

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

imaginary creatures: music for strings

Christine Draeger Three Dances

Maria Grenfell Knitting Unicorns

Jessie Montgomery Starburst

Kate Whitley Autumn Songs

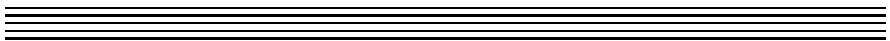
Julia Wolfe Cruel Sister

Christine Draeger, flute

David Angell, conductor

2.30 pm, Sunday 14 April 2019

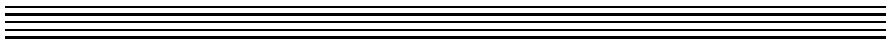
St. Stephen's Church, Newtown



Though nowadays one can, more than ever before, hear music by female composers of previous centuries, it seems still difficult, sometimes, for them to escape the stereotypes of “women’s music” – songs, chamber music and elegant piano pieces. If this were ever the full extent of female composers’ writings (in fact, it never was), we are happy to draw attention to the great variety of style in the five works comprising today’s Bourbaki Ensemble concert. We open with Jessie Montgomery’s *Starburst*, effectively a fanfare for strings, which has been described as “fizzy and fabulous”. It’s succeeded by Maria Grenfell’s *Knitting Unicorns*, a warm and comforting work written with young hospital patients in mind. After interval is the tense, dark and dramatic *Cruel Sister* by Julia Wolfe. In between we have the witty and delightful *Three Dances for Imaginary Animals*, especially written for this concert by our long-time friend and collaborator Christine Draeger, and Kate Whitley’s *Autumn Songs*, an essay in mysterious textures echoing with the sounds of distant (and sometimes closer) thunderstorms.

The Bourbaki Ensemble will give two further concerts in 2019. *Poems, dreams, lullabies* on Sunday 11 August will feature soprano Ayşe Gökür Shanal in a programme including vocal works by Peter Sculthorpe, John Wayne Dixon (world premiere) and Ernest Chausson. Further details on the back cover. On 8 December we present *Italian connections*. Tchaikovsky’s memories of Italy are encapsulated in his *Souvenir de Florence*; Respighi’s third suite of *Antiche Danze ed Arie* is a fond look at Italian music from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; and Raffaele Marcellino, an Australian composer of Italian ancestry, contributes *L’Arte di volare*, “The Art of Flying”.

Bourbaki concerts are now available through Eventbrite. Keep an eye out there (or, better still, join our email list) for concert information and special pre-purchase ticket prices!



PROGRAMME

Jessie Montgomery Starburst

Maria Grenfell Knitting Unicorns

Kate Whitley Autumn Songs, for 12 solo strings

Christine Draeger Three Dances for Imaginary Animals

I Quadruped

II Bird

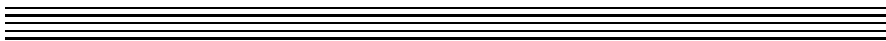
III Fish

Christine Draeger, flute

INTERVAL

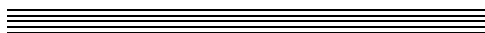
20 minutes

Julia Wolfe Cruel Sister



Violinist and composer **Jessie Montgomery** was born in New York in 1981. She began violin studies at the Third Street Music School Settlement, one of the longest established and most highly respected community music schools in the US. She is a graduate of the Juilliard School (violin) and New York University (composition). Jessie has been associated with numerous chamber groups, is currently a member of the Catalyst Quartet, and performs with Yo-Yo Ma's Silkroad Ensemble. Her work with Community MusicWorks in Providence, Rhode Island and with The Sphinx Organization is just part of Jessie's deep commitment to music education.

Starburst (2012) is a vibrant and dazzling fanfare for string orchestra. An explosive opening stretches from the lowest to the highest reaches of the ensemble, leading into a tumult of complex syncopations and cross-rhythms; off-beat accents and constantly varying metres add to the vitality of the texture. Murmuring semiquavers in the first violins form the background to a quieter episode, before a reprise of the opening leads to a spectacular conclusion.



