THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

young composers write for strings

Robert Davidson Dodecahedron
Janáček Idyll, for string orchestra
Scriabin Two Pieces for String Orchestra
Mendelssohn String Symphony No. 9 in C major

David Angell, conductor

2.30 pm, Sunday 24 October 2004
St. Stephen's Church, Newtown

Welcome to the Bourbaki Ensemble's final concert for 2004, "young composers writing for strings". We hope that you will enjoy this programme of music by composers ranging in age from the thirteen–year–old Mendelssohn to the (relatively) elderly Scriabin – all of twenty seven when he composed his *Andante* for string orchestra. In between these two, the Czech composer Leoš Janáček and the Australian Robert Davidson contribute works written in their early twenties.

Once again it is a pleasure at the end of the year to thank all those who have made our 2004 concerts possible. In particular our gratitude is due to all at St. Stephen's for affording us the use of the church, and to Kerry Klujin for organising our July concert at Macquarie University. And finally, thanks to you, our audience, for attending Bourbaki Ensemble concerts. We *could* still play music without you being there – but it would be much less enjoyable! We look forward to seeing you again in the coming year.

BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE 2005

The Bourbaki Ensemble's programmes for next year will be posted on our website as soon as details are finalised. The site also contains complete records of our past concerts, and programme notes which can be read or downloaded. Go to

`users.tpg.com.au/ddangell`

to find out about all sorts of composers from Bach and Barber to Wilson and Woolrich! To join our mailing list and receive information about all our future activities, contact David Angell at

`ddangell@hotmail.com`

PROGRAMME

Robert Davidson Dodecahedron, for thirteen strings

Leoš Janáček Idyll, for string orchestra

I. Andante
II. Allegro
III. Moderato
IV. Allegro
V. Adagio
VI. Scherzo
VII. Moderato

INTERVAL — 20 minutes

Alexander Scriabin Two Pieces for String Orchestra

I. Scherzo
II. Andante

Felix Mendelssohn String Symphony No. 9 in C major

I. Grave—Allegro
II. Andante
III. Scherzo—Trio più lento, "La Suisse"
IV. Allegro vivace

Robert Davidson (born 1965) has studied composition at the University of Queensland, and subsequently with Terry Riley in California. His original compositions have been widely performed, and his scoring for viola and orchestra of Schubert's *Arpeggione Sonata* has attracted great acclaim. Robert is also a bass player and the founder of contemporary music ensemble *Topology*. He currently teaches composition and performance at the Queensland University of Technology.

Dodecahedron, composed in 1985, is scored for thirteen separate string parts, comprising seven violins, three violas, two cellos and bass. It features continually varying textures created sometimes by the gradual accumulation of notes within a single part, and sometimes by the superimposition of contrasting parts to form an intricate musical jigsaw. The overall effect of the piece is energetic, rhythmic and sparkling. Towards the end of *Dodecahedron* there is a controlled fade as lines thin out and instruments fall silent, until a *crescendo* on a sustained chord brings the piece to a close.

We often think of **Leoš Janáček** as a "modern" composer. And, indeed, much of his music has a harmonic and emotional tension which decisively separates it from the classical era, as well as a gritty realism which with equal clarity dissociates the composer from the romantic movement of the nineteenth century. It is quite surprising, then, to find that he was born in 1854, only thirteen years after his compatriot, friend and colleague Antonín Dvořák. The latter's example seems to have intimidated rather than encouraged the younger man, who said later (though apparently without animosity): "You know how it is when someone takes the words out of your mouth; for me it is always like that with Dvořák". The discrepancy between

Janáček's birth date and his musical style is explained by the fact that it took him many years to achieve public success. Of his greatest works, only the opera *Jenůfa* was composed before Janáček's sixtieth birthday; the decade preceding the composer's death in 1928 then saw an extraordinary burst of creativity which produced further operas such as *Káťa Kabanová* and *From the House of the Dead* (based on Dostoyevsky), two string quartets and the *Sinfonietta* for orchestra.

The *Idyll* for string orchestra, perhaps the most successful of Janáček's early compositions, was written in 1878, when the composer was 24 years of age, and must therefore count as an extremely early work. Nonetheless it anticipates various aspects of Janáček's later style. Many themes in the *Idyll* are constructed from an accumulation of short phrases, a technique which was to become more important to Janáček as his music matured, while the use of figures borrowed from Czech and Moravian folk song and dance marks the composer's departure from Austrian and German models.

