

# 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 I wooden sticks  
(two players) 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

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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



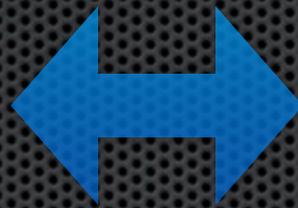
1. Mars
2. Venus
3. Mercury

4. Jupiter

5. Saturn
6. Uranus
7. Neptune

## ***THE PLANETS***

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



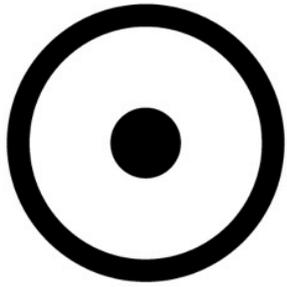
## **SYMPHONY**

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



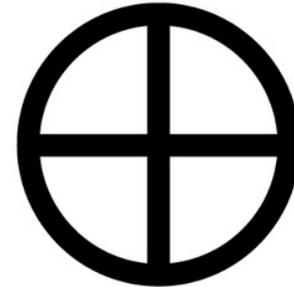
Sun



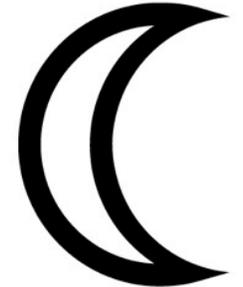
Mercury



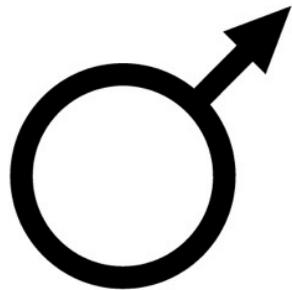
Venus



Earth



Moon



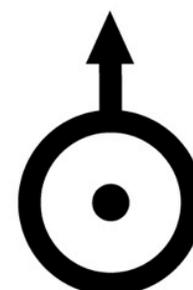
Mars



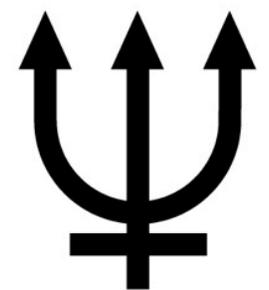
Jupiter



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

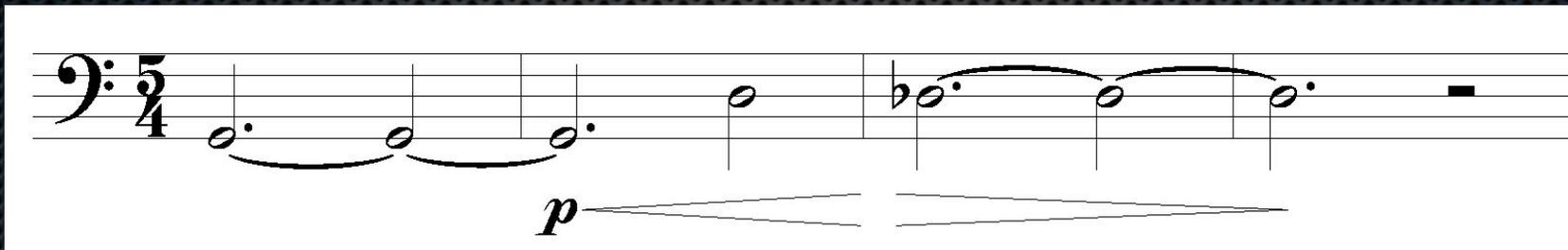
The image shows a musical score for the MARS ostinato in 5-beat measure. The score is written for five parts: 1st Violins, 2nd Violins, Violas, Violoncellos, and Doublebasses. Each part is marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic and the instruction "col legno" (col legno battuto), indicating that the wood of the instrument should be struck. The score is divided into two measures, each containing five beats. The first measure is marked with a "1" and the second with a "5", indicating the beat number. The notation shows a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in the upper parts and quarter notes in the lower parts.

