
THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

stars and angels: music for harp and strings

William Alwyn *Lyra Angelica*

Barber Adagio for strings

Britten Prelude and Fugue

Georges Lentz Birrung

Karel Husa Pastoral

Verna Lee, harp

David Angell, conductor

2.30 pm, Sunday 20 October 2013

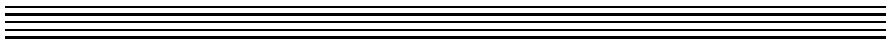
St. Stephen's Church, Newtown

2.00 pm, Sunday 27 October 2013

Boronia Park Uniting Church

Welcome to the Bourbaki Ensemble spring concerts for 2013! We are delighted to welcome back Verna Lee as soloist in our programme of *stars and angels: music for harp and strings* with us. As Newtown locals may already know, St. Stephen's is the perfect Sydney venue for a concert of harp music, the cemetery surrounding the church being the resting place of Nicolas-Charles Bochsa. Born in France in 1789, Bochsa displayed musical talent from an early age, and by his mid-twenties had been appointed official harpist to the Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte. Regrettably, he also developed a distinct aptitude for counterfeiting and forgery, talents which made rapid departure from his homeland a matter of necessity. Settling in London, Bochsa involved himself in a wide range of musical activities. Neither the authorities nor British society, it would seem, felt any inclination to hand him over to the Emperor's courts on account of the still pending forgery charges; but it was another matter when he began a liaison with Anna Bishop, wife of the respected composer Henry Bishop (later the first musician ever to be honoured with a knighthood), and Bochsa was once again on the move. Together with Anna he toured America and Europe; they arrived in Sydney in December 1855, but Bochsa soon passed away and was buried in Camperdown Cemetery. His tomb, pictured on the back cover of the programme booklet, features a broken column and a now barely discernible harp. It is about 50 metres forward and to the left of the main church doors: if you can't find it, ask one of us to show you.

We hope that you will enjoy this afternoon's performance and that you will join us again for Bourbaki Ensemble concerts in 2014. We haven't yet decided on our programmes, but you can count on them including music you are unlikely to have heard before! Details will be available on our website at www.bourbakiensemble.org.



PROGRAMME

Samuel Barber Adagio for Strings

Karel Husa Pastoral, for String Orchestra

Benjamin Britten Prelude and Fugue, Op. 29, for 18-part
string orchestra

INTERVAL

20 minutes

Georges Lentz Birrung, from *Caeli enarrant*... VII, for
eleven strings

William Alwyn *Lyra Angelica*, concerto for harp and
string orchestra

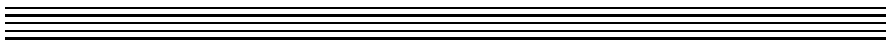
I Adagio

II Adagio ma non troppo

III Moderato

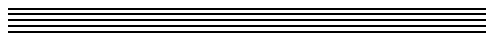
IV Allegro jubiloso

Verna Lee, harp



The string quartet is not a medium which has been greatly favoured by American composers; nevertheless, important quartets have been written by Charles Ives, Elliott Carter, George Crumb and **Samuel Barber** (1910–1981). The *Adagio for Strings* is Barber's own reworking for orchestra of the second movement of his only quartet, written in 1936. The arrangement was suggested by the great conductor Arturo Toscanini, who first performed the work with the NBC Symphony Orchestra in 1938.

As the title implies, the work is slow in tempo from beginning to end. It has often been seen as an expression of profound grief, and was performed in America after the assassination of John F. Kennedy. A different interpretation, however, approaches the work simply as music of unaffected, unselfconscious beauty. A theme is made up of one long note in the violins and a gradually rising passage; it is allowed to expand, passes to other sections of the orchestra, and occasionally is combined in gentle counterpoint with variants of the same material, though more commonly it relies for support on richly scored, slowly changing harmonies. The movement eventually reaches a climax of great intensity, with violins, violas and cellos playing in their highest registers; after a silence, the mood relaxes once more, and the work ends quietly.

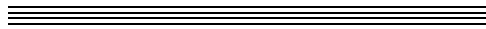


Born in Prague in 1921, the composer **Karel Husa** began his tertiary musical education at that city's Conservatory during the Second World War, no doubt an exceedingly difficult and tense time for study. After the war's end he undertook advanced courses in composition and conducting in Paris; upon completing his study, however, he found that he was no longer welcome in his now Communist-controlled homeland, and since

1954 he has been resident in the USA. His works include numerous items for large orchestral or wind ensembles, as well as a good deal of chamber music. Husa's most acclaimed composition has been *Music for Prague 1968*, a twenty-five-minute piece for concert band in which the composer expresses the distress he felt, watching from America, as the anti-Communist "Prague Spring" movement was crushed by Warsaw Pact troops.

