

οἱ πλάνητες

the wanderers

the worlds around our sun

Helios

(Pacific Northwest premiere, 2019)

by Timothy Takach

with projections

by CandyStations



THE ESOTERICS
Directed by Eric Banks

Saturday | 3 December 2022 | 8pm

Sunday | 4 December 2022 | 4pm

Queen Anne Christian Church
1316 3rd Avenue West | Seattle

About the composer

Reviewed as “gorgeous” (*Washington Post*) and “stunning” (*Lawrence Journal-World*), the music of Timothy C. Takach has risen fast in the concert world. Applauded for his melodic lines and rich, intriguing harmonies, Takach has received commissions from the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, St. Olaf Band, Cantus, Pavia Winds, Lorelei Ensemble, VocalEssence, the DeBartolo Performing Arts Center, The Rose Ensemble, and numerous other organizations. His compositions have been performed on A Prairie Home Companion, The Boston Pops holiday tour, multiple All-State and festival programs and at venues such as the Library of Congress, Kennedy Center and Royal Opera House Muscat. He is a co-creator of the theatrical production of *All is Calm: the Christmas Truce of 1914*, by Peter Rothstein. Takach studied music composition at St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN, and has frequent national work as a composer-in-residence, presenter, clinician and lecturer. He is a full-time composer and lives in Minneapolis with his wife and two sons.

Foreward to *Helios*

Helios is a musical exploration of our solar system. The libretto is inspired by the Greek and Roman gods for which the planets are named, the science of each planetary body, and the faith in unanswered questions we have as humans. The idea for this piece was born on a tour with Cantus back in 2013. I was thinking about how to combine my passions together in music, and I thought I should write a choral cycle based on the planets. Over the course of the next six years I researched the solar system and started to piece together the libretto movement by movement. I couldn't find the support to fund the whole cycle in one commission, so I started to write individual movements for smaller commissions along the way. In the spring of 2018 I was talking with Matt Culloton about having it on The Singers' 15th anniversary season, even though it wasn't finished or funded. He told me, “if you write it, I'll program it.” So I jumped the rest of the way in. At that point I had written four movements, and I would complete a fifth the next fall.

The libretto contains poetry commissioned for this piece alongside translations of ancient writing and previously published poetry. Each movement's text is inspired by the planet for which it is named, and *Helios* itself has an overarching theme of control. In our lives, some things are within our control and others are not. *Helios* asks us to analyze these situations and be active in finding ways where we can choose. We have the choice to point our lives in a certain way, to decide who we want to be and how we want to live. In “Pluto” we stand at the border of chaos, ready to jump in. Patricia Monaghan has us believe that chaos can be beautiful, that it offers us more exciting choices than control. The music brings us into chaos immediately, each section in their own rhythmic pattern, surging and combining to make something greater. “Neptune” offers us a familiar story of a father intervening in his two sons' conflict. As a father I can emphasize with Neptune's rage at the chaos his sons are causing but I also love the description of how he controls them: “He sways their passions with his words and soothes their hearts.” A great way to parent. Turbulent trills and glissandi abound as the winds combat each other, and the contrasting homophony later delivers Neptune's words.

Patricia Monaghan's poetry embodies the cold isolation of “Uranus.” The axial tilt of Uranus is almost parallel to the solar plane, meaning that instead of spinning like a top, it rolls around the sun in its orbit, causing an alternating 42 years of sunlight then darkness at the poles. This isolating coldness is what inspired this poem choice and the paired quote from Shakespeare. So many people feel isolated, alone, unloved, and they feel as if their fate is not in their own hands. Tony Silvestri uses “Saturn” as an autobiographical account of his childhood, how he gazed at Saturn and unlocked his wonder for the universe. The movement opens with a solo trio, more intimate and personal than any texture we've heard so far. When the choir enters the heavens crack open, and wonder is upon us. The choir lays down a familiar harmonic progression often found in popular music, rooting this movement here on Earth, but the text explores the many wonders that occur in the heavens.

The title character does not appear in “Jupiter,” but instead the movement is sung from the perspective of Juno, Jupiter's wife. Silvestri has written a rage aria with a powerful twist. Instead of only proclaiming her rage, Juno marks Jupiter's beautiful image as his famous red spot - a continuous storm, the largest in the solar system. In “Comet” Jupiter asks Venus to take the spirit of Julius Caesar and turn him into a star. She agrees and carries his spirit up to the heavens, feeling it transform into a fiery comet. In ancient Rome, Caesar's Comet was seen for 7 days in 44 BC. The repeating glissandi in the bass section are a Shepard tone, giving an unending sense of rising motion. Are we able to control the legacy we leave behind? We cannot transform into a comet, but we can choose what we wish to leave behind, how we want to be remembered.

