

# AN ELECTRIC EVENING

OCTOBER 19, 2018

**Darko Butorac**, Conductor  
**Anthony McGill**, clarinet

**Mason Bates**  
(b. 1977)

**Mothership**

**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**  
(1756-1791)

**Clarinet Concerto in A Major, K. 622**

Allegro  
Adagio  
Rondo (Allegro)

INTERMISSION

**Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky**  
(1840-1893)

**Symphony No. 5 in E Minor, Op. 64**

Andante—Allegro con anima  
Andante cantabile, con alcuna licenza  
Valse—Allegro moderato  
Andante maestoso—Allegro vivace

Nearly two million people tuned into Youtube on 20 March 2011 for the live-broadcast premiere of **Mason Bates' *Mothership***. It is dedicated to Michael Tilson Thomas and the Youtube Symphony Orchestra—the conductor and performers for that premiere at the Sydney Opera House. The beginning of the single-movement work reads “**Scherzo. *Lifting Off* . . .**” Three flutes, piccolo, three clarinets, bass clarinet, three oboes, English horn, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, two trombones, bass trombone, tuba, percussion, harp, piano, strings, and laptop comprise the orchestration. The composition also involves four soloists playing electric guitar, violin, electric string bass, and guzheng (a Chinese zither). Later Bates also scored *Mothership* for a wind ensemble. There are several recordings of the work, and Nicolas Blanc has choreographed *Mothership* for the New York City Ballet.

So you have not seen a laptop listed in an orchestral score before? The following is taken from Bates' own website: “Included with the rental of the materials is a download link for a simple software sampler that triggers the sounds from the laptop (an additional percussionist or an assistant conductor simply hits laptop keys at rehearsal numbers). The electronic component is simple, inexpensive, and designed to work within a compressed orchestral rehearsal period, and a 'live' version of the electronic part can be realized when the composer is present.”

The American-born composer, **Mason Bates (b. 1977)** is also a DJ who has a BA in English literature and masters and doctoral degrees in musical composition, the latter from UC Berkeley. He has studied with John Corigliano and David del Tredici and has received commissions from the National Symphony Orchestra and San Francisco Symphony. His works combine classical elements, the repetitive patterns of minimalism, jazz-inspired improvisation, electronic components from techno, and a lot of the drama associated with blockbuster film soundtracks. The best description of *Mothership*, not surprisingly, comes from the composer's own words printed in the score: "This energetic opener imagines the orchestra as a mothership that is 'docked' by several visiting soloists, who offer brief but virtuosic riffs on the

work's thematic material over action-packed electro-acoustic orchestral figuration. The piece follows the form of a scherzo with double trio (as found in, for example, the Schumann Symphony No. 2). Symphonic scherzos historically play with dance rhythms in a high-energy and appealing manner, with the 'trio' sections temporarily exploring new rhythmic areas. *Mothership* shares a formal connection with the symphonic scherzo but is brought to life by thrilling sounds of the 21st Century—the rhythms of modern-day techno in place of waltz rhythms, for example.”

Most of today's readers know that pop icon Michael Jackson did not have a normal childhood and consequently never really grew up, thanks to his father's management of the family's musical talent. Michael's 18<sup>th</sup> century counterpart, **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-91)**, also had a father who promoted, and benefited from, his children's talents by taking them on concert tours that began when Wolfgang was only six. And, like Michael, who joined his older brothers onstage when he was five, Wolfgang often exhibited childish tendencies in adulthood (and a bathroom sense of humor, if one reads his letters). However, as a composer, Mozart was gifted in all genres and wrote over 600 works in his brief lifespan of thirty-five years. He worked in various positions in Salzburg, Austria (his birthplace) until 1781, when his employer, Archbishop Colloredo, gave him the boot (literally, according to some accounts), and the composer decided to risk becoming a freelancer in Vienna. That is where he worked for the last ten years of his life. In his final year, Mozart composed many works including a string quintet, parts of the Requiem, the operas *La Clemenza di Tito* and *Die Zauberflöte*, his last piano concerto, and the clarinet concerto.

