

**Kishwaukee Symphony Orchestra  
Program Notes for Concert October 8, 2016**

**Santa Fe, by Emily Bear**

Emily Bear composed and orchestrated this piece when she was 10 years old. "Santa Fe" had its world premiere on December 24, 2012 with the Santa Fe Concert Association, conducted by Joe Illick.

The composition was inspired by the beauty and history of Santa Fe, New Mexico. As Emily composed it, she said she imagined being in a high-speed aircraft sweeping over the city and surrounding countryside with its unique architecture and physical landscape. She was inspired by the craggy textures of the landscape, the rich red rock formations, and the distinctive pueblo architecture, as well as the people that inhabit this special place. The rich traditions and cultural heritage served as a palette for her musical inspiration.

**The Bravest Journey, by Emily Bear**

"The Bravest Journey" was composed and orchestrated by Emily Bear. at age 13, for Stars & Stripes - A Salute to Our Veterans, an event for 6,000 people, honoring war veterans and featuring General Colin Powell. The world premiere, on October 10, 2015, was performed with the Rockford Symphony Orchestra conducted by Steven Larsen. "The Bravest Journey" describes the journey that the soldier takes: enlisting or being recruited into the army, leaving his family and loved ones, and experiencing war and the difficulty of returning home after what he has seen and gone through, as well as having memories of those who did not make it home. This composition was inspired by interviews with local veterans and their families.

**Les Voyages, by Emily Bear**

"Les Voyages" was composed and orchestrated by Emily Bear in 2014, at the age of 12. The world premiere was on December 24, 2014. The piece is composed for full concert orchestra. Emily Bear received the ASCAP 2015 Morton Gould Young Composer of the Year Award for "Les Voyages".

"Les Voyages" takes inspiration from Homer's *Odyssey*. The piece touches on many of the main parts of Homer's ten-year voyage home. From the first note to the ending climax, the music drives forward through the many trials Homer endures toward the resolution of his final return home to Ithaca and his reunion with his beloved and faithful wife and son. Following his triumph at the Battle of Troy, Odysseus begins his journey home, Poseidon curses Odysseus to wander the sea for ten years, during which he would lose all his crew and only return home through the aid of others. In the English

language as well as many others, the word “odyssey” has come to refer to an epic voyage.

## **Rhapsody in Blue, by George Gershwin**

Program notes by Geoffrey Decker © 2016

George Gershwin's (1898-1937) *Rhapsody in Blue* is a quintessential work of American music, one whose popularity transcends traditional boundaries separating classical music from jazz and blues and perhaps even that separating classical music from rock and roll. Although much of today's American youth are lucky to recognize little beyond hip hop, rap and pop music, many of those from earlier generations know and love *Rhapsody in Blue* and can even tell you who composed it!

The second child of Russian and Ukrainian Jewish immigrants, George Gershwin was born in Brooklyn on September 26, 1898. Although his birth certificate gives his name as Jacob Gershwine, friends and family always knew him as George and, after he became a professional musician, he changed his last name to Gershwin. He and his older brother, Ira, spent most of their boyhood in the Yiddish Theater District where George occasionally worked as an extra. Not particularly interested in music as a young boy, 10-year-old George was intrigued when he heard a friend's violin recital and beginning soon thereafter, he spent as many waking hours as possible at the piano their parents originally bought for Ira.

After studying classical piano style and some of the standard piano repertoire with his mentor, Charles Hambitzer, and further classical music education with American composer Henry Cowell, George worked as a “song plugger” and made piano rolls for several music publishing houses in New York's Tin Pan Alley. It was during this time that he published his first song, “When You Want 'Em, You Can't Get 'Em, When You've Got 'Em, You Don't Want 'Em,” at age 17 in 1916. It earned him a whopping 50 cents! His first real success – and some degree of fame – came with his 1919 hit song, “Swanee,” that the popular Vaudevillian, Al Jolson, heard and liked enough to add to his show. He eventually recorded it too!

In New York in November 1923, band leader Paul Whiteman led an experimental jazz concert mixed with classical elements. Whiteman, known at that time as the “King of Jazz,” earned \$1 million a year. His influence in the music scene on the east coast was substantial and he consistently sought to push the boundaries in jazz. Because of the success of his “experiment,” he called upon Gershwin to provide a kind of classical-style piano concerto but one that was “jazzed up” for another experimental concert to be given in February 1924. Knowing that the composition would require work that time would not permit, Gershwin turned down Whiteman's offer.

