

MASON BATES

Critical acclaim for artist

"Be it mixing trip-hop and funk at a club or writing a symphonic or chamber work, composer Mason Bates is getting noticed for his straddling of classical music and electronica. ... Young, Juilliard-trained and already celebrated, he's become a fixture not only in concert halls but in the world of electronica as well. At a time when symphony orchestras nationwide are trolling for audience magnets - the type of new material that can lure members of generations X and Y along with older subscribers - Bates just might have that bait."

Los Angeles Times, "Concerto for Two Universes," by Donna Perlmutter

"Mason Bates, 30 years old...knows how to command an orchestra just as well as he does his touchpad. Bates's Liquid Interface, a National Symphony commission that received its world premiere last night, surpassed in sheer sonic beauty even the works by Mendelssohn and Tchaikovsky that rounded out the program."

The Washington Post, Andrew Lindemann Malone

"The Juilliard School, in its annual Focus! Festival, presented six evenings of works written in 2005, including ... Mason Bates' Digital Loom, for organ and electronics, which transformed the hall into something between a decaying cathedral and an East Berlin club."

The New Yorker, Alex Ross

"Morgan led the world premiere of Icarian Rhapsody, an appealingly crafted work for strings by Oakland composer Mason Bates ... lovely to hear and ingeniously constructed..."

San Francisco Chronicle, Joshue Kosman

"Eventually, someone was bound to grow up so immersed in genre-mixing that they would get both sides of the equation right. Bates has. ...The most impressive thing is how comfortably his two idioms mix."

Symphony Magazine, "The Bilingualist," by Kyle Gann

"Mercury Soul Merges Visual Art with Classical Music & Electronica"

SFWeekly, Ezra Gale

"... [Sounds For His Animation, for synthesizer & orchestra] opens with music for the beginning of time - an isolated, eerie harmonic note from the violins, which the synthesizer mimics and then turns into a whale cry before passing back. Before the first movement ends, Bates' point about the synthesizer has become clear: It is all instruments and unique at once, first chasing the strings over light passages, then

blending with the horns, and finally soaring above them all with an electronic sound familiar to anyone who has heard the techno music of nightclubs... ..Bates' concerto was well received by the audience, which burst into conversation along with its applause."

Atlanta Journal Constitution, Deborah Geering

"A probing and sustained achievement - and for at least one listener the triumphant high point of the weekend - was Mason Bates' Liquid Interface, a four-movement tone poem that combines virtuoso orchestral writing with the rhythms and textures of electronica. It's all too easy to blend disparate musical strains like this, but it's rare to hear it done with such canny skill or formal control."

San Francisco Chronicle, Joshua Kosman

"With rubber washers, pencil erasers and screws placed strategically in the Steinway's strings, the trio presented String Band, for violin, cello and prepared piano, a rhythmic, lyrical work composed for the ensemble by 27-year-old Mason Bates. Kwong created faint Irish clogging sounds, bell tones and muted gongs to accompany the pitch-bending melody in the strings."

Washington Post, Grace Jean

"And never has a Beethoven's Ninth Symphony been so colored by the music that preceded it on the program. Mason Bates' Ode , commissioned by the Phoenix Symphony, takes the argument of the Beethoven and turns it backward ... So that when the Beethoven begins, and plays the music in the proper order, we have a different take on it."

Arizona Republic

"Take Mason Bates' Digital Loom for organ and electronics...Definitely a voice from the younger generation, Bates reimagines the king of instruments as a surreal creature inventing its own space, the illuminated stops flashing like an enormous pinball machine and presided over by the organist as D.J. who programs wild sequences of hip-hop, funk, and ambient electronica."

New York Magazine, Peter Davis



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MASON BATES

Chicago Sun-Times • May 12, 2011

CSO composer Mason Bates a disc jockey by night

BY ANDREW PATNER

He listens to Poulenc piano pieces and Pink Floyd, George Gershwin and the German electronica duo Mouse on Mars.

He studied music at Juilliard with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's first composer-in-residence, John Corigliano, and literature at Columbia University with the late New York School poet of exuberance, Kenneth Koch.

A composer by day and a DJ by night, Mason Bates, 34, is now one of two CSO Mead composers-in-residence and co-curator of the CSO's MusicNOW series. In March, his piece "Mothership (Remix)" was viewed live by millions of people worldwide when Michael Tilson Thomas led it with the YouTube Symphony Orchestra from Australia's Sydney Opera House.

