

Programme note

In 2007 astronomers at the University of California announced that they had found for the first time a star around which exists a quintuple planetary system: Cancri 55 is a star roughly the same size as our sun, and the fourth planet out - and the last to be discovered - appears to be in the "Goldilocks zone" at such a distance from its star so as to be neither too hot nor too cold for life.

The tremendous excitement we might feel for what might be "up there" is tempered by the knowledge that no one is likely to know anything much for centuries – if ever. However we *can* go there in our imaginations! In my piece I invite you to join me in a musical journey visiting these five planets.

Right at the beginning we hear a single *crotale* note, a pinpoint of light which we soon discover to be concealing five distinct "soundworlds". Each planet, as we approach, we find to have its own *timbre*, its own pulse and harmonies, its own musical idiosyncrasies.

We do not simply fly from one soundworld to the other. Often planets will eclipse each other, and sometimes we are overwhelmed with a richness of aural vision as we go through the awesome complexity of a planetary conjunction. We find that some of the planets are busy little places – like the earth - whilst on others we find maybe beautiful and unusual landscapes but little else.

The flautist – in my imagination the traveller – looks on, takes part in the planetary music, and even sets up a dialogue with musical fragments (life forms?) it finds – listen to the duet with the double bass ten minutes into the work. Throughout its musings, never far away is the melody of Samuel Rudigast's joyful chorale *Was Gott thut, das ist wohlgetan* (What God has done is well done). This pervades the harmonies of the planets; and the flute "tries out" the melody in the alien modes of the five soundworlds, before it bursts out in a quotation of one of Bach's own settings (from Cantata 100).

As a small boy, I remember wondering whether, if there are intelligent beings on other planets, there might also be music elsewhere. Is there another Bach in the universe? And if so does his music have the same wholeness and strength? Does it rejoice in the same God?

Perhaps these are idle musings for a grown man. Yet consider the words of Gaston Bachelard: "In a flash the stars break our solitude..... Distance is abolished. An infinity of communion erases an infinity of size. The world of stars touches our soul".