

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra
2014-2015 Subscription Series

May 15 and 17, 2015

MICHAEL FRANCIS, CONDUCTOR
ANNE MARTINDALE WILLIAMS, CELLO
JAMIE BARTON, MEZZO-SOPRANO

MASON BATES *Alternative Energy* for Orchestra and Electronica
I. Ford's Farm, 1896
II. Chicago, 2012
III. Xinjiang Province, 2112
IV. Reykjavik, 2222

JAKE HEGGIE *The Work at Hand* for Mezzo-Soprano, Cello
and Orchestra
WORLD PREMIERE
COMMISSIONED BY THE
PITTSBURGH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Ms. Williams
Ms. Barton

Intermission

BÉLA BARTÓK Concerto for Orchestra
I. Introduction: Andante non troppo — Allegro vivace
II. Game of the Pairs: Allegretto scherzando
III. Elegy: Andante non troppo
IV. Interrupted Intermezzo: Allegretto
V. Finale: Presto

PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

MASON BATES

Born 23 January 1977 in Philadelphia.

Alternative Energy for Orchestra and Electronica (2011)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Chicago, 2 February 2012; Symphony Hall; Chicago Symphony Orchestra; Riccardo Muti, conductor

THESE PERFORMANCE MARK THE PSO PREMIERE

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 25 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: piccolo, three flutes, alto flute, three oboes, English Horn, E-flat clarinet, three clarinets, three bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, laptop, percussion, harp, piano and strings.

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 records his *Liquid Interface*, *The B-Sides* and *Alternative Energy* for release in 2015.

Bates’ rapidly accumulating portfolio of orchestral, chamber, vocal, theatrical and electronic compositions includes commissions and performances by the major orchestras of Pittsburgh, London, Lisbon, New York, Washington, Atlanta, Toronto, Phoenix, San Francisco, Oakland, Annapolis, Los Angeles, Miami and Detroit, the Tanglewood, Aspen, Cabrillo and Spoleto USA festivals, Biava Quartet, Chanticleer and New Juilliard Ensemble. In 2010, Bates was commissioned to write *MotherShip* for the second concert of the YouTube Symphony Orchestra, an ensemble composed of musicians from around the world who were selected through on-line auditions by Michael Tilson Thomas, the project’s director and conductor, and assembled in Sydney, Australia for rehearsals and a live concert on March 20, 2011 streamed on the internet; the first YouTube Symphony Orchestra concert was held in New York in 2009. 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 wrote of *Alternative Energy*, composed in 2011 as part of his Chicago Symphony Orchestra residency, “*Alternative Energy* is an ‘energy symphony’ spanning four movements and hundreds of years. Beginning in a rustic midwestern junkyard in the late-nineteenth century, the piece travels through ever greater and more powerful forces of energy — a present-day particle collider, a futuristic Chinese nuclear

plant — until it reaches a future Icelandic rainforest, where humanity's last survivors seek a return to a simpler way of life.

"The *idée fixe* [a recurring motto] that links these disparate worlds appears early in *Ford's Farm*, 1896. This melody is heard on the fiddle — conjuring a figure like Henry Ford — and is accompanied by junkyard percussion and a 'phantom orchestra' that trails the fiddler like ghosts. The *accelerando* cranking of a car motor becomes a special motif in the piece, a kind of rhythmic embodiment of ever-more-powerful energy. Indeed, this cranking motif explodes in the electronics in the second movement, *Chicago*, 2012, where we encounter my recordings from the Fermilab particle collider. Hip-hop beats, jazzy brass interjections, and joyous voltage surges bring the movement to a clangorous finish.

"Zoom a hundred years into the dark future of the *Xinjiang Province*, 2112, where a great deal of the Chinese energy industry is based. On an eerie wasteland, a lone flute sings a tragically distorted version of the fiddle tune, dreaming of a forgotten natural world. But a powerful industrial energy bubbles to the surface, and over the ensuing hardcore techno sounds, wild orchestral splashes drive the music to a catastrophic meltdown. As the smoke clears, we find ourselves even further into the future: *Reykjavik*, 2222 — an Icelandic rainforest on a hotter planet. Gentle, out-of-tune pizzicatos accompany the fiddler, who returns over a woody percussion ensemble to make a quiet plea for simpler times. The occasional songs of future birds whip around us, a naturalistic version of the cranking motif. Distant tribal voices call for the building of a fire — our first energy source."

JAKE HEGGIE

Born 31 March 1961 in West Palm Beach, Florida.

The Work at Hand for Mezzo-Soprano, Cello and Orchestra (2014-2015)

WORLD PREMIERE

COMMISSIONED BY THE PITTSBURGH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 18 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: piccolo, three flutes, alto flute, three oboes, English Horn) E-flat clarinet, three clarinets, three bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, laptop, percussion, harp, piano and strings.

