

YCO Notes

Here are some program notes about each of the pieces and some background information about the times in which the pieces were composed.

“Jupiter”

The Planets, composed for orchestra between 1914 and 1916, is a suite of seven tone poems, each describing the planets from Mars to Neptune; Earth was excluded and Pluto hadn't been discovered yet (and of course, now – its not even recognized as a Planet!) At a time when Holst was finding large-scale composition difficult, due to demands on his time, his friend Clifford Bax talked to him about astrology. The clearly defined character of each planet suggested the contrasting moods of a work that was unlike anything he had yet written.

In the autumn of 1914, in an atmosphere of depressing news from the battlefronts of World War I, with uncertainty and worry uppermost in many people's minds, Holst began work on *Venus* and *Jupiter*; the former is one of the most sublime evocations of peace in music and the latter is a robust expression of unselfconscious jollity.

Holst had meant *Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity* to be “buoyant, hopeful and joyous.” It has been suggested that this movement might serve as an overture for an English country festival on a great green meadow, where all men are friends. The horns usher in each of five themes, like the competing guilds in a pageant. The introduction is a genial, syncopated dance, expressing Holst's love of English folk tradition. In striking contrast, the middle section belongs to Holst's `other life' of school-singing and Morley College festivities. It is nearly always associated with the hymn *I vow to thee my country*, owing to the fact that Holst used it as a setting for these words years later. The frivolity of the games soon return with a conclusion in scales and arpeggios.

There is a free recording you can check out in the bottom right hand corner of this Wikipedia link (not always a great informational resource, but has free recordings from time-to-time! http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Planets)

“1812 Overture” – new edition will be distributed next Tuesday ☺

On September 7, 1812, 120 km (75 miles) west of Moscow at Borodino, Napoleon's forces met those of General Mikhail Illarionovich Kutuzov in the only concerted stand made by Russia against the seemingly invincible French army. The Battle of Borodino saw casualties estimated as high as 100,000 and resulted in victory for neither side. It did, however, break the back of the French invasion.

With resources depleted and supply lines overextended, Napoleon's crippled forces moved into Moscow, which surrendered without resistance. Expecting capitulation from the displaced Tsar Alexander I, the French instead found themselves in a barren and desolate city razed to the ground by the retreating Russian Army.

Deprived of winter quarters, Napoleon found it necessary to retreat. Beginning on October 19 and lasting well into December, the French army faced several overwhelming obstacles on its long retreat: famine, frigid temperatures, and Russian forces barring the

way out of the country. Abandoned by Napoleon in December, the Grande Armée was reduced to one-tenth its original size by the time it reached Poland.

The music can be interpreted as a fairly literal depiction of the campaign: in June 1812, the previously undefeated French Allied Army of over half a million battle-hardened soldiers and almost 1200 state-of-the-art guns (cannons, artillery pieces) crossed the Niemen river into Lithuania on its way to Moscow. The Russian Orthodox Patriarch of All the Russians, aware that the Russian Imperial Army could field a force only a fraction of this size, inexperienced and poorly equipped, called on the people to pray for deliverance and peace. The Russian people responded en masse, gathering in churches all across Russia and offering their heartfelt prayers for divine intervention (the opening hymn). Next we hear the ominous notes of approaching conflict and preparation for battle with a hint of desperation but great enthusiasm, followed by the distant strains of La Marseillaise (the French National Anthem) as the French approach. Skirmishes follow, and the battle goes back and forth, but the French continue to advance and La Marseillaise becomes more prominent and victorious - almost invincible. The Tzar desperately appeals to the spirit of the Russian people in an eloquent plea to come forward and defend the Rodina (Motherland). As the people in their villages consider his impassioned plea, we hear traditional Russian folk music. La Marseillaise returns in force with great sounds of battle as the French approach Moscow. The Russian people now begin to stream out of their villages and towns toward Moscow to the increasing strains of folk music and, as they gather together, there is even a hint of celebration. Now La Marseillaise is heard in counterpoint to the folk music as the great armies clash on the plains west of Moscow, and Moscow burns. Just at the moment that Moscow is occupied and all seems hopeless, the hymn which opens the piece is heard again as God intervenes, bringing an unprecedented deep freeze with which the French cannot contend (one can hear the winter winds blowing in the music). The French attempt to retreat, but their guns, stuck in the freezing ground, are captured by the Russians and turned against them. Finally, the guns are fired in celebration and church bells all across the land peal in grateful honor of their deliverance from their "treacherous and cruel enemies."

Link of Skidmore College performing

arrangement: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1812_Overture

“Les Misérables”

Basic plot: Based on a book by Victor Hugo... *Les Misérables* is the story of four people, Bishop Myriel, Jean Valjean, Fantine, and Marius, who meet, part, then meet again during the most agitated decades of nineteenth-century France. The storyline involves love between a mother and child, the love of an adopted father and his child, and a love triangle that ends tragically in an act of devotion. It also tells the story of the 1832 revolution and describes the unpleasant side of Paris. The novel is in essence a plea for humane treatment of the poor and for equality among all citizens. It is an incredible musical – you should all see it if you have a chance!

Brahms “Hungarian Dance No. 5”

While Wikipedia is not always a stellar place to find factual information – it does sometimes have access to free recordings! Check out this link for basic information about

this piece, but check out the bottom right hand corner for a free recording by the Fulda Symphonic Orchestra. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hungarian_Dances_\(Brahms\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hungarian_Dances_(Brahms))