The Planets

Book I: Sun ☉  Moon ☼  Venus ♀  Mars ♂

Book II: Jupiter ♃  Mercury ♀  Saturn ♄

Book III: Uranus ♃  ♃  ♃  Neptune ♈  ♈  ♈  Pluto ♄

by Kyle Gann
1994-2008
In addition to the individual dedicatees for each movement, *The Planets* in its entirety is dedicated to the Relache ensemble, with gratitude.
No one could be more aware than I am of the foolhardiness of competing with Gustav Holst. Asked, years ago, to write an article about my favorite orchestral warhorse, I picked his *The Planets*. My justification for writing my own such piece is this: music has not progressed since Holst, in the sense of having improved, the new superceding the old - but astrology has. The ushering in of "free will astrology" by composer-astrologer Dane Rudhyar and others in the mid 20th century has replaced the old view of astrology as implacable fate with a new one of psychological process. At the same time, through the advent of minimalism, music itself has become more capable of embodying gradual and transformational process. Where Holst had melodies suggestive of traditional planetary forces, I have processes that mirror our current understanding of how those forces operate. My *Planets* may be worse, may be better, but their raison d'etre is that they are more suggestive of contemporary astrology than Holst's. This was sufficient reason to update.

At the same time, I have Pluto, which wasn't discovered until 13 years after Holst wrote *The Planets* - and which is still used as a crucial astrological planet, even if downgraded by the astronomers. And Holst didn't portray the Sun and Moon, which astrology refers to as planets, possibly because they seemed too personal to exert the same influences, or perhaps simply because they weren't, strictly speaking, planets. But in astrology as conceived today, the Sun isn't really the Self (nor the Moon the female or receptive Self), but is rather an influence that acts upon the Self with particular characteristics, more intense, perhaps, but no less qualifiable than Mars, Saturn, and so on. And so I have ten movements where Holst had only seven. The male planets are Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn.
Mercury and Uranus are neuter; Moon, Venus, Neptune, and Pluto are female (though Pluto is related to Mars despite its Dark Mother feminine archetype). The "personal" planets (Sun, Moon, Mars, Venus, Mercury) are characterized by clear melodies and individualistic solo parts; the "transcendent" outer planets are depicted in cloudier ensemble effects. Male-planet movements are driven by active melodies, female ones often fall into a receptive musical background with no foregrounded elements.

**Sun:** The Sun is the planet of progressive self-realization; we are not necessarily born with the qualities of our sun-sign, but spend our lives growing into them. Thus the "Sun" movement evolves through the linear crescendo common to all sunrise movements (for example, Ferde Grofe's "Sunrise" from the Grand Canyon Suite). The form of the movement is strictly additive: A, AB, ABC, ABCD, and so on. In addition, a plethora of motives is determined by the number series. The "5 motive" reappears in repetitions 10 and 15, the "3 motive" in repetitions 6, 9, 12, and 15, and so on. The content of each module within the lengthening crescendo is determined by its numerical place. From the boiling intensity of the minor-key opening, one might gather that I "am" a (that is, my Sun is in) Scorpio. The movement is dedicated to Joseph Franklin, original director of Relache.

**Moon:** The "Moon," depicting our archetypal phase-shifting experience, is reflective in many senses, based on chords going in and out of phase, and the constant of the movement is that every texture is made up of phrases going out of phase with each other. The ancient archetype of the moon is its changeability, and thus the movement changes texture about once a minute. Also, since the Moon represents our comfort zone, the music keeps modulating toward the flat side, drawing us in and making us feel more comfortable - up to a point. The Moon represents not only Woman, but our collective past, so the final section is marked by a host of voices from which no individual one emerges. Dedicatee: Janice Giteck.

**Venus:** Venus is the planet of receptivity and relationships. Each instrument here gets paired with another, each phrase is answered by a corresponding phrase, and two tempos float in relation to each other (one of them a simple 3/4, the other a virtual 25/16 meter that moves in beats 5 16th-notes long). Venus determines the style of not what we do, but of what we want from others. Therefore the climax is a negative one: the music opens up a space for a melody, and none appears: we wait, we receive. Dedicatee: Nancy Cook.

