

SOMM
RECORDINGS



HOLST
The Planets
ELGAR
Introduction and Allegro
Salut d'Amour

Tessa Uys & Ben Schoeman
piano duo



The two large works in this collection – Elgar’s Introduction and Allegro and Holst’s *The Planets* – stand amongst the finest English compositions in music of any genre. Their familiarity today is naturally predicated upon the medium through which they are heard, more often by way of recordings and broadcasts than live concerts, but during the dozen or so years in which these works appeared – that is to say, between 1905 and 1918 – such global media either did not exist, or were in their infancy.

It is no exaggeration to claim that until the universal acquisition of a radio or gramophone one hundred years ago, virtually every household that aspired to a general appreciation of art, especially music, possessed a piano. It was not unusual at that time to find at least one family member who could read and play music to some degree – ostensibly for home entertainment, naturally, but equally to familiarise themselves and their close relatives with such concert or operatic music as may have been heard in live performances.

It was during the dozen years or so preceding the outbreak of World War I – in Britain, known as the Edwardian era – that music appreciation amongst the general population was concentrated upon what might be termed the family piano, through which those who could sight-read sheet music would familiarise themselves with orchestral repertoire by way of keyboard transcriptions for one or – occasionally, for more fully scored music – two players. So strong was the demand for such transcriptions that a veritable industry had long arisen to meet it, the more gifted transcribers being highly prized by publishers.

One little-appreciated by-product of what might be termed the transcriber’s art was the growth in the practice by composers of first laying out their orchestral music in pianistic terms, more so if they were themselves gifted keyboard players. As just one example from many, in 1895 Rachmaninoff arranged his First Symphony for two pianists, in which version it was published many years prior to the printed orchestral score becoming available.

By the mid-1920s, the rise in electrical (as evolved from acoustic) gramophone recording and the establishment of nationwide broadcasting saw the rich repertoire of keyboard transcriptions of orchestral music becoming swiftly abandoned: there was no longer a reliance upon one or more family members who could “play the piano” when, with the turn of a switch, the family could hear and appreciate orchestral music as the composer intended it to be heard.

As a result, the vast amount of transcriptions – including those made by composers themselves – became irrelevant to publishers’ needs, forgotten in the wake of wars, revolutions and global economic and political change, to the point of being consigned to the archives of musical history.

Even if the practical need for keyboard transcriptions had long passed, the fact remains that many of these were undertaken by outstandingly gifted musicians – often with the enthusiastic approval of composers themselves – and that such applied artistry ought not to be entirely forgotten or overlooked. In examining the contemporaneous existence of pianistic versions of orchestral music, some little-known and surprisingly significant facts may come to light.

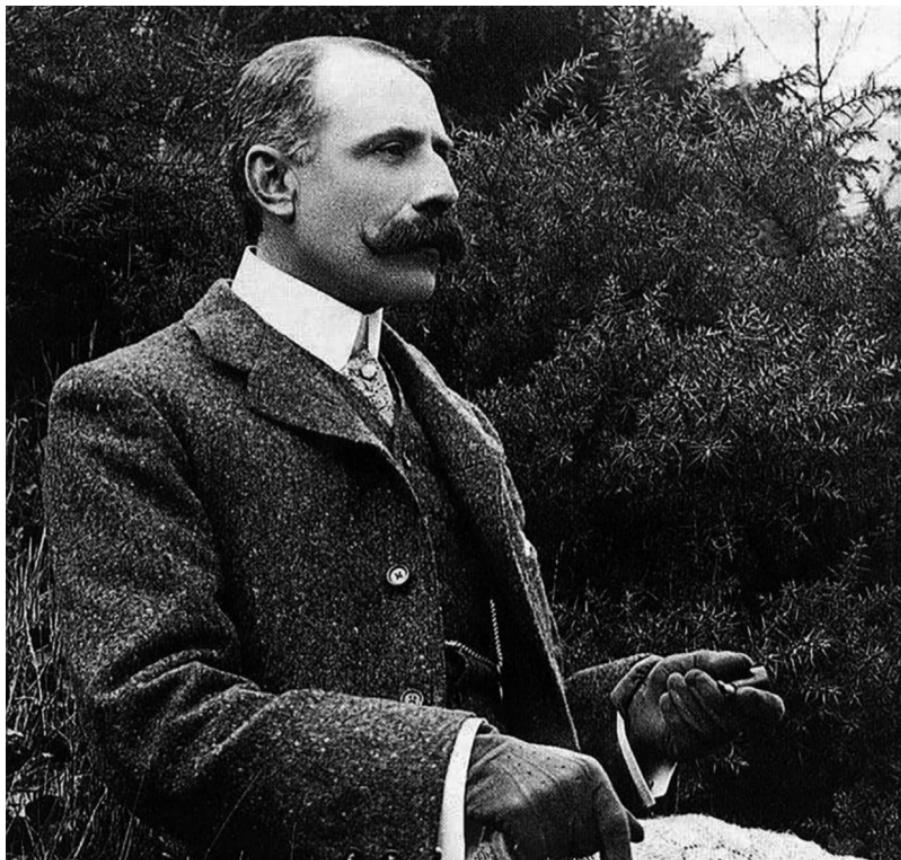
The immediate success in 1918 of Gustav Holst’s suite for large orchestra *The Planets*, conducted by Adrian Boult, catapulted the then little-known Cheltenham-born composer into the musical limelight – and not solely in England. Until that time, little was known of Holst in so far as the general musical public was concerned, but early on he had formed what would prove to be a lifelong friendship with Ralph Vaughan Williams – a fellow pupil of Charles Villiers Stanford at the Royal College of Music – and was much admired within his own circle of friends.