Husa has received a number of significant awards and commissions in his adopted country, among them the 1969 Pulitzer Prize for his third string quartet and the 1993 Grawemeyer Award for his cello concerto. The 1979 *Pastoral* was commissioned by the American String Teachers' Association and was first performed in 1980, with the composer conducting. It frequently employs techniques of bitonal or polytonal counterpoint – that is, the separate instrumental lines, while more or less of traditional shape individually, do not interact with each other in traditional ways. This is most easily heard at the very outset, where the successive entries of first violins, violas and second violins can be heard as belonging to three different keys.

The *Pastoral* falls into three sections: the second, slightly faster than the others, is initiated by a flexible theme for violas, supported by *pizzicato* figures in the other instruments. Overall, the work conveys an undemonstrative expressiveness which composer and writer Douglas Knehan describes as "autumnal". Perhaps we should have programmed it six months ago!



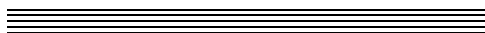
Nowadays, a great number of chamber and small orchestras can be found performing in many cities around the world. It may therefore come as something of a surprise that in the early part of the twentieth century, even in such a great musical centre as London, such ensembles were virtually unknown

at the professional level, which was entirely dominated by the large orchestras required for late nineteenth-century repertoire. The revival of the Baroque chamber orchestra, and the development of its modern counterpart, was at first largely the work of one man. Boyd Neel (1905–1981), by profession a physician and surgeon but by inclination a musician, formed an orchestra from students and recent students of the Royal College of Music and the Royal Academy of Music, and conducted its debut performance in June 1933. Its success was so great that before the year was out, the Boyd Neel London String Orchestra had been invited to give broadcasts on the BBC; not long afterwards Decca offered the group and its young conductor a contract, whereupon Neel abandoned medicine and took up a full-time musical career.

For many years, Baroque orchestral music had been performed, if at all, by immense ensembles, creating an effect in which, one imagines, the composers would scarcely have recognised their own music. Neel and his orchestra, though they continued to perform on modern instruments, can be seen as precursors of today's early music and authentic performance movements. However, they were also keen supporters of contemporary composers both British and overseas, and their relationship with **Benjamin Britten** (1913–1976) was especially close. Neel commissioned the young composer to write his magnificent *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge* for the 1937 Salzburg Festival, and gave the premiere performance of the song cycle *Les Illuminations* in 1940; Britten himself conducted the orchestra, together with soloists Peter Pears and Dennis Brain, in a celebrated recording of the *Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings*. The *Prelude and Fugue* for 18-part string orchestra was composed in 1943, and is dedicated “to BOYD NEEL and his ORCHESTRA on the occasion of their tenth birthday”.

The work consists of a slow prelude followed by a faster fugue, *allegro energico*, concluding with a two-part coda which reprises elements of both prelude and fugue. The prelude begins with high, strongly accentuated phrases for violins, violas and cellos; an unchanging note in the basses is assisted by firm *pizzicati* from the upper parts, whom the composer has granted not even a moment's rest in the gaps punctuating their theme. This soon dissolves into a subdued four-note figure repeated over and over by the whole ensemble but for a soaring solo violin. A tense and mysterious atmosphere is created by the subtly varying lengths of the four-note figure, and by its deliberate misalignment with the solo. A hushed return of the opening music arrives at an eerie chord: the fugue begins without a break.

Each of the eighteen instruments for which the work is written has its own entry in the fugue, taking turns in strict order from the bottom to the top of the orchestra. Thus, we hear the second bass, joined immediately by the first bass; a few moments later the third, second and first cellos are added; subsequently violas and second violins make their appearance, and the six parts of first violins complete the texture. Within each section, every entry is identical in rhythm with the preceding one but a little higher in pitch: the effect is not unlike the “close-harmony” arrangements beloved of big bands in the 1930s and 40s. After a variety of episodes (all, however, firmly based upon the fugue material), the succession of entries occurs once more, but with the parts jammed together so as to take up only one third of the time of what was heard before. This section rises rapidly from *pianissimo* to *fortissimo*, and leads into a slow coda which recalls the prelude; the coda in turn gives way to a brief but active – one might even say hyperactive – few bars which return for the last time to the tempo and ideas of the fugue.



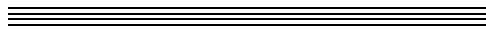
Composer and violinist **Georges Lentz** was born in Luxembourg in 1965. He studied in Europe and the USA, as well as in Australia, where he has been resident since 1990. He is a member of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and of various chamber ensembles. As a composer, he has been working for many years on an extended series of compositions under the title *Caeli enarrant*... The first of these gained him the prestigious Paul Lowin Orchestral Prize in 1997, while a later work in the cycle, *Guyuhmgan*, was the top recommended work at the 2002 International Rostrum of Composers in Paris.

The works comprising *Caeli enarrant*... are often intensely quiet – often, indeed, utterly silent for considerable periods – and express the composer’s fascination with the stars and galaxies, with the vast spaces between them, and with the philosophical and spiritual implications of these things. The title is drawn from the opening words of Psalm 19, often translated into English as “The heavens are telling the glory of God”. Different parts of the cycle are scored for different forces, ranging from full orchestral works (one of them a viola concerto) to string quartets, music for prepared piano and a sixty-minute piece for solo electric guitar.

