



QUEER URBAN ORCHESTRA
presents

QUEER COSMOS

SAT • OCT 18 • 2025

St. Paul & St. Andrew
263 W 86th St • 8pm

David Bloom Artistic Director

QueerUrbanOrchestra.org

From the Artistic Director

Dear friends,

How to measure QUO's impact in 16 seasons? Light-years of music performed, gigawatts of smiles, parsecs of premieres, newtons of hugs? By any unit of measure, QUO's dedication to nurturing safe space for queer folk has been as essential as the Orchestra's contributions to orchestral music. That space has always been at the center of our organization, and now we're taking an entire year to celebrate that in our season, titled *A Place for Us*, celebrating the joy, beauty, and necessity of queer space.

Tonight's concert, *Queer Cosmos*, is (yes) a cheeky take on the meaning of queer space, but it also presents a vast imagination of where we can make safe space for queer communities: anywhere! Even as the universe expands, queer safe space on Earth seems to become less abundant, not more. That's why QUO is devoted to working harder for you and our community during challenging times.

We are thrilled to be joined tonight by some new friends: pianist **Isabelle O'Connell** is our soloist to premiere the revised version of **Viet Cuong's** *Stargazer*, and the **Brooklyn Treble Choir** joins us for both the ethereal finale of **Gustav Holst's** *The Planets* and for excerpts from *The Sun's Journey*, a rarely performed cantata by his daughter **Imogen Holst**, a gifted and innovative composer and conductor.

By being here tonight, you are demonstrating your enthusiasm and optimism for safe space for queer expression and solidarity. From all of us at QUO, thank you.

Lots of love,



David Bloom



Council on
the Arts

This program is made possible by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature.

NYC Cultural
Affairs

This program is also supported in part by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.



Queer Cosmos

Saturday, October 18, 2025 | 8 pm
The Church of St. Paul & St. Andrew | New York, NY

from **The Sun's Journey** (1965)

Imogen Holst

3. *Hark, the fair hour — Glorious and bright*
4. *Spring song*
12. *Winter's song*
13. *See what strange light appears!*
14. *Here in this mirror*

Brooklyn Treble Choir, Liz Geisewite — artistic director
Derek Weagle — conductor

Stargazer (2023, rev. 2025)

Viet Cuong

world premiere, revised version

Isabelle O'Connell — piano

— *Intermission* —

The Planets, Op. 32 (1914–1917)

Gustav Holst

- I. *Mars, the Bringer of War*
- II. *Venus, the Bringer of Peace*
- III. *Mercury, the Winged Messenger*
- IV. *Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity*
- V. *Saturn, the Bringer of Old Age*
- VI. *Uranus, the Magician*
- VII. *Neptune, the Mystic*

Brooklyn Treble Choir, Liz Geisewite — artistic director

*Please silence your phones, and recording is strictly
prohibited—let's keep the spotlight on the music!*

Violin I

Phong Ta ♦♦
Rafael Albertini
Amber Hansen Arney
Brian Harrington
Elaine Lee
Arielle Lubin
Connor Madsen
Richard Nguyen
Emerson Olson
Johann Palo
Joey Plaster
Nic Salas
Farzaneh Sarafranz
Dane Stalcup
Navida Stein
Liann Wadewitz
Trevor Wadleigh

Violin II

Tank Tan ♦♦
Jeanne Azzouni
Christian
Balmaseda-Lucca
alva bostick
Julia Case
Jocelyn Cheng
Wiqar Farooqi
Peter Fifield

Andre Gillard
Aaron Haines
Liam O'Brien
CoryAnn Pitts
Ligia Sakurai
Melissa Seefeldt
Bob Wei

Viola

Noah Green *
James Di Meglio ♦
Sam Cooper
Karishma Gottfried
JohnMark Ofrasio
Haley Pearson
Mason Pilevsky
Genevieve Pool
Nicholas Singletary
Jacob Szilagi
Nathan Threlkeld
Dustin Zuelke

Cello

Michael Viljoen *
Navin Manglani ♦
Claire Hebert
Alex Humesky
Lucie le Blanc
Maurice Lee
Michelle Leidecker

Steve McLure
Kate Penrose
Michael Richman
Nick Saunders
Penglong Zhu

Bass

Jared Chamoff ♦♦
Craig Klonowski
George Nicholson
Andrew Op't Hof
Barnaby Woods

Flute

Craig Devereaux ♦♦
Justin Lee
Bianca Morris *
Scott Oaks

Piccolo

Craig Devereaux ♦♦
Justin Lee

Alto Flute

Justin Lee

Oboe

Matthew Hadley ♦
Taemin Ahn
Heath Koch
Brian Shaw *

English Horn

Matthew Hadley ♦

Bass Oboe

Brian Shaw *

Clarinet

Francis Novak *
Daniel Olson ♦
Alice Petre

Bass Clarinet

Larry Beckhardt

Bassoon

David Lohman ♦♦
Kevin O'Brien
Chanelle Junio

Contrabassoon

Jonathan Stark

French Horn

Kyle Walker *
Lynn Caron ♦
Elizabeth Dejean
Bryan Jacobowitz
Lance Lucas
Eric Peterson
Wesley Richter

