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Welcome to our newsletter

Welcome to the thirteenth issue of the Chamber Music Club Newsletter. We hope you will enjoy reading it.

There are three major items. The very thorough survey of our 2018-19 concert season gives an idea of the range and variety of our programmes, which cover both standard and more 'out of the way' repertoire. Our final concert of the season included music by Gustav Holst, and this composer's brief, perhaps little-known, association with UCL is investigated in an article which illustrates how difficult it can sometimes be to get the facts straight! The latest in the 'Meet the Committee' series of interviews features Gillian Hogg, a recent recruit to the committee but a long-standing member of the Club who has taken part in our concerts as a choral singer and recorder player (and more than once provided invaluable advice on Russian pronunciation). A note about the forthcoming, and typically enterprising, UCOpera production completes the issue.

The Newsletter has now moved to yearly rather than twice-yearly production, which gives everyone more time to write articles! It's not too early, however, to be thinking about offering a contribution for our fourteenth issue, especially if you have not written for the Newsletter before. Concert and book reviews, letters to the editors and other short items, as well as full-length articles (c.3000 words) are all welcome. It's a good idea to let us know what you have in mind before you actually start writing. Feel free to contact any of the editors with your suggestions; we are: Dace Ruklisa (dd.rr.tt@btinternet.com), Jill House (j.house@ucl.ac.uk) and myself (rabeemus@gmail.com).

My thanks, as ever, to Dace and Jill for their work in preparing this issue.

Roger Beeson, Chair, UCL CMC

Intimacy in trios, songs, films and jazz: a view on the experiments of the sixty-seventh season

The annual banquet of chamber music at UCL has not lacked in variety of tastes, dishes and even flowers to adorn it. The prevailing atmosphere of the fifteen concerts of the sixty-seventh season has been that of intimacy. The programmes have shown how different its sources can be, from piano trios to solo songs, from twentieth-century explorations of musical boundaries to twenty-first-century premieres, with quite a few Baroque eccentricities thrown in the middle. A strong core of classical chamber music repertoire has been juxtaposed with excursions into film and jazz, while almost every concert has included something less known and rarely played. Let us dwell on this feast for a while.

This season's chamber music repertoire involved a lot of introspection and sometimes also quirkiness and unpredictability. The major focus was on small ensembles and solo songs accompanied by a single instrument. Thus, four songs on Housman poems for voice and violin by Ralph Vaughan Williams revealed less typical facets of the composer's writing style. The first song, 'We'll to the woods no more', seemed wistful, with the violin part freely wandering and imitating the voice. Both musicians conjured an emotionally tense culmination towards the end. The singer exhibited excellent control of her voice, especially considering the broad vocal range of this short song and leaps across large intervals. 'Along the field' introduced the theme of death (prominent in this cycle) and relayed it in a slightly ironical vein, conveying the joys of life in the phrase 'it was a lover and his lass' and then quickly jumping to the inevitable outcome. Then 'The half-moon westers low' traversed several tonalities and sounded sparse and bleak regardless of the rich violin texture involving chords. At a November concert it was possible to appreciate the scope of Fauré compositions for solo piano, piano duet and voice and piano. 'Automne', Op.18 No.3, was the first in a sequence of Fauré songs. Initially the voice sounded as if at a distance. The singing gradually gained intensity and captured listeners' attention with nuanced phrasing. The lugubrious atmosphere of the songs was momentarily dissipated by the brighter sections of 'Spleen', Op.51 No.3, and 'Prison', Op.83 No.1. The piano parts of these pieces were notable – diverse textures and harmonies substantially contributed to the interpretations of the poems. Changes in rhythms were clearly emphasised by the piano, especially within the jumpy imitations of 'Automne'.

This season has witnessed several performances of piano trios in their entirety. In the autumn term Beethoven's Trio in B flat major, Op.11, was played on clarinet, cello and piano. In the first movement the timbres of clarinet and cello were well aligned. The cellist played almost without vibrato and added light and evasive figurations to the texture. The piano came to the forefront with elegantly rendered fast passages. The second movement began with a cello melody that recalled an

ancient song – it was played without additional embellishments. Something naive was preserved throughout this movement – this impression was not substantially altered by the later use of waltz style. The third movement variations were rendered with plenty of contrasts in dynamics; the clarinet sound was initially matte, but later acquired bright and rich tone. At a January concert Schubert's Piano Trio No.1 in B flat major was performed. In the first movement the piano part provided a solid rhythmical canvas over which various themes were evolving. Here, the mood unexpectedly veered from melancholy to merriment. The theme of the third movement differed from anything that had come before – abrupt interruptions by the violin were crisp and precise and then the scherzo gave way to a ponderous waltz with a seemingly infinite melody.

