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*Jupiter: The Musical Journey of Outward Conflict and Inner Resolution*

Gustav Holst's glorious orchestral suite, *The Planets*, is one of the most celebrated and performed English works of the Twentieth Century. Its lavish orchestration and unforgettable motives have propelled the work into the forefront of standard orchestral repertoire. Written between the years of 1914 and 1916, *The Planets* embodies the "English" style that Holst and contemporaries such as Vaughn-Williams tried to foster through their compositions. Each of its seven movements is named after a planet, excluding Earth and Pluto, and corresponds to a Roman deity. The fact that Earth is not a part of the musical picture implies that Holst intended *The Planets* to have an astrological basis, not an astronomical one. The movements convey stimulating ideas and emotions associated with the human psyche and, as they unfold, seem to depict the progression of life.

One of the most compelling movements of the entire suite is *Jupiter, The Bringer of Jolity*. While the entire suite merits an in-depth examination, the excitement, grace, and nuance of this fourth movement in particular warrant a closer analysis. Listening to *Jupiter* multiple times leads to further discoveries about the piece, and, most importantly, leads to further questions regarding its musical characteristics. On the surface of the

piece, there is a strong sense of conflict between various musical aspects. However, the overall mood of the piece is uplifting, celebratory, and triumphant. Analysis of the form, thematic and motivic structure, the central and well-known hymn section, and the overall tonality of the piece serves to reconcile the outward conflicts within *Jupiter* and provide possible answers to musical questions.

An integral aspect of *Jupiter* is the variety of distinct themes that appear throughout the piece. These themes create a whirlwind of emotions through contrasting timbres, orchestration, and overall mood. Holst introduces each of the six major themes in direct succession during the first half of the piece. What is most striking about the way in which Holst presents each theme is the lack of musical transition between them. Each theme ends precisely as the next one begins, and there is little or no overlap connecting one theme to another. Following the sixth or central theme, each theme is presented again at least once in a similar manner to the first presentation, giving the piece as a whole a loose ABA form. Although the themes seem to flow more fluidly together the second time through, a complete sense of continuity is still absent. However, analyzing these themes reveals that they share integral musical material despite their lack of connectivity on the surface.

The sixth and perhaps most well known portion of the piece is the hymn theme in the middle of *Jupiter*. This section of the music is the most separated from the rest in terms of its texture, timbre, and mood. It does not have any musical introduction and simply begins out of the blue. The lavish string orchestration and noble and sacred tone of this section set it apart from the other themes as a special point in the piece. Upon a cursory listen and overview of the music of the central theme,

it bears no resemblance to the rest of the piece. However, a closer look at its underlying motivic structure reveals a strong connection between the central melody and the surrounding themes and, ultimately, a powerful relationship among all of the themes in general.

The opening three notes of the hymn section drive the deeply lyrical theme throughout this portion of *Jupiter*. The motivic grouping of a minor third between the first two notes followed by a resolution to an interval of a perfect fourth between the first and third notes is the cornerstone of this central section. In the case of the beginning of the hymn theme, this central motive is evident in the melodic motion from the concert G to the B-flat followed by a C on the downbeat of the first full measure of the theme (See the bracketed notes in Figure 1.). The rhythmic relationship of two “fast” notes followed by one of longer value (the C in this case) is also an important motivic feature of this theme. In order to make a connection between this central hymn and the remaining themes of *Jupiter*, we must analyze the other five themes with respect to the aforementioned motivic foundation.



Figure 1. The sixth/hymn/central theme of *Jupiter* (mm. 209-217)

The opening theme of *Jupiter* jumpstarts the piece with syncopated rhythms and flashy sixteenth notes (See Figure 2.). The french horns, violas, and cellos have the melodic line first followed by the low brass, low woodwinds, and string bass during the repetition of the theme. This opening line is filled with vigor and propulsion, yet it harbors a mysterious quality of covert excitement. The low register of the instruments that play the theme in addition to the trumpet crescendo beginning in measure 12 create an excitingly tense atmosphere, and it seems as through something most exhilarating is bound to happen throughout the entire opening section. While this theme does not explicitly feature the consecutive minor third and perfect fourth intervals, it does highlight the relationship between the concert G and B and the interval of a major third. This relationship can be seen explicitly in the first measure of the theme as well as in the second, fourth, and sixth measures (See the grouped notes in Figure 2.).



