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Conductor Steven Smith leads the Santa Fe Symphony during the performance of Gustav Holst's seven-movement 'Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity' during Voyages of Discovery. The concert was held at the Lensic Performing Arts Center. - Natalie Guillén/The New Mexican



Galactic symphony: Concert brings planetary images and music into perfect harmony

Robert Nott | The New Mexican
Posted: Saturday, October 30, 2010 - 1/1/70

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It's probably one of the few times that the Bringer of War joined the Bringer of Peace in a mixture of music, movies and Milky Way to get scientists excited about classical music and lead classical-music lovers to study the skies.

That was how it seemed Saturday afternoon when the Santa Fe Symphony and José Francisco Salgado of Chicago's Adler Planetarium teamed up for the concert, *Voyages of Discovery: The Planets*, at the Lensic Performing Arts Center.

The event focused on British composer Gustav Holst's seven-movement *The Planets (Opus 32)*, written between 1914 and 1916. The seven movements correspond to the seven planets that were known to man at the time (Pluto was not discovered until 1930, and Holst didn't include Earth.)

Saturday's near-capacity crowd — which included lots of kids and teenagers — applauded enthusiastically throughout as cinematic images of planetary activity played over the 85-member orchestra's heads. The symphony's music director, Steven Smith, conducted the concert.

Salgado produced and directed the film, which included space footage contributed by NASA and ESA (European Space Agency), film shot by Mars Exploration Rovers, and images from high-powered telescopes. The movie imagery also included original animation by Salgado and archival texts commemorating the discovery and naming of the planets.

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In a brief introduction to the audience, Salgado explained that he wanted to use art as "a vehicle to communicate science." This mix of disciplines, he said, may draw you into wanting to learn more about a particular medium, be it science, classical music or film.



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Much of Holst's work in *The Planets* does have an emotionally sweeping feel, suggesting a score to a big-scale movie epic. It seemed to connect with the students in the audience.

Merritt Barnwell, 12, said she thought the event was "really amazing." Her friend, 12-year-old Elsebeth Kirby, agreed. "I love how the music played with the video images," she said. At times, she found the combination "suspenseful."

Yet another 12-year-old, Sophia Katz, noticed the acute difference between the musical movements for Mars (Bringer of War) and Venus (Bringer of Peace). The first was aggressively combative; the second peacefully light.



Katz said she was aware of the axiom that men are from Mars and women are from Venus, but she was reluctant to say whether she agreed with that notion.

"Possibly," she mused. "I mean, in general."

After the concert, Santa Fe Symphony Orchestra's founder and general director Gregory W. Heltman said the three-way mix of mediums is a perfect way to remind people that classical music remains vibrant.

"When people say to me, 'Classical music is dying,' I ask, 'What did you think about the score to *Avatar*? Or *Star Wars*? Or the *Indiana Jones* movies?' What are those but classical music works?"

The symphony presents the concert again at 4 p.m. today at the Lentic.

IF YOU GO

What: *Voyages of Discovery: The Planets*, a Santa Fe Symphony Orchestra concert featuring *The Planets* by Gustav Holst and *Nocturnes* by Claude Debussy

When: 4 p.m. today

Where: Lentic Performing Arts Center, 211 W. San Francisco St.

Cost: Tickets \$20 to \$70; call 988-1234.

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