Trumpet

Julia Cohen ♦♦
Erin Kulick
Ron Nahass
Ryan Yacos

Trombone

Ryan Gochee *
Ryan McTernan

Bass Trombone

Alex Arellano ♦

Euphonium

Nick Denton

Tuba

Adam Rosenberg

Keyboards

Mark Galinovsky

Organ

Derek Weagle

Harp

Margery Fitts *
Maria Banks

Percussion

Andrew Berman ♦
Meredith Butterworth
Michaela Kiberstis
Jay Nерger
Àlvaro Rodas
Hannah Webster

♦ Concertmaster
* Principal
♦ Section Leader

QUO performing in 2023 at Symphony Space

Photo by David Lohman



About the Artists



Photo by Jiyang Chen

David Bloom *QUO Artistic Director*

David Bloom (he/him) is a conductor equally at home in orchestral repertoire, opera, and new music, noted for his "dazzling precision and grace" (*San Francisco Chronicle*), "intelligence, elegance, and passion" (*Opera News*), "ferocious and focused" (*The New York Times*) performances, and "breathtaking and inspired programming" (*Shepherd Express*). He dedicates his work to collaborating with artists and communities to inspire creativity, empathy, and joy.

In such venues as Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Walt Disney Concert Hall, Kennedy Center, and Park Avenue Armory, Bloom has guest conducted the Los Angeles Philharmonic, American Composers Orchestra, Washington National Opera, Opera Omaha, Central City Opera, Tri-Cities Opera, Bang on a Can All-Stars, The Crossing, Ensemble Connect, and Kronos Quartet and worked with such soloists and Dashon Burton, David Byrne, Anthony Roth Costanzo, Helga Davis, Isabel Leonard, Iarla Ó Lionáird, Courtney Love, Hila Plitmann, Dawn Upshaw, and Andrew Yee, and composers Clarice Assad, Courtney Bryan, John Corigliano, Donnacha Dennehy, Du Yun, inti figgis-vizueta, Michael Gordon, Nathalie Joachim, David Lang, Tania León, Andrew Norman, and Julia Wolfe. He conducted the opening of Lincoln Center's 2024 Summer for the City festival with a program of operatic standards and original songs with drag artists Sapphira Cristál, Monét X Change, and Thorgy Thor.

Since 2022, he has been Artistic Director of Queer Urban Orchestra, the only orchestra in the Northeast rooted in the LGBTQ+ community. He is also Principal Conductor of the orchestras at New York University, Co-Artistic Director of Contemporaneous, and Principal Conductor of Present Music. He has conducted over 500 world premieres, including the orchestral version of Philip Glass' *La Belle et la Bête* with Jean Cocteau's 1946 film, Dylan Mattingly's six-hour opera *Stranger Love*, and Raven Chacon's *Voiceless Mass*, which went on to win the 2022 Pulitzer Prize. He has recorded for the Nonesuch, Sony Masterworks, Cantaloupe, New Amsterdam, Innova, New Focus, Starkland, Kairos, and Navona labels.

Derek Weagle *QUO Associate Conductor*

Musician/Educator/Wearer-of-Many Hats **Derek J. Weagle** (they/them) is a Brooklyn-based artist and healer working in the medium of sound. Seeking the deepest joy in all things, they are invested in the disruption of cultural barriers around music-making, preserving it as a vital act of humanness. With a practice rooted in syncretism, Derek's musical and teaching styles draw from a wide breadth of experience, modality, and tradition. They are passionate about the fusion of these approaches as a means of authentic connection and collective healing.

Derek holds a M.M. with Academic Honors in Composition with a minor in Choral Conducting from the New England Conservatory and a B.M. in Music Education from the University of Massachusetts Lowell, certificates in Sound Healing from the Sage Academy of Sound in Woodstock, NY, and Biosonic Sound Repatterning with Dr. John Beaulieu. In 2025, they completed an Artist Diploma in Composition with a citation for Exceptional Achievement and a certificate in Contemporary Collaboration as a member of the Gabriela Ortiz Composing Studio at the O Academy Music Conservatory.

Derek's current engagements include work as a Sound Practitioner at Official Ritual, Founding Artistic Director of Bloom Sound Collective, Faculty at Juilliard Extension, Associate Conductor of the Queer Urban Orchestra, Co-Director of the Khôra Consort, Core Member of The Why Collective, Resident Music Director and Composer with Lucada Mélange, and the Refugee Orchestra Project Board of Directors. Their work as a composer has received recognition both nationally and internationally, including the American Prize in Composition, the International Horn Society, and in the International Composition Competition Harelbeke.