Jake Heggie, one of America's most gifted composers of vocal music, was born in West Palm Beach, Florida on March 31, 1961 and raised in a suburb of Columbus, Ohio. Though he took piano lessons from childhood and started writing music when he was eleven, Heggie did not study composition formally until his family moved to San Francisco in 1977, when he became a student of Ernst Bacon, the American composer, critic, conductor and writer who is best remembered for his many songs. Heggie also studied composition at UCLA with Roger Bourland, Paul Reale, Paul Des Marais and David Raksin and piano at the Paris Conservatoire, but he found his most influential mentor in 1981 at UCLA in Johana Harris, widow of the distinguished American composer Roy Harris. With Mrs. Harris, Heggie formed both a close personal relationship and a two-piano duo that performed across the country. She inspired her young colleague and student not only with her commitment to the Classical repertory (she changed her name from Beula to Johana in honor of Johann Sebastian Bach), but with her love of American folk music, which she researched with the pioneering folksong scholar Alan Lomax in the 1940s. Since 1993, Heggie has lived in San Francisco.

Jake Heggie has transmuted the elements of his musical experiences — the simplicity and lyricism of American vernacular song, the direct and spacious idiom of Harris and Copland, the harmonic subtleties of the European tradition — into a style of immediacy and expressive sincerity that has won the advocacy of such noted performers as Frederica von Stade, Jennifer Larmore, Dawn Upshaw, Renée Fleming, Audra McDonald, Joyce DiDonato and Sylvia McNair. Though Heggie has written several instrumental, chamber, choral and orchestral compositions (including his 2013 *Ahab Symphony*), his reputation is largely founded upon his vocal works, which include folksong settings, more than 250 art songs, a 1997 piece titled *So Many Notes!* for eleven solo singers and orchestra (commissioned by San Francisco Opera to celebrate its 75th Season and the reopening of the War Memorial Opera House) and several song cycles. In 1998, Heggie was named the first Chase Composer-in-Residence for the San Francisco Opera, which premiered his *Dead Man Walking* in October 2000 to extraordinary international acclaim. *Dead Man Walking*, with a libretto by the eminent American playwright Terrence McNally based

on Sister Helen Prejean's award-winning book, has since been recorded on the Erato label, performed across the country and in Australia, Europe and South Africa, and made the subject of a PBS documentary. Heggie has continued his exceptional success as an opera composer, in collaborations mostly with librettists Gene Scheer and Terrence McNally, with *The End of the Affair* (2003, based on Graham Greene's novel, commissioned by Houston Grand Opera), *To Hell and Back* (2006, based on the myth of Persephone, Boston's Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra), *Three Decembers* (2008, based on McNally's original play *Some Christmas Letters*, Houston Grand Opera and San Francisco Opera), *Moby Dick* (2010, after Melville's novel, the opera companies of Dallas, San Francisco, San Diego, Calgary and South Australia), *Out of Darkness* (2013, Music of Remembrance, the Seattle-based organization remembering Holocaust musicians), and *Great Scott* (2015, Dallas Opera).

Heggie wrote of *The Work at Hand*, "The late Laura Morefield (1960-2011) was a private poet, unknown to most people. Her mother, the gifted San Diego poet and writer Charlene Baldrige, has been a friend for nearly twenty years and I've set several of her poems. Laura was the friendly, bright-eyed, soft-spoken powerhouse I knew primarily as Charlene's daughter, who I would sometimes see when they traveled on their annual mother-daughter adventures: a couple of times to a premiere of mine, then on a cruise through the Baltic when Frederica von Stade and I gave recitals as the entertainment. Laura was immensely proud of her mother's poetry, but was fairly quiet about her own work. Shortly after the Baltic cruise in 2008, Laura was diagnosed with advanced colon cancer. That's when I found out about her poetry and asked if she would send me several, including her top ten favorites. Shortly after, a packet of shatteringly beautiful poems arrived with *The Work At Hand* on top. I was completely overwhelmed and asked if I could set this poem one day. She was delighted. Not long after that — but after an extraordinarily brave fight — Laura passed away. None of us could believe it. She was fifty years old.

"*The Work At Hand* is one of Laura's post-diagnosis poems. It is about the difficult and deeply human experience of knowing it is time to say goodbye and let go: resenting, fighting, struggling, and then finding peace in acceptance. The language and imagery she chose is particularly striking: origami, the yoga Warrior 1 position, and a shimmering reconnection to nature.

"The opportunity to set *The Work At Hand* presented itself when Jamie Barton asked for a new set of songs for her Carnegie Hall recital and Anne Martindale Williams asked for a new piece to perform with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, where she is Principal Cellist. Being a little too busy these days (and counting my blessings for that), I suggested we combine it into a piece that exists as both a chamber and an orchestral work. Both agreed. [The chamber version was premiered on February 17, 2015 by Ms. Barton, Ms. Williams and pianist Bradley Moore at Carnegie Hall in New York.]

"Laura's final request to her mother was that she publish a collection of her post-diagnosis poems in a chapbook, and that exists as *The Warrior's Stance*. All proceeds from sales of the book benefit the Colon Cancer Alliance (thewarriorsstance.com). I'm deeply grateful to Laura's amazing husband, Dan Morefield, for his generosity in granting me permission to set *The Work At Hand*; to Charlene for her passion, friendship and guidance; and to Jamie and Anne for saying yes to the journey."

