

# WIGMORE HALL

Monday 3 January 2022 1.00pm

Imogen & Gustav Holst

Elizabeth Watts soprano

Julius Drake piano

BBC  
RADIO



This concert is being broadcast on BBC Radio 3

**Gustav Holst** (1874-1934)

Calm is the morn Op. 16 No. 1 (1903-4)

Persephone Op. 48 No. 1 (1929)

Betelgeuse Op. 48 No. 12 (1929)

The heart worships (1907)

The Floral Bandit Op. 48 No. 6 (1929)

**Imogen Holst** (1907-1984)

Weathers (1926)

From *4 Songs from Tottel's Miscellany* (1944)

*Shall I thus ever long • As lawrell leaves*

From *10 Appalachian Folk Songs* (1938) *world première*

*My dearest dear • The brisk young lover • I must and I will get married*

**Gustav Holst**

Hymns from the Rig Veda Op. 24 (1907-8)

*Ushas (Dawn) • Varuna I (Sky) • Maruts (Stormclouds) •*

*Indra (God of Storm and Battle) • Varuna II (The Waters) •*

*Song of the Frogs • Vac (Speech) • Creation • Faith*

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**Imogen Holst** was a composer, conductor and writer on music who studied at the Royal College of Music, was Artistic Director of the Aldeburgh Festival for many years and was made CBE in 1975. When Imogen's father Gustav Holst died in 1934, Benjamin Britten became something of a proxy; her commitment to helping him could be almost suffocating at times, but her contributions to their Purcell editions and her work as Britten's amanuensis between 1952 and 1964 proved essential. She could be assertive and highly organised, too, especially when running the Aldeburgh Festival. She regularly attended and gave concerts at Wigmore Hall, and as founder and conductor of the Purcell Consort of Voices she wrote works for the group to perform at Wigmore Hall in the 1960s and 1970s.

Perhaps inevitably, Imogen Holst's compositional output was deeply influenced by that of her father. **Gustav Holst** himself has been something of a victim of his own success, with the enormous popularity of his innovative orchestral suite *The Planets* overshadowing some of his smaller-scale achievements. Earlier in his career, Holst became used to his compositions being rejected by publishers, including some of the 6 Songs Op. 16, which date from 1903-4. 'Calm is the morn' is the first of the six and is a serenely beautiful setting of words from Tennyson's *In Memoriam*. A similar quality of long-breathed contemplation characterises a slightly later song, *The heart worships* (1907), to poetry by Alice Buckton.

In the 1920s Gustav Holst became friends with the poet Humbert Wolfe, and in 1929, after a holiday in Italy, Holst wrote his *12 Humbert Wolfe Songs* Op. 48. The set opens with the animation of 'Persephone', in which the music's momentum reflects the poet's repeated exhortation to 'Hasten!', and a similar sense of urgency pervades the sixth song, 'The Floral Bandit', which ends with a witty surprise. The fascination with space found in *The Planets* inhabits 'Betelgeuse', the last of the Wolfe songs, but whereas in the orchestral work each planet represented human characteristics that related them to life, 'Betelgeuse' is a chilling, other-worldly reminder of life's end.

In 1899 Gustav Holst became fascinated by Sanskrit literature, such as the Rig Veda and Bhagavad Gita, but was unimpressed by the translations he read and started studying at the London Institution's School of Oriental Languages in order to interpret the originals for himself. He made several settings of his own translations of the ancient, sacred Rig Veda texts, including 'Invocation to the Dawn' from the 6 Songs Op. 15, and four sets of *Choral Hymns from the Rig Veda*, composed between 1908 and 1912. The haunting *Hymns from the Rig Veda* for voice and piano, Op. 24, were written between 1907 and 1908. Each song contemplates an aspect of nature, from specific creatures ('Song of the Frogs') to natural phenomena such as 'Dawn', 'Sky', 'Stormclouds' and 'The Waters', as well as the larger concepts of 'Speech', 'Creation' and 'Faith'.

