

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra
2014-2015 Subscription Series

March 27, 28 and 29, 2015

ANDRES OROZCO-ESTRADA, CONDUCTOR
WILLIAM D. CABALLERO, HORN
ROBERT D. LAUVER, HORN
MARK HOUGHTON, HORN
JOSEPH C. ROUNDS, HORN

MASON BATES

The Rise of Exotic Computing for Sinfonietta and Laptop

ROBERT SCHUMANN

Konzertstück for Four Horns and Orchestra

in F major, Opus 86

- I. Lebhaft —
- II. Romanze: Ziemlich langsam, doch nicht schleppend —
- III. Sehr lebhaft

Mr. Caballero

Mr. Lauver

Mr. Houghton

Mr. Rounds

Intermission

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Opus 68

- I. Un poco sostenuto — Allegro
- II. Andante sostenuto
- III. Un poco allegretto e grazioso
- IV. Adagio — Allegro non troppo, ma con brio

PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

MASON BATES

Born 23 January 1977 in Philadelphia

The Rise of Exotic Computing for Sinfonietta and Laptop (2013)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Pittsburgh, 5 April 2013; Static Nightclub; members of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 12 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: piccolo, flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn, trumpet, percussion, harp, piano, two violins, viola, cello, bass and laptop.

Mason Bates brings not only his own fresh talent to the concert hall but also the musical sensibilities of a new generation — he is equally at home composing “for Lincoln Center,” according to his web site (www.masonbates.com), as being the “electronica artist Masonic® who moved to the San Francisco Bay Area from New York City, where he was a lounge DJ at such venues as The Frying Pan — the floating rave ship docked off the pier near West 22nd Street.”

Bates was born in Philadelphia in 1977 and started studying piano with Hope Armstrong Erb at his childhood home in Richmond, Virginia. He earned degrees in both English literature and music composition in the joint program of Columbia University and the Juilliard School, where his composition teachers included John Corigliano, David Del Tredici and Samuel Adler, and received his doctorate in composition from the University of California, Berkeley in 2008 as a student of Edmund Campion and Jorge Lidermann. Bates was Resident Composer with the California Symphony (2008-2011), Project San Francisco Artist-in-Residence with the San Francisco Symphony (2011-2012), and Composer of the Year with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra for both the 2012-2013 and 2014-2015 seasons; he began a five-year residency with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in September 2010. The San Francisco Symphony gave a “Beethoven & Bates” festival during its 2013-2014 season and recorded his *Liquid Interface*, *The B-Sides* and *Alternative Energy* for release in 2015. Bates’ many honors include a Charles Ives Scholarship and Fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Guggenheim Fellowship, Jacob Druckman Memorial Prize from the Aspen Music Festival, ASCAP and BMI awards, a Fellowship from the Tanglewood Music Center, Rome Prize, Berlin Prize and a two-year Composer Residency with Young Concert Artists. In 2012, he was awarded the Heinz Medal in Arts and Humanities.

Bates is also an ardent and effective advocate for bringing new music to new spaces, “whether,” he explained, “through institutional partnerships such as the residency with the Chicago Symphony’s MusicNOW series, or through the project *Mercury Soul*, which has transformed spaces ranging from commercial clubs to Frank Gehry-designed concert halls into exciting, hybrid musical events drawing over a thousand people. *Mercury Soul*, a collaboration with director Anne Patterson and conductor Benjamin Schwartz, embeds sets of classical music into an evening of DJing and beautiful, surreal visuals.”

Bates composed *The Rise of Exotic Computing* in 2013 on a commission from the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra; members of the PSO premiered the work at the downtown Static Nightclub on April 5, 2013. Bates noted that *The Rise of Exotic Computing* combines the worlds of classical and electronic dance techno and wrote of it, “This short and visceral sinfonietta was inspired by the notion of synthetic computing, which allows for computer code to grow itself in a kind of organic way. Hence the motifs quickly spread from instrument to instrument as the piece unfolds in an infectious manner. Like a self-replicating synthetic computer, the material of this work insidiously jumps from instrument to instrument. The piece accumulates energy as it goes, and by the time it gets to the climax the techno beats and the ensemble are pretty much throbbing at full pulse.”