Photo by Erik McGregor



Photo by Stefan Seyfert

Isabelle O'Connell *Piano*

Since her Carnegie Hall debut recital in 2002, pianist **Isabelle O'Connell** has developed an international career as soloist and chamber musician that has taken her around the United States, Canada, Japan, Australia, New Zealand and Europe, to venues such as Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center, Chicago Cultural Center, Cleveland Museum of Art, Detroit Art Institute, the Gilmore Keyboard Festival, St David's Hall, Cardiff and the National Concert Hall, Ireland.

Isabelle is co-founder of Grand Band, a piano sextet described by the New York Times as: *"six of the finest, busiest pianists active in New York's contemporary-classical scene"*. Isabelle has performed as concerto soloist with the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland. She has also performed with Crash ensemble, Alarm Will Sound, Da Capo Chamber Players, the ConTempo and New Zealand String Quartets and is a member of the Friends of MATA ensemble.

Composers she has worked with include John Adams, John Luther Adams, Morton Subotnick, Meredith Monk, Julia Wolfe, Michael Gordon, Kevin Volans, Donnacha Dennehy, Dan Trueman, Bunita Marcus, amongst many others.

Isabelle has recorded for the Diatribe, Innova and Lyric fm labels. Her debut solo album RESERVOIR released in 2010 features solo piano music by nine contemporary Irish composers and for this The New Yorker hailed her as "the young Irish piano phenom". She recorded Kevin Volans' Concerto for Piano and Winds with the RTE NSO in 2014. A Fulbright scholar, Isabelle holds degrees from the Manhattan School of Music and the Royal Irish Academy of Music. She is currently on the piano faculty at Bard College, NY.

BROOKLYN TREBLE CHOIR

MAKING TREBLE IN BROOKLYN



Brooklyn Treble Choir *Liz Geisewite — artistic director*

Brooklyn Treble Choir is a multigenerational community ensemble dedicated to excellence in choral singing. Performing a varied, vibrant, and timely repertoire, with an emphasis on music by contemporary women and other underrepresented composers, their music reflects a broad range of human experience.

Founded in 2001 by Jessica Corbin as Bella Voce Singers, the choir has continuously strived to create a welcoming and safe space for women and gender minorities from all backgrounds and levels of musical knowledge. BK Treble is dedicated to building a shared vision of inclusion, community, and justice.



About the Music



Photo by George C. Beresford, 1926

Imogen Holst (1907–1984) *The Sun's Journey*

Sponsored by Peter Fifield in memory of Beryl L. Pettigrew (1929–2025)

Imogen Holst (1907–1984) was a British composer, conductor, teacher, and writer. But for far too long, she was known for being the daughter of Gustav Holst and the musical assistant for Benjamin Britten, another famous British composer. Born into a family of musicians, Holst composed her first works when she was ten years old. She enrolled at the Royal College of Music, one of the most prestigious music schools in the world, where she excelled as a student of composition.

After graduating from university in 1930, Holst joined the English Folk Dance and Song Society as a teacher and piano accompanist. During concerts, she would finish her piano parts and race to the stage for the country dance. At the Society, she developed her love for folk music by making instrumental and vocal arrangements for classic folk melodies. At the dawn of the Second World War, she joined the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts, an initiative that brought music to the far corners of war-ravaged Britain. Holst traveled the country on a shoestring budget, supporting amateur musical groups in the unlikeliest of places: a grocery store owner who conducted a choir in the back of his shop, a violinist postal worker who founded an orchestra, a gardener who loved sixteenth-century German recorder music. She conducted brass bands and women's choirs, organized concerts and sing-alongs. These responsibilities—and the chaos of living

through a war—kept her busy; she did not compose much in these years.

By the time she returned to composition in 1940, however, she had developed a distinct musical style that combined her love for folksong and dance with her interest in 16th and 17th century English music. She also added texture to her compositions by using dissonance and experimenting with scale patterns. In 1965, she was commissioned by the National Union of Townswomen's Guilds to write a choral-orchestral piece for their National Music Festival. The result was *The Sun's Journey*, a fourteen-movement piece "consisting of solo recitations, semi-chorus, and full-chorus and orchestrated for flutes, strings, percussion, and piano." The lyrics came from *The Sun's Darling*, a play written by John Ford and Thomas Dekker in 1656.

"I'm not really a composer," Imogen Holst explained in 1972. Throughout her life, she composed well over two hundred pieces, including an opera, a mass, and a ballet. If she's not a composer, nobody is.