This week Bates will be putting on his university-trained and techno-experienced hats for his first collaboration with music director Riccardo Muti on CSO concerts. With MusicNOW, Bates also will bring one of his "Mercury Soul" evenings to the Redmoon Theater space Friday night.

When Muti, seen by many as one of the last of the great traditionalists, took the CSO job, he wanted to use the Mead composers program to shake things up. He had never heard of Bates, or the other artist he ultimately selected, Anna Clyne, now 30, before he started examining scores they had submitted.

"I'll be honest," Bates said. "When I first was invited to talk with [Muti], I was not expecting that he would have fully studied and learned — without having ever heard — a piece of mine with the name 'Liquid Interface.' He's astounding."

Bates and Muti, who turns 70 this summer, and is not known for following popular musical styles or electronics, clicked immediately. The Bates piece the CSO is performing this week is "The B-Sides." Commissioned by Michael Tilson Thomas for the San Francisco Symphony, which premiered it in 2009, it's an off-kilter dance suite that drops into five surreal landscapes and pays tribute to Chicago and Detroit club music traditions. "Maestro Muti looked at my score, which calls for a full orchestra and electronics, and lasts 20, 25 minutes, the way he looks at any other piece, with incredible concentration and analysis."

Muti was frank with Bates. "There's a section that I think of as the easiest to perform because so many people have incorporated so many of the types of rhythms in dance music into their minds and bodies and vocabularies. And Muti said to me when we were preparing for the first rehearsals this week, 'I think this is the hardest section!' But somehow he just zeroed in on the phrasing and made all of it start clicking."

"The B-Sides" is the opener in a CSO program with a Strauss tone poem and Schumann's Cello Concerto with soloist Yo-Yo Ma. For "Mercury Soul," Bates is joined by Clyne and CSO members, along with his regular collaborators, conductor Benjamin Schwartz and designer Anne Patterson as well as additional guest DJs. "We're creating a different environment for making and listening to music."

"It's all about expanding conceptions, of the orchestra, of types of music, of performance space. It's going to be an interesting week."



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MASON BATES

Chicago Tribune • March 16, 2011

Bates, Clyne bringing fresh vibe to CSO's new music series

BY JOHN VON RHEIN

Their personalities could not be less alike. He's talkative and outgoing, a hip, freewheeling musician who's perfectly at home whether he's talking Boulez or playing DJ in a San Francisco rock club. She's shy and serious, speaks in a soft British accent and is known around Symphony Center for the colorful knit caps she's given to wearing.

Riccardo Muti chose Mason Bates and Anna Clyne as the current Chicago Symphony Orchestra resident composers because both are, in his view, gifted young composers whose works breathe an accessibility and vitality all their own. Just as important, they are in synch with the eclectic spirit of contemporary classical music.

Each composer has written a new piece on commission from the CSO that is to receive its world premiere as part of the season's final MusicNOW concert Monday night at the Harris Theater for Music and Dance.

Bates' opus is "Stereo is King," for three percussionists and electronics. Clyne's work is "Spangled Unicorn," for a 10-member brass ensemble and optional electronic tape. They will share the program with scores by Kaija Saariaho ("Graal Theatre," a concerto for violin and string ensemble, with CSO assistant concertmaster Yuan-Qing Yu as soloist) and Nathan Davis ("Like Sweet Bells Jangled"). Pablo Heras-Casado will conduct.

Both Bates and Clyne tailored their pieces to the particular musical personalities of the CSO members who will be performing their music – in the case of "Stereo is King," CSO percussion virtuosa Cynthia Yeh.

"Cynthia is an amazing player, just so musical in addition to being so precise," says Bates. Per the title, "the piece is a lot of back and forth across the stage between Cynthia, who's playing marimba most of the time, a 'shadow' percussionist playing a set of Thai gongs and a third player who supports them.

"One of the reasons I wanted to compose the piece, in addition to writing for Cynthia, was that I have never really approached the kind of out-of-tune world you can get in percussion. You can really leave the world of notes behind and focus more on textures. That was a challenge for me to write."

Clyne drew her inspiration for "Spangled Unicorn" from the big sound and style of the CSO's fabled brass choir, whose members she has gotten to know well during the six months she has been attending rehearsals and concerts at Orchestra Hall.

"Mason and I are lucky that for the MusicNOW commissions we were able to choose our instrumentation," the composer explains. "With this legendary brass section, it made absolute sense to give it a shot. I've met with the musicians just to make sure everything is playable, so they have been an integral part of the (compositional) process."