But even the programmes involving better-known chamber music repertoire contained a lot of discoveries. Clara Schumann's Romance from *Quatre pièces caractéristiques* was played in November – the subtle overlay of rather discrepant metrical figures in both hands was rendered in a transparent way. The piece sounded lyrical and contemplative and the interpretation captured something of otherworldly tranquillity. Another piece by Clara Schumann, Three Romances for violin and piano, Op.22, could be heard at an all-Schumann recital alongside Robert Schumann's *Dichterliebe* – it was a welcome CMC revival of a serious chamber music composer. On this occasion the full *Dichterliebe* cycle was performed – it was interpreted as an ongoing journey with plenty of inner transformations along the way. The narrative was structured by grouping of songs, therefore quite a few pieces were performed without pauses between them. A concert by performers from UCL Music Society was full of proficient playing, especially of string instruments. Cellos seemed to almost dominate the programme which began with three movements from J.S. Bach's Cello Suite No.1. Particularly memorable was an arrangement for cello, double bass and piano of Dmitry Shostakovich's Prelude from the Five Pieces for Two Violins and Piano: continuous melodies from the strings were freely floating around and above the piano accompaniment carrying with them full-blown blues.

Wind instruments occasionally assumed central roles in chamber ensembles. The performance of Edwin York Bowen's Phantasy Quintet Op.93 for bass clarinet and string quartet was a rather unusual experience. The first section was played with a sense of restlessness and tautness. The bass clarinet sounded mellow, with a deep tone; its low register was frequently used in the piece. A macabre mood was created in the middle of the piece, which later turned to a sense of unease despite several lyrical melodies played by the bass clarinet. The latter were crucial to achieving a calm resolution in the coda. The dense and orchestral textures of the composition were skilfully navigated by the musicians. The first movement of the Flute Sonata by Mel Bonis surprised with distinct harmonic language, where chord changes rapidly altered the atmosphere, especially from the darker passages

towards something lighter. The beginning of the piece was marked by short bursts of motifs in the flute and later in the piano, which only gradually were assembled into longer melodies. Chromatic arabesques were scattered throughout the composition – they were surprisingly varied and left an impression of uncertainty and wandering. The tone and phrasing of the flute was smooth and even regardless of the swift reshuffling of the musical material. The piano playing was the most prominent in the last movement which began with stormy and passionately played cascades.

A contrast to the sonorities of smaller ensembles was a performance of Haydn's *Missa brevis* in F at the Christmas concert. The sections with chorus had a very warm sound which was carefully balanced across voice groups. Within the middle movements the chorus provided energetic accelerations of tempo. The short bass intonations before Gloria and Credo introduced an unanticipated polarity with respect to the chorus and were like sobering proclamations. Soprano and alto soloists kept up and carried further the motifs introduced by the chorus, especially in the Benedictus, but rendered them in a far more tranquil manner than the chorus. The final section, Agnus Dei, conveyed some sadness that was turned into a reconciliatory finale.

This year's themed concerts dwelled on the intersections of music with other arts. A concert of film music showcased audio fragments of films most associated with the featured composers. Thus, Three Improvisations for solo piano by Elisabeth Lutyens were preceded by a fragment of the horror film *The Skull* and Nino Rota's Trio for Clarinet, Cello and Piano was introduced by a scene from *The Godfather*. At this concert Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* was played in the composer's version for solo piano. It revealed Gershwin's skilful use of a mixed spectrum of compositional techniques and his appreciation of avant-garde compositions. In the introduction sound effects were given more prominence than individual motifs – this approach resembled the orchestral version. Sections of polytonality and sequences of cluster chords were clearly relayed. The pianist chose a brisk tempo, which seemed to depict a rush in a city in the second half. The hymnic culmination was affirmative, but shunned sentimentality. In the first movement of Nino Rota's trio the brief cello notes evoked the noise of sawing. These were followed by crystalline and pared-down piano motifs that were transparently rendered. In the Andante a pensive theme played by the clarinet immediately attracted attention. After an exchange of responses between cello and clarinet a rather harsh cello melody in low register altered the direction of the movement. Then quiet and obscure piano figurations slowly emerged and gradually climbed towards elevated registers creating a fascinating effect.