Imogen Holst's original compositions are colourful and evocative, warmly melodic and often tonally ambiguous, occupying more than one key area at once or using twinges of chromaticism. She was as passionate about poetry as about music, enabling her to draw upon a wide range of literature in her compositions. In the Hardy setting *Weathers* (1926) the refrain 'And so do I' recurs amid autumnal imagery: 'When showers betumble the chestnut spikes, And nestlings fly...' Her sparkling *4 Songs from Tottel's Miscellany* (1944) show a marked progression in style, with particularly fine piano writing, to four texts from the 16th-century anthology *Tottel's Miscellany* – the first printed anthology of English poetry, published by Richard Tottel in 1557. We hear 'Shall I thus ever long', to the ardent poem 'To Her Sea-faring Lover' attributed in different sources to either John Heywood or Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey. It is more certain that Howard wrote 'As lawrell leaves', its theme of steadfast loyalty no doubt appealing to Imogen Holst, whose devotion to those with whom she worked went hand-in-hand with moments of self-effacement that belied her abilities.

Imogen Holst knew the Appalachian folksongs collected by Cecil Sharp intimately, and in 1937 wrote piano accompaniments for his *12 Songs for Children from the Appalachian Mountains*. Her *10 Appalachian Folk Songs*, arranged for voice and piano, followed in 1938. During the Second World War, Imogen Holst was part of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA), which entailed an itinerant existence bringing music into rural communities. Her teaching methods were sometimes viewed as unconventional; she emphasised learning easily memorable pieces as rounds rather than in counterpoint. The *Appalachian Songs* became invaluable in this context. She recalled: 'At the end of each visit people used to ask me, "Where can we buy copies of those songs and rounds?" and I had to say, "You can't. The English folk songs are from journals ... the Appalachian songs are from volumes published at 35s. each (melody only)". This experience inspired the later publication of her volume *Singing for Pleasure* in 1957. Of the *10 Appalachian Folk Songs*, we hear 'My dearest dear', 'The brisk young lover' and 'I must and I will get married'. Imogen Holst did not get married, despite some promising encounters, but was a much-loved musical collaborator and teacher, as one of her students recalled:

'I have never met anyone like her before – she danced about in her muted cotton skirt and blouse, woolly cardigan, woven shoulder bag, with her sandy hair drawn tightly back in a small knob, her pale face animated with her humorous eyes. I was completely captured by her unique, charismatic personality and it was the beginning of a love which all of us had for her ever after.'

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## **Gustav Holst** (1874-1934)

### **Calm is the morn Op. 16 No. 1** (1903-4)

*Alfred Lord Tennyson*

Calm is the morn without a sound,  
Calm as to suit a calmer grief,  
And only thro' the faded leaf  
The chestnut pattering to the ground:

Calm and deep peace on this high wold  
And on these dews that drench the furze,  
And all the silvery gossamers  
That twinkle into green and gold:

Calm and still light on yon great plain  
That sweeps with all its autumn bowers,  
And crowded farms and lessening towers,  
To mingle with the bounding main:

Calm and deep peace in this wide air,  
These leaves that redden to the fall;  
And in my heart, if calm at all,  
If any calm, a calm despair:

Calm on the seas, and silver sleep,  
And waves that sway themselves in rest,  
And dead calm in that noble breast  
Which heaves but in the heaving deep.

### **Persephone Op. 48 No. 1** (1929)

*Humbert Wolfe*

Come back Persephone!  
As a moonflake thin,  
Flutes for the dancers  
You danced with begin.

Leave the deep hellebore,  
The dark, the untranquil -  
For spring's pale primrose  
And her first jonquil.

Again they are singing  
(O will you not heed them?)  
With none now to answer,  
And none to lead them.

They will grow older,  
Till comes a day  
When the last of your maidens  
Is tired of play:

When the song as it rises  
Faints and droops over,

And your playmates go seeking  
A gentler lover.

Listen the dancers!  
The flutes oh listen!  
Hasten Persephone!  
Persephone! Hasten!

### **Betelgeuse Op. 48 No. 12** (1929)

*Humbert Wolfe*

On Betelgeuse  
The gold leaves hang in golden aisles  
For twice a hundred million miles,  
And twice a hundred million years  
They golden hang and nothing stirs,  
On Betelgeuse.

Space is a wind that does  
Not blow on Betelgeuse,  
And time - oh time - is a bird,  
Whose wings have never stirred  
The golden avenues of leaves  
On Betelgeuse.

On Betelgeuse  
There is nothing that joys or grieves  
The unstirred multitude of leaves,  
Nor ghost of evil or good haunts  
The gold multitude  
On Betelgeuse.

And birth they do not use  
Nor death on Betelgeuse,  
And the God, of whom we are  
Infinite dust, is there  
A single leaf of those  
Gold leaves on Betelgeuse.

