ David Whitwell, "20th Century English Composers--Their Music for Winds," Instrumentalist, p. 48.

In 1893, at age nineteen, Holst entered the Royal College of Music in London.⁶ He studied composition from Stanford and piano and organ from Sharpe and Hoyt until neuritis developed in his right hand. Because of this physical condition, Holst began to study the trombone from Case. He progressed to a point at which he was able to earn his living by playing the trombone.

Holst played trombone on the pier at Brighton and other seaside resorts during the holidays to pay for his college expenses. He joined the White Viennese Band, a noted waltz band, which played for dances and parties.⁷

Holst left the Royal College of Music to become first trombonist and repetiteur of the Carl Rosa Opera Company. He had to coach soloists in unfamiliar arias and ensembles.⁸ This experience was useful in learning to overcome technical difficulties. Through listening at rehearsals, he learned the practical possibilities of the orchestra and the strong points and shortcomings of the different instruments.

After leaving the Carl Rosa Company, he toured several seasons as second trombone in the Scottish Orchestra.⁹ The experience of being a professional trombone player was helpful in his knowledge of wind instruments and practical orchestrational techniques.

In 1903 Gustav Holst entered the teaching profession by becoming Music Master at Edward Alleyn School in Dulwich England.¹⁰ "From the first moment

⁶Edwin Evans, Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians, p. 657.

⁷Imogene Holst, Gustav Holst, p. 15.

⁸Imogene Holst, Gustav Holst, p. 18.

⁹Imogene Holst, Gustav Holst, p. 20.

¹⁰Edwin Evans, Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians, p. 658.