Figure 2. Opening Theme (mm. 6-12)

As we move to the second theme of *Jupiter* we get closer to the central motive. This theme can be regarded as a fanfare because the opening four measures of the melodic line feature a glorious call on the French horn. The music of the remaining four measures of the theme is syncopated and grounds the exuberance of the previous material. While this Fanfare Theme similarly does not feature the sequential movement

from an interval of a minor third to that of a perfect fourth, it prominently features the interval of a fourth. In the first and second measures, the distance between each pair of successive notes within each measure is that of a perfect fourth (G to C and C to F in the first measure). The third measure also features the movement from G to C to F and moves from G to D on the downbeat of the fourth measure. The syncopated section also contains perfect-fourth intervals including the D to the G (a twelfth) and the F to the C in fifth measure and the D to the A in the fifth and sixth measures. (See Figure 3 for an illustration of these groupings.) In addition to the notes, the eighth-note and quarter note rhythm of the first two measures mimics the rhythmic motive of the central theme.



Figure 3. Fanfare Theme (mm.29-36)

The third theme, labeled “pesante” in the score, is the shortest theme within *Jupiter*, but it contains motivic material that is the closest, thus far, to that of the central theme. The violins have the melody which is full of intervals spanning the range of a third and fourth. The opening motive is almost identical to the minor third to perfect fourth motive and features an eighth-note C-sharp to an eighth-note E-sharp followed by a quarter note F-sharp (See Figure 4). Aside from the fact that the interval between the C-sharp and the E-sharp is a major third, the two motives from the different themes are identical. The second measure of the four-measure Pesante Theme is a repeat of the first,

but the third to the fourth measures contain the exact intervals of the central motive (a minor third between F-sharp and A and a perfect fourth between F-sharp and B). As we move through the themes towards the central theme and continue to analyze each of the themes in relation to the central motive, it is evident that the themes share progressively more material with the central hymn.



Figure 4. Pesante Theme (mm. 45-48)

In the fifth “molto pesante” theme, we finally have a motivic basis that mirrors that of the central theme. The violins, once again, have the melody along with the violas and cellos. Although in a different time and key signature than the central melody, the beginning of the Molto Pesante theme mimics the familiar central motive in terms of its rhythmic and motivic structure. The movement from the B to the D to the E marks the beginning of each new phrase of this theme and closely links it to the principle motive (See Figure 5.)



Figure 5. Molto Pesante Theme (mm. 65-71)

The fifth and final theme of *Jupiter* before the central theme can be regarded as a “folk” theme on account of its dance-like quality and triple meter. The horns, followed by the trumpets and tuba, have the melody of this theme. While the rhythmic structure and motivic structure of the Folk Theme are not identical to the central motive, the basic intervals of a minor third and a perfect fourth are still present. The first, third, and fifth measures of this dance-like theme contain a descending interval of a fourth followed by an ascending interval of a major second between the second and third notes (See Figure 6.). Thus, this theme does contain both of the cornerstone intervals of the main motive, the perfect fourth and minor third.

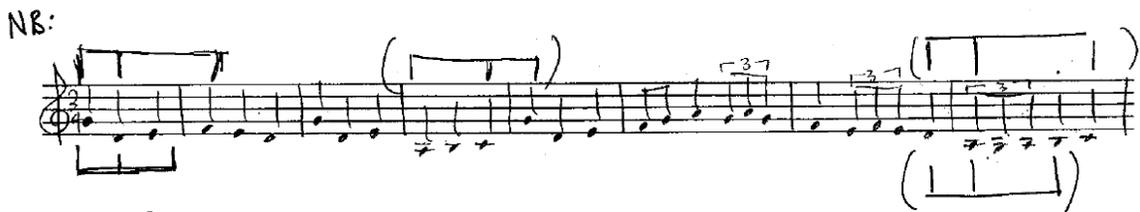


Figure 6. Folk Theme (mm. 65-71)

Going back even further in *The Planets* to the second movement *Venus, Bringer of Peace* reveals the earliest foreshadowing of the central theme. In the opening section of this tranquil movement, a solo violin has a lyrical melodic line. The end of this melody features the all-important skip of a minor third up to a perfect fourth. As depicted in Figure 7, the violin has a dotted eighth note D to sixteenth note F on the upbeat of the fourth measure to a G on the downbeat of the fifth. The melodic line stops here, as the G is held for the entire measure. The central theme can be regarded as a

development of the conclusion of this solo violin melody because the ending of the violin melody contains the distinctive interval of a minor third and the range of a fourth that characterizes the upbeat and downbeat of the of the phrases in the central theme.



Figure 7. Solo violins melody in *Venus* (mm. 32-36)

The preceding analysis of the various themes in *Jupiter* and even the foreshadowing theme from *Venus* reveals that Holst took great care to subtly prepare the important central theme and did not just insert it adventitiously. All of the aforementioned themes are related in one form or another to the central theme and are, most importantly, connected to each other. This demonstrates the care with which Holst strove to link each seemingly disjoint section of *Jupiter*. Even though a cursory overview of the movement can lead to the conclusion that each theme stands alone, separate from the rest of the piece, an in-depth analysis exposes a common motivic thread running throughout that serves to connect all of the sections of *Jupiter* on a deeper musical level.