The concert devoted to jazz inspirations exhibited some parallels to the film music programme. On this occasion Gershwin's 'Summertime' was sung – the voice sounded lucid and the high notes of the soprano line were reached with ease

and with smooth phrasing. *Sonatine transatlantique* by Alexandre Tansman began with angular and dissonant musical material that soon morphed into a more defined tonality and some recognisable jazz harmonies. Throughout the first movement blocks characterised by different degrees of dissonance were deftly juxtaposed. Syncopated rhythms were in abundance even by jazz standards – these were confidently rendered by the pianist. Stylised melodies of spirituals and blues in the second movement were particularly engaging; they were varied by capricious decorations and interjections of additional piano voices. At the close of the concert *Dances* for trombone quartet by Stanley Glasser, a London composer with Goldsmiths College associations, were performed. The initially clear dance rhythms disintegrated fairly quickly and were scattered among other things. This piece of two minutes contained a surprising number of musical ideas and its texture was constantly shifting.

The end-of-season concert was dedicated to the four elements: earth, air, water and fire. The programme began and ended with movements from Jean-Féry Rebel's *Les éléments*. The first of them, 'Le chaos', depicted a fairly rationally arranged eighteenth-century tumult and was introduced by a slightly menacing dissonant chord. The latter progressively grew (or diminished) into sparser chords and distinct melodies. Then the musical motifs associated with the four elements were presented almost simultaneously by soloists and smaller ensembles – flute players were particularly notable with their shrill and bright summons. Dense chords of strings consistently counteracted other themes. The elements were exposed separately in 'Ramage' (l'air), Loure (la terre – l'eau) and Chaconne (le feu). As before, the string group exhibited a lot of coherence and unity, especially when playing fast scales upwards and downwards. It was a pleasure to hear the ethereal duet of two flutes in the 'Ramage', which was aptly scored in high registers. In addition, the CMC choir presented 'Hymn to the Waters' and 'To Agni, God of Fire' from Gustav Holst's *Choral Hymns from the Rig Veda*. The choir displayed sensitive phrasing, confidently inhabited the colourful modal harmonies and conjured a slightly mysterious atmosphere. The accompaniment of 'Hymn to the Waters' was played on the piano instead of a harp. Here, the pianist produced a sound that hinted at the timbres of a harp, especially within the fast figurations in higher registers that were played without any sense of heaviness.

Quite a few shorter and far from well-known pieces from the Baroque and Renaissance periods have been scattered across CMC programmes this year. Thus, Michel Corrette's Sonata in D minor for cello and basso continuo, Op.20 No.2, was played on two cellos. The most delightful was the middle movement with two different arias – the musicians revealed subtle nuances of emotions and outlined both sudden and gradual transitions between moods; the phrases were carefully shaded and the playing resembled a slowed-down dance movement. Afterwards J.S. Bach's Sonata No.1 in G major for viola da gamba and cembalo was played

on cello and piano. It began in moderate and sustained tempo, which allowed full enjoyment of evenly and lightly played trills and decorations by the piano. Throughout this performance the left-hand part of the piano was executed in a sensitive way that did not overshadow other layers, but rather provided a punctuated grounding for different melodies. The very long notes of the cello sounded surprisingly interesting and even came to the foreground due to timbral nuances with which they were imbued. The second movement introduced a sprightly interplay between both instruments with frequent imitations of each other's themes. After this experience the Andante movement created a nearly hypnotic effect, especially by the slowly evolving, despondent and chillingly regular piano part; the cello assumed a leading role when emphasising transitions from minor to major and then back again. At a concert called 'Sing & Play' vivid impressions were created by compositions for solo instruments. Telemann's Fantasia No.8 in E minor for solo flute did not dwell within a single tonality and possessed notable chromatic passages. The flautist carefully separated individual notes and was successful at delineating hidden polyphony within the rather sparse texture that was nevertheless replete with brief fragments of melodies. In the last section the performer precisely rendered rhythms within the frequent juxtapositions of rapid and slower notes. Dall'Abaco's Capriccio No.1 in C minor for solo cello was largely based on melodic sequences gradually descending within the given tonality. Occasionally a motif was played in a delicate manner as if barely touching the strings. The cellist experimented with slight accelerations and various timbres, occasionally metallic, within the repetitive texture. It seems that the solo instrument pieces by this composer are more notable for their atmosphere than development in time. At the Christmas concert 'O magnum mysterium' by Tomás Luis de Victoria was sung. The CMC choir brought out the transparency inherent in the structure and the harmonies of this piece. Interesting rhythmic accents on weak beats within bars could be heard – individual words and polyphonic lines were emphasised thus. Voice groups tended to blend smoothly when singing similar musical material.

