The Planets
By Gustav Holst

Sydney Symphony Orchestra
David Robertson
Chief Conductor and Artistic Director

Tea & Symphony
Friday 27 March 2015

A Concert for the Planet
Saturday 28 March 2015
Janine Jansen plays Brahms
BRAHMS Violin Concerto
BUTTERLEY Never This Sun, This Watcher
SIBELIUS Symphony No.5
Daniel Blendulf conductor
Janine Jansen violin

SSO Presents: The Planets by Gustav Holst
A concert for the planet on the evening of Earth Hour.
In association with the Global Orchestra project.
David Robertson conductor
Ladies of the Sydney Philharmonia Choirs

Symphonic Variations
MOZART Symphony No.31 (Paris)
FRANCK Symphonic Variations for piano and orchestra
MOZART Rondo in D for piano and orchestra, K382
FRANCK Symphony in D minor
Yan-Pascal Tortelier conductor
Louis Lortie piano

Louis Lortie in Recital
FAURÉ Préludes, Op.103
SCRIABIN 24 Preludes, Op.11
CHOPIN 24 Préludes, Op.28

Le Grand Tango with Sydney Dance Company
PIAZZOLLA arr. Arturo Rodriguez
Libertango • Le Grand Tango
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BIZET Carmen: Suite No.1
PIAZZOLLA The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires
GINASTERA Concerto Variations
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THE PLANETS
A Concert for the Planet

David Robertson conductor
VOX – Sydney Philharmonia Choirs

GUSTAV HOLST (1874–1934)
The Planets, Op.32

Mars, the Bringer of War
Venus, the Bringer of Peace
Mercury, the Winged Messenger
Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity
Saturn, the Bringer of Old Age
Uranus, the Magician
Neptune, the Mystic

The concert will conclude at noon (Fri) and 9.30pm (Sat).

COVER DESIGN: Christie Brewster

This program has been printed on 100 per cent recycled paper.
Holst’s Planets

The Planets must be one of the most influential musical works of the 20th century. Russell Crowe and his cohorts in Gladiator seemed that bit more craggily determined thanks to a score that reminded us of Mars. At the opening of Uranus, you could be forgiven for expecting Darth Vader to rip off his headgear and reveal the clown beneath. At the close of Neptune, Holst invents the fade-out. The iridescent opening of Jupiter foreshadows the work of John Adams, and for many years Anglicans have sung its big central tune as the patriotic hymn, I vow to thee my country, which was featured in the funeral service for the late Princess of Wales. An Australian newspaper columnist once suggested – and in all seriousness – that the same tune should be our new national anthem, as it kind of fits the words of Dorothea MacKellar’s My Country.

As a repository of orchestral special effects and memorable tunes, the piece has certainly earned its pop status, but its very popularity and the imitations it has spawned have disadvantaged it and its composer. We need to make an effort to hear the work with fresh ears – forgetting about Russell and Darth and all that – and to remind ourselves that this was very radical music for its time. Moreover, we should note that it is atypical of its composer. An artist of great integrity, Holst refused to imitate the piece to ensure his own status, so that we sadly hear little of his other work, even though much of it is of the same quality as The Planets.

Holst, like his great friend Vaughan Williams, was of a generation educated at London’s Royal College of Music which rejuvenated British music through the study of Tudor music and the collection of folksong. The young Holst was at first a Wagnerian, and his early works show this influence in their opulence and richly chromatic harmony. After some years as a professional trombonist – playing on occasion under that master orchestrator Richard Strauss – Holst decided in 1903 to devote himself to composition. In practice, though, this meant beginning his career as an outstanding teacher at St Paul’s Girls School, Morley College, and later the RCM. In the first decade of the century he also became drawn to eastern mysticism, particularly that of Hinduism, which led, indirectly, to his development of a much leaner harmonic style.

