

MASON BATES PSO Composer of the Year

Born January 23, 1977 in Philadelphia

Violin Concerto (2012)

WORLD PREMIERE

Commissioned by Anne Akiko Meyers with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 25 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, four trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, piano, harp 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 MusicNOWseries, 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 his Violin Concerto, commissioned in 2012 by Anne Akiko Meyers for the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, “Composers paint with sound, and my sonic palette has been growing rapidly in large-scale symphonies fusing orchestral and electronic sounds. But the pops, clicks and thuds of techno present challenges in a violin concerto: the subtle textures of this eighteen-inch instrument would be quickly painted over by the powerful colors of such a big palette. So, in order to fully showcase the violin, I stepped back into the acoustic universe — but with my ears still humming with exotic sounds.

“The search for novel sounds pushed me, surprisingly, into primeval territory, resulting in a concerto filled with ancient animals. First and foremost is the solo violinist, who inhabits two identities: one primal and rhythmic, the other elegant and lyrical. This hybrid musical creature is, in fact, based on a real one. The *Archeopteryx*, an animal of the Upper Jurassic famously known as the first dinosaur/bird hybrid, can be heard in the sometimes frenetic, sometimes sweetly singing solo part. The searching melody that underlies the entire work, not heard in full until we are well into the first movement, has in fact been peering at us from behind the orchestral fauna all along.

“Unfolding continuously out of the explosive first movement, the middle movement (*Lakebed Memories*) explores this melody dreamily, conjuring the lakebed in southern Germany where the archaeopteryx fossil was discovered. Eerie, hazy sonorities give way to a kind of underwater epiphany, pushing us airborne into the finale. In this last movement (*The Rise of Birds*), the soloist stays aloft on a jetstream of notes, inspired equally by Bach inventions and sparkling electronica. The work’s final measures transform the soloist fully from dinosaur into bird, with the melody floating high above an orchestra of fluttering textures.

“Many thanks to Anne Akiko Meyers, whose fiery and soulful playing inspired every note of this piece, and to my dear friend Leonard Slatkin.”