Student Guide

to

FIRST SUITE IN Eb
Opus 28, No. 1 (H. 105)

by

Gustav Holst
STUDENT GUIDE

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LEARNING GOALS

By the end of the instructional unit you should be able to:

1. Play your part to the First Suite perfectly.

2. Play on your instrument and identify by ear three intervals (perfect 4th, perfect 5th, and perfect octave), two triads (major and minor), and three scale types (major, natural minor, and Dorian mode).

3. Compose an original melody for your instrument and transform it using compositional techniques similar to those used by Holst in the First Suite.

4. Define any of the terms listed in the Glossary.

5. Provide background information about the First Suite, Gustav Holst, and the style period.
ASSIGNMENTS

Before beginning work on the assignments below, examine the learning goals for this unit, read the Historical Notes for the *First Suite*, and study the terms given in the Glossary. Your grade for the unit will be based on mastery of the learning goals as revealed through your ability to play your part, class assignments, and unit quiz. Be sure to review all terms in the Glossary prior to taking the quiz. This unit will take approximately four to six weeks to complete. Your band director will guide you through its completion.

**Listening Assignment:** Listen to a recording of the *First Suite* while following the score. A score and recording will be placed on reserve by your band director.

Complete this assignment by ____________

**Practice Assignment:** See Home Practice Guide. Begin working on this assignment as soon as possible.

**Worksheet Assignment:**

Complete worksheet assignment by ____________

**Creative Project:** See Important Facts (Melody).

Complete this assignment by ____________

**Band Project (Optional):** For extra credit, or simply to expand your knowledge, select and complete one of the following projects.

1. Listen to a recorded or live performance of music by Gustav Holst, Ralph Vaughan Williams, or Percy Grainger and write a brief critique. These outstanding composers wrote excellent compositions for band as well as music for other performance mediums—orchestra, chorus, piano, chamber ensembles, and so on.

2. Read a book about Gustav Holst and write a brief report. Ask your band director for suggestions if you need guidance.

3. Devise your own Band Project with the approval of your director.

Complete the optional Band Project by ____________
HISTORICAL NOTES

About the COMPOSITION

The First Suite in Eb (composed in 1909) is not based on any extra-musical idea. It is also the first of several British wind band masterpieces composed in the twentieth century. Why and for whom the composition was written is unclear. Holst’s daughter has indicated that the work probably was written for a special occasion such as the Festival at the People’s Palace, Mile End, London, which was held in May 1909. The first known performance of the First Suite took place at Kneller Hall on June 23, 1920; the performance was by the 165 member Royal Military School of Music Band. This “music school” band was unusually large and not representative of British military bands at the time. In the early twentieth century, British regimental bands had 30 players, staff bands had 40, and guards bands had 65. The original instrumentation of First Suite fits that of the regimental band. In his personal notebook, Holst referred to the First Suite in Eb as “1st Suite for Military Band Op. 28A.” In England the term “military band” signifies the mixed woodwind, brass, percussion band as opposed to the brass band.

About the COMPOSER

Holst was born in Cheltenham, England, in 1874, and died in London in 1934. Although music was a part of Holst’s childhood environment, his serious interest in it did not begin until 1893, when he entered the Royal College of Music. After graduating from college, Holst earned his living as a professional trombonist, first with the Carl Rosa Opera Company and later with the Scottish Orchestra. From 1904 to the end of his life, Holst pursued a dual career, teaching and composing. In addition to his duties as musical director of St. Paul’s Girl’s School, London, he held teaching positions at Morley College, the Royal College of Music, and, for a short time, at America’s Harvard University.

Holst’s compositions encompass all types of music-opera, orchestra, band, choral, chamber music, and keyboard. His early style was influenced by the music of the great German composer Richard Wagner. Wagner’s influence can be heard in Holst’s most famous orchestral work, The Planets, composed between 1914 and 1917. This suite of tone poems musically and symbolically depicts the astrological nature of each of the seven then-known planets in the solar system.

Around 1905, Holst, along with his close friend and fellow composer Ralph Vaughan Williams, became involved in the rediscovery of English folk songs. This interest, and his later study of Eastern philosophy, influenced his music and his thinking; his goal in both was to achieve directness of expression. He detested conventionality and strove for clear thinking and feeling. Eventually, Holst came to feel that folk music had the simplicity and economy of means that was essential to his art. This influence not only helped to purify his style, but it also provided a new freedom and flexibility for his musical ideas.

