

PROGRAM

ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-FIRST SEASON

Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Riccardo Muti Music Director

Pierre Boulez Helen Regenstein Conductor Emeritus

Yo-Yo Ma Judson and Joyce Green Creative Consultant

Bank of America 
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Thursday, February 2, 2012, at 8:00

Friday, February 3, 2012, at 8:00

Saturday, February 4, 2012, at 8:00

Tuesday, February 7, 2012, at 7:30

Riccardo Muti Conductor

Honegger

Pacific 231

Bates

Alternative Energy

Ford's Farm, 1896—

Chicago, 2012

Xinjiang Province, 2112—

Reykjavik, 2222

**Commissioned for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra by the Louise Durham Mead Fund
for New Music**

World premiere

INTERMISSION

Franck

Symphony in D Minor

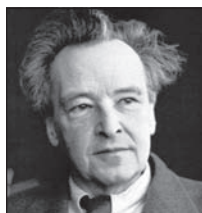
Lento—Allegro non troppo

Allegretto

Allegro non troppo

CSO Tuesday series concerts are sponsored by United Airlines.

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Arthur Honegger

Born March 10, 1892, Le Havre, France.

Died November 27, 1955, Paris, France.

Pacific 231, Mouvement symphonique No. 1

I have always had a passion for locomotives,” Arthur Honegger wrote after *Pacific 231*, his high-speed tone poem named after a locomotive, became a runaway hit. “To me they are living beings, and I love them as others love women or horses.”

Honegger first attracted attention in the early twenties as a member of the group of French composers known as Les six, although history has cut that number in half, remembering just Honegger, along with Darius Milhaud and Francis Poulenc. Honegger was something of an outsider in Les six—he got involved almost by accident, and he never could stomach the pranksterish music of Eric Satie, who inspired the group

and served as its spiritual mentor. In *I Am a Composer*, he writes, “I am what the language of passports calls of ‘dual nationality,’ that is to say, a combination of French and Swiss.” Born in Le Havre, he had studied composition first in Zurich, his parents’ hometown, and then commuted to Paris for two years to work at the conservatory. In 1913—Honegger was nineteen—he settled in Paris, a city bursting with avant-garde surprises, later claiming that, despite his Swiss upbringing, “all the rest—my intellectual blossoming, the sharpening of my moral and spiritual values—I owe to France.” Among the qualities he owed to Switzerland, Honegger listed “a naïve sense of honesty” and his knowledge of the Bible, though

COMPOSED

1923

FIRST PERFORMANCE

May 8, 1924, Paris, France

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCE

October 17, 1924,
Orchestra Hall. Frederick
Stock conducting

MOST RECENT

CSO PERFORMANCES

December 9, 1930,
Orchestra Hall. Frederick
Stock conducting

July 26, 1964,
Ravinia Festival. Seiji
Ozawa conducting

CSO PERFORMANCES

CONDUCTED BY HONEGGER

March 15 & 16, 1929,
Orchestra Hall

INSTRUMENTATION

two flutes and piccolo, two oboes and english horn, two clarinets and bass clarinet, two bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones and tuba, cymbal, snare drum, bass drum, tam-tam, strings

APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME

6 minutes

he might also have mentioned his lifelong love of Bach, whose cantatas he regularly heard in the Protestant church of his youth.

Honegger achieved almost overnight fame in 1921 for his oratorio *Le roi David* (King David), but he caused a real stir two years later with *Pacific 231*. This short orchestral work began life as one of three so-called symphonic movements, but Honegger quickly realized that, in a city still reeling from the shock of *The Rite of Spring*, his title was, as he put it, a bit colorless. “Suddenly a romantic idea crossed my mind, and when the work was finished I wrote the title, *Pacific 231*, which indicates a locomotive for heavy loads and high speed,” he later recalled.

To tell the truth, in *Pacific* I was pursuing a very abstract and quite unalloyed idea, by giving the feeling of a mathematical acceleration of rhythm, while the actual motion of the piece slowed down. In musical terms, I composed a huge, formal chorale, strewn with counterpoint in the manner of J. S. Bach.

