

LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Symphonic Cinema: Holst's The Planets

Sunday, January 31, 2027 · 18:00 · Barbican

Matteo Dal Maso, conductor · Lucas van Woerkum, film director

approximately 50 minutes

Gustav Holst

1874–1934

The Planets, Op. 32

50 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

The Planets made Gustav Holst famous, somewhat against his wishes, and it has a particular link with this orchestra: the London Symphony Orchestra gave the first complete public performance, under Albert Coates, on 15 November 1920.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Mars, the Bringer of War. A five-beat rhythm is tapped out quietly by timpani, harps and strings played with the wood of the bow, and it hardly lets up. The music builds again and again to brutal, dissonant climaxes, with the organ adding its weight.

Venus, the Bringer of Peace. A solo horn is answered softly by flutes and oboes; later come a solo violin and the cool glitter of harps, celesta and glockenspiel. It is the answer to Mars.

Mercury, the Winged Messenger. The shortest movement and the scherzo of the set, over in about four minutes. Fragments dart between instruments in two keys at once, and in the middle a small tune, first heard on a solo violin, is passed around the orchestra a dozen times in different colours.

Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity. Bustling high spirits frame the broad central melody that Holst later allowed to be sung as the hymn 'I Vow to Thee, My Country'. In the suite it moves at half the speed of the music around it, and its final cadence is left unresolved.

Saturn, the Bringer of Old Age. Holst's own favourite. Flutes and harps tread like a slow clock, a solemn melody rises in the trombones, and the procession grows to a clangorous climax with bells before it fades into calm.

Uranus, the Magician. Four loud brass notes cast the spell. A galumphing dance for bassoons and timpani gets more and more out of hand, in the manner of Dukas's *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, until it is swept away at a stroke.

Neptune, the Mystic. Quiet throughout, in a swaying five-beat metre, with flutes, harps and celesta to the fore. In Holst's score a hidden chorus of women's voices joins without words and recedes until it is hard to say where sound ends and silence begins. The LSO's listing for these film performances does not name a choir.

Tonight's artists

Lucas van Woerkum *film director*

The LSO bills van Woerkum as 'film-maker and image soloist'. For these two performances, at 6pm and 7.45pm, he plays *LOSS*, his silent film for *The Planets*, from a place inside the orchestra. The film stars Emma Thompson and Greg Wise as a married couple separated by death, with dance sequences by the Arts Umbrella Dance Company of Vancouver. The LSO announces these as its UK premiere; the Sydney Symphony Orchestra gave the first performances in May 2026.

Lucas van Woerkum is a Dutch film director and the creator of Symphonic Cinema, a format in which a silent drama film is performed with a live orchestra and edited in real time to follow the players. He trained as a horn player before turning to film, and began with documentaries about music and composers. The first Symphonic Cinema film, *The Isle of the Dead*, after Rachmaninoff, dates from 2011. It was followed by *Firebird*, after Stravinsky, *Daphnis & Chloe*, after Ravel, *The Echo of Being*, set to music from Mahler's symphonies, and *LOSS*, made for Holst's *The Planets*. In performance he sits on stage with a touchpad and triggers each shot himself, speeding the film up or slowing it down to match the orchestra.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/lso-2027-01-31-dal-maso>

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