**Mars:** "Mars" is "Venus"'s opposite: rhapsodic, jagged, nonpolyphonic, single-minded, channeling its anger
into a Sybaritic dance. The rhythmic language, switching among various tempos, is one I derived from Hopi, Zuni, and various Pueblo Indian musics. The fact that the movement is more plaintive than forceful, and ends softly, can be attributed to the fact that I was born with Mars in the gentle sign of Libra; ultimately, the entire piece can only be an astrological self-portrait. Dedicatee: Mikel Rouse.

**Jupiter:** Jupiter is sometimes said to be the "octave" of the Sun, that is, a similar kind of force on a larger and more unconscious plane. Therefore "Jupiter" is a second sunrise, another expansive additive form. The languidness of Jupiterian action is suggested by a certain passivity, and as there is also a kind of Sagittarian depression that comes from high expectations going unfulfilled (Jupiter being the ruler of Sagittarius), the piece ends in mournful anticlimax. Dedicatee: John Luther Adams.

**Mercury:** Mercury is the quick, darting, mercurial planet whose retrograde phases everyone seems to know about; bad luck for contracts, repairs, and so on. Two retrogrades are audible in this Mercury movement, points at which the music turns backward briefly before going forward again. Since this is the planet of communication and logic, the disconnected phrases (articulating different tempos) cumulatively combine themselves into longer phrases that begin to make more rhythmic sense. And since Mercury is a kind of gender-neutral planet, the harmonies all combine major with minor triads. Dedicatee: Brenda Hutchinson.

**Saturn:** The Saturn movement must be a process like a Saturn transit itself - a transition from the painful, irritating, and overly long to the most exquisitely beautiful. If no one looks at their watch during "Saturn," the music will have failed to express the essence of the planet. Structure is everything, and the closing music conservative, almost conventional, as befits Saturn's relationship to the past. The form, traditionally enough, is a chaconne, or recurring series of harmonies, the harsh dissonances of the opening cumulatively replaced by waves of melody. Dedicatee: William Duckworth.

**Uranus:** Uranus is the planet of unexpected events - strange things that break one out of one's habits by revealing bizarre impulses that refuse to be repressed. Musically I understood that as a series of nonsequiturs whose very unrelatedness begins to make its own kind of sense through relentless repetition. Since I have Uranus trine (in pleasant aspect to) my Sun and ascendant, my experience of Uranus is more benign than many people's, thus the rather upbeat movement for this compulsively individualistic planet. Dedicatee: Eve Beglarian.

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**Neptune:** Neptune is the planet of vagueness, irreparable disappointment, glamor, and egolessness, which appear in the successive stages of the "Neptune" movement. The planet's lack of definition required that, for the first time in 20 years, I set all the musicians going independently at different tempos, coming together in rhythm only for the "glamor" moment. (Theoretically the tempo ratios are 18:19:20:21:22:23:24:25, but the synchronization is not intended to be exact, and using clicktracks for performance would violate the required effect.) As Neptune is the "higher octave" of Venus, "Neptune" is based on the motives and chord progressions of the "Venus" movement. 

Dedicatee: Elodie Lauten.

**Pluto:** Pluto is the planet of transformation, power struggles, and obsession. Consequently the piece contains only one idea - the transformation of minor chords into major and vice versa, both contrapuntally and structurally, sometimes carried out in bitonal conflict - and no changes of tempo, meter, or (almost) even rhythm. The effect would be incomplete without a long passage of Plutonian depression. Dedicatee: Joseph Bakst Zahm.