1 2 3 4 5, 1 2 3 4 5

# MARS

the bringer of war

- 3-note **MARS MOTIVE**



The image shows a musical score for a brass ensemble. The staves are labeled from top to bottom: Hrn. (Horn), Trp. (Trumpet), Ten. Trb. (Tenor Trumpet), Bass Trb. (Bass Trumpet), and Ten. Tub. (Tenor Tuba). The Horn and Tenor Trumpet staves feature a chromatic 'sliding' theme, which is highlighted by a blue star. The Trumpet staff features an ostinato pattern. The Tenor Tuba staff features a melodic line. The score is written in a key signature of two flats and a common time signature.

★ 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, specifically focusing on the woodwind and horn sections. The score is written in a major key with a 4/4 time signature. The tempo is marked 'Adagio'. The woodwind section includes 4 Flutes (I and II, III and IV), 3 Oboes, an English Horn, 3 Clarinets in Bb, a Bass Clarinet in Bb, 3 Bassoons, and a Double Bassoon. The horn section consists of 6 Horns in F (I and II, III and IV). The woodwinds play a descending melodic line starting on a high note and moving down stepwise, while the horns play an ascending melodic line starting on a low note and moving up stepwise. Dynamics include piano (p) and pianissimo (pp). Blue callout boxes with white text point to the descending and ascending motives.

