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Welcome back to Busy Kids Love Music, the podcast for busy kids who love music, and their families, too, of course! I'm your host, Carly Seifert, the creator of Busy Kids Do Piano, and today we are diving into the second episode of our three-part series on the incredible composer Gustav Holst. In our first episode, we learned about Holst's life and musical style, and I will link to that episode in the show notes in case you missed it. Today, we'll explore one of his most famous and beloved works: The Planets

Holst's *The Planets* is a suite of seven movements, each named after a planet in our solar system and its corresponding astrological character. A suite in music is a collection of short musical pieces or movements that are grouped together and intended to be performed as a single work. Each movement in a suite typically has a distinct character or mood – in this case, the characters are the planets themselves!

Holst was fascinated by astrology. Astrology is the study of how the positions and movements of the stars and planets might influence people's lives and events on Earth. Some people, like Gustav Holst, believe that by looking at the stars and planets, they can learn about personalities, people and even predict future events. This fascination played a significant role in the creation of The Planets.

Before we dive into the music, let's talk about what a character piece is. A character piece is a type of instrumental music that portrays a specific mood, scene, or character. In *The Planets*, each movement is a character piece, representing the astrological traits associated with each planet in Roman mythology.

The first movement is the one you're listening to now: "Mars, the Bringer of War." This powerful and intense piece sets the stage with its relentless rhythm and bold brass fanfares. Holst wrote this

movement just before the outbreak of World War I, and its aggressive nature seems to foreshadow the conflict to come.

An early outline of Holst's suite listed Mercury as number one, which may suggest Holst intended to write about the planets in their order of nearest to the sun from the farthest, but in the end, Holst decided to open with the disturbing and dramatic character of Mars.

Next, we move to a complete contrast with "Venus, the Bringer of Peace." This serene and gentle movement features beautiful, flowing melodies and lush harmonies. It's like a calm oasis after the storm of Mars. The movement starts with a solo horn theme that is answered with quiet melodies from the flutes and oboes. The solo violin plays the second theme of this piece.

"Mercury, the Winged Messenger" is the third movement, and it's all about speed and lightness. In Roman mythology, Mercury is the god of commerce, communication, and travelers. He is often depicted as a swift messenger with winged sandals and a winged helmet, allowing him to move quickly and freely. Mercury is known for his cleverness and agility, always darting about and bringing messages between gods and humans.

In Holst's *The Planets*, "Mercury, the Winged Messenger" captures these qualities through quick, lively melodies and light, rapid orchestration.

The music is fast-paced and playful, with sudden changes in dynamics and rhythm that evoke the swift and unpredictable nature of Mercury. Does the music help you to imagine Mercury, flying through the stars to deliver his messages?

The fourth movement, "Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity," is one of the most famous and uplifting parts of the suite.

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In Roman mythology, Jupiter is the king of the gods. He rules over the sky and thunder and is often shown holding a thunderbolt. Jupiter is very powerful and is known for being a strong and fair leader, protecting people and making sure things are just.

In Holst's suite, "Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity" shows us what Jupiter might be like through music. This part of the music is very happy and full of energy, with big, exciting tunes that make you feel like celebrating. The music is grand and joyful, just like how you might imagine a mighty and kind king. One of the most famous parts of this music became a hymn called "I Vow to Thee, My Country," which shows Jupiter's strength and his happy, generous spirit.

Next, we have "Saturn, the Bringer of Old Age." In Roman mythology, Saturn is the god of time and harvest. He is often shown as an older person, representing wisdom and the passing of time. Saturn is connected to the idea of planting and harvesting crops, as well as getting older and the changes that come with it.

In Holst's *The Planets*, "Saturn, the Bringer of Old Age" captures the serious and thoughtful nature of Saturn. The music starts slow and steady, like a clock ticking away time. As it goes on, the music becomes more intense, making you feel the weight of getting older. The melodies are calm and serious, making you think about the wisdom that comes with age and the passage of time, just like Saturn.