

# Hearty Vitality Of Gustav Holst

**W**HAT do they know of Gustav Holst who only "The Planets" know? The answer is, in Adelaide, not much.

This limited acquaintance with the music of a composer who contributed significantly to 20th century English music is soon to be extended when the Burnside Symphony Orchestra next week will play Gustav Holst's Fugal concerto for flute, oboe and strings.

It is perhaps inevitable that the enterprise and achievement of this English composer of Swedish extraction should be overlooked in the shock and excitement attending the more startling innovations in music which recent years have brought.

Holst lived for 60 years, even in these days of musical longevity a fair span for a composer. Into these years he concentrated more experiment and endeavor than many other composers who have lived longer.

His Swedish forbear came to England via Russia early in the last century; but through the distaff side Holst is predominantly English. He was born on the edge of the Cotswolds: a birth-heritage which linked him as closely with the western countries as Hardy or Housman.

From this background stemmed his passionate love of English folk music, in his art contending with the legacy of post-romantic music which he inherited along with R. Strauss and Mah-

## MUSIC

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ler. To both of these factors was opposed a natural inclination towards clarity and economy of expression.

His open-mindedness induced him to try his hand with all manner of new problems, though never solely for the sake of experiment. Sometimes these led him into what some have called aridity, others austerity; while others again hailed his efforts as far-reaching and stimulating achievement.

To this genre belongs the Fugal Symphony, which was completed in 1923 when Holst was recovering from a fall he had from the rostrum while conducting. Some critics have claimed, indeed, that the so-called aridity of his later works was due to the post-concussive effects of this accident; but he had already begun exploring the contrapuntal aspects of composition well before this.

The Fugal concerto, too, formal and frankly rhythmic though it is, is graciously melodic compared with, say, the Fugal Overture.

The first movement harks back to 18th century style, the fugal voices entering in expected key and the modulations following a normal pattern. But beneath the 18th century courtly pedantries can be recognised the hearty vitality of the modern English composer, Holst himself.