Writing a piece inspired by “Mars” offered a much-needed exploration of how we view masculinity. The Roman god of war is usually portrayed in a very aggressive, stereotypically masculine way. To me, the way culture tends to convey traditional masculinity is not usually the truth but a mask we wear to show bravado, toughness and confidence. When the 2004 Mars rover Spirit broke a wheel, it ended up dragging the wheel across the surface of the planet, scratching the surface to discover silica underneath. This discovery pointed to the fact that hot water once flowed on or under the surface of Mars. It's such a great metaphor for our sense of manliness - that as our outer layer is scarred we reveal something more gentle underneath. Bill Reichard's wonderful poem explores all of this and offers what I think is a more complete honest view of what it means to be a man.

“Moon” has a mysterious feel to it: an exploration of sound, texture and environment. We hear a brilliant sense of light in the climax, even as a mere reflection of the true source. Like “Saturn,” “Earth” is rooted on the ground. While both depict the wonder of the heavens, Newhouse's poem reminds us how special our humanity is. Humans are a product of the only known cradle of life in the universe, and we alone get to experience complex emotion. “Venus” has been seen in the night sky throughout most of human history, and in Julia Klatt Singer's words “we feel a strong attachment to her—she rises for you, lingers for you, wants you to see her, notice her, want her to stay in the sky. And since she is the second brightest thing up there, next to the sun, she does linger, stay.” Venus orbits in the opposite direction from all other planets in our system, moving against expectations, showing how powerful we can be if we choose.

An interlude illustrates the value of inward growth and change, contrary to the expectation that change is always visible and in a prescribed direction. Self-discovery and awareness lead us into “Mercury,” where a limited pitch set opens the piece, eventually yielding to a wide palette of color and harmony. We are in charge of our own limits. We can make the pendulum shift in as many degrees of freedom as we can imagine. In a universe where chaos is beautiful and breeds life, we can still control our own balance and destiny. The sun is our greatest source of energy. Our journey through the solar system ends as we finally are drawn into its warmth, enveloped in family, community wonder and light. We are home.

Timothy C. Takach

ΟΙ ΠΛΑΝΗΤΕΣ

the wanderers

P R O G R A M

Please turn off all noise-making devices, and refrain from talking during the performance.

Helios (2019)

by Timothy Takach (1978)
with projections by CandyStations

- I. Prelude | Chaos and order
- II. Pluto | The border
- III. Neptune | The storm was loose
- IV. Uranus | White silences
- V. Saturn | Longing for infinity
- VI. Jupiter | A wife betrayed
- VII. Comet | Transmigration
- VIII. Interlude | With my face to the sun
- IX. Mars | Love asleep and waiting
- X. Moon | Everything is made of light
- XI. Earth | Only here
- XII. Venus | Everything seems possible
- XIII. Interlude | Opening inward
- XIV. Mercury | Move towards freedom
- XV. Sun | Perihelion

*After a brief talk with Tim at the start of the concert,
his piece will be performed without intermission.
The running time is about 65 minutes.*

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*Soloists are denoted by the number
in which their solo occurs.*