The seventh part of *Caeli enarrant*..., which also bears the title *Mysterium*, began life as an abstract, unrealised score, and it was only some time after it had been begun that the composer felt justified in turning his ideas into specific pieces of music for specific instruments. The first result of this as yet unfinished project was *Birrung*, originally compiled in 1997 and revised most recently in 2007, for eleven strings. The work, whose title means “star” in the Aboriginal language once spoken in the Sydney region, is, with only a couple of brief exceptions, quiet from start to finish. It can be regarded as a single melodic line enunciated by varying combinations of instruments, sometimes

expanding into multiple strands which then form traditional or non-traditional harmonies. There is frequent use of quarter-tones (the notes which lie in between the semitones of the customary chromatic scale); the heart of the work consists of a long held chord of B major which gradually and imperceptibly acquires a cluster of these minute pitch variations. From time to time some of the instruments provide as background a shower of very short and quiet notes, perhaps representing the faint scintillations of barely visible stars.

Ultimately, it is probably unwise to analyse *Birrung* too much. The composer suggests on his website that one possible way to listen to it is “[to] simply imagine a starlit sky with all its different constellations and concentrations, its darkness and light, the vastness of its silence.”



William Alwyn (1905–1985) was the composer of a large amount of concert music and over seventy film scores. His harp concerto *Lyra Angelica* was inspired by the English metaphysical poet Giles Fletcher; each movement bears a superscription from Fletcher’s epic poem *Christ’s Victorie and Triumph*.

The opening *Adagio* is headed “I looke for angels’ songs, and hear him crie”; its general sustained mood is occasionally diverted into more virtuosic or dance-like episodes. Languid and perhaps wearied scales initiate the following movement (“Ah! who was He such pretious perills found?”). The third movement illustrates the lines “And yet, how can I let Thee singing goe, When men incens’d with hate Thy death foreset?” with a grim and turbulent beginning which is soon supplanted by a kind of solemn and irregular march. Finally, a vigorous *allegro jubiloso* (“How can such joy as this want words to speake?”) leads into a recollection of the first movement.

David Angell, conductor

David has been playing viola for many years with some of the best known non-professional orchestras in Australia, and recently took part in a month of intensive activity with various London amateur orchestras. As a violist and chorister he has performed under internationally famous conductors including Sir Charles Mackerras, Stuart Challender and John Hopkins.

David took up conducting in 1998 with a highly successful season of *West Side Story* for Holroyd Musical and Dramatic Society. In February 2001 he assembled the Bourbaki Ensemble and conducted its inaugural performance; since its inception in December 2002 he has also been the conductor of Orchestra 143. In June 2013 he conducted a programme of Mahler, Mozart, Sculthorpe, Palmer and Kats-Chernin with the Crenodon Chamber Orchestra in Thame, near Oxford, UK.

Verna Lee, harp

Verna began studying harp at the age of 12, made her public solo debut at 13 and has worked professionally since she was 19. She has performed as soloist with many Sydney orchestras; one of her career highlights was in 1996 when she was the soloist with the Australian Youth Orchestra at the Adelaide Arts Festival, performing Ravel's *Introduction and Allegro*.

Harp has taken Verna around the world on tours (Japan and New Zealand), for work (Singapore Symphony Orchestra) and study (Germany and the United States). She has worked and recorded with orchestras such as the Sydney Symphony, Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra, Tasmanian Symphony, Australian Philharmonic, and was principal harp of the Australian Youth Orchestra for ten years. As well as recording for television, radio and soundtracks, Verna and her harp had a lot of fun filming a scene in the movie *The Matrix*.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

Formed in 2001, the Bourbaki Ensemble is a string orchestra based at St. Stephen's Church, Newtown. The Ensemble performs exciting recent music alongside the masterpieces of the string repertoire, and is strongly committed to programming works by Australian composers.

While many military histories attest to the varied achievements of General Charles Denis Sauter Bourbaki (1816–1897), his musical activities still await formal investigation. It has recently been suggested that Bourbaki was in fact a member of the *Société Sébastien*, a clandestine organisation of French harpists named after the celebrated instrument maker Érard. The avowed aim of the society was to promote the use of harp music as an accompaniment to competitive figure skating, but rumours hint that it may actually have had rather more sinister political aims. It is possible that Bourbaki was something more than just an ordinary member of the society, for after the date of his death no further mention of it is found either in public or in private records.



Violins Alastair Duff–Forbes, Emlyn Lewis–Jones,
Kathryn Crossing, Dawid Botha,
Camille Hanrahan–Tan,
Madeleina Hanrahan–Tan, Paul Hoskinson,
Maiko Inoue, Greta Lee, Richard Willgoss.

Violas Kathryn Ramsay, Robyn Botha,
Tara Hashambhoy, Kate Hughes.

Violoncellos John Napier, Michael Bowrey,
Catherine Willis.

Basses James Heazlewood–Dale, Mark Szeto.

