



# ABOUT THE MUSIC

## THE PLANETS

May 3, 4 & 5, 2025  
Program Notes by Elizabeth Schwartz

### GABRIELA ORTIZ

Antrópolis for Orchestra



**COMPOSER:** Born December 20, 1964, Mexico City  
**WORK COMPOSED:** 2018-2019  
**WORLD PREMIERE:** Carlos Miguel Prieto led the Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional de México on April 1, 2018, at the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City.  
**INSTRUMENTATION:** Piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 4 trumpets, 2 trombones, bass trombone, tuba, timpani, almglocken, bass drum, 2 bongos, claves, cowbell, cymbals, drum set, glockenspiel, güiro, maracas, marimba, metal güiro, snare drum, suspended cymbal, 3 tin cans, vibraphone, vibraslap, whip, xylophone, and strings  
**ESTIMATED DURATION:** 10 minutes

### ABOUT THE MUSIC

Born into a musical family, Gabriela Ortiz didn't choose music – music chose her. Her parents were founding members of the group Los Folkloristas, a renowned ensemble dedicated to performing Latin American folk music. Growing up in cosmopolitan Mexico City, Ortiz's music education was multifaceted; as a child, she played charango and guitar with Los Folkloristas while also studying classical piano. Ortiz's music embraces disparate musical worlds, from traditional and popular idioms to avant-garde techniques and multimedia works. This is, perhaps, the most salient characteristic of her work: an ingenious merging of distinct sonic realms.

"Gabriela is one of the most talented composers in the world – not only in Mexico, not only in our continent – in the world," declared Conductor Gustavo Dudamel, a longtime champion of Ortiz's music. "Her ability to bring colors, to bring rhythm and harmonies that connect with you is something beautiful, something unique."

"The word *antro* has its origin in the Latin 'antrum,' meaning 'grotto' or 'cavern,'" Ortiz writes in her program note for *Antrópolis*. "In Mexico, until the 90s, the term referred to bars or entertainment places of dubious reputation. But nowadays, and especially among younger people, this word refers to any bar or nightclub. One time, while talking with flutist Alejandro Escuer, we imagined the title of a future work, one that would synthesize the music of Mexico's legendary dance halls and bars: *Antrópolis*, a neologism, a precise invented name for a piece that narrates the sound of the city through its dance halls and nightclubs.

"In 2017, conductor Carlos Miguel Prieto commissioned me to write a short work – brilliant and rather light-hulled – to be premiered at the close of a concert celebrating the 80th birthday of American composer Philip Glass, performed by the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra at Carnegie Hall in New York.

"Given the parameters of the commission, I retrieved the title we had imagined, and thus *Antrópolis* came to life. It is a piece in which I wanted to pay a very personal tribute to some of those 'antros' or emblematic dance halls of Mexico City that left a special sonorous imprint in my memory. These cabarets or dance halls that represent the nostalgia for *rumberas* and live dance orchestras, such as 'El Bombay,' where it is said that Che Guevara would twirl; or the 'Salón Colonia,' which

seems to have come out of dreams taken from a film of the Golden Age of Mexican cinema. Who doesn't remember the fun ballroom 'Los Infernos,' a perfect place for those who after a long day at work would leave their cubicles to go dancing, drink, and listen to music. Finally, the memory of the bar 'Tutti Frutti' leaves an impression, where I first met the punk couple who owned the 'antro,' and where you could listen to experimental music from the 1980s.

"Antrópolis is the sonorous reflection of a city through its 'antros,' including the accumulation of experiences that we bring, and that form an essential part of our history in this very complex but fascinating Mexico City."

## GEORGE GERSHWIN

### Concerto in F major for Piano and Orchestra



**COMPOSER:** Born September 26, 1898, Brooklyn, NY; died July 11, 1937, Hollywood, CA

**WORK COMPOSED:** May through November 10, 1925

**WORLD PREMIERE:** Gershwin performed the piano solo at the premiere on December 3, 1925, with Walter Damrosch leading the New York Symphony Society at Carnegie Hall.

**INSTRUMENTATION:** Solo piano, piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, bells, cymbals, gong, slapstick, snare drum, triangle, wood block, xylophone and strings.

**ESTIMATED DURATION:** 29 minutes

### ABOUT THE MUSIC

When conductor Walter Damrosch approached George Gershwin in the spring of 1925 with a commission for a piano concerto, Gershwin did not hesitate. After *Rhapsody in Blue* premiered in 1924, critics had attacked both the work and its composer, in part because Gershwin did not orchestrate it himself. Although Gershwin had never written a work for full orchestra before, he had studied harmony, orchestration, and musical form with Edward Kilenyi. Gershwin was determined to prove himself a composer of "serious" music, one capable of orchestrating his own work. To that end, Gershwin studied Cecil Forsythe's book *Orchestration* and solicited advice from musical colleagues.

Gershwin's initial sketches, under the working title *New York Concerto*, were completed by September 1925. "Many persons had thought that the *Rhapsody* was only a happy accident," said Gershwin. "I made up my mind to do a piece of absolute music. The *Rhapsody*, as its title implies, was a blues impression. The concerto would be unrelated to any program. And that is exactly how I wrote it."

The concerto has the improvisatory feel of jazz, and critics were quick to label it a "Jazz Concerto," but Gershwin himself took pains to draw a distinction between pure jazz and what he described as "certain jazz rhythms which are worked out in a more or less symphonic manner." The most prominent "jazz rhythm" in the Concerto in F is the Charleston, the signature dance of the Jazz Age. In Gershwin's program notes, he described the Allegro as "quick and pulsating, representing the young, enthusiastic spirit of American life." In similar fashion, the closing Allegro agitato features what Gershwin called "an orgy of rhythms."