Planned in 1913 and composed between 1914 and 1917, the seven movements of The Planets are less about depicting large balls of gas and rock than about each planet’s astrological significance. Given the outbreak of the First World War at the time, it is hard not to see Mars, the Bringer of War as grimly prophetic of the carnage of the first hi-tech war. Where a

Keynotes

HOLST
Born Cheltenham, England, 1874
Ruling Planet: Mercury
Died London, 1934

‘You possess decidedly a large brain, but unfortunately the vitality is not equal to the brain power’. As a result, according to this phrenologist’s report on the 18-year-old Gustavus Theodor von Holst, he would be prone to nervous exhaustion. It was almost prophetic! Holst suffered lifelong from debilitating neuritis. While working on The Planets, he was often unable to play his sketches over on the piano. Neuritis affected not only how he wrote, but what he wrote, and it may explain his great attraction to ostinatos. The crucial medical dividend of ostinatos is that you can massively reduce the number of notes you need to write by scribbling a pattern once, then following it with dittos.

THE PLANETS

There was a strong streak of the unorthodox in Holst. His spiritualist interests were encouraged by his theosophist stepmother. He learned Sanskrit, set Hindu hymn texts to music, and was an amateur astrologist, from which emerged his interest in the character of each planet. The Planets brought Holst unexpected recognition. But he was not naturally a creature of the limelight, and rather than receive applause for The Planets, Holst preferred casting horoscopes for his friends!
composer like Mahler uses military music for an ambiguously thrilling effect, Holst takes pains to make his music simply inhuman: the opening three note theme traces the tritone, an unstable interval often called ‘the devil in music’. The relentlessly repeated rhythm, or ostinato, is no simple march, having five beats to a bar. The harmony is bitonal, that is, it superimposes chords of two different keys to give it its sense of unrelieved dissonance, especially at the shattering climax.

Venus, the Bringer of Peace of course offers a complete contrast: the orchestration is sweet and languorous and the harmony, while still frequently bitonal, uses chords which avoid direct clashes of adjacent notes, creating subtle voluptuousness. Framed by slow sections, the piece moves through a slightly faster section and a contrasting animato.

The planets according to Holst

The characteristics of each planet as Holst conceived them can be found in the book What is a Horoscope? by Alan Leo, which Holst is known to have been reading at the time.

Mars – independent, confident, ambitious, enterprising, skilful in action, ‘headstrong and at times too forceful’. Leo doesn’t mention a (negative) warlike aspect; this comes more from Roman mythology.

Venus – awakens the ‘affectional and emotional side’ of her subjects, giving them ‘a keen appreciation of art and beauty’.

Mercury – the ‘winged messenger of the Gods’ gives ‘adaptability, fertility of resource, and the ability to use the mind in various ways’.

Jupiter – brings ‘an abundance of life and vitality’ – those under its influence will be cheery and hopeful in disposition, and possess a noble and generous spirit.

Saturn – those under its influence will be ‘more plodding and persevering than brilliant and active’ with a ‘firm hold on life’; as Holst noted, ‘brings not only physical decay, but also a vision of fulfilment’.

Uranus – ‘will incline its subjects toward the metaphysical… tending to stimulate in them all the higher side of human, intellectual and finer nature’. The adverse side of this influence produces eccentric, strange, and erratic reactions.

Neptune – great influence over psychic tendencies, helping mediums and other sensitive people to transcend mundane distractions and sense ‘those vibrations that so rarely come to the ordinary human being…’

Holst on horoscopes

As a rule 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. It’s a pity we make such a fuss about these things. On one side there’s nothing but abuse and ridicule, with the natural result that when one is brought face to face with overwhelming proofs there is a danger of going to the other extreme. Whereas, of course, everything in the world – writing a letter, for instance – is just one miracle itself. Or rather, the universe itself is one.

Gustav Holst in a letter to a friend. Long after he completed The Planets, Holst continued to cast his friends’ horoscopes.
A Guide to the Music of The Planets

MARS: Holst had arranged the planets in the order of their mean distance from the Earth, beginning with Mars. As it happened, war was declared on 4 August 1914, just after the completion of Mars. The music depicts the horrors of war, with a battering five-to-a-bar rhythm, dismal chromatic howlings, and stern calls to action by the brass, suggestive of the Last Post.

VENUS, on the other hand, is serene and unhurried; the strings bring in a sweet sensuousness, with fluctuations of tempo, but the initial feeling of peace is finally restored.

MERCURY is scored with the utmost delicacy. It moves like quicksilver, and is a kind of scherzo and trio, the former poised between two keys (B flat and E), the latter between two rhythms (3/4 and 6/8).