I wrote "Sun," "Moon," "Venus," and "Mars" (under the less competitive title Astrological Studies) in 1994 on trips to Seattle with the Relache Ensemble, as part of the Music in Motion program. I wrote "Jupiter" and "Neptune" for another performance in 2001, but Relache's endemic financial fragility made me reluctant to complete my longest work for them, at least until they seemed guaranteed to survive. Survive they have, and I am grateful to them for keeping their faith in the work. The first book was written with the help of a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Performances:
February 11, 1995 by the Relache Ensemble at Arts Bank in Philadelphia (Book I only)
February 29, 1996, by Relache at Merkin Hall, New York City (Book I only)
May 28, 2007, by Relache at Fels Planetarium at the Franklin, Philadelphia

- Kyle Gann
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The Planets

Book I: Sun ☉ Moon ☽ Venus ♀ Mars ♂

(1994)
With hushed but insistent energy

\( \text{\textcopyright 2003 Monroe Street Music} \)

\textit{Sun}

Kyle Gann
1994

*Score in C

Copyright © 2003 Monroe Street Music
The Planets: Sun
The Planets: Sun
The Planets: Sun
The Planets: Sun
The Planets: Sun
The Planets: Sun
The Planets: Sun
The Planets: Sun
The Planets: Sun
The Planets: Sun

Fl.

Ob.

A. Sax.

Bsn

Synth.

Perc.

Vla

Cb.
The Planets: Sun
The Planets: Sun
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The Planets: Sun
The Planets: Sun
The Planets: Sun

Completed December 10, 1994
Lewisburg, PA
The Planets: Moon

Mysteriously still

\( \text{Flute} \)

\( \text{Oboe} \)

\( \text{Alto Saxophone} \)

\( \text{Bassoon} \)

\( \text{Synthesizer} \)

\( \text{Percussion} \)

\( \text{Viola} \)

\( \text{Contrabass} \)

\( q = 56 \)

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The Planets: Moon
The Planets: Moon
The Planets: Moon
The Planets: Moon
The Planets: Moon
The Planets: Moon
A. Sax.
Bsn.
Synth.
Perc.
Va.
Cb.

The Planets: Moon
Drums (bongos or tom-toms played with hands; this section need not be literal, but can be improvised in the style given):

The Planets: Moon
The Planets: Moon
The Planets: Moon
The Planets: Moon
The Planets: Moon
The Planets: Moon
The Planets: Moon
The Planets: Moon
Tempo I  \( \frac{\d}{\d} = 56 \)

The Planets: Moon
The Planets: Moon
The Planets: Moon
The Planets: Moon
The Planets: Moon
To Nancy Cook

The Planets:

Venus

Serene, floating

\( \text{pp} \)

Flute

Oboe

Alto Saxophone in E\text{\#}*

Bassoon

Vibraphone

Synthesizer

Viola

Contrabass

*Score notated in C; all instruments sound as written, except that the contrabass sounds an octave lower

The Planets: Venus

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The Planets: Venus
The Planets: Venus
The Planets: Venus
The Planets: Venus
The Planets: Venus
The Planets: Venus
The Planets: Venus
The Planets: Venus

Faster, flowing

\( \text{\textit{Faster, flowing}} \quad q = 84 \)

\( \text{\textit{Faster, flowing}} \quad j = 84 \)


\textbf{The Planets: Venus}
The Planets: Venus
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The Planets: Venus
The Planets: Venus
The Planets: Venus

January 22-28, 1994
revised, March 3-6, 1994
Seattle, WA / Lewisburg, PA
Quick, with muted intensity
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*Score notated in C; all instruments sound as written, except that the contrabass sounds an octave lower

Copyright © 2003 Monroe Street Music
The Planets: Mars
The Planets: Mars
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The Planets: Mars
The Planets: Mars
The Planets: Mars
The Planets: Mars

ff
The Planets: Mars
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The Planets: Mars
The Planets: Mars
The Planets: Mars
The Planets: Mars
The Planets: Mars
The Planets: Mars
The Planets: Mars
Without ritard.

Pizz.

