

A Mesmerizing Season Finale from Canton Symphony Orchestra (April 26)

by Tom Wachunas



Describing this season's final concert by the Canton Symphony Orchestra at Umstadt Performing Arts Hall on April 26 brings to mind a bevy of feel-good bromides. Still, none would be more apropos than "out of this world."

Everything that makes this orchestra truly noteworthy was in full force. With just two works on the program – Mozart's Symphony No. 41, "Jupiter", and Holst's *The Planets*, the orchestra under Maestro Gerhardt Zimmermann thrilled the capacity audience with its broad palette of commanding sonority, astonishing technical virtuosity and gripping expressionism.

Zimmermann's reading of Mozart's greatest symphonic accomplishment was brilliantly balanced in its moderate pacing, precision of textures, and palpable affection for Mozart's intricate, complex mixing of thematic motifs. That intricacy is clearly apparent in the first movement's melding of majestic pomp with gentle graciousness. Even more so, the second movement is a sumptuous triad of contemplative, fiery and calming moods.

But it's in the ebullient finale where Mozart pulled out all the fugal stops, as it were. The coda is a magnificent soundscape of five interwoven melodic elements and the orchestra met its dizzying contrapuntal challenges with remarkable clarity and authority. This was

no headlong rush into perfunctory flamboyance, but rather a stunning surrender of sorts — an impassioned caress of the breathtaking power of the music itself.

While Gustav Holst's *The Planets* is certainly less complex than Mozart's "Jupiter" symphony in terms of its seven movements' thematic structures, the work is nonetheless Olympian in its dramatic thrust. Augmenting the already cinematic character of the music were the gorgeous HD projections on a giant screen above the orchestra. They were originally created by filmmaker Duncan Copp in cooperation with NASA and Jet Propulsion Laboratories for a 2009 production by the Houston Symphony. The images were a constantly moving, hypnotic montage of photos from satellites, surface rovers and computer-generated animations of vast alien landscapes.

The orchestra has never been more startlingly thunderous, particularly during the brutish, menacing tumult of the first movement, *Mars, the Bringer of War*, or more committed to brassy, heroic jubilation than in the fourth movement, *Jupiter*. Balancing out these and other moments of rattling aural intensity were many powerful passages throughout the work wherein strings, winds and percussion soared into lyricism so crisp and shimmering that the air in the auditorium seemed to crystalize.

As if defying the beautiful mass and poetic gravity of the previous six movements, Holst fashioned his final movement, *Neptune, the Mystic*, not as an outward burst of otherworldly wonder, but a diaphanous falling away of melodic fragments.

Like so many meteoric trails of light, the orchestra evanesced into distant harmonies. Then, amid the instrumental fading, the faintest of eerie intonations from an offstage women's chorus gradually emerged into a haunting, wordless cadence that in turn progressively drifted to nothing.

This silence of the spheres was indeed a potent, mystical ending. Yet days after the concert, it continues to speak volumes in my memory — not of cosmic phenomena, but of the mesmerizing phenomenon that is the Canton Symphony Orchestra.

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