THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

music for clarinet and strings

Bridge Lament for Strings
Finzi Concerto for Clarinet and String Orchestra
Richard Meale Cantilena Pacifica
Grieg Holberg Suite

Nick Carey, clarinet

David Angell, conductor

2.30 pm, Sunday 27 February 2005
St. Stephen's Church, Newtown

Today's concert marks the commencement of the Bourbaki Ensemble's fifth year of existence! We would like to extend a warm welcome to all of our audience, both long–standing supporters and those who may be visiting for the first time. We trust that you will enjoy our selection of Australian, Norwegian and British music, and will appreciate the marvellous atmosphere and acoustics of St. Stephen's Church.

For our first concert in 2005, we present music having something of a "commemorative" theme. Grieg's *Holberg Suite* was written for the 200th anniversary celebrations of the Norwegian dramatist's birth, Richard Meale's *Cantilena* is a serene and peaceful elegy, while the dedicatee of the Bridge *Lament* was a young victim of the *Lusitania* sinking. Though Finzi's clarinet concerto has no specific memorial intent, it shares with much of this composer's music an elegiac quality which may have been prompted by a number of personal losses in his youth.

An inspection of the Camperdown Cemetery is always a fascinating adjunct to a concert at St. Stephen's. Fran Morris has generously offered to share her knowledge of the most interesting and historically significant parts of the site in a free guided tour to start soon after the conclusion of the concert. Don't miss it if you have an interest in local history!

If you are on our email list for concert information you will have read about and (we hope!) visited the new Bourbaki Ensemble web page. Put together by Joal Taylor in a clear and visually attractive design, the page contains information about current and future Bourbaki performances, as well as an informative archive of programme notes from past years. Go to `users.tpg.com.au/ddangell` – while there you can send us an email to join the mailing list and receive early notification of all Bourbaki activities. Thank you for attending this concert, and we look forward to welcoming you to future performances.

PROGRAMME

Frank Bridge Lament for Strings

Gerald Finzi Concerto for Clarinet and String Orchestra, Op. 31

I Allegro vigoroso
II Adagio ma senza rigore
III Rondo: allegro giocoso

Nick Carey, clarinet

INTERVAL — 20 minutes

Richard Meale Cantilena Pacifica, for string orchestra

Edvard Grieg Holberg Suite

I. Präludium
II. Sarabande
III. Gavotte—Musette
IV. Air
V. Rigaudon

The horrors of the First World War touched many composers, both in Britain and overseas. Though relatively few were directly involved in the war – among them George Butterworth, killed in action at Pozières in the battle of the Somme, and Ivor Gurney, who survived only at the cost of a severe and lasting psychological disturbance – it can scarcely be an exaggeration to say that a whole generation of composers was affected by the experience, whether at first or at second hand, of life and death in the trenches. A case in point is that of **Frank Bridge** (1879–1941). Bridge's early works are characterised by elements of romanticism and of impressionism which did not survive the conflict, as he turned to a much bleaker and frequently introspective style of writing, culminating in 1930 with the cello concerto *Oration*, an impassioned protest against the futility of war.

The particular occasion which prompted Bridge's sombre *Lament for Strings* is to be found in the dedication at the head of the score: "Catherine, aged 9, *Lusitania* 1915". On a voyage from New York, the British passenger liner *Lusitania* was sunk off the Irish coast by a torpedo from a German submarine. What was held to be an unprovoked attack on a non–combatant vessel enraged public opinion not only in Britain but also, on account of the significant number of American victims, in the then neutral USA; the incident probably had a substantial influence on America's entering the war two years later. The *Lament* derives its emotional force from the contrast between the simple, even banal, lullaby in the first violins and the disturbing background provided by the lower parts. The latter consists largely of harmonically complex rocking figures which can be heard as an extension of the lullaby, as a depiction of the heaving ocean waves, as a mournful keening – or as a combination of all three. Only in the last few bars does the music turn to traditional harmonies, ending on a calm and deeply scored chord of E♭ major.

