

Composers of Great Band Works
by Dr. Brian Harris, Bandroom.com Publications

Gustav Theodore Holst (1874 - 1934)

Lifeline

- born in town of Cheltenham, England (September 21).
- was the eldest of two sons.
- at 18, he entered the Royal College of Music in London.
- began playing trombone professionally at age 23.
- at 26, married Isobel Harrison.
- gave up trombone and began teaching at the James Allen Girls' School, (age 29).
- at 31, he was appointed Music Director at the St. Paul's Girls' School.
- only child, daughter Imogen, was born in 1907 (Holst was 32).
- at 35, wrote the *First Suite in E-flat* (first performance date unknown).
- at age 44, the first public performance of *The Planets* catapulted him to popularity.
- at 48, during a rehearsal, he fell backwards off a platform and suffered a concussion.
- suffered a nervous breakdown two years later; took a year's rest (age 50).
- at 57, he became invalid due to a peptic ulcer and failing health.
- died at age 59, two days after surgery (May 25).



Anecdotes and Trivia

- came from a third generation immigrant family.
- his father and grandfather were respected music teachers.
- his mother died when he was 8.
- was a delicate child, suffering from asthma and weak eyesight.
- he had to give up playing piano and violin because of severe neuritis (inflammation of the nerves); at times, he had to tie a pen onto his finger in order to write.
- in college, he took up trombone (which reportedly cured his asthma).
- became close and lifelong friends with Ralph Vaughan Williams, whom he met in college.
- met his wife (a "fair-haired, blue-eyed soprano") in one of the choirs he conducted.
- it was not until he quit performing and took a teaching position that he could afford a house.
- During WWI, he dropped "von" from his last name.
- had a special, soundproof office for composing at St. Paul's Girls' School (which was located in the noisy London suburb of Hammersmith).
- outdoor interests included bicycling and nature walks.
- disliked publicity and photographs.
- was proud of being a music teacher.



Works for Band

First Suite in E-flat, Op. 28, No. 1 (1909)
Second Suite in F, Op. 28, No. 2 (1911)
Three Folk Tunes (1911)
Hammersmith, Op. 52 (1928)
A Moorside Suite (for brass band, 1928)

Suggested Readings

The Music of Gustav Holst by Imogen Holst (1968)
Holst by Imogen Holst (1974)
Gustav Holst: The Man and his Music by Michael Short (1990)