But audiences and critics could only hear the locomotive. “People of great talent wrote wonderful articles describing the driving rods,

the noise of the pistons, the screeching of the brakes, the hissing of steam, the commotion of the front wheels, etc., etc.,” Honegger later wrote. This was the height of Europe’s fascination with the age of the machine, and *Pacific 231* was hailed as one of its landmarks. (Actually, one critic, misunderstanding the title, discerned in Honegger’s high-powered writing the smells of the open sea.) Honegger quickly became known as the man who wrote the piece about the train, even though, in fact, he hadn’t.

When Honegger conducted *Pacific 231* in Chicago, at the conclusion of a program entirely of his own works performed by the Chicago Symphony in 1929, he was once again praised as a master tone painter—“the snorting, throbbing, tumultuous progress of a railroad engine is depicted with extraordinary skill,” one local critic wrote. By then, Honegger had decided to play along with *Pacific 231*’s many new fans. In the published score, he described the overall shape of the piece: “the quiet breathing of the machine at rest, its effort in starting, then the gathering speed, the progress from mood to mood, as a 300-ton train hurtles through the dark night, racing 120 miles an hour.” ■



Mason Bates

Born January 23, 1977, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Alternative Energy

At a junkyard looking for ‘car-part instruments’ for *Alternative Energy* (a new Chicago Symphony piece coming in February),” Mason Bates wrote on Twitter last October 27. Historians who used to transcribe sketches and search composer’s diaries for clues about how pieces of music came into being now scan tweets and YouTube videos—there is, in fact, a YouTube clip of Bates on a junket to Fermilab last May, where he went to collect sound samples from a particle accelerator for *Alternative Energy*—to understand the composition process.

Bates first made a name for himself as a composer who liked to incorporate electronics within orchestral music. That was not really unexpected from someone who first heard an orchestra listening to Pink Floyd and Moody Blues albums and was taken by the seamless fusion of orchestral and

electronic elements. When Bates started going to hear the Richmond Symphony in Virginia, where he grew up, he suddenly made contact with the great composers, and he began to develop an understanding of the orchestra’s place in history.

After a traditional musical upbringing in Richmond, which included piano lessons and singing in the choir, Bates studied composition and English literature in the Columbia–Juilliard joint program. He worked with David Del Tredici and John Corigliano, and then moved to the Bay Area in 2001 to enroll in the Ph.D. program at Berkeley’s Center for New Music and Audio Technologies. His career, like his music, is a singular mix of old-world establishment and New Age culture: he has been lavished with big-league honors, from institutions such as the American Academy in Rome and the American Academy for Arts and

COMPOSED

2011

These are the world premiere performances.

INSTRUMENTATION

three flutes, three piccolos and alto flute, three oboes and english horn, three bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones and tuba, laptop, an extensive percussion battery, harp, piano, celesta, strings

APPROXIMATE

PERFORMANCE TIME

25 minutes

Letters (an award that “acknowledges the composer who has arrived at his or her own voice”), and he also has spent many nights as a DJ, spinning and mixing at dance clubs in San Francisco, New York City, Berlin, and Rome.

Alternative Energy, which occupied Bates for much of 2011, marks a new stage in his evolving—and, perhaps, maturing,” as he says—approach to integrating electronics into the orchestra. “The sounds coming from the speakers are as carefully crafted as the sonorities in the orchestra,” he says, “and the influences reach far beyond techno.” And the use of scrap metal in his large percussion battery, as well as the Fermilab recording, is merely part of Bates’s ongoing quest to expand—and refine—his vocabulary of sound. Offsetting high-tech electronic sounds with old car parts fits perfectly with the sense of passing time and changing worlds that lies behind *Alternative Energy*. “The idea was that each movement would be separated by a hundred years,” Bates says, “starting with old energy (the first movement uses scrap metal to evoke a junkyard) and moving to new energy (the second movement uses actual recordings from Fermilab to evoke a particle accelerator).”

Bates is, above all, a storyteller, and for him all music tells stories of one kind or another. “Sometimes that story is entirely on the level of pure sound,” he says, “but I find it especially exciting when fresh orchestral writing animates an imaginative extramusical narrative (as in Berlioz’s *Symphonie*

fantastique or the Stravinsky ballets).” Bates had been tossing around the ideas behind *Alternative Energy* for a long time, but hearing Riccardo Muti’s performance of the *Symphonie fantastique* here last season and getting to know his “unique understanding of dramatic music” brought his “energy symphony” to life at last.

