MASON BATES
Rusty Air in Carolina

Mason Bates was born in Philadelphia in 1977. He composed this work in 2006 on a commission from the Winston-Salem Symphony and it was first performed by that orchestra under the direction of Robert Moody. The score calls for 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, prerecorded “electronica,” percussion, harp, piano, and strings.

Mason Bates grew up in Virginia, where he studied piano with Hope Armstrong Erb and composition with Dika Newlin. He earned degrees in composition and English literature in the Columbia-Juilliard program, where he studied with John Corigliano, David Del Tredici, and Samuel Adler. He is currently working on his doctorate at the University of California at Berkeley, studying with Edmund Campion, David Wessel, and Jorge Liderman. He has been the recipient of an American Academy in Berlin Fellowship, the Rome Prize from the American Academy in Rome, a Charles Ives Scholarship and Fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Jacob Druckman Memorial Prize from the Aspen Music Festival, ASCAP and BMI awards, and a fellowship from the Tanglewood Music Center. Bates composes music for electronica, acoustic instruments, and very often an eclectic combination of the two; his works have been performed by orchestras and ensembles across America and all over the world.

Bates writes the following about Rusty Air in Carolina: “To begin with, I'm a Virginian. Perhaps to anyone in the Carolinas, the task of conjuring up the rich summer noise of the South and pairing it with orchestral textures should be a job for an authentic Carolinian. But the memories are so vivid from that summer in Brevard, South Carolina—where I spent several months at the music festival there as a teenager—that some sort of homage seemed necessary, so state pride will have to take a back seat.

“Not only did the thick buzzing of cicadas and katydids always accompany the concerts there, but sometimes it was the music itself: on more than one occasion I remember sitting on the porch of 100 year-old Nan Burt and listening to the sounds of summer while she told stories from her long life. This venerable lady was introduced to me by the assistant conductor at the festival, Robert Moody—who, a mere ten years older than I, would become a dear friend and collaborator. When Bob took the helm at the Winston-Salem Symphony and asked if I might write a new piece for him, perhaps his own return to the Carolinas inspired Rusty Air. Though he travels the world, he’s a Greenville boy.

“The work uses electronics to bring the white noise of the Southern summer into the concert hall, pairing these sounds with fluorescent orchestral textures that float gently by. ‘Nan’s Porch’ begins at dusk, while the katydids make their chatter. Three orchestral clouds—each with a different harmony, register, and orchestration—hover in the heavy air, and they ultimately begin to meld together when the cicadas start their singing.

“The climax of this movement sends us into ‘Katydid Country,’ when the ambience of the first movement evolves into a bluesy, rhythmic tune. The clicks of the katydids become a beat track over which the orchestra, reduced to chamber-music size, riffs on a simple tune inspired by old-time blues. It is said that katydids are loudest at midnight, and as the movement reaches its central point, the katydid music at last finds its melody.

“Soaring in the strings over the last breaths of the blues tune, this long-lined melody moves into ‘Southern Midnight.’ The three distinct textures from the opening return, but now each is brought to life by a phrase of the melody. At the close of this lyrical section we hover in that strange space between night and day, when only the singing of the first bird alerts us to the approaching dawn. But it is a hot, Southern dawn, both sparkling and heavy, with the air made rusty again by the buzzing
cicadas. The bluesy tune begins to creep back into the middle register, while above and below figurations buzz about in different tonalities."

**SAMUEL BARBER**

*Knoxville: Summer of 1915, Op. 24*

Samuel Barber was born in West Chester, Pennsylvania in 1910, and died in New York in 1981. He composed this work in 1947, and it was first performed the following year by Eleanor Steber with the Boston Symphony conducted by Serge Koussevitzky. The score calls for soprano, flute, piccolo, oboe, English horn, clarinet, bassoon, 2 horns, trumpet, percussion, harp, and strings.

Samuel Barber belonged to that bright young generation of American composers that included Aaron Copland, Walter Piston, William Schuman and others. After Copland, it is Barber whose music retains the most currency today. Most concert-goers will be familiar with the Adagio for Strings, but Barber left a great many works that reward the listener. His music is clear, direct, and expressive. It is also, at its core, profoundly lyrical. Barber was a singer himself, and it’s arguable that his best work is in his music for voices. His sensitivity to the sound and spirit of language was deep; it pays to listen to how he sets every phrase.

