



The Planets Suite

(Week 4)

Gustav Holst
1874 - 1934

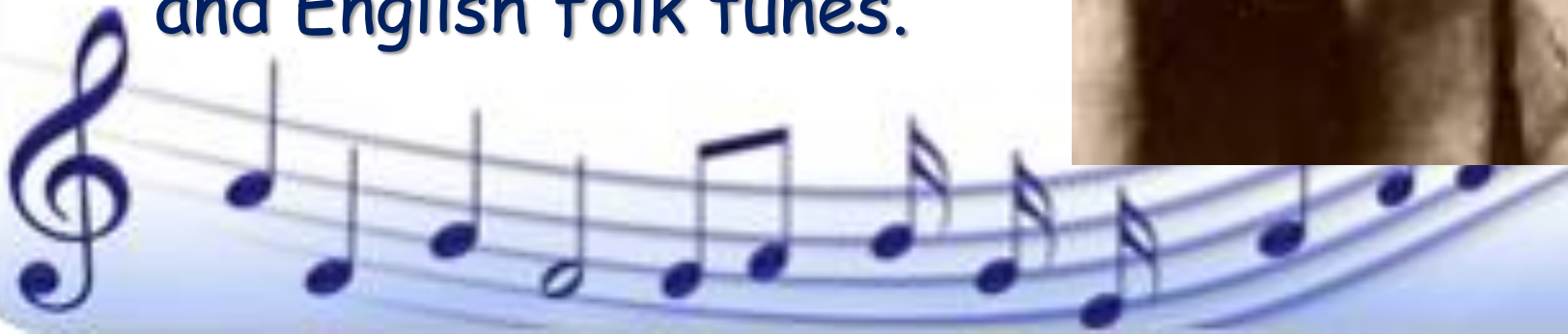
Week 4 - Venus (Gustav Holst, The Planets Suite)

- This week (Week 4), we will listen to 'Venus' from 'The Planets Suite' (by Gustav Holst).
- Slides 3-13 provide information about the life of Gustav Holst. If you have read this already, go straight to Slide 14.
- Slides 14-21 provide information about the 'Venus' movement.



Learning about a famous composer's life

- Gustav Holst was an English composer and music teacher for over 20 years.
- Most of the music he composed was original, but he had influences from Hindu spiritualism and English folk tunes.



Learning about a famous composer's life

- Gustav Holst was born in Cheltenham, England on the 21st September 1874.



Statue of Holst in his home town.



Gustav Holst



Learning about a famous composer's life

Holst was born into a very musical family. His grandfather was a harp composer and teacher; his father was an organist, pianist and choirmaster, and his mother was a singer.



Gustavus von Holst



Adolf Holst



Clara Holst



Learning about a famous composer's life

As a child, Gustav was taught the piano and violin.



This is Holst's piano. You can see it in the Holst Birthplace Museum. He composed *The Planets* on this piano.

This is Holst playing the violin.



Learning about a famous composer's life

Gustav was a sickly child. His eyes were weak, but no-one realised that he needed to wear glasses.

His chest was weak and he suffered from asthma. When he was young, Gustav hated playing the violin, but enjoyed playing the piano.



Learning about a famous composer's life

Unfortunately, Holst also had pain in his hands, so it made practising the piano very difficult and painful.

After leaving school, he got his first job as an organist and choirmaster.



Learning about a famous composer's life

He became a student at the Royal College of Music, where he studied composition.

Unfortunately, the pain in his right hand became worse. Playing for a long time was impossible and he had to accept that he would never be a professional concert pianist.



Learning about a famous composer's life

Holst decided to take up the trombone. It would allow him to play in orchestras, and he could earn some money. Also, the experience would be useful to him as a composer. Perhaps, he thought that playing the trombone would help to strengthen his chest and lungs.



Learning about a famous composer's life

- Holst wrote The Planets Suite between 1914 and 1916.
- Each of the seven movements is named after a planet of the Solar System and its corresponding astrological character.



Learning about a famous composer's life

1. Mars - the Bringer of War
2. Venus - the Bringer of Peace
3. Mercury - the Winged Messenger
4. Jupiter - the Bringer of Jollity
5. Saturn - the Bringer of Old Age
6. Uranus - the Magician
7. Neptune - the Mystic



Learning about a famous composer's life

Holst did not compose a piece of music about Pluto, as Pluto was not discovered until 1930.

Colin Matthews, a recent composer created a piece of music called Pluto: the Renewer. This is sometimes played alongside Holst's Planet Suite in concerts.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W3Mcn3zo5C0>





Venus

The Bringer of Peace

(Week 4)

Learning what timbre is

Venus was the Roman goddess of love and beauty.



