



# GUSTAV HOLST THE PLANETS

GEORGE GERSHWIN  
SECOND RHAPSODY  
"RHAPSODY IN RIVETS"

ANDREW STAUPE, PIANO

ROB SMITH  
SNAPDRAGON

THE TEXAS MUSIC FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA

FRANZ ANTON KRAGER

MUSIC DIRECTOR & CONDUCTOR

GUSTAV HOLST (21 September 1874 – 25 May 1934) was an English composer and teacher, best known to international audiences for his orchestral suite, *The Planets*, his opus 32, written between 1914 and 1917 and thus encompassing years of the Great War. His suite – which does not include Earth – has movements named after the seven known planets at the time with specific emphasis on their supposed astrological character.

When it comes to popularized musical depictions of outer space, *The Planets* by Gustav Holst is arguably the first widespread symphonic work to do so for the many pre-*Star Wars* and *Star Trek* generations of the 20th Century. The bespectacled, unassuming British composer accomplished this in capturing seven planets using the multifaceted palette of the large symphony orchestra. It was first heard in London's Queen's Hall on 29 September 1918, conducted by his friend and colleague Adrian Boult; and in a short time it appeared in concert halls around the world – where it remains popular to this day.

The work had its origins in March and April 1913, when Holst and his friend and benefactor Balfour Gardiner holidayed in Spain, along with the composer Arnold Bax and his brother, the author Clifford Bax. At the time, a discussion about astrology stimulated Holst's interest in the subject. Clifford Bax later commented that Holst became "a remarkably skilled interpreter of horoscopes". Shortly after the holiday, Holst wrote to a friend:

"I only study things that suggest music to me. That's why I worried at Sanskrit.

Then recently the character of each planet suggested lots to me, and I have been studying astrology fairly closely".

He told Clifford Bax in 1926 that the idea of *The Planets*:

"... whether it's good or bad, grew in my mind slowly – like a baby in a woman's womb ... For two years I had the intention of composing that cycle, and during those two years it seemed of itself more and more definitely to be taking



form."

*The Planets* was largely composed during the Great War, although Mars: the Bringer of War, which Holst wanted to sound "terrifying", in fact predates the July 1914 onset of conflict. In any case, clouds of impending war, saber rattling, and diplomatic sparring between alliances all contributed to the threatening atmosphere in which Holst lived and worked.

Debate continues over Holst's motivations for writing the music, but an obvious factor was his interest in astrology, as seen in the subtitles given to the music for each planet. Holst described *The Planets* as "a series of mood pictures", acting as "foils to one another", with "very little contrast in any one of them". Some of the characteristics the composer attributed to the planets may have been suggested by Alan Leo's booklet *What is a Horoscope?*, which Holst was reading at the time. He took the title of two movements – "Mercury, the Winged Messenger" and "Neptune, the Mystic" – from Leo's books. But although astrology was Holst's starting point, he arranged the planets to suit his own plan, ignoring some specifically astrological factors, such as the influence of the sun and the moon, and attributing certain non-astrological qualities to each planet. Nor is the order of movements the same as that of the planets' orbits round the sun, the only criterion apparently being that of musical flow and effectiveness. Astronomy and/or Astrology combine instinctively for the many admirers who react to the music's evocation of the wonder and mystery of the heavens.



Holst was unable to serve a combat role in the War due to a medical deferment, but in late summer 1918 the YMCA invited him to organize musical activities for troops stationed in Thessaloniki, Greece. The finishing touches to The Planets were written into the manuscript at the YMCA's London Headquarters, while Holst was waiting for his travel papers.

The first performance was given thanks to financial support from Holst's benefactor, friend, and fellow composer Henry Balfour Gardiner, and was rushed through before Holst left for Greece. The orchestra was only able to rehearse for a couple of hours before that historic first performance took place, conducted by Adrian Boult. The Musical Times declared The Planets "one of the most ambitious achievements in modern British music", even though a minority of conservative critics were less enthusiastic. Regardless, it soon was recognized as a popular British musical phenomenon like no other. As an early, and unusual, indicator, by 1921 The Planets was available in a complete recording, with the composer himself conducting the London Symphony Orchestra.

To understand the immediate impact of The Planets it's surely relevant that it was written during the first great era of popular astronomy. Ever more sophisticated photographic film and equipment enabled the capture of spectacular images of our celestial neighbors, which fed into the public imagination. By the mid-1920s The Planets had been performed in the UK and other English-speaking countries, including the US, and in continental cities including Vienna, Berlin, Paris, and Rome.