Frank Bridge, born in Brighton in 1879, began to learn violin at the age of six, and soon became an active performer in local chamber and theatre ensembles. Later, studying at the Royal College of Music, he turned to the viola, and spent the rest of his professional life as a member of various string quartets. A large part of his compositional output consists of chamber music for strings, doubtless influenced by his experience as a performer. Bridge was also a noted teacher of composition. His star pupil, Benjamin Britten, seems in later life to have retained little esteem for any other teacher, acknowledging his debt in one of his earliest successes, the *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge* for string orchestra. Bridge died in 1941, a few weeks short of his sixty second birthday.

Anyone interested in the relative influence of heredity and environment on the development of an artist could do worse than ponder the case of **Gerald Finzi** (1901–1956). Born in London to an Italian father and a German mother, Finzi eventually became a composer whose characteristic "Englishness" is evident in every piece he wrote. Finzi had a great devotion to the English cultural heritage in other respects too. He collected an extensive library of English literature and composed many fine settings of English poetry; he unearthed, edited and published works by obscure eighteenth century English composers; he grew apples as a hobby, saving many rare varieties from extinction.

Like Bridge, Finzi was indirectly but deeply affected by the war, his esteemed composition teacher Ernest Farrar having died on the Western Front. Before he reached maturity Finzi had also lost his father and three brothers; it is therefore not surprising that his music is often suffused with a gently elegiac spirit, passing through patient grief to a timeless wisdom. As a composer Finzi was largely a miniaturist; prominent among his compositions are dozens of settings of Thomas Hardy, whose poems frequently combine a melancholy which must have been congenial to Finzi with a darker streak of pessimism which found less response from the composer. He also wrote numerous works for strings or small orchestra, many of these also with voice. Notable is *Dies Natalis* for voice and strings, a setting of words by Thomas Traherne (*ca.* 1638–1674) which conveys a picture of the world through the perceptions of a newborn child. Towards the end of his life, however, he began to work on a larger scale, producing an expansive setting of Wordsworth's *Intimations of Immortality* as well as concertos for cello and for clarinet.

The clarinet concerto, written for the eminent British performer Frederick Thurston, incorporates both the sort of wistful writing which one feels to be typical of Finzi and suggestions of what he may have done had he lived longer. The concerto opens with a vigorous and dramatic orchestral passage featuring frequent clashes of major and minor modes, an effect of which Finzi was eternally fond. After a brief pause the soloist enters with a theme whose lyrical and wistful contour tends to disguise its close kinship with what has already been heard. A second theme, for clarinet over a murmuring viola accompaniment, leads to an *appassionato* passage which briefly recreates the mood of the orchestral introduction before slowing into a poised and reflective solo. The initial tempo is resumed and the two principal themes revisited; an orchestral *crescendo* breaks off at its climax to accommodate a clarinet cadenza. Not originally part of the concerto, the cadenza was suggested to Finzi by Ralph Vaughan Williams after the first performance of the concerto at the 1949 Three Choirs Festival. A very short coda ends the movement.

The second movement, *Adagio ma senza rigore*, much more typical of Finzi's earlier style, boasts a serene gravity which never descends to anything approaching despair. Short orchestral passages with achingly beautiful harmonies and two brief solo cadenzas introduce the main section, whose first three notes echo and re–echo throughout the *Adagio*. The generally tranquil course of the music is interrupted only once, when increasingly urgent scales and arpeggios from the soloist are overtaken by an orchestral passage in which the augmentation of its intervals transforms the quiet principal theme into a passionate outburst.

Despite its generally serious tone, Finzi's music displays occasional moments of humour (as, for example, in his Hardy setting *Rollicum–Rorum*). The grim and angular opening of the *allegro giocoso* which concludes the clarinet concerto lasts but a few bars before the soloist takes over with an attractive and easygoing tune over the simplest of *pizzicato* accompaniments. The *rondo* theme appears four times in all, with varied intervening episodes. Finzi then re–introduces the first solo melody from the opening movement, which however lasts only a couple of phrases before first clarinet and then strings fade into silence. After a half–hearted attempt by the orchestra to start the rondo once again, a few fireworks bring the concerto to a close.