ROBERT SCHUMANN

Born 8 June 1810 in Zwickau, Germany; died 29 July 1856 in Endenich, near Bonn

Konzertstück for Four Horns and Orchestra in F major, Opus 86 (1849)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Leipzig, 25 February 1850; Gewandhaus Orchestra; Julius Rietz, conductor; Eduard Pohle, Joseph Jehnichen, Eduard Leichsenring and Carl Wilke, soloists

PSO PREMIERE: 28 January 2004; Heinz Hall; Sir John Eliot Gardiner; William D. Caballero, Robert D. Lauver, Ronald M. Schneider, Joseph C. Rounds, soloists

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 18 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: woodwinds in pairs plus piccolo, two horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani and strings

Though horns of metal or animal horn were known as early as 2400 B.C. in Sumeria, the modern orchestral instrument traces its provenance to the 16th century. Before that time, the horn had a very limited range and a piercing, raucous tone quality — more a noise-maker for military, hunting and civic signaling than a true musical instrument. By the late 1500s, the instrument had been increased in length, allowing the performer to sound a greater number of pitches; to facilitate its handling, the metal tube was wrapped into a number of circular coils. The earliest reference to the “French” horn (curiously, called “French” only in the English language) was in England in 1681 at just about the time that its musical usefulness was beginning to be recognized. Presumably (though not demonstrably) the name arose because the English thought that the instrument was developed in France, though Italy and Bohemia also figure prominently in the horn’s early history.

Early horns were valveless, and therefore limited to only those notes available in the natural overtone series, just as is a simple bugle today. Beginning in 1718, crooks came into common use. These devices were additional lengths of tubing that could be plugged into the horn to create another overtone series with its extra, supplementary set of notes. By the middle of the 18th century, one Anton Joseph Hampel of Dresden formalized the technique of hand-stopping, which served both to mellow the tone (previously, the horn’s bell had been held above the player’s head, and produced a harsh, strident sound) and to fill in some of the gaps in the overtone series. (Complete stopping of the bell lowers the pitch by a half step, but muffles the tone.) It was for this awkward instrument, with its interchangeable crooks and cumbersome hand-stopping, that Mozart wrote his four delightful concertos.

At the beginning of the 19th century, horn players still had to switch crooks for each piece (in some cases, for each movement) to match the key of the rest of the orchestra. This problem was solved by the use of a valve mechanism, patented in 1818 by Heinrich Stolzel and Friedrich Bluhmel. Their system allowed the player to deflect the main air stream into side tubes of different lengths by depressing valves, essentially making a series of crooks available at the touch of a key and allowing the production of the complete chromatic scale. It is the system still used on all brass instruments except the slide trombone. One important remnant of the old playing technique, however, was incorporated into the design of the modern horn: the valves are operated by the left hand, unlike the right-handed trumpet, allowing the right hand to rest in the bell to mellow the sound and produce a variety of tonal effects. Though the horn is one of the most treacherous of all instruments to play, in the hands of a master performer its burnished, noble tone is among the most stirring of all musical sounds.

During Schumann’s residence in Dresden, from 1844 to 1850, he was naturally in frequent contact with the local musicians. Richard Wagner, filled with revolutionary political and musical ideas, was conductor at the Royal Opera House, which boasted one of the finest orchestras on the Continent at the time. A chief adornment of that ensemble was a player named Lewy, a virtuoso who headed up the orchestra’s horn section and was also one of the earliest exponents of the new valved instrument. Schumann was so impressed with the possibilities of the improved horn, and with the expressive avenues for it that Wagner had opened in his operas (*Rienzi*, *The Flying Dutchman* and *Tannhäuser* had all been staged by 1845), that he undertook a grand, concerted piece for not just one horn, but for an entire quartet of the instruments. The *Konzertstück* that he devised was certainly a showpiece for the valved horn, but it was also so hard as to be proclaimed by some as virtually unplayable — Schumann’s biographer Robert Schauflier decided that “the difficulties are so horrendous that it needs almost the trump of an archangel to cope with them.” Performances of the *Konzertstück* (“quite a curiosity,” the composer called it) have, understandably, been rare over the years, but when a company of master hornists rises to its challenge, it proves to be one the most exciting entries in all of Schumann’s catalog.