Completed March 25, 1994
Lewisburg, Pennsylvania

The Planets: Mars
The Planets

Book II: Jupiter ♄ Mercury ♀ Saturn ☿

(2001-8)
Jupiter

\( \text{\textcopyright Kyle Gann 2001} \)

To John Luther Adams

The Planets:

\( J = 69 \) Calm, stately, yet with energy and not too languid

All dynamics take place within a general crescendo to measure 67

*p*

Synthesizer

\( mp \) Sustained organ or string timbre

Vibrphone

\( mp \)

Viola

\( \text{pizz.} \) \( mp \)

Double bass

\( mp \)

*Score in C; all instruments sound where written except for double bass, which sounds an octave lower*

Copyright © Kyle Gann 2001
The Planets: Jupiter
The Planets: Jupiter
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The Planets: Jupiter
The Planets: Jupiter
The Planets: Jupiter
The Planets: Jupiter
The Planets: Jupiter
The Planets: Jupiter
The Planets: Jupiter
The Planets: Jupiter
The Planets: Jupiter
Main melody - sing out!

The Planets: Jupiter
The Planets: Jupiter
The Planets: Jupiter
The Planets: Jupiter
The Planets: Jupiter
The Planets: Jupiter
The Planets: Jupiter
The Planets: Jupiter
The Planets: Jupiter
The Planets: Jupiter

June 3-12, 2001
Lewisburg, PA
Anxious, light

\[ \textit{Mercury} \]

\[ j = 116 \]

To Brenda Hutchinson

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*Score notated in C; all instruments sound as written, except that the contrabass sounds an octave lower
The Planets: Mercury
The Planets: Mercury
The Planets: Mercury
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The Planets: Mercury
The Planets: Mercury
The Planets: Mercury
The Planets: Mercury
The Planets: Mercury
The Planets: Mercury
The Planets: Mercury
The Planets: Mercury

Fl.
Ob.
A. Sax.
Bsn.
Synth.
Perc.
Vla.
Cb.

The Planets: Mercury
The Planets: Mercury
with hushed excitement

The Planets: Mercury
The Planets: Mercury
The Planets: Mercury
The Planets: Mercury
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The Planets: Mercury
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The Planets: Mercury

January 2-7, 2008
Germantown, NY
The Planets:
Saturn

Bleak

q = 54

to William Duckworth

Flute
Oboe
Alto Saxophone*
Bassoon
Synthesizer
Percussion
Viola
Contrabass

*Score notated in C; all instruments sound as written, except that the contrabass sounds an octave lower and piccolo an octave higher

Copyright © Monroe Street Music 2008
The Planets: Saturn
A Desolate

The Planets: Saturn
The Planets: Saturn
The Planets: Saturn
The Planets: Saturn
The Planets: Saturn
The Planets: Saturn
D Pensive

The Planets: Saturn
The Planets: Saturn

218
The Planets: Saturn
The Planets: Saturn
The Planets: Saturn
The Planets: Saturn

Determined

The Planets: Saturn
The Planets: Saturn
The Planets: Saturn
The Planets: Saturn
The Planets: Saturn
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The Planets: Saturn
The Planets: Saturn
The Planets

Book III: Uranus ☿ Neptune ♄ Pluto ♄

(2001-8)
The Planets:

Uranus

To Eve Beglarian

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Kyle Gann
2005/7

Flute

Oboe

Alto Saxophone*

Bassoon

Percussion

Synthesizer

Viola

Contrabass

*Score notated in C; all instruments sound as written, except that the contrabass sounds an octave lower

Copyright © Monroe Street Music 2008
The Planets: Uranus
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The Planets: Uranus
The Planets: Uranus
The Planets: Uranus

Fl.
Ob.
A. Sax.
Bsn.
Perc.
Vib.
Synth.
Vla.
Cb.

mp
mf
mp
mp
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arco
mf
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The Planets: Uranus
The Planets: Uranus
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The Planets: Uranus
The Planets: Uranus

C mysteriously

The Planets: Uranus
The Planets: Uranus
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The Planets: Uranus
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The Planets: Uranus
The Planets: Uranus
From E to F, parts may be played in free tempo, unsynchronized, even allowing for some improvisation around the general Eb major/Bb sus chord harmony. At F, some cue (possibly the final sax note) brings the section to a close and cues the tempo for the remainder of the piece.

