HARTFORD SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA®

DEBUSSY & RAVEL - Copy

Friday, November 4, 2022 - Sunday, November 6, 2022

About the Show

Masterworks Series

HARTFORD SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Carolyn Kuan, music director

DEBUSSY & RAVEL

Friday, November 4, 2022 / 8:00 p.m.
Saturday, November 5, 2022 / 8:00 p.m.
Sunday, November 6, 2022 / 3:00 p.m.
Belding Theater, The Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts

CAROLYN KUAN, conductor
ALESSIO BAX, piano

MASON BATES **(b. 1977)**	*Liquid Interface* Glaciers Calving Scherzo Liquido Crescent City On the Wannsee
MAURICE RAVEL **(1875-1937)**	Piano Concerto for the Left Hand **Alessio Bax,** piano

-INTERMISSION-

CLAUDE DEBUSSY **(1862-1918)**	*Clair de lune*
CLAUDE DEBUSSY **(1862-1918)**	*Nocturnes* Nuages (Clouds) Fêtes (Festivals) Sirènes (Sirens)

The post of Music Director is endowed by The Beatrice Fox Auerbach Foundation.

Cameras and recording equipment are not permitted during the performance.

As a courtesy to the performers and other audience members, please turn off watch alarms and cell phones.

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Program Notes

Mason Bates (Born January 23, 1977 in Philadelphia)

Liquid Interface (2006-2007)

World Premiere: *February 22, 2007*
Most Recent HSO Performance: *April 9, 2017*

Instrumentation: *3 flutes all doubling on piccolo, 3 oboes with third oboe doubling on English horn, 3 clarinets with third clarinet doubling on E-flat clarinet and bass clarinet, 3 bassoons with third bassoon doubling on contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, electronica, bass drum, sizzle cymbal, hi-hat, snare drum, drum set, triangle, tamtam, glockenspiel, xylophone, marimba, vibraphone, chimes, crotales, bongos, castanets, wind machine, suspended cymbal, ride cymbal, splash cymbal, 2 harmonics, guitar, musical glasses, washboard, harp, piano, and strings: violin I, violin II, viola, cello, and bass*

Duration: *24'*

Mason Bates brings not only his own fresh talent to the concert hall but also the musical sensibilities of a new generation — he is equally at home composing “for Lincoln Center,” according to his web site (www.masonbates.com), as being the “electronica artist Masonic® who moved to the San Francisco Bay Area from New York City, where he was a lounge DJ at such venues as The Frying Pan — the floating rave ship docked off the pier near West 22nd Street.”

Bates was born in Philadelphia in 1977 and started studying piano with Hope Armstrong Erb at his childhood home in Richmond, Virginia. He earned degrees in both English literature and music composition in the joint program of Columbia University and the Juilliard School, where his composition teachers included John Corigliano, David Del Tredici and Samuel Adler, and received his doctorate in composition from the University of California, Berkeley in 2008 as a student of Edmund Campion and Jorge Lidermann. Bates was Resident Composer with the California Symphony from 2008 to 2011, Project San Francisco Artist-in-Residence with the San Francisco Symphony in 2011-2012, and Composer of the Year with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra in 2012-2013; he held a residency with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra from 2010 to 2015, and was the first-ever Composer-in-Residence at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. from 2015 to 2020. He also teaches in the Technology and Applied Composition Program of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music.