Written by Elaine Lee

Text from *The Sun's Journey*

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>3. Hark, the fair hour is come.
Behold, the broad-eyed lamp of heaven
descending.
Glorious and bright, the broad-eyed lamp of
heaven descends,
Leaving awhile his sphere, to call men home.
All seasons shower your comforts down,
while swift time moves.
And hover, you winged musicians, in the air.</p> | <p>14. Here in this mirror,
Let man behold the circuit of his fortunes.
The season of the Spring dawns like the
Morning,
Bedewing Childhood with unrelish'd beauties.
The Summer, as the Noon,
Shines in delight of Youth,
and ripens strength to Autumn.</p> |
| <p>4. What bird so sings yet so does wail?
'Tis Philomel, 'tis Philomel, the Nightingale.
Jugg. (x6)
Terroo, Terroo, she cries,
Terroo. (x5)</p> | <p>Here in Autumn the Ev'ning grows,
And knits up all in felicity.
[In Autumn the Ev'ning grows, it grows to
Night.]</p> |
| <p>'Tis Philomel, 'tis Philomel, the Nightingale.
And hating earth, to heaven she flies, she flies.
To heaven she flies.
Hark! Hark, the Cuckoos sing.
To welcome, welcome in the Spring:
Cuckoo! (x5)</p> | <p>Winter at last draws on the Night of Age.
Winter draws on.
Henceforth Go all your ways in peace,
And no more Question the pow'r of external
greatness.</p> |
| <p>Brave prick song! Who is't now we hear?
'Tis the Lark's silver leer-a-leer.
Chirrup! Chirrup! The Sparrow flies away.
For he fell to't ere break of day.
Hark! Hark!</p> | <p>Man hath a double guard, if Time can win him;</p> |
| <p>Cuckoo! (x6)
The Cuckoos sing,
Cuckoo! (x3)</p> | <p>Heavn's pow'r above him,
his own peace within him. (x2)</p> |
| <p>13. See! What strange light appears! The Sun is up!</p> | <p>12. I am Winter, worn and spent.
So far with age, I am Time's monument.
Do not scorn my age.
My frosts and snows do purify the air,
From choking fogs, make the sky cleat and fair,
And tho' by nature cold and chill I be
Yet I am warm in bounteous charity;
And can by grave and sage advice,
Bring you to the happy shades of paradise.</p> |

The text for 'The Sun's Journey' is adapted from 'The Sun's Darling' (1624), a Jacobean play by John Ford and Thomas Dekker. Holst reworked lines from the original, drawing on its rich imagery and allegorical themes.



Photo by David Franco

Viet Cuong (b. 1990) *Stargazer*

Sponsored by Navin Manglani

Described as "alluring" and "stirring" (*The New York Times*), the "arresting" (*Gramophone*), "irresistible" (*San Francisco Chronicle*), and "exhilarating" (*Chicago Tribune*) music of Vietnamese-American composer **Viet Cuong** (b. 1990) has been commissioned and performed on six continents by musicians and ensembles such as the New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Eighth Blackbird, Kronos Quartet, Sandbox Percussion, Alarm Will Sound, Sō Percussion, PRISM Quartet, and Dallas Winds, among many others. Cuong's music has been featured in venues such as Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, NPR Music's Tiny Desk, the Kennedy Center, and National Gallery of Art, and his works for wind ensemble have garnered over a thousand performances worldwide.

A composer known for his imagination and colorful voice, Cuong strives to blend the whimsical with the profound, often finding new expressive possibilities through unexpected instrumental pairings and textures. This eclecticism extends to the variety of musical groups he writes for, and he has worked closely with ensembles ranging from middle school bands to Grammy-winning orchestras and chamber ensembles. Currently the Pacific Symphony's Composer-in-Residence, Cuong was also the California Symphony's Young American Composer-in-Residence from 2020-23. He has held artist residencies at Copland House, Yaddo, Ucross, the Atlantic Center for the Arts, and at Dumbarton Oaks, where he served as the 2020 Early-Career Musician-in-Residence.

Cuong serves as Assistant Professor of Music Composition and Theory at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, where he teaches composition, orchestration, and music theory. He has also served on the faculties of the Eighth Blackbird Creative Lab and Juilliard Summer Composition. He holds degrees in music composition from Princeton University (MFA/PhD), the Curtis Institute of Music (Artist Diploma), and the Peabody Conservatory (BM/MM). His mentors include Jennifer Higdon, David Serkin Ludwig, Donnacha Dennehy, Steve Mackey, Dan Trueman, Dmitri Tymoczko, Kevin Puts, and Oscar Bettison.

About *Stargazer*

Tonight marks the world premiere of the revised version of Viet Cuong's single-movement piano concerto, *Stargazer*. The work showcases Cuong's deft blending of two musical techniques, one old and one new. The old technique is that of an underlying cyclic bass line that provides the basic structure, not unlike a Baroque chaconne or ground bass. The newer technique mimics a tape delay, familiar from artists like the Beatles and Jimi Hendrix, in which music is recorded and then played back after a very brief delay. In *Stargazer*, it's as if the orchestra were playing into an electric guitar pedal, doubling and layering melodies as they unfold. In this case, the orchestra is completely unplugged.