The individual movements are as follows:

Mars, the Bringer of War - is marked *allegro* and is in a relentless, repetitious *ostinato* for most of its duration. It opens quietly, with the music building to a quadruple-*forte*, dissonant, harrowing climax. Although Mars is often thought to portray the horrors of mechanized warfare, it was written before the onset of the First World War.

Venus, the Bringer of Peace – placed by the composer as a stark contrast to what

came before. The movement opens with a solo horn theme answered quietly by the flutes and oboes. A second theme is given to solo violin. The music proceeds tranquilly with oscillating chords from flutes and harps, with decoration from the celesta. The movement has deservedly been called "one of the most sublime evocations of peace in music."

Mercury, the Winged Messenger - the last of the seven movements to be written, contains Holst's first experiments with bitonality. He juxtaposes melodic fragments in B-flat major and E-major in a fast-moving scherzo. Solo violin, high-pitched harp, flute and glockenspiel are prominently featured. It is the shortest of the seven movements, typically taking less than 4 minutes in performance.

Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity - Nobility and generosity are the alleged astrological characteristics of those born under the sign of Jupiter, and in the slower middle section Holst provides a broad tune embodying those traits. It has been adapted to later use as the melody for a solemn patriotic hymn, I Vow to Thee My Country [Thraxed]. The preceding, opening section of the movement is marked *allegro giocoso* in 2/2. The second theme, at the same tempo, is in 3/4 time, as is the broad melody of the middle section, marked *andante maestoso*. Holst marked this to be taken at half the speed of the opening section. The movement ends with a *fff fortissimo* chord for the full orchestra.

Saturn, the Bringer of Old Age - was Holst's favorite movement of the suite, according to composer Colin Matthews. He goes on to describe it as "a slow processional which rises to a frightening climax before fading away as if into the outer reaches of space". The movement opens as a quiet *adagio* in 4/4 and the basic pace remains slow throughout. Apart from the timpani, no percussion is used in this movement except for tubular bells at climactic points.

Uranus, the Magician – Composer Colin Matthews describes the character of the movement as that of "a clumsy dance, which gradually gets more and more out of hand, not unlike Paul Dukas's Sorcerer's Apprentice. And with what seems like a magic wand, all is abruptly swept away into the far distance". The movement is marked *allegro* in 6/4 time, proceeding in "a series of merry

pranks" with occasional interjections in 9/4 time, building to a ffff climax, after which the music suddenly drops to a pianissimo to bring the movement to its conclusion.

Neptune, the Mystic - The music of the last movement is quiet throughout, in a swaying, irregular meter, opening with flutes joined by piccolo and oboes, with harps and celesta prominent later. The composer makes much use of dissonance in this movement. As the movement develops, the orchestra is joined by an offstage female chorus singing a softly undulating wordless line. This was unusual in orchestral works at the time, although Claude Debussy had used the same device in his *Trois Nocturnes* of 1900. As the orchestra falls silent, the ethereal, unaccompanied voices gradually fade away to bring the work to a pppp pianissimo conclusion.

Holst's conducting score of *The Planets*. This is copy No. 1 of a first edition of 200 copies published in 1921.



GEORGE GERSHWIN (26 September 1898 – 11 July 1937) was an American pianist and composer of the first rank, whose compositions spanned popular, jazz, and classical music, and were instant and enduring successes with audiences.

He was born in Brooklyn, New York, on 26 September 1898, the son of Rose and Morris Gershovitz, who were Jewish immigrants from Russia. After settling in New York, Morris changed the family name Gershvin. When teen-aged son George entered Tin Pan Alley as a professional songwriter, he changed the "v" to "w" making "Gershwin" his name going forward.

Among his best-known works are the orchestral compositions *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924), the *Piano Concerto in F* (1925), and *An American in Paris* (1928). His compositional masterpiece is the opera *Porgy and Bess* (1935). Among the multitude of individual songs immortalized in the American Songbook Repertoire are *Swanee*, *Fascinating Rhythm*, *I Got Rhythm*, *Embraceable You*, *The Man I Love*, *Someone to Watch Over Me*, *Nice Work If You Can Get It*, and *Summertime*. And the list goes on.



Gershwin studied piano under Charles Hambitzer and composition with a diverse selection of teachers including Rubin Goldmark, Henry Cowell, Wallingford Riegger, and Edward Kilenyi, which demonstrated early on his compulsive desire for self-improvement as a musician. He began his career in 1916 as a songwriter, peddling his works in New York's Tin Pan Alley, but soon started composing also for the Broadway Theater, collaborating with his brother Ira and with Buddy DeSylva. At one point in the mid-1920s he moved to Paris, intending to study with Nadia Boulanger, but she demurred, expressing her judgment that rigorous classical study could impair his jazz-influenced creative style. During his single tour to the United States in 1928, Maurice Ravel met

Gershwin at several events and heard a number of performances of the American's music, for which he expressed admiration. But when George suggested taking lessons from Ravel, the Frenchman objected: "...it would probably cause him to write 'bad Ravel' and lose his great gift of melody and spontaneity."