Gustav Holst’s two suites for military band—First Suite in Eb (1909) and Second Suite in F (1911)—are milestones in the history of band literature. These works, along with his masterpiece Hammersmith: Prelude and Scherzo (Op. 52) and the wind band compositions of Ralph Vaughan Williams, are today considered among the great classics of British military band music. Holst and Vaughan Williams stand together in the history of British music representing England’s best compositional talent during the first half of the twentieth century.
About the STYLE PERIOD

More than any other period in the history of humans, the twentieth century is a time of rapid change. A person born around 1900 who lived to be at least eighty years old would have witnessed the post-industrial revolution, nuclear fission, space exploration, and the widespread application of technology. Significant discoveries in scientific and technical fields such as medicine, physics, biology, aerospace, astronomy, and electronics have radically changed the way we live and think.

Important social, political, and historical events of the twentieth century include two world wars, the struggle of Capitalism over Communism, the establishment of compulsory education, a world-wide population explosion, and the emergence of Third World countries (Africa, Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East).

Twentieth century art music encompasses a diversity of styles and trends—Impressionism, Expressionism, Neoclassicism, Atonalism, Serialism, Aleatoric (chance) Music, Electronic Music, Minimalism, and so on. Early twentieth century composers experimented with new approaches to music composition, strongly rejecting the subjective elements of Romantic music. While some composers looked to the distant past for fresh material and ideas, others looked to the future searching for new ways to express their creative ideas. Today, composers are still exploring new horizons, and there are many currents and cross currents in art music. This may partially explain why audiences have been slow in appreciating contemporary music. The average “classical” music lover still prefers to listen to eighteenth and nineteenth century orchestral music.

The wind band continues to evolve throughout the twentieth century—the collegiate marching band begins early in the century; the “school band movement” is established in the 1920s and 30s; and Frederick Fennell establishes the “artistic wind band” with the founding of the Eastman Wind Ensemble in the early 1950s. From mid-century on, world-class composers increasingly write art music for the flexible wind band.

Major twentieth century composers include Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel (French Impressionists); Arnold Schoenberg (creator of the twelve-tone system of music composition); Igor Stravinsky, Bela Bartok, and Paul Hindemith (three great, foreign-born composers who lived and worked in the United States); Gustav Holst, Ralph Vaughan Williams, and the Australian-born Percy Grainger (known for their excellent band and orchestra music based on English folk songs); and Charles Ives, Aaron Copland, William Schuman, and Vincent Persichetti (a few of America’s many respected composers who wrote music for band and orchestra).

GLOSSARY

absolute music - music, such as the Holst First Suite in Eb, that is not based on an extra-musical idea. Opposite of program music which is usually based on a story, poem, picture, or even an object.

chaconne - a musical form characterized by series of variations taking place over a repetitive harmonic chord progression or bass line. A chaconne is typically in a moderately slow triple meter. This type of music was prevalent during the Baroque Period of Western art music (c. 1600-1750).

Dorian mode - a scale that is similar to the natural minor scale except that it has a raised sixth degree. For example, on the piano the white keys-D, E, F, G, A, B, C, D-produce a Dorian mode on D.

intermezzo - an interlude or middle movement of an extended composition.

march - a type of music originally composed to accompany soldiers on the march. The earliest indications of the march are found in battle pieces (known as battaglias) of the sixteenth century. The standard form of the march is derived from the minuet and trio of the eighteenth century. There are several types of marches, for example, the funeral march and the quick step march. The finest examples of the latter type were composed by the American “march king,” John Philip Sousa.

pedal point - a compositional technique in which one note (normally, but not always, in the bass) is sounded for several measures while the harmonies change in the other parts. This technique often produces tension which enhances musical expression.

suite - an instrumental form consisting of a number of movements in contrasting character, style, and tempo.

thematic transformation - a process or technique of composition used by a composer to transform a melody; these include, for example, inversion, augmentation, diminution, transposition, and retrograde. See Important Information for examples.

Terms from the score: look up terms that you don’t know in a music dictionary.

Movement I

allegro moderato
pesante
brillante
ritardando al fine (rit. al fine)
crescendo poco a poco
staccato (stacc.)
legato
diminuendo (dim.)
maestoso
solo
soli
a2

Movement II

vivace
l’estesso tempo
morendo
dolce
con sordino
senza sordino
simile (sim.)
ripieno
cantabile
tutti
senza ritardando (senza rit.)