Holst had long maintained an interest in Eastern philosophy and Hindu poetry. By 1908 he had composed two operas – *Sita* and *Sāvitri* – from Sanskrit texts and in 1912 he completed his choral work *Hymns from the Rig Veda*. It was around that time that he became interested in astrology – not so much in the casting of fortunes but in the influential nature and character of the Solar System’s individual planets – and had conceived the idea of a suite based on such characteristics for orchestra. Such were Holst’s circumstances at the time, however, that the original layout of the work was for two pianos.

This was because of neuritis, a physical and neurological condition that he intermittently suffered from virtually throughout his adult life. The condition made writing painfully difficult, and as a consequence, Holst originally drafted *The Planets* for two pianos – orchestrating it only later. In committing the music to paper, Holst was initially greatly assisted by two pianist friends, Nora Day and Vally Lasker, who played the two-piano version in rehearsals and concerts prior to Boult’s orchestral premiere in 1918.

Such was the immediate success of the final orchestral version that the original two-piano arrangement was soon overlooked and forgotten; it was eventually first published separately in 1949–51 and reissued complete in one volume by Holst’s daughter, Imogen in 1979. The latter is the version used by Tessa Uys and Ben Schoeman on this recording. By the early 1950s, of course, *The Planets* had become established as a major score in 20th-century orchestral music. In addition, the noble theme from “Jupiter” had been adapted in 1921 to the words of Sir Cecil Spring Rice – “I vow to thee, my country” – creating a patriotic hymn that would thereafter form part of the repertoire of many choirs and choral societies. Of course, those words were far from Holst’s mind when that great melody was written.

The subtitles given by Holst to each of the seven planets in the Solar System apart from our own Earth – the eighth, Pluto, was discovered in 1930, and it is now classified as a dwarf planet – allude to the worlds’ astrological characteristics.



The fact that *The Planets* opens with "Mars, the Bringer of War", and was written in 1914 has often misled people to assume that the outbreak of World War I in August of that year inspired the music. That first movement was, however, written some months before hostilities began. The individual movements were not written in sequence: the last to be completed, "Mercury" (also the shortest movement), was written in 1916. Unlike Vaughan Williams, who served in the British Army virtually throughout the war, Holst was deemed medically unfit and could only rely on reports from the Front.

Holst's astrological appellations encapsulate the nature of the music admirably – such is the fame of the orchestral suite and individual passages within it that it is difficult to hear the original keyboard version without recalling the familiar orchestrations. But if we can – momentarily – concentrate upon the original two-piano textures, the inherent nobility, originality and strengths of Holst's composition become apparent. The availability of this universal masterpiece in its original form does much to widen our appreciation of Holst's genius.

