

# THE PLANETS

GUSTAV HOLST



Gustav Holst (1874-1934)

# Gustav Holst

- ✦ English Composer
- ✦ From a family of three generations of professional musicians
- ✦ Career as a performer cut short by neuritis in right arm
- ✦ Studied at Royal College of Music

# Gustav Holst

- ✦ Could not support himself solely as a composer
- ✦ “Man cannot live by composition alone.”
- ✦ Worked as a trombone player, and as a teacher

# Gustav Holst

- ✦ Studies Classical Indian Music, and Hindu mythology
- ✦ Several of his works, including his opera *Savitri*, are inspired by his interest in Indian culture

# Gustav Holst

- ✦ His friend Clifford Bax introduces him to Astrology
- ✦ Holst becomes adept at astrology, and casts horoscopes for his friends

# Gustav Holst

- ✦ Holst wants to write a substantial piece for a large orchestra
- ✦ His interest in astrology sparks his inspiration for *The Planets*
- ✦ Inspired by a book by astrologer Alan Leo, who is often referred to as “the father of modern astrology”

# Gustav Holst

- ✦ Holst works on *The Planets* for over two years, 1914-1916

# Gustav Holst

- ✦ Sketches most of the movements for piece for 2 pianos
- ✦ Writes “Neptune” for the organ
- ✦ Cannot write out the music for orchestra because of his neuritis

# Gustav Holst

- ✦ Orchestrates from the 2 piano score
- ✦ Holst cannot write out the score because of his neuritis, and his students and friends help

First page of the score to *The Planets*

I. Mars, the Bringer of War.

**Allegro**

2 Piccolos  
2 Flutes  
2 Oboes  
English Horn  
Bass Oboe  
3 Clarinets in Bb  
Bass Clarinet in Bb  
3 Bassoons  
Double Bassoon  
6 Horns in F I II III  
IV V VI  
4 Trumpets in C I II  
III IV  
2 Tenor Trombones  
Bass Trombone  
Tenor Tuba in Bb  
Bass Tuba  
6 Timpani (two players) I wooden sticks  
II  
Side Drum  
Cymbals  
Bass Drum  
Gong  
Harp I  
Harp II  
Organ  
1<sup>st</sup> Violins col legno  
2<sup>nd</sup> Violins col legno  
Violas col legno  
Violoncellos col legno  
Doublebasses col legno

**Allegro**  
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# Gustav Holst

- ✦ Scored for very large orchestra:
- ✦ piccolo, 4 flutes, bass flute, 3 oboes, bass oboe, English horn, 3 clarinets, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon
- ✦ 6 horns, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, euphonium, bass tuba
- ✦ Percussion (2 timpanists), celesta, pipe organ, 2 harps
- ✦ String section
- ✦ Womens chorus for the final movement

## ORCHESTRA

Four Flutes	{ 3rd to combine 1st Piccolo, 4th to combine 2nd Piccolo and Bass Flute.	One Bass Tuba	
Three Oboes		{ 3rd to combine Bass Oboe.	Six Timpani (Two Players)
English Horn			Triangle
Three Clarinets in B $\flat$ and A		Side Drum	
Bass Clarinet in B $\flat$		Tambourine	
Three Bassoons		Cymbals	
Double Bassoon		Bass Drum	
Six Horns in F		Gong	
Four Trumpets in C		Bells	
Two Tenor Trombones		Glockenspiel	{ Two Players
One Bass Trombone		Celesta	
One Tenor Tuba in B $\flat$		Xylophone	
		Two Harps	
		Organ	
		Strings	
In the 7th Piece only, a Hidden Choir of Female Voices in 6 parts.			