Many works by **Richard Meale** (born 1932) demonstrate not only an intellectual interest in the European *avant–garde*, but also an emotional fascination with the continent. From the early *Homage to García Lorca* and *Incredible Floridas*, inspired by the poetry of Arthur Rimbaud, to the recent *Three Miró Pieces*, Meale's music frequently evokes the sensuous lyricism of the Mediterranean region. This being the case, the composer's much–discussed "return to tonality", beginning in the late 1970s with the orchestral *Viridian*, the opera *Voss* and the second string quartet, should perhaps have caused less surprise than was often expressed by commentators.

The final movement of the quartet, entitled *Cantilena Pacifica*, was later rescored by the composer for string orchestra. Although it commemorates the death of a close friend, Meale has chosen in his memorial to stress themes of peace and acceptance rather than of grief. Structurally, as befits its inspiration, the piece is extremely simple, consisting of a gently rhapsodic violin melody floated over a sustained cushion in the lower instruments, the relationship between the two gently animated by the clash of duple and triple rhythms. Harmonically, the movement is an extension rather than a repudiation of traditional procedures. The chord heard in the first bar functions as a (not quite textbook) "tonic", while at various points the harmonic motion can almost be heard as a plagal ("amen") cadence. Eventually even the mildest dissonance is abandoned, and the work ends in a serene and unclouded E major.

In the late 1740s a Scot by the name of Alexander Greig (by some accounts, fleeing the Battle of Culloden) arrived in the Norwegian seaport of Bergen to take up the post of British consul. His son and grandson in their turn held the same position, and the family – possibly assisted by the alteration of their surname to a more typically Norwegian spelling and pronunciation – had become a prominent and respected one in Bergen by the time of the birth of Alexander's great–grandson **Edvard Grieg** (1843–1907).

Edvard's mother, an accomplished amateur musician, encouraged musical interests in her son, who began to learn the piano at the age of six and produced his first compositions by the age of nine. Though Bergen boasted some sophistication in its musical life, it soon became something of a small pond for such a talented adolescent, and at the age of fifteen he was sent to the Leipzig Conservatorium, where Schumann became an important influence. It was not until he spent time living and studying in Copenhagen from 1863 that Grieg became acquainted with Scandinavian folk music and began, as he later wrote, "to know the northern folk tunes and [his] own nature".

In 1884 Grieg was commissioned by the city of Bergen for a piece to celebrate the bicentenary of the birth of Ludwig Holberg (1684–1754). There can hardly have been a more appropriate commission in the history of music. Both subject and composer were natives of Bergen; Holberg was the first major writer to employ Scandinavian languages in literature, just as Grieg was the first major composer to emulate Scandinavian folk models; Holberg was Norway's leading dramatist of the time, while Grieg's like status had recently been confirmed by a government pension which freed him from any financial concerns.

The *Holberg Suite* comprises five movements with a faintly archaic and sometimes a lightly French feeling, perhaps reflecting the music of Holberg's era and the time he spent in Paris. A brief *Präludium* is notable principally for its rhythmic animation, and is crowned by a broad and majestic ending. The *Sarabande* has a melodic freshness which recalls parts of Grieg's music for *Peer Gynt*. This is succeeded by an elegant, rather courtly, *Gavotte* which alternates with the imitation bagpipe drone of a *Musette*. Much deeper in emotional feeling, the *Air* uses sustained pulsating quavers as a background for poignant, arching melodies which twice reach a powerful climax before sinking into silence. The final *Rigaudon* is a hornpipe–like dance with important roles for solo violin and viola and a contrasting minor–key central episode.