The Second Rhapsody (1931) was originally titled Rhapsody in Rivets. Its genesis lies in a Hollywood commission for a score for the movie Delicious. Part of the score was an instrumental montage accompanying the main character wandering the streets of New York City. First titled "Manhattan Rhapsody", then "New York Rhapsody", and finally "Rhapsody in Rivets", Gershwin early on also conceived the montage as a stand-alone work apart from the film soundtrack. The full score was finished on 23 May 1931. Gershwin thought highly of the new composition and wrote in a letter, "In many respects, such as orchestration and form, it is the best thing I have written." Despite the composer's favorable opinion, many revisions, additions, subtractions, and rewriting resulted in various versions of the work, including the first publication which featured wholesale reorchestration and other editorial intervention to make Second Rhapsody more "accessible".

It received its concert premiere with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Serge Koussevitsky conducting, on 29 January 1932, with Gershwin himself as piano soloist. After attending the premiere, a correspondent for the Associated Press wrote, "...the staccato tones of the riveter tinkled loudly from the treble of the keyboard, and succeeding themes reflected nearly every form of jazz from the slowest blues to the wildest-rhythmed dance steps and broad syncopated surges, which carried the piece on to climax after climax, as Gershwin touched the manifold aspects of life on the streets of New York."

In 1934 Gershwin began what would become his masterwork, the "Great American Opera" Porgy and Bess, in collaboration with brother Ira, as lyricist, and author DuBose Heyward, as librettist. The first private performance



was in the autumn of 1935 in Carnegie Hall, with additional shows in Boston and on Broadway, and a tour in 1936. This would be Gershwin's last farewell – on 11 July 1937, he died in Los Angeles at age 38, during surgery for brain cancer.

As a commissioned encore work for the TMF Concert that formally ended with the Gershwin Second Rhapsody, Snapdragon was written with both this orchestra and soloist in mind. Moores School of Music faculty composer Rob Smith wrote the vivacious three-minute bagatelle, which is quite successful in wrapping up the evening's proceedings in fine, boisterous spirits.

The Immanuel and Helen Olshan Texas Music Festival® was founded in 1990 to provide young professional musicians with a high-level environment in which to develop skills in orchestral, chamber music, and solo performance. The TMF Orchestra is the largest ensemble gathered for the summer festival.

The intensive Orchestral Institute on the University of Houston campus is guided by distinguished artist-faculty from the Moores and Shepherd Schools of Music, principals and members of the Houston Symphony, Houston Grand Opera, and Ballet orchestras; and internationally recognized guest artists. TMF faculty members perform as soloists with the Festival Orchestra and as part of the PERSPECTIVES chamber music series.

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 Franz Anton Krager is Music Director of the Immanuel and Helen Olshan Texas Music Festival, held each summer at the University of Houston, and is also the Hourani Endowed Professor of Music, Director of Orchestras, and Chair of the Conducting Department at the University of Houston Moores School of Music, where he has brought the Moores School Symphony Orchestra and the conducting program to international prominence.



For HDTT High Definition Tape Transfers in its “Immersive Surround-Sound” series of multichannel Blu-Ray Audio discs and digital downloads, Krager has recorded music of Bruckner, his Great Mass in F-Minor and Symphony 7; of Respighi, his “Roman Trilogy” Tone Poems; of Leonard Bernstein, his Jeremiah Symphony, Symphonic Dances from West Side Story, and excerpts from “Candide”; of Mahler, his Symphony 2, “Resurrection”; and with organist Robert Bates, the Symphonie concertante of Jongen and the Organ Concerto of Poulenc. Forthcoming releases include the symphonic arrangement of “Death and the Maiden” by Schubert; Lincolnshire Posy by Percy Grainger, arranged for full symphony orchestra; Symphony 2, “Romantic” by Howard Hanson; Concerto for Orchestra by Rob Smith; and Cityscape by John Wineglass.

Krager has made his artistic presence felt both at home and abroad with performance engagements in some of the world’s most celebrated concert halls and musical centers. Since making his prize-winning European conducting debut in Copenhagen’s Tivoli Koncertsalen in 1978, Krager has led orchestras in the Leipzig Gewandhaus, Moscow’s State Kremlin Palace, Manchester’s Bridgewater Hall, Birmingham England’s Adrian Boult Hall, Guangzhou China’s Xinghai Music Center, the Sydney Opera House, The Hague’s Congres-

gebouw, Kazan’s State Philharmonic Hall in Russia, Guadalajara’s Degollado Theater, and Sarasota’s Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall.

