
THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

elegies and escapades

Elgar Introduction and Allegro

Bridge Suite for Strings

Kats-Chernin Innocent Clouds

Michael Dunn Scherzo for a Pussycat

George Antheil Serenade

Grace Williams Elegy

David Angell, conductor

2.30 pm, Sunday 9 August 2026

St. George's Hall, Newtown

Welcome to the Bourbaki Ensemble's programme of *Elegies and Escapades*! The escapades range from the whimsical to the weird; the elegies, we hope, will touch your heart. Michael Dunn's irreverently elegiac tribute to a beloved pet combines both moods, as do the Elgar and Bridge works.

We are proud and delighted to present the Australian premiere of Grace Williams' moving *Elegy for string orchestra*. The Bourbaki Ensemble is immensely grateful to Oriana Publications, specialist publishers of contemporary and historical Welsh classical music (www.orianapublications.co.uk), who kindly provided the score and parts of the *Elegy* free of charge. Acts of generosity like this help to keep Bourbaki going!

Instead of printing a conductor biography, which many of you will have read (or will, at any rate, have had the opportunity to read...) numerous times, we have decided today to begin a "meet the orchestra" series. We trust that you will enjoy reading about our wonderful violinists, twin sisters Camille and Maddy. Look out for more in the future!

The final Bourbaki Ensemble performance for 2026 will be on Sunday 22 November. As soloist, we welcome Greg van der Struik, principal trombone with the Opera Australia Orchestra. Greg is also an active composer, and this will be the fourth time he has joined us to perform his concertos. Since Greg's latest composition also includes parts for woodwinds, we have chosen to pair it with the original chamber version of Copland's *Appalachian Spring*, as well as a delightful suite of light music by English composer George Dyson. Anyone who is not on our email list and would like to be need only scan the QR code! Please join us next time for another programme of music you (probably) haven't heard before!



PROGRAMME

George Antheil Serenade for String Orchestra
 I. Allegro
 II. Andante molto
 III. Vivo

Elena Kats-Chernin Innocent Clouds

Frank Bridge Suite for String Orchestra
 I. Prelude
 II. Intermezzo
 III. Nocturne
 IV. Finale

INTERVAL

20 minutes

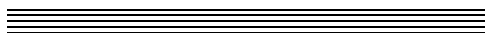
Grace Williams Elegy

Michael Dunn Scherzo for a Pussycat

Sir Edward Elgar Introduction and Allegro, Op. 47, for
 string quartet and string orchestra
 Emlyn Lewis-Jones, violin
 Julia Pokorny, violin
 Hannah Keese, viola
 Ian Macourt, violoncello

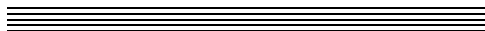
George Antheil (1900–1959) was one of the numerous American composers who based themselves in Paris between the wars. Reading various sources about his activity there, or perhaps his unreliable (but bestselling) autobiography *Bad Boy of Music*, might suggest to the uncharitable that he saw celebrity as a path to musical success more than the other way around. His concerts, both as pianist and composer, were bankrolled by an American patron, and he was not above attracting publicity by a faked “disappearance” in Africa. His notoriety was enhanced by his allegiance to *futurism* and the cult of “machine music”, exemplified by his *Ballet Mechanique*, scored for multiple pianos, percussion and aircraft propellers.

Antheil’s *Serenade for String Orchestra* was premiered in 1948, by which time his music had become far less provocative, though still “individual”. It features frequent melodic fragments reminiscent of nineteenth-century American popular song, somewhat in the manner of Charles Ives – though since Ives’ music had at this stage yet to reach a wide audience, it is unlikely that the older composer had any direct influence on the younger. The first movement includes accompanying passages marked *pizzicato sul ponticello* – plucked near the bridge to give a hard, dry tone – which may have been intended to emulate the quintessentially American sound of the banjo. The subsequent *andante molto* begins with an air of mystery, emphasized by a somewhat disturbing background in which cellos and basses play in a different key from the upper instruments. A central section features cadenza-like solos for violin, viola, cello and bass, and the movement ends with a coda curiously reminiscent of Dvořák’s “American” scores. The finale reprises American popular song, with interludes in which an elegant waltz harks back to Antheil’s days in Paris.



