



California Symphony to present world premiere of Mason Bates' *Music From Underground Spaces*

*Last work by the Oakland
composer performed
at Carnegie Hall by the National
Symphony in February*

On May 4 and 6, 2008, the California Symphony under Music Director Barry Jekowsky will present the world premiere of *Music From Underground Spaces* by Mason Bates, its 2007 – 2010 Young American Composer-in-Residence who is quickly emerging as one of America's leading composers. The occasion marks the debut of the first of three major works commissioned by the California Symphony from the 31-year-old Oakland resident, who will also perform live electronica in the orchestra's percussion section at the upcoming May concerts.

Most recently, Bates' acclaimed *Liquid Interface* received its New York premiere at Carnegie Hall on February 7 and world premiere at the Kennedy Center last year, commissioned and performed on both occasions by the National Symphony under Music Director Leonard Slatkin. Calling it "cleverly constructed," the *New York Times* noted that the "colorful four-movement tone poem, which uses a vast orchestra and electronics to evoke water in both soothing and menacing forms.... was like wandering down a road with a string quartet playing on one side and a D.J. spinning on the other."

Music From Underground Spaces marries orchestra and electronics in four movements – beginning with "Tunnels," in which we hear subways roar past kaleidoscopic orchestral figuration. The

fleeting textures of “Tunnels” morph into the surreal effects of “Infernos,” where a demonic techno groove, paired with flickering figuration, moves the work into an what sounds like a nightclub. The cultish tension accumulates until all the pressure forges “Crystalline Cities” — a kind of euphoric limbo, where sudden crescendos fuse into sparkling bits of diamond and crystal. Featuring the orchestra alone, this slow-motion, sparkling netherworld finally gives way to the glacial textures of “Tectonic Plates.” Initially eerie, this final movement explores primarily the beautiful possibilities of the subsonic. The lowest members of the orchestra trade sonorities like slow-motion sea swells, with the ghostly earthquake recordings sounding like the gentle creaking of a boat. The piece features earthquake audio recordings processed by Peggy Hellweg of the Berkeley Seismology Laboratory and actual subway sounds captured by Bates himself.

“I wanted to do a kind of piece that gets more beautiful and mysterious as it unfolds,” says Bates, who notes that *Music From Underground Spaces* was inspired by seeing California Symphony’s season debut concert last October. Called “Reaching the Outer Limits,” the unprecedented program featured a soaring presentation of Gustav Holst’s *The Planets Op. 32* performed live to the critically-acclaimed “Gustav Holst’s The Planets” suite of seven high-definition videos conceived and directed by Adler Planetarium astronomer and graphics artist Dr. José Francisco Salgado and narrated by award-winning Bay Area science educator and author Dr. Andrew Fraknoi.

“As soon as Barry offered me the YACR appointment, I had begun conceiving *Music From Underground Spaces*. It was when I went to the opening concert, where they had all of this incredible video and animation of the planets that I thought, ‘Wow, if I could create a piece that ends the season with what is the exact inverse of this concert! So instead of it being extra-terrestrial, I would make mine sub-terrestrial. It actually solidified for me how this piece should develop,” he relates.

What inspires him to continually merge two unlikely types of music? “There’s just nothing really happening in the orchestral world with electronics, so it’s such fertile ground. It’s as if a new section of the orchestra has just been invented for me to explore. Plus, I’m constantly find compelling ideas that I want to pursue.”

“There have been composers who have tried to blend classical music with electronic pop culture, but it has always been very obvious,” says Barry Jekowsky, who selected Bates for the prestigious YACR position last October. “What I find remarkable about Mason’s music is the tasteful and imaginative integration of these worlds. Through subtle blending, they become something new and different. Mason writes fascinating and engaging music with a truly individual voice.”

The recipient of the coveted Rome Prize and American Academy in Berlin Prize, the Columbia-Juilliard graduate will receive his doctorate from the University of California, Berkeley, this spring. A member of the Young Concert Artists of New York, Bates was profiled in *Symphony* magazine, where author Kyle Gann noted that “Mason Bates, or someone like him, was bound to appear sooner or later...Many artists in one of these worlds have dabbled in the other. But Bates is the first to carry on two careers in tandem, and win credibility in both arenas....The most impressive thing is how comfortably his two idioms mix.”

The only hands-on training ground of its kind, the California Symphony’s acclaimed Young American Composer-In-Residence program uniquely provides gifted composers with three world premieres, up to four weeks of annual on-site residency with the California Symphony, reading rehearsals with each commission that gives them enough time for experimentation and revisions before a work’s public debut, direct interaction and feedback from both Jekowsky and members of the orchestra, and help in securing future commissions and positions, among other benefits. “We consider it a model for how an orchestra should work with young composers to develop their talents, business acumen and music,” says Jekowsky, who also founded the award-winning California Symphony in 1986.

Significant of its success, YACR alumni have gone on to win two of the three BBC International Masterprizes awarded to date and four Rome Prizes. As well, the program has produced 21 new American works, including the *Young American Composers Concerto for Orchestra* – the first known symphonic work created through a collaboration of composers (each YACR wrote a movement emphasizing a different family of instruments.)

The May 4 and 6 concerts will also include *Carmina Burana* with Barry Jekowsky conducting the California Symphony, Oakland Symphony Chorus and Contra Costa Children's Honor Chorus with featured guest artists soprano Kiera Duffy, tenor Tyler Nelson and baritone Keith Phares.

Sponsored by Bank of America, Chevron, and KPMG, both concerts will be held at the Leshar Center for the Arts in Walnut Creek. Dates and times: Sunday, May 4, 2008, at 4 pm. Tuesday, May 6, at 7:30 pm. Tickets: \$39 - \$59. Purchase online at www.LesharArtsCenter.org or by calling (925) 943-SHOW. For more information, visit www.CaliforniaSymphony.org or (925) 280-2490.

DETAILS

WHAT: California Symphony final season concerts featuring the world premiere of Mason Bates’ *Music from Underground Spaces*, with the composer performing live electronica; and

Carmina Burana with Barry Jekowsky conducting the California Symphony, Oakland Symphony Chorus and Contra Costa Children's Honor Chorus with featured guest artists soprano Kiera Duffy, tenor Tyler Nelson and baritone Keith Phares.

DATES: Sunday, May 4, 2008, at 4 pm. Tuesday, March 6, 2008, at 7:30 pm.

WHERE: Hofmann Theatre, Leshar Center for the Arts, 1601 Civic Drive, Walnut Creek, CA

TICKET PRICES: \$39 - \$59

TO PURCHASE: call (925) 943-SHOW or purchase online at www.LesharArtsCenter.org

MORE INFORMATION: www.CaliforniaSymphony.org or call (925) 280-2490

This event has been made possible by support from Bank of America, Chevron, and KPMG.

MEDIA INFORMATION:

Photo credit: Lydia Danmiller

Official website: www.masonbates.com

Profile of Mason Bates in SYMPHONY Magazine March/April 2006:
http://www.symphony.org/news/room/06_mapeople.shtml

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