Orchestra requirements from the score of *The Planets*

# Gustav Holst

- *The Planets* performed as a “send off” for Holst, who was going to mainland Europe to help with the demobilization of British WW I troops

# Gustav Holst

- ✦ A partial premiere was given in the Queen's Hall in 1918 for an invited audience of 250 people
- ✦ First complete performance in 1920 by the London Symphony



Our Planets



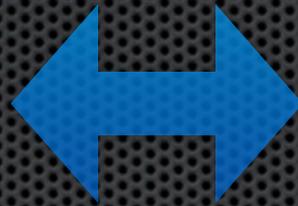
1. Mars
2. Venus
3. Mercury

4. Jupiter

5. Saturn
6. Uranus
7. Neptune

## ***THE PLANETS***

1. Mars (Moderate)
2. Venus (Slow)
3. Mercury (Very Fast)
4. Jupiter (Fast)



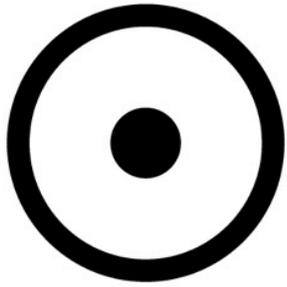
## **SYMPHONY**

1. Moderate-to-Fast
2. Slow
3. Scherzo (Very Fast)
4. Rondo (Fast)

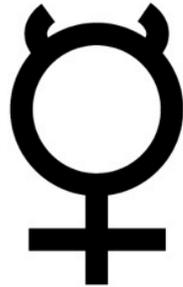


There is no Pluto movement

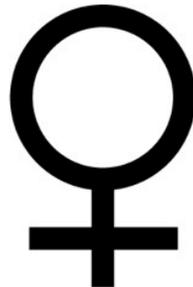
Pluto was discovered in 1930,  
four years before Holst's death



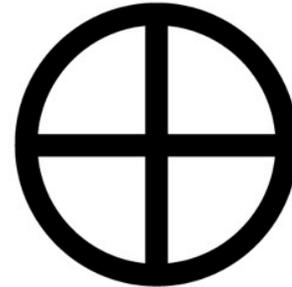
Sun



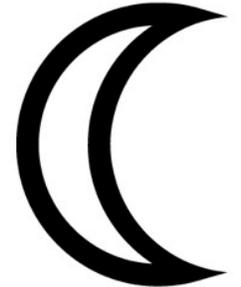
Mercury



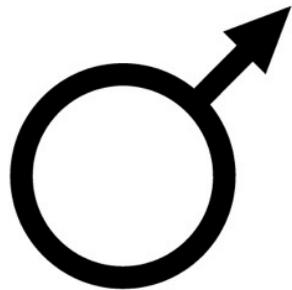
Venus



Earth



Moon



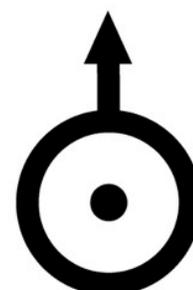
Mars



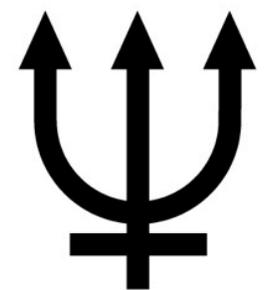
Jupiter



Saturn



Uranus



Neptune

# The Astrological Signs for the Planets

# MARS

bringer of war





## Attributes of Mars

Helmet

Spear

Wolf

Woodpecker

# MARS

## the bringer of war

- ✦ **Theme 1**: 3-note **MARS MOTIVE**
  - ✦ **Motive** = very short theme, usually only a few notes
- ✦ **Theme 2**: Chromatic “sliding” Theme
- ✦ **Theme 3**: Fanfares in Canon
- ✦ Build and “**Disaster I**”
- ✦ **Theme 2** builds
- ✦ Return of **Theme 1** and **Theme 2**
- ✦ “**Disaster II**” and **Coda** (Fragments of Ostinato)