Bates' music is literally all over the map. On Sunday, his recent orchestral work "Mothership" will be streamed over the Web in a live performance by the YouTube Symphony Orchestra 2011 from the Sydney Opera House in Australia. Muti is to conduct the Chicago premiere of Bates' "The B-Sides, Five Pieces for Orchestra and Electronica," at subscription programs in May. He and Clyne also are working on new CSO-commissioned works to be premiered here in February and which Muti and the orchestra plan to take on a winter tour to California.



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MASON BATES

NPR • March 13, 2011

Mason Bates: Electronica, Meet Orchestra

Mason Bates lives in two musical worlds. In one, he spends his nights playing some of the world's most exclusive dance clubs. In the other, he creates pieces as the composer-in-residence for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

"I never thought of these two things as compatible when I started getting interested in DJing about 10 years ago," Bates tells Weekend All Things Considered host Guy Raz. "I would keep these two lives pretty separate — I would write a piece for the Phoenix symphony and then I would go and DJ for a few hours in San Francisco."

Bates says it took a while for him to realize how the two genres could be integrated. "It was a real revelation," he says. His album *Digital Loom*, released in 2009, combines the two genres.

The opening track, "Blues 7," is an impressive hodgepodge: Hip-hop beats float under watery piano sounds and 12-string guitar samples.

"It's probably a little more abstract than the music I would spin at the top of a night at a club somewhere," Bates says. "But it's absolutely out of the world of electronica."

Bates says that classical fans have put up the most resistance to what he's doing, but that in general, people have been receptive to the cross-pollination of classical and electronic music.

"I've found that there's a remarkable amount of curiosity across these two worlds," Bates says. "There might be an image of the classical patron as someone who is fairly distrustful of pop music," he says, but he maintains that classical audiences can be converted: "They're open-minded if something works."

In a few weeks, about 100 musicians from 30 countries will perform Bates' composition *Mothership* at the Sydney Opera House. YouTube organized the event, having expressed the desire to present a new piece of music that focused on improvisation.

"It's very difficult to do much on the level of improv with an orchestra," Bates says. "What you hear in the piece is this orchestra humming along, and during several moments in the piece, it kind of downshifts and lets in the soloist. They groove over the orchestra, and then they go deeper into space, I suppose."

You can watch the grand finale of the YouTube Symphony Orchestra 2011 live from the Sydney Opera House, featuring Mason Bates' composition *Mothership*, on March 20 at 8 p.m. ET.



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MASON BATES

Musical America • October 8, 2010

In Chicago, MusicNOW

BY WYNNE DELACOMA

Riccardo Muti is home in Italy being treated for a gastrointestinal ailment that befell him last Saturday and abruptly cut short his fall residency as the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's new music director. But his influence was palpable Monday night in the Harris Theater as the CSO opened a bracing new season of its MusicNOW contemporary chamber music series.

The MusicNOW programs are being organized this year by the orchestra's newest composers in residence: Anna Clyne and Mason Bates. Muti chose the two—Clyne, a Brit; Bates, an American, both in their early 30s—in part because he wants Chicago audiences to hear what a younger generation of classically trained composers is up to. That Clyne and Bates, like many young composers, use electronic effects as readily as violins or kettle drums in their scores fazes him not in the least. What interests him, Muti has said, is well-crafted, deeply felt music. Monday's program offered that and more.



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MASON BATES

San Francisco Classical Voice • September 16, 2010

Chanticleer: Out of This World

BY JOSEPH SARGENT

Chanticleer's concerts often take on wide swaths of musical history, and the ensemble's opening concert of its 2010/2011 season, "Out of This World!" is no exception. The celestial-themed program, presented Sept. 17-26 throughout the Bay Area, gathers together a far-flung repertory drawn from the Italian Renaissance, German Romantic, and American modern eras.

Floating among the stelle and Sterne are two premieres — Mason Bates' *Observer in the Magellanic Cloud* and Erika Lloyd's *Cells Planets* — that offer a special breed of eclecticism. Bates, a Berkeley composer of classical/electronic music, as well as a disc jockey, infuses into his piece images of clouds, satellites, and the voices of ancient Maoris, an indigenous Polynesian population of New Zealand. Lloyd's piece, meanwhile, draws on the sounds of her indie band, *Little Grey Girlfriend*, for a distinctive choral/rock fusion.