The modern clarinet was “invented” about 1700; however it did not become truly popular until the publication of a clarinet concerto in 1772. Mozart thought its timbre was quite pleasing and considered it to be closest to the human voice. Add to that the fact that he had a Masonic friend, Anton Stadler, who was a clarinet virtuoso, and you understand the genesis of this concerto. Stadler had jerry-rigged his instrument with supplementary keys and tubing to allow for additional bass notes, producing an instrument that is now known as a basset clarinet. Today's performers on the standard clarinet have to adjust some of the notes in Mozart's concerto because of the modern instrument's more limited range. It is the extremes of register that you will probably find most striking upon hearing Mozart's **Clarinet Concerto**; both the high- and the low pitches of the instrument are on display. As usual, Mozart composed the work in a very short amount of time, and Stadler played the premiere on 16 October 1791. Mozart became ill about two weeks later and died December 5.

Most symphonies and concertos by Haydn and Mozart have opening movements that are weightier than the succeeding ones, and the first movement (**Allegro**) of this composition comprises about half the concerto's playing time. This concerto has the elegance and charm that one expects from Mozart. It also demonstrates his skill at writing beautiful melodies, including a secondary theme in the first movement that surprises us when the clarinetist introduces it in a minor key. There is no real cadenza in the concerto, although there are a few places where soloists may insert a few extra notes or occasionally a slightly longer improvisation. The *Adagio* is exquisite, but before it gets too sentimental, Mozart wisely launches the final *Allegro* with a dance-like rondo theme that returns several times in between alternating episodes. The capabilities of the solo instrument and the instrumentalist are showcased throughout this concerto, an important piece in the repertoire and one that influenced all subsequent clarinet concertos.

At age twenty-one, **Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)** quit law school to study composition and orchestration at St. Petersburg Conservatory. After graduating in 1865, he was hired to teach harmony at

the Moscow Conservatory, where he remained until 1875, when severe depression led him to resign from teaching. The following year, a wealthy widow began providing a yearly stipend that continued until 1890, allowing Tchaikovsky the luxury of devoting himself to composing. The **Fifth Symphony** was written in 1888 and premiered that November in St. Petersburg with the composer conducting. Tchaikovsky, whose music was greatly influenced by the West, was often depressed and pessimistic, and much has been written about his homosexual angst. After several early performances of the Fifth, he criticized his own work: “[It’s] a failure. There is something repulsive about it, a certain excess of gaudiness, insincerity, and artificiality. And the public instinctively recognizes this.” In later years, however, he developed a more positive opinion of his symphony.

In an early manuscript, Tchaikovsky suggested that Fate, which was the basis of the Fourth Symphony ten years earlier, was also the inspiration for this work: “Introduction: Total submission before Fate, or, which is the same thing, the inscrutable designs of Providence.” Borrowing from Glinka’s opera *A Life for the Tsar*, Tchaikovsky’s introduction in the clarinets’ low register is a melody that his countryman had set to the words “turn not to sorrow.” The first few bars comprise the “Fate motto” that returns in various guises in every movement, unifying the symphony as a whole. Clarinet and bassoon accompanied by march-like basses start the first movement proper, and violins present the lyrical second theme that is eventually taken over by the full orchestra. After this **Allegro con anima** marches into the distance, the **Andante** begins with a reflective string chorale that introduces a poignant and familiar horn solo. A soulful secondary theme appears in the oboe. Listen for the exquisite countermelodies throughout the second movement. When the motto reappears, it briefly disrupts the mood, but the Andante ends as it begins, with quiet reflection. Surprisingly, the third movement is cast as a waltz rather than the traditional scherzo. Although there is a playful trio section, it is not without ominous undercurrents. At the end of the waltz, the “Fate” motto returns in solemn fashion before it transforms into a majestic march, heard for the first time in the major mode. By the coda of the **Allegro Vivace**, the motto has become triumphant, and brass and timpani provide a rousing, Tchaikovskian-signature conclusion. (Beware the pause in the action before the last section; wait for that applause!)

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