Elena Kats-Chernin (1957–) was born in Uzbekistan and emigrated to Australia in 1975. She is celebrated for her orchestral and stage music, in particular the ballet *Wild Swans* and the opera *Whiteley*, and for her vast output of piano music. Elena is often the performer of her own piano works, notably on the CD *Slow Food*, a “collaboration” with celebrated chef Kylie Kwong. Unusual items among Elena’s lesser known compositions include four scores for 1920s silent movies.

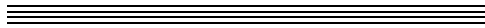
Kats-Chernin is a prodigious and skilful recycler of her own music, and many works exist in numerous versions. *Innocent Clouds* was originally the first movement of *Without Words*, a set of six pieces loosely inspired by Mendelssohn’s *Songs without Words*. The first movement is very tenuously based upon the second of six pieces in Mendelssohn’s Op. 53. The brief *allegro non troppo* has attracted the English title *The Fleecy Cloud*, though this name was not bestowed by Mendelssohn himself, and the piece seems never to have attracted any title at all in German! Any reference to the work in Elena Kats-Chernin’s composition is obscure, and possibly restricted to the first four notes of Mendelssohn’s theme. This should not be any reason for adverse comment: as Elena has explained, “Once I had chosen six of my favourite *Songs Without Words* I set out on the journey of getting more and more acquainted with them and of finding out where the inspiration would take me”.



Not all good music is written by string players! However, it’s possible to argue that good *string music* is generally written by those who have a practical acquaintance with string performance issues. After graduation from the Royal College of Music, **Frank Bridge** (1879–1941) spent much of his early life as a professional violist in string quartets. His writing for strings

is idiomatic, and just “works”. That’s not to say that it is easy – he was, after all, a professional performer – but he never introduces unnecessary difficulties through ignorance.

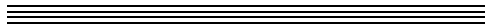
As a composer, Bridge began in a fairly conventional style, later absorbing the influence of Debussy and Stravinsky. After 1918, responding in despair and bitterness to the war and its aftermath, his music became much more searching and less comfortable for the listener. The *Suite for string orchestra* (1910) is an early work, though there are hints of the depth of feeling accessed later by Bridge. The first movement is lyrical in nature and makes much of the unaccompanied opening theme given to first violins and violas. The second has the lightness of a Mendelssohn *scherzo*, with a rather forceful *trio* section in a distant key. The succeeding *adagio molto* introduces a more serious mood, opening with a tentative, forlorn violin theme above unstable and wayward harmonies. If the title *Nocturne* denotes “night music”, this is not a warm, comforting night, but an unsettling and rather eerie one; though a *dolcissimo* central episode with cascading violin semiquavers does restore some calm. The finale is a complete contrast, with close harmony passages and vivacious semiquavers leading to a strong conclusion.



Wales, the homeland of **Grace Williams** (1906–1977), is famously a land with a long and glorious tradition of song. In her twenties, the young composer was a student of Vaughan Williams in London, and a close friend of Benjamin Britten. Any listener expecting, on this basis, a songful composition with hints of English folk music, could be in for a bit of a shock. The *Elegy* for string orchestra, while not in any way atonal, stretches the bounds of conventional harmony with the addition of poignant dissonances which recall certain works of the

late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – one might, for instance, hear a kinship with Schoenberg’s early masterpiece *Transfigured Night*. Yet further acquaintance with Williams’ biography should dispel any great sense of surprise; for she studied not only in London, but also in Vienna, where her principal teacher Egon Wellesz was himself a pupil of Schoenberg. Grace Williams’ other works – not always in the same style – include the Welsh-inspired *Ballads* and *Penillion*, two symphonies, a chamber opera and the Mass setting *Missa Cambrensis*.