JUPITER, the giant planet, is cast on a bold scale. The three big tunes near the beginning are vigorous, almost coarse. The middle section is a noble, hymn-like tune rising from the depths of the strings towards the upper regions – when it is rudely interrupted by the brash motives heard previously, and the piece ends in a positive riot.

SATURN was Holst’s favourite movement, ‘his own sort of music’, as his daughter Imogen says. Here are strange ostinato passages, tramping basses, wisps of melody in the depths of the orchestra, and the feeling of being suspended in mid-air, until finally the bells clang and the presence of the Angel of Death is sensed – ‘you may almost hear the beating of his wings’.

URANUS breaks the spell with his magic formula of four weird notes. We are hustled along through unknown worlds of fantasy until finally after an extraordinary blaze of orchestral virtuosity, a huge organ glissando brings us to the verge of infinity and permits us to gaze into it.

NEPTUNE dwells on the confines of the universe, far from the Earth and its passions. The orchestra is directed to play as softly as possible throughout as the music swings upon two chords, E minor alternating with G sharp minor: and we are left with the sound of distant, wordless female voices, endlessly re-echoing the same two chords, more and more faintly.

DONALD PEART (1909–1981)  
*Foundation Professor of Music, University of Sydney*
**Mercury, the Winged Messenger** on the other hand is rather like a symphonic scherzo: short, fast and orchestrated with the utmost delicacy. At the heart of the suite, **Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity** is an orchestral tour de force. The glittering fast music with which it opens is busy but crystal clear; its theme, like that of **Mars**, is based on a three-note motive, but here it is completely and solidly diatonic. **The Planets** was first planned during a holiday in Spain, so we shouldn’t be surprised to hear certain Iberian sounds and rhythms in the dance music which follows. This is interrupted by a fanfare of repeated chords, which ushers in the quiet statement of the celebrated **maestoso** theme. The quintessentially British tune may seem out of place in a celebration of the Bringer of Jollity – it is hardly thigh-slappingly funny. Curiously, too, it doesn’t reach a full close: what should be the second last chord sets off an echo the shimmering sounds of the opening. The tune does, however, stride through tumultuous last pages of the movement.

If **Jupiter**’s big tune was a reminder that joy is fleeting, **Saturn, the Bringer of Old Age** makes this very clear in its portentous, death-ward tread and ever more disturbing brass chords. **Uranus, the Magician**, however, casts a spell (after ripping off the Darth Vader mask) in a music as innocent as **The Sorcerer’s Apprentice**. Tasking his cue from Debussy’s **Sirènes**, Holst imbues **Neptune, the Mystic** with the mystery of wordless, offstage female voices. With its translucent scoring and the hypnotic use of repeated chord patterns, the work ends as perhaps no other had before, fading imperceptibly into night and silence.

GORDON KERRY © 2003

*The Planets* is scored for a very large orchestra: four flutes (also doubling piccolo and alto flute), three oboes (one doubling bass oboe), cor anglais, three clarinets, bass clarinet, three bassoons, and contrabassoon; six horns, four trumpets, three trombones, tenor tuba and bass tuba; celesta and organ; timpani, bass drum, snare drum, cymbals, triangle, tam-tam, tambourine, glockenspiel, xylophone, and tubular bells; two harps and strings. An off-stage choir of women’s voices sings in **Neptune**.

The SSO first performed *The Planets* in 1942 with conductor William Cade, and most recently in 2011 with Ludovic Morlot.
PLANETS AND ENIGMAS
These pieces were suggested by the astrological significance of the planets,’ Holst explained in 1920, leaving a lot to the imagination of the listener. Elgar, likewise, left few clues as to the interpretation of his Enigma variations. Thus, two of the peak masterworks of English orchestral music remain alluring puzzles. Holst’s preferred conductor for The Planets, Adrian Boult, offers his musical solutions to both these enigmas on this budget-priced remastered pairing. With the London Philharmonic Orchestra (Planets) and the London Symphony Orchestra (Enigma).
EMI CLASSICS 31783 or WARNER CLASSICS 23077