# MARS

the bringer of war

- **MARS ostinato** in **5-beat** measure

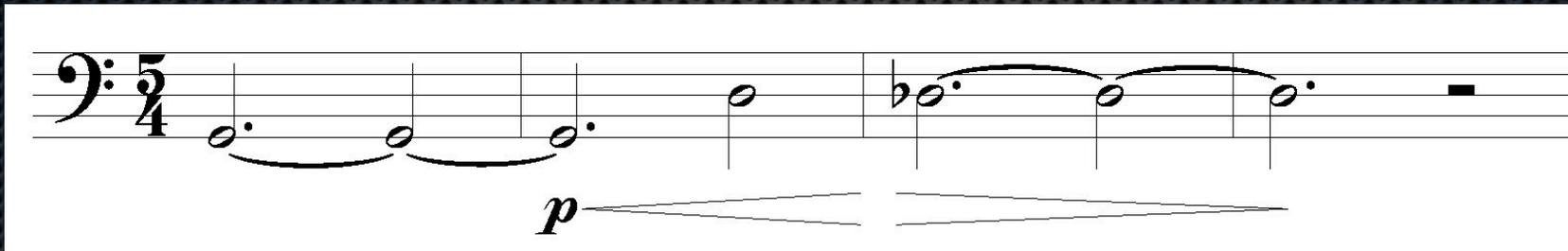
The image shows a musical score for the MARS ostinato in 5-beat measure. The score is written for five parts: 1st Violins, 2nd Violins, Violas, Violoncellos, and Doublebasses. Each part is marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic and the instruction "col legno" (col legno battuto), indicating that the wood of the instrument should be struck. The notation consists of five measures, each containing a sequence of notes that create a rhythmic pattern. The first measure is followed by a comma and the second measure, which is then followed by measures 3, 4, and 5. The notes are written in a way that suggests a specific rhythmic pattern, likely a sequence of eighth notes.

1 2 3 4 5, 1 2 3 4 5

# MARS

the bringer of war

- 3-note **MARS MOTIVE**



A musical score for a brass ensemble, featuring five staves: Horns (Hrn.), Trumpets (Trp.), Tenor Trumpets (Ten. Trb.), Bass Trumpets (Bass Trb.), and Tenor Trombones (Ten. Tub.). The score is written in a key signature of two flats and a common time signature. The Horns part features a complex, chromatic melodic line with many accidentals. The Trumpets part plays a rhythmic ostinato of eighth notes. The Tenor Trumpets and Bass Trumpets parts play a chromatic, sliding melodic line. The Tenor Trombones part plays a similar chromatic, sliding melodic line. Two blue stars are placed on the score: one on the second staff (Horns) and one on the fourth staff (Bass Trb.), both pointing to the chromatic 'sliding' theme.

★ Chromatic “sliding” theme  
(with ostinato in trumpets)



Mars, Bringer of War

# VENUS

the bringer of peace





## Attributes of Venus

The ocean

Roses

Myrtle

# VENUS

the bringer of peace

- ✦ **Ascending motive / Descending motive**
  - ✦ **Rocking ostinato**
- ✦ **Theme 1** in strings, **Theme 2**
- ✦ **Theme 3** in Oboe
  - ✦ **Rocking ostinato**
- ✦ **Theme 3**
- ✦ **Return of Theme 1 and 2**

Descending  
Motive

*Adagio*

The image shows a page of a musical score for a symphony orchestra. The score is for the woodwind and horn sections. The instruments listed on the left are: 4 Flutes (I II and III IV), 3 Oboes, English Horn, 3 Clarinets in Bb, Bass Clarinet in Bb, 3 Bassoons, Double Bassoon, and 6 Horns in F (I II and III IV). The tempo is marked 'Adagio'. The music is in 4/4 time and features a descending melodic line in the upper woodwinds and an ascending melodic line in the horns. The descending line starts on a high note and moves down stepwise, while the ascending line starts on a lower note and moves up stepwise. The descending line is marked with a 'p' (piano) dynamic, and the ascending line is also marked with a 'p' dynamic. The descending line is annotated with a blue callout box labeled 'Descending Motive', and the ascending line is annotated with a blue callout box labeled 'Ascending Motive'.