Bates' rapidly accumulating portfolio of orchestral, chamber, vocal, theatrical, film (notably Gus Van Sant's 2014 *The Sea of Trees* starring Matthew McConaughey and Naomi Watts) and electronic compositions includes commissions and performances by the major orchestras of London, Lisbon, New York, Washington, Atlanta, Toronto, Phoenix, San Francisco, Oakland, Annapolis, Los Angeles, Miami and Detroit, the Tanglewood, Aspen, Cabrillo and Spoleto USA festivals, Biava Quartet, Chanticleer and New Juilliard Ensemble. In 2010, Bates was commissioned to write *Mothership* for the second concert of the YouTube Symphony Orchestra, an ensemble composed of musicians from around the world who were selected through on-line auditions by Michael Tilson Thomas, the project's director and conductor, and assembled in Sydney, Australia for rehearsals and a live concert on March 20, 2011 streamed on the internet; the first YouTube Symphony Orchestra concert had been held in New York in 2009. Bates' *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs*, premiered by Santa Fe Opera in July 2017, received the 2019 Grammy Award for Best Opera, and is scheduled for productions in Atlanta, Austin and Kansas City; Bates is currently at work on The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay for the Metropolitan Opera with librettist Gene Scheer. Another recent project is Philharmonia Fantastique, which uses a hybrid of animation and live-action filming to look at — and in — orchestral instruments as they are being played. Philharmonia Fantastique, developed with director and sound designer Gary Rydstrom and animator Jim Capobianco, was commissioned by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Dallas Symphony Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony and American Youth Symphony, and is scheduled for upcoming live performances as well as theatrical release.

In addition to being recognized as the most-performed American composer of his generation and named "2018 Composer of the Year" by *Musical America*, Bates has received a Charles Ives Scholarship and Fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Guggenheim Fellowship, Jacob Druckman Memorial Prize from the Aspen Music Festival, ASCAP and BMI awards, a Fellowship from the Tanglewood Music Center, Rome Prize, Berlin Prize, a two-year Composer Residency with Young Concert Artists, and the 2012 Heinz Award in Arts and Humanities.

Mason Bates is also an ardent and effective advocate for bringing new music to new spaces, “whether,” he explained, “through institutional partnerships such as the residency with the Chicago Symphony’s MusicNOW series, or through the project *Mercury Soul*, which has transformed spaces ranging from commercial clubs to Frank Gehry-designed concert halls into exciting, hybrid musical events drawing over a thousand people. *Mercury Soul*, a collaboration with director Anne Patterson and conductor Benjamin Schwartz, embeds sets of classical music into an evening of DJing and beautiful, surreal visuals.”

Bates wrote of *Liquid Interface*, composed in 2006-2007 on a commission from the National Symphony Orchestra and premiered on February 22, 2007 at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. conducted by Leonard Slatkin, “Water has influenced countless musical endeavors — Debussy’s *La Mer* and Wagner’s *Siegfried’s Rhine Journey* quickly come to mind — but it was only after living on Berlin’s enormous Lake Wannsee that I became consumed with a new take on the idea. Over the course of barely two months, I watched this huge body of water transform from an ice sheet thick enough to support sausage venders to a refreshing swimming destination heavy with humidity. If the play of the waves inspired Debussy, then what about water in its variety of forms?

“*Liquid Interface* moves through all of them, inhabiting an increasingly hotter world in each progressive movement. *Glaciers Calving* opens with huge blocks of sound drifting slowly upwards through the orchestra, finally cracking off in the upper register. (Snippets of actual recordings of glaciers breaking into the Antarctic, supplied by the adventurous radio journalist Daniel Grossman, appear at the opening.) As the thaw continues, these sonic blocks melt into aqueous, blurry figuration. The beats of the electronics evolve from slow trip-hop into energetic drum ’n’ bass, and at the movement’s climax the orchestra blazes in turbulent figuration. The ensuing *Scherzo Liquido* explores water on a micro-level: droplets splash from the speakers in the form of a variety of nimble electronica beats, with the orchestra swirling around them.

“The temperature continues to rise as we move into *Crescent City*, which examines the destructive force as water grows from the small-scale to the enormous. This is illustrated in a theme-and-variations form in which the opening melody, at first quiet and lyrical, gradually accumulates a trail of echoing figuration behind it. In a nod to New Orleans, which knows the power of water all too well, the instruments trail the melody in a re-imagination of Dixieland swing. As the improvisatory sound of a dozen soloists begins to lose control, verging into big-band territory, the electronics — silent in this movement until now — enter in the form of a distant storm. At the peak of the movement, with an enormous wake of figuration swirling behind the soaring melody, the orchestra is buried in an electronic hurricane of processed storm sounds. We are swept into the muffled depths of the ocean. This water-covered world, which relaxes into a kind of balmy, greenhouse paradise, is where the symphony ends with *On the Wannsee*. A simple, lazy tune bends in the strings above ambient sounds recorded at a dock on Lake Wannsee. Gentle beats echo quietly in the moist heat. At near-pianissimo throughout, the melody floats lazily upwards through the humidity and, at the work’s end, finally evaporates.”