Since Bates became one of the Chicago Symphony’s Mead Composers-in-Residence last season (along with Anna Clyne, whose *Night Ferry* will be premiered next week), the Orchestra has played his *Music for Underground Spaces* and *The B-Sides*. *Alternative Energy*, however, is the first work written expressly for the Chicago Symphony and Riccardo Muti as part of this residency.

Mason Bates on *Alternative Energy*

A*lternative Energy* is an “energy symphony” spanning four movements and hundreds of years. Beginning in a rustic Midwestern junkyard in the late nineteenth century, the piece travels through ever greater and more powerful forces of energy—a present-day particle collider, a futuristic Chinese nuclear plant—until it reaches a future Icelandic rain forest, where humanity’s last inhabitants seek a return to a simpler way of life.

The *idée fixe* that links these disparate worlds appears early in Ford’s Farm, 1896. This melody is heard on the fiddle—conjuring

a Henry Ford-like figure—and is accompanied by junkyard percussion and a “phantom orchestra” that

surges bring the movement to a clangorous finish.

Zoom a hundred years into the dark future of the Xinjiang Province, 2112 where a great deal of the Chinese energy industry is based. On an eerie wasteland, a lone flute sings a tragically distorted version of the fiddle tune, dreaming of a forgotten natural world. But a powerful industrial energy simmers to the surface, and over the ensuing hardcore techno, wild orchestral splashes drive us to a catastrophic meltdown. As the smoke



Mason Bates at Fermilab, May 2011

trails the fiddler like ghosts. The accelerando cranking of a car motor becomes a special motif in the piece, a kind of rhythmic embodiment of ever more powerful energy. Indeed, this crank motif explodes in the electronics in the second movement’s present-day Chicago, where we encounter actual recordings from the Fermilab particle collider. Hip-hop beats, jazzy brass interjections, and joyous voltage

clears, we find ourselves even farther into the future: an Icelandic rain forest on a hotter planet. Gentle, out-of-tune pizzicatos accompany our fiddler, who returns over a woody percussion ensemble to make a quiet plea for simpler times. The occasional song of future birds whips around us, a naturalistic version of the crank motif. Distant tribal voices call for the building of a fire—our first energy source. ■



César Franck

Born December 10, 1822, Liège, Belgium.

Died November 8, 1890, Paris, France.

Symphony in D Minor

César Franck matured as a composer very late in life, but he first won acclaim as a child prodigy. He was born in Liège, in the French-speaking Walloon district of the Netherlands; this heritage was reflected in the mixture of French and Flemish in his name. Early on he showed unusual musical talent, which his father, Nicolas-Joseph, set about nurturing, promoting, and finally exploiting. In 1830, his father enrolled him in the Liège Conservatory, and César made his first tour as a virtuoso pianist at the age of eleven, traveling throughout the newly formed kingdom of Belgium. (His specialty was playing variations on popular opera themes à la Liszt.)

Having outgrown the Liège Conservatory, César moved to Paris, with his entire family in tow,

for advanced study in 1835. When the Paris Conservatory initially rejected his application because of his Belgian birth, Nicolas-Joseph sent for French naturalization papers. César was an exemplary student, and he walked off with many top prizes. He was always interested in composing, but his father discouraged him from entering the prestigious Prix de Rome competition in the hope that he would devote his life to concertizing. Nicolas-Joseph even pulled César out of school in 1842 to send him off on another recital tour, which was highlighted by a meeting with Franz Liszt, who encouraged him to keep composing.

