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Mason Bates concludes three-year California Symphony residency with debut of powerful new work, *Silicon Blues*, on May 2 & 4

On May 2 & 4, 2010, the California Symphony will present the world premiere of *Silicon Blues* by Mason Bates – which coincides with the conclusion of his remarkable three-year tenure as the orchestra's 6th Young American Composer-in-Residence (YACR).

The new work will be the 28th commissioned thus far under the award-winning program, founded by Music Director Barry Jekowsky in 1991. Bates' previous two commissions developed under it are *Music from Underground Spaces* in 2008 and the orchestral version of *White Lies for Lomax* in 2009. Notably, *Music from Underground Spaces* is being presented by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra next week for four performances.

Silicon Blues takes Bates in a surprising new direction. Unlike his previous works, which uniquely fused orchestral textures with live electronica, *Silicon Blues* strives for the same result using acoustic instruments. "This new piece explores ways of recreating the precision and drama of electronica through the instruments alone: breathy flute interjections, chirping trumpets, prepared piano, even an old typewriter," Bates says. "The grooves of *Silicon Blues* hiccup from measure to measure as rapidly as data quietly flashing on the silicon innards of a computer, yet the piece is entirely 'unplugged.'"

The only hands-on training ground of its kind in the world, the YACR program provides resident composers with at least three world premieres, up to four weeks of annual on-site residency with the California Symphony, audio recordings of reading rehearsals with each commission that gives them enough time for revisions before a work's public debut; direct interaction and feedback from both Jekowsky and members of the orchestra; and a permanent recording of each premiere performance for use in securing future commissions and positions, among other benefits.

“Writing for orchestra means, for almost every composer, learning how to fit an artistic experience into only a few rehearsals,” says Bates. “Not so with the California Symphony. I’ve had several opportunities each year to try out anything I’d like with the entire orchestra. A midnight idea can actually see the light of day, since composer readings are budgeted into the process.”

Bates adds that “the program is also wonderful in many other ways. The musicians, for example, are some of the Bay Area’s finest, and they approach each new piece with the best attitude I have ever encountered – and they have a superb leader in Maestro Barry Jekowsky, whose amazing musicianship is complemented by an unflinching commitment to new American music. By including an American work on every program, he demonstrates time and again how important it is for orchestral music to stay close to its community.”

“Working with our resident composers is always a pleasure, but being a participant in the artistic evolution of *Silicon Blues* has been doubly gratifying because of its remarkably creative and experimental nature,” says Jekowsky. “Mason has such a unique compositional voice and an amazing imagination. His music is beautiful and thought-provoking. It will be fascinating to see where his enormous talents lead him. I do believe Mason Bates will take his place as one of the most important American composers of the 21st century.”

Scheduled for Sunday, May 2, at 4 pm and Tuesday, May 4, at 7:30 pm, both performances of *Silicon Blues* will take place at the Leshar Center for the Arts, 1601 Civic Drive, Walnut Creek, CA 94596. Also on the program will be Beethoven’s *Symphony No. 5* and the Bay Area debut of 14-year-old virtuoso Sarina Zhang performing both Liszt’s *Piano Concerto No. 1 in E flat* and Tchaikovsky’s *Pezzo Capriccioso for Cello and Orchestra*. Tickets are \$44-\$64 and \$20 for students, and can be purchased online at www.LesharArtsCenter.org or by calling (925) 943-SHOW. For more information, visit www.CaliforniaSymphony.org or call (925) 280-2490.

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