

## Opening Weekend: Holst's *The Planets* in HD

### ONE-MINUTE NOTES

**Elgar: *Pomp and Circumstance* March No. 1**

Graduation isn't until late next spring, but we are all sure to smile and hum along with this iconic commencement anthem.

**Sarah Kirkland Snider: *Hiraeth* (with film by Mark DeChiazza)**

*Hiraeth* is Sarah Kirkland Snider's evocative valentine to her ancestral home in Salisbury, North Carolina. The music speaks of "a feeling of homesickness for a land that never existed or one to which you can never return." Mark DeChiazza's film complements Snider's music.

**Holst: *The Planets—An HD Odyssey***

This audience favorite is both a large suite and a series of symphonic poems. One can perceive Holst's subject matter as character portraits of the Roman gods, an astrological journey or a study in astronomy. Collectively, *The Planets* comprise a metaphor for the human condition and the progression from birth to death.

### **ELGAR: *Pomp and Circumstance* Military March in D Major, Op. 39, No. 1**

**EDWARD ELGAR**

**Born:** June 2, 1857, in Broadheath, near Worcester, England

**Died:** February 23, 1934, in Worcester

**Composed:** 1901

**World Premiere:** October 19, 1901, in Liverpool. A.E. Rodewald conducted.

**NJSO Premiere:** 1953–54 season. Samuel Antek conducted.

**Duration:** 5 minutes

When Elgar first played this piece at the piano for his friend Dora Penney, he called its central melody “a tune that comes once in a lifetime.” He wasn’t far off the mark. The English conductor Henry Wood likened it to “a second [British] national anthem.” In fact, the tune universally associated with commencement exercises in America is the middle section of this tripartite march.

Elgar wrote two *Pomp and Circumstance* marches in 1901, adding two more in 1904 and 1907 and a fifth in 1930. The first has all but eclipsed the others, and it remains Elgar’s most famous theme. On this concert, it heralds the commencement of the NJSO’s exciting 2019–20 classical season.

For those with keen ears, Elgar plays a musical joke at the beginning: eight measures in E-flat major, before he settles into his stated tonality of D major. It is a neat trick.

*Instrumentation: four flutes (two doubling piccolo), two oboes, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, two cornets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, triangle, tambourine, sleigh bells, cymbals, bass drum, glockenspiel, two harps, organ and strings.*

## **SARAH KIRKLAND SNIDER: *Hiraeth* (with film by Mark DeChiazza) (NJSO Premiere)**

### **SARAH KIRKLAND SNIDER**

**Born:** October 8, 1973, in Princeton, New Jersey

Currently residing in Princeton

**Composed:** 2015

**World Premiere:** September 26, 2015, in Chapel Hill, North Carolina

**NJSO Premiere:** These are the NJSO premiere performances.

**Duration:** 27 minutes

For Sarah Kirkland Snider, all her music is autobiographical. “It’s all informed by my life experience,” she has said. When the North Carolina Symphony invited her to write a piece exploring her family history in the state—her father grew up in Salisbury, NC—her imagination took off. “This commission created a uniquely personal, more intensely autobiographical writing space inside my head. I called upon specific childhood memories to trigger musical ideas, something I don’t usually do. I’d take a walk and think about the time my brother and cousin and I were down by the train tracks when I was 8 and my brother said something funny—

how it felt when the train whooshed by, how my cousin's laugh sounded, how the air smelled—and I'd hear a melodic idea. I'd work with that material while thinking about my Dad's funeral, and I'd conceive of the material in a new way harmonically or rhythmically."

She describes composing *Hiraeth* as a process of summoning those memories, then layering and juxtaposing them, the way memory and grief do. Her title is a Welsh word that the University of Wales defines as "homesickness tinged with grief or sadness over the lost or departed; a mix of longing, yearning, nostalgia, wistfulness." Oxford and Merriam Webster define it as "a homesickness for a home you cannot return to, or that never was."

