

PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

MASON BATES

Born 23 January 1977 in Philadelphia.

Rusty Air in Carolina (2006)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Winston-Salem, North Carolina, 20 May 2006; Stevens Center; Winston-Salem Symphony; Robert Moody, conductor

THESE PERFORMANCES MARK THE PSO PREMIERE

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 14 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, 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 Composer of the Year with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra in 2012-2013; he began a continuing residency with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in September 2010. His 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 *Rusty Air in Carolina*, “To begin with: I’m a Virginian. Many chide that it lies not far enough from the Mason-Dixon to be sufficiently Southern, but the air says something different: it has a texture to it — weighted not only with humidity but also with the persistent buzzing of insects.

“A bit further down the coast is a wonderful music festival where I spent a summer as a teenager. Not only did the thick buzzing of cicadas and katydids always accompany the concerts at the festival in Brevard, North Carolina, but sometimes it became the music itself: I remember sitting on the porch of 100-year-old Nan Burt and listening to the sounds of summer while she told stories from her long life. This venerable lady was introduced to me by a young conductor at the festival, Robert Moody, who would become a loyal collaborator. When he recently took the helm at the Winston-Salem Symphony, he asked if I might write him a new piece.

“*Rusty Air in Carolina* uses ‘electronica’ to bring the white noise of the Southern summer into the concert hall, pairing these sounds with fluorescent orchestra textures. *Nan’s Porch* begins at dusk, while the katydids make their chatter. Three orchestral clouds — each inhabiting a different harmony, register and orchestration — hover in the dusk, at first independently but ultimately fusing together when the cicadas start their singing.

“The climax of this movement sends us into *Katydid Country*, when the ambient opening evolves into bluesy, rhythmic figuration. The clicks of the katydids become an electronica beat track over which the orchestra, in a smaller, more chamber setting, riffs on a simple tune inspired by old-time blues. It is said

that katydids are loudest at midnight, and as the work reaches its central point, the rhythmic katydid music at last finds its melody.

“Soaring in the strings over the last breaths of the blues tune, this long-lined melody moves into *Southern Midnight*. The three distinct textures from the opening return, each brought to life by a phrase of the melody. At the close of this lyrical section, we hover in that strange space between night and day, when only the singing of the first bird alerts us to the approaching day (*Locusts Singing in the Heat of Dawn*). But it is a hot, Southern dawn, both sparkling and heavy, with the air made rusty again by the buzzing cicadas (popularly called locusts). And on this note, this homage — partly to the almost mythical place so far from where I now live, partly to the very real friend who made it possible — brings itself to an end.”

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

Born 1 April 1873 in Oneg (near Novgorod), Russia; died 28 March 1943 in Beverly Hills, California.

Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 43 (1934)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Baltimore, 7 November 1934; Lyric Theater; Philadelphia Orchestra; Leopold Stokowski, conductor; Sergei Rachmaninoff, soloist

PSO PREMIERE: 2 December 1937; Syria Mosque; Michel Gusikoff, conductor; Sergei Rachmaninoff, soloist

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 23 minutes

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

The legend of Nicolò Paganini has haunted musicians for nearly two centuries. Gaunt, his emaciated figure cloaked in priestly black, Paganini performed feats of wizardry on the violin that were simply unimagined until he burst upon the European concert scene in 1805. Not only were his virtuoso pyrotechnics unsurpassed, but his performance of simple melodies was of such purity and sweetness that it moved his audiences to tears. So far was he beyond the competition that he seemed almost, well, superhuman. Perhaps, the rumor spread, he had special powers, powers not of this earth. Perhaps, Faust-like, he had exchanged his soul for the mastery of his art. The legend (propagated and fostered, it is now known, by Paganini himself) had begun.

Paganini, like most virtuoso instrumentalists of the 19th century, composed much of his own music. Notable among his *oeuvre* are the breathtaking *Caprices* for Unaccompanied Violin, works so difficult that even today they are accessible only to the most highly accomplished performers. The last of the *Caprices*, No. 24 in A minor, served as the basis for compositions by Schumann, Liszt and Brahms, and was also the inspiration for Rachmaninoff's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*. Rachmaninoff's work is a series of variations on this theme, which is characterized as much by its recurrent rhythm (five short notes followed by a longer one) as by its melody.

Taking his cue from the Paganini legend, Rachmaninoff combined another melody with that of the demonic violinist — the *Dies Irae* (“*Day of Wrath*”) from the Requiem Mass for the Dead. This ancient chant had long been connected not only with the Roman Catholic Church service, but also with musical works containing some diabolical element. Berlioz associated it with the witches' sabbath in his *Symphonie Fantastique*, Liszt used it in his *Totentanz* (“*Dance of Death*”), Saint-Saëns in his *Danse macabre*, and Rachmaninoff himself in his earlier *Isle of the Dead*.