Not surprisingly, Bates' piece makes some unusual demands on Chanticleer's dozen male singers. An entry on the group's blog notes, "A lot of discussion was had about the right sound for the satellite's beeps — finding a vowel for it that isn't like a Maori vowel or a regular a e i o u vowel." Trial and error was evidently part of the work process; the blog continues, "Adam [Ward, an alto] came up with one which we thought sounded more like a submarine than a satellite. We'll be experimenting for a while."

Chanticleer has a solid working relationship with Bates, having recently recorded excerpts from his *Sirens* (which Bates composed for the group in 2008) and programming another piece later in the year. This familiarity has bred content, as observed in another blog entry: "[Bates] really enjoyed writing for us — this time knowing exactly how everybody sounds ... and being able to write music in 12 parts knowing that we will sort it out and make a fabulous texture of it. We hope we do."

Lloyd's piece blends indie cred with her classical chops, which include a bachelor's degree in early music vocal performance from Indiana University. "I think because of that, there was an aesthetic to begin with that had the recognizable potential for a more complex, choral version," she says of the original rock song. As for the choral arrangement, by Vince Peterson, founder and director of Choral Chameleon, she enthuses, "He knows *Little Grey Girlfriend*'s music by heart and I bet had some of these musical ideas in his head even before the prospect of arranging it for Chanticleer came along. ... He added a lot of movement and texture, built on some of the chords, and added a dash of his signature cross-genre style."

Lloyd's own career resonates with Chanticleer's all-encompassing aesthetic. "As a freelance musician, I have to be as versatile as possible to get by, but I really think it's all one and the same, anyway," she says. "Modern technology has made hundreds of years of music instantly accessible. Because this new generation of songwriters and performers has such a huge range of global influences, they are naturally incorporating it into cross-genre work. I like being a part of that. Especially in regards to an instrument as old as the human voice, not much has changed. We're certainly singing for the same reasons and about the same emotions. The Pixies really aren't that far off from 11th-century troubadours."



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MASON BATES

Chicago Tribune • August 3, 2010

Lively new music scene gets livelier with arrival of CSO's young resident composers

BY JOHN VON RHEIN

Hopes are running high following Riccardo Muti's appointment of Mason Bates and Anna Clyne, two of the freshest and most compelling voices of their generation, as the new composers in residence at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

Their two-year terms, which begin this fall, promise to kick up the excitement quotient in Chicago's new music scene in ways that should engage listeners not usually drawn to contemporary classical works.

Bates, 33, is a Virginia-born, Guggenheim Fellowship winner who lives in San Francisco and works part-time in area clubs as a hip-hop underground DJ known as "Masonic." I can't wait to hear him cut loose on electronic drum pad and laptop in the first Chicago performances of his frisky "The B-Sides," which the CSO will perform under Muti's direction in May.

Clyne, 30, is a Brit based in Brooklyn whose luminous, absorbing music also finds inspiration in partnerships with cutting-edge choreographers, musicians, film-makers and visual artists. Her depiction of an American nocturnal cityscape, "rewind," is to receive its CSO premiere in February, three months before Muti and the orchestra take the piece to New York's Carnegie Hall.

As curators and hosts of the CSO's contemporary series, MusicNOW, Bates and Clyne have put together a series of programs for 2010-11 that reflect not only their own eclectic, multi-media embrace but also the barrier-crossing energy of today's new music scene in general. The performers again comprise members of the CSO under the series' principal conductor, Cliff Colnot, plus a new-music ensemble from Germany.

All concerts will take place at 7 p.m. Mondays at the Harris Theater for Music and Dance in Millennium Park. Here is the schedule:

Oct. 4. Bates' "Digital Loom" (for pipe organ and electronics) and Clyne's "Steelworks" (prerecorded tape, percussion, flute and clarinet) share the program with works by Mexican composers Enrico Chapela and Ana Lara, and Chicago composer Marcos Balter.

Dec. 13. New music by Derek Bermel (his part-notated, part-improvised "Three Rivers"), Paola Prestini ("Spell," for clarinet, cello and percussion), Edmund Campion ("Corail," for saxophone and electronics) and Jason Eckardt ("Tangled Loops," for soprano sax and piano) frames Steven Mackey's virtuosic "Micro-Concerto" for solo percussionist and five instruments.

Jan. 31. The German electronics duo Mouse on Mars joins CSO musicians under conductor Andre de Ridder for Argentinian composer Martin Matalon's "A Cat's Seven Lives," a "cinema counterpoint" to the classic Luis Bunuel-Salvador Dali silent, "Un Chien andalou." The 1929 film will be accompanied by an eight-member ensemble and tape.