When the prospect arose of an accompanying film by Mark DeChiazza, Snider was thinking in terms of landscape, architecture and sky. Because her piece focuses on family, DeChiazza suggested she involve her children and her uncle (her father's twin). Snider recalls, "We set about re-creating some of my father's, uncle's and my childhood experiences in North Carolina. The result is something hazy and atmospheric, somewhere between memory and dream."

Snider was born and grew up in Princeton. She attended Wesleyan University, then earned an M.M. and Artist Certificate at the Yale School of Music. She won the Detroit Symphony Orchestra's Elaine Lebenbom Memorial Award in 2013 and is the recipient of many other honors. Her teachers have included Martin Bresnick, Marc-Andre Dalbavie, Aaron Jay Kernis, Ezra Laderman, David Lang and Christopher Rouse. She divides her time between Princeton and New York City.

#### IN THE COMPOSER'S AND FILMMAKER'S WORDS

*Sarah Kirkland Snider and Mark DeChiazza have both written about Hiraeth and their creative collaboration. The composer's description of Hiraeth follows in its entirety, followed by text from DeChiazza's website, [markdechiazza.com](http://markdechiazza.com).*

In 2013 the North Carolina Symphony commissioned me to write a large-scale piece about my family ties to the state. My father grew up in the small town of Salisbury, and his ancestors had been in North Carolina for 13 generations (or so the legend goes). His mother was an avid historian who helped found the Salisbury Historic Foundation and fought to preserve much of the town and surrounding areas. She

assiduously educated my brother and me on our great-grandparents, great-aunts and uncles, and cousins—their names, personalities and accomplishments—going back several generations. It was very important to her that we knew where we came from. We were very close with my Dad’s side of the family, and spent a lot of time in Salisbury as I grew up. All of this fostered in me a deep feeling that while New Jersey was my circumstantial home, North Carolina was my spiritual one—a safe harbor, a place that would, if all else failed, take care of me somehow.

My plan was to write a personal meditation on notions of home, family and identity, as seen through the lens of my childhood memories of North Carolina. I was delighted to have Princeton Symphony Orchestra join as co-commissioner of the work; there could be no more fitting partner for this project than the orchestra of my own hometown, the locus of all my other childhood memories. Upon receiving the commission, I began imagining a film accompaniment for the piece. Because music is so abstract and the theme for this commission so specific, I thought it might be interesting to have a visual component explore some of the memories that inspired the piece. Sunlight was a salient feature of my memories of North Carolina—the play of light and shadow on wax myrtle trees on my grandparents’ patio, the burnished late-day light filtering through their sunroom windows, or the soothing, consoling sunlight of winter, which looked and felt very different to me from the light up North. I knew of a filmmaker, Mark DeChiazza, who made beautiful films for concert music, and I thought he might be able to capture this. With the support of several historic foundations in Salisbury, we were able to make it happen.

My father was thrilled about all of this. That his daughter was co-commissioned by his two hometown orchestras to explore notions of family history was a source of great pride and excitement for him. Shortly after I received the commission, however, my dad was diagnosed with a rare, untreatable cancer. I had just begun writing the piece when, three months later, he was gone.

I could no longer write the piece I’d planned to write. My musical ideas were now refracted through the lens of grief and the anguish and disorientation of letting go. My dad, with whom I was very close, was my primary living connection to North Carolina. The memories of my time there were newly painful to recall, because I could no longer share them with him. And the memories themselves almost felt surreal, difficult to compartmentalize: how do we reconcile the importance of places in our past that hold no future for us? Reeling from the shock and pain of his absence, what had initially begun as a rosy, nostalgic exploration of childhood was now suffused with melancholy and angst. The material grew darker, my thinking about the

piece more complex.

