

Holst: In the Footsteps

Ashok Gupta *piano*

Elitsa Bogdanova *viola*

Holst Victorian House

Saturday 13 July

Gustav Holst	2 Folksong fragments Op. 46	4'
Gustav Holst (arr. for piano by Everard Sigal)	Venus Bringer of Peace from The Planets Op. 46	8.5'
Imogen Holst	Duo for Viola & Piano	10'
	<i>i.</i> Allegro	
	<i>ii.</i> Poco lento	
	<i>iii.</i> Vivace	
Domenico Scarlatti	3 Sonatas	6'
	<i>i.</i> K554 in F major	
	<i>ii.</i> K555 in f minor	
	<i>iii.</i> K513 in C major	
Ralph Vaughan Williams	6 Studies in Folksong	10'

About the Programme

In her book *Sound Heritage: Making Music Matter in Historical Houses*, Jeanice Brooks explores how 'composer houses' both influence and curate musical practices. What can we learn from these curated spaces dedicated to the works of acclaimed musicians? The Holst Victorian House serves as a historical collection and preservation of Holst's birthplace in Cheltenham and is the setting for the first part of the *Holst: In the Footsteps* concert series.

Holst's 1927 piano solo **2 Folksong Fragments** opens the concert, performed by Ashok Gupta. Both 'fragments' are based on ancient folk tunes from Northumbria, *o, I hae seen the roses blaw* and *The Shoemaker*. The first fragment suggests a timeless quality in its sensitive approach to its arrangement of the folk tune. There is a gentle lilt throughout this first fragment, before Holst switches to a more jaunty and discordant style for the second fragment.

Venus Bringer of Peace is a work that needs little introduction - originally included in Holst's *The Planets Suite* for large orchestra, this piano reduction recontextualises the serenity of the original for new instrumentation. *Venus* has been described by Holst's biographer Michael Short as '*one of the sublime evocations of peace in music*'. When considering today's performance space, this piece can also serve as a reflection on Holst's upbringing - the tragic death of his mother at aged 8 and being raised by his Aunt Nina who taught him piano.

On the topic of family, Imogen Holst's **3 Duos for Viola and Piano** follows. The Viola solo, performed by Elitsa Bogdanova, creeps in to open the first movement, *Allegro Molto*, introducing a constrictive theme of semitones and small intervals, growing in range of pitch but always returning to a state of harmonic tension. There is some colourful dialogue between the Viola and piano throughout this movement, before returning to the solitary viola to end. Movement 2, *Poco Lento*, offers a contrasting melancholic style, with a possible allusion to Vaughan-William's *The Lark Ascending*, in some of its pentatonic passages. The final movement returns to a similar plucky style as the first movement, with Holst introducing extended techniques of the Viola and more adventurous, dissonant harmony in the piano as the movement develops.

Three of Domenico Scarlatti's five-hundred and fifty-five published keyboard sonatas follows, played on a modern piano. This is perhaps music that may have been learnt and performed by Holst, just under 150 years ago. The sonatas are in Scarlatti's typically single-movement form, and suggest the upcoming classical style through various musical techniques.

Concluding the first part of the *In the Footsteps Concert* is a chamber work by one of Holst's friends and musical contemporaries, Ralph Vaughan Williams. His **6 Studies In Folksong** follow a simple and repeatable structure between each movement - in each movement a clear folksong theme is presented as a monophonic idea from one of the solo instruments, before a longer, more embellished rendition is played in duet. These sensitive arrangements bring a sense of calm and serenity to this part of the concert.

Programme notes written by Oliver Picken (RPS Young Classical Writers Prize).

Our thanks go to The Holst Foundation who have kindly granted permission to perform Imogen Holst's Duo and provided access to the score.

Artist Biographies

Ashok Gupta *piano*

Described by the Times as "a thoughtful and sensitive pianist", Ashok was prize winner at the 2016 Ferrier Awards, the 2017 Bonn Beethoven Competition and the 2018 Royal Overseas League Competition.

Ashok has enjoyed collaborations with internationally acclaimed artists including Alessandro Fisher, Sarah-Jane Brandon, Dame Sarah Connolly, Louise Kemény, Dame Ann Murray, Daniel Pailthorpe, Jâms Coleman, Olivier Stankiewicz, Lorenza Borrani and Luise Buchberger.

He has performed at major music centres including Wigmore Hall, Birmingham Symphony Hall, Holywell Music Room, Bonn Beethoven-Haus, Glyndebourne and festivals including Oxford Lieder, Leeds Lieder, Buxton and Cheltenham.

Ashok is gaining experience as a conductor, studying with Sian Edwards, Toby Purser, Peter Davies and Daniel Hogan. He has assisted at Royal Danish Opera, Garsington Opera and Opera North and, this winter, will work with opera students at Guildhall School of Music and Drama as they prepare their scenes. He has also been a visiting coach at the Royal Academy of Music.

Elitsa Bogdanova *viola*

Bulgarian violist, Elitsa Bogdanova started her musical studies at the National Music School in Sofia. After moving to London in 2007, she completed her BMus and MMus degrees at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, studying with Rachel Roberts. During her time in Guildhall, Elitsa developed a keen interest for historical performance, working closely with Jane Rogers and Pavlo Beznosiuk.

Elitsa is actively freelancing in the UK, dividing her time between chamber orchestras and smaller chamber ensembles. On period instruments she has worked with the London Handel Orchestra Florilegium, Academy of Ancient Music, The Hanover Band and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. Elitsa is also the principal viola of La Serenissima, who specialise in the music of Antonio Vivaldi and his contemporaries. She regularly performs as a member of the 12 Ensemble and has done extra work with the London Symphony Orchestra, London Sinfonietta, Aurora Orchestra, London Contemporary Orchestra and others.

Elitsa is a member of the Consone Quartet, focusing on exploring classical and early romantic repertoire on period instruments. The quartet won the 2016 Ensemble Prize at the Royal Over-Seas League Competition and has performed in Bulgaria, Belgium, Italy, France, the Czech Republic, Austria, Germany and throughout the UK, recently making their Wigmore Hall debut.