The *Konzertstück* was written in 1849, when Schumann was in good health and spirits, and producing music with greater ease and alacrity than at almost any other time in his life — some thirty works date from what he referred to as “my most fruitful year.” The work is in the standard three movements, though played without pause. The first movement abounds with breathtaking feats of virtuosity and intricate

ensemble (the opening fanfare may well stay in the listener's mind for days) couched in a fine orchestral accompaniment with expansive harmonies and rich sonorities. Schumann called the autumnal second movement "Romanze," using as the theme of its center section a broad melody that returns in transformation in the last movement. The finale resumes the quick tempo and the flashing musical pyrotechnics of the opening movement, though it contains some episodes of contrasting character that Alfred Nieman believed were "not far from the impressionistic images of Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, woven together with effortless spontaneity." Schumann piles one challenge upon another as the movement progresses, ending with an admonition to the soloists that the final, rousing pages are to be delivered "mit Bravour."

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Born 7 May 1833 in Hamburg; died 3 April 1897 in Vienna

Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Opus 68 (1855-1876)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Karlsruhe, 4 November 1876; Orchestra of the Grand Duke of Baden; Felix Otto Dessooff, conductor

PSO PREMIERE: 9 November 1900; Carnegie Music Hall; Victor Herbert, conductor

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 45 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: pairs of woodwinds, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani and strings

Brahms, while not as breathtakingly precocious as Mozart, Mendelssohn or Schubert, got a reasonably early start on his musical career: he had produced several piano works (including two large sonatas) and a goodly number of songs by the age of nineteen. In 1853, when Brahms was only twenty, Robert Schumann wrote an article for the widely distributed *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* ("New Journal for Music"), his first contribution to that publication in a decade, hailing his young colleague as the savior of German music, the rightful heir to the mantle of Beethoven. Brahms was extremely proud of Schumann's advocacy and he displayed the journal with great joy to his friends and family when he returned to his humble Hamburg neighborhood after visiting Schumann in Düsseldorf, but there was the other side of Schumann's assessment as well, that which placed an immense burden on Brahms' shoulders.

Brahms was acutely aware of the deeply rooted traditions of German music extending back not just to Beethoven, but even beyond him to Bach and Schütz and Lasso. He knew that, having been heralded in a widely publicized article by Schumann, his compositions, especially a symphony, would have to measure up to the standards set by his forebears. At first he doubted that he was even able to write a symphony, feeling that Beethoven had nearly expended all the potential of that form, leaving nothing for future generations. "You have no idea," Brahms lamented, "how it feels to hear behind you the tramp of a giant like Beethoven."

Encouraged by Schumann to undertake a symphony, Brahms made some attempts in 1854, but he was unsatisfied with the symphonic potential of the sketches and diverted them into the First Piano Concerto and the *German Requiem*. He began again a year later, perhaps influenced by a performance of Schumann's *Manfred*, and set down a first movement, but that music he kept to himself. Seven years passed before he sent that movement to Clara, Schumann's widow, to seek her opinion. She was pleased with the C minor sketch, and encouraged him to finish the rest so that it could be performed. Brahms, however, was not to be rushed. Eager inquiries from conductors in 1863, 1864 and 1866 went unanswered. It was not until 1870 that he hinted about any progress at all beyond the first movement. The success of the superb *Haydn Variations* for orchestra of 1873 seemed to convince Brahms that he could complete his initial symphony, and in the summer of 1874, he began two years of labor — revising, correcting, perfecting — before he signed and dated the score of the First Symphony in September 1876.

The first movement begins with a slow introduction energized by the heartbeat of the timpani. The violins announce the upward-bounding main theme in the faster tempo that launches a magnificent, seamless sonata form. The second movement starts with a placid, melancholy song led by the violins. After a mildly syncopated middle section, the bittersweet melody returns. The brief third movement, with its prevailing woodwind colors, is reminiscent of the pastoral serenity of Brahms' halcyon earlier Serenades. The finale begins with an extended slow introduction based on several pregnant thematic ideas, and concludes with a noble chorale intoned by trombones and bassoons. The finale proper begins

with a new tempo and a broad hymnal theme, and progresses in sonata form, but without a development section. The work closes with a majestic coda in the brilliant key of C major featuring the trombone chorale of the introduction in its full splendor.

— Dr. Richard E. Rodda