Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra
2018-2019 Mellon Grand Classics Season

September 28 and 30, 2018

MANFRED HONECK, CONDUCTOR
PINCHAS ZUKERMAN, VIOLIN

MASON BATES — *Resurrexit*

WORLD PREMIERE
COMMISSIONED BY THE PITTSBURGH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA IN CELEBRATION OF MANFRED HONECK'S SIXTIETH BIRTHDAY

MAX BRUCH — Concerto No. 1 in G minor for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 26

I. Prelude: Allegro moderato —
II. Adagio
III. Finale: Allegro energico

Mr. Zukerman

Intermission

JOHANNES BRAHMS — Symphony No. 2 in D major, Opus 73

I. Allegro non troppo
II. Adagio non troppo
III. Allegretto grazioso (Quasi Andantino)
IV. Allegro con spirito

PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

MASON BATES

Resurrexit (2018)

Mason Bates was born in Philadelphia on January 23, 1977, and currently resides in the Bay Area. He has served as the Pittsburgh Symphony's Composer of the Year in the 2012-13 and 2014-15 seasons, and composed several works for the ensemble, including his Violin Concerto, premiered in December 2012. *Resurrexit* was composed in 2018 in celebration of Manfred Honeck's 60th birthday, and this weekend's performances mark the World Premiere. The score calls for two piccolos, three flutes, three oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, three clarinets, bass clarinet, three bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, piccolo trumpet, four trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, piano, celesta and strings. Performance time: approximately 14 minutes.

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 held a residency with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra from 2010 to 2015, and is the first-ever Composer-in-Residence at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. through the 2019-2020 season. He also teaches in the Technology and Applied Composition Program of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music.

Bates' rapidly accumulating portfolio of orchestral, chamber, vocal, theatrical, film 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 had been held in New York in 2009. Among his recent works is *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs*, premiered by Santa Fe Opera in July 2017 and released on the Pentatone label in June 2018.

In addition to being recognized as the most-performed American composer of his generation and named "2018 Composer of the Year" by *Musical America*, Bates has received 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, a two-year Composer Residency with Young Concert Artists, and the 2012 Heinz Award in Arts and Humanities.

Mason 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."

"To celebrate the sixtieth birthday of Manfred Honeck, who has taken us on a unique journey into the spirituality of music," wrote Mason Bates of *Resurrexit*, commissioned by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, "I turned to a biblical narrative full of mystery and the supernatural. While composers from Bach to Mahler have set the Resurrection in large-scale choral settings, the story has not been animated in the purely symphonic, kinetic form that attracted me. *Resurrexit* challenged me to consider a subject and soundworld I had never explored musically.

"The piece opens in biblical darkness, with the dusty mystery of the Middle East evoked by exotic modes and sonorities, as a throaty melody laments the death of Christ. The entrance of the beautiful Easter chant *Victimae Paschali Laudes* ['*Praise the Easter Victim*'] signals the first stirrings of life, conjured by trills, altar bells and the remarkable 'Semantron' (a large wooden plank hammered by huge mallets used by Byzantine monks as a call to prayer). Mystery turns into magic as the 're-animation' is illustrated by quicksilver textures that whirl and flicker, building to an exhilarating finale that features a soaring reprise of the Easter chant."

MAX BRUCH

Concerto No. 1 in G minor for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 26 (1865-1866)

Max Bruch was born in Cologne on January 6, 1838 and died in Friedenau (near Berlin) on October 20, 1920. The first sketches for Bruch's G minor Concerto date from 1857; the work was mostly composed in 1865-1866. It was premiered on April 24, 1866, at the Music Institute in Coblenz, with Otto von Königslöw as soloist and the composer conducting. Bruch revised the score the following year, and Joseph Joachim gave the first performance of this definitive version on January 7, 1868, in Bremen. The Pittsburgh Symphony gave its first performance of the G minor Violin Concerto in November 1897, with soloist Friedrich Voelker and Frederic Archer conducting, and most recently performed it in October 2017 with soloist Ray Chen and Krzysztof Urbanski conducting. The score calls for woodwinds in pairs, four horns, two trumpets, timpani and strings. Performance time: approximately 26 minutes.