His affiliations with leading music festivals include the Lancaster International Concert Series and Lichfield and Aberystwyth International Arts Festivals in the U.K.; the Festival Internacional de Santa Lucía in Mexico; and the Texas Music Festival and Interlochen National Music Camp in the United States.

Krager has led the Houston; Russian State; Traverse City, Michigan; and Florida West Coast Symphony Orchestras; Romanian and Kazan State Philharmonics; and orchestras in Berlin, London, Chicago, Paris, Singapore, Leipzig, Bratislava, Monterrey, Pordenone, Ingolstadt, Neuss, and Honolulu.

In 2015, he was appointed Principal Guest Conductor of the North Shore Chamber Arts Ensemble in Chicago. Krager is the Founding Co-Artistic Director of the Virtuosi of Houston, Artist-in-Residence at The Kinkaid School, and Evaluator/Clinician for the Orchestra America National Festival.

Pianist Andrew Staupe is emerging as one of the distinctive voices of a new generation of pianists.

He has appeared as soloist with many of the top orchestras throughout the United States and in Europe, including the Baltimore Symphony, San Diego Symphony, Houston Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra, Fort Worth Symphony, Indianapolis Symphony, the George Enescu Philharmonic in Romania, and many others. He has collaborated with distinguished conductors Osmo Vänskä, Cristian Macelaru, Jahja Ling, Gerard Schwarz, Andrew Litton, Lucas Richman, Josep-Caballe Domenech, and Philip Mann. He has performed recitals across the United States and extensively in Europe, appearing distinguished concert venues including the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, Rachmaninov Hall in Moscow, the Schumann Haus in Leipzig, and the Salle Cortot in Paris.



An avid chamber musician, Staupe has jammed with legendary vocalist Bobby McFerrin, played Tangos with the Assad Brothers, and has collaborated with numerous other distinguished instrumentalists and singers.

He recently recorded his debut CD for Naxos with violinist Hasse Borup in Copenhagen. Staupe has a keen interest in performing new music and has collaborated with composers Howard Shore, Augusta Read Thomas, Yehudi Wyner, Sarah Kirkland Snider, Pierre Jalbert, Richard Lavenda, and Christopher Walczak among others. Other notable performances include concerts at Carnegie Hall and Steinway Hall in New York, and the Kennedy Center and Library of Congress in Washington DC.

Deeply committed to teaching, Staupe is an Assistant Professor of Piano at the University of Houston Moores School of Music, and formerly taught at the University of Utah. He is Artistic Director of the Young Artist World Piano Festival in Minnesota, and gives frequent master classes and lectures around the United States. A native of Saint Paul, Minnesota, he earned his Doctorate at Rice University with Jon Kimura Parker, and also studied at the University of Minnesota with Lydia Artymiw.

Recorded in public concerts in the Moores Opera House, University of Houston  
Holst – 9 June 2018; Gershwin and Smith – 11 June 2022  
Produced & Recorded by John Gladney Proffitt  
5.0 channel Immersive Surround Sound  
High Resolution 24-bit, 192k sampling rate  
PURCHASE OF THIS RECORDING BENEFITS THE TEXAS MUSIC FESTIVAL

The technique used to record the massive sound of large symphony orchestra in the Moores Opera House is simple and direct. Simple, in that five Neumann and Peluso omnidirectional condenser microphones are carefully placed to capture the total soundstage from the point of view of the conductor on the podium. Direct, in that, each microphone feeds into a single channel of the high-resolution digital recorder with no mixing, equalization, or other manipulation of the pure sound coming from each mic. The result is heard in five-channel surround sound reproduction (in a home theater system, for instance) places the listener on the podium with the conductor – in effect, "immersed" in the sound.

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The Texas Music Festival Orchestra  
Franz Anton Krager, music director & conductor

GUSTAV HOLST – The Planets (1917)

- [1] Mars, the Bringer of War 08:12
- [2] Venus, the Bringer of Peace 07:58
- [3] Mercury, the Winged Messenger 04:40
- [4] Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity 08:18
- [5] Saturn, the Bringer of Old Age 08:51
- [6] Uranus, the Magician 06:06
- [7] Neptune, the Mystic 09:17

[8] GEORGE GERSHWIN – Second Rhapsody, “Rhapsody in Rivets” (1931) 15:21

[9] ROB SMITH – Snapdragon (2022) 03:01  
both with Andrew Staupe, piano

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