Maurice Ravel (Born March 7, 1875 in Ciboure, Basses-Pyrénées, France Died December 28, 1937 in Paris)

Concerto for the Left Hand for Piano and Orchestra (1929-1930) Maurice Ravel

World Premiere: *January 5, 1932*
Most Recent HSO Performance: *December 1983*

Instrumentation: *Solo piano, 3 flutes with third flute doubling on piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, snare drum, triangle, tamtam, woodblock, harp, and strings: violin I, violin II, viola, cello, and bass*

Duration: *19'*

Maurice Ravel made a triumphant tour of America as pianist and conductor in 1928. Plans were begun almost immediately for a second foray into the New World, and Ravel started work on a piano concerto in 1929 that was to be the centerpiece of the venture. While he was at work on what became the Concerto in G, however, he was asked to compose another concerto by the pianist Paul Wittgenstein, brother of the eminent Austrian philosopher, Ludwig, who was determined to continue his concert career despite the loss of his right arm during the First World War. Wittgenstein had transcribed several piano works for his own performance for left hand alone, and had commissioned new pieces from some of the era's most distinguished composers — Strauss, Prokofiev, Franz Schmidt, Britten, Hindemith, Korngold. Ravel was intrigued by Wittgenstein's sincerity and by the challenge of the project, and he accepted the proposal. He laid aside the concerto in progress, and took up the new score with enthusiasm.

There were few models for Ravel's task. Saint-Saëns had written *Les Six Etudes pour la main gauche* and Leopold Godowsky had produced *Transcriptions for the Left Hand Alone of the Chopin Etudes*. Alkan and Liapunov had also written left hand studies, and Stravinsky may have brought Scriabin's *Prelude and Nocturne* to Ravel's attention, but Ravel was prowling largely in unexplored territory. Mindful that the Concerto in G was still lying unfinished in his desk, he recalled in later years, "It was an interesting experiment to conceive and to realize simultaneously the two concertos. The first ... is a concerto in the most exact sense of the term and is written in the spirit of Mozart and Saint-Saëns.... The Concerto for the Left Hand is of a rather different character." Like Brahms in the *Tragic* and *Academic Festival Overtures* and Beethoven in the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, with these Concertos Ravel composed at the same time a pair of works that are very unlike in form and content. The Concerto in G is brilliant and showy, a piece following the traditional 18th-century, Classical concept of the genre. In contrast, the Left Hand Concerto derives from the intense drama and romanticism of Liszt and the grand gestures of 19th-century music. Laurence Davies

allowed that it is “possibly the most serious work in Ravel’s entire catalogue.” Henry Prunières felt the Left Hand Concerto disclosed “what Ravel had implacably banished from the other Concerto” — sentiment. “And sentiment had taken its revenge for this long exile; it lights up the work magnificently and sometimes almost romantically.”

When Ravel first presented the work to Wittgenstein, the pianist could not hide a certain initial disappointment: “I wasn’t overwhelmed by the composition. It always takes me a while to grow into a difficult work. I supposed Ravel was disappointed and I was sorry, but I had never learned to pretend.” His evaluation was to change, though, and eventually he said, “Only much later, after I’d studied the work for months, did I become fascinated by it and realize what a great work it was.” Composer and pianist continued to have misunderstandings over the Left Hand Concerto, however. Wittgenstein altered Ravel’s meticulously prepared score to make some of the effects more brilliant, and he was called to task for his “improvements.” “Performers must not be slaves,” Wittgenstein argued. “Performers *are* slaves,” Ravel insisted. An uneasy truce settled over their relationship, but Ravel chose as his favored performer of the Concerto Jacques Février, the son of a chum from his Conservatoire days, whom the composer tutored and advised on the performance and recording of the work. Wittgenstein continued to concertize, with the Ravel Concerto as one of his principal vehicles. He settled in New York in 1939, where he lived until his death in 1961.

