



The Great Forgotten Danish Violinist

# HENRY HOLST

First release

1947 Live Walton

1949 Live Vaughan Williams

Violin Concertos

**CHAMBER MUSIC BY HAYDN AND SCHUBERT**

## CD 1

**Ralph Vaughan Williams** (1872-1958)

**Violin Concerto in D minor, 'Concerto Accademico'** (1924-25) 17:05

[ 1 ] I. Allegro pesante 5:37

[ 2 ] II. Adagio 6:51

[ 3 ] III. Presto 4:29

BBC Welsh Orchestra · Mansel Thomas, conductor

Live broadcast February 2, 1949 (From BBC acetates)

**Frederick Delius** (1862-1934)

[ 4 ] **Légende in E flat major** (1895) 8:37

Gerald Moore, piano

Rec. August 7, 1942, Columbia DX1094, mtx CAX 9032-33

**William Walton** (1902-1983)

**Violin Concerto** (1938-39) 30:29

[ 5 ] I. Andante tranquillo 10:46

[ 6 ] II. Presto capriccioso alla napoletana 6:39

[ 7 ] III. Vivace 12:56

BBC Northern Orchestra · Charles Groves, conductor

Live broadcast November 17, 1947 (From private off-air acetates)

**Pablo de Sarasate** (1844-1908)

[ 8 ] **Zigeunerweisen Op. 20**, (1878) 6:28

Rec. Berlin c. 1929, mtx Deutsche Ultraphon 15565-66 (From Henry Holst's test pressing)  
issued as Clangor M9241

**Fritz Kreisler** (1875-1962)

[ 9 ] **Liebesleid** 3:19

Rec. Berlin c. 1929, mtx Deutsche Ultraphon 15489 (From Henry Holst's test pressing)  
probably never issued

## CD 2

**Franz Schubert** (1797-1828)

**Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano in B flat major, Op. 99** 32:57

[ 1 ] I. Allegro moderato 10:53

[ 2 ] II. Andante un poco mosso 7:29

[ 3 ] III. Scherzo. Allegro 6:00

[ 4 ] IV. Rondo. Allegro vivace 8:28

Henry Holst, violin

Erling Blöndal Bengtsson, cello

Victor Schiøler, piano

Rec. 1955, HMV BLP 1077, mtx OXCS 125-2N, 126-2N

**String Quartet No. 14 in D minor, D810 'Death and the Maiden'** 32:43

[ 5 ] I. Allegro ma non troppo 11:24

[ 6 ] II. Andante 9:23

[ 7 ] III. Menuetto: Allegretto 3:25

[ 8 ] IV. Allegro moderato 8:21

Philharmonia Quartet

Henry Holst, Ernest Element, Herbert Downes, Anthony Pini.

Rec 1946, Columbia DX 8181-84, mtx CAX 9022-28 and 9031

**Joseph Haydn** (1732-1809)

**Piano Trio No. 39 in G major, Hob.XV:25 'Gypsy'** 12:10

[ 9 ] I. Andante 4:30

[10] II. Poco adagio cantabile 4:12

[11] III. Rondo all'Ongarese (Presto) 3:26

Henry Holst, violin

Anthony Pini, cello

Eileen Joyce, piano

Rec. 1941, Columbia DX1054-1055, mtx CAX 8956-58

Henry Holst (1899 - 1991) grew up in Sæby, a small provincial market town at that time with a population of only two thousand in the northern, sparsely populated region of Jutland. His father was the organist in the local church, and music played a central rôle in the home. Henry began playing the violin at an early age and attracted the interest of Peder Møller, a friend of the family, a violinist and member of the Royal Danish Orchestra and incidentally from the same area of northern Jutland, since he was born in Brønderslev, only 38 km away.

Henry's father died in 1907 and in 1913 his mother sold the house in Sæby and moved to Copenhagen where the 14-year-old boy was to be taught by Peder Møller, who, however, succumbed to stress and too many cigars and had to call in sick! But he saw to it that the boy was sent to Axel Gade, the leader of the Royal Danish Orchestra, who was the son of the composer Niels W. Gade. With him Henry Holst found a home with culture and vision, which, as he himself relates, gave him many positive impulses. But the most important thing was probably that Gade saw to it that already in 1914 Henry entered the conservatoire and on a scholarship at that. He lived up to all expectations, developed quickly and found many friends.

He explains himself: "It was a happy time, and in 1918 I passed the final examination with the following testimonial: 'Mr. Henry Holst has developed into a good and perceptive violinist and among other things is in possession of a beautiful and well-grounded tone with an extremely good technique, altogether a promising violin talent.' - Signed by N. P. Weiss, Anton Svendsen, Axel Gade and Carl Nielsen. I made my first public appearance as a soloist the same year and pursued advanced studies in Copenhagen with Emil Telmányi and in Berlin with Willy Hess from 1919 until 1921, and when I returned home, I succeeded in securing a position as a violinist in the Royal Danish Orchestra".

But already not long afterwards in 1923 he presented himself as a candidate for the leader of The Berlin Philharmonic, which after the death of Artur Nikisch in the previous year now had Wilhelm Furtwängler as its chief conductor. He won the position over 14 competitors and relates himself:

"That was quite something for an enthusiastic young violinist! From the last desk of the second violinists on Kgs. Nytorv to the highly responsible first desk in Bernburger Strasse, enjoying a close working relationship with such a great figure as Furtwängler". Also in this orchestra he had many solo performances, but after eight years, in

1931, he was offered a position in England at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, an offer which to many people's astonishment he accepted. If the political developments in the Weimar Republic had not been, as far as one can judge, a deciding factor, then it was probably a strong motivation for his farewell to Germany, where his friends asked him what on earth he wanted to do in "ein Land ohne Musik?"