### **The heart worships** (1907)

*Alice M. Buckton*

Silence in Heav'n,  
Silence on Earth  
Silence within!  
Thy hush, O Lord,  
O'er all the world covers the din.  
I do not fear to speak of thee in mortal kind  
And yet to all thy namelessness I am not blind.  
Only I need and kneel again  
Thy touch to win;  
Silence in Heav'n  
Silence on Earth  
Silence within!

## **The Floral Bandit Op. 48 No. 6** (1929)

*Humbert Wolfe*

Beyond the town - oh far! beyond it  
She walks - that lady - have you seen her?  
That thief of spring, that floral bandit  
Who leaves the grass she walks on greener.

And she can sing - the blackbirds hear her -  
Those little coals with throats of flame -  
And they can find, alighting near her,  
No sweeter practice than her name.

What is her name? O ask the linnet,  
For human tongue would strive in vain  
To speak the buds uncrumpling in it,  
And the small language of the rain.

Who is this lady? What is she?  
The Sylvia all our swains adore?  
Yes, she is that unchangingly,  
But she is also something more.

For buds at best are little green  
Keys on an old thin clavichord,  
That only has the one high tune -  
That, since the first, all springs have heard.

And all first love with the same sighing  
Tunes, though more sweetly touched, has lingered,  
As though he were forever trying  
Toccatas Purcell might have fingered.

But no one knows her range nor can  
Guess half the phrases of her fiddle,  
The lady who fore ev'ry man  
Breaks off her music in the middle.

## **Imogen Holst** (1907-1984)

### **Weathers** (1926)

*Thomas Hardy*

This is the weather the cuckoo likes,  
And so do I;  
When showers betumble the chestnut spikes,  
And nestlings fly;  
And the little brown nightingale bills his best,  
And they sit outside at 'The Traveller's Rest',  
And maids come forth sprig-muslin drest,  
And citizens dream of the south and west,  
And so do I.

This is the weather the shepherd shuns,  
And so do I;  
When beeches drip in browns and duns,  
And thresh, and ply;  
And hill-hid tides throb, throe on throe,  
And meadow rivulets overflow,  
And drops on gate bars hang in a row,  
And rooks in families homeward go,  
And so do I.

### **From 4 Songs from Tottel's Miscellany** (1944)

#### **Shall I thus ever long**

*attr. Henry Howard*

Shall I thus ever long and be no whit the neare?  
And shall I still complain to thee, the which me will not hear?  
Alas! say nay, say nay, and be no more so dumb,  
But open thou thy manly mouth, and say that thou wilt come,  
Whereby my heart may think although I see not thee,  
That thou wilt come, thy word so sware, if thou a live man be.  
The roaring huge waves, they threaten my poor ghost,  
And toss thee up and down the seas, in danger to be lost.  
Shall they not make me fear that they have swallow'd thee,  
But as thou art most sure alive, so wilt thou come to me.  
Whereby I shall go see thy ship ride on the strand,  
And think and say, 'lo where he comes, and sure here will he land!  
And then I shall lift up to thee my little hand,  
And thou shall think thy heart in ease, in health to see me stand.  
And if thou come indeed, as Christ thee send to do,  
Those arms which miss thee now shall then embrace thee too.  
Each vein to ev'ry joint the lively blood shall spread,  
Which now for want of thy glad sight doth show full pale and dead.  
But if thou slip thy troth and do not come at all,  
As minutes in the clock do strike so call for death I shall.  
To please both thy false heart and rid my self from woe  
That rather had to die in troth than live forsaken so.

#### **As lawrell leaves**

*?Henry Howard*

As lawrell leaves that cease not to be green  
From parching sun, nor yet from winter's threat:  
As harden'd oak that fear'th no sword so keen,  
As flint for tool in twain that will not fret,  
As fast as rock or pillar surely set  
So fast I am to you, and aye have been,  
Assuredly whom I cannot forget,  
For joy, for pain, for torment nor for tene,  
For loss, for gain, for frowning nor for threat,  
But ever one, yea, both in calm and blast,  
Your faithful friend, and will be to my last.

## From *10 Appalachian Folk Songs* (1938)

### My dearest dear

*Traditional*

My dearest dear, the time draws near  
When I and you must part,  
And no-one knows the inner griefs  
Of my poor aching heart  
Or sees what I suffer for your sake,  
For you I love so well,  
For fear I'll never see you more  
While here on earth we dwell.

I wish your breast was made of glass,  
All in it I might behold;  
Your name in secret I would write  
In letters of bright gold.  
Your name in secret I would write,  
Pray believe in what I say,  
You are the man that I love best  
Unto my dying day.

