

# Planetarium show tours planets

by Bruce Mann  
Feature Editor

"Grand Tour of the Planets," the Morehead Planetarium's new summer show, traces the path that outer planetary spacecraft missions will follow later in this decade.

Specifically, the show, which opened June 1, focuses on the journey of TOPS, the acronym for Thermoelectric (nuclear-powered) Outer Planet Spacecraft, a



A Zeiss planetarium device is used to project images on the dome of the Morehead Planetarium for the summer shows. There are only five others like it in the world and it is worth a quarter of a million dollars.

program which will launch artificial satellites on courses to Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto.

In September 1977, when these outer planets will be arranged in the most appropriate lineup for space travel in 175 years, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration will send two flights, following in 1979 with the last of the series of study missions.

The Planetarium's narrators Richard Knapp, John Zunes, Fred Sanders, and Tom Heffner start the show with a visit to Jupiter, a planet TOPS will take two years to reach.

Jupiter, named after the Roman god of thunder, is an unusual planet due to its turbulent lightning, its puzzling red spot (which is perhaps a depression on the planet's surface), its swift ten hour day, and the large amount of radio noise it emits. This turbulence, which appears to be an inner source of energy, leads scientists to believe that Jupiter may indeed supply the key to the organization of life.

Saturn, with its mysterious floating rings, is the next stop on the tour. The Planetarium program speculates on the theories of the rings' composition using artists' conceptions. The comment that Saturn is hypothetically the only planet which would actually float in water—it has a density less than that of water—is also discussed.

The space mission next visits Uranus, first of the so-called "invisible planets." Its unusual atmosphere and contorted orbital paths are both investigated and illustrated, the explanation of the latter abnormality serving as introduction to Neptune, the planet which exerts a tugging effect on Uranus.

Neptune also has its unusual feature, an erratically behaving outer moon which orbits in the opposite direction from the inner moon.

As the TOPS vehicle approaches Pluto, the audience watches from the desolate landscape surface of the planet. TOPS will reach Pluto after a nine year journey.

Special effects during the program include an illustration of retrograde motion of the planets, a recording of actual radio noise monitored from Jupiter, and enlarged representations of the TOPS spacecraft and the outer planets against the background of a 1977 sky as only the Zeiss Model 6 Planetarium Projector can show it.

Students who have never experienced this unique type of educational environment should take advantage of the opportunity to witness this far better-than-average planetarium presentation in Chapel Hill. After all, the Zeiss instrument is one of only six in the world, the others being located in metropolitan centers such as New York and Chicago.

"Grand Tour of the Planets" may be seen through the summer at 11 a.m., 3 and 8:30 p.m. on weekdays; at 11 a.m., 1, 3, 4 and 8:30 p.m. on Saturdays; and at 2, 3, 4 and 8:30 p.m. on Sundays. No reservations are required.

Admission to the Planetarium Sky Theater is \$1.25 for adults, \$1.00 for students and \$.75 for children through eleven years of age. No reservations are required.

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