

*Written in 1916 (before the discovery of Pluto!), Holst focused on the astrological characters to brilliantly describe each planet. This music is so exciting to perform, with each planet being majestically characterized by a unique rhythm, texture, timbre, and dynamic.*

SUZANNE KELLY, NCS VIOLIN

## *Rainphase*

### **SALINA FISHER**

BORN October 6, 1993, in New Zealand

PREMIERE Composed 2015; first performance July 15, 2015, in Wellington, New Zealand, José Luis Gomez conducting

### **THE STORY**

The music of Salina Fisher is imbued with the traditions, sounds, and spirit of her native New Zealand and her ancestral Japan. Fisher, born in 1993, has received grants from Fulbright New Zealand, Creative New Zealand, and the Arts Foundation, and is the youngest-ever winner of the SOUNZ Contemporary Award (2016, 2017). Her works have been commissioned and performed internationally by ensembles including the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra (NZSO), New Zealand String Quartet, Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, Albany Symphony, and International Contemporary Ensemble. After graduating from the New Zealand School of Music in 2015, Fisher received a Fulbright New Zealand General Graduate Award and an Edwin Carr Foundation Scholarship through Creative New Zealand for advanced study at the Manhattan School of Music, where she received her master's degree in 2018. She returned to New Zealand in July 2019 to serve as the Creative New Zealand Composer-in-Residence at Victoria University of Wellington. As a violinist, Fisher has

performed frequently with the NZSO and was concertmaster of the NZSO National Youth Orchestra of New Zealand.

Fisher composed *Rainphase* in 2015 for the National Youth Orchestra of New Zealand and it won the 2016 SOUNZ Contemporary Award. She writes: “For quite some time, the beauty and chaos of Wellington rain has inspired me to respond musically. My orchestral work *Rainphase* draws on characteristics of water as rain: its shape and shapelessness, its transparency and density, its energy and calm, and its capacity for reflection in both a literal and emotional sense.”

In addition to the North Carolina Symphony’s performances in these concerts, *Rainphase* is also performed in the United States this season by the National Symphony Orchestra and Dallas Symphony Orchestra under the direction of New Zealand conductor Gemma New.

## **LISTENING TIPS**

“Structurally, [*Rainphase*] flows through various stages of this ‘phase’ in the water cycle: last rays diminishing as gray clouds form; droplets released; a frenzy of water and wind; all collecting in streams,” writes Fisher. “I’m particularly fascinated by the variation in sound and movement of raindrops depending on the material upon which they fall, and the texture created when these countless individual timbres and rhythms happen all at once. The ending evokes a memorable moment of obscure beauty that I experienced on a still night last winter. Heavy rain had transformed empty streets into blurry mirrors, reflecting warm glows of street and traffic lights.”

## **INSTRUMENTATION**

*Three flutes (one doubling piccolo), two oboes, English horn, three clarinets (one doubling bass clarinet), two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, two harps, strings*

## *Nocturnes*

### **CLAUDE DEBUSSY**

BORN August 22, 1862, in St. Germainen-Laye, near Paris; died March 25, 1918, in Paris

PREMIERE Composed 1897-1899; first performance December 12, 1900, in Paris, Camille Chevillard conducting

### **THE STORY**

“One stormy day in 1897, as Debussy was crossing the Pont de la Concorde in Paris with his friend Paul Poujaud,” recorded the composer’s biographer Léon Vallas, “he told him that on a similar kind of day the idea of the symphonic work *Nuages* had occurred to him: he had visualized those very thunder-clouds swept along by a stormy wind; a boat passing, with its horn sounding. These two impressions are recalled in the languorous succession of chords and by the short chromatic theme on the English horn.”

Debussy went on to explain to Poujaud that *Fêtes* had been inspired by a recollection of merry-making in the Bois de Boulogne, with noisy crowds watching the drum and bugle corps of the Garde Nationale pass in parade. The finale, *Sirènes*, which includes a women’s chorus singing without text, derives from *L’Homme et la Sirène* by Henri de Régnier, a symbolist poet.

The idea for the tone-painting of this work — and its title, *Nocturnes* — may have been taken from the work of James McNeill Whistler, the American-born artist who lived in Paris and London for most of his life.

### **LISTENING TIPS**

Debussy himself caught the delicate blending of reality and imagination in a poetic description of his *Nocturnes* that he provided for the work’s first complete performance,

on October 27, 1901: "The title *Nocturnes* is intended to have here a more general and, more particularly, a more decorative meaning. It is not meant to designate the usual form of a nocturne, but rather all the impressions and the special effects of light that the word suggests.

*"Clouds: the unchanging aspect of the sky and the slow and solemn march of clouds fading away in gray tones slightly tinged with white.*

*"Festivals: vibrating, dancing rhythm, with sudden flashes of light. There is also the episode of a procession (a dazzling, fantastic vision) passing through the festive scene and becoming blended with it; but the background remains persistently the same: the festival with its blending of music and luminous dust participating in the universal rhythm of things.*

*"Sirens: the sea and its endless rhythms; then amid the billows silvered by the moon, the mysterious song of the Sirens is heard; it laughs and passes."*

## **INSTRUMENTATION**

*Three flutes (one doubling piccolo), two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, three bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, two harps, strings*

## *The Planets*, Op. 32

### **GUSTAV HOLST**

BORN September 21, 1874, in Cheltenham, England; died May 24, 1934, in London

PREMIERE Composed 1914-1917; first performance September 29, 1918, in London,  
Adrian Boult conducting

### **THE STORY**

Holst's interest in writing a piece of music on the attributes of the astrological signs was apparently spurred by his visit in the spring of 1913 with the writer and avid star-gazer Clifford Bax, who noted that Holst was himself "a skilled reader of horoscopes." Of the music's inspiration, Holst noted, "As a rule I only study things that suggest music to me. That's why one time I worried at Sanskrit. Then recently the character of each planet suggested lots to me, and I have been studying astrology fairly closely." Despite his immediate attraction to the planets as the subject for a musical work, however, he took some time before beginning the composition. He once wrote to William Gillies Whittaker, "Never compose anything unless the not composing of it becomes a positive nuisance to you," and it was not until the summer of 1914, more than a full year after he had conceived the piece, that he could no longer resist the lure of *The Planets*.

### **LISTENING TIPS**

Holst wrote of *The Planets*, "These pieces were suggested by the astrological significance of the planets. 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."

The staggering hammerblows of *Mars, the Bringer of War* are followed by the sweet luminosity of *Venus, the Bringer of Peace*. *Mercury, the Winged Messenger* is a

nimble scherzo. Within *Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity* co-exist a boisterous Bacchanalian dance and a striding hymn tune to which Elgar stood godfather. Holst declared the lugubrious *Saturn, the Bringer of Old Age* to be his favorite movement in the suite. *Uranus, the Magician* is shown as a rather portly prestidigitator. *Neptune, the Mystic* is a disembodied siren song for the female chorus floating away to inaudibility among the spheres.

### **INSTRUMENTATION**

*Four flutes (one doubling piccolo, one doubling piccolo and alto flute), three oboes (one doubling bass oboe), English horn, three clarinets, bass clarinet, three bassoons, contrabassoon, six horns, four trumpets, three trombones, two tubas, two timpani, percussion, celesta, organ, two harps, strings*

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