March 21. The season finale includes the premieres of new Bates and Clyne works commissioned by MusicNOW, plus recent pieces by Kaija Saariaho and Nathan Davis.

Mason Bates

Chicago Tribune • August 3, 2010

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Series subscriptions are \$60 for general admission, \$20 for students; phone 312-294-3000, cso.org. Single tickets for all 2010-11 CSO and Symphony Center Presents events go on sale Aug. 13 at the Symphony Center box office, 220 S. Michigan Ave.

Sharps and flats

Tickets are still available for Chicago Opera Theater's second annual Opera Cruise on Lake Michigan. Boarding begins at 5:30 p.m. Aug. 12 at Navy Pier. Included is an open bar, a raffle and entertainment by singers Nancy Gustafson and Paul La Rosa. Tickets are \$60-\$100; 312-704-8414, chicagooperatheater.org.

In other COT news, Verdi's "Giovanna d'Arco" has won the company's People's Opera contest. COT will present the Chicago premiere during its 2012-13 season to herald the 2013 Verdi bicentenary. "Giovanna" nudged out two other rarely-heard Verdi works, "I Masnadieri" (second place) and "I due Foscari" (third place) in the fund-raiser, which netted more than \$32,000.

The Bilingualist

Classically trained but keenly attuned to the possibilities of electronica, composer **Mason Bates** is making waves in both the club scene and the orchestra world.

by Kyle Gann



Christian Schmitt

Mason Bates, or someone like him, was bound to appear sooner or later. Bates is a fast-rising young composer of orchestral music, and also a deejay. In the latter guise, he performs at electronica clubs under the nom-de-laptop DJ Masonic. His

electronica has a quasi-classical fluidity, and in his orchestra music, he performs on laptop computer and drum pads as a soloist, eliciting much the same kind of noise grooves that he uses as a deejay. 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.

As I say, it was only a matter of time. Throughout the 1970s, the pop, classical, and jazz worlds were meticulously distinct. Musicians who were trained in more than one field knew not to mix. In the 1980s that all changed. Punk guitarists started working with minimalist drones, classical composers played rock clubs, symphonies for electric guitars appeared. The crossovers were sometimes amateurish. When the pop audience was impressed, the classical fans generally weren't, and vice versa. But eventually, someone was bound to grow up so immersed in genre-mixing that they would get both sides of the equation right.

Bates has. Born in 1977, he never knew a world in which playing pop disqualified him from classical, or vice versa. He acknowledges that they're still separate: His web site, www.masonicelectronica.com, opens with the command, "Choose one: electronica / classical." Both routes, however, lead to kudos. In classical music he's won the Rome Prize, the Berlin prize, the Charles Ives Award, and a Naumburg commission, plus a string of orchestral commissions. In the pop arena, he performs his own blend of hip-hop, trip-hop, funk, and electronica at clubs like the Roter Salon in Berlin, Cloud 9 in San Francisco, and Scarabocchio in Rome. He has patrons on one side, fans on the other. The most impressive thing is how comfortably his two idioms mix.

For instance, Juilliard, Bates's alma mater, commissioned a piece from him to celebrate their 100th anniversary. The resulting work, *Digital Loom* for organ and electronics—or as he terms it, "electronica"—was premiered at New York's Peter Jay Sharp Theater on February 2. *Digital Loom* starts with a drone chord on the organ. Over it come various pops, clicks, and scratchy sounds that could be mistaken for background noise on a vinyl record. Eventually you realize that those little noises have formed a groove, to which new noises keep adding. The chord metamorphoses unnoticeably at first, but finally breaks into syncopations that have their own complex relation to the groove. Every pop and click is

meticulously notated in the score. It's a well-thought-out piece.

And it works because, for Bates, the organ and club-dance beats aren't really in opposition. He's seen through to their underlying similarity, not of musical materials, but of social function. "After all," he says of the organ, "it is the world's oldest synthesizer. Indeed the organist—like his modern-day club counterpart, the deejay—is simultaneously perceived as background accompaniment to various activities, and as the invisible hand controlling the choreography within its belly."