T H E E S O T E R I C S

Now on the cusp of its 30th concert season, Seattle's most innovative chorus has drawn local, national, and international praise for performing rarely-heard compositions of contemporary music for unaccompanied voices, for infusing elements of the literary, theatrical, and visual arts into the typical concert experience, and for inspiring and performing new *a cappella* choral settings of poetry, philosophy, and spiritual writings by composers around the world. In early 1992, Eric Banks brought together a group of friends to perform his Master's and Doctoral recitals in Choral Studies at the University of Washington. After Banks' recitals were completed, the group wanted to keep singing together, so Banks chose a name for his ensemble based on the Greek adjective εσοτερικος – which describes a close-knit community and the secret knowledge that its members share. Since incorporating with this name in 1993, The Esoterics has performed hundreds of concerts throughout the Pacific Northwest, has commissioned and premiered hundreds of new works for *a cappella* voices in myriad languages, and has mastered many of the most virtuosic choral works of the last century in concerts described as “compelling,” “crafted,” “luxuriant,” “lyrical,” “sumptuous,” and “superb.” The Esoterics has released twenty-one CD recordings on its own label (Terpsichore) and has been honored to compete at the 2000 Cork International Choral Festival (Ireland), the 2001 Certamen Coral de Tolosa (Spain), and the 2006 Harald Andersen International Choir Competition in Helsinki (Finland). As well, The Esoterics has demonstrated its continuing commitment to choral education in becoming the only choral ensemble in Washington State that grants continuing-education credit to its members who also teach in the public schools. In recognition for its efforts in choral education and innovation, The Esoterics has been honored five times with the ASCAP and Chorus America Award for the Adventurous Programming of Contemporary Music (in 2001, 2003, 2006, 2008, and 2017). The Esoterics has been honored to receive grants from the arts commissions of Washington State, King County, and the City of Seattle, as well as funding from Amazon, Google, Microsoft, the Seattle Foundation, the Aaron Copland Fund for Music, the BMI Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. The Esoterics is a proud member chorus of ACDA (the American Choral Directors Association), Chorus America, IFCM (the International Federation for Choral Music), and GALA (the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses).

M I S S I O N S T A T E M E N T

The Esoterics is a Seattle-based vocal ensemble that is dedicated to performing and perpetuating contemporary *a cappella* choral settings of poetry, philosophy, and spiritual writings from around the world.

While cultivating artistic expression and cultural understanding among its singers and audience alike, The Esoterics aspires to reflect the beauty, power, and significance that are inherent in the music of our time.

E R I C B A N K S

As a conductor, composer, clinician, vocalist, linguist, and ethnomusicologist, Eric Banks has garnered significant acclaim as one of the most creative and compelling choral directors in the United States for his unwavering commitment to new music for unaccompanied voices. In 1992, Eric founded The Esoterics, a professional-caliber chamber chorus in Seattle whose mission is to perform and perpetuate contemporary choral music beyond the scope of the established *a cappella* canon. After completing his BA in Composition at Yale University in 1990, Eric relocated to Seattle to study in the departments of Choral Studies and Music Theory at the University of Washington. His MM thesis (1992) is a performance edition of *Dixit Dominus* by Chiara Margarita Cozzolani; his MA thesis (1995) is a postmodern analysis of Arvo Pärt's *Credo*; and his DMA dissertation (1996) surveys the choral music of Mexican composer and Aztec ethnomusicologist Carlos Chávez. In 1997, at the conclusion of his graduate study, Banks traveled to Sweden as a Fulbright Scholar and Lois Roth Fellow in order to learn more about its contemporary choral culture. While in Stockholm, Eric performed with several ensembles, including the Swedish Radio Choir and the Eric Ericson Chamber Choir. In his music, Eric is drawn to ideas that are 'esoteric' in origin, and chooses to express concepts that are undiscovered, under-represented, or not easily decipherable to a wider audience. As a composer, Banks has been able to combine his love of poetry, foreign language, classical civilization, social justice, comparative religion, and the natural sciences to create a growing repertoire of new works for *a cappella* chorus. Several of Banks' commissioned works have been recorded by The Esoterics, and can be found on CDs released on the Terpsichore label. Eric was a visiting scholar at the Royal Conservatory of Music and Swedish National Radio in Stockholm, as well as at the Cama Oriental Institute in Mumbai, India. Winner of the 2010 *Dale Warland Singers Commission Award* from Chorus America and the American Composers Forum, Eric has received composition and research grants from 4Culture, the Aaron Copland Fund for Music, Artist Trust, the Atwood Foundation, New Music USA, the San Francisco Arts Commission, Seattle City Artists, the Washington State Arts Commission, and three “creativity” grants from the National Endowment for the Arts. His upcoming premieres include pieces for the International Federation for Choral Music, the Taipei Philharmonic Chorus, and the Vancouver Chamber Choir. Eric lives in Seattle with David Gellman, his husband of 25 years (who is also The Esoterics' graphic design guru). You can read more about Eric's work on his own webpage: www.ericbanks.com. Eric is a member of ASCAP.

THE ESOTERICS

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The Esoterics' continued success as an arts organization is directly related to you and your generosity.

If you are committed to the future of the choral art, then please consider supporting The Esoterics: invite friends to our performances, purchase our CDs, or make a tax-deductible contribution to the group. Thank you!