As the story goes, Gershwin and a friend were playing billiards at the Ambassador Billiard Parlor at Broadway and 52<sup>nd</sup> Street in Manhattan late on the night of January 3, 1923, when Gershwin's brother Ira came across an article about Whiteman's upcoming

concert in the next morning's *New York Tribune* claiming, "George Gershwin is at work on a jazz concerto, Irving Berlin is writing a syncopated tone poem, and Victor Herbert is working on an American suite." Gershwin called Whiteman the next morning and learned that one of the latter's rivals was planning his own experimental concert and, with this challenge and only five weeks to complete it, Gershwin began work on his concerto.

Just as he began to form ideas for the work, Gershwin boarded a train to Boston. He gave the following colorful – and perhaps mostly imagined – description of *Rhapsody in Blue*'s genesis to his biographer in 1931: It was on the train, with its steely rhythms, its rattle-ty bang, that is so often so stimulating to a composer – I frequently hear music in the very heart of the noise. ... And there I suddenly heard, and even saw on paper – the complete construction of the *Rhapsody*, from beginning to end. No new themes came to me, but I worked on the thematic material already in my mind and tried to conceive the composition as a whole. I heard it as a sort of musical kaleidoscope of America, of our vast melting pot, of our unduplicated national pep, of our metropolitan madness. By the time I reached Boston I had a definite plot of the piece, as distinguished from its actual substance.

Beginning work on January 7 as dated on the original manuscript for two pianos, the piece was originally titled *American Rhapsody* but was later changed to *Rhapsody in Blue* as suggested by George's brother and collaborator Ira. Finished within a few weeks, Gershwin asked Paul Whiteman's arranger, composer Ferde Grofé, to orchestrate it. Grofé finished his work on February 4, only eight days before the premiere.

The famous opening clarinet glissando came into being during a rehearsal for the premiere when, as Charles Schwartz describes in his 1973 biography, *George Gershwin: His Life and Music*, "... as a joke on Gershwin, [Ross] Gorman (Whiteman's virtuoso clarinetist) played the opening measure with a noticeable glissando, adding what he considered a humorous touch to the passage. Reacting favourably to Gorman's whimsy, Gershwin asked him to perform the opening measure that way at the concert and to add as much of a 'wail' as possible." And the practice stuck. In fact, in older recordings, one can hear not only the glissando that opens the work but also what can only be described as highly-stylized clarinet "laughing" on the descending notes that follow the glissando's ascent. One can only wonder why this "laughing" hasn't stuck?

With the composer at the piano, Paul Whiteman conducted his Palais Royal Orchestra at the premiere of *Rhapsody in Blue* at the afternoon concert titled *An Experiment in Modern Music* at the Aeolian Hall in New York City on Tuesday, February 12, 1924. With curiosity heightened by Gershwin's participation, in the audience were both John Philip Sousa and Sergei Rachmaninov, among many other famous musicians of the era. But the event is now only remembered because of its association with Gershwin's famous "concerto."

Whiteman and his band recorded *Rhapsody in Blue* with the composer at the piano, and within the next few years, Whiteman and his band had played the piece more than 80 times and the recording sold more than a million copies! Restrictions in record side lengths forced the composer and Whiteman to play the work faster than normal, but people loved it nonetheless.

After the immense success of his *Rhapsody in Blue*, Gershwin and his brother became the “toast of New York’s jazz age,” which prompted their being asked to go to Hollywood and participate in the growing movie industry. In Hollywood, they collaborated on many successful ventures. George wrote song-and-dance routines for Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers and also set DuBose Heyward’s novel and play *Porgy* to music, creating his American opera titled *Porgy and Bess* with a libretto derived from the novel by Ira Gershwin and author DuBose Heyward.

With his fame came much love and respect, but along with that came the fact that he was constantly in demand and overworked himself. What came next is best described in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music*: “Few events in the history of American music were more shocking than Gershwin’s death, seemingly on the threshold of new musical achievements. During the first half of 1937, although he complained of intermittent dizzy spells and feelings of emotional despondency, he continued to perform in public and to compose. On 9 July he fell suddenly into a coma. A brain tumour was diagnosed and emergency surgery performed, but on the morning of 11 July 1937 Gershwin died at the age of 38.” George Gershwin’s body was returned home where he was laid to rest in Westchester Hills Cemetery in Hastings-on-Hudson, just 20 miles north of New York City.