A mournful but sonorous theme for second violins and violas provides an appropriately sombre opening for the *Elegy*. In the fifth bar the full string orchestra enters with a plangent chord – a C♯ major triad with haunting added dissonances – which will turn out to be the harmonic basis of the entire composition. For most of the piece, melodic interest is shared equally between first violins, seconds and violas, forming an expressive web of counterpoint. Towards the end, the first *tutti* section is recalled *sotto voce*, now augmented by a soaring solo violin descant. In the the final bars, the *Elegy* seeks to settle onto an unclouded C♯ major triad; but the attempt is twice frustrated by intransigent dissonances before it is finally achieved.

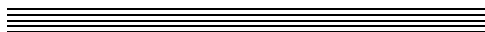


Scherzo for a pussycat is a deeply personal tribute to a beloved pet, yet, its sentiment is entirely universal. The titular pussycat was Honey, a cuddly British Shorthair – friendly, constantly hungry, endlessly curious, and clumsily overweight. My goal was to somehow capture her quirky personality through music. The piece operates as a musical reverie, drifting through memories of life together. Aiming to represent Honey’s unique characteristics, the title *scherzo* (meaning “joke”) became an apt fit for the silly, irreverent music that emerged. Yet the title

carries a layer of irony, as the piece is ultimately about grief. Subtle glimpses appear as the work progresses, but only at the end does reality set in, forcing a confrontation with a loss that never really ends, but rather fades over time. While this is an intensely personal work, I hope listeners connect with its basic sentiment – the powerful bonds we form with our companion animals and the profound emptiness we feel when they are no longer with us.

Michael Dunn studied composition under Andrew Ford at Wollongong University in the 1980s. After graduating, his career pivoted to traditional hand-drawn animation, working on numerous feature films, digital and TV products. He is an active pianist, accompanist and cellist, and has lived in Newtown for over 30 years.

Programme note by kind courtesy of the composer.



The *Introduction and Allegro* for strings was written at a time when **Sir Edward Elgar** (1857–1934) had at last succeeded in achieving a measure of public acclaim. A long period of struggle, ending only in 1899 with the performance of the *Enigma Variations*, had left him with a personality compounded of wildly contradictory elements. In February 1905, with characteristic offhandedness, Elgar wrote to his friend and champion August Jaeger, “I have finished the string thing and it’s all right”. After the work’s premiere in March had attracted only a lukewarm reception, however, he wrote to Dora Penny with an equally characteristic mixture of pride and despair: “Nothing better for strings has ever been done and they don’t like it”.

In late 1904 Jaeger had suggested to Elgar that he compose “a *brilliant* quick String Scherzo... a real bring down the house *torrent* of a thing such as Bach could write”. Hardly an

assessment of Bach's music which modern ages would find sympathetic; be that as it may, Elgar took up the idea and within four months had completed the *Introduction and Allegro*. The only hints of any Baroque influence on the piece are the opposition, very loosely in the manner of a *concerto grosso*, of solo quartet and string orchestra, and the "devil of a fugue" (Elgar's words) which comprises the central part of the work. Far from being a Baroque pastiche, the work is most notable for its overt Romanticism, and for the depth of feeling which Elgar, so wary of revealing in real life, was never afraid to display in his music.

The beginning of the *Introduction and Allegro* features frequent and often abrupt changes of mood and tempo. The majestic chords and triplets of the opening almost immediately give way to an aspiring passage for the solo quartet (annotated as "smiling with a sigh" in Elgar's manuscript score), which in turn is succeeded by an important dotted motif in violas, cellos and bass. This itself lasts only two bars before we hear a more relaxed version of the triplets, two more bars of the quartet theme and two of the dotted theme – six short sections within the first minute of the piece. In the first extended episode a solo viola announces a theme inspired by a Welsh folk song which Elgar had heard while on a ramble in the country. A return to the triplets of the opening is crowned by four mighty pauses, and a melancholy quartet version of the "Welsh" theme concludes the *Introduction*.