In Cuong's imagination, the pianist is the gazer and the orchestra forms the stars. Cuong remarked, "I like the idea that the pianist is the *Stargazer*, with the piano as your telescope. You're looking out and hearing the orchestra twinkle around you and they're taking the sounds from you. Each one of the notes echoes itself, so it snowballs and creates this very lustrous texture. It ends up sounding sort of electronic, and very reverberant. It sounds like everything is echoing off itself, like there's more than one piano playing. It's a magical effect when it really works." The colorful orchestration exploring textures and sounds is one of Cuong's hallmarks, "finding ways to write for instruments that sound enchanting," all leading to what the composer calls a healing catharsis by the end.

Stargazer was commissioned by the California Symphony and premiered in 2023 with pianist Sarah Cahill.

Actively Forming Star System Lynds 483 (NIRCam Image) photographed by the James Webb Telescope, 2025

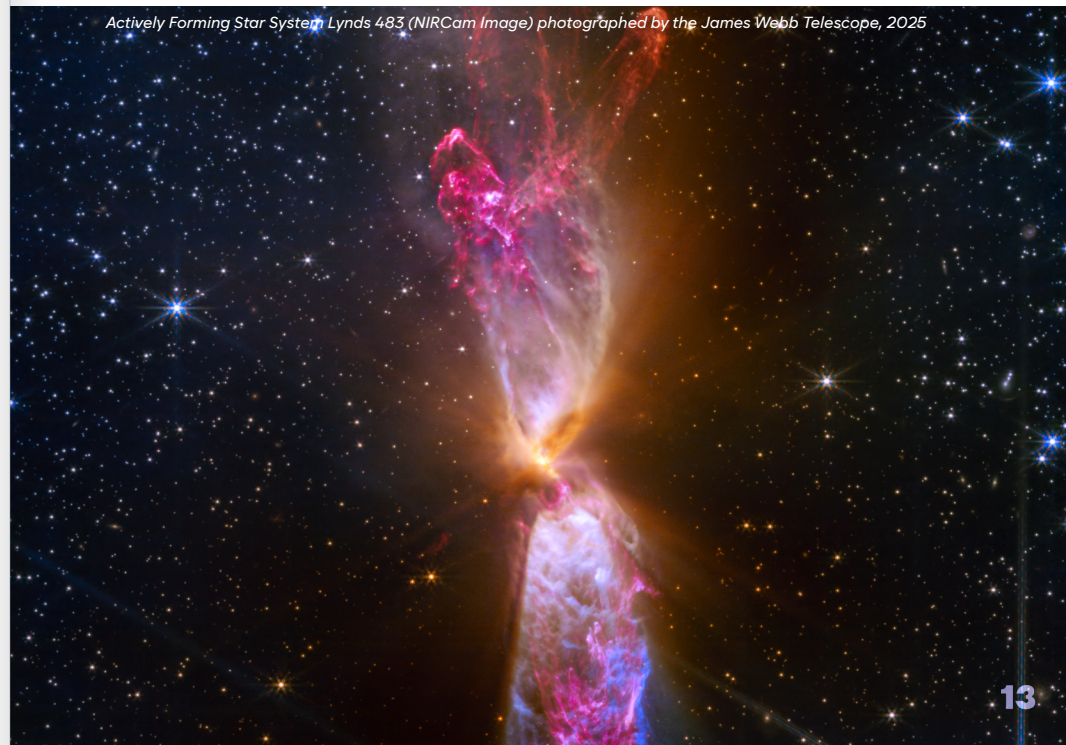
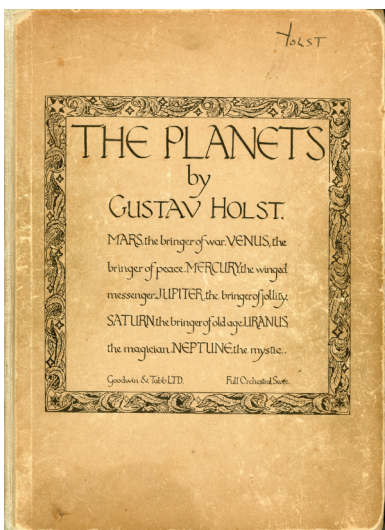




Photo by Herbert Lambert, ca. 1925

Gustav Holst (1874–1934) *The Planets, Op. 32* For Chloë

When we think of the planets, we think of Earth in the vast context of the universe. Gustav Holst, born in 1874, grew up in a universe of music. His father and grandfather were harpists, his mother a singer. With a family like that, it's no surprise he gravitated toward music himself. And at the Royal College of music, he met his life-long bestie Ralph Vaughan Williams. They were the second generation of composers leading a renaissance of English music, an institution that had all but died with Henry Purcell in 1695.



Gustav Holst's conductor's score of *The Planets*

In addition to composing, he aspired to be a concert pianist, but neuritis in his right arm, as well as asthma had him switch to the trombone. He became very proficient, playing in professional ensembles and opera companies. But when he married and started a family, he transitioned from performing to teaching, which was a passion he relished all his life.