David Angell, conductor

David conducts the Bourbaki Ensemble and Orchestra 143 (a chamber orchestra based in Turramurra); plays viola in various orchestras and chamber groups; co–wrote and conducted a film soundtrack heard in Sydney and London; writes programme notes for the Ku–Ring–Gai Philharmonic Orchestra; has acted as conductor or pit muso in numerous musical theatre productions; is the editor of a revised score of the *Concerto for Strings* by Margaret Sutherland; has contributed translations of Russian and Italian poetry to the *Lied and Art Song Texts* website... and more!

Nick Carey, clarinet

Nick Carey began taking clarinet lessons at the age of nine, and since then has performed both as a soloist and with a wide range of ensembles. He has performed regularly with orchestras and wind bands and with a large variety of chamber groups. Nick has been a member of the Sydney Youth Philharmonic and SBS Radio and Television Orchestras and is currently a member of the Sydney Youth Orchestra.

In 2005, Nick commences his fourth year of the Bachelor of Music (Performance) course at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, where he has been studying with Francesco Celata and Peter Jenkin. Whilst at the Conservatorium, Nick has performed with the Conservatorium Symphony Orchestra as principal clarinet and also with the Conservatorium Chamber Orchestra which toured to Noumea in 2003. Nick also had the opportunity to perform both the Mozart and Brahms clarinet quintets with the Greenway String Quartet. In 2003 he toured regional NSW with the Greenway Quartet, performing the Mozart quintet and other chamber works. During 2004 Nick was offered a casual position in the Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra performing in the Banda for *Der Rosenkavalier*.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

The Bourbaki Ensemble was formed in 2001 with the aim of performing both familiar and lesser–known works from the repertoire for string orchestra. Every Bourbaki concert contains one or more Australian compositions, past programmes having included works by Nigel Butterley, Peter Sculthorpe, Colin Brumby and others.

Charles Denis Sauter Bourbaki was born in 1816 and graduated in 1834 from the *École Spéciale Militaire*. Distinguishing himself by his boldness in numerous campaigns, he eventually rose to the rank of General in the French Army. Throughout his career Bourbaki maintained a close interest in music, and was a keen admirer of Isaac Nathan, the English–born composer who was a leading figure in mid–nineteenth–century Australian musical life. Bourbaki's plans to visit Sydney at Nathan's invitation were frustrated by the latter's sudden death under the wheels of a horse–drawn tram in Pitt St on 15 January 1864. By a scarcely believable coincidence, Nathan is buried in St. Stephen's cemetery, just a few metres from the venue of today's concert.

Violins David Saffir, Jackie Chang,
Rebecca Foulcher, Valerie Gutenev,
Warwick Pulley, Kathryn Topp,
Justin White, Richard Willgoss.

Violas Jill Quin, Paul Hoskinson, Rebecca Pulley.

Violoncellos Steve Meyer, Imogen Granwal,
Ian Macourt.

Bass Nicole Murray–Prior.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

ocean music for string orchestra

Peter Sculthorpe Songs of Sea and Sky
Frederick Delius Two Aquarelles
Tōru Takemitsu Towards the Sea II
Vasco Martins Symphony No. 4, *Ocean in the Heart*
Grace Williams Sea Sketches

Christine Draeger, flute
Verna Lee–Brown, harp
David Angell, conductor

2.30 pm, Sunday 18 September 2005
St. Stephen's Church, Newtown
Tickets $18, concessions $10

2.30 pm, Sunday 25 September 2005
Macquarie Theatre, Macquarie University
Admission free

We explore the many moods of the ocean, from Peter Sculthorpe's *Songs of Sea and Sky*, inspired by the bright and sunny waters of the Torres Strait, to the dark Debussyan nocturne of Japanese composer Tōru Takemitsu. Vasco Martins' symphony depicts the broad swell of the Atlantic which so dominates his home in the Cape Verde Islands, while Grace Williams' delightful suite expresses the calm and stormy moods of the seas bordering her native Wales.

Further information `users.tpg.com.au/ddangell`
Programme details subject to change