“What I do in [Omnivorous Furniture] is in-between a live performer and a technician,” says Bates. **“I call it a ‘dynamic tape part.’ Because I really believe that it’s important for any electronic element to have a life to it.”**

A Curious Genesis

You might assume that Bates was a pop musician who tried his hand at classical, but actually it was the opposite: He loved classical music in high school and came to electronica only later. Growing up in culturally conservative Virginia, Bates studied composition with Dika Newlin, the formidable composer and musicologist who's a leading authority on Austrian music from Bruckner through Webern, and who was teaching at Virginia Commonwealth University. At fifteen he came to the attention of Robert Moody, then chorus master of the Brevard Music Center Festival. Bates was in the chorus, and as Moody recalls today, "He had written an *a cappella* choral work, and came to me and asked, 'Would you be interested in taking a look at it?' It was a piece on the Latin text 'Timor et tremor.' As soon as I saw it, I realized what a talent he was." Moody requested a work from Bates for another group he was directing, the Evansville Philharmonic Youth Orchestra, and received *Free Variations* for orchestra.

Such a premiere for a seventeen-year-old helped propel the young composer to Juilliard—and to the culture shock of New York. Still afraid to commit fully to a musical career, Bates enrolled in the Columbia-Juilliard program, simultaneously earning

degrees in composition and literature. (In the latter discipline he gravitated toward the English medieval mystery plays, drawn to their "combination of folksiness and complicated symbolism.") At Juilliard his composition teachers were John Corigliano and David Del Tredici, who encouraged him even if they weren't always simpatico to his static rhythms. Conservative Juilliard was a strange place to get the electronica bug, but Bates did.

"Juilliard has this really cool electronic studio," he says, noting that the facility is on a more "commercial level" than the

from six months in Berlin, Bates is now completing a doctorate at Berkeley—and receiving the kind of attention that very few composers receive while still students.

Part of this was due to further encouragements from Moody. "Mason and I had discussed that once I became music director of an orchestra he would be my first commission," he says. "We conductors have a short shelf life, but composers live forever, and I wanted to be remembered for my association with him." The opportunity came when Moody became resident conductor of the Phoenix Symphony, which commissioned five young composers to write pieces that would precede Beethoven symphonies on concerts. "The references to Beethoven," Moody recalls, "could be obvious or extremely subtle. We picked Mason to write the companion piece to Beethoven's Ninth, and he wrote *Ode*." Cleverly, *Ode* ends with the same quiet tremolo fifth,



Bates appeared out front with conductor Alexander Mickelthwate and the Los Angeles Philharmonic New Music Group after performing as "electronica soloist" in his *Omnivorous Furniture* last season.

Center for New Music and Audio Technologies at Berkeley, where he now studies. "It was a huge room with all this equipment, empty all the time." Bates took advantage of that, and he also soon found himself soloing in the Lower East Side's simmering electronica scene. After graduation he headed for Berkeley, and started calling himself DJ Masonic. With Corigliano and Del Tredici as mentors, he won the Rome Prize and Berlin Prize in quick succession, and participated in the electronica worlds of both cities, the latter especially known as a hotbed of technopop. Recently back

A and E, with which the Ninth Symphony opens.

