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Planets align for musical odyssey

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WHAT: Gustav Holst's *The Planets* performed by Fox Valley Symphony; HD images by Dr. Jose Francisco Salgado, Adler Planetarium, Chicago
WHEN: 6:30 & 8:30 p.m. Feb. 27
WHERE: James Perry Hall, UW-Fox Communications Arts Center, Menasha
COST: \$12
INFO: balowplanetarium.org, foxvalleysymphony.com



By Jim Lundstrom

Poor Gustav Holst.

He never could get over the fact that his "series of mood pieces," as he referred to his 1916 composition *The Planets*, overshadowed everything else he did until his death in 1934.

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Even though *The Planets* propelled him to the upper echelon of classical composers (i.e., those whose works are performed and embraced by the public), it bothered him that his 15 other orchestral works, 13 operas, seven chamber works, five band pieces, three ballets and many other musical compositions were largely rejected by contemporary critics and the public.

"If nobody likes your work, you have to go on for the sake of the work," Holst once wrote. "And you're in no danger of letting the public make you repeat yourself."

Even if you don't know *The Planets*, you have heard parts of it referenced or ripped off in many movie soundtracks. The fourth movement, "Jupiter, Bringer of Jollity," has obviously been the inspiration for many Western movie soundtrack composers. But the martial air of the opening movement, "Mars, the Bringer of War," with its con legno battuto strings (the players percuss the strings with the wood of the bow) and ominous horns, is probably the most familiar piece. It can be heard in *Star Wars*, *Gladiator*, *The Mummy Returns*, to name just a few, as well as countless video games.

"If you get to know Holst's *The Planets*, it shows up everywhere," said Alan Peche, director of the Barlow Planetarium on the UW-Fox campus.

Even if you are familiar with *The Planets*, you have never heard and seen it as the Fox Valley Symphony and Barlow Planetarium will present it in two multi-media performances on Saturday, Feb. 27, at the new James W. Perry Hall on the University of Wisconsin-Fox campus in Menasha.

This is the Wisconsin premier of *The Planets* as conceived by Dr. Jose Francisco Salgado, who holds the double title of astronomer and visionary at the Adler Planetarium in Chicago.

"Centuries ago, during the Renaissance, people worked in many disciplines at the same time. Now we're all so specialized. We don't have that holistic approach of enjoying something that feeds from different disciplines. That's what I'm trying to achieve," Salgado said by telephone from his home in Chicago.

Since its debut with the Chicago Sinfonietta in May 2006, Salgado's visual depiction of *The Planets* with live orchestral performance has wowed full-house audiences in Europe, Taiwan and around the United States.

"We were close to having one in Milwaukee last year as part of International Year of Astronomy, but it didn't happen," Salgado said.

For each of the seven movements, Salgado created videos of the featured planet using the latest in NASA and European Space Agency images of the planets, animation from those agencies, his own animation, as well as historical illustrations from the Adler Collection of Works on Paper.

"The way I see it, I really see the film as an art piece," Salgado said. "The reason why I say that, it's my visual interpretation of the music. First I researched for months the best materials available for each planet. I had a vast amount of resources. I selected what I thought were the most visually appealing. The visuals and the music reinforce each other, not to compete, to create a greater experience."

Then he spent months pairing images to the music.

"In order to reinforce the music, what I'm doing is following very closely the tone and the tempo of music so there's really an obvious correlation to them," he said. "One thing I didn't do is to show things at random. It is not a slide show. There is a logic. When you watch the whole thing, you'll see that. The logic is following a visual storyline, if you will. When something's happening in the music, something's happening on the screen as well."

"A full orchestra in that hall is going to be exhilarating," said Marta Weldon, executive director of the Fox Valley Symphony. "The sound potential is huge. You have these magnificent images and an amazing, powerful orchestra behind the images."

The only thing missing in the presentation is the celestial women's choir that brings the last movement, "Neptune, the Mystic," to a close.

