

Fanfare from *Also sprach Zarathustra* (“Thus spake Zarathustra”), Op. 30 (1896)
RICHARD STRAUSS N 1864-1949

Though Strauss borrowed the title of his 1896 tone poem *Also sprach Zarathustra* from Nietzsche’s philosophical novel, the music and the poem actually share little more than a name and a few pretentious ideas. “I did not intend to write philosophical music or to portray in music Nietzsche’s great work,” Strauss wrote. “I meant,” he continued, modestly, “to convey by means of music an idea of the development of the human race from its origin, through the various phases of its development, religious and scientific, up to Nietzsche’s idea of the Superman.”

The work’s magnificent opening, inextricably wedged into the public consciousness by *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), Stanley Kubrick’s visionary Oscar-winning meditation on man’s place in the universe, was meant, according to Strauss, to portray “Sunrise, Man feels the power of God. *Andante religioso*.”

Primal Message for Harp, Percussion and Strings (2018)
NOKUTHULA NGWENYAMA N BORN 1976

The talents and accomplishments of Nokuthula Ngwenyama are as wide and varied as her personal heritage in the cultures of Japan and the Ndebele peoples of Zimbabwe’. Nokuthula Ngwenyama (*No-goo-TOO-lah En-gwen-YAH-mah*, Thula to her friends), born in Los Angeles in 1976, started making up her own pieces soon after she began piano lessons at age four, then moved onto violin and later to viola, which she mastered so quickly that she won the Primrose International Viola Competition at sixteen. The following year Thula won the Young Concert Artists International Auditions, which led to debuts at the Kennedy Center in Washington and 92nd Street Y in New York, and acceptance as a student at the highly competitive (and tuition-free) Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. Thula took advanced studies at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris as a Fulbright Scholar, and also completed a Master of Theological Studies at Harvard University. She has appeared as orchestra soloist, recitalist and chamber musician from Japan’s Suntory Hall, KwaZulu-Natal Philharmonic Orchestra in Durban and the Louvre in Paris, to Los Angeles, National Arts Centre Orchestra in Ottawa and the White House. Thula, a recipient of a prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant, is also a strong advocate for music and for her own instrument, having served as President of the American Viola Society, a director of the Primrose International Viola Competition, and spokesperson before Congress on behalf of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). An avid educator, she has been Visiting Professor at the University of Notre Dame and Indiana University Jacobs School of Music. Since writing a work for violin and string orchestra for a church in Phoenix in 2015, Thula has devoted increasing time to composing, creating numerous chamber works (many on commissions, notably *Elegy* for Piano Quartet, which was premiered at the Kennedy Center in October 2022), a viola concerto, and pieces for voice.

The composer wrote of *Primal Message*, “It was 1974. What should we put in humanity’s first ‘message in a bottle’ sent 25,000 light years away? Astronomers Frank Drake (known for the ‘Drake Equation’ [used to estimate the number of active, communicative extraterrestrial civilizations in the Milky Way Galaxy]), Carl Sagan (*Contact* [1985 hard science fiction novel about contact between humanity and a more technologically advanced extraterrestrial life form]), and others created the historic ‘Arecibo Message,’ in which 186 seconds of interstellar radio waves sent a friendly map, our then-understood DNA structure, and transmitting technology in binary anthropomorphic organization to globular M13 in our galaxy’s Hercules cluster.

“The ideas conveyed by Steven Johnson’s *New York Times Magazine* article *Greetings E.T. (Please Don’t Murder Us)* from June 28, 2017, encouragement from the Phoenix Chamber Music Society and Chamber Music Northwest, and early days with partner John Clements awakened my imaginings about what a ‘primal message’ might sound like. This assumes other possible life forms hear and feel sound like we do. Opening off-world communication through transverse waves explores existential conveyance under a frayed veil of decorum through form, melody and numbers.

“*Primal Message* is a fantasia that relies upon primal relationships: duo vs. trio textures; modulations through conventional chord changes; one voice as the outlier in primal 2 vs. 3 vs. 5 rhythmic layering; melodic structures descending in [small intervals of] seconds and thirds with occasional large leaps. The piece invites examination of our collective evolution through a drive to express, tying us in concert with universal celebration.”

Northern Lights Electric (1992, orchestrated 2000)
PAUL MORAVEC N BORN 1957

Paul Moravec, born on November 2, 1957 in Buffalo, New York, holds an undergraduate degree in music from Harvard (1980) and master's and doctoral degrees in music composition from Columbia (1982, 1987). Moravec has taught at Columbia, Dartmouth, Hunter College/CUNY, Mannes School of Music, and, since 1997, at Adelphi University in Garden City, New York, where he is University Professor. Moravec's more than 200 works — orchestral, chamber, choral and vocal compositions, as well as operas, oratorios, film scores and electro-acoustic pieces — have earned many distinctions, including the Rome Prize Fellowship from the American Academy in Rome, fellowships from the NEA and Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship, three awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a Bearns Prize in Music Composition, and election to the American Philosophical Society. In April 2004, he was awarded the year's Pulitzer Prize in Music for his chamber work *Tempest Fantasy*. Moravec's residencies include the Composers' Conference of the East at Bennington College (Vermont), California Summer Music, Centrum Music Festival (Washington) and Newel Center (Virginia); he was Artist-in-Residence with the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton in 2007-2008.

Most of Moravec's works have referential qualities, and several of his compositions have been inspired by episodes of American history that are worth recalling in this year of the country's Semiquincentennial. The oratorio *The Blizzard Voices* (2008) is based on Ted Koozer's book about the Great Plains blizzard of 1888. *Sanctuary Road* (2017), an "American historical oratorio," focuses on William Still, an African-American conductor on the Underground Railroad, which enabled escaped slaves to flee north to freedom. The song cycle *A New Country* (2018) is about immigrants arriving in the United States through New York, and includes settings of a text by Anna Vacek, a 1901 Ellis Island immigrant, and *The New Colossus*, iconic poem about the Statue of Liberty by Jewish-American writer Emma Lazarus. The choral anthem *Light Shall Lift Us* (2020) was composed in support of the survivors and families of the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando in 2016. *All Shall Rise* (2025), about the history of voting rights in America, was premiered at Carnegie Hall in May 2025.

Moravec wrote of *Northern Lights Electric*, "While music — especially music without words — speaks an essentially abstract, non-representational language, my own music often seems to involve some physical, tangible catalyst. *Northern Lights Electric* was directly inspired by a nighttime walk in New Hampshire, when I happened to look up to see an astonishing display of the northern lights filling the sky. Among the eerier aspects of such an experience is the majestic light show's utter silence. The only sound I heard was the hum of a nearby electric streetlamp. *Northern Lights Electric* originated in my natural musical instinct to imagine a soundtrack for this natural phenomenon combined with the energy from a local power station, suggesting perhaps a union of the ethereal and the earthly."

The Planets, Op. 32 (1914-1917) **GUSTAV HOLST ^N 1874-1934**

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*.

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.

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