THE WORK AT HAND By Laura Morefield

Some moments:

I feel compelled to start my long goodbye — folding advice
until it reveals hope, creasing resilience side by side with laughter
tucking courage into the pocket made by joy — making
the message of my life into individual origami.
I want to start this project early because
there are so many
(nieces, nephews, brothers, sisters, parents,
friends) who enfold my life with grace and song.

(And then there is also and always you.)

Other times:

The work of goodbye seems a betrayal,
a prediction of defeat — inappropriate to my
interior pose of being.
A warrior keeps her back leg strong, connected

to the earth. She faces her hips forward.
She lifts hands and face skyward as
her front leg leans into the territory of the enemy
as far as, as long as, her breath will take her.

And then:
there are slow seconds like these,
when the single square of window reveals
pine tree needles bursting into branches,
making their stubborn way through a furrowed trunk.
When the wind moves
like a feathered thing over my waiting skin.
When all I want is to unfold a small quilt
of sunlight onto the cool green and sit very still,
to let the light of heaven flow over me like honey
until my bones are on fire with the beauty of it all.

BÉLA BARTÓK

Born 25 March 1881 in Nagyszentmiklós, Hungary; died 26 September 1945 in New York City.

Concerto for Orchestra (1943)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Boston, 1 December 1944; Orchestra Hall; Boston Symphony Orchestra; Sergei Koussevitzky, conductor

PSO PREMIERE: 18 January, 1946; Syria Mosque; Fritz Reiner, conductor

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 35 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: piccolo, three flutes, three oboes, English horn, three clarinets, bass clarinet, three bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, two harps and strings.

Béla Bartók came to America in October 1940, sick of body and afflicted of spirit. He had been frail all his life, and the leukemia that was to cause his death five years later had already begun to erode his health. Adding to the trial of his medical condition was the war raging in Europe, a painful source of torment to one of Bartók's ardent Hungarian patriotism. Upon leaving his homeland, he not only relinquished the native country so dear to him, but also forfeited the secure financial and professional positions he had earned in Budapest. Compromise in the face of Hitler's brutal inhumanity, however, was never a possibility for a man of Bartók's adamant convictions. Filled with apprehension, he made the difficult overland trip to Lisbon, then sailed on to New York.

Sad to say, Bartók's misgivings were justified. His financial support from Hungary was cut off, and money worries aggravated his delicate physical condition. His health declined enough to make public appearances impossible after 1943. His chief disappointment, however, was the almost total neglect of his compositions by the musical community. It is to the credit of ASCAP (American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers) that it provided money for the hospital care that enabled Bartók to continue composing to the very end of his life.

It was at this nadir in his fortunes that the commission for the *Concerto for Orchestra* was presented to Bartók. Phillip Ramey related the circumstances: "By early 1943, things had gotten so bad that two old friends of Bartók, [violinist] Joseph Szigeti and [conductor] Fritz Reiner, suggested to Sergei Koussevitzky [music director of the Boston Symphony] that he commission an orchestral work in memory of his wife, Natalie. Koussevitzky agreed and, one spring day, while Bartók was in a New York hospital undergoing tests, he appeared unexpectedly and startled the composer by offering him a commission for \$1,000 on behalf of the Koussevitzky Foundation. Bartók, as fastidious as ever, would initially only accept half of that amount because he feared that his precarious health might prevent him from fulfilling Koussevitzky's request." The commission and an ASCAP-sponsored stay at a sanatorium in Saranac Lake in upstate New York fortified Bartók's strength enough so that he could work on this new orchestral piece "practically night and day," as he wrote to Szigeti. Upon its premiere, the *Concerto for Orchestra* was an instant success. It was accepted immediately into the standard repertory and led to a surge of

interest in Bartók's other compositions. He died less than a year after this work, the last he completed for orchestra, was first heard, not realizing that he would soon be acclaimed as one of the greatest composers of the 20th century.

"The title of this symphony-like work is explained by its tendency to treat single instruments or instrument groups in a '*concertant*' or soloistic manner," wrote the composer to clarify the appellation of the score. Concerning the overall structure of the *Concerto*'s five movements, he noted, "The general mood of the work represents, apart from the jesting second movement, a gradual transition from the sternness of the first movement and the lugubrious death-song of the third, to the life-assertion of the last one." The first and last movements, Bartók continued, "are in more or less regular sonata form," while "the second consists of a chain of independent short sections by wind instruments introduced in five pairs (bassoons, oboes, clarinets, flutes and muted trumpets). A kind of 'trio' — a short chorale for brass instruments and snare drum — follows, after which the five sections are recapitulated in a more elaborate instrumentation.... The form of the fourth movement — 'Interrupted Intermezzo' — could be rendered by the symbols 'A B A — interruption — B A.'" The interruption to which Bartók referred is a parody of the German march theme from the first movement of Shostakovich's Symphony No. 7, "Leningrad," which was in turn a mocking phrase based on a song from Lehár's *The Merry Widow*.