He was a shy man, and was somewhat abashed by the success of *The Planets*. And despite critics and fans alike wanting him to write another work like it, he never did. Holst had a very keen intellect and studied things closely that suggested music to him, such as the Sanskrit language that he taught

himself and translated to set to music. Similarly, while on holiday in Spain with composer Arnold Bax and his brother, his interest in astrology was awoken by nights spent stargazing. He became very adept at writing very accurate horoscopes for his friends and he was clearly thinking a lot about our relation to these celestial bodies, their influence on us and the music that it suggests. This context of planetary influence on us is likely why the suite has no Earth movement.

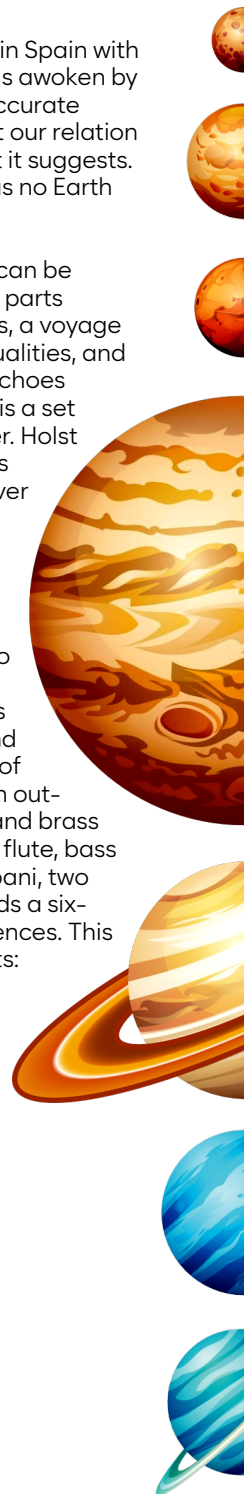


Modern bass oboe used in *The Planets*

The scale and breadth of this work is enormous. It can be viewed as a double symphony, with the first of four parts grounded in the physical and second of three parts, a voyage into the spiritual and the mystical. This theme of dualities, and the contrast of the physical with the spiritual has echoes everywhere throughout the work. Each movement is a set character, and each in turn contrasts with the other. Holst had such a busy schedule with teaching at St Paul's Girls School and Morley College, that it took him over two years to complete. And with his arm being an issue, he enlisted the help of two of his colleagues to help as scribes to complete his mammoth 200-page score.

The writing and orchestration was so unique and so ahead of its time, that many film composers have "borrowed" and even quoted directly from it. This is why 100 years later, it sounds both of our time—and familiar. Appropriately for what he called "a series of mood pictures" on a galactic scale, he writes for an out-sized orchestra: expanding the usual woodwinds and brass with extra players as well as "exotics" such as bass flute, bass oboe, contrabassoon, euphonium, two sets of timpani, two harps and organ. And then on top of all that he adds a six-part chorus, which at the time flabbergasted audiences. This is a huge rocket of sonics, so buckle those seatbelts: Kansas is about to go bye-bye.

Written by Michael J Viljoen



I. Mars, the Bringer of War

From Holst's subtitle it is unlikely to surprise some that this planet rules Aries and Scorpio — so these are not fighting words! This planet of outward activity and animal passion (oh my), influences how we express aggression, handle confrontation, pursue goals and channel your physical drive. So how does he depict these characteristics musically?



We begin immediately with the duality of outward actions and inward thoughts. The strings open with a short rhythmic figure played with the wood of the bow, that repeats and repeats like history that cannot escape the inevitability of repeating itself.

Low brass intone a menacing theme of long notes that grows and grows. Darth Vader anyone? After this surge of anger has built and collapsed on itself, cellos and basses restate part of the opening theme. This whole movement is in an uneven meter of 5/4 and it feels woozy, suggesting aggression makes us feel ill. It's like tanks lumbering around and there's a drum tattoo or gunfire answering, using an extended version of the opening string figure later joined by the trumpets. It builds again to the full orchestra hammering the repeated figure. It does not stop. Thundering. Raging, til the end.

II. Venus, the Bringer of Peace

Ruler of Taurus and Libra, in astrology, Venus represents love, beauty, and harmony. It influences our romantic preferences, how we express love, desire, and affection and pursue beauty and luxury. Holst cleverly sets up a wonderful contrast to the angry clamor and crashing of war with this movement.

The duality of Venus is our outward actions—heard in the noble french horn making an ascending call for peace that receives a descending calm answer from the woodwinds. Our inward thoughts are of love, and this is first depicted tenderly by the solo violin. Long sustained chords, gently rippling harps and twinkling celesta ground us in a timeless and ethereal calm. All of the violins pick up this love theme, and there is a swelling of strings to an ardent expression of love. When it is answered by the solo cello, it evaporates like mist back into the calm of the opening. In the end, it is the violins, flutes and celesta that draw us upward, as if calling us to our higher, better selves.



