



# Program Notes for kids

The Planets  
Saturday, April 9, 2016  
8:00 p.m.  
Michigan Theater

**Chambers** The Tall-Eared Fox and the Wild-Eyed Man  
**Mendelssohn** Violin Concerto in E minor

*Intermission*

**Holst** The Planets  
*with visuals by Adrian Wyard*

# The Tall-Eared Fox and the Wild-Eyed Man

by *Evan Chambers*



## Listen for...

In this piece, Chambers requires the string players to play like Irish fiddlers. Listen for them to slide between notes and play *double-stops*, or two notes at the same time.

stretched, looking right at me, and he was laughing. It struck me as an admonition that we should live life like we make music, with love, a deep sense of the simple and overwhelming beauty around us, and with wild abandon.”

## About the Composer

**Evan Chambers** | Born 1963 in Alexandria, Louisiana | Lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan

### Family & Career

Chambers is a composer, Irish fiddler and Professor of musical composition at the University of Michigan.

### Music

Chambers’s music often draws from musical traditions of other cultures. He has been influenced by music from Albania and Pakistan, polkas, and Irish jigs. Chambers hopes that he is known as a composer who tries to pour his heart out in every single piece that he writes.

# Violin Concerto in E minor

by *Felix Mendelssohn*

## About the Music

**What kind of piece is this?**

## About the Music

**What kind of piece is this?**

This piece is a set of two *Irish jigs*, a type of lively folk music which usually accompanies dancing. Chambers is a traditional Irish fiddler and loves to bring folk music into his compositions.

**When was it written?**

Chambers originally wrote this piece for string quartet. In 1994, he arranged it for orchestra.

**What is it about?**

Evan Chambers writes that the inspiration for this piece came when he was traveling in Wales: “I happened to see a fox with very tall ears standing with his nose to the wind in a field by the ocean. Later, while walking down a steep back road I was passed by a farm cart, in which was a man with the wildest eyes I have ever seen. He was standing up, facing the rear of the wagon with his head thrown back, his long, knotted hair streaming, swaying violently from side to side with his arms out-



A *concerto* is a piece of music written for a solo instrument with an orchestra. In this case, the violinist is the soloist, so he stands at the front of the stage and plays the most important part. In a concerto, the soloist and orchestra can interact in different ways: the soloist could play alone, the orchestra could play alone, the orchestra could play something to support the soloist, or the soloist could join in like a member of the orchestra. Concertos usually have three *movements* or sections.

### When was it written?

Mendelssohn first thought about writing a violin concerto in 1838. For seven years he worked on it, with much assistance from a violinist friend, until it was first performed in 1845.

## About the Composer

**Felix Mendelssohn** | Born February 3, 1809 in Hamburg, Germany | Died November 4, 1847 in Leipzig, Germany

### Family & Career

Mendelssohn was a child prodigy. He began taking piano lessons at age 6 and gave his first public concert at age 9. Between the ages of 12 and 14, he wrote 12 string symphonies to be performed at his parents' gatherings. He published his first piece of music – a piano quartet – at age 13 and composed his first symphony when he was 15.

Felix was not the only musical genius in his family. His sister Fanny was equally talented. As she grew up and was forced to give up her dreams of becoming a professional musician because she was a woman, she continued to compose. Some of the music written under Felix's name was actually written by Fanny. In fact, the Queen of England once told Felix what her favorite piece was, and it turned out to be one of Fanny's!

## Movement Titles

1. Mars, the Bringer of War
2. Venus, the Bringer of Peace
3. Mercury, the Winged Messenger
4. Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity
5. Saturn, the Bringer of Old Age
6. Uranus, the Magician
7. Neptune, the Mystic

### Listen for...

The *Violin Concerto* has three movements, but they are played *attaca*, or attached. Mendelssohn did not allow breaks between the movements because he didn't want the audience to applaud. See if you can hear the long bassoon note that acts as a bridge between the 1st and 2nd movements.



Fanny and Felix Mendelssohn

### Fun Facts

Mendelssohn spent a lot of time in England, where he was very popular. Once when he was there, Mendelssohn was overcome with joy when he discovered a butcher shop that sold genuine German sausages. It was a taste of home! He purchased a long string of sausages and ate them on the spot.

## The Planets

by *Gustav Holst*

### About the Music

#### What kind of piece is this?

This is a *suite*: a set of short instrumental or orchestral pieces performed on a concert. This suite has seven movements, or sections, each named for one of the planets besides Earth that were known at the time of its composition.

### Listen for...

For Mars, the “Bringer of War,” Holst uses snare drum and bugle calls to imitate the sounds of a military band. Watch for the string players to play *col legno*, meaning on the wooden part of their bow. Holst uses the string instruments like they are percussion instruments!

The movement about Jupiter contains a melody that has become a hymn used for patriotic and religious occasions. Princess Diana used it for the procession at her wedding. You’ll hear it in the middle of the movement when the *tempo*, or speed, slows down. Listen for the same melody to come back near the end of the movement.

Holst created the first ever “fade-out” ending, long before this became the norm in recorded music. At the end of the last movement, Neptune, an offstage, wordless chorus of women (they sing syllables like “ooo”) gets softer and softer. Holst wrote that the last measure should be “repeated until the sound is lost in the distance.” Doesn’t it sound mystical?



### Fun Facts

*The Planets* made Holst famous, but he hated the attention it brought him. When people would ask him for an autograph, he would hand them a piece of paper that stated that he didn’t give autographs.

### When was it written?

Holst composed *The Planets* in 1916. It was his most successful work and audiences were disappointed by everything he composed after it.

### What is it about?

Holst’s interest in *astrology* – the study of the movement and position of moons, planets and stars and their spiritual effect on people – inspired him to compose *The Planets*. Each movement is meant to express the ideas and emotions associated with that planet’s effect on people, as outlined in astrology. There is no movement for Earth since it is not one of the planets of astrology. And Pluto does not have a movement either, since it was not yet discovered when the piece was composed.

*The Planets* uses a really big orchestra that includes many unusual instruments: alto flute, bass oboe, tenor tuba, six timpani, two harps, and an organ. There’s even a wordless, offstage women’s chorus in “Neptune.”

## About the Composer

**Gustav Holst** | Born September 21, 1874 in Cheltenham, United Kingdom | Died May 25, 1934 in London, United Kingdom

### Family & Career

Holst was born to a musical family, so it was no surprise when he started composing and studying violin and piano as a child. Unfortunately, he was always sick. He had poor eyesight, asthma, and constant pain in his hands. The pain in his hands caused him to give up piano playing when he was still a young man, so he decided to take up the trombone instead. He thought the trombone wouldn’t cause such pain and it might help to strengthen his lungs. He helped pay for college by performing in orchestras, but Holst ultimately made a career of teaching and composing.

In 1923, Holst came to Ann Arbor to conduct a music festival. He was offered a job at the University of Michigan, but he declined the offer because he felt he didn’t have the energy for it.

### Music

Holst was a self-taught composer who said he just worked to “find the right notes.” He composed over 200 works including operas, ballets, symphonic and choral music and smaller works for his students to perform.