

## 2026 Festival Orchestra Concert Notes

THE PLANETS AND TCHAIKOVSKY  
Sunday, March 1, 2026



**Piano Concerto No. 2 in G major, Op. 44**  
**Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky**  
**Born: May 7, 1840**  
**Died: November 6, 1893**  
**Composed: 1880**

Tchaikovsky and pianist Nikolai Rubenstein had a long relationship before the Piano Concerto No. 2 was composed. Rubenstein had given Tchaikovsky's first concerto a scathing criticism, stating it was trivial, vulgar and exhibitionistic. However, as the first concerto gained popularity, Rubenstein reversed his opinion and became a great proponent and performer of the work. Tchaikovsky, having forgiven him, was inspired by Rubenstein's performance of Tchaikovsky's new G Major piano sonata and decided to dedicate Piano Concerto No. 2 to the pianist.

When the score was finished he sent it to Rubenstein and Sergei Taneyev (Rubenstein's former pupil, who had given the first concerto its Moscow premiere). Taneyev loved it but Rubenstein had some criticism, saying that it was "strange to me that the piano part is episodic and mostly in dialogue with the orchestra, and not enough in the foreground over the accompaniment of the orchestra. But as I say all this having scarcely played the concerto once through, perhaps I am wrong."

Unfortunately, Tchaikovsky would never hear Rubenstein perform the concerto as the pianist died suddenly in Paris in March of 1881 at the early age of 45. Taneyev, instead, premiered the work in New York, at the Industrial and Cultural Exhibition in November of 1881.

In 1941 Russian-American choreographer George Balanchine created a work called Ballet Imperial based on Piano Concerto No. 2

*Program Notes by Naomi G. Martinez-Goldstick*



### ***The Planets***

**Gustav Holst**

**Born: September 21, 1874**

**Died: May 25, 1934**

**Composed: 1914 - 1917**

In 1913 Gustav Holst began to study astrology and it became a life-long interest. The book *What is a Horoscope and How is it Cast?* by Alan Leo described the planets, giving each a short description and astrological significance. This inspired Holst to write *The Planets*, reflecting his own characterization of each planet, with the exception of the Earth and Pluto (which had not yet been discovered).

Mars, the Bringer of War was completed first and its forceful rhythmic opening is now widely recognized. The brass fanfares and huge climaxes depict battles, rage and finally a triumphant march. It has become a favorite among the movements.

Venus, the Bringer of Peace creates an atmosphere of quiet and delicate orchestral colors.

Mercury, the Winged Messenger was the last planet to be composed and has a rushing, scurrying quality. Holst considered this movement to reflect the “process of human thought.”

Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity is arguably the most famous of the movements, possibly influenced by English folk dances. The anthem in the middle of the movement has been extracted for a patriotic hymn titled “I Vow to Thee My Country” which displeased the composer.

Saturn, the Bringer of Old Age was Holst’s favorite movement, depicting a human life-cycle from a restless beginning to a march-like middle age and a dirge-like melody representing the ravages of old age, moving into a serene and peaceful maturity. Uranus, the Magician opens with a four-note musical representation of Holst’s name in the brass section and moves through spooky sounding chords, a manic dance and a quiet and sinister ending.

Neptune, the Mystic has chilling qualities. This is the only title that Holst took directly from Leo’s book where the planet is described as “subtle and mysterious” being at the far edges of the solar system. Holst writes that it should be performed pianissimo (extremely quietly) throughout and gives no real melody or rhythm to grasp and a female chorus sings wordlessly from offstage and gradually fades out.

Holst was amazed and even dismayed that the piece had such worldwide success stating that “every artist ought to pray that he may not be a success.” Note that for this performance, Jupiter is being performed as the final movement.

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