If you would like to receive information about future concerts, or are interested in volunteering, please contact us:

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The Esoterics would like to acknowledge our generous rehearsal and concert venues, as well as their staff, for their contributions to The Esoterics' success this year:

Mary Palmer, Tom Kirkland, and the entire parish at Queen Anne Christian Church in Seattle

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Helios

composed by Timothy Takach (1978)
with projections by CandyStations

*Dedicated to Jocelyn,
who convinced me I could.*

I. Prelude | Chaos and order

Chaos was the law of nature
Order was the dream of man.
Chaos often breeds life,
when order breeds habit.

Henry Brooks Adams

II. Pluto | At the border

Here is where chaos starts.

It is the fiercest hunger.
It is a great tearing pain
that so occupies the mind
that there is nothing else.

It is being breathed.
It is being breathless.

Standing on the border
of chaos means standing
in a sharp cold wind
on the highest pass
in the arctic mountains.

It means plunging
into stars.
It means soaring into jade seas.

Here at the border
we are not in chaos yet.
This is more relentless
than chaos. And

more beautiful. Far,
far more beautiful.

*Patricia Monaghan
"Mandelbrot Set: 4. The Border"
(used with permission)*

III. Neptune | The storm was loose

Neptune, meanwhile,
greatly troubled,
saw that the sea was churned
with vast murmur,
and the storm was loose
and the still waters welled
from their deepest levels:

he raised his calm face
from the waves,
gazing over the deep.

He calls the East and West winds to him,
and then says:

"Tantane vos generis tenuit fiducia vestri?
"Does confidence in your birth fill you so?
Iam caelum terramque meo sine numine, venti,
*Winds, do you dare, without my intent, to mix
miscere, et tantas audetis tollere moles?"*
earth with sky, and cause such trouble now?"

So he speaks,
and swifter than his speech,
he calms the swollen sea,
scatters the gathered cloud,
and brings back the sun.

He sways their passions with his words
and soothes their hearts:
so all the uproar of the ocean died,
as soon as their father,
gazing over the water,
carried through the clear sky,
wheeled his horses,
and gave them their head,
flying behind in his chariot.

*Virgil: Aeneid I, 124-156 (edited),
translated by A.S. Kline,
PoetryInTranslation.com
(used with permission)*

IV. Uranus | White silences

Beyond geography. Beyond blood.
Beyond latitude. Beyond salt.

Beyond continents. Beyond tears.
That kind of coldness.

My hair is beaded with crystals.
Forgetful and aloof, I am slipping

into white silences, becoming
cold skin over hard finality.

*Patricia Monaghan
"White Silences"
(used with permission)*

It is the stars,
The stars above us,
govern our conditions.

*William Shakespeare
"King Lear," 4.3.32-33*

V. Saturn | Longing for infinity

When I was nine years old,
I first looked through a telescope,
And what I saw astounded me:
Floating in the inky black,
The orb of Saturn, like a pearl,
Encircled in its perfect rings.
So small it seemed, and yet as large
As almost a thousand Earths;
So close, and yet so very far away.

The sight awoke in me
A longing for infinity
And all its wonders:
The spinning planets, burning stars;
Galaxies of endless worlds
Hurling headlong through the void;
The many-colored nebulae—
Graveyards of exploded stars,

And nurseries of the new;
The universe extending
In ever-widening spheres
Of color, light, and energy;

An endless source of wonder and humility.
This journey through infinity
Began for me when I first beheld
The icy rings of Saturn
From a field on Earth
That summer evening
When I was nine years old.

*Charles Anthony Silvestri
(commissioned for Helios)*

VI. Jupiter | A wife betrayed

Look at him.
Just look at him.
Smug and fat, pompous, preening,
Rolling about in bedsheets
Of orange and scarlet satin,
Surrounded by his paramours—
Io and Europa,
Iocaste and Eurydome,
Leda, Adrastea,
Callisto, Themisto—
[Even S-2010-J2, that slut!]
So many I can't even count
[Actually eighty]
Or care to remember.
And yet, I do remember.

Look at him.
He cares little for my honor,
Even less for my feelings.
I am his lover! His wife! His queen!
And yet no planet wanders named for me!
No stately Juno to glide about the sun,
Wrapped in swirling clouds
of rose and silver grey...
Alas, that is not to be,
For Jove takes all.
Attracts all.
Rules all.

