

# Symphony No. 4: Eclipse

## I. First Contact

### Instrumentation

- 3 Flutes (3<sup>rd</sup> doubling Piccolo), 3 Oboes, 3 Clarinets in Bb (2<sup>nd</sup> doubling Eb Clarinet), 3 Bassoons (3<sup>rd</sup> doubling Contrabassoon)
- 4 Horns in F, 3 Trumpets in C, 3 Trombones, 1 Tuba
- Timpani; Perc. 1: Glockenspiel, Suspended Cymbal, Sand Blocks, Snare Drum, Claves; Perc. 2: Vibraphone, Tubular Bells, Triangle, Snare Drum, Bass Drum; Perc. 3: Bass Drum, Triangle, Tam-tam, Crash Cymbals, Suspended Cymbal
- Harp
- Strings

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**First Contact**, for orchestra

Duration: 16'

Total solar eclipses have been taking place on Earth for millions of years, and they will continue to occur for at least 1.2 billion years into the future. Witnessing a solar eclipse is therefore a way of connecting with our planet's remote past, our present, and the distant future. It also makes us keenly aware of the scale of the cosmos and the celestial dance that Earth executes flawlessly together with the Sun and Moon.

*First Contact* draws us into the crucial first moments of the eclipse, when the Moon takes its first nibble out of the solar disk. Little by little—as the Moon takes over, increasingly blocking the Sun's light—our pupils dilate, and the color of the sky and landscape begin to change. As we get closer to totality, solar rays are only allowed through an ever-thinner sliver of the sun. As a result, objects around us become sharper, and animals start to behave strangely, as if settling into the night. Diurnal insects like bees and cicadas get louder, only to quiet down once totality ensues, while nocturnal creatures like bats and owls come to life. Temperatures begin to drop while the wind changes directions, sometimes blowing noticeably stronger. At last, the shadow cone comes at you at mighty speeds above 1,000 MPH (1,600 KMH), whooshing over you and blanketing everything in darkness.

Witnessing a total solar eclipse can be an exhilarating, cathartic, and life-changing experience. They have the power to stir our deepest emotions, bring us to tears, and awaken feelings of kinship and interconnectedness with the cosmos. In this piece I have strived not only to paint in music the different stages of an eclipse, but also the emotions elicited by it.

During my research, I dug extensively into Johannes Kepler's *Harmonices Mundi*, a 17<sup>th</sup> century treatise where he studies and explains the motion of the planets with the use of musical harmonies. In it, he announces the discovery of his third law of planetary motion. Although the concept of "music of the spheres" was not new at the time, Kepler's way of describing the motion of celestial bodies with the use of mathematics and musical harmonies is incredibly elegant, and had a lasting and



revolutionary impact. Throughout this work I reference the intervallic motions that he attributes to the Earth and Moon and complement it with some of the ideas that Swiss mathematician Hans Cousto outlines in his 2000 book *The Cosmic Octave*.

*First Contact* is part of a larger, three-part symphony, in which each movement focuses on a specific total solar eclipse taking place at a different date and corner of the world. This first movement chronicles the Great North American Eclipse that will take place on April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024, and which will be visible across several large urban centers throughout Mexico, the United States, and Canada. It was inspired by the awe-inducing emotions that the 2017 total solar eclipse awoke in me, and which led me to gain an even greater appreciation for the wondrous universe we live in.

*First Contact* was commissioned by Houston Symphony and Juraj Valčuha, Music Director. The first performance will take place on 26 April 2024 with Houston Symphony and Conductor Laureate Andrés Orozco-Estrada.

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