Movement III

meno mosso
piu mosso
con larghezza
tempo di marcia
ad lib (ad libitum)
unison (unis)
HOME PRACTICE GUIDE

1. Practice your part to the *Suite in Eb* until you can play it perfectly. Mastery of the skills listed below should help you to play your part.

2. Practice the following concert pitch scales and arpeggios both ascending and descending:

   Eb, Ab, and C Major
   F Dorian mode
   C Minor (Natural form)

   Note: The F Dorian mode is similar to the F natural minor scale except that it has a raised sixth degree. The half steps fall between the second and third degrees of the scale and the sixth and seventh degrees. The notes for all instruments are:

   | Concert Pitch Instruments | F G Ab Bb C D Eb F |
   | Bb Transposing Instruments | G A Bb C D E F G |
   | F Transposing Instruments | C D Eb F G A Bb C |
   | Eb Transposing Instruments | D E F G A B C D |

3. Vary the scales and arpeggios using the following articulations, dynamics, and rhythms.

   **Articulations:**
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Articulation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>legato</td>
<td>smooth, connected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>staccato</td>
<td>short</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>marcato</td>
<td>marked, strongly accented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tenuto</td>
<td>full duration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   **Dynamics:**
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dynamics</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

   Work at developing gradations of volume on a scale from 1 to 8, and control of extreme dynamics levels.

4. Practice playing and singing the following primary (consonant) intervals until you can quickly identify them by ear:

   Perfect 4th, Perfect 5th, Perfect Octave.
IMPORTANT INFORMATION
(Melody)

All of the important melodies heard in the *First Suite in Eb* are derived from the opening chaconne theme (Example 3-1). Holst varied this theme using several thematic transformation techniques. Movement I is comprised of 15 variations on the chaconne melody. In one of the variations Holst inverted the tune (Example 3-2), and in another he transposed it up an interval of a third without changing the key signature (Example 3-3).

Example 3-1 Chaconne theme

Example 3-2 Inversion of the Chaconne theme

Example 3-3 Chaconne theme transposed up one third

The first theme of movement II is based on the first five notes of the opening chaconne melody (in Example 3-4, related notes are circled). Theme II—the contrasting lyrical tune in this movement—is also related to the opening chaconne melody (Example 3-5). When transforming the chaconne melody for these themes, the composer varied the tempos, meters, rhythms, dynamics, articulations, instrumentation, and even some of the notes.

Example 3-4 First theme of second movement

Example 3-5 Second theme of second movement
The first march tune appearing in movement III is indirectly related to the chaconne melody (Example 3-6). The contrasting cantabile melody, however, is clearly modeled after the chaconne theme (Example 3-7). In the final section of the march, Holst states both march tunes simultaneously in brilliant counterpoint (Example 3-8).

Example 3-6 First march tune in third movement

Example 3-7 Contrasting cantabile melody in third movement

Example 3-8 Final section of march with both themes in counterpoint

Composers often achieve unity and variety in their musical compositions by employing thematic transformation techniques such as inversion, transposition, rhythmic augmentation or diminution, and retrograde. To invert a melody invert the intervals and contour of the tune so that the transformed version is the mirror image of the original (Example 3-9). To transpose a melody write it in a new key, or shift the melody up or down without changing the key (Example 3-10). You can transform a melody by changing the rhythms and meter. Rhythmic augmentation occurs when the notes values are lengthened in duration, and rhythmic diminution occurs when the note values are shortened (Example 3-11). Melodic retrograde is achieved by writing the original melody backwards note for note (Example 3-12).

Example 3-9

Original

Inversion
Melodic Worksheet Assignment: Before beginning the creative project below, copy Holst’s chaconne melody (Example 3-13) on music manuscript paper. Use either treble or bass clef. Transform the melody using at least three of the following transformation techniques: inversion, augmentation, diminution, shifting, retrograde. Be sure to indicate the technique used for each transformation.

Creative Projects: There are two parts to this assignment. First, compose a short, original melody for your instrument. Second, transform your melody using one or more thematic transformation techniques—inversion, augmentation, diminution, transposition, shifting, retrograde, combinations. Be sure that your melody includes a tempo marking, dynamics, articulations, and specified instrument.

Optional Assignment (acceptable as a band project): Compose a duet for two instruments of your choice. Use your original melody for part A, and a transformed version of your melody for part B.