Mark's and my thinking about the film changed as well. We had initially envisioned an abstract visual poem of town and landscape, but because the piece is ultimately about family, Mark suggested we bring some aspect of humanity into it. We decided to shoot images of my own children (then 6 and 4 years old) re-creating my father's and my memories of Salisbury: playing in parks, backyards and railroad tracks; running around downtown and lazing quietly around the house. He suggested the film include my father's identical twin, Britt Snider, to offer a different narrative perspective. We also shot scenes of social gatherings—the kind that populated our visits down there, where the grownups would drink bourbon, smoke cigarettes and tell stories while children ran amok through the proceedings. For these scenes, we brought together friends of my parents and grandparents who are still living in Salisbury, and just let the cameras roll.

Ultimately, *Hiraeth* is both elegy and personal meditation, steeped in the hazy, half-recollected textures and sensations that surround a memory. At times I consciously strove to emulate the logic and architecture of a dream, the way memory sometimes feels: motifs overlap in evolving ways; thoughts wander and interrupt one another suddenly; and frequently, one memory is imbued with the color and perfume of another. But mostly I just tried to immerse myself in my own hiraeth for this time and place I can't return to, and give voice to what rose to the surface.

— Sarah Kirkland Snider

DeChiazza's film, which partners with live performance of composer Sarah Kirkland Snider's 30-minute orchestral work *Hiraeth*, aims to realize moments that never existed—rarefied memories from an imagined childhood. The film's imagery could be understood as an intricate collage of invented home movies—an idealized and amped-up version of dad's old super-8s.

Shot on location around Salisbury, NC, where Snider's father grew up and where, as a child, she would visit her grandparents' home. DeChiazza cast Jasper and Dylan, Snider's own children, as the primary subjects of his film, drawn to the immediate and tactile way that children explore their surroundings through play, and how childhood memories are shaped through this mode of encountering the world.

With real people and places as raw material, the camera's eye constructs a fictional nostalgic past, selectively focusing on some elements while leaving others obscured in luminous haze. It can draw very

close, or pull back to skirt the periphery of its subjects as it seeks to simplify what is complicated and lingers to burnish the beautiful.

The children exist within a story that is always kept slightly outside of our frame—we are right beside it but always looking at a tangent to it. Evading narrative's factual details, we instead become steeped in the tones, colors, and textures it exudes—a poetry that can be understood through sensation and experience.

– markdechiazza.com

*Instrumentation: piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (vibraphone, slapsick, tenor drum, snare drum, bass drum, large suspended cymbal, small splash cymbal, small tam tam, glockenspiel, caxixi, crotales, triangle, celeste, marimba), piano, harp and strings.*

## **HOLST: *The Planets*, Suite for Large Orchestra, Op. 32**

### **GUSTAV HOLST**

**Born:** September 21, 1874, in Cheltenham, England

**Died:** May 25, 1934, in London, England

**Composed:** 1914–16

**World Premiere:** September 29, 1918, in Queens Hall, London.

**NJSO Premiere:** 1999–2000 season. Sergiu Comissiona conducted.

**Duration:** 51 minutes

### **Homage to Schoenberg and Stravinsky**

When Gustav Holst began work on *The Planets* in 1914, he had thought about composing a large orchestral suite for some time. This one began with the title *Seven Pieces for Large Orchestra*, an homage to his contemporary Arnold Schoenberg, whose *Five Pieces for Orchestra* (1909) Holst greatly admired. Most critics compare *The Planets* to Schoenberg's *Pieces* or to Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* (1913), both of which were certainly influential. In terms of orchestral precedent, the best comparison is to Bedřich Smetana's *Má vlast* (*My Fatherland*), six movements loosely linked by the course of a great river, each of which functions as a discrete tone poem.

### **A Collection of Contradictions**

*The Planets* is full of paradoxes. One irony is that Holst wrestled with large forms, uncomfortable with the structural constraints that symphonies and concerti presented. Yet in this collection of orchestral movements, he composed one of the most monumental pieces in the literature. Another contradiction is that *The Planets* was written from 1914 to 1917, and is thus generally classified as a war work. Yet its relentless, menacing first movement—“Mars, The Bringer of War”—was fully drafted before Great Britain entered the war. Thus it is certainly not Holst’s reaction to the horror of military conflict; his daughter and biographer, Imogen Holst, deemed the movement prophetic.