A spirit of experimentation could be felt in many programmes where twentieth- and twenty-first century music, including premieres, was presented. For example, at the Christmas concert a composition by Roger Beeson for the unusual combination of a choir, cello, flute and clarinet, which was based on the Thomas Hardy poem 'The Oxen', was premiered. The piece began with cello pizzicatos counting twelve hours till midnight when the action takes place. After the cello changed to *arco* the mood became more menacing and uncertain. This section was followed by a slightly chilly duo of the flute and clarinet until the choir brought warmer colours into the music. The pizzicato counting returned in the coda, this time creating a comfortable and familiar feeling. Another premiere took place at the joint concert with the Oxford and Cambridge Musical Club. *Helford River at Night* for viola and piano by Anthony Green vividly evoked sounds caught around a river in nighttime, including movements of waves and perhaps even some fishing. Each

section had a distinct texture and the piano accompaniment was always kept uncluttered, which allowed audience to appreciate diverse harmonic tints and the atonal melodic lines. In the end a subdued theme was played by the viola before descending into silence. This composition was preceded by *2 Woofs* for solo piano by Henry Cowell – these miniatures were played with great expressiveness and also precision with respect to syncopations and pauses. This concert also included three Tango Etudes for solo violin by Astor Piazzolla. In the Etude No.3 the violinist underlined the characteristic tango rhythm. It was interesting to listen to the melodies interspersed between the occurrences of the main theme – the performer had found unexpected ways of contrasting different musical materials by articulation and dynamics. The Etude No.6 did not become monotonous despite its repetitive figures and short motifs – the violinist maintained a sense of movement and emphasised the emergence of novel motifs and the lyrical passages. The performance became more and more virtuosic with each piece and the tempo was consistently increased. These etudes revealed the composer's versatility in using various compositional techniques and also paid tribute to J.S. Bach through their complex hidden polyphonies.

A concert in memory of John Lindon occupied a special place last season. John was an outstanding figure in the history of the CMC as a performer and committee member, being active within the Club since the late sixties in various capacities. His ventures in Italian culture and chamber music were presented by twelve performers who had played with him on many occasions in various settings in London. The Monteverdi madrigal 'Ohimè, dov'è il mio ben' was sung by a duet of mezzo-sopranos – the soloists relayed the poem without haste, savouring ornamentations and occasionally speeding up some phrases to conjure impatience in love. The impression was both leisurely and somewhat teasing and capricious. After this 'Chiome d'oro' sounded very lively and as if embodying the joys of love. Here, the rhythmic synchronisation of both voices on various (often short) syllables of text was important and was successfully achieved. The singing was delicately accompanied by two Baroque flutes, a Baroque cello and a harpsichord. John was the editor of the texts for a full set of Monteverdi compositions published in Rome. The programme was concluded by Johannes Brahms's Sonata No.2 in A major for violin and piano. The first movement began moderately slowly, but soon the violin engaged in energetic outbursts. After that the performance resembled a freely floating narrative filled with piano figurations and lengthy violin melodies. Perhaps the light lyricism of the second movement was the most appealing aspect of this piece. These sections led to something like a merry scherzo in the Vivace, which was later repeated by loud violin pizzicatos.

The new, sixty-eighth season will offer sixteen concerts, some of which have already been heard. In February a concert will be dedicated to the Chamber Music Club's own composers and contemporary music. The tradition of fostering ensem-

ble playing will be continued in May with an ensembles' programme. A themed concert about chivalry will include compositions related to Don Quixote among others. There is plenty of space for making musical discoveries and many signs of inventiveness and diversity in the forthcoming programmes.

Dace Ruklisa

UCOpera presents Haydn's last opera

Founded in 1951, UCOpera is a student-led opera company based at UCL. It is known for staging a different opera every spring and for frequently bringing to attention less familiar works. This year Haydn's last opera, *L'anima del filosofo* or *Orfeo ed Euridice*, will be presented. It was composed in London, but was never fully performed during the composer's lifetime. The piece retells the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, a story of love, death and the power of music. This year's production will involve professional soloists and students and staff of UCL who take smaller roles and participate in the chorus and orchestra. The opera will be conducted by Charles Peebles, who is already known to UCL audiences from previous UCOpera productions. It is directed by Jack Furness and Crystal (Qiuyan) Da is preparing its design. Performances will take place in Bloomsbury Theatre on the evenings of 23rd, 25th, 27th and 28th March. Tickets can be bought online or in the theatre box office.

Meet the committee – Gillian Hogg

Roger Beeson: *Gillian, when did you first become aware of the Chamber Music Club, and what prompted you to join?*

Gillian Hogg: I joined UCL via SSEES (School of Slavonic and East European Studies) shortly after it merged so it felt a bit semi-detached and I didn't fully explore UCL life for a while. But I think I had vaguely heard of it before the time I was on a secondment and somehow found out that the 2009 Christmas concert would include part of Handel's *Messiah*. They were inviting singers to join, and it seemed I could fit in the proposed rehearsals, and it seemed like a good opportunity as I hadn't been able to join a choir for many years. Singing in the Christmas concerts has been the major aspect of my participation and in some years the 'Christmas choir' also did a summer concert together, or there were other opportunities to sing in an ensemble. I have also played the recorder in ensembles in some concerts.