The remarkable story of Elgar's rise to global fame – from provincial musician to international figure – during the dozen years or so of the Edwardian era is well known. Coincidental with his large-scale orchestral and choral works at that time, the popular appeal of his Serenade for Strings (Op.20) and the initial *Pomp and Circumstance Marches* (Op.39) was reinforced by such immediately melodious gems as the *Salut d'Amour* (Op.12) and *Chanson de Matin* (Op.15/2). Elgar's music – of all types – was greatly sought after, and his new music was immediately published – with demand, as we shall see, extending to piano transcriptions commissioned by the publishers of his orchestral works.

The published piano transcriptions of Elgar's orchestral music have largely remained unknown, but at the time were welcomed by a grateful public. Such was his fame that several established musicians were commissioned to undertake those tasks: both Sigfrid Karg-Elert and Otto Singer II made solo piano versions of Elgar's major orchestral works. Karg-Elert transcribed both of Elgar's symphonies and the symphonic study *Falstaff* following Singer's admirable transcription of the Introduction and Allegro (Op.47) for piano duet (piano four-hands).

Otto Singer II (1863–1931) was a noted composer whose reputation at the time was largely predicated upon his piano duet transcriptions of Bruckner's nine numbered symphonies, which were outstandingly well done, and although Elgar's Introduction and Allegro was written in 1905 for the string section of the London Symphony Orchestra and its premiere was conducted by Elgar, the work was largely neglected thereafter. It was the only one of Elgar's pieces of relative significance that the composer never conducted on record.

Those familiar with Elgar's scores know his music is scrupulously marked as to how he wanted every phrase – sometimes every bar or note within that phrase – to be played. Whilst it may appear a relatively easy task to reproduce what the composer so clearly communicated that he wanted, this is by no means easy in Elgar's orchestral scores, any more than it is in the music of Wagner, Mahler or Richard Strauss. Details must be observed, of course, but never exaggerated at the expense of the underlying structure. It is a measure of Singer's insight and skill that his piano four-hands transcription appears to "fit" the keyboard admirably.

The work is constructed from three main ideas, textural and melodic, and the original string double-stopping is transferred admirably to spread keyboard chords. Thereafter, the pianists' four hands cope fully with the changing contrapuntal texturalisation to the point

where Elgar's linear and harmonic thoughts – the first, a Celtic theme allegedly inspired by distant voices; the second, the extended fugal working of a newer, organically connected theme – lead inexorably to a powerfully ringing conclusion.

At the other end of Elgar's compositional spectrum is his famous melody *Salut d'Amour*, written in 1888 and offered as a wedding present to his fiancée, Caroline Alice Roberts. She was the daughter of a Major-General in the British Army and was eight years older than her husband-to-be. That fact was one of several reasons why her family did not wholly approve of her marriage (another being that, socially, Elgar was perceived to be a tradesman's son; the Victorian class structure at that time retained no little influence in certain quarters). But their union proved to be a love-match: her influence, moral support and occasional direct assistance following their marriage in May 1889 were considerable – Carice (Elgar's pet name for her) was convinced of her husband's genius from the start.

This simple but naturally inspired tune was originally titled in German *Liebesgruß* (love's greeting), yet it was only after the original publishers, Schott & Co., retitled the piece in French as *Salut d'Amour* that it became a staple of the light music repertoire. Indeed, Schott's catalogue advertised this melody in no fewer than 25 arrangements – some by Elgar himself. However this simply inspired music is heard, its direct emotional appeal never fully leaves the listener's consciousness.

Robert Matthew-Walker © 2025



Tessa Uys and Ben Schoeman piano duo

In 2010, Tessa Uys and Ben Schoeman established a duo partnership after being invited to give a two-piano recital at the Royal Over-Seas League in London. Ever since, they have performed regularly at music societies, festivals and at the BBC. They have recorded six volumes encompassing the nine symphonies by Beethoven arranged for piano duet by Xaver Scharwenka, alongside two-piano works by Schumann, Saint-Saëns and Busoni for SOMM Recordings. They have received resounding praise for this “landmark” project, which has been described as a “tour-de-force” in the *BBC Music*, *Gramophone* and *International Piano* magazines.



