



Chicago Symphony plays new music in SF

By: [Janos Gereben](#) | 02/12/12 4:00 AM

Special To The SF Examiner

San Francisco composer Mason Bates says he “decided to go big” on his latest work, “Alternative Energy,” a Chicago Symphony Orchestra commission getting its local premiere this week at Davies Symphony Hall under the baton of Riccardo Muti.

Spanning four movements and “hundreds of years,” the work, which Bates calls his “Energy Symphony,” begins in a Midwestern junkyard and travels through more powerful forces of energy to a particle collider and a futuristic Chinese nuclear plant.

In the finale, the music settles in a rain forest, where, Bates has said, “humanity’s last inhabitants seek a return to a simpler way of life.”

The 120-year-old Chicago Symphony, visiting its younger colleague for concerts Tuesday and Wednesday that are part of San Francisco’s centennial American Orchestra Series, always has had great conductors, such as Fritz Reiner and Georg Solti — but Muti’s engagement is special even against that proud history.

One of the most sought-after conductors in the world, following a long history with the Philadelphia Orchestra and Milan’s La Scala Opera, Muti resisted recent invitations to be music director of top orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic.

Yet he surprised many in 2010, when at age 70, and not in the best of health, he accepted the position in Chicago. Illness forced him to cancel his first fall residency, but he fully recovered.

The “unexpected, late-in-life love affair,” writes former Chicago Sun-Times music critic Wynne Delacoma, “was sparked in 2007 when Muti arrived at Chicago’s Symphony Center to conduct the CSO for the first time in more than three decades. Those concerts truly were unforgettable.

“A few minutes into the programs featuring Prokofiev and Paul Hindemith, **Alexander Scriabin** and Ravel, it was clear that something special was happening. The combination of hair-trigger precision and deep emotion, the full-bodied sound, and the seamless, singing flow were spellbinding. CSO audiences, who had waited so long for Mr. Right, suddenly found him.”



COURTESY PHOTO

Riccardo Muti conducts Chicago Symphony Orchestra in highly anticipated concerts in The City this week.

In addition to the Bates work, Tuesday's concert includes Arthur Honegger's 1923 "Pacific 231" and César Franck's 1888 Symphony in D Minor.

The following night, music from Schubert's "Rosamunde" and 1827 Symphony in C Major (premiered posthumously, in 1840) bracket the West Coast premiere of another Chicago Symphony commission, Anna Clyne's "Night Ferry," first performed Feb. 9.

Clyne describes the piece as "music of voyages, from stormy darkness to enchanted worlds, music of the conjurer and setter of tides, through the ungovernable and dangerous."

Clyne and Bates are the orchestra's Mead composers-in-residence, whom Muti has called "artists who write from the heart, who defy categorization and who reach across all barriers and boundaries."

Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Presented by San Francisco Symphony

Where: Davies Symphony Hall, 201 Van Ness Ave., San Francisco

When: 8 p.m. Tuesday-Wednesday

Tickets: \$15 to \$120

Contact: (415) 864-6000, www.sfsymphony.org

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