RB: *Could you tell us something about your musical background?*

GH: It's hard to know where to begin. I'm not sure if it's the particular schools, or my age, or a combination of the two, but singing was part of school life from

an early age. My grandmother played the piano, though I don't remember trying it out that much, before a friend of my mother passed on a second-hand piano to us when I was around seven. I managed to pick out a theme song and Christmas carol and it encouraged mum to get me lessons. My dad, meanwhile, had an old military clarinet stashed in a wardrobe which I eventually got a few notes out of. At some point I started with the treble recorder which was somewhat easier, and with my music training I sort of taught myself. I also got a more modern clarinet and based on the recorder experience more or less taught myself for a few years. Also in primary school, the music teacher was an amazing enthusiast, and, because kids are often made to learn their music by heart, I still remember *The Goliath Jazz* which we actually recorded onto vinyl.

I enjoyed playing but had virtually no discipline in my practice, scraped my way through the grades and even Music A-level, but I was always a nervous solo performer (lucky for the audience, as I'm sure my lack of practice meant the nerves were entirely justified!). And the secondary school was quite small with one orchestra and no vacancy for mediocre clarinetists, unlike the primary school wind band. So I tended to stick to choirs as well as piano.

RB: *You've been involved in quite a number of our concerts over the years. Are there any particular CMC events that you have especially enjoyed taking part in?*

GH: The Christmas concerts have covered a lot of ground and offer some challenges.

RB: *And any concerts you've attended as an audience member that stand out?*

GH: The great thing about Chamber Music Club concerts in general is often that the items are short and you get to see a variety, so it seems invidious to mention them; but I did enjoy hearing my former SSEES colleague Barbara Wylie playing Bartók, in what may not strictly have been a CMC concert, but I believe Rupert Bawden also took part.

The other thing is the ones I did not hear or participate in and regret – such as Helene's celebration of Kodály and his legacy in music teaching.

RB: *You've mentioned SSEES. For our 'Russian modernism' concert three years ago you helped with the pronunciation and translation of Russian texts. How did you come to know the language?*

GH: My secondary school offered Russian as a modern language, and quite a number of us took it to O-level. Rather fewer of us went on to the subject for A-level, but I was one of them. I was fascinated by the classic literature, and went on to read Russian at university.

RB: *You were elected to the committee in June 2019. Any comments so far about the operation of the committee? (Be honest!)*

GH: It was a revelation! Despite being a member for so long, and participating

in the concerts, I hadn't fully understood exactly how it worked in terms of pulling the concerts together. Some of my fears were realised – an increase in email traffic as well as regular meetings. Typical of modern life, getting the info we need for ourselves and the members, with developments like GDPR and a big financial transaction like the purchase of the new piano – to run the necessary items of a club properly and stay efficient of people's time – I'm sure it doesn't get easier!

RB: *How would you like to see the Club developing over the next few years? Are there important priorities that we should attend to?*

GH: I'm constantly amazed by the quality of the performances and slightly intimidated at times when I hear or learn about the musical life of the fellow members. To paraphrase Groucho Marx 'I don't want to join a club that would have me as a member'.

I think the current life of universities, and living in London with long commutes, can take its toll on the capacity of members or potential members to commit to things outside their work and family life. Maybe even because there is such a rich musical life around us, people don't need the UCL bit to link them. I wonder whether people fully understand what chamber music is, or whether they just don't see that the club could be for them. Because chamber music generally needs fewer people to get together, in theory it could be easier logistically. But on the other hand, we need to help potential playing partners find each other. It's a bit like sport – my friend may play badminton or go running – but if they are far better or far worse than me they are maybe not the easiest or best person to do sport with on every occasion – but if you join 'parkrun' you'll find someone at your level to jog around with on the day and may find that by doing it you improve. For some of us that improvement may be so gradual as to be imperceptible, compared to others! In some cases the active involvement as well as the more passive company of those who are better will help us, such as those like yourself who take on direction of a group of singers. But it's unlike 'parkrun' in that people generally stay in the same place when they are making music so finding a location for lots of little groups can be a bit of a headache!

It may be good to link more to parts of the university where there could be professional connections – the languages and culture departments have been represented, but maybe more could be done to link the club into UCL cultural life and get it 'on the radar'. It's always a tension to keep the high standards of music-making and remain welcoming and offering opportunities to as diverse a group as we can. Music is constantly evolving and, however experienced or educated in it we are, I'm sure all the membership are constantly (re?)discovering its many different aspects, including how it benefits health, development and community, as well as the satisfaction of performance.