But when you're on some distant shore,  
Think on your absent friend,  
And when the wind blows high and clear,  
A line or two pray send.  
And when the wind blows high and clear,  
Pray send it, love, to me,  
That I may know by your own hand-write  
How time has went with thee.

### The brisk young lover

*Traditional*

There was a young man who courted me,  
He stole my heart away from me;  
He stole it away with a free good-will,  
Wherever he goes I love him still.

There is a house in this same town,  
He often goes there and sits him down;  
He'll take a strange girl upon his knee,  
And he'll tell her things that he won't tell me.

It troubles me so, I'll tell you for why,  
Because she has more gold than I,  
But gold will melt and silver will fly,  
But mine is love that will never die.

Must I go bound, must I go free,  
Must I love a young man that won't love me,  
O no, O no that never can be  
Till apples grow on an orange tree.

Go dig my grave both wide and deep,  
Put a marble stone at my head and feet,  
And o'er my grave a little dove  
To prove to the world that I died for love.

### I must and I will get married

*Traditional*

One morning, one morning, the weather being fair,  
The mother and the daughter walk'd out to take the air;  
And as they were a-walking this maid began to vow;  
I must and I will get married, I'm in the notion now.

O daughter, O daughter, 'tis hold your foolish tongue;  
What makes you want to marry? You know you are too young.  
I'm sixteen now dear mother, and that you must allow,  
I must and I will get married, I'm in the notion now.

Suppose you were to try, my dear, and could not find a man?  
O never mind, dear mother, for there is Miller Sam.  
He calls me milk and honey, goes milking of my cow.  
I must and I will get married, I'm in the notion now.

Suppose he was to fool with you as he has done before?  
O never mind, dear mother, for there are plenty more;  
For there is Jack the farmer goes whistling to his plough,  
I must and I will get married, I'm in the notion now.

## Gustav Holst

### Hymns from the *Rig Veda Op. 24* (1907-8)

*Gustav Holst, after anonymous/liturgical Sanskrit*

#### Ushas (Dawn)

Behold the Dawn, the fairest of all visions,  
Day's glory now appears.  
Arise! For the night hath fled!  
Arise and greet the Dawn.  
Welcome her! Unveiled she now appeareth,  
All things greet her radiant smile.  
Borne by wingèd horse and car  
She steals across the sky.  
Child of heav'n arrayed in shining garments,  
Blushing maiden draw thou near:  
Sovran lady of earth and sky,  
We hail thee as our queen.  
Heav'n's breath awakeneth creation,  
The sky is all aflame,  
Th'eastern Portals open wide.  
The Sun draws nigh.  
Greeting thee, the holy fire ascendeth,  
Greeting thee, our hymns arise,

Greeting thee, the Sun appeareth,  
Greeting thee, thy worshippers  
Bow down and bless and adore.

## Varuna I (Sky)

Oh thou great judge, Varuna,  
Day after day we break thy holy laws.  
Oh let us not be yielded up to Death to be destroyèd,  
To be destroyèd in thy wrath.

To gain forgiveness, Varuna,  
In deepest woe I raise to thee my chant:  
Behold, it riseth up towards thy holy throne to beg for mercy,  
As flies the bird unto his nest.

Thou knowest all, Varuna,  
Thou knowest the pathway of the moon and wind,  
Thy laws throughout eternity endure, thou mighty ruler,  
And to thy judgement all must come.

He doth appear! My cry is answered!  
I am delivered from my sin.

## Maruts (Stormclouds)

Mighty Warriors,  
Children of Thunder,  
Glorious Maruts,  
Heralds of storm!  
Through the gloom  
Gathering round us  
Ye and your horses  
Appear in the sky;  
Glowing like flames  
From the holy fire  
That springs from the altar,  
Rising to God.

Flashing sword blades,  
Tramping of horses,  
Shouting of riders  
Fill the sky!  
Ye are seen  
Spreading a mantle,  
Cov'ring the heavens  
And hiding the sun.  
Then from above 'midst  
The lightning's bright gleam,  
Rejoicing in freedom,  
Falleth the rain.

Rushing onward  
Hurling your weapons,  
Chanting your war songs

Nearer ye come!  
We would fain  
Welcome you fitly,  
But faint are our voices  
And feeble our lays.  
Come then, dwell within us,  
With your power inspire our hearts,  
Then shall our songs,  
Like clouds expanding,  
Carry your glory  
Throughout the world.