But I am Juno,
Mighty Queen of gods and men,
And I demand my due!
I shall be a tempest,
Red and roiling like an angry sore,
Digging into his tender side—
A bright red spot to spoil his splendor,
A reminder of the ageless rage
Of a wife betrayed.
So, look at him!
All who gaze at him,
From now until the ending of the worlds,
Shall see only me!

*Charles Anthony Silvestri
(commissioned for Helios)*

VII. Comet | Transmigration

Then Jupiter, the Father, spoke...
"Take up Caesar's spirit
and change it into a star...
He had barely finished,
when gentle Venus stood,
seen by no one,
and took up the newly freed spirit
of her Caesar from his body,

and preventing it from vanishing into the air,
carried it towards the glorious stars.
As she carried it, she felt it glow and take fire,
and loosed it from her breast:
it climbed higher than the moon,
and drawing behind it a fiery tail,
shone as a star.

*Ovid, "Metamorphosis"
translated by A.S. Kline,
PoetryInTranslation.com
(used with permission)*

VIII. Interlude | With my face to the sun

I wish to leave the world
By it's natural door;
Do not put me in the dark
I am good, and like a good thing
I will die with my face to the sun.

*José Martí
excerpt from "A Morir"*

IX. Mars | Love asleep and waiting

A solitary planet spins alone
But never alone
There are moons
There are stars
A silent man lives alone
But never alone
There are voices
There are songs
Under the rocky surface
There is ice
Where once was water
Under the cold hide
There is ice
But also blood
A lonely planet spins amidst
The endless celestial bodies
The vast potential of space
A single man can never be lonely
If he's a son, a father, a brother
If he's a husband, a friend, a lover
Peel back the planet's skin
And find water, waiting, for the sun
Peel back the body's fierce façade
And find love, asleep, and waiting

*William Reichard
(commissioned for Helios)*

X. Moon | Everything if made of light

The moon translates a rhythm
of this night that knows no breath.
Everything is made of light.
The whole world is glowing.

*William Reichard
(commissioned for Helios)*

XI. Earth | Only here

My skies blaze and dazzle with ice,
lava burns in my veins.
All the glories of the gods are here—
but no gods gave me their name.

Mars may boast about war,
but only here are there blades,
and only here blood-stained soil.

Venus may preach on love,
but only here does an eye meet an eye
and whole new heavens are born.

Only here is there spring,
only here the breath of the rose.
Only here is there miracle, suffering, awe—
and only here do they kneel in prayer.

*Brian Newhouse
commissioned for Helios)*

XII. Venus | Everything seems possible

What is life with nothing to contain it?
Shore or edge of night, first rising star
For you
Her favorite word is linger
For her
Bliss is the blackest sky
The way she lights it
With her beauty.
When the sea became the sea
She moved like she still moves
In the opposite direction
Towards that something
To define her, beyond
which everything seems
possible.

*Julia Klatt Singer
(commissioned for Helios)*

XIII. Interlude | Opening inward

I am, at this moment,
walking in a direction
you cannot imagine,
you who judge everything
in terms of forward motion,
you who imagine me unmoving,
waiting as you pass through my world
like a brilliant burning comet,
leaving faint periodic traces
in a spiral galaxy:

I am opening inward,
spiralling towards nothingness and truth,
moving in no direction
you can imagine,
opening like an expanding universe
with no unmoving point within it.

*Patricia Monaghan
excerpt from "Nothing is Ever Simultaneous"
(used with permission)*

In my breast are the stars of my fate.

*Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller
(adapted for Helios)*

XIV. Mercury | Move towards freedom

a pendulum can only swing
(no matter how fast how slow)
can only swing in that small space
(no matter how fast how slow, no matter)
it can only swing
one degree
one degree of freedom,
that is what it is called,
that limit cycle,
(back & forth, no matter
back & forth, fast and slow):

one degree of freedom
But there is a way to get more
there is a way to move
there is a way to reach
infinite degrees of freedom:

move towards chaos,
move towards change,
move towards turbulence
there are so many degrees of freedom
there are so many degrees
uncounted uncountable
a rolling ring of freedom
so many degrees of freedom
this close to chaos

*Patricia Monaghan
"Degrees of Freedom"
(used with permission)*

XV. Sun | Perihelion

(textless vocalise)

*Helios was premiered by The Singers-Minnesota
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*World premiere performance
by The Singers - Minnesota Choral Artists,
Dr. Matthew Culloton, conductor.
St. Paul, MN; 18 May 2019.*

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