Born in Malaysia, brought up in New Zealand and educated in New York and Los Angeles, **Maria Grenfell** (1969–) now makes her home in Hobart, where she is a senior lecturer at the Conservatorium of Music, University of Tasmania. Her music has been performed by most of the major Australian and New Zealand symphony orchestras, as well as by chamber groups including the Australia Ensemble and the Seymour Group. Many of her compositions are based on ideas from Chinese literature and culture: examples are *Ten Suns Ablaze*, inspired by a Chinese legend; *Poems of a Bright Moon*, from verses of the T'ang dynasty poet Li Po; and *Five Songs from the East*, a set of in-

strumental pieces for pipa (a Chinese plucked string instrument similar to the Western lute) and piano.

Knitting Unicorns (2017), for string orchestra, was commissioned by the Hush Foundation, an organisation which seeks to use music and other arts to create a calm and reassuring atmosphere for patients, visitors and staff in hospitals. The composer gives the following background to her work.

When I had the opportunity to visit the Royal Hobart Hospital, there was bright colour on the walls, sunshine outside, and young people playing on their electronic devices or watching bad TV. One young lady, however, spent much of her time studying her high school textbooks, and knitting voraciously. In the bed next to hers was a toddler who was captivated by some unicorns from the hospital's toy box. Coincidentally, the knitter was also knitting a unicorn. Maybe the magic of this mythical yet beautiful creature transports children of all ages to their happy place.

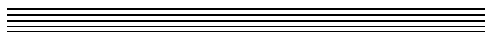
Maria has described herself as “a big fan of Burt Bacharach”, and felt that something in a similar style, with a “relaxed bass line. . . and pop-style harmonies” would be appropriate for the hospital patients. So, after a brief introduction, the syncopated bass line makes its appearance, soon joined by a warm and comforting cello melody. Though this melody prompts imitations in other parts (notably two solo violins), it really always belongs to the cellos. Brief episodes in remote keys lead back to one more statement of the cello theme, before the piece fades into a somewhat enigmatic conclusion.



Turning just 30 this year, **Kate Whitley** (born 1989) has already had her music performed by major ensembles including the London Symphony Orchestra, and at prestigious venues such

as the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam and Sadler’s Wells. Works for children’s choir include *Speak Out*, to words by Nobel prize winner Malala Yousafzai (commissioned by the BBC for International Women’s Day 2017) and *I am I say*, released on CD by NMC Recordings and greeted by *Gramophone* magazine with the comment “make no mistake, Kate Whitley is a composer to watch”. The opera *Paws and Padlocks*, also written for young performers, tells the tale of two children accidentally locked in a zoo overnight. Further compositions include orchestral and chamber music, songs and piano pieces. Together with conductor Christopher Stark, Kate runs The Multi-Story Orchestra, which performs in “unexpected places” such as car parks around the UK.

Autumn Songs (2014) was commissioned by the 12 Ensemble, London, and is scored for their core group of 7 violins, 2 violas, 2 cellos and bass. A high, expressive melody for one violin is supported by whispering scales in other violin parts. As these scales spread downwards through the violas to cellos and bass, they gather force, suggesting the approach of distant thunder on an autumn day. A slower episode sets fragmentary themes for solo violins and cello amidst a beautifully judged and subtly varying shimmering of delicate *tremolo* textures. An abbreviated return of the opening scales culminates in an accumulation of tone building up from the lowest end of the ensemble to the highest, cutting off on a vibrant note on one violin before the work concludes with a final dramatic cascade.



Christine Draeger was born in Melbourne in 1955, but grew up in Hobart. She studied flute at the Tasmanian Conservatorium, and with Zdenek Bruderhans at Adelaide University, graduating with a Bachelor of Music (Honours). She was a

member of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra 1981–86 and has freelanced with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, the AOBO and the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra. From 1982 to 2007 she was a member of the contemporary music ensemble The Seymour Group.

Christine has recorded three CDs of Australian flute music, all available through www.fluteworthy.com.au: *Streeton's noon* (1999), *Eat Chocolate and Cry* (2009) and *Spirit of the Plains* (2013). She has also made studio recordings for ABC Radio and Fine Music (2MBS) FM. Christine is a partner in Fluteworthy Publications; writing, arranging and editing educational flute music.

