



**Sakari Oramo**

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## Review: BBC PROMS: PROM 46: HOLST'S THE PLANETS, Royal Albert Hall

Finnish conductor Sakari Oramo transported us through time  
and space

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If anyone were to worry about the future of classical music, Prom 46 would surely reassure them that we are in good hands. Students from the Royal College of Music Chamber Choir, Royal College of Music Symphony Orchestra and the Sibelius Academy Symphony Orchestra from Helsinki came together for an incredibly powerful and accomplished programme.



Two of the world's leading conservatoires created a super-orchestra. A vast array of players from Finland and the UK, with over 100 musicians and 70 string players on stage, who gave a superb performance that showed a maturity that belied their years.



To start, the enigmatic Finnish conductor Sakari Oramo, who is also Chief Conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, transported us to the Nordics with Sibelius's depiction of forest creature "The Wood Nymph", with precise, yet lyrical musicality from the orchestra. From the stately fanfare, to the woodwind flurries and then dreamlike waltz leading to the ending funereal march, the sound was superb.

Next came Finnish-American composer's Lara Poe's brand new work "Songs from the Countryside", written specifically for soprano Anu Koms. The song cycle is based on her conversations with her grandmother about her upbringing on a farm in Finland in the 1930s and 1940s and how it was impacted by the Second World War.

There were cattle calls, pastoral scenes and reflections on human relationships with animals. Poe's work is poignant and delicate and it was evident how much thought has gone into working with Koms's sparkling voice. Although the cycle was slightly too long, Poe is certainly a talent to watch.



Soprano Anu Koms

However, the sold-out crowd was there chiefly because of Holst. In his 150th anniversary year, "The Planets", his soundtrack for the solar system sounded as imaginative, cinematic and inciteful as ever.

The colours shown by the orchestra were extraordinary, with Oramo giving each section incredible attention and enthusiasm. The ferocious pounding of "Mars", sounding angrier than ever, the translucent and romantic stillness of "Venus" was beautifully striking. "Mercury" was light and fleet-footed; "Jupiter" energetic and "Saturn" suitably melancholic. "Uranus" had biting brass and "Neptune"'s diminishing chorus (from a wonderful off-stage Royal College of Music Chamber Choir) was an ethereal and gorgeous listen.

Each section should be rightly proud of this rousing performance, with particular note going to the percussionists, who all radiated huge energy and drive throughout.

There is a very good reason why "The Planets" is a Proms staple; the genius of Holst's composition is the total definition between each planet told through pure instrumental vitality. He crafted a unique personality for each one, which still sounds out of this world.

*The BBC Proms continues at The Royal Albert Hall until 14 September*

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