4 Flutes  
III IV

3 Oboes

English Horn

3 Clarinets in B $\flat$

Bass Clarinet in B $\flat$

3 Bassoons

Double Bassoon

6 Horns in F  
I II  
III IV

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

*p* *con sord.*

*p* *con sord.*

*p* *con sord.*

*p* *con sord.*

*p* *pizz.*

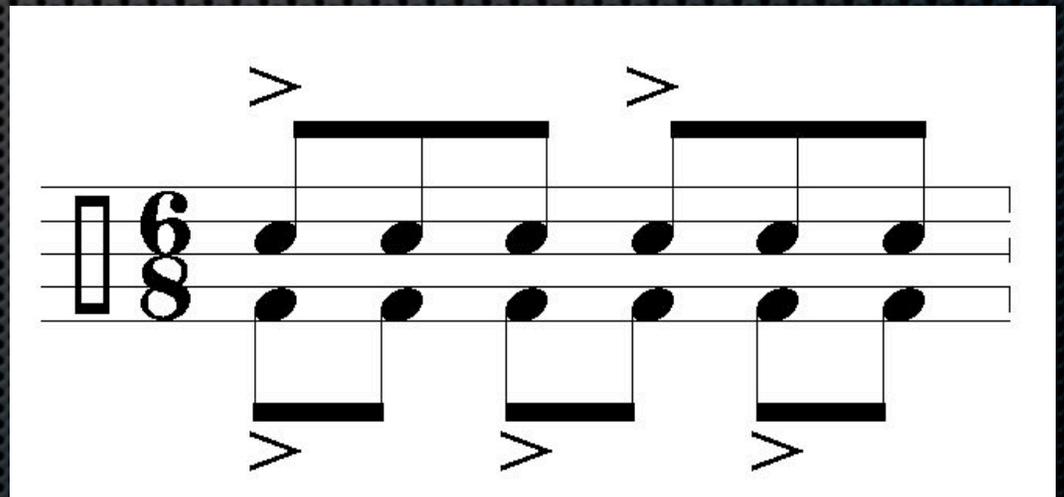
**Vivace.**

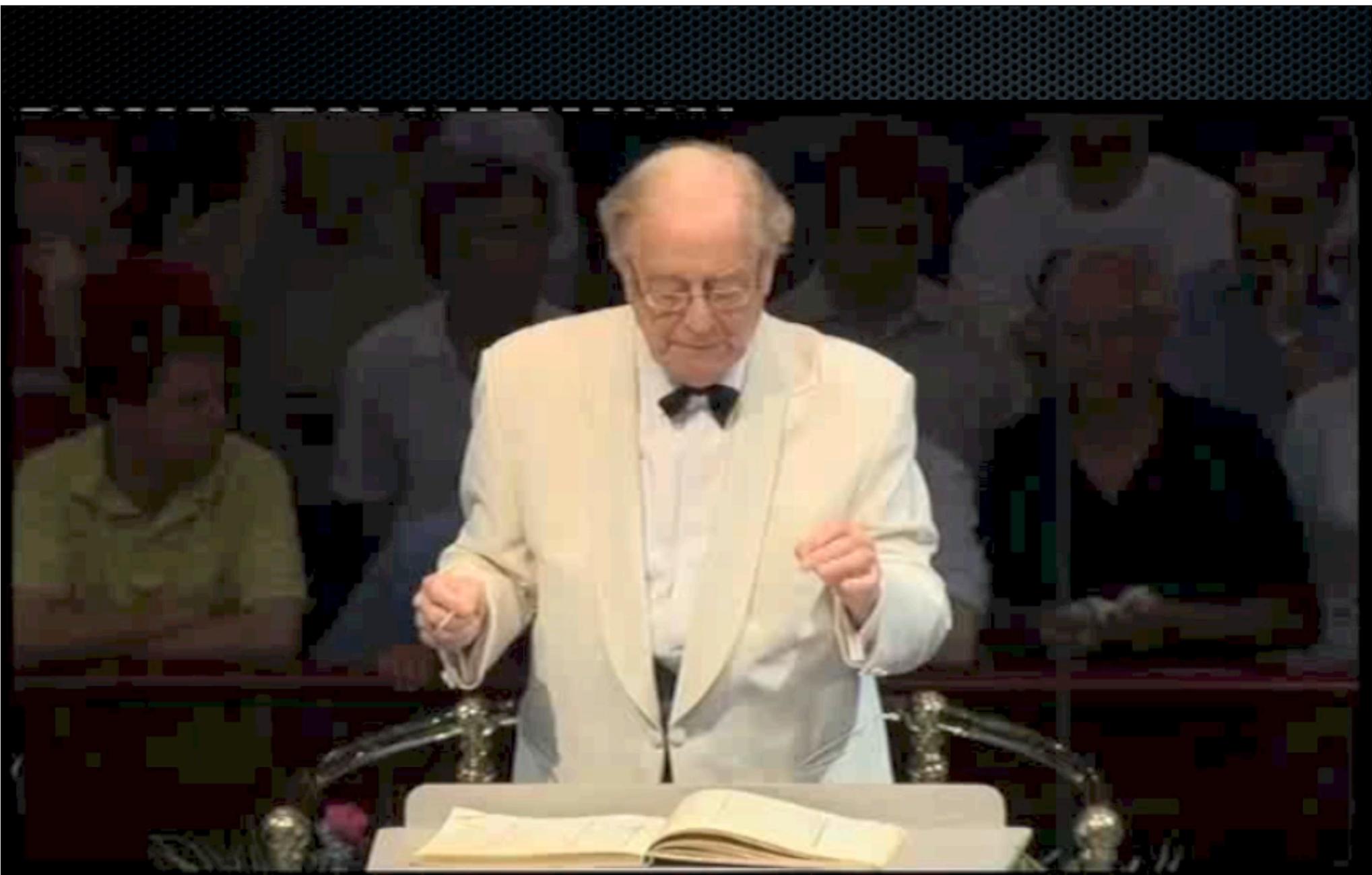
“Flying” Theme

# 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”

The image shows a page of musical notation for a string quartet and double bass. The score is written for Violins (Vns.), Violas (Vas.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Double Bass (Db.). The tempo is marked 'Andante maestoso' with a time signature of 2/2. The key signature has two flats. The score includes dynamic markings such as *pp* (pianissimo) and *mf* (mezzo-forte), and performance instructions like 'arco' (arco) and 'pizz.' (pizzicato). A blue callout bubble points to the word 'Hymn' in the bottom left corner.

