

## Critical Analysis – Mars by Gustav Holst

Mars is a planet, and is named after the Greek god of war. Gustav Holst, a composer, wrote a piece of music called Mars. His music was influenced by astrology and mythology, and the Greek idea of the "Music of the Spheres". As well as Mars he composed music named after all the planets and their Greek god names that it represented (except Earth) this was called "The Planets Suite".

The low tones and the use of the flat notes used in Mars gives us an insight of the merciless horrors of war as well as giving a supernatural touch to the music, this as well as the forceful and powerful aspect to the music, gives us an idea that the music may be about gods at war. Holst directed that Mars should be played slightly faster than a regular march, giving it an inhuman character. This further proves my point that Mars may be about gods at war.

Mars is Gustav Holst's most famous piece of music, and has been quoted in everything from Carl Sagan's Cosmos, reality television shows to video games, such as Outpost and Super Mario Bros 3 as well as being played in concerts and many more places. Hence the music was originally intended for concerts, halls as well as the theatre and was to be shown to the audiences there, the music was first performed in the autumn of 1918 but nowadays because of its forceful nature it features in games, television shows and concerts alike.

I think that the message being portrayed in this music is the fact that war is unrepentant, unrelenting and merciless and it offers us no hope of redemption. The other message in the music is that war is a reality and the full horror of war and its vast number of consequences is much too severe then to have first imagined. Many are often surprised to learn that Gustav Holst actually finished Mars just before the horrors of World War I. Also that war causes a lot of bloodshed and innocent lives are always taken.

The music begins with forceful energetic movement. Percussion and stringed instruments are used in a rhythmic sequence, forming an ostinato that gives the section its pulsing, relentless pace. Mars "The bringer of war" immediately establishes his aggressive character through a low, menacing melody. Unresolved harmonies and unrelated chords are used, creating a clash that rightly represent conflict. This ostinato rhythm disappears and reappears as the music moves through several scenes, firstly a triumphant march and then the chaotic heat of battle and the rage of bloodshed. Generous use of brass instruments amplifies the military tone. The use of triplets, quarter-notes, and eighths dominates the ostinato, but they now pound in short pulses separated by silence. At the end, the piece dissolves into a uproar of brass and percussion and comes to its emphatic close.

From listening to the music, I would say that the location of the war would be in the outer world (in our solar system) where all the Greek gods such as Zeus and other gods would be fighting. The music Mars was written when astrology was

reaching its peak and when astrologist were looking for new planets this also influenced his work.

The music has many strengths such as the way the music builds up. Also the way that the music makes you reflect on different things like the low notes makes understand that war is unrepentant and causes blood shed. The steady beat represents the persistent march of the soldiers. The use of dynamics adds texture and a sense of power to the music. To find a weakness in a music of such superior quality was quite hard but on listening to the music again I found that the music didn't flow as well as I first thought if I could change something about the music this is what I would change. Mars is a really strong and powerful piece of music an I think it works really well, the fact that it has been used in countless number of cases proves the fact that Mars works really well as a piece of music.