



Lieutenant Colonel Jason K. Fettig, Director

UNITED STATES MARINE BAND  
Sunday, February 28, 2016 at 2:00 P.M.  
Rachel M. Schlesinger Concert Hall and Arts Center  
Northern Virginia Community College  
Alexandria Campus  
Major Michelle A. Rakers, conducting

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### Character Pieces

John Mackey (b. 1973)

*The Frozen Cathedral* (2013)

William Bolcom (b. 1938)  
transcribed by the composer

Concerto Grosso for Four Saxophones and Band (2000)

Lively  
Song Without Words  
Valse  
Badinerie

*GySgt Steven Temme, GySgt Gregory Ridlington,  
GySgt David Jenkins, and GySgt Otis Goodlett, soloists*

### INTERMISSION

Gustav Holst (1874–1934)  
transcribed by Merlin Patterson

*The Planets, Opus 32*

Mars, the Bringer of War  
Venus, the Bringer of Peace  
Mercury, the Winged Messenger  
Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity  
Saturn, the Bringer of Old Age  
Uranus, the Magician  
Neptune, the Mystic

The Marine Chamber Orchestra will perform Sunday, March 6 at 2:00 P.M. in the Rachel M. Schlesinger Concert Hall and Arts Center at Northern Virginia Community College, Alexandria Campus. The program will feature works by Mendelssohn, Schumann, and Brahms.

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# ***PROGRAM NOTES***

## ***The Frozen Cathedral (2013)***

John Mackey (b. 1973)

John Mackey received his bachelor of fine arts degree from the Cleveland Institute of Music in Ohio, where he studied with Donald Erb, and his master of music degree from The Juilliard School in New York City where he was a student of John Corigliano. Composing most often for symphonic winds, Mackey is the youngest composer to have won the American Bandmasters Association/Ostwald Award, which was for his first wind band work, *Redline Tango*, in 2005. *The Frozen Cathedral* was premièred on March 22, 2013, with the University of North Carolina Greensboro Wind Ensemble, led by John Locke and was inspired by Locke's son's fascination with Alaska as described on Mackey's website:

The Koyukon call it "Denali," meaning "the great one," and it is great. It stands at more than twenty thousand feet above sea level, a towering mass over the Alaskan wilderness. Measured from its base to its peak, it is the tallest mountain on and in the world – a full two thousand feet taller than Mount Everest. It is Mount McKinley, and it is an awesome spectacle. And it is the inspiration behind John Mackey's *The Frozen Cathedral*.

The piece was born of the collaboration between Mackey and John Locke, Director of Bands at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Locke asked Mackey if he would dedicate the piece to the memory of his late son, J.P., who had a particular fascination with Alaska and the scenery of Denali National Park. Mackey agreed – and immediately found himself grappling with two problems:

How does one write a concert closer, making it joyous and exciting and celebratory, while also acknowledging, at least to myself, that this piece is rooted in unimaginable loss: the death of a child?

The other challenge was connecting the piece to Alaska – a place I'd never seen in person. I kept thinking about all of this in literal terms, and I just wasn't getting anywhere. My wife, who titles all of my pieces, said I should focus on what it is that draws people to these places. People go to the mountains – these monumental, remote, ethereal, and awesome parts of the world – as a kind of pilgrimage. It's a search for the sublime, for transcendence. A great mountain is like a church. "Call it *The Frozen Cathedral*," she said.

I clearly married up.

The most immediately distinct aural feature of the work is the quality (and geographic location) of intriguing instrumental colors. The stark, glacial opening is colored almost exclusively by a crystalline twinkling of metallic percussion that surrounds the audience. Although the percussion orchestration carries a number of traditional sounds, there are a host of unconventional timbres as well, such as crystal glasses, crotales on timpani, tam-tam resonated with superball mallets, and the waterphone, an instrument used by Mackey to great effect on his earlier work *Turning*. The initial sonic environment is an icy and alien one, a cold and distant landscape whose mystery is only heightened by a longing, modal solo for bass flute – made dissonant by a contrasting key, and more insistent by the eventual addition of alto flute, English horn, and bassoon. This collection expands to encompass more of the winds, slowly and surely, with their chorale building in intensity and rage. Just as it seems their wailing despair can drive no further, however, it shatters like glass, dissipating once again into the timbres of the introductory percussion.