The two piano concertos were Ravel’s last major works. (The Concerto in G was finished a few months after the Left Hand Concerto.) He took great care in the construction of the solo part of the Left Hand Concerto so that, as he said, “the listener must never have the feeling that more could have been achieved with two hands,” and most performers agree that the writing generally lies better for one hand than it does in the version created for two hands by Alfred Cortot. Of the work’s musical nature, Ravel wrote, “It contains many jazz effects, and the writing is not as light [as the Concerto in G]. In a work of this kind, it is essential to give the impression of a texture no thinner than that of a part written for both hands. For the same reason, I have resorted to a style that is much nearer to that of the more solemn kind of traditional concerto. A special feature is that, after a first section in this traditional style, a sudden change occurs and the jazz music begins. Only later does it become manifest that the jazz music is built on the same theme as the opening part.”

The Left Hand Concerto is in three sections. The opening rises from a barely audible rumbling of the lowest instruments during which two thematic cells are presented: the first, with its snapping rhythmic figures, is intoned by the contrabassoon; the other, appearing in the eighth measure, is a smooth melody presented by the horns in octaves. (It is this second motive on which the “jazz music” of the central section is based.) The two themes are interwoven to achieve a crashing climax from the full orchestra after which the soloist emerges with a cadenza based on the snapping-rhythm theme. Most of the remainder of the opening section is given over to further orchestral elaborations of this melody, with florid figurations from the soloist. The central, “jazzy” section is driving in rhythm and brilliantly brittle in sonority. A scherzo-like strain and a cheeky tune piped by the high woodwinds are followed by the recall of the smooth melody of the beginning, here entrusted to the solo bassoon and then the

solo trombone. The jaunty scherzo resumes, but is brought to a sudden halt by a silence and the return of the snapping opening theme in a bold setting for full orchestra. A sweeping cadenza and closing flourishes from the orchestra bring this masterwork of Ravel's maturity to a powerful conclusion.

Claude Debussy (Born August 2, 1862 in St. Germain-en-Laye, near Paris Died March 25, 1918 in Paris) Arranged (1939) by Lucien Cailliet (1891-1985)

"Clair de Lune" ("Moonlight") from Suite Bergamasque (1890)

World Premiere: *June 1905 (first publication)*
Most Recent HSO Performance: *February 1996*

Instrumentation: *2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, harp, celeste, and strings: violin I, violin II, viola, cello, and bass*

Duration: *5'*

The title that Debussy chose for himself — *musicien français* — points directly to the heart of his music and the center of his philosophy of art. His entire career as composer and critic was dedicated to finding a uniquely French musical language, free of the Germanic influence he believed had dominated Gallic composers since the late 18th century. He therefore sought to revive the old, long-dormant traditions of French Renaissance and Baroque music, though more for their spirit than for their techniques and forms. "French music is all clearness, elegance; simple, natural declamation," he wrote. "The aim of French music is, before all, to please. The musical genius of France may be described as a fantasy of the senses." He viewed the two greatest masters of French Baroque music — Jean Philippe Rameau and François Couperin — as the lodestars guiding his quest. The evaluation he gave in 1912 of Rameau might very well have been written about himself: "Rameau's major contribution to music was that he knew how to find 'sensibility' within harmony; and that he succeeded in capturing effects of color and certain nuances that, before his time, musicians had not clearly understood."