Gustav Holst, Sanskrit and UCL

If you go to www.ucl.ac.uk/about/who/history, click on 'Famous alumni' and scroll down to '1900s', you will find 'Gustav Holst (UCL Languages 1909)'. In 1909 Holst (1874-1934) was a busy man, establishing himself as a composer and directing music both at St Paul's Girls' School, Hammersmith and at Morley College. He was also married, with a two-year-old daughter. So what was he doing as, apparently, a language student at UCL?

The short answer is that he was studying Sanskrit, the ancient Indian language of Hindu literature. A little background will help. It is well known that Holst had a wide and eclectic range of interests which found their way into his music. As well as the enthusiasm for English folk-song which he shared with his lifelong friend Ralph Vaughan Williams, there is astrology (*The Planets*, 1916) and Gnosticism (*The Hymn of Jesus*, 1917). Not surprisingly, his interests extended to Indian culture at a time when the sub-continent was the 'jewel in the crown' of the British Empire. Whatever their views about, or experience of, the British Raj, many writers (most obviously Rudyard Kipling), artists (William Morris), and musicians were drawn to India as a source of inspiration. A thorough study of the Indian 'connection' in British musical life, from Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee to the end of the Raj, through an examination of six contrasting musicians, including Holst, can be found in Nalini Ghuman's book *Resonances of the Raj: India in the English musical imagination, 1897-1947* (see Bibliography).

Holst's own 'Indian' period, as far as his compositions are concerned, comprised approximately the first decade of the twentieth century. The main 'Indian' works of this time are the opera *Sita* (completed 1906), *Vedic Hymns* for solo voice and piano (1907-08), *Choral Hymns from the Rig Veda* (1908-12) – two of which were performed in the CMC concert on 30 May last year – the chamber opera *Sāvitrī* (1908) – a highly original masterpiece – and the choral work *The Cloud Messenger* (1909-10).

It was not only classical Indian literature and ideas which interested Holst. The extent to which he absorbed influences from actual Indian music into his own style – for example in his use of ostinati, pedal notes and unusual scales or modes – has been a matter of debate, but we can note that he certainly had opportunities to hear Indian music. Ghuman mentions various lectures and performances which took place in London in the 1890s and early 1900s, as well as early recordings, and points out that Holst was working in Scotland as a trombonist in the Scottish Orchestra at the time of the Glasgow International Exhibition of 1901, where he could have heard Indian musicians perform (*Resonances of the Raj*, pp.107-8). Furthermore, at some unspecified time, Holst sought technical advice on Indian music from Maud MacCarthy, who was a pioneer in the first-hand study of Indian music and its dissemination in the UK. In 1935 she wrote: 'I remember that fine composer, the

late Gustav Holst, coming to me years ago for “Indian scales”.

Never one to do things by halves, and dissatisfied with the Victorian translations of the ancient texts, Holst at some point set out to learn enough Sanskrit to enable him to make translations of his own, suitable for setting to music. As we have seen, it was in 1909 that he enrolled at UCL in order to attend Sanskrit classes. (If you’re wondering why he didn’t go to SOAS the answer is that SOAS did not exist: it was founded in 1916. To study the languages of India in London prior to that, UCL was clearly the place. It had an ‘Indian School’, whose primary purpose was to provide background knowledge and training for potential recruits to the Indian Civil Service.) Holst enrolled in January 1909 for terms 2 and 3 to attend classes for two hours per week as a ‘non-matriculated’ student, and re-enrolled in October 1909.

Now this is where matters become a little obscure. Holst’s 1909 attendance is well attested by internal UCL sources – his entry and re-entry forms, record card and entries in the Professors’ Fees Book – but otherwise only Wikipedia (as far as I’ve been able to ascertain) identifies 1909 as the year of his enrolment. In the Chronology prefacing the Thematic Catalogue of her father’s music Imogen Holst states that in 1898 (which would be immediately after his graduation from the Royal College of Music) he ‘studied Sanskrit at the University College, London’ (p.xiv); in the 1980 *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* she is less specific about the date, just writing in the section about his student days that he ‘had lessons at University College, London’; in the 2001 *New Grove* Colin Matthews more or less follows Imogen Holst: ‘At about this time [the later 1890s] he also became interested in Hindu literature and philosophy, and took lessons at University College, London.’ But this is all very much open to question. There is no actual evidence of his attending UCL around 1898/99, and the ‘First Entry Form’ that Holst filled in on registering in 1909 makes no mention of previous study at UCL – he gives his previous place of education as the Royal College of Music.

The solution, I think, is that Holst did study Sanskrit language and literature intermittently for something over a decade from 1898, and this includes a formal period of study at UCL in 1909-10; no doubt it would be easy enough to mix up these two pieces of information. He may, as Paul Holmes states, have enquired about classes at UCL around 1898, but there is no reason to suppose that he joined any classes at that time.