III. Mercury, the Winged Messenger

Holst said that Mercury, "is a symbol of the mind." Since the ruler of Gemini and Virgo represents intellect and quick thinking, it therefore governs curiosity, adaptability and—most importantly—communication.

Short rhythms passed back-and-forth between woodwinds and strings, give a sparse chattering texture suggesting words and thoughts whizzing about at lightning speed. The celesta and harps set up the 4-note melody of outward actions—communicating—which is played by the oboes under the

first violins playing a high repeated rhythmic figure, taken over by the glockenspiel—is that morse code? Is Holst sharing a secret code to life, the universe, everything (it's 42), or telling us to accept that some things are just a mystery? The violins extend the melody and it is picked up by the oboe and then celesta. This builds into a joy that communicating enables us to connect with each other. When it subsides, we turn our gaze back inward to our inner thoughts and their back-and-forth of cackling and arguing with each other.

IV. Jupiter, Bringer of Jollity

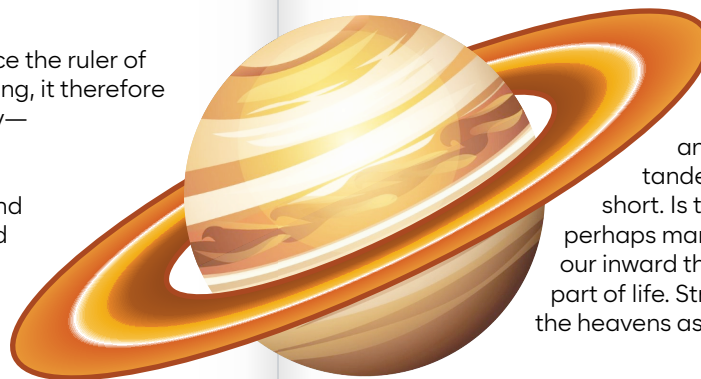
The ruling planet of Sagittarius and Pisces represents growth, expansion, luck, and abundance. It influences generosity, faith, optimism, and expansive energy. This was characterised by Holst as "jollity in the ordinary," and "ceremonial rejoicing."

We hear this in an energetic relay of a 3-note motif set up by the violins, under which the horns and cellos burst in with an optimistic theme. As we celebrate our outward actions of rejoicing, the first theme of 3 notes is played by the horns in unison. In fact, it is answered by a unison string melody that is also based on the 3-note motif. Much jollity in the ordinary! This winds down into what is Holst's most famous melody, which has even been set to words. With our attention now on our inward thoughts of ceremonial rejoicing, the 3-note motive is broadened into a long singing melody played by the strings in unison that is almost religious. We reprise the opening briefly and then the ceremonial theme is heard in all of the bass instruments with strings and woodwinds whooping and sweeping above it. We close with an exuberant brass flourish.

V. Saturn, Bringer of Old Age

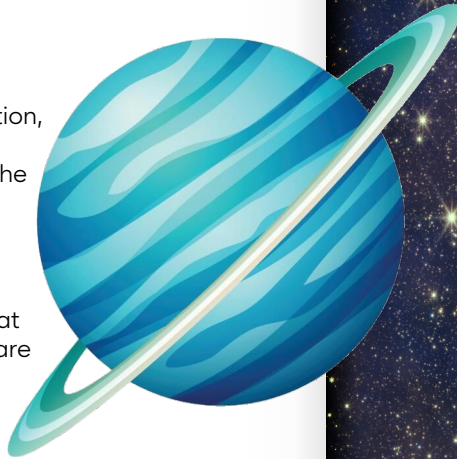
This planet that rules Capricorn represents meaning, permanence, and wisdom. It influences hard work, maturity, and self-mastery. This was Holst's favourite movement of the suite, and it portrays the duality of physical decay and also fulfilment. Slow and steady with long phrases, it is the antidote to the ebullient energy of Jupiter.

Holst represents our outward action of ageing—with the basses playing the melody!—and then slow plodding footsteps that get heavier and heavier. It feels like time is slowing and movement is an effort. A brass choral in tandem rises to eventually wail against life being too short. Is this a funeral march? Clanging bells ring out, perhaps marking the hand of fate. And then we settle into our inward thoughts of the acceptance of ageing as being part of life. Strings ascend quietly, slowly, and inexorably into the heavens as we find peace in acceptance.



VI. Uranus, the Magician

Ruler of Aquarius, this planet represents freedom, innovation, and eccentricity, and it therefore influences our futuristic and humanitarian qualities. You are allowed to giggle at the name. But that is where the silliness ends. As we journey further and further away from Earth, and so too from the physical to the metaphysical it is fitting that a magician appears. This may remind you of another magician famously depicted in music: The Sorcerer's Apprentice that Paul Dukas wrote in 1897 and that Holst certainly was aware of. He even wrote an opera about a wizard following The Planets, called The Perfect Fool, where the trombones are used to portray him summoning the elements.