The *Allegro* begins with the "smiling with a sigh" theme and introduces a new idea in which vibrant semiquavers alternate between quartet and orchestra. Eventually the second violins lead off the fugue, which reaches a powerful climax before easing into a recapitulation of the *Allegro*. Brilliant scales in semiquavers usher in a final section in which the "Welsh" theme, *molto sostenuto*, appears at last in the full ensemble.

Meet the orchestra!

Madeleine and Camille Hanrahan–Tan, violins



Since November 2010 (the year after we graduated high school), we have loved every Bourbaki season that we have been fortunate enough to be part of. You can usually find us together at the back of the violin section, or at the tea

and biscuits during break. During the day Madeleine works as a high school music teacher at Rosebank College and Camille works as an acoustical engineer based in Rozelle. Music and sound has always been central to our lives and we know it always will be.

While we have played in various other community orchestras including Sydney Uni Orchestra, Artes Christi, Strathfield Symphony Orchestra and Balmain Sinfonia, Bourbaki offers a positive energy that really is unique to the group. We love that David always selects a diverse range of repertoire which includes Australian composers, gender-diverse composers, and contemporary composers. During school Madeleine learnt Bassoon and Camille learnt Oboe, so we also enjoy all the wind solo pieces that David often incorporates into the programme. As locals living in Marrickville, the location at the beautiful St. George's Hall in Newtown is also ideal for us.

We are so grateful for the regular opportunity to play with Bourbaki, and the ongoing happiness we experience and share with this wonderful group of musicians and people that are Bourbaki (audience included!). Very special thanks to David who is the soul and spirit of Bourbaki.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

Charles Denis Sauter Bourbaki (1816–1897), later a leading figure in the French military, grew up in a home where music and literature were greatly valued. His admiration for composer Hector Berlioz is a matter of common knowledge (though actual documentary evidence has sometimes been mysteriously lacking). On the other hand, his opinion of Felix Mendelssohn is less clear. Berlioz himself had a high opinion of Mendelssohn’s music, and may perhaps have communicated this to Bourbaki after the two composers met in Rome in 1831. On the other hand, Mendelssohn (though he esteemed Berlioz personally) had little enthusiasm for the latter’s music, referring to his scoring as “messy and slapdash”. It may be that Bourbaki could not forgive the German composer this slight on his hero. After hearing the eight books of *Songs without Words*, Bourbaki sought to publish a pamphlet entitled *Paroles sans chants*. The contents of Bourbaki’s writing are unknown, but apparently they were such as to make the publishers refuse it on legal advice.



Violins Emlyn Lewis–Jones, Julia Pokorny,
Joanna Buggy, Camille Hanrahan–Tan,
Madeleina Hanrahan–Tan, Deborah McGowan,
Jenny Mee, Rob Newnham, Chantal Nguyen,
Paul Pokorny, Warwick Pulley, Victor Wu.

Violas Hannah Keese, Mikayla Hartigan, Paul Hoskinson,
Daniel Morris, Evonne Voukidis

Violoncellos Ian Macourt, Liesje Croeser,
Serena Devonshire, Ying Huang,
Nicole McVicar, Catherine Willis.

Basses Sasha Cotis, Deniz Emul.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

music from five continents

Greg van der Struik Trombone Concerto

Aaron Copland Appalachian Spring

Heitor Villa-Lobos Suite for Strings

Eunsung Kim Vivo

George Dyson Woodland Suite

Greg van der Struik, trombone

2.30 pm, Sunday 22 November 2026

For our final concert of 2026 we welcome leading Sydney trombonist Greg van der Struik to perform his own *Concerto*, accompanied by the strings of the Bourbaki Ensemble and a quartet of guest woodwinds. There will also be music from north America, south America, Europe and Asia.

The Bourbaki Ensemble is a chamber string orchestra which has been giving concerts in Newtown since 2001. September 2024 saw the Ensemble's Sydney Opera House debut. Every concert features works by at least one Australian composer, most recently Peter Sculthorpe, Angus Davison and Iain Grandage. The Bourbaki Ensemble has given world premieres of well over a dozen pieces, some written especially for our concerts.

www.bourbakiensemble.org

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