# 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**”

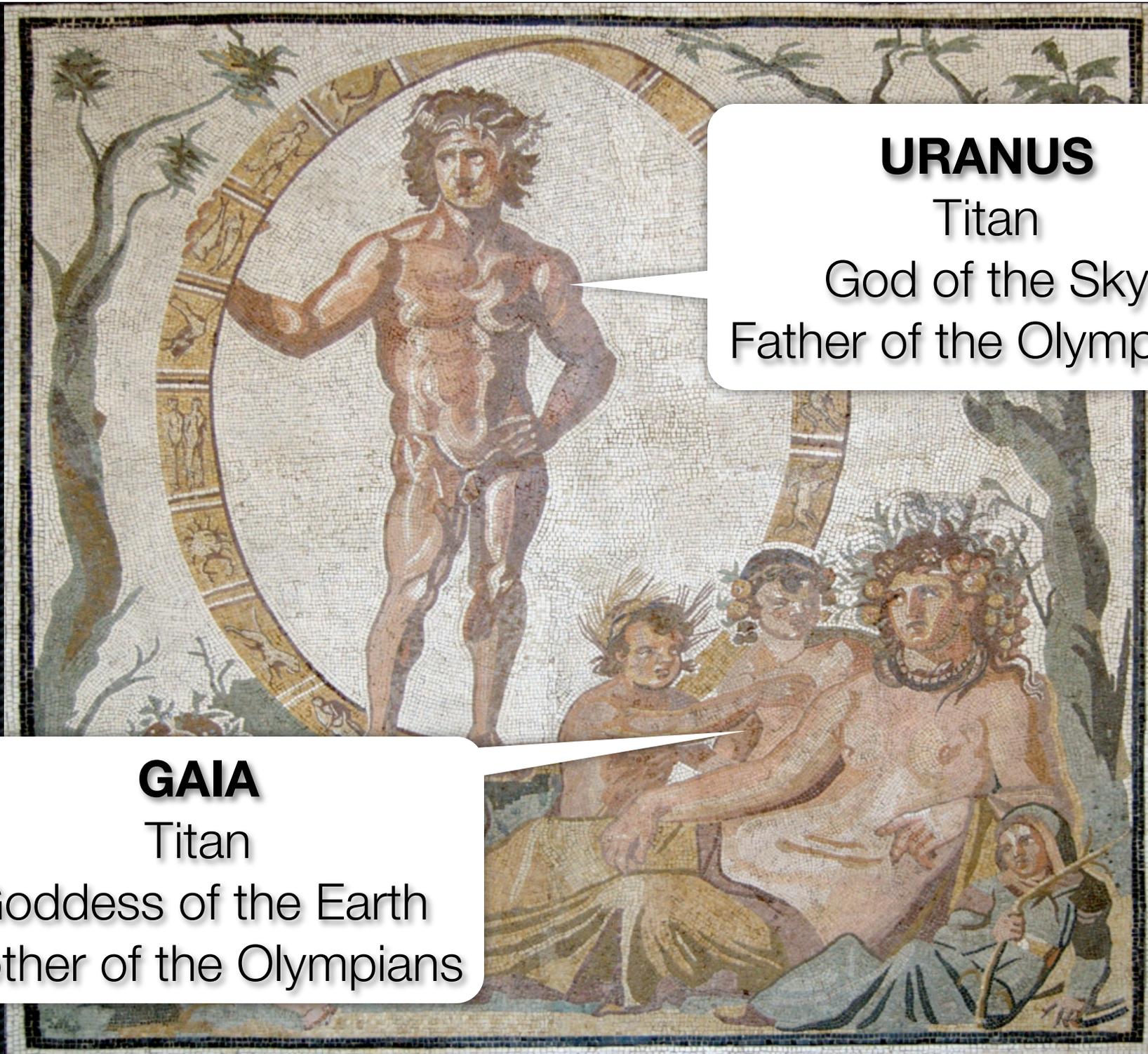


Jupiter, Bringer of Jollity

# URANUS

the magician





## URANUS

Titan

God of the Sky

Father of the Olympians

## GAIA

Titan

Goddess of the Earth

Mother of the Olympians

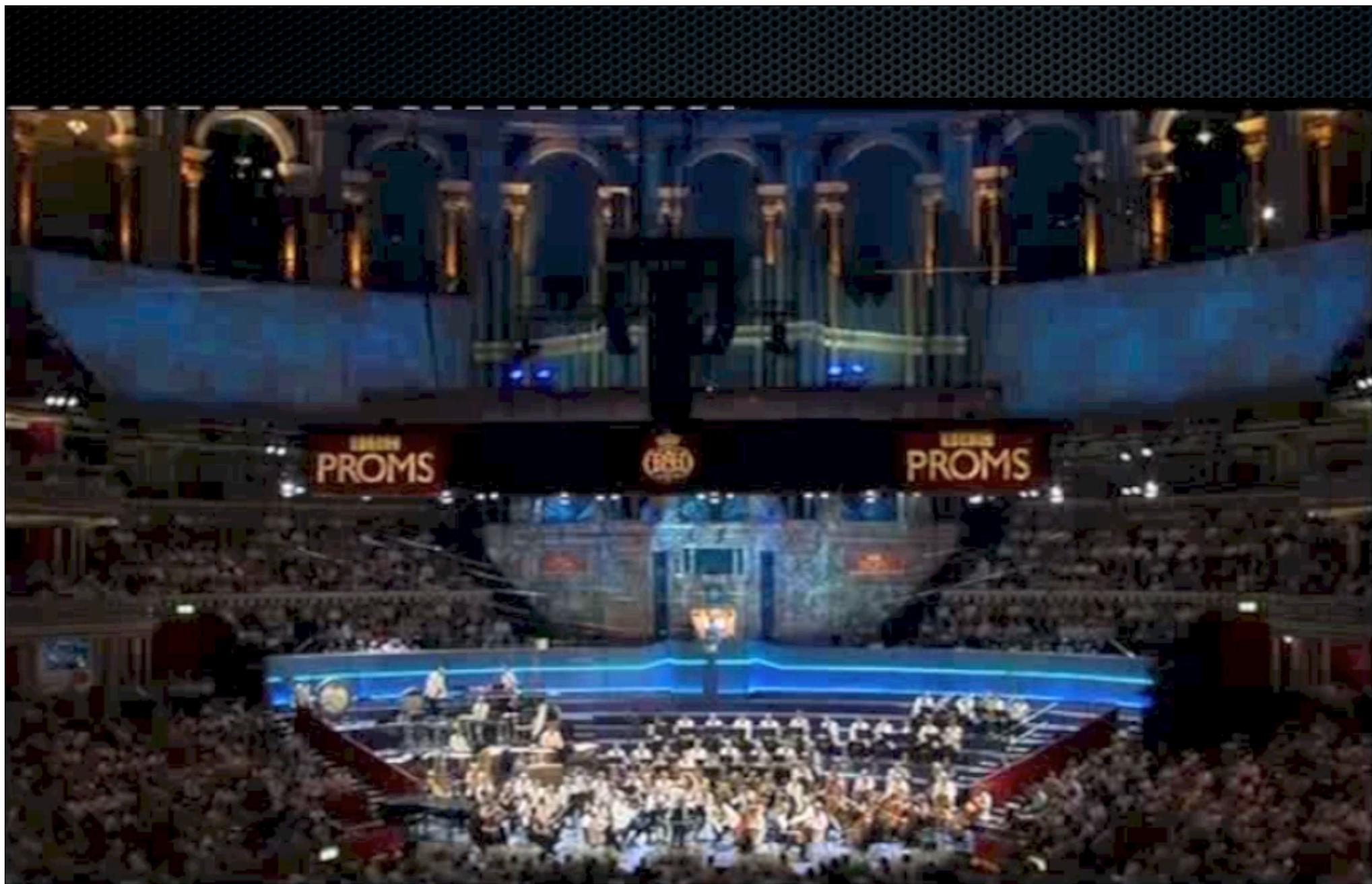
# URANUS

## 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

The image shows a musical score for brass instruments. On the left, the instruments are listed: 4 Trumpets in C (subdivided into I II and III IV), 2 Tenor Trombones, and Bass Trombone. The score consists of five staves. The first two staves are for the trumpets, the next two for the tenor trombones, and the bottom one for the bass trombone. The music is in 4/4 time and C major. A 4-note motive (G4, A4, B4, C5) is played by all instruments in the first measure. In the second measure, the trumpets play a descending line (A4, G4, F4, E4) while the trombones play a descending line (F3, E3, D3, C3). In the third measure, the trumpets play a descending line (E4, D4, C4, B3) while the trombones play a descending line (B2, A2, G2, F2). In the fourth measure, the trumpets play a descending line (C4, B3, A3, G3) while the trombones play a descending line (E2, D2, C2, B1). In the fifth measure, the trumpets play a descending line (B3, A3, G3, F3) while the trombones play a descending line (D2, C2, B1, A1). The notes are marked with 'a 2' above them, indicating a second octave adjustment.

“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

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