Ascending  
Motive



Rocking Motive  
(in flutes)



Venus, Bringer of Peace

# MERCURY

the winged messenger





## Attributes of Mercury

Olympian  
Winged shoes  
Winged hat  
Caduceus

# MERCURY

## the messenger

- ✦ **Section I Theme 1 “Flying”** in **compound meter** with **Hemiolas** and interruptions ... transition
- ✦ **Section II Theme 2** ... transition
- ✦ **Section III Theme 1** ... interruption that builds into a...
- ✦ **Section IV Detour** ... transition with recollections of Themes 1 and 2
- ✦ **Coda Theme 1**

1<sup>st</sup> Violins

2<sup>nd</sup> Violins

Violas

Violoncellos

Doublebasses

*con sord.*

*p*

*con sord.*

*p*

*con sord.*

*p*

*con sord.*

*p*

*pizz.*

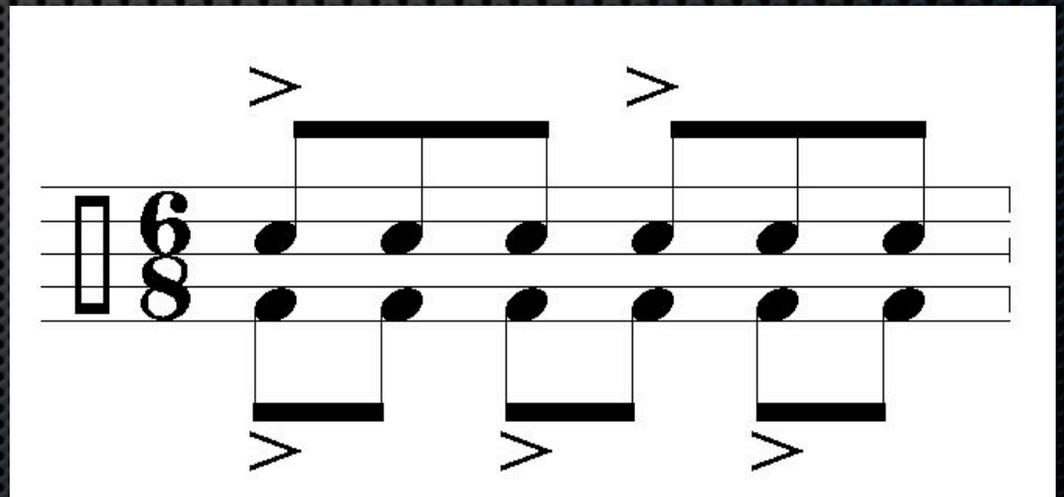
**Vivace.**

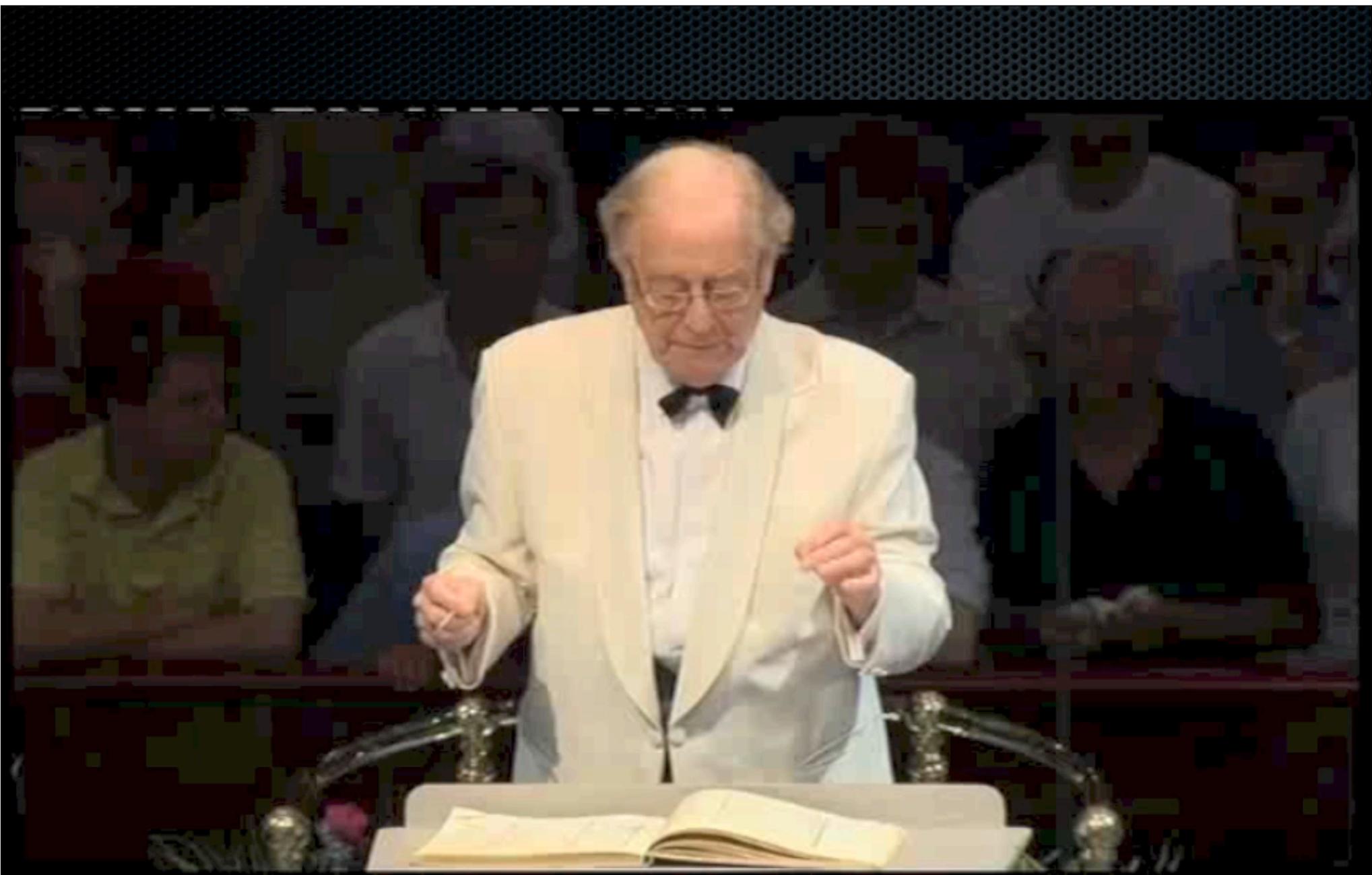
“Flying” Theme

# MERCURY

## the messenger

- ✦ **HEMIOLA** = alternating the possible rhythmic stresses in **compound** time
- ✦ **1**-and-uh, **2**-and-uh
  - ✦ alternating with
- ✦ **1**-and, **2**-and, **3**-and





Mercury, the Winged Messenger

# JUPITER

the bringer of jollity





## Attributes of Jupiter

Olympian

Lightning Bolt