"There just is no room for a choir," Weldon said. "Brian (Groner, musical director of the symphony) has orchestrated the choir to be played by the orchestra."

Barlow director Peche describes the event as the perfect and long overdue meeting of science and art.

"This synergy with the symphony really works out," he said. "This is very exciting because this is not typical for a community of this size. The dean (Jim Perry, for whom the hall in the new Communication Arts Center is named), has been thinking about something like this for a long time, but there was no way we could put an orchestra on a stage before. The whole idea is there's a new kid on campus now."

Peche adds that UW Fox could not have pulled this off without the support of the Fox Valley Symphony and several community donors. "This is a very expensive program for us in the size venue we are doing it in (360 seats)," Peche said. "The Fox Valley Symphony is providing their services at cost for us. That's our partnership. Even with that very generous offer, it's still a very expensive program and we needed those funders and a nearly sold-out show to make everything work."

The price of admission to one of the two performances includes a ticket to attend a Barlow Planetarium show. Weather permitting, the Barlow will hold its monthly Family Astronomy Night on the same nights as the concerts.

"It's funny how things come together," Peche said. "We always plan Family Astronomy Night every month for astronomical reasons between the first quarter and the full moon. Of course, Feb. 27 is within that range. We'll have our telescopes out if it's clear and we'll be doing Planetarium shows at the Barlow."

"Stop by. See Saturn, something that's a billion miles away. It's one thing to see a picture in a magazine

Upcoming Events

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Local Weather for Appleton, WI



APPLETON, WI

Mostly Cloudy

18°

Humidity: 47%

°F | °C Wind: N at 0 mph

Mon Tue Wed Thu



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or book, but there's something special about actually catching the photons from that object that makes it special. It's going to be a fun astronomy night."

And that, says Salgado, is the whole point of his putting images to music.

"Since I'm also an educator, it's very important to me that people get exposed to these works. We might have some concertgoers that haven't necessarily been exposed to astronomy. After they have been exposed to the awe-inspiring images, they might develop an interest in astronomy. Astronomy enthusiasts who are there go, wow, this classical music is really good and I should check out some other works. These things really compliment each other."

Hooray for Hollywood!

The back-to-back performances of *The Planets* on Feb. 27 will be the second big event of the month for the Fox Valley Symphony, the first being the annual pops concert at the Fox Cities Performing Arts Center in Appleton at 7:30 p.m. on Feb. 6.

Hollywood is the theme, with the first half featuring movie tune arrangements by Appleton composer Maury Laws, whose work is heard every Christmas season on perennial Rankin-Bass animated features such as *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*. Laws served as musical director for Rankin-Bass productions. Mary Schmidt and John Stangel of the White Heron Chorale will be the featured soloists.

Soundtrack composer John Williams will be featured in the second half, with his music for *Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, *The Empire Strikes Back* and selections from *Star Wars*.

"Soundtracks do stack up to some of the best classical music out there," said Marta Weldon, executive director of the Fox Valley Symphony. "People talk about modern composers not being able to make a living. Composers always went where they could make a living. Film composers are doing what composers have always done – making a living where it pays. People don't understand when they go to a movie, they are listening to some of the best classical music being made. I am constantly on my soapbox to get people over that elitist idea that they have with the music we play. Hollywood Pops is one of the best examples we can give."

Plus, Maestro Brian Groner will conduct a Name That Tune game show.

"It's going to be hilarious," Weldon said.

The Fox Valley Symphony has also invited members of the 501st Legion and Rebel Legion. Both are International Star Wars organizations consisting of volunteers who build screen-accurate Star Wars costumes. (501st.com and rebellegion.com.) Darth Vader, Princess Leia, Boba Fett, Padme, Stormtroopers, Rebel Pilots and many other Star Wars characters will greet the audience and participate in the concert.

"With the appearance of the 501st Legion and Rebel Legion we will bring film history to life," said Weldon. "We anticipate this concert will appeal to many generations, and how very fortunate that live symphonic music can bring so many different people together."