### **Recommended Recordings**

The two recordings made by Leonard Bernstein playing solo piano and conducting from the keyboard, one for Columbia Records (Sony) with the New York Philharmonic, recorded in June 1959, and the second recorded at Davies Symphony Hall in San Francisco with the Los Angeles Philharmonic on tour in June 1982, can hardly be bettered. Both are currently available although the 1982 recording is perhaps more exciting because it was made during a live performance and in excellent digital sound.

Of course, if you don’t mind the monophonic sound, Gershwin’s own first recording made shortly after the premiere in 1924 is lots of fun. Listen to the laughing clarinet and other such stylized performance practices that you would never hear in a modern recording. And you can hear it on YouTube for free!

The next best thing to Gershwin’s 1924 recording is the one with Michael Tilson Thomas’ conducting the Columbia Jazz Band accompanying Gershwin’s own piano roll of the solo piano part. It is available on Sony and is still considered groundbreaking more than 40 years on.

There are countless other great recordings of *Rhapsody in Blue*, but one of the newer ones that really stands out is that made by Decca in Leipzig in 2010 with Italian pianist Stefano Bollani accompanied by Riccardo Chailly conducting the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra. Besides being served by superlative recording quality, it's a committed, rhythmically vital and fully in-the-right-style performance.

### ***The Planets, Op. 32, Gustav Holst***

Program notes by Geoffrey Decker © 2016

In the 16 years between 1914, when British composer Gustav Holst (1874-1934) began work on his orchestral suite *The Planets*, Op. 32, and the year 1930, when American astronomer Clyde W. Tombaugh discovered Pluto, Holst's work represented all planets except Earth in our solar system. Earth wasn't included because it's a point of reference in astrology. The absence of Pluto left a gaping hole, though.

In the four years he lived beyond Pluto's discovery, why didn't Holst return to fill the hole and add Pluto to his suite? We know that, just like *Rite of Spring* did to overshadow all the rest of Stravinsky's works, Holst's suite did the same and eclipsed everything else he wrote, some of which he considered to be far more significant in representing his best work. Because of his chagrin and the fact that he was dogged with ill health in his last years, he probably never even considered returning to it.

Of course, we now know that it's probably best he didn't put himself through it. Although it would certainly be nice to have a movement representing Pluto added to *The Planets*, the decision in August 2006 to reclassify Pluto as a "dwarf planet" rather than a true planet completely vindicates Holst and makes *The Planets*, Op. 32 truly complete.

Begun shortly before the outbreak of the First World War, the suite's first movement, "Mars, the Bringer of War," is often said to foreshadow the horrors of the conflict. The menacing rhythmical figure that marches indefatigably through the movement can only be described as a true and accurate harbinger of what was to come. In a comment referring to "Mars," the conductor most closely associated with *The Planets*, Sir Adrian Boult, once said, "I well remember the composer's insistence on the stupidity of war as well as all its other horrors ... I feel the movement can easily be played so fast that it becomes too restless and energetic and loses some of its relentless, brutal, and stupid power."

The second movement, or planet, is "Venus, the Bringer of Peace." The *New Grove Dictionary of Music* describes the movement as one in which we hear Holst at his most relaxed and lyrical, characteristics that eluded Holst in his later works. The ascending solo horn seems to be beckon for something not quite attainable. Perhaps it's peace?

The third movement, "Mercury, the Winged Messenger," is as fleet-of-foot a description of the Greek god as ever could be imagined in music. The celesta makes an almost

soloistic appearance and fully participates along with a solo violin in the musical line that darts from one instrument to another.

Of the fourth movement, “Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity,” the *New Grove Dictionary of Music* states that we get a rare glimpse of Holst the extrovert. Certainly one of the suite’s most famous movements, Jupiter is a jolly romp and, as commentator Jim Yancy says, has a “Falstaffian sense of humor” and “conveys the astrological significance of Jupiter as benevolent and generous.” The movement’s middle section introduces a beautiful and very English, almost Elgarian, melody that was later arranged as the hymn tune “Thaxted,” the name of Holst’s own village. It’s not surprising, as one cannot avoid feeling that the tune should have words.

“Saturn, the Bringer of Old Age,” the fifth movement, depicts the onslaught of old age with the same effectiveness as Richard Strauss’ tone poem, *Tod und Verklärung* (Death and Transfiguration), Op. 24. Jim Yancy appropriately describes the movement as “serene and somber, especially with its rhythmical base suggestive of a tolling bell which reaches a frightening climax, but gives way to a calm and peaceful resolution.”