Eagle messenger

# JUPITER

## the bringer of jollity

- ✦ **Introduction** Horn Calls
- ✦ **Section I “Jupiter Dances”** in Duple Meter; and then in Triple Meter ... Transition
- ✦ **Section II Hymn** ... Transition
- ✦ **Section III “Jupiter Dances”** (Recapitulation)
  - ✦ Build Up; Recall of **Hymn**
- ✦ **Coda**

Musical score for Tenor Trumpet (Ten. Trb.), Bass Trumpet (Bass. Trb.), Tenor Trombone (Ten. Tub.), Bass Trombone (Bass. Tub.), and Timpani (Timp.). The score is written in 2/4 time and features a key signature of one sharp (F#). The Tenor Trumpet part begins with a melodic line in the third measure, which is highlighted by a blue callout box. The other parts provide harmonic support and rhythmic accompaniment.

“Jupiter” horn calls

“Jupiter Dances”  
[Duple Meter]

Violins (Vns.), Violas (Vas.), Cellos (Vc.), and Double Basses (Db.) are shown in a musical score. The tempo is marked *f molto pesante: non legato*. The score includes a first ending bracket labeled *a tempo*.

“Jupiter Dances”  
[Triple Meter]

Horns (Hrn.) are shown in a musical score. The score includes a first ending bracket labeled *a 2*.