The *Rhapsody*, a brilliant showpiece for virtuoso pianist, is a set of 24 variations. The work begins with a brief, eight-measure introduction followed, before the theme itself is heard, by the first variation, a skeletal outline of the melody reminiscent of the pizzicato opening of the variation-finale of Beethoven's “*Eroica*” Symphony. The theme, 24 measures in length, is stated by the unison violins. The following variations fall into three groups, corresponding to the fast–slow–fast sequence of the traditional three-movement concerto. The most familiar section of the *Rhapsody*, and one of the great melodies in the orchestral literature, is the climax of the middle section. This variation, No. 18, actually an inversion of Paganini's theme, has a broad sweep and nobility of sentiment unsurpassed anywhere in Rachmaninoff's works.

HECTOR BERLIOZ

Born 11 December 1803 in Côte-Saint-André, France; died 8 March 1869 in Paris.

Symphonie Fantastique, Opus 14a (1830)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Paris, 5 December 1830; Paris Conservatoire; François Habeneck, conductor

PSO PREMIERE: 22 December 1905; Carnegie Music Hall; Emil Paur, conductor

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 52 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, four bassoons, four horns, two cornets, two trumpets, three trombones, tenor and bass tubas, timpani, percussion, two harps and strings.

By 1830, when he turned 27, Hector Berlioz had won the *Prix de Rome* and gained a certain notoriety among the fickle Parisian public for his perplexingly original compositions. Hector Berlioz was also madly in love. The object of his amorous passion was an English actress of middling ability, one Harriet Smithson, whom the composer first saw when a touring English theatrical company performed Shakespeare in Paris in 1827. During the ensuing three years, this romance was entirely one-sided, since the young composer never met Harriet but only knew her across the footlights as Juliet and Ophelia. He sent her such frantic love letters that she never responded to any of them, fearful of encouraging a madman. Berlioz, distraught and unable to work or sleep or eat, wandered the countryside around Paris until he dropped from exhaustion and had to be retrieved by friends.

Berlioz was still nursing his unrequited love for Harriet in 1830 when, full-blown Romantic that he was, his emotional state served as the germ for a composition based on a musical “Episode from the Life of an Artist,” as he subtitled the *Symphonie Fantastique*. In this work, the artist visualizes his beloved through an opium-induced trance, first in his dreams, then at a ball, in the country, at his execution and, finally, as a participant in a witches’ sabbath. She is represented by a musical theme that appears in each of the five movements, an *idée fixe* (a term Berlioz borrowed from the just-emerging field of psychology to denote an unhealthy obsession) that is transformed to suit its imaginary musical surroundings. The *idée fixe* is treated kindly through the first three movements, but after the artist has lost his head for love (literally — the string pizzicati followed by drum rolls and brass fanfares at the very end of the *March to the Scaffold* graphically represent the fall of the guillotine blade and the ceremony of the formal execution), the *idée fixe* is transmogrified into a jeering, strident parody of itself in the finale in music that is still original and disturbing almost two centuries after its creation. The sweet-to-sour changes in the *idée fixe* (heard first in the opening movement on unison violins and flute at the beginning of the fast tempo after a slow introduction) reflect Berlioz’s future relationship with his beloved, though, of course, he had no way to know it in 1830. Berlioz did in fact marry his Harriet–Ophelia–Juliet in 1833, but their happiness faded quickly, and he was virtually estranged from her within a decade.

Berlioz wrote of the *Symphonie Fantastique*, “PART I: *Reveries and Passions*. The young musician first recalls that uneasiness of soul he experienced before seeing her whom he loves; then the volcanic love with which she suddenly inspired him, his moments of delirious anguish, of jealous fury, his returns to loving tenderness, and his religious consolations.

“PART II: *A Ball*. He sees his beloved at a ball, in the midst of the tumult of a brilliant fête.

“PART III: *Scene in the Country*. One summer evening in the country he hears two shepherds playing a *ranz-des-vaches* in alternate dialogue; this pastoral duet, some hopes he has recently conceived, combine to restore calm to his heart; but she appears once more, he is agitated with painful presentiments; if she were to betray him! ... One of the shepherds resumes his artless melody, the other no longer answers him. The sun sets ... the sound of distant thunder ... solitude ... silence ...

“PART IV: *March to the Scaffold*. He dreams that he has killed his beloved, that he is condemned to death, and led to execution. The procession advances to a march that is now somber and wild, now brilliant and solemn. At the end, the *idée fixe* reappears for an instant, like a last love-thought interrupted by the fatal stroke.

“PART V: *Dream of a Witches’ Sabbath*. He sees himself at the Witches’ Sabbath, amid ghosts, magicians and monsters of all sorts, who have come together for his obsequies. He hears strange noises, groans, ringing laughter, shrieks. The beloved melody reappears, but it has become an ignoble, trivial and grotesque dance-tune; it is she who comes to the Witches’ Sabbath.... She takes part in the diabolic orgy ... Funeral knells, burlesque parody on the *Dies Irae* [the ancient ‘Day of Wrath’ chant from the Roman Catholic Requiem Mass for the Dead]. Witches’ Dance. The Witches’ Dance and the *Dies Irae* together.”

— Dr. Richard E. Rodda