The Planets: Uranus
The Planets: Uranus
The Planets: Uranus
The Planets: Uranus
Instructions for Neptune

Each instrument plays at a different tempo from everyone else for most of the movement. Simultaneities are not coordinated, but left to chance, except in the one section between rehearsal letters D and E, as described below.

The beginning of the piece need not be precisely cued. Once someone begins, everyone else should enter pretty much immediately, or within 3 or 4 seconds.

Dynamics for all instruments are soft throughout. In general, active melodic figures are to be in the foreground, sustained notes in the background.

Each person plays at his or her own tempo until rehearsal letter D. At D, the percussionist waits for the flute and oboe to finish their (concurrent) solos, and then begins playing the notated steady beat on the cymbal at $\frac{\text{d}}{\text{e}} = 80$. Once the cymbal begins, all players who have not reached letter D should jump to that point. Everyone plays together at a tempo of $\frac{\text{d}}{\text{e}} = 80$ from letter D to letter E, at which point each player resumes his or her opening tempo.

When all players have reached the end of their parts, they repeat their last note as necessary until making eye contact with the double bass player, whose final pizzicato note acts as a cut off for all the other players.

It is expected and even hoped that by letter D some players will be as much as 20 seconds apart in their material. 30 seconds is acceptable. 40 seconds apart begins to be a problem. In other words, each player should reach letter D between four minutes and 20 seconds (4:20) and four minutes and 50 seconds (4:50) after beginning. The musicians should practice their parts alone, in strict tempo, in an attempt to achieve this time frame. It is hoped, of course, that the playing in performance will not be metronomically strict, but musically flexible. (To perform with clicktracks would negate the echoes between motives built into the loose conception of the piece, and is not allowed.)

The tempo ratios among the instruments are $25$ (flute) : $24$ (oboe) : $23$ (viola) : $22$ (vibraphone) : $21$ (alto sax) : $20$ (synthesizer) : $19$ (bassoon) : $18$ (double bass). The score is a fiction: it shows where the parts would coincide if everyone kept a metronomically precise and correct tempo.
The Planets:
Neptune

To Elodie Lauten
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Kyle Gann
2001

Flute
Oboe
Alto Saxophone*
Bassoon
Vibraphone
Synthesizer
Viola
Contrabass

*p pretty much throughout
q = 100

*p pretty much throughout
q = 96

*p pretty much throughout
q = 84

*p pretty much throughout
q = 76

*p pretty much throughout
q = 88

*p pretty much throughout
q = 80

*p pretty much throughout
q = 92

*p pretty much throughout
q = 72

*Score in C; all instruments sound where written except for double bass, which sounds an octave lower

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The Planets: Neptune
The Planets: Neptune

The page contains a musical score for "The Planets: Neptune," featuring a section of the sheet music with annotations for various instruments, including Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Alto Saxophone (A. Sax.), Bassoon (Bsn), Vibraphone (Vib.), Synthesizer (Synth.), Violin (Vla), and Cello (Cb.). The score includes musical notations such as "mp," "sfz," and "mp 3." The page number 273 is visible at the top right corner.
The Planets: Neptune
The Planets: Neptune
The Planets: Neptune
The Planets: Neptune
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The Planets: Neptune
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The Planets: Neptune
The Planets: Neptune
The Planets: Neptune
The Planets: Neptune
Sultry, with a jazzy feel

The Planets: Neptune
The Planets: Neptune

Sultry, with a jazzy feel
The Planets: Neptune
The Planets: Neptune
The Planets: Neptune
The Planets: Neptune
The Planets: Neptune
The Planets: Neptune
The Planets: Neptune
The Planets: Neptune
Relentless

\( \text{q} = 104 \)

The Planets:
Pluto

Explode

to Joseph Bakst Zahm

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Kyle Gann
2001/8

Flute

Oboe

Alto Saxophone

Bassoon

Percussion

Synthesizer

Viola

Contrabass

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The Planets: Pluto
The Planets: Pluto
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