Vns. arco *pp* *mf* arco

Vas. arco *pp* *mf* arco

Vc. arco *pp* *mf* arco

Db. *pp* *mf* pizz. *mf*

Andante maestoso  $\text{♩} = \text{♩}$

B. & H. 15970

“Hymn”

# JUPITER

## the bringer of jollity

- ✦ The slow “**Hymn**” section was turned into an **actual hymn** by Holst.
- ✦ Holst was asked by his friend Ralph Vaughn-Williams to write a hymn, and Holst found that the central tune from “Jupiter” fit the poem “**I vow to thee, my country**”

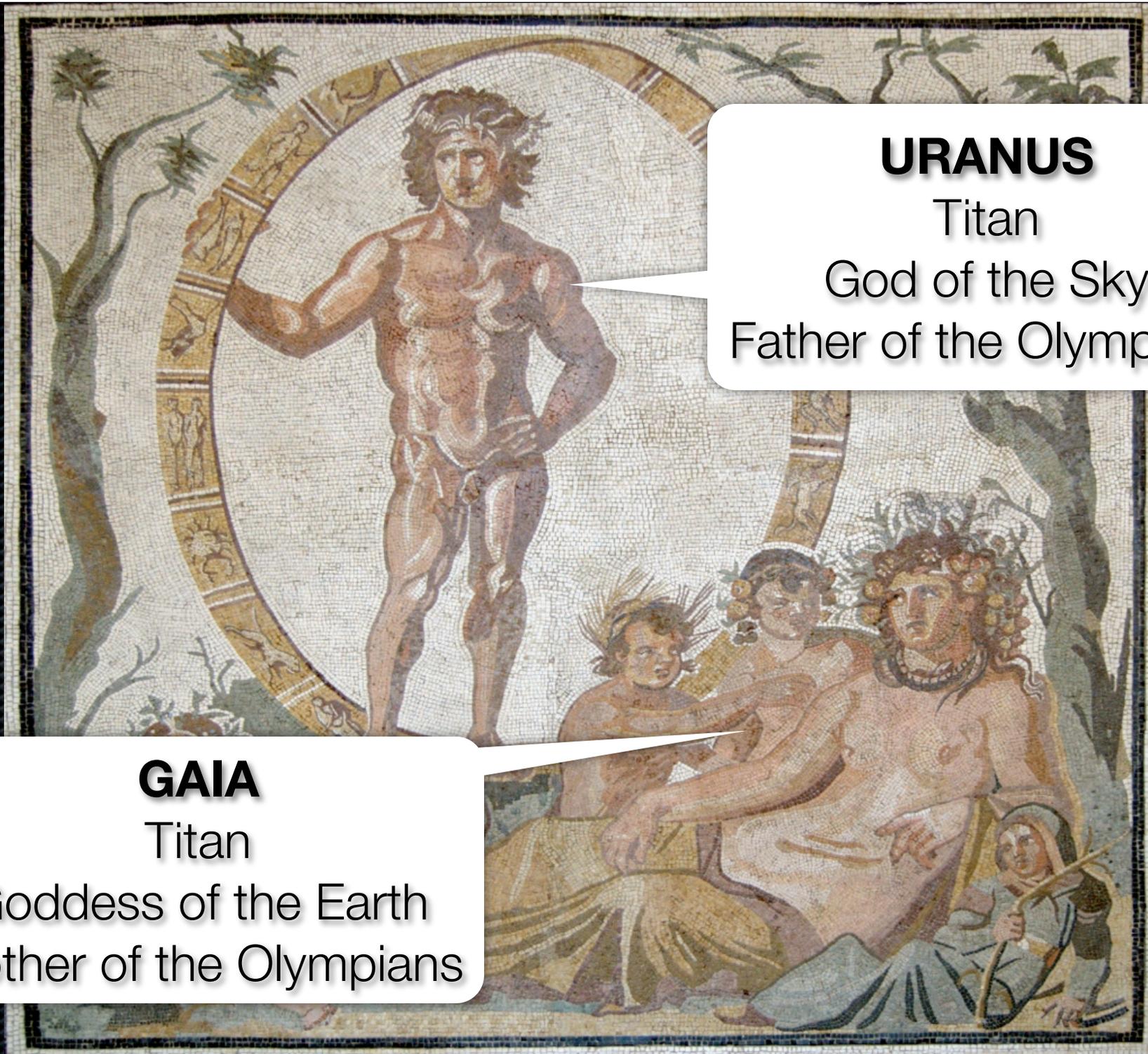


Jupiter, Bringer of Jollity

# URANUS

the magician





