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Welcome to Busy Kids Love Music, the podcast for busy families and kids who love music and want to learn more about their favorite composers, instruments and styles of music. I'm your host, Carly Seifert, the creator of Busy Kids Do Piano, and today we are kicking off a special 3-part series on the life and music of the great composer, Gustav Holst. In this first episode, we'll explore Holst's family life, his early interest in music, his musical training, and some of the unique characteristics that make his compositions stand out.

Gustav Holst was born on September 21, 1874, in Cheltenham, England. He came from a musical family, so you could say that music was in his blood. His Swedish father, Adolph von Holst, was a professional musician who played the piano and taught music. His mother, Clara, was a singer and pianist, but sadly, she passed away when Gustav was just eight years old. His family then moved so his Aunt Nina could help with the upbringing of Gustav and his brothers.

Growing up, Gustav's family encouraged his musical talents. His father gave him his first piano lessons, and he also learned to play the violin and the trombone. However, Holst was often plagued by poor health, including severe asthma and problems with his eyesight, which made it difficult for him to practice for long periods. Because he also suffered from neuritis, a disease which affected his arm, playing the piano was difficult and he focused mostly on trombone.

Despite these challenges, Holst's passion for music never waned. At the age of twelve, he began composing, and his father proudly supported him by arranging for his early compositions to be performed. Holst knew that he wanted to pursue music seriously, so he applied to the Royal College of Music in London. Initially, he was rejected, but he didn't give up. He continued to work hard and eventually gained admission in 1893.

At the Royal College of Music, Holst studied composition with Sir Charles Villiers Stanford and also took lessons in the trombone. These years were formative for him, not only because of the technical skills he developed but also because of the lifelong friendships he formed, including with fellow composer Ralph Vaughan Williams. Vaughan-Williams and Holst would play their latest compositions for one another while they worked on them, each criticizing and helping the other to help make their compositions even better.

Gustav Holst married Isobel Harrison in 1901, who was a soprano and former student of his at the Royal College of Music. The couple had one daughter, Imogen Holst, born in 1907. Imogen followed in her father's footsteps, becoming a respected composer, conductor, and musicologist in her own right. The Holst family was close-knit, with Isobel supporting Gustav through his many health challenges and Imogen inheriting and preserving her father's musical legacy. Their home was often filled with music, and Gustav's family played a crucial role in his personal and professional life, providing him with both inspiration and support.

Holst soon became known for his ability to incorporate different influences into his compositions. He was particularly interested in English folk music, which he felt brought a unique character to his work. Additionally, Holst was fascinated by the music of other cultures, particularly Indian music, which he studied and even incorporated into some of his compositions, such as in the opera you're listening to now, called *Savitri*, which is based on an ancient Sanskrit text.

One of the trademarks of Holst's music is his ability to blend these diverse influences into a cohesive and original style. He often used innovative harmonies and complex rhythms, which gave his music a distinctive sound. Holst was also known for his interest in astrology, which inspired one of his most famous works, "The Planets." Each movement of "The Planets" suite is named after a different planet and

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reflects its astrological character, and we'll be exploring that work in more depth during the next episode of Busy Kids Love Music.

Holst's dedication to his craft and his willingness to explore new musical territories made him a unique figure in the world of classical music. Although he faced many challenges, including health issues and the initial struggle to gain recognition, his perseverance paid off, and today, he is celebrated as one of the great composers of the 20th century. If you head to this episode's show notes at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/130, I've put together a curated playlist of some of Gustav Holst's most famous works – including the entirety of the pieces you heard excerpts of in today's episode. Again, you'll find that playlist linked at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/130.

That's all for today's episode of Busy Kids Love Music. I hope you enjoyed learning about the life of Gustav Holst. In our next episode, we'll dive deeper into some of his most famous works, including "The Planets." Be sure to tune in and discover the magic of Holst's music. Until next time, keep exploring music, and I look forward to connecting with you again in 2 weeks as our series continues. Bye for now!