At this point we should mention two figures: Dr Mabel Bode (1864-1922) and Romesh Chandra – or Chunder – Dutt (1848-1909). Mabel Bode was a leading scholar of Pāli, the language of Indian Buddhist scriptures, but also had expertise in Sanskrit. She had studied at various times in the 1890s at UCL and in Berne and Paris. She was appointed to the Indian School at UCL in 1909 as an Assistant to teach Pāli and Buddhist Literature as well as Sanskrit; in 1911 she became Lecturer in Pāli and Buddhist Literature. Romesh Dutt had been in the Indian Civil Service;

FIRST ENTRY FORM.
Form to be filled up by NON-MATRICULATED Students of the University wishing to enter the College.

UNIVERSITY OF LONDON.
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE.

Name in full: *Gustav Theodor von Holst*
 Address while attending the College: *22 Green Street, Brunswick Square, C. The Terrace, Brixton, S.W.*
 Home Address (if not as above):
 Date of Birth: *Sep 21 1874*
 Previous place of education: *Royal College of Music*
 Scholarship or Exhibition tenable at College:
 Last Public Examination passed (if any) and date:
 Next Public Examination in view (if any) and date:
 Name and Address of Parent or Guardian:
 (The person named here undertakes to be responsible for the payment of College dues.)

Proposed Course of Study in the Faculty of:

Subjects.	Description of Class, Quota Index Letter.
<i>Sanskrit</i>	<i>2-2, 3-4, 7-9 B.S. -</i>

(Included in Composition Fee.)
 Union Society: _____
 Ordinary Subscription: _____

I, the undersigned, do hereby engage that I will conform to such regulations as have been, or may be, made for the maintenance of order in the College and in the Classes which I attend.

Date: *Jan 14* 1909
 (Signed) *G von Holst*
 Approved by the Faculty: _____ 1909

Amount of Fees and Date of Payment: *£ 3.5.0* *20/1/09*

RE-ENTRY FORM.
Form to be filled up at the beginning of each Session by Students who are not Matriculated Students of the University and are re-entering the College.

UNIVERSITY OF LONDON.
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE.

Name in full: *Gustav von Holst*
 Address while attending the College: *10 The Terrace, Brixton, S.W.*
 Home Address (if not as above):
 Public Examination (if any) passed since the commencement of the preceding Session:
 None
 Next Public Examination (if any) in view: *None*
 Name and Address of Parent or Guardian:
 (The person named here undertakes to be responsible for the payment of College dues.)

Proposed Course of Study in the Faculty of: *Arts*

Subjects.	Description of Class, Quota Index Letter.
<i>Sanskrit</i>	<i>2-2, 3-4, 7-9 B.S. -</i>
<i>2 Hours a week</i>	<i>£ 3.3.0 - Section Special fee</i>

(Included in Composition Fee.)
 Union Society: _____
 Ordinary Subscription: _____

Date: *Oct 19* 1909
 Approved by the Faculty: _____ 1909

Amount of Fees and Date of Payment: *£ 3.3.0* *20/1/09*

Sanskrit *Mrs Bose* *260*

Class	Subject	Fee	Total
<i>1st</i>	<i>Sanskrit</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>13 4</i>
<i>2nd</i>	<i>Sanskrit</i>	<i>2 2</i>	
<i>3rd</i>	<i>Sanskrit</i>	<i>3 3</i>	
<i>4th</i>	<i>Sanskrit</i>	<i>2 2</i>	
<i>5th</i>	<i>Sanskrit</i>	<i>3 3</i>	
		<i>10 10</i>	
		<i>10 10</i>	
		<i>10 10</i>	
		<i>3 6 8</i>	
		<i>6 13 4</i>	

Call Share 1/21 = 10-
do 1/3 of total = 3.6.8

All photos courtesy of UCL Special Collections.

he was an economic historian, and a translator of the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata*. He taught at UCL between 1898 and 1904, holding the post of Lecturer in Ancient Indian History.

It appears that Holst's Sanskrit studies did indeed begin in about 1898/99 with Dr Bode. Since she was abroad at various times and he was working as an orchestral trombonist, the extent and regularity of his studies must have been limited. He was also acquainted with Dutt, corresponding with him in 1901 about the libretto of a projected opera (which became *Sita*). This provides at least an indirect link with UCL, and Holst may indeed have heard Dutt lecture there. His interest in Sanskrit may have been renewed around 1907/08 in connection with the composition of *Sāvitrī* and the solo and choral *Rig Veda* settings. According to Raymond Head he purchased Edward D. Perry's *A Sanskrit Primer* in July 1908, and seems to have worked his way through the first nineteen lessons. We can perhaps speculate that he then sought to refresh and further his Sanskrit studies formally. Did Mabel Bode (who had become, and remained for the rest of her life, a family friend) encourage him to enrol at UCL, or did he perhaps decide that this was the obvious thing to do? As we have seen, he joined the College in January 1909. If we assume that Mabel Bode's employment at UCL began in the autumn term of 1909, then Holst would initially have been taught by Professor L.D. Barnett. Thereafter he studied with Dr Bode: the Professors' Fees Book for 1909-10 records Holst's name and fees, with payment made to her by the College.