The second half of the piece begins in a manner that sounds remarkably similar to the first. In reality, it has been transposed into a new key and this time, when the bass flute takes up the long solo again, it resonates with far more compatible consonance. The only momentary clash

is a Lydian influence in the melody, which brings a brightness to the tune that will remain until the end. Now, instead of anger and bitter conflict, the melody projects an aura of warmth, nostalgia, and even joy. This bright spirit pervades the ensemble, and the twinkling colors of the metallic percussion inspire a similar percolation through the upper woodwinds as the remaining winds and brass present various fragmented motives based on the bass flute's melody. This new chorale, led in particular by the trombones, is a statement of catharsis, at once banishing the earlier darkness in a moment of spiritual transcendence and celebrating the grandeur of the surroundings. A triumphant conclusion in E-flat major is made all the more jubilant by the ecstatic clattering of the antiphonal percussion, which ring into the silence like voices across the ice.

-Program note by Jake Wallace

### **Concerto Grosso for Four Saxophones and Band (2000)**

William Bolcom (b. 1938)  
transcribed by the composer

Born in Seattle, William Bolcom began studying composition privately at an early age with George Frederick McKay and John Verrall at the University of Washington. He received his master of arts degree at Mills College in Oakland, California, with Darius Milhaud, and his doctor of musical arts degree at Stanford University in Palo Alto, California, with Leland Smith. From 1973 to 2008, Bolcom taught composition at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and served as chairman of the composition department from 1998 to 2003. Bolcom was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for music in 1988 for his *Twelve New Etudes for Piano*, four GRAMMY Awards in 2005, and the National Medal of Arts in 2006.

The composer provides the following program note:

Concerto Grosso, written for the PRISM Saxophone Quartet (which has included at different times a few of my former students in composition,) was written purely as a piece to be enjoyed by performers and listeners. PRISM had mentioned wanting a concerto grosso for themselves. (To remind readers, a concerto grosso is a Baroque-era form involving a small group of instrumentalists, called the concertino, in dialog with the ripieno or large orchestra.)

The first movement, *Lively*, in simple sonata form, evokes blues harmonies in both its themes. *Song without Word*, which follows, is a lyrical larghetto. The following *Valse*, which has a very French cast, begins with a long solo stretch for the saxophone quartet; the development of this theme alternates with a pianissimo Scherzetto section. The final *Badinerie*, a title borrowed from Bach, evokes bebop and rhythm-and-blues.

The orchestral version of the work was commissioned by New Sounds Music, Inc. for the PRISM Quartet, with support from a variety of funding agencies, and premièred in 2000. I did the band transcription in 2009, stemming from a request by Professor Michael Haithcock to enable the work to be performed on the [University of Michigan's] Symphony Band's upcoming tour of China.

## ***The Planets, Opus 32***

Gustav Holst (1874–1934)

transcribed by Merlin Patterson

Contrary to his enduring fame as the composer of the popular orchestral suite *The Planets*, Gustav Holst spent most of his life in relative obscurity. In fact, the attention he received for *The Planets* was quite a surprise to Holst, and an unwelcome one at that. Not only was he a shy and humble man ill-equipped to adequately handle the onslaught of reporters and admirers, he also greatly feared the pressure that popular success placed on a composer. In the midst of the activity that followed the debut of the piece, Holst wrote to a close friend, “If nobody likes your work, you have to go on for the sake of the work, and you are in no danger of letting the public repeat yourself.” Indeed, for the remainder of his professional life, Holst continued to develop his distinct compositional voice, taking care not to simply copy the successful formula of *The Planets*. Though he went on to create strikingly original music, his misgivings about fame and public approval were realized as he never again enjoyed the recognition *The Planets* brought him.

Gustav Holst was born Gustavus Theodore von Holst in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, England, in 1874. He was the son of a highly regarded pianist and organist, and it seemed likely that the young Holst would follow in his father’s musical footsteps. Unfortunately, he suffered from asthma and a nerve condition as a child, which would worsen throughout his life and deny him a career as a performer. Instead, Holst turned his focus to composition and teaching. He studied at the Royal College of Music in London, and began writing music that showed the strong influence of composers like Antonín Dvořák and Richard Wagner. During his student years, he met fellow British composer Ralph Vaughan Williams, who introduced Holst to the wealth of musical inspiration in traditional English folk song. This influence helped Holst to codify his own straightforward style of composition and would provide a thread that permeated all of his mature works in one way or another.