Franck next won fame as an organist and a composer of organ music (his impassioned organ improvisations were greatly

COMPOSED

1886–1888

FIRST PERFORMANCE

February 17, 1889, Paris

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCE

February 2, 1900, Auditorium Theatre. Theodore Thomas conducting

MOST RECENT

CSO PERFORMANCE

March 3, 2007,
Orchestra Hall. Philippe Jordan conducting

INSTRUMENTATION

two flutes, two oboes and english horn, two clarinets and bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets and two cornets, three trombones and tuba, timpani, harp, strings

APPROXIMATE

PERFORMANCE TIME

41 minutes

CSO RECORDING

1961. Pierre Monteux conducting. RCA

celebrated). Then, in middle age, he devoted himself to teaching, and, in the process, influencing an entire generation of French composers, including Vincent d'Indy and Ernest Chausson, who were nearly idolatrous in their devotion. Like Bruckner (with whom he has sometimes been compared), Franck came into his own as a composer late in his career. His major works—this Symphony in D minor, along with the violin sonata and the piano quintet, the Symphonic Variations for piano and orchestra, and several symphonic poems—were all written between 1880 and 1890, the last decade of his life.

The symphony is by far the best known of Franck's orchestral works. Although Franck called it a symphony in response to his students, who quite literally demanded that he try his hand at the form, it is not so much a work in the tradition of Beethoven as a hybrid characteristic of Franck, combining elements of both symphony and symphonic poem in a thematically unified whole. Even in the late 1880s, the French musical public was put off by the unclassifiable nature of the piece. "The subscribers could make neither head nor tail of it," d'Indy wrote of the chilly reception at the premiere, "and the musical authorities were in much the same position."

Although we think of Franck as a one-symphony composer like his countryman Georges Bizet, he had in fact written an earlier symphony when he was studying in Paris (it was even performed in 1841) that was plainly indebted to

the Viennese classical tradition. The symphony he wrote in the mid-1880s, however, is the "real" Franck, inspired by the music of Liszt and Wagner, masters of thematic transformation, novel orchestral effects, and bold new forms. Franck also was influenced by the French orchestral tradition, although d'Indy, ever the loyal pupil, insisted that Franck completed his symphony before he knew Saint-Saëns's *Organ* Symphony, which was premiered in May 1886. But Franck's short-score sketch is dated September–October 1887, so his symphony may have been, at least in part, a reaction to Saint-Saëns's striking new work. We know that Franck finished the orchestration in August 1888, and that he also arranged the symphony for piano duet that year, obviously hoping it would be a piece people would want to play at home. He must have been as dismayed as his students when the work fell flat at the premiere.

The D minor symphony has three movements, a formal layout that Franck used in nearly all his major works (a fondness inherited by his students as well). The entire score is saturated with the main theme of the first movement, a three-note motif that echoes the famous questioning motto of Beethoven's last string quartet—he gave it the words *Muss es sein?* (Must it be?)—which Liszt later transformed to unforgettable effect in his symphonic poem *Les préludes*. (It also is mirrored in Wagner's "fate" motif in *The Ring*.) The opening movement follows the general guidelines of sonata form,

but it also ranges widely, reinventing and transforming its basic thematic material as it goes; it offers a tantalizing suggestion of the kind of magic Franck must have created improvising at the organ.

The Allegretto is both slow movement and scherzo rolled into one. Its main melody, unfolded at a leisurely pace, is introduced by the english horn, an unconventional choice that particularly offended one of the conservatory professors who attended the premiere: “Just mention a single symphony by Haydn or Beethoven with an english horn,” he demanded of d’Indy that night, failing to recall the quite fantastic symphony by Berlioz that makes magical (unforgettable, one would think) use of the instrument. (Actually, Haydn’s Symphony no. 22 [*The Philosopher*] calls for *two* english horns, but it was unknown in France at the time.) Muted strings suggest the spirit of a scherzo, continuing and at the same time complementing what has gone before.

“The finale takes up all the themes again, as in [Beethoven’s] Ninth,” Franck wrote. “They do not return as quotations, however; I have elaborated them and given them the role of new elements.” That is the essence of the entire score—music continuously revisited, transformed, and in the process reborn. “I risked a great deal,” Franck said of his new symphony, “but the next time I shall risk even more.” Perhaps chastened by the cool reception the work received, however, he wrote no more orchestral works. It was only after his death in 1890 that the D minor symphony began to be played more and more—a spectacular performance in Paris in 1893 may have marked the turning point—eventually becoming the most popular work in Franck’s small but prime catalog. ■

Phillip Huscher is the program annotator for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.