## URANUS

Titan

God of the Sky

Father of the Olympians

## GAIA

Titan

Goddess of the Earth

Mother of the Olympians

# URANUS

## the magician

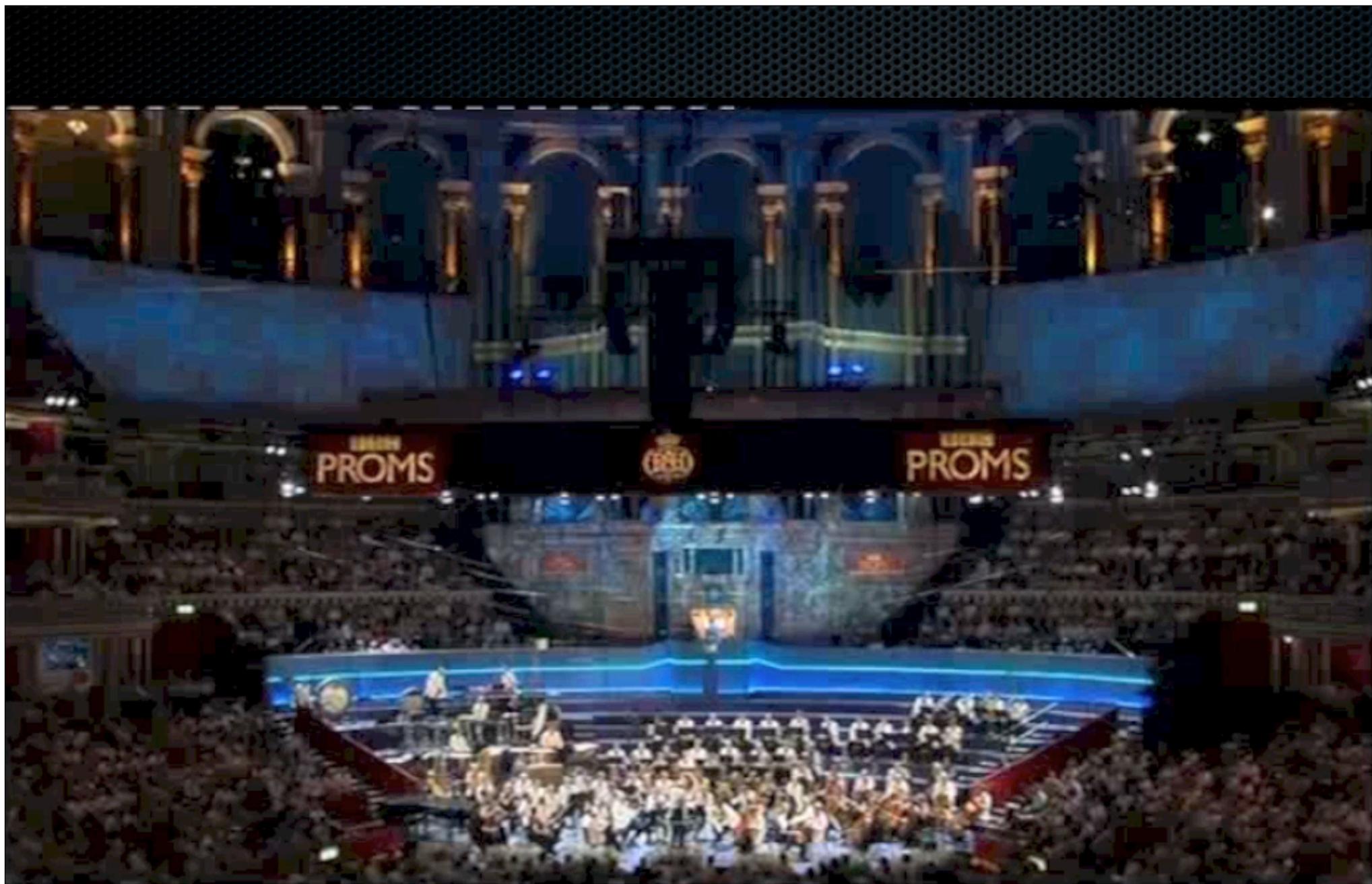
- ✦ **Introduction** 4-note Uranus motive
- ✦ **Section I MARCH** based on Uranus motive; transition
- ✦ **Section II MARCH-TRIO** with **2 themes** in **two sections**
  - ✦ [A, transition, B, transition]
    - ✦ interruption--transition and build to...
    - ✦ Return to [A, B, A], and a build up to...
- ✦ **Section III “The Disappearance”**: very quiet 5-note