The text of Knoxville: Summer of 1915 comes from James Agee’s memoir *A Death In the Family*, a work that reminded Barber of his own childhood. On the surface it is brimming with nostalgia, but underlying it all is an unsettled questioning that undermines its sentimentality. This undertone did not escape Barber’s notice, for he placed the climax of the work at the words “By some chance, here they are, all on this earth; and who shall ever tell the sorrow of being on this earth, lying, on quilts, on the grass, in a summer evening, among the sounds of the night.” Here, and all through this piece, Barber hears the intent of the words, and he writes music that illuminates their meaning from within.

**Gustav Mahler**

*Symphony No. 4 in G-Major*

Gustav Mahler was born in Kalischt, Bohemia, in 1860 and died in Vienna in 1911. The Finale of this work has its origins in a song Mahler composed in 1892; he composed the rest of the symphony between 1899 and 1901. Mahler himself led the Kaim Orchestra of Munich in the premier performance in 1901. As was his habit, he revised the orchestration several times, lastly in 1911. The score calls for soprano soloist, 4 flutes, 2 piccolos, 3 oboes, English horn, 3 clarinets, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, timpani, percussion, harp, and strings.

Mahler had long been fascinated by a collection of folk poetry called Des Knaben Wunderhorn (The Youth’s Magic Horn). Like other romantics, Mahler was drawn by its juxtaposition of moods, ranging from child-like innocence to spooky grotesquerie. Eventually he would set eight Wunderhorn texts for voice and piano and fifteen more for voice and orchestra.

In a way, the Second and Third Symphonies were Mahler’s first two attempts at writing a Wunderhorn symphony. These gargantuan works were, in large part, assemblages of Wunderhorn songs and instrumental movements derived from his previous settings of other Wunderhorn texts. When he revisited these materials in the Fourth Symphony he took a different approach: one of refinement rather than expansion. The Fourth became the apotheosis of the set, distilling the varied Wunderhorn sentiments into a concentrated extract.

The diverse moods of the poetry are reflected in the symphony’s four movements. The opening sleigh bells and wind figures set an eerie stage for Mahler’s “divinely gay and deeply melancholy tune.” In the Scherzo the concertmaster plays a violin with scordatura tuning—its strings are raised by a whole step—and is instructed to play it “like a fiddle.” Mahler originally gave it the macabre subtitle “Freund Hein Spielt Auf!” (“Friend Death Plays On”). Of the Adagio that follows, Mahler told Bruno Walter that his inspiration came from the vision of a church sepulcher and its recumbent stone figures of the dead, “their arms closed in eternal peace.”

The fourth movement had been composed in 1892 and was originally intended to be the finale of the Third Symphony. Mahler deleted it from that work and eventually decided to combine it with three new movements in the Fourth. The Finale’s song is “Das himmlische Leben” (“The Heavenly Life”), a serene and child-like view of Paradise. The singer’s four sections
are punctuated by orchestral ritornelli that recall the symphony’s opening bars. By the time the voice describes the angelic choirs that “lift up our spirits to the highest of heavenly joys,” Mahler has likewise lifted the key center from the expected G-Major to an unusual—but celestial—E-Major.

Mahler revised the Fourth Symphony several times, with each revision bringing a reduction, rather than an augmentation, of the score; as he rounded-off his Wunderhorn period he sought to achieve greater clarity and simplicity. The Fourth is more lightly scored than his previous symphonies, and his pursuit of clarity is reinforced by the symphony’s formal construction: the relative complexity of the movements devolves from an intricate and sophisticated sonata form in the first movement, through a scherzo with two trios, a double-variation Adagio, and finally to a simple song with an orchestral refrain. The first three movements prepare for the Finale not only thematically but also in a progression of decreasing complexity.

The Fourth was received coolly in Mahler’s day, but over time audiences have come to appreciate its direct, personal language and the optimistic innocence of its Finale. Mahler always said that when he composed he felt directed by a higher power: “This time it is a forest with all its mysteries and its horrors which forces my hand and weaves itself into my work. It becomes even clearer to me that one does not compose, but is being composed.” As a chapter in Mahler’s vast musical autobiography, the Fourth Symphony comes as an epilogue to the Wunderhorn symphonies, and it stands as a lucid resting place before the tumult of the next three.

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