

MASON BATES, 2012-2013 COMPOSER OF THE YEAR

Born January 23, 1977 in Philadelphia.

Desert Transport (2011)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Scottsdale, Arizona, February 22, 2011

Arizona Musicfest All-Star Orchestra

Robert Moody, conductor

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 13 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: three piccolos, three flutes, three oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, three clarinets, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, 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 from 2008 to 2011, Project San Francisco Artist-in-Residence with the San Francisco Symphony in 2011-2012, and began a continuing residency with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in September 2010; he is Composer of the Year with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra in 2012-2013.

Bates’ rapidly accumulating portfolio of orchestral, chamber, vocal, theatrical and electronic compositions includes commissions and performances by the major orchestras of 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.

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.”

Mason Bates wrote of *Desert Transport*, composed in 2011 on a commission celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the Arizona Musicfest in Scottsdale, “*Desert Transport* contemplates the dynamic Arizona landscape from the high-flying perspective of a helicopter. The journey begins in the hubbub of an airport hangar but ultimately takes us to the mystic heights of an Indian cliff dwelling. I climbed aboard a jet-black helicopter piloted by Bob Dengler and was soon overwhelmed by the slow acceleration of the spinning rotors. Before long we were gliding high over Sky Ranch, an airport on a mesa in Sedona hidden amidst sorrel cacti, and I marveled at the constantly changing desert colors. Looming red rocks appeared on the horizon, and as we glided over Sedona, these became giants amid an entire landscape of rust-red orange.

“The Sedonan spiritual power known as the Vortex carries us to our final stop: the thousand-year-old cliff dwellings known as Montezuma’s Castle. Tunnels carved out of impossibly high rocks looked back at our helicopter like so many eyes. Dengler may have a hangar, but Montezuma has a castle in the sky — and it will

persist long after our helicopter has become scrap metal. Drifting amid the orchestral clouds is a field recording of the Pima Indians (used by permission). Their gentle melody is picked up by the orchestra, and we head for home.”