## Indra (God of Storm and Battle)

Noblest of songs for the noblest of Gods!  
A song that shall reach to the throne of Indra,  
The Lord of the sky!  
Radiant with light, thou dost ride through the heav'ns.  
The Holy Ones rush forth to greet the monarch,  
Who ruleth the sky!

Lo! to thy shrine we come, pouring libations.  
Swelling like mighty floods, our hymns rise to heav'n,  
Yoking thy steeds to thy swift flying chariot,  
Bringing thee earthward to aid us in battle,  
Filling our hearts with valour and strength,  
With strength as of heroes!

Like to the river expanding the sea,  
Our loud swelling song shall increase  
Thy glory o'er earth and sky.  
Lover of sacrifice, lover of singing,  
Loud-voiced Thunderer,  
Shaker of mountains and Lord of the sky.

## Varuna II (The Waters)

'Fore mine eyes,  
Yawning and hungry,  
Looms the grave.  
Spare me, O great Varuna.  
Tossed by winds,  
Trembling and faint,  
I come to thee.  
Spare me, O great Varuna!  
Mighty God!  
Waters o'erwhelm me  
Swiftly rising.  
Spare me, O great Varuna!  
Yet within,  
Thirst fiercely burning  
Gnaws my heart.  
Spare me, O great Varuna.

## Song of the Frogs

Throughout the summer they were lying,  
Their skins were scorching in the sun,  
Now the rain hath wakened their voices,  
Their singing hath begun,  
And welcoming each other,  
They rise and quench their thirst.  
And one repeats another's greeting,  
In courtly words polite and mild,  
As a scholar learning a lesson,  
A father teaching his child.  
With eloquence and wisdom  
They swell and seem to burst.  
"Brothers rise and join the throng  
Our throats are moist and ripe for song.  
So pray you bellow like a cow,  
Or bleat like goat, or grunt like sow."

Like Brahmans sitting round the altar,  
Who loudly talk of holy rite,  
Round the pool the frogs are ranging  
With speech and song and fight.  
Their year-long vow of silence  
Hath ended with the Rain.  
The joyous earth is now reviving,  
The trees and flowers now arise,  
And our hearts go forth in gladness  
To greet the noisy cries.  
The singing of the Frogs  
Hath brought wealth to us again.  
"Brothers rise and join the throng  
Our throats are moist and ripe for song.  
So pray you bellow like a cow,  
Or bleat like goat, or grunt like sow."

## Vac (Speech)

I, the queen of all,  
First of those that mankind worship,  
Worthy of all praise,  
I proclaim aloud my wisdom.  
Hearken unto me,  
My word is true:  
Unto God and Man  
I bring blessing,  
Pouring forth my wealth,  
Making wise the man I cherish.  
Through me each one lives,  
Each one breathes and sees and hearkens.  
All unite in me,  
I alone sustain creation,  
Compassing the earth  
I reach t'ward heav'n.  
In the water's depth  
I have my dwelling,

On the summit of the universe  
I bring forth the Father.  
Beyond the earth and sky  
I reign in my mystic grandeur.

## Creation

Then, Life was not!  
Non-life was not!  
No vast expanse of air,  
Nor vaster realm of sky that lies beyond.  
Was water there, the deep abyss of ocean?  
Then, Death was not!  
Non-death was not!  
No change of day and night.  
And, cov'ring all, the gloom was lost in gloom.  
All was unseen, One universe unknown.  
Then there was One! One alone!  
Calm and self-existing:  
Beyond and apart was naught.  
Then up rose Desire,  
Fierce glowing Desire.  
The seed of spirit,  
The germ of mind,  
The source of life,  
Begetting mighty forces,  
All heaved in restless motion.  
Who then knows,  
Who can now declare  
Whence cometh creation?  
He the Primal One whose  
Eye controlleth all things,  
He alone doth know it,  
Or perchance even  
He knoweth it not!

## Faith

By Thee the fire doth shine  
Upon the sacred altar:  
To Thee we raise our song of joy and homage,  
Most Holy Faith!  
By Thee the gen'rous heart  
Is blessed with wealth and wisdom:  
To Thee he giveth all in humble gladness,  
Most Holy Faith!

By Thee the prayers are heard  
That rise in silent worship:  
To Thee mankind and God are drawing nearer,  
Most Holy Faith!  
By Thee inspired, our song  
Ascendeth ever higher  
To Thee at early morn, at noon, at even,  
Most Holy Faith!