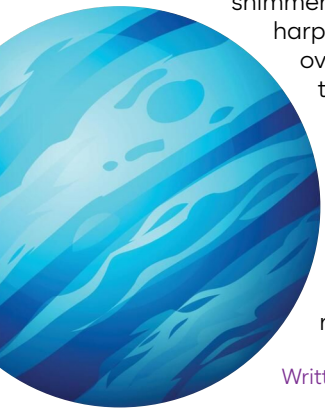
Similarly, in the opening of this movement, the brass blast 4 notes, played again but faster by tuba and euphonium and then even faster by the timpani. These four notes represent his name, Gustav Holst in their corresponding German musical letters, G, E $\flat$, A and B $\flat$. See how many times you can spot them! A jaunty march and gets more and more out of hand as it lurches along, until we hit a massive climax that is underpinned by some chair-rattling chords from the organ. And then, just like that, the magician disappears in a puff of smoke, leaving us baffled at all the drama.

VII. Neptune, the Mystic

The governor of dreams, intuition, and spirituality, this planet rules Pisces. It influences the imagination, empathy, and compassion. Furthest in this set of planets from Earth, in this movement we perhaps feel the most out in the far reaches of space. We are back in the 5/4 meter that we started with in Mars. But now the tempo is much slower, and the orchestra is marked very soft for the entire movement.

Holst conjures a weaving of light and magical constellations of sound that shimmer and dance in fast-moving arpeggios in the celesta, harps, and violins. Time is suspended as these are played over long sustained chords that seem to vibrate because they don't quite belong together. Is Holst perhaps expertly depicting here the outward, the vibrations of the celestial bodies, and the inward of our psychic vibrations? And just as we become a little more accustomed to this alien landscape, a wordless chorus floats into earshot. Our humanity has a place in the cosmos. Then just as they appeared to center us, the instruments stop and the chorus fades into the ether, reminding us that there's no place like home.

Written by Michael J Viljoen



Star-Filled Portrait of the Pillars of Creation photographed by the James Webb Telescope, 2022

Space is Gay

Written by Jessica Cauttero

When QUO announced a program called **Queer Cosmos**, featuring Holst's *Planets*, I was elated! Not just because *Planets* is a perennial favorite of both musicians and casual listeners alike but because space is gay.

Then when I overheard our esteemed Artistic Director David Bloom say it was just a clever play on words, about the importance of taking up space as queer people, I knew I had to intervene. Not because it isn't important to take up and create spaces as queer people. It is! But because space is very much... Gay.

When asked point-blank if outer space is gay or straight by podcaster Theo Von, Neil Degrasse Tyson answered, "Practically everything we see and measure in space... is on a spectrum. In fact, the very word spectrum comes from what happens when you take light and break it up into its colors... I'm gonna tell you, whatever the universe is, is on a spectrum... The world is not gonna change to fit your inability to recognize how it's actually manifesting."

Basically since the universe has no inherently fixed orientations—it's infinite and moving in all directions simultaneously, eschews binary definition and restrictive categorization, and contains infinite possibilities—the greater cosmos is both a metaphor for queerness and inherently queer!

The queer community has also taken many literal strides into space as scientists: transgender astrophysicist Dr. Rebecca Oppenheimer discovered the first brown dwarf star, Dr. Sally Ride the first American woman in space came out posthumously, transgender astrophysicist Dr. Jessica Mink discovered the rings around the planet Uranus, and many, many more.

Every sci-fi text invites queerness in its storytelling, because of these infinite possibilities. The very first "space opera" in Western literature, written in the second century A.D. by Lucian of Sampsata, a short, satirical novel modeled after *The Odyssey*, involves a trip to the moon. Moon society is all men, living together and making gay moon babies through calf-pregnancy, reminiscent of Zeus birthing the pleasure god Dionysus—very on brand for the Greeks.

20th and 21st Century Western sci-fi canon has continued this exploration of queer space. There is Ripley in *Alien*, a role written for a man and cast as a woman with basically no textual changes because space allows gender and specifically womanhood to expand its scope of presentation. The found family of *Star Wars* across genders, generations, and species, shown banding together to fight for freedom of diverse interests. *Star Trek* continually invents planets with alternate experiences of gender and sexuality, which are normal to the species of origin but odd to those from Earth. The reactions of our normative Terrans range from rejection to experimentation themselves. The world of space created by the human imagination is full of queerness.

I hope as you listen tonight, you feel the expansiveness of the universe in this music, your place within it, and the spectrum of possibilities expanding to make space for you.

Keep the music coming...

Be the reason the music doesn't stop! Your gift helps us bring bold, inclusive performances to the stage. See how you can support QUO below.



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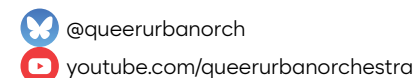
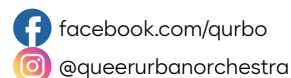
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