

Wires

Bryce Dessner

Bryce Dessner has performed widely as a member of the indie rock band The National, which he and his twin brother, Aaron, founded in 2001. The National won the 2018 Best Alternative Album Grammy for their recording *Sleep Well Beast*. He is also a member of Clogs, a quartet of instrumentalists who met in the late 1990s when they were all students at Yale, where Dessner was pursuing his master's degree at the Yale School of Music.

He gained widespread acclaim for the score he co-wrote (with Ryuichi Sakamoto and Alva Noto) for Alejandro González Iñárritu's film *The Revenant*, released in 2016. His most recent film projects are the scores for *The Kitchen*, released this August, and *The Two Popes*, which will be distributed in limited release in the United States later this month.

Apart from his own work in rock music, Dessner has contributed orchestrations for recordings by the likes of Paul Simon and Bon Iver. He has also collaborated with such classical figures as mezzo-soprano Kelley O'Connor and has received commissions from the Orchestre de Paris, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Carnegie Hall, and the Kronos Quartet. He will be one of the eight creative advisers to conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen when he assumes the post of music director of the San Francisco Symphony in 2020.

In 2019 Gautier Capuçon and his seven-cello ensemble premiered Dessner's *The Forest*, commissioned by the Fondation Louis Vuitton; the Australian Chamber Orchestra toured with his *Réponse Lutostawski*; and the Los Angeles Philharmonic and Roomful of Teeth premiered his theater piece *Trip-tych (Eyes of One on Another)*, which integrates Robert Mapplethorpe photographs with the musical score. In New York, The Metropolitan Museum featured the song

Death is Elsewhere (co-written by Dessner) in one of its first-ever contemporary installations. His latest albums were also released in 2019: *When We Are Inhuman* (a collaborative album involving Dessner, Bonnie "Prince" Billy, and the ensemble Eighth Blackbird); *Tenebre*, an album of his string compositions performed by Ensemble Resonanz; and *El Chan*, which includes his Concerto for Two Pianos played by Katia and Marielle Labèque and the London Philharmonic. That doesn't count the most recent release from The National, *I Am Easy to Find*, its music composed by Dessner and his brother Aaron; it is accompanied by a film directed by Mike Mills, starring Swedish actress Alicia Vikander.

Dessner is deeply involved in collaborative creations, which include the 2017 ballet *No Tomorrow* (created with artists Ragnar Kjartansson and Margrét Bjarnadóttir), which was awarded Iceland's Gríman Award. And while this is the first time the New York Philharmonic has performed his music at David Geffen Hall, *Wave Movements* — his collaboration with Richard Reed Parry of the band Arcade Fire — was presented at its new

In Short

Born: April 23, 1976, in Cincinnati, Ohio

Resides: in Paris, France

Work composed: 2016

World premiere: September 24, 2016, at the Philharmonie de Paris, by Ensemble Intercontemporain, Matthias Pintscher, conductor, with the composer as soloist

New York Philharmonic premiere: these performances, which mark the work's New York Premiere

Estimated duration: ca. 14 minutes

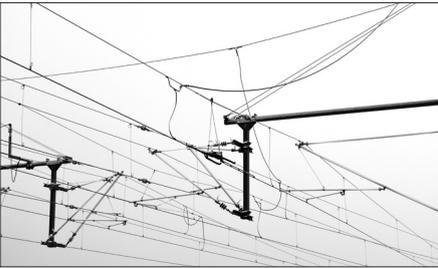
music series in 2015. He has programmed festivals and events at the Barbican in London, the Philharmonie de Paris, and Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie. He co-founded and curates the festivals MusicNOW in Cincinnati, Haven in Copenhagen, Sounds from a Safe Harbour in Cork, Ireland, and PEOPLE in Berlin.

Although *Wires* includes a prominent part for electric guitar, it is not a concerto but rather employs that instrument as a conspicuous participant in the orchestral texture, almost always part of the action, sometimes playing an entirely independent part, sometimes doubling lines with other instruments. The single-movement piece is cast in four connected sections. The first is at moderate tempo, the second ramps up to a slightly faster speed (marked "aggressive, unsettled"), and the third is headed "slower, guitar solo." The fourth speeds up considerably, with guitar and other instruments intoning rapidly

repeated rhythmic patterns before the piece concludes in a calm coda that escalates in a huge crescendo before leaving the audience listening to lingering tones die away. "It doesn't necessarily have any subject matter," Dessner said in an interview with Nadia Sirota, the New York Philharmonic's Marie-Josée Kravis Creative Partner. "I was thinking just about [how] instead of sending e-mails we used to send wires." Something suggesting telegraphic transmission certainly resides in the rhythms of the fourth section.

Instrumentation: two flutes (one doubling piccolo), oboe, two clarinets (one doubling bass clarinet), two bassoons, horn, trumpet, trombone, tuba, timpani, crotales, orchestra bells, xylophone, vibraphone, marimba, chimes, two triangles, wood blocks, bass drum, tom-toms, drum kit (with brake drum), tam-tam, harp, piano, electric guitar, and strings.

Listen for . . . *Wires*, Acoustic and Electric



Bryce Dessner's publisher has provided this comment about *Wires*:

The focus of the piece is quite literally wires: wires that connect us, wires that make sound, and wires that separate us from one another. Three wired instruments stand in the foreground of this triple chamber concerto: the electric guitar, the harp, and the piano.

Needless to say, electric guitar is not a standard part of the orchestra. In this New York Premiere of *Wires*, Dessner becomes the first solo artist on electric guitar to appear with the New York Philharmonic in a work written specifically for orchestral forces, not a pop or jazz arrangement. (*Wires* was premiered in a version for chamber orchestra, but the score allows for expansion of the strings to full orchestral size, as performed here.) Yet it is not a true concerto, but rather a piece that attempts to move the electric guitar out from its typical confines to explore how it can be integrated with its acoustical counterparts. In its review of Dessner's April 2018 performance of *Wires* with the Munich Chamber Orchestra, newspaper *Münchener Merkur* wrote that the composer / performer "emancipates the electric guitar from the noise generator," demonstrating the "soloistic modulation ability of the guitar. He cleverly combines styles, alienates them, creates new ones. A strong composition with a very strong fortissimo ending." (For more on Bryce Dessner's work and influences, see *Out on the Wires*, page 12.)