Tessa Uys

Born in Cape Town, Tessa Uys was first taught by her mother, Helga Bassel, herself a noted concert pianist. At 16, she won a Royal Schools Associated Board Scholarship and continued her studies at the Royal Academy of Music in London, where she studied with Gordon Green. In her final year she was awarded the MacFarren Medal. Further studies in London with Maria Curcio and in Siena with Guido Agosti followed. Shortly thereafter Tessa Uys won the Royal Over-Seas League Competition and was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music. During the past decades,

Tessa Uys has established herself an impressive reputation, both as concert performer and as a broadcasting artist, performing at many concert venues throughout the world. She has performed at the Wigmore Hall, Southbank, Barbican and St John's Smith Square, and has played under such distinguished conductors as Sir Neville Marriner, Walter Susskind, Louis Frémaux and Nicholas Kraemer.

impulse-music.co.uk/tessauys/



photo: Zach Gerard

Ben Schoeman

Steinway Artist Ben Schoeman was the first prize laureate in the 11th UNISA International Piano Competition in Pretoria, winner of the gold medal in the Royal Over-Seas League Competition in London and was also awarded the contemporary music prize at the Cleveland International Piano Competition. He has performed in prestigious halls on several continents, including the Wigmore, Barbican and Queen Elizabeth Halls in London, Carnegie Hall in New York, the Konzerthaus in Berlin, the Gulbenkian Auditorium in Lisbon, Cape Town City Hall and at the

Enescu Festival in Bucharest. As a concerto soloist he has collaborated with conductors including Diego Masson, Gérard Korsten, Yasuo Shinozaki, Bernhard Gueller, Jonathan McPhee and Wolfram Christ. Ben Schoeman studied piano with renowned musicians such as Joseph Stanford, Michel Dalberto, Boris Petrushansky and Eliso Virsaladze. He obtained a doctorate in music from City, University of London and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama with a thesis on the piano works of the composer Stefans Grové, whose African-inspired music Schoeman has premiered and performed in numerous countries. Over the past decade, he has been a senior lecturer and research fellow at the University of Pretoria. He has served on the jury of international music competitions, and his students have won top prizes.

benschoeman.com

The Tessa Uys and Ben Schoeman Beethoven Cycle on SOMM Recordings



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SOMMCD 0637

"This magnificent recording ... the sound is fabulous ... the playing exemplary" *MusicWeb International*



Volume 2

(*Symphony No.5 · Schumann Andante & Variations*

Saint-Saëns Variations on a Theme of Beethoven)

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International Piano



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Duettino Concertante)

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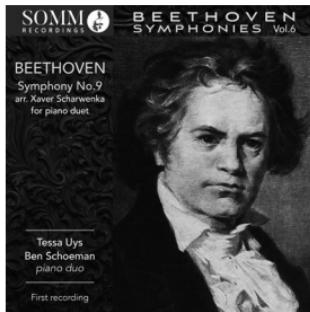
Volume 5

(*Symphonies 4 & 8*

Mozart/Busoni The Magic Flute Overture)

SOMMCD 0687

"[Scharwenka's transcriptions] are more resourceful and idiomatic from a pianistic standpoint ... The words 'resourceful' and 'idiomatic' also apply to Tessa Uys and Ben Schoeman's remarkable ensemble synchronicity" *Gramophone*



Volume 6

(*Symphony No.9*)

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SOMMCD 0709

HOLST • ELGAR

Tessa Uys & Ben Schoeman piano duo

Gustav HOLST (1874–1934)

Arr. Gustav Holst for two pianos

The Planets H.125 (Op.32)

①	I. Mars, The Bringer of War	6:53
②	II. Venus, The Bringer of Peace	6:54
③	III. Mercury, The Winged Messenger	4:05
④	IV. Jupiter, The Bringer of Jollity	8:04
⑤	V. Saturn, The Bringer of Old Age	7:48
⑥	VI. Uranus, The Magician	5:43
⑦	VII. Neptune, The Mystic	7:10

Edward ELGAR (1857–1934)

⑧	Introduction and Allegro Op.47	13:30
	Arr. Otto Singer II for piano duet	

⑨	Salut d'Amour Op.12	2:44
	Total duration:	

62:54

Tessa Uys *piano II (Holst), primo (Elgar)* • Ben Schoeman *piano I (Holst), secondo (Elgar)*

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Recording Engineer: Paul Arden-Taylor

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by John Constable (1776–1837)

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