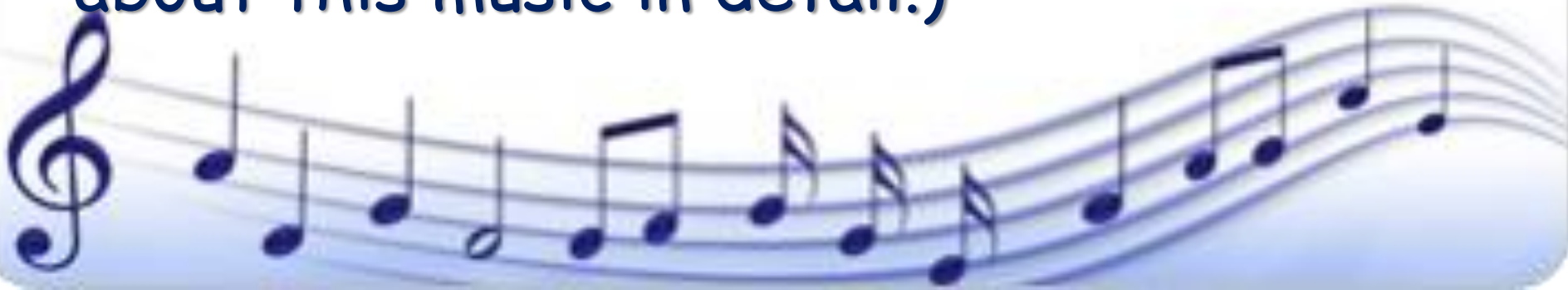
Learning what timbre is

Watch video clip: [Watch Venus here](#)

While you listen, draw a picture of how the music makes you feel.



(Later on, if you would like to, use the separate "Recording Sheet" to write about this music in detail.)



Learning what timbre is

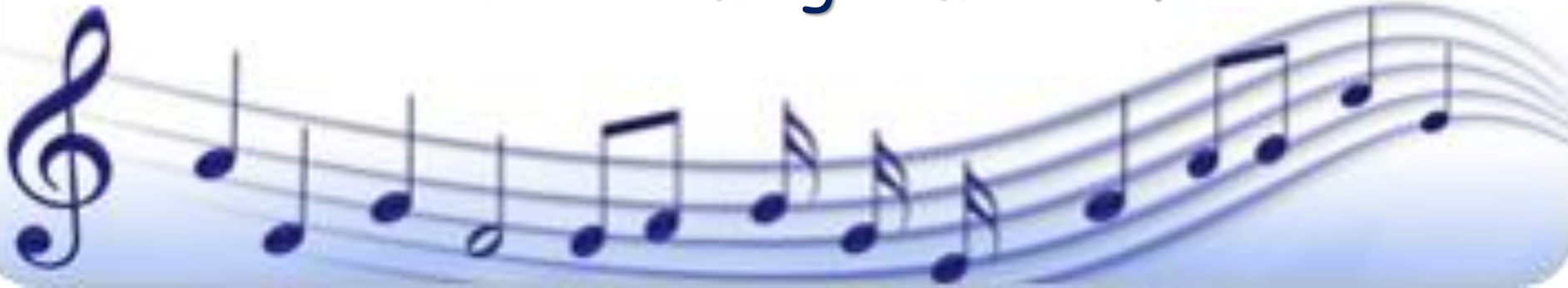
Venus was written to be the opposite to the music of Mars.

Mars used very loud instruments such as *con legno* strings and brass. He therefore chose different instruments for Venus.



Learning what timbre is

- The timbre in music is the distinctive quality of a sound or instrument. This is why you can sometimes recognise certain instruments in a piece of music.
- Holst decided that Venus should have a peaceful and soft timbre, in contrast to the harsh booming timbre of Mars.



Learning what timbre is

- Holst chose a **celesta** to be the main instrument in this piece.
- The celesta looks similar to an upright piano or a large wooden music box.
- The keys are connected to hammers which strike a graduated set of metal plates, which are suspended over wooden resonators.



Learning what timbre is

- The sound of the celesta is similar to that of a glockenspiel, but it has a much softer and more subtle timbre.
- This quality gave the instrument its name. Celeste in French means 'heavenly'.



Learning what timbre is

- Sometimes, people refer to timbre as the 'colour' of the music.
- Listen to a bit of the music again with your eyes shut.
- *What colour does it make you think of? Why?*
- *Which colours do you associate with peace?*