The bluesy melancholy of the Adagio-Andante con moto, with its opening trumpet solo, conveys a quintessentially American type of solitude/isolation, not unlike the self-contained loneliness of the figures in Edward Hopper's 1942 painting, *Nighthawks*. Gershwin wrote, "The second movement has a poetic nocturnal atmosphere which has come to be referred to as the American blues."

The audience cheered at the opening performance, but reviews were mixed. The *New Yorker* described it as "about the most important new work that has been aired in this hamlet," but other critics used Gershwin's lack of compositional training to dismiss the concerto as "trivial." Time has proved the naysayers wrong; today, the Concerto in F is the most popular and most frequently performed piano concerto written by an American composer.

# GUSTAV HOLST

## *The Planets* for Orchestra, Opus 32



**COMPOSER:** Born September 21, 1874, Cheltenham, England; died May 25, 1934, London  
**WORK COMPOSED:** 1914-1916

**WORLD PREMIERE:** Adrian Boult conducted a private performance of *The Planets* with the New Queen's Hall Orchestra on September 29, 1918. Albert Coates led the London Symphony Orchestra in the first public performance of all seven movements at Queen's Hall in London on November 15, 1920.

**INSTRUMENTATION:** Female chorus, 4 flutes (2 doubling piccolo; one doubling bass flute), 3 oboes (one doubling bass oboe), English horn, 3 clarinets, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 6 horns, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, tenor tuba (euphonium), tuba, 2 sets of timpani, bass drum, cymbals, glockenspiel, gong, orchestra bells, snare drum, triangle, xylophone, celeste, organ, 2 harps, and strings

**ESTIMATED DURATION:** 48 minutes

### ABOUT THE MUSIC

Gregarious. Reticent. Perceptive and naïve. Practical and visionary. Musically and intellectually adventurous. Unconcerned with commercial success or failure. Perhaps the best descriptor for composer Gustav Holst is “mercurial,” a nod to the sign under which he was born. Holst embodied many contradictions, and it was his good fortune to find a vehicle – music – through which he could explore them all.

Like Leopold Mozart, Holst's father Adolph prioritized musical education for his children. Young Gustav studied piano, violin, and trombone and quickly developed an interest in composition. Holst absorbed musical ideas from works he heard or played, but he had little formal training as a composer. Holst wrote many works but is best known for just one: *The Planets*.

“As a rule, I only study things that suggest music to me,” wrote Gustav Holst to a friend in 1913, just before beginning “Mars, Bringer of War,” the first movement of *The Planets*. “... Recently, the character of each planet suggested lots to me, and I have been studying astrology fairly closely ...” Holst regretted that astrology was so belittled by those who debunked it as unscientific. For Holst, astrology offered keen insights into humanity, ideas he likely picked up from Alan Leo's influential 1902 book, *What Is a Horoscope and How is it Cast?* Leo, considered the father of modern astrology, advocated a psychological interpretation of star signs rather than using them as predictors of specific events.

“These pieces were suggested by the astrological significance of the planets,” said Holst of his finished work. “There is no program music in them, neither have they any connection with the deities of classical mythology bearing the same names. If any guide to the music is required, the subtitle to each piece will be found sufficient, especially if it is used in a broad sense. For instance, Jupiter brings jollity in the normal sense and also the more ceremonial kind of rejoicing associated with religious or national festivities. Saturn brings not only physical decay but also a vision of fulfillment.” Some years after the premiere, Holst described the individual movements as “mood pictures,” organized in careful juxtaposition with contrasting emotional qualities. Holst also intended the music to embody the subtitles he gave to each planet. Thus, “Mars, Bringer of War” does not depict a specific battle; it is an expression of the emotional state of being at war.

“Mars, Bringer of War” opens with *col legno* strings (players bounce the wood of their bows on the strings, creating a percussive effect). The ominous marching strings meter – groups of five, rather than the conventional march tempo of four or two. Brasses signal military might in this music of formidable, almost unstoppable power. The gentle calm of “Venus, Bringer of Peace,” is the perfect foil to Mars' bellicosity, while Mercury's playfulness suggests the quicksilver nature of “the wingéd messenger.” Jupiter's “jollity” encompasses a wide expanse of qualities: noble, magisterial, benevolent. Its several themes embody joy, excitement, and heroism. Jupiter is the most English-sounding movement in *The Planets*, in the nationalistic sense personified by Ralph Vaughan Williams' music. Its central theme resembles a folk melody of quiet dignity. Saturn, Holst's favorite section of *The Planets*, represents old age in a series of slow, plodding tones and rhythms; later, chimes echo through a static soundscape. Reviewers and biographers interpreted this music as a harbinger of death, but Saturn also fosters the act of reflection; the music has subtle connections to the closing notes of “Mars.” How you interpret “Saturn” depends in large part on how you feel about growing old.

“Uranus, The Magician” reflects Holst's interest in mysticism and the occult, while “Neptune, The Mystic,” enters an otherworldly realm. Holst emphasizes Neptune's ethereal nature with glockenspiel, celeste, shimmering winds, gossamer strings, and a wordless chorus of female voices.

Music critics were divided about *The Planets*, but audiences, then as now, responded with overwhelming enthusiasm.

Reviewer Ernest Newman praised Holst for possessing “one of the subtlest and most original minds of our time,” and Holst’s friend and colleague, Ralph Vaughan Williams, observed, “Holst’s music reaches into the unknown, but it never loses touch with humanity.”

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