One should not be led into assuming that Henry Holst had family connections with England or English people, even though the name Holst might cause one to imagine this to be the case: one only thinks of the composer Gustav Holst.

About his farewell to Germany and his time in England he himself relates in a speech he gave at a commemoration at the conservatoire:

"I have never regretted taking that step. England was of course by no means without music. Many great names in the history of music have felt attracted to England: Haydn, Mozart, Weber and our own Niels W. Gade were active in England and benefitted considerably from recognition in that country.

When the Second World War broke out, most of my pupils were called up, and things began to look bad for musical activity. However, after a few months it got started again, but in new guises. People realised that soldiers should have food for the soul as well as military drill. Departments of the Ministry of Education were to take care of spiritual nourishment for soldiers and civilians during the terrible air raids which affected people deeply, so an orchestra consisting of the finest musicians was established. Only the very best were taken into consideration, and they were exempted from military service. Even I was confronted with the choice of either working in a factory or being the leader of this élite orchestra. I naturally chose the latter.

The orchestra was domiciled in Liverpool's new concert hall and Malcolm Sargent became the chief conductor of the orchestra. During concerts he talked about the music and the composers in a wonderfully accessible way, and through these concerts it was possible to come into contact with an audience who had never before been to an orchestral concert, and here the foundations were laid for a growing interest in music in the postwar years."

His activities both as a soloist in works including Sibelius's Violin Concerto which English people discovered because of his sublime interpretation, and also as a chamber musician led to steadily increasing recognition, and in 1946 also to his being

appointed a professor at The Royal Academy of Music in London at the same time as he continued to be a soloist.

Apart from Delius's *Legende* and Sarasate's *Zigeunerweisen*, the first CD in this anthology only contains recordings which have not previously been issued, while CD 2 presents a small selection of works which have been issued before.

He had a rather special relationship with William Walton's *Violin Concerto*. It was written between 1938 and 1939, commissioned by and dedicated to Jascha Heifetz, who gave the first performance with the Cleveland Orchestra in 1939. Owing to the war he was unable to play it in Europe. And since he had exclusive performing rights on first performances, his permission was necessary if someone else was to present it in England. But Holst was allowed to perform the concerto under the composer's baton in 1941.

Walton revised the concerto in 1944, and it has become one of Walton's most durable works. Holst gave the first performance of the new version, and played it innumerable times. Here you can listen to it at a live concert on the BBC in 1947, when Holst was the soloist for the 25th time. It is an extremely complicated and demanding concerto. Space does not permit many comments here, but references to and analyses of the work are available on the internet. The recording was made off-air, that is to say from a radio, and of course suffers from small blemishes, but after a careful restoration and removal of cracks etc. it is absolutely worth a hearing and presents Holst's superlative virtuosity with distinction.

This anthology also shows Holst as a soloist in another English violin concerto from the 20th century, namely Vaughan Williams's concerto composed between 1924 and 1925 bearing the title *Concerto Academico*, also performed on a live recording in 1949. The concerto is in the neo-classical style which characterised much orchestral music from the 1920s. It is dedicated to the Hungarian violinist Jelly d'Aranyi and is inspired by both Bach's contrapuntal style and by English folk-music. Vaughan Williams's popular *The Lark Ascending* for violin and orchestra has somewhat outshone this fresh and approachable concerto. This seems unfair, and Holst's interpretation may perhaps change this, since it does full justice to the work. The recording here may well have been made by the BBC at the request of Holst and it is of good quality considering when it was made.

The recordings of the two English violin concertos presented here have never

before been available.

Sarasate's convivial and virtuoso Zigeunerweisen and Kreisler's Liebesleid from the time in Germany around 1929 can also be found in this anthology. They were transferred from test pressings from Holst's own archives as were the recordings of the concertos. Only the Zigeunerweisen has been issued on a gramophone record.

The track list contains all the information to which we have access.

Of the previously issued works, Beethoven's trio Op 97, the "Archduke Trio" with Solomon playing the piano is the most well-known, and it is indeed also available on CD, but Holst played together with many pianists including Eileen Joyce, as here in the Haydn trio, and Louis Kentner. The Haydn trio is incidentally Holst's first recording of him performing chamber music.

The Philharmonia Quartet founded by Holst entered into a recording contract with the record company Columbia. This led among other things to recordings of Mozart and Schubert quartets. The quartet became one of the most highly respected chamber music ensembles in England and was extremely active until it ceased to exist in 1952.

Two years later he returned to Denmark, where the conservatoire established an external professorship for him, and in 1961 he became a professor on a permanent basis and a sought-after teacher of the violin and chamber music. From this period comes the recording of Schubert's Trio in B-flat with Victor Schiøler and Erling Blöndal Bengtsson, which is also found on CD 2. This trio is regrettably his only recording to be made in Denmark.

He was 70 in 1969 and accordingly retired on reaching the age limit, but he continued with extensive activities for many years afterwards. It should also be mentioned that he was greatly interested in Suzuki's method of violin teaching. He was acquainted with Suzuki personally from the latter's time in Berlin the 1920s, and this friendship led to him also teaching in Japan for some years in the 1960s.

Holst was a lovable person with a marked sense of humour. He died in 1991 and he was the most distinguished representative of Danish music abroad in the whole of the 20th century.

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Ernest Clement    Herbert Doree    Henry Holt    Anthony Ricci



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2 CD

Total playing time:

66:39 + 78:18

First releases

CD 1 [ 1 ], [ 5 ], [ 9 ]

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