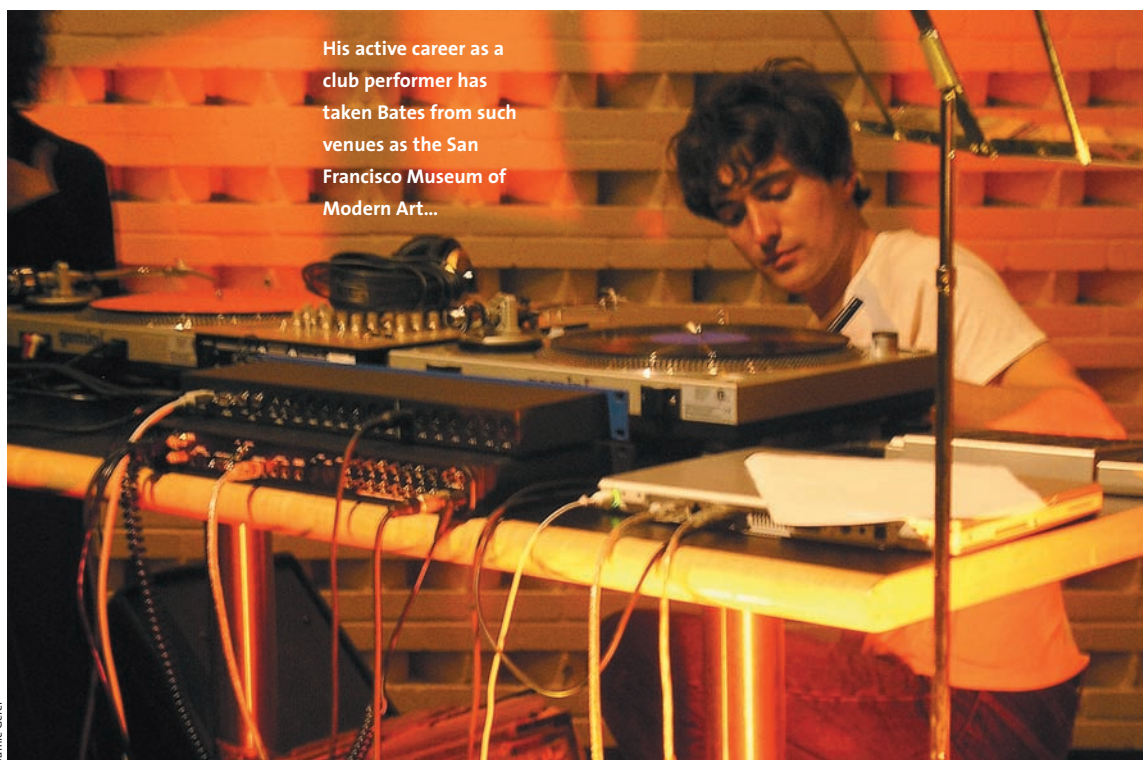
Bates's first attempt to mix his worlds was a synthesizer concerto that he played with the orchestras of Atlanta and Phoenix. Wilder and more ambitious was his piece *Omnivorous Furniture*, premiered in November 2004 by the Los Angeles Philharmonic New Music Group. Bates was one of the composers included in a composer-conductor symposium sponsored by the orchestra. As Edward Yim, the Philharmonic's then-director of artistic planning, recalls, Music Director Esa-Pekka Salonen "saw a

lot of promise in his work. It made such a great impression that we wanted to be involved with the development of his career. It's exciting to see a young composer combining craftsmanship and taking the tradition in new directions."

Omnivorous Furniture had Bates sitting in the percussion section playing a drum machine, a concerto soloist buried in the back. The orchestra part looks and sounds as though it was written by "orchestrating" the drum machine groove, with dramatic bass lines in the piano and repeating staccato interjections in the strings. Meanwhile, the electronica part ("I think of it as a super percussion section that can do anything," he says) is carefully notated—after he figures out what he's basically going to play—but is not carefully followed in performance. The piece will receive its New York premiere March 17 by the American Composers Orchestra.

"The point of the notation is to have something there that the performer can look at," he explains. "There's a lot going on in the electronica, and it's not assumed that the performer will be following along, but it is assumed that there will be moments where the orchestra will line up with the beat. What I do is in-between a live performer and a technician. I call it a 'dynamic tape part.' Because I really believe that it's important for any electronic element to have a life to it. That way if there's an alignment problem, I can kind of help things out electronically. It so happens that with this kind of music, a click-track isn't necessary, because the beat is a click-track in itself."

At this writing, Bates, along with Kenji Bunch and Kevin Puts, is in the initial stage of a three-year Music Alive residency with the Mobile Symphony sponsored by Meet The Composer and the American Symphony Orchestra League. "Our goal was to show our audience that 'modern music' has many different facets,



His active career as a club performer has taken Bates from such venues as the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art...

Jamie Geier



...to Berlin's Zu Mir Oder Zu Dir (My Place or Yours).

Max Lautenschläger

that not all new music sounds the same," says the orchestra's music director, Scott Speck. "We have found three young composers with compelling musical worldviews, each of whom is completely different from the others."

Christina Littlejohn, Mobile's CEO from 1995 until February 2006, elaborates. "Mason's music is edgier, interesting in terms of its form and instruments. We wanted to highlight our percussion ensemble, and thought Mason's music was perfect for that. We also do a lot of education programs, and Mason is very articulate about his music and about music in general." Along with writing a commissioned piece, Bates will work with local third-graders, helping them make their own music score into a video.

Dancing with Orchestras

Meanwhile Moody, recently named music director of the Winston-Salem Symphony, has commissioned another Bates opus: *Rusty Air in Carolina*, for orchestra and electronica. "Since he's from Virginia, and this is a piece for Winston-Salem," Moody says, "he started thinking about life in the Appalachians, and camping, and the sounds you hear when you're camping. He's trying to capture the quality of ambient sound that exists in the Carolina mountains. 'Rusty' doesn't mean corroded in this case, but refers to the color of the sound. He'll be in the percussion section running the electronic side of things. He told me to trust him, and I do."

