

Astral Wonder

Nicolas Bizub: *Points of Light*

Labyrinths Above
Veiled Mist
Radiant Blaze
Boundless
Shadowed Gravity
Luminous Heavens
Gleaming Webs

Points of Lights is a set of seven miniatures set in arch form which explores light and dark facets of the celestial world as metaphors for the human ethos. The outer movements contain the raw materials on which the inner movements are built. The four movements surrounding the center explore in isolation a facet of the first and last movements, which sibling movements sitting in stark contrast to each other. The center movement is a spacious and free abstraction of all musical material contained within the piece.

The work was composed in response to a poem I wrote, which reflects upon the likenesses between the celestial world and inner world of human emotion:

Points of Light

Points of light spin
Gleaming webs.

Strong diamonds,
Soft starlight,
Crystalline.

Labyrinths above
Point within.

Garrett George: *Ad Astra*

When I received a commission from Michael Delfin for a piece with an astronomical theme, my mind went immediately to the image of stars glistening like jewels in the sky – the night sky, unmoving yet full of activity. It seemed only fitting to write a perpetuum mobile piece that highlighted the piano's brilliant upper register.

Two outer fast sections are balanced by a lyrical middle section, with the emphasis throughout on line and melody. Beginning in A minor, the work finally concludes in A major.

Martin Hebel: *Radiant Pillars*

Radiant Pillars is an abstract reflection on two scientific observations which expanded our understanding of the universe: the Hubble telescope image, “Pillars of Creation,” showing stars forming from massive clouds of gas and dust, and the discovery of the Cosmic Microwave Background, the edge of the universe still expanding from the Big Bang.

Radiant Pillars begins by contrasting light, gently reverberating motives and delicate fragments with darker, colossal columns, illuminated by cascades of vivid, intense color. Bright, vibrant flourishes follow, building a torrent of energy as Radiant Pillars culminates in an immense explosion. Finally, clear, gentle fragments return, echoing in the highest reaches of the piano as they fade away.

Joseph Harkins: *Asteroid*

Never underestimate the power of a fast-flying ball of rock, no matter the size. The small ones strike when you least expect it – the large ones, well, they bring certain destruction. There’s not enough time for indecision, or uncertainty, when the rocks swirling around you carry all the energy in the place. Occasionally we don’t even get to the other side, having been dealt a feast of ice, metals, and space dust. However, these raw materials might also yield vital information on how our world and the worlds around us came to be – some hypothesize water was introduced to Earth by a rogue asteroid. Perhaps we can introduce water to the conclusion of these virtuosic calisthenics!

Brian Raphael Nabors: *Polaris*

I often gaze up at the night sky entranced by the glorious wonder of the celestial bodies above, wondering what lies beyond our tiny mote of matter.

Is there life elsewhere?

What are they doing now?

Will we ever be able to travel and find out?

Many others like myself love to gaze at this open dome teeming with existential vastness, finding joy in viewing various stars and constellations. The North Star, Polaris, has always particularly interested me. From its shining spot on the tip of the "Little Dipper" constellation, to its deeper meaning of freedom and wonder for so many. In this work, I sought to capture the sparkling, shining, nature of the star and the ethereal aura one experiences when looking at the sheer majesty of the night sky. Beginning with a simple rising theme, the piece quickly gives way to many sparkling harmonic colors and rhythmic gestures. I wanted to invite the listener into a vast, suspended open world of mystery, introspection, and effervescent light.

Julien Monick: *Star Path*

Star Path is an imagined journey through the voids of space before eventually crashing back down to Earth. This first movement, titled Flow, exemplifies the motion necessary to break through the clouds and out of the Earth's gravitational pull. In my imagination, this force isn't just literal, but an ebb and flow of various forms of movement both mental and physical that allow oneself to dislocate from our surroundings and enter a truly free landscape. At first this work took form in the spring of 2020 as an improvised response to my grandmother's death alone in a hospital from COVID-19 and my desire to escape from this reality and my feelings of helplessness. This movement is dedicated to Katherine Monick.

Michael Delfin: *New Horizons*

In 2006, the *New Horizons* probe was launched from Cape Canaveral and sped towards the Kuiper belt in the outer reaches of the Solar System at roughly 36,000 mph. After a flyby of Pluto, the probe was sent to 486958 Arrokoth, a planetoid whose location and size made it extremely difficult to observe, even with the Hubble Space Telescope. Nicknamed "Ultima Thule" ("Final Land"), it excited astronomers when it was finally spotted by Hubble, once its location was pinpointed, *New Horizons* was diverted to investigate. The probe hurtled through the Kuiper belt, a perilous region in our Solar System of asteroids, ice, and planetoids, and ultimately arrived at its destination on Jan 1, 2019. After astounding astronomers worldwide with its telemetry, it continued its race into the unknown.

What new horizons will the probe explore in the decades to come? What new probes will scientists launch to show us what else is out there? Even when merely looking up at the night sky, the spirit of discovery drives us to find out what lies beyond our reach.