During his early years, Debussy turned to the refined style of Couperin and Rameau for inspiration in his instrumental music, and several of his works from that time are modeled on the Baroque dance suite, including the *Suite Bergamasque*. The composition's title derives from the generic term for the dances of the district of Bergamo, in northern Italy, which found many realizations in the instrumental music of the 17th and 18th centuries. The rustic inhabitants of Bergamo were said to have been the model for the character of Harlequin, the buffoon of the Italian *commedia dell'arte*, which became the most popular theatrical genre in France during the time of Couperin and Rameau. Several of Watteau's best-known paintings take the *commedia dell'arte* as their subject. The poet Paul Verlaine (1844-1896) evoked the bittersweet, pastel

world of Watteau and the *commedia dell'arte* with his atmospheric, evanescent verses, which Debussy began setting as early as 1880. In 1882, he wrapped the words of Verlaine's *Clair de Lune* ("*Moonlight*") with music, and made another setting of it a decade later as the third song of his first series of *Fêtes galantes*:

Your soul is a rare landscape
with charming maskers and mummers ['masques et bergamasques']
playing the lute and dancing, almost
sad beneath their fantastic disguises.

While singing in minor mode
of victorious love and life in its season,
they do not seem to believe in their happiness,
and their song mingles with the moonlight.

With the calm moonlight, sad and lovely,
that sets the birds in the trees to dreaming,
and the fountains to sobbing in ecstasy,
the great fountains, svelte among the marbles.

Debussy best captured the nocturnal essence of Verlaine's poem not in his two vocal settings, however, but in the famous (and musically unrelated) *Clair de Lune* that serves as the third movement of his *Suite Bergamasque*, composed in 1890 and revised for publication in 1905.

The orchestral arrangement of *Clair de Lune* is by Lucien Cailliet (1891-1985), who studied at the Conservatory of Dijon in his native France before coming to America in 1918 to play clarinet in the Philadelphia Orchestra. He arranged many pieces for concert band and orchestra during his two decades with that ensemble, and continued his work as one of the country's leading arrangers and orchestrators after leaving Philadelphia in 1937 while also teaching at Interlochen and the University of Southern California, conducting the orchestra of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and the Kenosha Symphony Orchestra, and scoring several movies.

Claude Debussy

Nocturnes for Orchestra (1897-1899)

World Premiere: *October 27, 1901*
Most Recent HSO Performance: *March 2, 2005*

Instrumentation: *3 flutes with third flute doubling on piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, 3 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, field drum, cymbals, 2 harps, and strings: violin I, violin II, viola, cello, and bass*

Duration: *25'*

The origin of Debussy's *Nocturnes* is cloudy. It is possible that he may have conceived the three movements of the work, and perhaps made some sketches, as early as 1892, when he was considering a tour to the United States proposed by one Prince Poniatowski. He informed the Prince that a piece called "'Trois Scènes au Crépuscule' ('*Three Scenes at Twilight*'), [was] almost finished, that is to say that the orchestration is entirely laid out and it is simply a question of writing out the score." This work, if it ever came into existence, seems to have completely disappeared, though it is rumored that a fragment has been locked away in private hands for years. The inspiration for this music was a set of ten poems (published in 1890) by Henri de Régnier, a symbolist poet and close associate of Mallarmé. (It was Régnier who approached Mallarmé with Debussy's request to base a work on his *Prélude à l'apres-midi d'un faune*.) Régnier's verses, collectively titled *Poèmes anciens et romanesques*, are, according to Edward Lockspeiser's study of Debussy, "the product of an imaginary theatre of the mind in which action is sacrificed to poetic associations." The images evoked are dream-like and ritualistic and were well suited to Debussy's ideal of a music "made up of colors and rhythms ... [rather than] something that can be poured into a tight and traditional form." Debussy's "Scenes at Twilight" have apparently faded into darkness, though they were the earliest evidence of the thoughts that eventually became the *Nocturnes*.

On December 29, 1893, the Ysaÿe Quartet introduced Debussy's String Quartet in G minor in Paris. The Belgian musician Eugene Ysaÿe was one of the great violinists of the time, and Debussy was impressed with his abilities and flattered by his interest in the young composer's music. In September 1894 Debussy wrote to Ysaÿe offering him a three-movement piece for solo violin and orchestra, recast from the earlier "Scenes at Twilight," which was "an experiment with the different shades that can be obtained from one color — like a study in gray in painting." Debussy specified that "the orchestration of the first movement is for strings, the second for flutes, four horns, three trumpets and two harps, while the third combines both these groupings." Debussy was also busy at the time with the composition of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, and it was two years before he was again able to approach Ysaÿe, imploring him to accept the concerted piece for his exclusive performance. Though the work for Ysaÿe never reached final form, Debussy remained interested in such a composition, and was still considering a "Poème" for solo violin and orchestra as late as 1914.