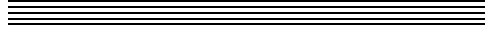
As a composer Christine is mostly self-taught. She is an associate represented composer at the Australian Music Centre with works for solo flute, flute and piano, flute quartets, flute choir, woodwind quintet and theatre pieces. Christine writes of her newly-composed concerto *Three Dances for Imaginary Animals* (2019):

I have always loved the sound of flute with strings. As a student, my favourite pieces were the Bach and Telemann suites and the Mozart flute quartets. However, in my own writing I had never composed for strings. Last year I decided to write a concerto, and David Angell kindly agreed to programme it in the Bourbaki Ensemble series.

The idea of three animals came from three kinds of rhythmic energy: walking, flying and swimming. I wanted to explore different ways of creating forward momentum in music. So I conjured into existence a quadruped, a bird and a fish. As I worked on them, the three animals began pushing the music in some unexpected directions.

The first movement, *Quadruped*, marked “passeggiando” or strolling, became a Cha Cha Cha danced by a hoofed animal. The second movement is a pastoral scene with bird calls, a favourite scenario for the flute. A bird

swoops and glides, only rarely landing. In the third movement I have used one of music's most famous "fish" themes to write a set of variations. A *habanera* rhythm suggests the leaping and gliding of the fish.



The ballad "Cruel Sister", also known as "The Two Sisters" or "Binnorie", is found in traditional English, Scottish, Scandinavian and other (mainly northern European) cultures. Though it exists in many variants, the essence of the story concerns two sisters, "one bright as the sun, the other cold and dark". The dark sister, jealous in her desire for the love of a young man, without compunction hurls the bright sister to her death in the sea. Her body is found by a minstrel, who fashions a harp from her breastbone and her golden hair, and takes it to play at the festivities celebrating the dark sister's wedding. But the harp, animated by the dead sister's spirit and needing no touch of a human hand, of its own volition recounts the murder. The tale reaches the bride's ears: "and surely now", the ballad concludes, "her tears will flow".

Though it employs neither text nor music from the ballad, Julia Wolfe's *Cruel Sister* (premiered by the Munich Chamber Orchestra, 2004) vividly illustrates its dark and dramatic plot. Beginning in a severely minimalist style, repeated quavers gradually build an atmosphere of tension and hatred. Frenzied dissonant interpolations, initially brief, start to take over the texture as the dark sister's mood turns from suppressed resentment to murderous determination, while occasional eerie hushed passages suggest the fair sister's helpless bewilderment. The composer urges on the performers with directions such as "passionately wild", "like talking", "maniacal", "don't let up".

Without warning the driving intensity collapses. "A very slow melody; timeless", for violins above a drone bass, depicts a

body floating on the sea. A long, long sustained chord, in which the composer specifically asks for “a rough irregular sound”, leads into the episode of the harp. Scattered notes in the violas are gradually joined by the other sections of the orchestra until the entire ensemble is engaged in “a horrific din of plucking” (Anthony Tommasini, New York Times). The *pizzicati* converge in a climactic unison; and are joined by a brief violin solo, a mournful elegy for the fair sister, bright as the sun, lost, drowned in the icy waters.

Julia Wolfe (1958–) was born in Philadelphia and educated at the University of Michigan and the Yale School of Music. She is currently professor of composition at New York University. Her music has been heard widely in both the US and Europe; it has been performed by leading orchestras including the New York and San Francisco Symphony Orchestras and the Orchestre National de France, and chamber groups such as the Kronos Quartet (US) and the Asko|Schönberg Ensemble (Netherlands). In 1987, together with composers Michael Gordon and David Lang, she founded the famed New York music collective Bang on a Can; their repertoire now includes a number of works by Wolfe, some written in collaboration with Gordon and Lang.