CHORAL HOLST
Unorthodox in his religious views, but deeply spiritual, Holst left a major legacy of choral music. A fine sample is offered in this 2-CD collection of Holst’s choral and orchestral works conducted by the late Richard Hickox. Featured works include The Cloud Messenger, based on the Indian epic poem ‘Meghaduta’; The Hymn to Jesus, based in part on secret texts from the gnostic gospels; and Ode to Death, a setting of verses by American poet Walt Whitman.
CHANODS 2406

ORCHESTRAL HOLST
The popularity of The Planets overwhelms the reputation of Holst’s other orchestral music, but if you want to explore further, look for the St Paul’s Suite for strings. It’s included in a performance conducted by Vernon Handley on a disc of English favourites.
LYRITA 336

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SYMPHONIC VARIATIONS
Yan Pascal Tortelier conductor
Louis Lortie piano
Mozart, Franck

SSO Radio
Selected SSO performances, as recorded by the ABC, are available on demand:
sydneyphony.com/SSO_radio

SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA HOUR
Tuesday 9 April, 6pm
Musicians and staff of the SSO talk about the life of the orchestra and forthcoming concerts.
Hosted by Andrew Bukenya.
fnemusicfm.com

Sydney Symphony Orchestra

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The Concert for the Planet is an initiative of the Global Orchestra Foundation, in partnership with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. This inaugural Concert for the Planet is a mass-participation, multi-location, simultaneous performance of Holst’s *Planets*. In preparation for the concert, the Global Orchestra’s online platform was created to achieve education outcomes for participants while exploring music as a metaphor for collaboration and sustainability.

During Saturday night’s performance, footage of conductor David Robertson will be beamed live into the atmosphere using Google’s Hangouts on Air Live, enabling participants all over Australia and around the world to play along.

The shared performance experience during this Concert for the Planet will bring participants together to mark our global commitment to listen to each other and our planet’s needs.

The Global Orchestra’s mission to create the Concert for the Planet has been achieved through valuable contributions from our trustees, ambassadors, partners, sponsors and volunteers.

www.globalorchestra.com
David Robertson is a compelling and passionate communicator whose stimulating ideas and music-making have captivated audiences and musicians alike. A consummate musician and masterful programmer, he has forged strong relationships with major orchestras throughout Europe and North America.

He made his Australian debut with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra in 2003 and soon became a regular visitor to Sydney, with projects such as The Colour of Time, a conceptual multimedia concert; the Australian premiere of John Adams’ Doctor Atomic Symphony; and concert performances of The Flying Dutchman with video projections. In 2014, his inaugural season as Chief Conductor and Artistic Director, he led the SSO on a seven-city tour of China.

Last year he launched his tenth season as Music Director of the St Louis Symphony. Other titled posts have included Principal Guest Conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Music Director of the Orchestre National de Lyon and resident conductor of the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra. An expert in 20th- and 21st-century music, he has also been Music Director of the Ensemble Intercontemporain in Paris (where composer and conductor Pierre Boulez was an early supporter). He is also a champion of young musicians, devoting time to working with students and young artists.

David Robertson is a frequent guest with major orchestras and opera houses throughout the world and in recent seasons he has conducted the New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and the Philadelphia and Cleveland orchestras, as well as the Berlin Philharmonic, Staatskapelle Dresden, BBC Symphony Orchestra and the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra. Last year he conducted the controversial but highly acclaimed Metropolitan Opera premiere of John Adams’ Death of Klinghoffer.

His awards and accolades include Musical America Conductor of the Year (2000), Columbia University’s 2006 Ditson Conductor’s Award, and, with the SLSO, the 2005–06 ASCAP Morton Gould Award for Innovative Programming. In 2010 he was elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and in 2011 a Chevalier de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres.

David Robertson was born in Santa Monica, California, and educated at the Royal Academy of Music in London, where he studied French horn and composition before turning to conducting. He is married to pianist Orli Shaham.

THE POSITION OF CHIEF CONDUCTOR AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR IS SUPPORTED BY EMIRATES
Elizabeth Scott graduated from the Sydney Conservatorium of Music in 1995 as a flute major and then studied choral conducting, vocal performance and aural training in Hungary and Germany. Before her appointment as Music Director of VOX, she was Sydney Philharmonia’s Assistant Chorus Master (2006–2008). She was Acting Music Director of Sydney Philharmonia Choirs for the first half of 2013.