I II  
4 Trumpets in C  
III IV

2 Tenor Trombones

Bass Trombone

“Uranus” 4-note motive



Uranus, the Magician

# NEPTUNE

the mystic





## Attributes of Neptune

Olympian  
God of the Sea  
Trident  
Dolphins

# NEPTUNE

## the mystic

- ✦ **Section I 2-chord bi-tonal ostinato** in **5-beat** (3+2) pattern
  - ✦ Transition and build up through layering of instruments and a gradual crescendo
- ✦ **Section II “Stasis”**... 2-chord patterns in different orchestral timbres (featuring harps and celesta)
- ✦ **Section III Canon-ostinato** in woodwinds, entrance of **2 Women’s choruses** (also in canon)
  - ✦ Interruption (recall of “stasis” section)
- ✦ Return of canon-ostinato and **fade out...**

C major

B major

Andante (3 beats followed by 2)

1 Piccolo

2 Flutes

Bass Flute

The image shows a musical score for three instruments: 1 Piccolo, 2 Flutes, and Bass Flute. The tempo is marked 'Andante' and the meter is '3 beats followed by 2'. The Piccolo part has a fermata over the first measure. The Flutes and Bass Flute parts play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score includes dynamics like pp and mf.

Two chord ostinato

A musical score for a canon section, featuring four staves: Bass Fl., Ob., E.H., and Bass Ob. The score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music is in 4/4 time. The canon begins with the Bass Ob. staff, followed by the E.H. staff, the Ob. staff, and finally the Bass Fl. staff. Blue stars are placed on the first note of each instrument's entrance. The word "text" is written in the center of the score, and a Roman numeral "II" is visible below the Ob. staff.

Canon section

★ = entrances of canon

# NEPTUNE

## the mystic

- ✦ One of the first classical pieces to use a “**fade out**” **technique** for its ending.
- ✦ Holst writes in the score:
  - ✦ “The chorus is to be placed in **an adjoining room**, the door of which is to be left open until the last bar of the piece, when it is to be slowly and silently closed. [The singers] are to be **well screened from the audience**”

# NEPTUNE

## the mystic

- Holst's daughter Imogen writes that the ending was "unforgettable, with its hidden chorus of women's voices growing fainter and fainter... until the imagination knew no difference between sound and silence"



Neptune, the Mystic

# Pieces to Know

- ✦ “Mars”
- ✦ “Venus”
- ✦ “Mercury”
- ✦ “Jupiter”
- ✦ “Uranus”
- ✦ “Neptune”



- ✦ from *The Planets* (Holst, *The Planets*)

# Terms to Know

- **MOTIVE** = short “tune” of only a few notes
- **5-beat time** = meter of 5 instead of 4 or 3
- **March-Trio** = March in ternary (3-part) form
- **Symphony** = large-scale work for orchestra in 4 mvts.
- **Compound meter** = Duple meter, subdivided into 6
- **Hemiola** = alternating metric stress of 2 or 3 in compound meter

# Terms to Know

- **BI-TONAL** = music in two keys at the same time
- **OSTINATO** = motive that repeats over and over
- **CANON** = a “rule”: in this case, a melody that is played in a copy-cat manner by different instruments in the orchestra
- **FADE OUT** = repeating over and over, getting softer and softer