The G minor Violin Concerto brought Max Bruch his earliest and most enduring fame. He began sketching ideas for the piece in 1857, when he was a nineteen-year-old student just finishing his studies with Ferdinand Hiller in Cologne, but they only came to fruition in 1865, at the start of his two-year tenure as director of the Royal Institute for Music at Coblenz. The piece was not only Bruch's first concerto but also his first large work for orchestra, so he sought the advice of Johann Naret-Koning, concertmaster at Mannheim, concerning matters of violin technique and instrumental balance. The Concerto was ready for performance by April 1866 with Naret-Koning slated as soloist but illness forced him to cancel, and Otto von Königslöw, concertmaster of the Gürzenich Orchestra and violin professor at the Cologne Conservatory, took over at the last minute. This public hearing convinced Bruch that repairs were needed, so he temporarily withdrew the Concerto while he revised and refined it during the next year with the meticulous advice of the eminent violinist and composer Joseph Joachim (who was to provide similar assistance to Johannes Brahms a decade later with his Violin Concerto). Joachim was soloist in the premiere of the definitive version of the Concerto, on January 7, 1868 in Bremen; he received the score's dedication in appreciation from Bruch.

The Concerto was an enormous hit, spreading Bruch's reputation across Europe and, following its first performance in New York in 1872 by Pablo de Sarasate, America. Its success, however, hoisted Bruch upon the horns of a dilemma later in his career. He, of course, valued the notoriety the Concerto brought to him and his music, but he also came to realize that the work's exceptional popularity overshadowed his other pieces for violin and orchestra. "Nothing compares to the laziness, stupidity and dullness of many German violinists," he complained to the publisher Fritz Simrock in a letter from 1887. "Every fortnight another one comes to me wanting to play the First Concerto; I have now become rude, and tell them: 'I cannot listen to this Concerto any more — did I perhaps write just this one? Go away, and play the other [two] Concertos, which are just as good, if not better." Bruch's vehemence in this matter was exacerbated by the fact that he had sold the rights to the G minor Concerto to the publisher August Cranz for a one-time payment, and he never received another penny from its innumerable performances. In a poignant episode at the end of his life, he tried to recoup some money from the piece

by offering his original manuscript for sale in the United States, but he died before receiving any payment for it. The score is now in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York.

The G minor Violin Concerto is a work of lyrical beauty and emotional sincerity. The first movement, which Bruch called a "Prelude," is in the nature of an extended introduction leading without pause into the slow movement. The Concerto opens with a dialogue between soloist and orchestra followed by a wide-ranging subject played by the violinist over a pizzicato line in the basses. A contrasting theme reaches into the highest register of the violin, and is followed by scintillating passagework of scales and broken chords for the soloist. A stormy section for orchestra alone recalls the opening dialogue, which softens to usher in the lovely *Adagio*. This slow movement contains three important themes, all languorous and sweet, which are shared by soloist and orchestra. The music builds to a passionate climax before subsiding to a tranquil close. The finale begins with eighteen modulatory bars containing hints of the upcoming theme before the soloist proclaims the vibrant melody itself, enriched with copious multiple stops. A broad melody, played first by the orchestra alone before being taken over by the soloist, serves as the second theme. A brief development, based on the dance-like first theme, leads to the recapitulation. The coda, with some ingenious long-range harmonic deflections, recalls again the first theme to bring the work to a rousing close.