The final shaping of the *Nocturnes* began in 1897. The influences of Régnier's symbolist poetry and the orchestral sonority of the music intended for Ysaÿe melded with yet another one, recorded by Léon Vallas in his biography of the composer: "One day, in stormy weather, as Debussy was crossing the Pont de la Concorde in Paris with his friend Paul Poujaud, he told him that on a similar kind of day the idea of the symphonic work *Nuages* ['*Clouds*'] had occurred to him: he had visualized those very thunder-clouds swept along by a stormy wind; a boat passing, with its horn sounding. These two impressions are recalled in the languorous succession of chords and by the short chromatic theme on the English horn." Debussy went on to explain to Poujaud

that *Fêtes* ("*Festivals*") had been inspired by a recollection of merry-making in the Bois de Boulogne, with noisy crowds watching the drum and bugle corps of the Garde Nationale pass in parade. The finale (*Sirènes* —"*Sirens*"), which includes women's chorus though they sing without text, derives from *L'Homme et la Sirène* by Henri de Régnier, a symbolist poet and close associate of Mallarmé. The title of the entire cycle — *Nocturnes* — and the idea for its tone-color painting may have been taken from the work of James McNeill Whistler, the American-born artist who lived in Paris and London for most of his life and whose best-known work, a portrait of his mother, was formally entitled by him *Arrangement in Gray and Black, No. 1*. All of these streams — poetic, visual, sensual, sonorous — flowed into the three *Nocturnes*.

Debussy worked for two years finishing the *Nocturnes*. On September 16, 1898 he wrote to the publisher Georges Hartmann that these three orchestral pieces were giving him more trouble than all the five acts of *Pelléas*. He wanted to follow the sensation created in 1894 by his *Prélude à l'apres-midi d'un faune* with an equally stunning orchestral work, but one that would also fulfill his grand, *avant-garde* view of the art. "I love music passionately, and because I love it I try to free it from the barren traditions that stifle it," he proclaimed. "It is a free art, gushing forth — an open-air art, an art boundless as the elements, the wind, the sky, the sea! It must never be shut in and become an academic art." Even after Hartmann published the work in 1899, Debussy continued to refine his vision by touching up the orchestration in his personal copy of the score for years thereafter. These changes were incorporated into the definitive version of the work issued in 1930.

The first two of the *Nocturnes* were given in Paris at the Lamoureux concert of December 9, 1900. Though they were unanimously hailed in the press, the critics were hard put to offer much technical explanation of this music in such an unprecedented style. Pierre de Bréville's comments for the *Mercure de France* were typical: "It is *pure music*, conceived beyond the limits of reality, in the world of dreams, among the ever-moving architecture that God builds with mists, the marvelous creations of the impalpable realms." Later writers have continued trying to describe this ineffable music. Among the most pointed observation is Olin Downes' summation that "Debussy was supremely the artist capable of selecting the instant of pure beauty and transfixing it on his tonal canvas for eternity."

Debussy himself caught the delicate blending of reality and imagination in the poetic description of his *Nocturnes* that he provided for the work's first complete performance, on October 27, 1901:

"The title *Nocturnes* is intended to have here a more general and, more particularly, a more decorative meaning. It is not meant to designate the usual form of a nocturne, but rather all the impressions and the special effects of light that the word suggests.

"*Clouds*: the unchanging aspect of the sky and the slow and solemn march of clouds fading away in gray tones slightly tinged with white.

“*Festivals*: vibrating, dancing rhythm, with sudden flashes of light. There is also the episode of a procession (a dazzling, fantastic vision) passing through the festive scene and becoming blended with it; but the background remains persistently the same: the festival with its blending of music and luminous dust participating in the universal rhythm of things.

“*Sirens*: the sea and its endless rhythms; then amid the billows silvered by the moon, the mysterious song of the Sirens is heard; it laughs and passes.”