The first of the seven movements of the *Idyll* is an *Andante*, a lyrical and somewhat nostalgic piece with a metrically flexible central section. It is succeeded by an *Allegro* whose dance–like central episode has something of the character of a gavotte. The third movement is rather slower than its *Moderato* tempo might suggest, and features a yearning theme, initially given to violas, in five beats to the bar. A rather rugged fourth movement contrasts with the tender and nostalgic opening of the *Adagio*. The *Scherzo* is an unpretentious and delightful dance movement with a contrasting trio. Like that of Dvořák's *Serenade for Winds*, the finale of the *Idyll* has a rather march–like feel, and the work ends with rolling *pesante* passages in the cellos and bass.

One of the most individual and interesting figures in Russian music of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is that of **Alexander Scriabin** (1872–1915). Born in Moscow, Scriabin made a great name for himself as a pianist (it was said that at the age of six he could hear a musical composition once and then reproduce it at the piano), until at about thirty years of age he began to cut back his performance activities in favour of composition. His works include ten sonatas and numerous smaller pieces for his own instrument, but Scriabin is best known today for his exotic and highly personal orchestral pieces. Many of these were composed under the influence of Russian mysticism and the then nascent cult of theosophy: his third symphony, *The Divine Poem*, was followed by *The Poem of Ecstasy* and *Prometheus: the Poem of Fire*. The latter work includes a part for "light keyboard", a device which was supposed to intensify the emotional impact of the music by means of a continuously varying range of colours projected onto a screen. Scriabin's music was far too idiosyncratic to attract imitators, and his later compositions have frequently inspired listeners either to adulation or to loathing. In the words of Christopher Palmer, "Scriabin either thrills or appals, but never bores".

As one might expect, Scriabin's earlier work is less confonting than this. The *Two Pieces for String Orchestra* were reconstructed in 1987 by Daniel Bosshard on the basis of fragmentary manuscripts held by the Glinka Museum in Moscow, and by referring to Scriabin's meticulously dated sketchbooks it is possible to assign the *Scherzo* to the year 1888. An initial *pizzicato* section inevitably brings to mind the third movement of Tchaikovsky's fourth symphony, while the syncopations of the *Trio* invoke a Russian spirit which has little in common with the composer's later aspirations to universality. In contrast, the *Andante*, written in 1899, suggests the idiom of Frédéric Chopin, whose melodic and harmonic style greatly influenced Scriabin before he set out on the solitary path which was to lead to his later compositions.

Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847) was born into a well–off middle class family whose wide circle of acquaintances included both professional and capable amateur musicians, and Felix was frequently able to have his early compositions performed for his own instruction. Among his teenage works are thirteen symphonies for strings, in which the young composer took the opportunity to experiment with the layout of the string orchestra: the eighth of the symphonies has a slow movement scored for three distinct viola parts, cello and bass but no violins, while the ninth, in C major, employs two separate viola parts throughout.

The first movement of the C major symphony opens with a mysterious slow introduction, in which the doubling of the violas creates a notable depth of tone. It leads directly into a joyous *Allegro*, with a development section in which the first theme takes on darker colours and visits remote keys before regaining its original carefree spirit. Violins alone, divided into four parts, begin the second movement with a gentle and ethereal melody over an accompaniment which sometimes becomes poignantly chromatic. A decidedly darker episode for violas, cellos and bass fades into silence before the original violin section returns, eventually supported by the lower instruments.

The third movement is a fast *Scherzo* with a central *Trio* which slows down suddenly in an evocation of the rustic Switzerland of the early nineteenth century. The finale begins quickly in a somewhat grim minor key, and features extensive fugal textures before a hushed pause introduces a coda which concludes the work in a bright and energetic C major.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

The Bourbaki Ensemble consists of professional musicians, amateurs, teachers and students. The Ensemble takes a particular interest in Australian and 20th century works, and we hope next year to include some 21st century music in our programmes!

Charles Denis Sauter Bourbaki was a prominent figure in the French army around the time of the Franco–Prussian War, a noted patron of music and a poet with a keen interest in early French verse. Bourbaki's immersion in mediaevalism had a considerable impact on his own writing:

Tu marques et tu marques et tu bâilles, effet typique.
Heaume et gaine! Heaume et gaine! Gigoté chic!
Tu marques et tu marques et tu bâilles, effet tac.
Heaume et gaine! Heaume et gaine! Gigoté Jacques.

Indeed, so closely did Bourbaki's own style become identified with his models that his epigrammatic verse has on occasion been erroneously ascribed to the sixteenth–century Coucy Castle manuscript (Ormonde de Kay, *N'Heures Souris Rames*).

Violins David Saffir, Martin Henschel,
Kirrillie Moore, Kathryn Topp, Justin White,
Richard Willgoss, Dale Wilson.

Violas Natalie Adby, Janice Buttle, Paul Hoskinson,
John Ma.

Violoncellos Chloe Miller, Ian Macourt,
Steve Meyer.

Bass Nicole Murray–Prior.