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Symphony No. 2 in D major, Opus 73 (1877)

Johannes Brahms was born in Hamburg on May 7, 1833, and died in Vienna on April 3, 1897. He composed his Symphony No. 2 in the summer of 1877, a great deal quicker than the fifteen-year period it took to complete his Symphony No. 1, and it was premiered by the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra under the direction of Hans Richter on December 30, 1877. The Pittsburgh Symphony first performed the symphony with music director Victor Herbert at Carnegie Music Hall in November 1898, and most recently performed it with conductor Christoph König in November 2011. The score calls for woodwinds in pairs, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani and strings. Performance time: approximately 43 minutes.

In the summer of 1877, Brahms repaired to the lakeside village of Pörtschach in the Carinthian hills of southern Austria. He wrote to a Viennese friend, "Pörtschach is an exquisite spot, and I have found a lovely and apparently pleasant abode in the Castle! You may tell everybody this; it will impress them.... The place is replete with Austrian coziness and kindheartedness." The lovely country surroundings inspired Brahms' creativity to such a degree that he wrote to the critic Eduard Hanslick, "So many melodies fly about, one must be careful not to tread on them." Brahms plucked from the gentle Pörtschach breezes a surfeit of beautiful music for his Second Symphony, which was apparently written quickly during that summer — a great contrast to the fifteen-year gestation of the preceding symphony. He brought the finished manuscript with him when he returned to Vienna at the end of the summer.

After the premiere, Brahms himself allowed that the Second Symphony "sounded so merry and tender, as though it were especially written for a newly wedded couple." Early listeners heard in it "a glimpse of Nature, a spring day amid soft mosses, springing woods, birds' notes and the bloom of flowers." Richard Specht, the composer's biographer, found it "suffused with the sunshine and warm winds playing on the waters." The conductor Felix Weingartner thought it the best of Brahms' four symphonies: "The stream of invention has never flowed so fresh and spontaneous in other works by Brahms, and nowhere else has he colored his orchestration so successfully." To which critic Olin Downes added, "In his own way, and sometimes with long sentences, he formulates his thought, and the music has the rich chromaticism, depth of shadow and significance of detail that characterize a Rembrandt portrait."

The Symphony opens with a three-note motive, presented softly by the low strings, which is the germ seed from which much of the thematic material of the movement grows. The horns sing the principal theme, which includes, in its third measure, the three-note motive. The sweet second theme is given in duet by the cellos and violas. The development begins with the horn's main theme, but is mostly concerned with permutations of the three-note motive around which some stormy emotional sentences accumulate. The placid mood of the opening returns with the recapitulation, and remains largely undisturbed until the end of the movement.

The second movement plumbs the deepest emotions in the Symphony. Many of its early listeners found it difficult to understand because they failed to perceive that, in constructing the four broad paragraphs comprising the Second Symphony, Brahms deemed it necessary to balance the radiant first movement with music of thoughtfulness and introspection in the second. This movement actually covers a wide range of sentiments, shifting, as it does, between light and shade — major and minor. Its form is sonata-allegro, whose second theme is a gently syncopated strain intoned by the woodwinds above the cellos' pizzicato notes.

The following *Allegretto* is a delightful musical sleight-of-hand. The oboe presents a naive, folk-like tune in moderate triple meter as the movement's principal theme. The strings take over the melody in the first Trio, but play it in an energetic duple-meter transformation. The return of the sedate original theme is again interrupted by another quick-tempo variation, this one a further development of motives from Trio I. A final traversal of the main theme closes this delectable movement.

The finale bubbles with the rhythmic energy and high spirits of a Haydn symphony. The main theme starts with a unison gesture in the strings, but soon becomes harmonically active and spreads through the orchestra. The second theme is a broad, hymnal melody initiated by the strings. The development section, like that of many of Haydn's finales, begins with a statement of the main theme in the tonic before branching into discussion of the movement's motives. The recapitulation recalls the earlier themes, and leads with an inexorable drive through the triumphant coda (based on the hymnal melody) to the brazen glow of the final trombone chord.

— Dr. Richard E. Rodda