As an aside, we may note that Holst registered at UCL as Gustav Theodore von Holst. His mother was English, but his father was of predominantly German ancestry (with some Swedish and Latvian). For more than half his career he was known as Gustav von Holst, his works were published under that name, reviews and the like referred to 'Mr von Holst', he signed letters GVH, and Vaughan Williams wrote to him affectionately as 'Dear Von'. It was not until September 1918 that he formally dropped the 'von': he was part of an educational mission sent by the YMCA to British troops in the eastern Mediterranean, and he felt (or was advised) that a German-sounding name would not go down too well with the soldiers. (In fact the adjustment of his name came, comparatively speaking, rather late. At the outset of the First World War Russia's capital St Petersburg became Petrograd; and in July 1917 the British royal family changed its name from Saxe-Coburg Gotha to the rather more patriotic Windsor, while its Battenberg cousins became Mountbatten. Petrograd changed to Leningrad in 1924, but in recent years has reverted to being St Petersburg. It is difficult to imagine, however, that the House of Windsor and the Mountbattens will ever readopt their German names; and it seems unlikely that any campaign to restore his 'von' to Gustav Holst would get very far!)

There is one further puzzle. While Imogen Holst has her father studying at UCL in 1898, as quoted above, in her biography of him she says that in 1899 he

was 'a student in the School of Oriental Languages at the London Institution', and furthermore: 'His Professor was Dr. Mabel Bode' (p.22). A number of other writers seem to take their lead from Imogen. Michael Short's biography (p.37) states that 'he enrolled at the London School of Oriental Languages to take a course in Sanskrit.' Ghuman, in *Resonances of the Raj*, writes that in 1899 Holst 'began to learn the Devanāgarī script and to read Sanskrit literature at the School of Oriental Languages in London with Dr Mabel Bode' (p.105). Tim Rayborn, citing Imogen and Short, refers to Dr Bode 'of the School of Oriental Languages at the London Institution' (p.95); while Jon C. Mitchell, in his *Comprehensive Biography*, writes that in 1899 Holst 'enrolled at the London School of Oriental Languages' (p.22). If Imogen's account is unreliable, then so of course are all the others. The issue again is a lack of evidence. It is difficult to find any trace of 'the School of Oriental Languages' or 'the London School of Oriental Languages'. Such a body may well have existed, though it could hardly have competed with UCL in terms of the prestige and expertise of its tutors; but so far I have found no references to it apart from those above. Meanwhile, an internet search for information about Dr Bode – admittedly not exhaustive – has yielded no mention of her teaching (let alone being a Professor) at this school, although other details of her academic activities can easily be found. (Strangely, an anonymous internet source mentions Holst as her *private* pupil in 1912, which does not seem very likely.) What about the London Institution? This certainly did exist, from 1805 to 1933. It was founded 'to promote the diffusion of Science, Literature and the Arts', but its main activities in the nineteenth century were in the field of scientific education. In 1912 the Institution, by that time in decline, moved out of its Finsbury Circus building and at the recommendation of the Royal Commission on University Education in London the premises were taken over by London University to house its new School of Oriental Studies (which became SOAS). Could this tenuous connection between the Institution and Oriental studies be the source of some confusion on the part of Holst's biographers? Or did the Institution in fact include Oriental studies in its activities (and appropriate texts in its very well-equipped library)? The evidence may exist somewhere...

A final, speculative thought. Gustav (von) Holst attended Sanskrit classes at UCL in 1909-10. At that time UCL's Professor of Latin was A.E. Housman. He was probably the leading Latinist of his day, but of course he was famous throughout the UK as a poet, author of the enormously popular *A Shropshire Lad*. His poems were set to music by numerous composers in the twentieth century (but not by Holst) – early examples are the song-cycles by Arthur Somervell (1904) and Vaughan Williams (1906-09). I wonder whether the distinguished Professor (and great poet) and the modest but determined part-time student (and great composer) may perhaps for a moment have passed by one another, unrecognised, somewhere

on our UCL campus?

Roger Beeson

with thanks to Robert Winckworth of UCL Special Collections, Archives & Records

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