Jaunty and bouncy like the earlier movement “Jupiter,” the sixth movement, “Uranus, the Magician,” features a romp with staccato bassoons that makes us think of Dukas’ *The Sorcerer’s Apprentice*. But, Holst had neither seen the score of Dukas’ work nor heard the work prior to composing this movement. The movement is permeated by a four-note theme often referred to as the “spell” motif and, although the middle section is rather macabre and marches on somewhat grotesquely, the movement ends with a quiet dissipation of the magic.

The seventh and final movement, “Neptune, the Mystic,” is one in which every instrument plays very quietly in successive chords giving a sense of faraway mysticism and timelessness. The addition of the textless women’s chorus offstage adds a feeling of being lost in space, and the two repeated alternating chords they sing at the work’s end melts away into nothingness.

Holst’s *The Planets* was originally scored for a piano duet. Except for a very short use of the organ for “Neptune,” Holst later colorfully and imaginatively orchestrated it. According to Wikipedia, this scoring is for a large orchestra consisting of four flutes (the third doubling first piccolo and the fourth doubling second piccolo and “bass flute in G” -- actually an alto flute, three oboes (the third doubling bass oboe), one English horn, three clarinets in B-flat and A, one bass clarinet in B-flat, three bassoons, one contrabassoon, six horns in F, four trumpets in C, two trombones, one bass trombone, one tenor tuba in B-flat (actually a euphonium scored for treble clef), one bass tuba, a percussion section with six timpani (requiring two players), bass drum, snare drum, cymbals, triangle, tam-tam, tambourine, glockenspiel, xylophone, tubular bells, celesta, pipe organ, two harps, and strings. And, last but not least, in “Neptune,” two three-part women’s choruses to be located in an adjoining room and screened from the audience, are added.

Holst's *The Planets*, Op. 32, was only heard in private or incomplete performances between September 1918 and October 1920. The premiere was at the Queen's Hall on September 29, 1918 and was conducted by Holst's friend, the aforementioned Adrian Boult – prior to his being knighted – and for an invited audience of about 250 people. The first complete public performance was finally given in London by Albert Coates conducting the London Symphony Orchestra on November 15, 1920.

### **Recommended Recordings**

What may be the finest recording ever made of Holst's *The Planets*, Op. 32 is that by Herbert von Karajan conducting the Berlin Philharmonic and made in January 1981 in Berlin's Philharmonie music hall. A good example of the somewhat tricky digital recording era, the recording has been served well by Deutsche Grammophon's Original-Image Bit-Processing. Being a rather conservative and somewhat stodgy institution prior to Karajan's tenure as their music director, the orchestra supposedly turned their noses up to Holst's work when first introduced to it. Karajan persisted, though, and completely won the orchestra over by the care he took in preparing and the magic he was able to conjure in the shortest movement, "Mercury, the Winged Messenger." It's a spectacular recording of a work by an English composer, played by a German orchestra, and conducted by an Austrian!

Surprisingly well-played with the even more conservative Vienna Philharmonic, Karajan's first record of Holst's *The Planets* was set down by Decca in the Sofiensaal in Vienna in September 1961. It was and, for some, may still be a demonstration disc of the qualities of early stereo hi-fi and of Decca's excellent recording team headed by the famed producer John Culshaw. This recording can be found coupled with a spectacular performance of Strauss' *Don Juan*, Op. 20 on Decca's *The Originals Legendary Recordings* 475 8225.

Other excellent recordings – and performances -- are those made by William Steinberg and the Boston Symphony Orchestra for Deutsche Grammophon in the early 1970s, Charles Dutoit's sonic spectacular recording made with his Orchestre symphonique de Montréal and recorded by Decca in St. Eustache Cathedral in Montreal in June 1986, Zubin Mehta's earlier recording with the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra on Decca made in 1971, and James Levine's recording for Deutsche Grammophon with our beloved Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 1989.

Our friend and local trumpeter, Mark Baldin, is particularly fond of the recording by Sir Adrian Boult and the BBC Symphony Orchestra made in the so-called Corn Exchange in Bedford, U.K., in early 1945. It is available in several forms and in several remasterings, the best of which is probably that by Andrew Rose offered at his online site, Pristine Classical, at [www.pristineclassical.com](http://www.pristineclassical.com).

Boult, whom you may remember from the discussion above, conducted the first full performance of Holst's *The Planets* and made no fewer than five commercial recordings

of the work, the last of which was by EMI as his penultimate recording late in his life with the London Philharmonic Orchestra and was released to celebrate his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. Really, any one of his recordings is authoritative and worth investigating.