



PROM AND BASS

The Proms have asked Goldie, the drum and bass artist and star of last year's *Maestro*, to pen an orchestral piece. **Nina Large** finds out how he's getting on...

After the success of last summer's BBC TV series *Maestro*, even Granny might be able to name a drum and bass artist. Back in August, Goldie and his trademark gold teeth took to our screens to learn to conduct and to battle it out against seven other celebrities. Despite his punchy, powerful final performance of Beethoven's Fifth, Goldie came second (comedian Sue Perkins waving the winning baton) but the experience has given him a taste for more. So this summer he's back – not on the podium, but as the composer of a Proms commission and the subject of a two-part documentary on BBC One charting his composing journey.

Is this a serious undertaking, or an exercise in popular entertainment, I ask him? Not one to mince his words, Goldie makes it clear he means business. 'People may have expected me to make a token drum and bass (D&B) record with an orchestra playing on top of it,' he tells us, 'but if I did I might as well have stabbed myself in the neck.'

There's a snag, though. Despite being a major D&B pioneer, Goldie can't read or notate music. Composing for a full symphony orchestra will require a new approach... plus some help from a few friends. Led by Ivor Setterfield, Goldie's conducting mentor from *Maestro*, various expert teachers are using a variety of techniques including encouraging Goldie to sing into a dictaphone and recording and mixing ideas. On one day, a whole orchestra was assembled to show Goldie the palette of instruments as his disposal.

'At first I was daunted by it,' he admits. 'In my D&B world I have blocks of text and colours – like bubbles of sound – but this is

GETTY, BBC



MAESTRO MENTOR:
Ivor Setterfield shows Goldie an up-beat

'People are gonna want to hear it again and again'

different because these bubbles have notes inside them and you have to make them work together. People in my world know my language. Ivor knows it now; one look and he knows what I am asking for. I couldn't do it without these guys.'

Composer Anna Meredith, who wrote a work for last year's Last Night (see p106), suggested one of her own compositional techniques – making a visual map of the

work. Goldie liked the idea and it provided the same anchorage that a score might for a traditional composer. Goldie's 'score' is several metres long, and shows the piece's structure and orchestration, with symbols and colours.

With a collaboration that involves so many different people, the question arises: when does the work stop being Goldie's alone? Setterfield treads carefully: 'The trouble is if it sounds very good, people will say he didn't write it. No, he couldn't physically put the notes down on the page, but if he's saying "I want a lower note" and then sings the note – then he is the composer.'

QUICK GUIDE TO GOLDIE



WHO IS HE?

Born Clifford Joseph Price, 19 September 1965, to Jamaican and Scottish parents. He started off as a graffiti artist in the West Midlands and later moved

to New York and Miami where he sold grills (gold teeth) – now his trademark.

WHAT DOES HE DO?

He is an electronic musician, disc jockey, artist and actor. He is a major pioneer of the drum and bass and jungle music genres, and has helped to promote them worldwide.

WHAT SHOULD I LISTEN TO?

Start with the 1995 *Timeless* – his pioneering, expansive disc which is still hailed by many as not only Goldie's best work, but the finest ever drum and bass album.



ON TOP OF THINGS:
Goldie gets to know the score; (below) in *Maestro*, where he came second



Key to the whole process has been the notation software *Sibelius*, which enables a composer to hear what he's written by arranging it into an orchestral score. What would the classical purists make of *that*? 'Do you think for one second that if Beethoven had *Sibelius* he would write everything down?' suggests Goldie. In the electronic world, music can be created in a moment – it's this immediacy that Goldie believes has driven the genre so far forward – and the instant results that *Sibelius* offers are something he thinks classical music needs. 'I find it tragic that there are so many young composers writing all this music and they never get to hear it,' he says. 'If the classical world is going to change, we need something like a regular Friday night concert where you get all the new composers in the land and just hear new pieces of music.'

Bringing his work to orchestral life has been a highlight for Goldie, who describes it as 'alchemy'. There's a sense of an ambition



realised. Since being introduced to the works of Górecki several years ago, he claims that orchestral music has been a part of his psyche, and the rhythmic strength and repetition of US minimalism has become a favourite – Goldie pays homage to John Adams's *Common Tones in Simple Time* in part of his new piece.

You get the feeling that on some level Goldie feels his own music has been misunderstood. When he took his seminal album, *Timeless*, to America, they didn't know which radio station to play it on and

he describes the track 'Sea of Tears' as having 'an orchestra wanting to get out'. His following album included one track, 'Mother', which is a full hour long – a concept that the electronic world couldn't get its head around: 'If I'd been given the freedom, or if it had come from Philip Glass or Steve Reich, maybe people would have said "this is fantastic, let's expand the idea!"'

He may have had his moments but Goldie insists he isn't nervous about the premiere – and the last thing he wants to do is conduct it. 'No way! I couldn't spend nine months doing it and then f*** it up on stage! Not having to conduct means I can concentrate on creating the music. I'm so happy. People are gonna hear it and they're gonna want to hear it again and again.' ■

The documentary 'Classic Goldie' will be broadcast on BBC Two in August
PROMS 21 & 23: 1 & 3 August, 11am-1pm, Goldie's new Darwin-inspired work will be performed at two Proms concerts