Wolfe’s catalogue includes multi-media and staged works, many of them giving voice to social concerns. She has written for an ensemble of nine bagpipes, and for another including twelve cheap wine glasses “(to be stomped on)”. There are also a number of works for strings; her quartets “combine the violent forward drive of rock music with an aura of minimalist serenity” (Russell Platt, The New Yorker). The oratorio *Anthracite Fields*, depicting the lives of coal miners in Pennsylvania around the beginning of the twentieth century, was awarded the 2015 Pulitzer Prize for music.

David Angell, conductor



photo: Steve Dimitriadis, www.mestevie.com

As a violist and chorister, David has performed under internationally famous conductors including Sir Charles Mackerras, Stuart Challender and Richard Bonynge. Since taking up conducting in 1998, he has directed a number of musical societies and orchestras, most frequently the Bourbaki Ensemble and Orchestra 143; other recent engagements include two programmes with the Woollahra Philharmonic (one in a replica pirate costume) and one with the Eastern Sydney Chamber Orchestra. A highlight was the Orchestra 143 Mozartathon, in which he conducted all the symphonies of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in a series of five concerts spread over a single weekend. David has also directed two concerts with the Crendon Chamber Orchestra (Thame, UK), presenting programmes featuring works by Mahler, Vaughan Williams and Australian composers. He has studied conducting with Richard Gill.

David is actively involved in arranging music for strings. His orchestration of Debussy's *Children's Corner* suite has been performed in Australia and the UK; he has (with the composer's permission) adapted Andrew Ford's *Oma Kodu*, originally composed for clarinet and string quartet, as a work for clarinet and string orchestra, and has transcribed Marc-Antoine Charpentier's *Noëls* for (modern) string orchestra. David is the editor of a revised score of the *Concerto for Strings* by Margaret Sutherland, and has contributed translations of Russian and Italian poetry to the *Lied and Art Song Texts* website.

Charles Denis Sauter Bourbaki

(1816–1897) was a prominent figure in the French military during the middle of the nineteenth century. Recent biographical research has centred on his marital status, though the available evidence, from possibly spurious family archives, is inconsistent and confusing. A number of letters from the late 1830s bear news of his betrothal to an attractive and virtuous young blonde woman, though later sources



from the same decade describe his fiancée as dark-haired and uncertain in mood. Scholars have deduced a visit by the future bride to her *coiffeur*, and find in the Bourbaki letters valuable evidence of a change in hair colour preferences among fashionable Parisian ladies of the time which is apparently not documented elsewhere. No reference to a wife is found in records from Bourbaki's later life, and it seems possible that, for some unknown reason, the proposed marriage did not take place.

Violins Emlyn Lewis-Jones, Paul Pokorny,
Joanna Buggy, Stephanie Fulton, Camille
Hanrahan-Tan, Madeleina Hanrahan-Tan,
Ie Wen Kwee, Danny Morris, Rob Newnham,
Warwick Pulley, Victor Wu.

Violas Kathryn Ramsay, Monique Mezzatesta,
Julia Pokorny, Richard Willgoss.

Violoncellos John Napier, Margaret Lazanas,
Ian Macourt, Nicole McVicar.

Basses Sasha Cotis, Cosimo Gunaratna.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

poems, dreams, lullabies: music for voice and strings

Antonín Dvořák Serenade for Strings
Peter Sculthorpe Island Dreaming
Peter Sculthorpe Maranoa Lullaby
Humphrey Searle Poem, for 22 strings
John Wayne Dixon Poplar
Ernest Chausson Chanson Perpétuelle

Ayşe Göknur Shanal, soprano
David Angell, conductor

2.30 pm, Sunday 11 August 2019

St. Stephen's Church, Newtown

Tickets \$35, concessions \$25

In the second Bourbaki Ensemble programme this year, distinguished soprano Ayşe Göknur Shanal will sing two works from the pen of Peter Sculthorpe, each inspired by Australia's indigenous cultural heritage, as well as the world premiere of a piece by Wollongong composer John Wayne Dixon; and a poignant late nineteenth century French *mélodie* for voice, piano and strings. Humphrey Searle was a British composer who, among other things, wrote the music for a few episodes of *Doctor Who*; his great-niece is a member of the Bourbaki Ensemble! The concert will conclude with Dvořák's well-loved *Serenade*.