Moving to the question of tonality within *Jupiter* uncovers another seemingly conflicting aspect of the music. The music of the early Twentieth-Century English composers was unique in the sense that composers shied away from writing traditionally tonal music and embraced modal music in an effort to create a distinct English style of music composition. Tonal music is characterized by fundamental and indispensable

elements of harmonic function premised upon the relationship between Tonic and Dominant whereas modal music contains much less diatonic functionality and an unclear center of tone. In this sense, *Jupiter* can be considered modal music. Many of the sections of the piece are ambiguous in terms of key and are void of the typical harmonic progressions found in traditionally tonal music.

A closer examination of the first few phrases of the central hymn section exposes a conflict between the melodic line and harmony, ultimately demonstrating Holst's use of modality. We turn to the harmonic analysis in Figure 8 to illustrate the qualities that allow us to characterize this section as modal. The top line is the melodic line of the violins and the bottom system is the harp part. While there are many other instruments playing in this section, the chords of the harp contain every note that is heard in the other voices. Therefore, the music that the harp plays is a good reduction of the harmony.

The image shows a musical score for the central theme of Holst's *Jupiter*. The top staff is the violin part, marked *arco* and *mf*. The bottom system consists of two staves for the harp, also marked *mf*. Below the harp staves is a Roman numeral analysis of the chords. The key signature is three flats (E-flat major). The analysis is as follows:

IV	V	I <sup>b</sup>	I <sub>5</sub> <sup>b</sup>	IV	V	vii <sup>o</sup>	iii <sup>b</sup>	IV	V	I <sup>b</sup>	I	IV <sup>7</sup>	ii <sup>b</sup>
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Figure 8. Roman numeral analysis of the central theme

Assigning roman numerals to the chords based upon the key signature of three flats reveals that the harmony is, for the most part, in the key of E-flat. The E-flat major

chord (more specifically I6) is featured multiple times throughout these measures, and the second phrase ends with all of the instruments playing the note of E-flat. (This note is omitted from the analysis but directly follows the final chord in the last measure of Figure 8.) However, the most striking characteristic of this music is the lack of a leading tone. As a result, the chords seem to float by without a clear direction. There is no use of a leading tone in the traditional sense and there are no dominant seventh to tonic cadences to fully tonicize the key of E-flat major. The progression from V to I6 appears a few times throughout this portion of the music, but there is no traditional movement from V7 to I. In addition, the E-flats (not illustrated above) at the end of the second phrase, which suggests an E-flat chord, are not preceded by a dominant chord. Instead they are preceded by a ii6/4 chord. This type of progression and lack of a clear dominant to tonic harmony strongly indicate that the music is modal.

Looking closely at the violin melody and central theme, this line appears to be in the key of C minor, the relative minor of E-flat major. The movement from the G to the downbeat on the note C at the beginning of the theme suggests a dominant to tonic harmony. In addition, C is the central note of the theme. It returns the most often and is almost always approached in a step-wise fashion. However, as the harmony lacks a leading tone, so does this violin melody. Instead of a B-natural leading to the C, we have a B-flat. This allows the theme to lean more towards the natural minor mode rather than the traditional harmonic minor that features the raised seventh-tone or leading tone of the scale.

The only way to reconcile the clash between the melody and harmony, the lack of a leading tone, and the absence of a clear dominant to tonic harmony is to characterize

the section as modal. Since the music is no longer tonal, expectations of harmonic progression and traditional movement from one chord to the next do not have to be met. It is perfectly acceptable to lack a clear tonal center and be unable to characterize the music as a whole in a particular key. Modality allowed composers such as Holst to create unique moods and atmospheres without the restrictions of traditional harmony. Modality is evident throughout *Jupiter*, and the largely expressive nature of each individual thematic event is due, in part, to Holst's ability to employ and utilize the different modes in inventive and creative ways.

The superficial conflicts that arise within *Jupiter* are an essential part of the beauty and mystery behind this piece. Whether Holst appears to have failed to link the thematic sections of the movement or has made the key ambiguous, there is always a deeper explanation for and reconciliation of the musical contradictions that he creates. This most striking feature of *Jupiter* accounts for the fact that underneath the conflicts on the surface of the music lies such celebratory zeal and climactic passion that an overwhelming air of unrestrained glory rises above the piece as a whole. Holst's focus and attention to the interplay between the outward conflicts and their profound musical resolutions allows *Jupiter* to shine brilliantly as a magnificent piece of musical expression.