Elizabeth Scott is also Associate Conductor of Sydney Chamber Choir and a guest choral director of Coro Innominata, Macquarie University Singers and Orpheus Choral Music, among others. She is Music Performance Projects Officer at The Arts Unit, a specialist branch of the Department of Education and Training, and the Choral Director for the Schools Spectacular. She is a graduate of the Symphony Australia Conductor Development Program, and in 2008 received the Sydney Choral Symposium Foundation Choral Conducting Scholarship. Elizabeth sings with Cantillation and has performed and recorded with Pinchgut Opera and The Song Company.

VOX is the young adult ensemble of Sydney Philharmonia Choirs – Australia’s largest choral organization – performing a diverse range of repertoire each year, ranging from early a cappella works to challenging contemporary music.

Having previously performed alongside the Sydney Philharmonia Choir in SSO concerts, in 2011 VOX made its first appearance with the orchestra in its own right as the chorus in a semi-staged production of Grieg’s Peer Gynt. Since then VOX has sung in the Lord of the Rings trilogy, Symphony in the Domain for the 2014 Sydney Festival and in a live screening of Gladiator.

This year, in addition to appearing in the Sydney Festival with Puncture and with the SSO in The Planets and a concert of Danny Elfman’s music from the films of Tim Burton, VOX will perform in several programs with Sydney Philharmonia Choirs, including A Christmas Story and Jenkins: The Armed Man – A Mass For Peace.
SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Founded in 1932 by the Australian Broadcasting Commission, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra has evolved into one of the world’s finest orchestras as Sydney has become one of the world’s great cities.

Resident at the iconic Sydney Opera House, where it gives more than 100 performances each year, the SSO also performs in venues throughout Sydney and regional New South Wales. International tours to Europe, Asia and the USA – including three visits to China – have earned the orchestra worldwide recognition for artistic excellence.

The orchestra’s first Chief Conductor was Sir Eugene Goossens, appointed in 1947; he was followed by Nicolai Malko, Dean Dixon, Moshe Atzmon, Willem van Otterloo, Louis Frémaux, Sir Charles Mackerras, Zdeněk Mácal, Stuart Challender, Edo de Waart and Gianluigi Gelmetti. Vladimir Ashkenazy was Principal Conductor from 2009 to 2013. The orchestra’s history also boasts collaborations with legendary figures such as George Szell, Sir Thomas Beecham, Otto Klemperer and Igor Stravinsky.

The SSO’s award-winning education program is central to its commitment to the future of live symphonic music, developing audiences and engaging the participation of young people. The orchestra promotes the work of Australian composers through performances, recordings and its commissioning program. Recent premieres have included major works by Ross Edwards, Lee Bracegirdle, Gordon Kerry, Mary Finsterer, Nigel Westlake and Georges Lentz, and the orchestra’s recordings of music by Brett Dean have been released on both the BIS and SSO Live labels.

Other releases on the SSO Live label, established in 2006, include performances with Alexander Lazarev, Gianluigi Gelmetti, Sir Charles Mackerras, Vladimir Ashkenazy and David Robertson. In 2010–11 the orchestra made concert recordings of the complete Mahler symphonies with Ashkenazy, and has also released recordings of Rachmaninoff and Elgar orchestral works on the Exton/Triton labels, as well as numerous recordings on ABC Classics.

This is the second year of David Robertson’s tenure as Chief Conductor and Artistic Director.
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Jennifer Hoy
Rory Jeffes
Andrew Kaldor AM
David Livingstone
The Hon. Justice AJ Meagher
Goetz Richter

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**AM**
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Christine Bishop
The Hon John Della Bosca MLC
Michael J Crouch AO
Alan Fang
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Simon Johnson
Gary Linnane
Helen Lynch AM
David Maloney AM
Justice Jane Mathews AO
Danny May
Jane Morschel
Andy Plummer
Deirdre Plummer
Seamus Robert Quick
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Juliana Schaeffer
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John van Ogtrop
Brian White
Rosemary White

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Donald Hazelwood AO OBE
Yvonne Kenny AM
David Malouf AO
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