Holst spent his entire adult life as a teacher, nearly all of which was dedicated to one institution, the St. Paul’s Girls’ School. It was there, during breaks from class and on weekends, that he began work on what was to become his landmark opus. At the turn of the century, Holst was introduced to astrology by his good friend Clifford Bax. He took to it with enthusiasm and almost immediately started to toy with the idea of an “astrological suite” based on his readings on the subject. “As a rule, I only study things that suggest music to me,” he wrote. “Recently the character of each planet suggested lots to me.”

However, it wasn’t until early in 1914 with World War I looming that he set to work in earnest. He began to sketch out the first movement, Mars, in the new soundproof music wing of the St Paul’s School. He completed this movement along with Jupiter and Venus in the fall of that year. Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune were added in 1915, and he finally finished the cycle with Mercury in 1916. The piece is scored for a massive ensemble and the orchestration was at times so dense that Holst’s degenerative neuritis prevented him from writing out the parts himself. He dictated much of the music to his students and fellow teaching staff who put his notes to paper. The première of the complete suite took place on November 15, 1920, in London under the direction of Albert Coates and was immediately received with tremendous enthusiasm.

For the remainder of Holst’s life, he was continually forced to clarify the musical intent of the work. For the 1920 première, the composer offered the following:

These pieces were suggested by the astrological significance of the planets; there is no program music, 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 be used in the broad sense. For instance, Jupiter brings jollity in the ordinary sense, and also the more ceremonial type of rejoicing associated with religions or national festivities. Saturn brings not only physical decay, but also a vision of fulfillment. Mercury is the symbol of the mind.

Mars, the Bringer of War: With its irregular and relentless rhythms and menacing, unresolved dissonances, the opening movement of the suite aptly represents its descriptor as “the bringer of war.” Not

surprisingly, Holst's contemporaries saw this music as a commentary about the ongoing war, yet Holst began this movement before World War I broke out in August of 1914.

**Venus, the Bringer of Peace:** In his book *The Principals and Practices of Astrology*, author Noel Tyl notes that "when the disorder of Mars is past, Venus restores peace and harmony." Following the pounding chords that end Mars, Holst does indeed provide relief with the soft and delicate sounds that open the second movement. Undulating chords in the harp and flute give way to singing, liquid melodies.

**Mercury, the Winged Messenger:** The first of two scherzos in the suite is given to Mercury, who was the Roman counterpart to Hermes, the messenger in the *Odyssey*. As Holst asserts in his own notes about this movement, Mercury is "the thinker" to astrologists. His musical depiction of the mind is cast in two opposing musical keys simultaneously, as different sections of the ensemble engage in an insistent, chattering dialogue.

**Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity:** The central movement of the suite is perhaps the best known. It is also the most conventionally "English" of the seven movements, giving a nod to the national style established by composers like Edward Elgar. An opening flourish in the woodwinds provides the backdrop for a succession of heroic and celebratory themes. The central hymn of the movement was later extracted by the composer in 1921, which he put to words and entitled "I vow to thee, my country."

**Saturn, the Bringer of Old Age:** This movement was Holst's favorite. Referencing Tyl's book once more, Saturn represents "man's time on Earth, his ambition, his strategic delay, his wisdom toward fulfillment, his disappointments and frustrations." Like the inevitable passage of time, the music begins with a slow, repeated alternation between two notes. A fragmented melody rumbles in the bass instruments, seemingly out of sorts with the "ticking." A march-like hymn emerges and builds to a glorious climax, interrupted several times by faster, alarming figures. Like bells atop a church, chimes quietly mark the last section, which echoes the beginning. Yet now the passage of time seems more comforting, peacefully signaling fulfillment.

**Uranus, the Magician:** In Roman mythology, Uranus ruled both invention and astrology itself. In Holst's scherzo, the magician is alternatively ominous and playful, casting spells that appear and disappear in quick succession. The magic builds to frenzy with a rollicking dance and a final spell that brings the force of the entire orchestra to bear. In the closing hushed bars, the memory of the episode mysteriously evaporates into the dark.

**Neptune, the Mystic:** In Holst's time, Neptune was the extreme point of our solar system. To astrologists, Neptune means confusion and the mystic connection with other worlds, known and unknown. Holst ends his monumental suite with an ethereal question mark, a movement built on two mesmerizing chords and almost no melody. The harps and celesta quietly paint shimmering stars in the distance while an offstage choir of women's voices wordlessly dissolves into infinite time and space.