### **A Journey through Life**

We would do better to look at the progression of character that Holst makes through his seven movements: from war (Mars) to peace (Venus), thence to a messenger (Mercury) who ushers in first jollity (Jupiter), then old age (Saturn). Finally we are introduced to magic (Uranus) and mysticism (Neptune). In a way, Holst is taking us as listeners on a journey through life, not only from a temporal standpoint but also from a spiritual one. Thus Venus here is a palliative to war, rather than a symbol of romantic love. She tempers the brutality and violence of Mars’ music, with reminders of beauty and refinement.

In “Mercury,” which functions as a scherzo movement, Holst gives vent again to adolescent energy and enthusiasm. He is herald to Jupiter, whose irrepressible joviality has made this central movement the best known and most popular of the seven. From here we encounter the darker, more abstract side of Holst’s personality. “Saturn” is the consummate mood piece, confronting us with fear of mortality. The sorcerer of Dukas’s *The Sorcerer’s Apprentice* clearly had at least a rhythmic impact on Holst’s evocation of “Uranus the Magician.” Mystery and the occult reach their peak in the finale, “Neptune,” which adds a wordless chorus of treble voices to evoke the transcendent boundlessness of the universe.

*The Planets* abounds in opportunities for every section of the orchestra and most of the instrumental principals, to an extent that rivals a concerto for orchestra. Holst’s extraordinary range of mood, color and expression makes *The Planets* an engrossing and powerful listening experience.

## GUSTAV HOLST, ASTRONOMY 100 YEARS AGO AND *THE PLANETS*

E.D. Hirsch's original *Dictionary of Cultural Literacy* (1988) told us that a planet is "a kind of object that is in orbit around a star, but does not give off its own light; rather, it shines by reflecting sunlight. ... There are nine major planets, including the earth, in orbit around our sun, along with many asteroids." The first thing we ought to know about Gustav Holst's most famous work, *The Planets*, is that it is *not* about mythology. Most planets in our solar system simply happen to be named for ancient Greek and Roman gods and goddesses.

We know from the program page that Holst's suite consists of seven movements. Hirsch and our middle-school science teachers taught us that our solar system had nine planets. That changed in 2003, when astronomers tentatively identified a 10th planet. They reported that the so-called 10th planet ("2003 UB313") was even larger than Pluto. Informally, they referred to it as Xena, but in 2006 they formally designated this trans-Neptunian object as Eris.

The three planets "missing" from the Holst composition are Pluto, Earth and the recently discovered Eris. Pluto was not discovered until 1930 (and in any case was downgraded in 2006 to a "dwarf planet," as was the newcomer, Eris). Holst completed *The Planets* in 1917. Earth, for whatever reason, did not stimulate his imagination. His symphonic suite is its own musical galaxy, less governed by science than by mysticism.

What then was Holst's context? Astrology, at least as a jumping-off point. But there is a lot more going on in these seven tone poems—for that is, in effect, what they are—than just the character he deemed appropriate to each of the planets. Holst was a bookworm who preferred the solitude of his study to almost everything. He became interested in eastern religions and mysticism early on, and he worked both aspects into much of his music, including *The Planets*. For him, philosophical ideas took precedence over astrological or astronomical accuracy. He thought of *The Planets* as a series of mood pictures, and he neither intended nor achieved immense contrast within any of its individual components. Between contiguous movements, however, there is a world of difference. That is precisely why this work is so enormously effective in its cumulative dramatic and musical impact.

*Instrumentation: four flutes (one doubling piccolo, one doubling bass flute), three oboes (one doubling bass oboe), English horn, three clarinets, bass clarinet, three bassoons, contrabassoon, six horns, four trumpets, two*



*tenor trombones, bass trombone, two tubas, six timpani (requiring two players), percussion (including side drum, cymbals, bass drum, triangle, tambourine, bells, tam-tam, xylophone, and glockenspiel), celeste, two harps, organ strings and treble chorus.*