What separates Bates from a lot of other would-be crossovers is his authenticity in both fields. He and I discuss a couple of other classical composers who have notably introduced pop beats into orchestra music, and Bates's diagnosis of them is dead-on: Not knowing electronica from the inside, they assume the loud 4/4 beat is everything, and ape only the most commercial aspects of the music. What's impressive about both *Omnivorous Furniture* and *Digital Loom* is how subtly the rhythm is portrayed, how unobtrusive the grooves are, how long it

takes to notice that things are repeating. Only someone who has spent night after night mesmerizing dancers in clubs would know to go to the most interesting kernel of the music and leave the clichés behind.

Transferred to the orchestra, the electronica style results in a kind of postminimalism, not all that different from a lot of other, slightly older composers who were deeply impressed by minimalism. One could name Bates's fellow San Franciscans John Adams, Belinda Reynolds, Dan Becker, and Paul Drescher—along with Paul

all the time. There are parts in *Omnivorous Furniture* and *Digital Loom* where the rhythm becomes a blob, arrhythmic." That explains why in every Bates piece the momentum subsides now and then to make room for an expansive lyricism—a reminder, perhaps, that his background includes studies with arch-romanticist Corigliano.

Likewise, Bates steers away from the more mechanical aspects of electronica. His deejay music isn't as grittily "electronic-sounding" as similar work by post-rock

So, fine. Juilliard and Cloud 9 have finally collaborated to create the pop/classical hybrid that we all knew was coming. What do we do with him? Are electronica fans going to be lured into the concert hall? Are orchestra patrons going to wave their hips to the drum machine? "It is two audiences," Bates readily admits, "and it's not like they have any overlap. But I've found that people are pretty receptive if you have a clear idea of what you're doing. The electronica audience is very curious. They don't usually listen to music with vocals, so it's a group very attuned to listening to harmony and texture. The best-case scenario is that you see someone in the concert hall who's kind of punked out next to someone with blue hair. But they're not going to morph into the same person. Trying to figure out what this audience wants, or that one, is a recipe for madness."

Bates admits that the most sophisticated classical fans put up the most resistance to what he's doing, but notes that a lot of orchestra members, after initial skepticism, have melted into an absorbed interest in how his equipment works. Clearly no rapprochement is going to happen overnight, and an influx of electronica will bring no miraculous reprieve from box-office ills. But for now, Bates has developed a practical means for bridging pop and classical practices, and has done so with enough bilingual panache that neither audience can afford to laugh at the results. He's certainly getting a lot of play: In addition to the Juilliard and ACO gigs, the Mobile Symphony will play his *Ode* on March 11, the Winston-Salem Symphony will premiere *Rusty Air* in Carolina on May 21, and he's writing a half-hour work with electronica for the National Symphony Orchestra, with a planned premiere in February 2007. Bates may be a genius, a flash in the pan, or just a sign of the times. But I'd expect a lot more like him coming around the corner. ∞

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Epstein, Mary Jane Leach, William Duckworth, and many others—as composers whose music is similarly often gradually self-transformational, with a steady beat and a diatonic pitch language. (One might also note that another composer, Anthony De Ritis, has already written a concerto for deejay, which the orchestras of Oakland and Hartford have performed.) One thing that's different about Bates—and ironically so, given his electronica background—is that he shies away from a relentless motoric pulse.

"I love certain pieces of John Adams," says Bates, "but his music could be conducted by a sequencer. It has zero flexibility in the rhythm. The temptation is to have a minimalist piece that pulses along forever. For me, the power of minimalism, or the power of these very static beats, is in what kind of expectation you create that you can play with. When I was working on *Omnivorous Furniture*, I wanted to avoid the trap of the rhythm being completely mechanical



Visitors to Bates's web site are directed to "choose one: electronica / classical."

bands like Autechre, Godspeed You Black Emperor!, and Bardo Pond. It's even grounded in jazz harmony. "It's important for me to make something that has a little more animal warmth. This has two ramifications. One is that I want to use a mix of acoustic and electronic sound sources. That may mean adding [prerecorded samples of] jazz piano or upright bass, so that it has acoustic warmth. Jazz harmony is a great way to bring a little bit of life to something that could otherwise become mechanical. The other is that the music needs to be more lyrical, have a little more dynamic and not be so repetitious."