Artist Biography

Alessio Bax

Combining exceptional lyricism and insight with consummate technique, Alessio Bax is without a doubt “among the most remarkable young pianists now before the public” (Gramophone). He catapulted to prominence with First Prize wins at both the Leeds and Hamamatsu International Piano Competitions, and is now a familiar face on five continents, not only as a recitalist and chamber musician, but also as a concerto soloist who has appeared with more than 150 orchestras, including the London, Royal, and St. Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestras, the New York, Boston, Dallas, Cincinnati, Seattle, Sydney, and City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestras, and the NHK Symphony in Japan, collaborating with such eminent conductors as Marin Alsop, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Sir Andrew Davis, Fabio Luisi, Sir Simon Rattle, Yuri Temirkanov, and Jaap van Zweden.

Bax constantly explores many facets of his career. He released his eleventh Signum Classics album, Italian Inspirations, whose program was also the vehicle for his solo recital debut at New York’s 92nd Street Y as well as on tour. He recently debuted with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, playing Schumann Concerto and the Seattle Symphony with Saint-Saëns’ Second Piano Concerto and embarked on a trio tour of Spain with violinist Joshua Bell and cellist Steven Isserlis. Bax and his regular piano duo partner, Lucille Chung, gave recitals at New York’s Lincoln Center and were featured with the St. Louis Symphony and Stéphane Denève. He has also toured extensively with Joshua Bell and presented the complete works of Beethoven for cello and piano with cellist Paul Watkins in New York City.

Bax revisited Mozart’s K. 491 and K. 595 concertos, as heard on Alessio Bax Plays Mozart, for his recent debuts with the Boston and Melbourne Symphonies, both with Sir Andrew Davis, and with the Sydney Symphony, which he led himself from the keyboard. In addition, Bax made his solo recital debut at London’s Wigmore Hall, and

give concerts at L.A.'s Disney Hall, Washington's Kennedy Center, and New York's Carnegie Hall.

As a renowned chamber musician, he recently collaborated with Joshua Bell, Ian Bostridge, Lucille Chung, Steven Isserlis, Daishin Kashimoto, Sergei Nakariakov, Emmanuel Pahud, Lawrence Power, Jean- Guihen Queyras, Paul Watkins and Tabea Zimmermann.

Since 2017 he has been the Artistic Director of the Incontri in Terra di Siena Festival, a Summer Music Festival in the Val d'Orcia region of Tuscany. He appears regularly in festivals such as Seattle, Bravo Vail, Salon-de-Provence, Le Pont in Japan, Great Lakes, Verbier, Ravinia and Music@Menlo.

In 2009, he was awarded an Avery Fisher Career Grant, and four years later he received both the Andrew Wolf Chamber Music Award and the Lincoln Center Award for Emerging Artists.

Bax's celebrated Signum Classics discography includes Beethoven's "Hammerklavier" and "Moonlight" Sonatas (a Gramophone "Editor's Choice"); Beethoven's "Emperor" Concerto; Bax & Chung, a duo disc with Lucille Chung; Alessio Bax plays Mozart, recorded with London's Southbank Sinfonia; Alessio Bax: Scriabin & Mussorgsky (named "Recording of the Month … and quite possibly … of the year" by MusicWeb International); Alessio Bax plays Brahms (a Gramophone "Critics' Choice"); Bach Transcribed; and Rachmaninov: Preludes & Melodies (an American Record Guide "Critics' Choice 2011"). Recorded for Warner Classics, his Baroque Reflections album was also a Gramophone "Editor's Choice." He performed Beethoven's "Hammerklavier" Sonata for Daniel Barenboim in the PBS-TV documentary Barenboim on Beethoven: Masterclass, available on DVD from EMI.

At the record age of 14, Bax graduated with top honors from the conservatory of Bari, his hometown in Italy, and after further studies in Europe, he moved to the United States in 1994. A Steinway artist, he lives in New York City with pianist Lucille Chung and their daughter, Mila. He was invited to join the piano faculty of Boston's New England Conservatory in the fall of 2019.